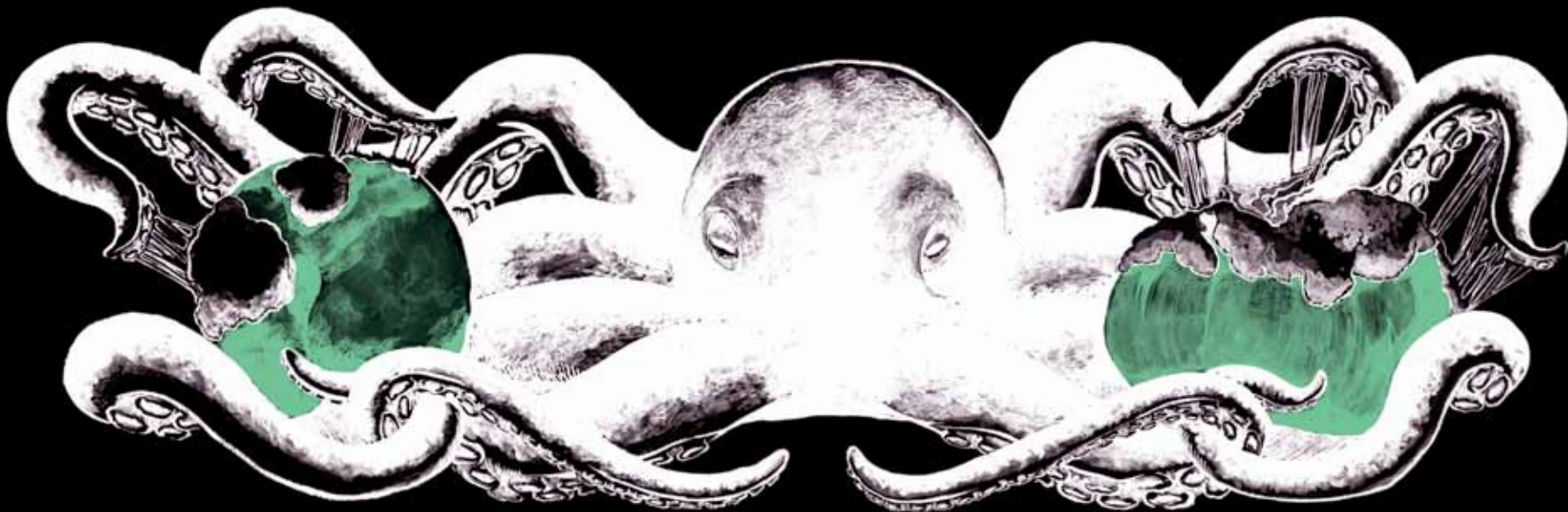


unseemingly lasting
sonia wong

unseemingly lasting sonia wong

mcmcreations



pain, and other small senses of inconsequence

if i can't talk about things painful and unpainful, i must therefore write. this is what youth has taught me. if there is a flicker, a faint touch, one must commit it to paper: one can only write. and so i write. about all feelings, thoughts, experiences, senses, things significant and insignificant. if they are all real, they are all of consequence.

i am not someone used to writing, yet it has been only through writing that i have discovered the fissures and disturbances between memory and sense – miniscule things that refuse to be framed by the toolboxes of our mundane language. if only language could distribute pain... the small breaths, murmurs, and moans that scream of the senses that precede language.

as for poetry, that came much later.

gradually came a sense of time. a becoming of images. senses potent, ethereal, from depression, violence, to tenderness. small joys that could be nothing but anger drifting away. it became a matter of habit.

they all say: it gets better with time. the days get longer, the distance further, new persons bring new emotions, and more moments with a clear mind. sometimes i do feel things are indeed getting better but it is not enough.

normal people do not live like this. in fact, 'normality' is forever elusive.

the days pass like this, with the understanding that this is but the choice to not die. it's not even the choice to live better, to live anew – the choice to not die differs from the choice to live.

and yet life must go on, as life. there is nothing to celebrate in this life to live, as it is. at least, before something otherwise pops up. being awake is just that, being awake. no beauty worth proclaiming, devoid of heroics, just a simple bare living: feeling lives, bodies, time, worlds, poetics, and the traces of humans permeating. day after day, you wake, breathe, move, ingest, vomit, fear, and fall asleep.

and when you are awake you begin pondering: why. why must fear be stark and real, why must pain be stark and real? stark and real. why must certain feelings be more stark and real than others? you do not have an answer.

they all claim that it gets better with time, everyone gets better with time, thus you too will get better.

but time passes, and things remain the same.

it gets no better, because it's not possible.

it's not right. they are not in the position to demand anyone to become normal. it's not possible, because time doesn't resolve any feelings, it doesn't even offer or steal from the meaning of an event. time allows things that used to boil and torture to settle under the surface, morphing into crystals with contrasting faces. things and meanings might be displaced – some floating, others ageing and sinking into a darker abyss, and joy may be forgotten. yet pain remains pain, for anger remains anger, welling upon the most sorrowful moments, like nightmares.

