

**Political  
Urgency**  
*A Cha Poetry Reading*



**Akin Jeje**



**Jason S Polley**

2 FEBRUARY 2018 • 7:30 PM • PAUSE 小息書店

A K I N  
J E J E  
&  
J A S O N  
P O L L E Y

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5<sup>th</sup> March 2014

## Chop

A chop, here in Greater China, is an emblem, carved in either icy stone, stern wood or delicate ivory. It is steeped in cloying black or scorching red ink before its indelible stamp.

Its mark is that of a company, an organization, a government or some other such institution. It emblazons the pride, spirit and convictions of the given institution.

On Kevin Lau Chun-to's streaked and bloodied back last week, there were several. Written Chinese is often difficult to decipher, but these marks were bold, simple and clear.

They read, 'Heed the script. Do not attempt to revise what has already been set with your own brush. Next time, our correspondence will be more firmly stamped, and final. If you must write, keep it simple, clear. The script is correct as the permanent symbol of the seal, or as proper as the right grip on the brush'.

Blurred and fading on a man in pain, the marks did not originate from the most artful calligraphy, but the message was clear- on the back and for the eyes of those whose brushes flowed elsewhere.

## oil and fire

*Ga-yau!*

Is a cheer, an exhortation to ultimate victory.

*Ga-yau!*

In the original Cantonese, literally means, 'add oil', like adding oil to a fragrant dish, a dish as Fragrant as this harbour, this temporary haven that seven millions still call home.

Schoolchildren, innocent and optimistic, cry,

*Ga-yau! Ga-yau! Ga-yau!*

As they cheer on classmates at a park stadium sheltered from concrete and crush, green and lush, Throwing, jumping and running their little limbs to the greatest of their abilities on a Sports Day.

*Ga-yau! Ga-yau! Ga-yau!*

Other students shout, as they spread like oil pouring into a Teflon pan, steadily, copiously, a-shine All over the heart of the city, lanes slick and glistening with the brightness of their ideals, litres and Gallons of them, not just mls. They diffuse over the centre, the central government claims, like the Exxon Valdez spill.

*Ga-yau! Ga-yau! Ga-yau! Ga-yau!*

Oil's brimming, having been poured over smoldering sentiments, billows of smoke rising in Gaseous tears and the acid bite of habanero mist. Police claim this blankets the flavour of disruptive Elements, but the scene starts to sizzle, fluids begin to crackle as the crowds raise their fists.

*Ga-yau!* CLAP-CLAP-CLAP!

*Ga-yau!* CLAP-CLAP-CLAP!

*Ga-yau!* CLAP-CLAP-CLAP!

*Ga-yau!* CLAP-CLAP-CLAP!

Shimmering pools of viscous frustration have started to spread, on a map of discord and discontent, City on the edge of the range, frighteningly within range of conflagration. Hailstones from dark Skies pound and smack barricades and streets, but oil melts and absorbs their precipitated fury.

Add oil, yes-yes-yes!

Add oil! yes-yes-yes!

Add oil! yes! Yes! Yes!

But pray, Hong Kong, they do not set fire, pour fire, or just fire on this ocean of oil, our most Precious natural resource, our people.

If they do, this city will alight. Then burn. And burn. And burn.

**Declaration**

BY BEI DAO

TRANSLATED BY BONNIE S. MCDOUGALL

*for Yu Luoke*

Perhaps the final hour is come

I have left no testament

Only a pen, for my mother

I am no hero

In an age without heroes

I just want to be a man

The still horizon

Divides the ranks of the living and the dead

I can only choose the sky

I will not kneel on the ground

Allowing the executioners to look tall

The better to obstruct the wind of freedom

From star-like bullet holes shall flow

A blood-red dawn

**reach**

Reach.

Reach high for the sky.

Reach so high that fingers part in trembling fear,

Kneeling on the cold tarmac, waiting for the heavy steps,

Hammers clicking as they cock,

Strides quickening as they walk,

Bellowing out demands,

Knees ache as loose gravel presses hard into you as those silver cuffs soon will,

Cutting the circulation of prize prey, a cause for celebration.

Reach,

To glance at least a flash of a badge,

Or a mark on a hand,

Hoping you'll make it at least to remand,

'Cause if you flinch or even twitch,

The last you'll feel is the force of those blasts.

It'll be in the news, but it won't last.

They'll escape the long arm of their own law.

Why?

They'll say you reached.

## Wasted

This is for those wasted,  
Served a searing afterlife, iced by chemical cocktails, pierced by shells,  
Or more sinister, a scimitar, a razor flash, a grave unmarked, another body shelved.

