

Static Exile

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George Ttoouli

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Gists and Piths

for ST

A Japanese student in America, on being asked the difference between prose and poetry, said: Poetry consists of gists and piths.

– Ezra Pound

No, I mean the sun
cannot, the colour of orange
peel does not or the trees
repay us with a wave, just like –
and so if the, you know, mistranslates
between the green and grey,
olive husks/body rind/pre-crematoria –
the happy/glad oil cannot
and crazy/dead husks do not,
et cetera, and this knot in my pen –
like day lancing the ignorant boil –
like love being what someone said
in a poem not so long ago, Yes?
I would rather cook my eyes
than not see you again!
I mean that the sun cannot be
the colour of sand under a rock, Yes?
Crabs! No, onions! Crying
before you've reached the heart of,
caramelised/flavour-changed, world
in a different – you
on my tongue – could the tang/sweet
melt or bite into an apple/onion, Yes?
That the onion layers remind me
of how the trees will drop

olives and husks will crack under our sideways
and so life is a fried orange, Yes?
And if you and I were crabs/husks
and had no oil/tongues
to cremate our skins
in the passion of our frying
then our love would be
long as the sun –
and as long as
the sun – illogical.

Ghosts

All the houses in this city
have ghosts. The shops in Little India
and the stalls in China Town all
full of ghosts. Sometimes you'll see a pickup

full of ghosts, Sri Lankans, Tamils,
making their way to a construction site,
under bridges or in alleys
howling with air conditioning units.

I found a line in one ghost's poem which read,
*You can't take the kampongs out
of the people,* and to me it sounded
defiant, but later I learned what it meant.

She was cute; her dad worked
for the government. At night I swim
with the ghosts in the pool by the flats,
their wakes skimming behind their empty shapes.

Love on a Monday Evening

Today I felt fear and it was the grandest thing —
like the crown of my head would lift off.
Not a leaf could have flipped on its back in the wind

that I wouldn't have noticed.
An Arab sat opposite me on the train.
I had taken the first carriage,

the one we had imbued with likely death
in a way we only can substantiate for each other.
My fingers filled with static and my blood turned

to white noise. I could describe him for you,
a quick photo-fit sketch, but mostly it was his stubble
and the wart on his left cheek, like in

news reports. I have a spot in the same place
on my right cheek. You've never called me
a terrorist when I've not shaved for that long. Mostly

I have been supporting myself on wire link fences
looking at each partition of waste land,
square by square, until the police move me on.