but they tell you none of this. they say none of this is important. what is important is that time has passed and you've grown, and that it's time to move on. one instant, one day, one year. transition and transgression are both consequential. you get better, it's fine, no more anger, no more pain.

but apparently not. apparently impossible. apparently none of this is necessary.

later on, you believe likewise. it's fine as it is. if you say so. like a pear of the 20th century.

because it can't be explained. because there is no answer. because there can't be.

as long as it is stark and real, it is permissible, it is normal, it is consequential.

the inevitability of chaos, of pain, of solitude, of fear, of sorrow, of madness.

perhaps this is why i write.

that's all there is.

sonia wong

september 2014 – february 2015
(translated by charlie)

magic, inconsequential or not

during my school days, 'creative writing' was called, rather mysteriously, 'compositions'. in any case, i liked compositions. it was fun, especially the kind of Chinese compositions that required us to look at an image and compose something in exactly 100 words.

it required a lot of skills, to compose.

but not courage. i vaguely assumed that 'compose' had something to do with 'constitute', 'consist' or 'comprise'; their subtle differences are what an online dictionary is intent on explaining to me, now that i am checking. back then, i was less interested in the first half of that word than in the second: 'pose'. i thought composing had something to do with posing, and i was good at that. that was precisely why i was amazed when i heard that at least one of my fellow students would dare not to pose. he put down his true feelings.

he didn't get the compliments i thought he deserved. the teacher was not impressed at all; she even mobilised a Chinese saying to discredit him, to disparage him, ultimately to discourage him. this was the saying: a young person, who has never tasted true sadness, needs to feign sadness to pen a new poem (少年不知愁滋味為賦新詞強說愁). the teacher was in effect denying a young person's right to feeling sad, and expressing it. she was silencing my classmate.

how would she know? how would any grown-up know?

perhaps the true sadness the young ones have to bear is that they are not even entitled to it.

all grown-ups have been young, and they should know better. but then, after all these years, i have become some sort of a grown-up and i understand them slightly more: perhaps the grown-ups are just scared, worried, or downright protective; they may be trying to prepare the younger generation for a harsher world to come. you haven't tasted true sadness yet. how can we imagine a harsher world to come when we are already in a harsh one?

it took me some years to pluck up enough courage to write my own struggles, my own pain, my own sadness, to move beyond (and probably,

p.s. if pain be public, if pain be private, if pain can only be known by people who have experienced pain. one can only listen, but not recapitulate; share, but not shoulder. the encounter between the painter Vincy and me began with a tender exchange. i know not if it was because of the anxiety of having to expose candidly our pain, or from realising the impossibility of doing so, that we gradually fell into silence. perhaps tenderness is made possible only because pain is our common language. but this language is, in essence, tacit and tortuous. i remember what she told me about sharing. perhaps pain is inevitably private. what we can perceive regarding the pain of others is inevitably about that of our own. that night, we did not talk about it. later on, we still had not talked about it. we exchanged our secrets, read and responded, quietly.

oftentimes, fall back to) what i was used to: posing as composing. writing became a way to – not so much to deal with, but to live – to live with sadness.

and after decades of working as a writer, i have taken up another role as a teacher. i meet young people all the time. they often look cheerful, carefree, and generally, indeed, youthful. some of them write sad stuff – totally unexpected from the way they look. i summon myself not to suspect, not to slight, not to silence. i summon myself that i should actually urge more young people to show the world their struggles, their pain, their sadness, and to find ways to live with it. writing or otherwise.

like Sonia, although she prefers to call hers ‘other small senses of inconsequence’ if not downright pain.

i don’t know if you will meet Sonia these days. if you do, you may, like me, find her – in her bright red hair and bright red smile – cheerful, carefree, and youthful. she is all that and she writes sad poems. let her and her words serve another reminder to the world that a young person needs not feign sadness for poetry.

i recall a song by Dead Man’s Bones, called ‘young and tragic’. there are only two lines:

i wish that we were magic
so we wouldn’t be so young and tragic

i do think Sonia is magic, too.

chow yiu fai
february 27, 2015, shanghai

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ego video, tu videsne?

it's all through my eyes
that i can see
people around me
and people
looking back at me

sometimes i worry for them
for they turn their heads back
when their feet are on the gas pedal
driving towards the reddened traffic lights
with old ladies bundling across the road
but their eyes are on me

there are two cats
one has a grey back, the other brown
both with white heads and bellies and limbs
sitting close together side by side on a stone wall
turning their heads in the same direction
and studying the approaching mini-bus

only a few drops of rain to begin with
and gradually the grey stone floor tiles are covered with dots
like an ill-bred Dalmatian
with more blacks than whites

damp dark grey was initially the minority
but it took over
and the lighter shade gave in
cast away as the lesser
raining can also be an invasion
what is "normal" is always relative
wet and dry parts of the same floor

when i was sitting at the PCC in Festie
trying to get my Latin worksheet done in an hour
i found my eyes hopelessly drawn to the pastry shelf
and hurriedly drained my cinnamoned paradise of chocolate
when i was not in a hurry
ironically trying to kill some time