Verdicts, edicts seem justified by their crimes,  
But decisions seem capricious, influenced by the times, political considerations,  
Hypocritical sentences from the mouths of duplicitous nations.

Kalief Browder,  
Andrew Chan,  
Myuran Sukumaran,  
Troy Davis,  
Joven Esteva,  
Leonarda Akula,  
Were but six,

The lifeless are legion worldwide, whose capital offense was the absence of influence against bars  
and stars of malevolent constellations, unable to evade predestination.

There are those who never make it to the arrest vehicle, spines split, bones broken, dead in custody.  
Freddie grayed then bleached. Eric Garner only sought to keep the peace. Mike Brown ran, but didn't  
reach. Tamir Rice blasted over a toy plastic piece. The innocent also frequently de cease.

The AME Charleston Nine were martyred in the house of the Divine. The answer is nine. Nine mm  
shells, scorching, spent nine lives. Nine angels fit on the head of a firing pin, or through the eye of a  
cross-haired needle. State Senator Pinckney, Cynthia Hurd, a librarian, single mother Sharonda  
Coleman-Singleton, Myra Thompson, Ethel Lance, Rev. Daniel Simmons, Rev. Middleton-Doctor  
whose ministrations could not heal the hate of a young white supremacist murderer, Susie Jackson,  
recent college graduate Tywanza Sanders, pastors, brothers, sisters, mothers and grandmothers.  
The devil without became the devil within. Community grieving from grievous sin- all wasted.

The night is still. A half-moon is still un-blooded. To ripen into its fullest, most frightening form, it  
waits with silver cleaver, a camouflaged trigger for the spark of dawn.

**dear white america** BY DANEZ SMITH

i've left Earth in search of darker planets, a solar system revolving too near a black hole. i've left in search of a new God. i do not trust the God you have given us. my grandmother's hallelujah is only outdone by the fear she nurses every time the blood-fat summer swallows another child who used to sing in the choir. take your God back. though his songs are beautiful, his miracles are inconsistent. i want the fate of Lazarus for Renisha, want Chucky, Bo, Meech, Trayvon, Sean & Jonylah risen three days after their entombing, their ghost re-gifted flesh & blood, their flesh & blood re-gifted their children. i've left Earth, i am equal parts sick of your go back to Africa & i just don't see race. neither did the poplar tree. we did not build your boats (though we did leave a trail of kin to guide us home). we did not build your prisons (though we did & we fill them too). we did not ask to be part of your America (though are we not America? her joints brittle & dragging a ripped gown through Oakland?). i can't stand your ground. i'm sick of calling your recklessness the law. each night, i count my brothers. & in the morning, when some do not survive to be counted, i count the holes they leave. i reach for black folks & touch only air. your master magic trick, America. now he's breathing, now he don't. abra-cadaver. white bread voodoo. sorcery you claim not to practice, hand my cousin a pistol to do your work. i tried, white people. i tried to love you, but you spent my brother's funeral making plans for brunch, talking too loud next to his bones. you took one look at the river, plump with the body of boy after girl after sweet boi & ask why does it always have to be about race? because you made it that way! because you put an asterisk on my sister's gorgeous face! call her pretty (for a black girl)! because black girls go missing without so much as a whisper of where?! because there are no amber alerts for amber-skinned girls! because Jordan boomed. because Emmett whistled. because Huey P. spoke. because Martin preached. because black boys can always be too loud to live. because it's taken my papa's & my grandma's time, my father's time, my mother's time, my aunt's time, my uncle's time, my brother's & my sister's time . . . how much time do you want for your progress? i've left Earth to find a place where my kin can be safe, where black people ain't but people the same color as the good, wet earth, until that means something, until then i bid you well, i bid you war, i bid you our lives to gamble with no more. i've left Earth & i am touching everything you beg your telescopes to show you. i'm giving the stars their right names. & this life, this new story & history you cannot steal or sell or cast overboard or hang or beat or drown or own or redline or shackle or silence or cheat or choke or cover up or jail or shoot or jail or shoot or jail or shoot or ruin

this, if only this one, is ours.

## curtains

Darkness has fallen, an angry orange gleam, a slashing sash of fire, smouldering at the fringes of the heavy onyx curtains that blank the horizon.

Some welcome the shade, scorning the scorch of desert storms, fever pitches, Montezuma's revenge, or simply light upon the bulbous blister of brown oxide scales spreading on iron frames.

Others feel their drawstrings tighten around their throats, their wrists, their limbs, trussed for the slaughter they've always remembered. No more trust for the ides of November.