the lady at the computer dressed in clothing inappropriate for her age
her bare legs obscene
the pink fringe on her shawl obscure
the translucent floral-printed skirt tasteless
and she wouldn't go away
occupying the seat even though people requested her to leave
her 15 mins over

seated down on the bus ready to go to school
it's a long way to CU
and my Latin homework yet to be finished

dictionary on my lap
worksheet in my hand

a middle-aged lady squeezes into the opposite seat
in the row across the aisle, a tanned man wearing a cap with a little pony tail
a black singlet, left upper arm tattooed
a dusty drill under his legs
he is talking loudly on the phone with his girlfriend
complaining about her obstructing his sleep
– well, not that anyone is getting enough rest these days –
i suppose
loud but calm and reasonable
i try not to giggle with his punchy lines
smart and funny
though they are meant to argue

the donkey jumped into the river
a sinus
a fluvium
and died

the emptied yogurt cup is still in my hand
the pear is in my bag

anyone recognize my handwriting?
even i myself wouldn't dare to make such a claim
as long as you can recall my way of writing
you will see
through Barbie-lashed eyes
what weaves in my porcelain head

time's up
pens down
please make sure that you have written down your student number
— so what?

august 23, 2009

to consume and to rot

to consume
sumere
consumere
to take
to use up
to destroy

from not yet
to no longer
that is when things start to decay
to rot
to perish

the old accompanied, supported by a maid
looking like an over-ripe banana
covered with rust spots
limbs like dried bamboo sticks
blackened canes
clothes waving in suffocating summer wind
eyes half-closed from the blinding sun
it's not even mid-day

the old man sitting next to me smells old
his clothes neat and clean
the thin white shirt looks nice and cool
i am drowned in sweat
how lovely
my earring rubs against my wet shoulder
trying to keep my fringe away from catching my lashes
or sticking to my sunscreen lip gloss

lady please
can you stop cursing the driver
i am trying to finish my pear
even the chewing sound cannot muffle her annoyance
please

away
there you
Cicero is laughing at you from Africa
hugging his friend
talking about this and that and
killing the day

knees drilling in
can't imagine my heels could be such torment
i am quite addicted to that wavy way of walking
won't dare to claim resemblance to Su Lizhen
but well
that's not for me to judge

like a willow
in the breached wind
duplicity
of heat and comfort

to kill Medusa with a mirrored shield
or kill me
the one who looks into the mirror
to double-check if the face is clean
and perfect from the sunlight

of course it won't be
how dare a mortal claim perfection
Narcissus ended up a flower
pondering his looks for eternity

is it not a curse
to be forced to see
oneself withering as seasons change
or is it not a blessing
that through constant karma one can
still recognize his own face
and be in love
even for one season

a lucky fella

a mind trick

there goes the flash
almost blinding in the broad daylight
what is it for?
automatic it is
necessary it is not

be it

meant to hurt
blinding the one who seeks
to follow the reflection of one's own
from the less than a square inch lens
yet all you can see is caellum above
and terra below

even deus ex machina
cannot save your soul
to perish in all eternity
the divine comedy

how can heaven be a joke
i have always wondered
though the quote from J.F. Prufrock is lovely
which means i can recite now
that's what the training is meant for
to memorize
getting it into your blood

it's in the blood

the urge to get it out of my system
to shoot and be shot
being pushed to meditate over my own face

be more natural

I AM natural
how fake can that smile be

what is wrong with me
when eyeballs shower over me
don't call me crazy
i will crack your skull

try so hard not to grab the bottle

if there is any i can crack
i'd do it with my keyboard
a friend says a gf of mine hits the keyboard like black rain signal
i like a yellow

well
i didn't know it'd sound like raining on a laptop
or that i can type that fast

so let's just put it all down
with lots of typos
and i don't even know what i am saying
at all

just a way to fool yourself
and whoever is reading this
that it's not a waste of time

august 28, 2009

the unexpected guest

an intruder
yet a guest

uninvited
yet welcomed

who is the stranger?

the one lying next to you
sharing your cup
or the one breaking in from the window
knocking?

the unfamiliar urge
you pour your heart out
to fill the glass of the stranger
who is not so estranged
after all

statues and masks and dead bodies
everywhere

empty that bottle of whiskey, will you?
night after night
staring out to the borderless darkness
with a gun in your hand

the pen is sitting still on the table

the house is not empty
you just pretend that the second doesn't exist
but not the third

who is the stranger now

an unexpected visit
breaking and entering
would you close the door for me if i knocked?

why did you open the door
you ask

why did you not close it
letting it be opened in the first place
i said

strange
as if the stranger shares a kind of familiarity
with the night-long waiting for the phantom companion

the drop of whiskey slides back down to the pool
along the carved curve of the bottle
the moon penetrates the thick fog
as if solely to light up the gate in this restless night

guess she is sleepless
just the same
twisting and turning in her bed
but you can never see the other side

a clever reminder
of the duplicity of reality

august 29, 2009