Theatre is a game played in the shadows, by the shadows, for the shadows. Indonesia calls it *wayang kulit*, a silhouetted procession of clowns and monsters, fallen heroes and brazen impostors. Shows play in real time, to the tinkling percussion of the *gamelan*. The *nayaga*, who play this progression of mallets, metallophones and xylophones know as acutely as the high notes reaching towards the intended climax who pays for the performance.

We are taxed, but don't write checks or balances. Here, the shows have been pre-scripted and pre-recorded. There's always the fear of something live jumping out of the narrative. Sorry, Bernie.

You didn't buy a ticket? Fine, watch outside the fence that is not yet a wall. Roast some corn. Pour something cold and frothy into a plastic glass more transparent than the content of tonight's act. Wait for the curtains to rise once more.

Applaud, cheer, boo, hiss, jeer to the loudest of your abilities. Your silence is not golden. Your voices add to the chorus.

Your reviews may just help this revue become great again. Or cancel its run. Don't blame this pantomime- you're the one who wanted to watch.

**home by WARSAN SHIRE**

no one leaves home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark  
you only run for the border  
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster than you  
breath bloody in their throats  
the boy you went to school with  
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory  
is holding a gun bigger than his body  
you only leave home  
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you  
fire under feet  
hot blood in your belly  
it's not something you ever thought of doing  
until the blade burnt threats into  
your neck  
and even then you carried the anthem under  
your breath  
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets  
sobbing as each mouthful of paper  
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,  
that no one puts their children in a boat  
unless the water is safer than the land  
no one burns their palms  
under trains  
beneath carriages  
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck  
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled  
means something more than journey.  
no one crawls under fences  
no one wants to be beaten  
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps  
or strip searches where your  
body is left aching  
or prison,  
because prison is safer  
than a city of fire  
and one prison guard  
in the night  
is better than a truckload  
of men who look like your father  
no one could take it  
no one could stomach it  
no one skin would be tough enough

the  
go home blacks  
refugees  
dirty immigrants  
asylum seekers  
sucking our country dry  
niggers with their hands out  
they smell strange  
savage  
messed up their country and now they want  
to mess ours up  
how do the words  
the dirty looks  
roll off your backs  
maybe because the blow is softer  
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender  
than fourteen men between  
your legs  
or the insults are easier  
to swallow  
than rubble  
than bone  
than your child body  
in pieces.

i want to go home,  
but home is the mouth of a shark  
home is the barrel of the gun  
and no one would leave home  
unless home chased you to the shore  
unless home told you  
to quicken your legs  
leave your clothes behind  
crawl through the desert  
wade through the oceans  
drown  
save  
be hunger  
beg  
forget pride  
your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear  
saying-  
leave,  
run away from me now  
i dont know what i've become  
but i know that anywhere  
is safer than here

# J A S O N P O L L E Y

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**1.**

“Oh Rascal Children Of Gaza” (2014)—Khaled Juma

Oh rascal children of Gaza,  
You who constantly disturbed me with your screams under my window,  
You who filled every morning with rush and chaos,  
You who broke my vase and stole the lonely flower on my balcony,  
Come back –  
And scream as you want,  
And break all the vases,  
Steal all the flowers,  
Come back,  
Just come back...

**2.**

“In Flanders Fields” (1915)—John McCrae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.  
We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.  
Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

## 3.

"Lines for a Hard Time" (1967)—Gena Ford

*Evil does not go always  
by dark ways. On any hot  
summer day, cleanshaven  
it may stride across  
a public place and head  
purposefully for high  
vantagepoints.*

*What whisper  
hisses in the inner ear  
take cover? Ah, and then  
the boy is dead, others dead  
or dying, and the evil  
laps out from bits of hot  
lead across nervepools  
of the nation.*

*We are sick  
in our littered streets  
and high places. Worms twist  
in our labyrinthine skulls.  
We are frightened by bland  
facades.*

*The losses are always  
personal. A phone rings;  
a father becomes less than  
the sum of his grief. Could we  
say better than his own words,  
And we will die as well...  
Spiral upward into All Love?*

**4.**

"We Real Cool" (1963)—Gwendolyn Brooks

*The Pool Players.*

*Seven at the Golden Shovel.*

We real cool. We  
Left school. We

Lurk late. We  
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We  
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We  
Die soon.

## 5.

"An Umbrella: Revolution" (2017)—*Henry Leung*

I leaned against a sycamore and peeled it to paper when a dying person called me instead of an ambulance. Sobbing and listening to sobbing are separate skills. The dry voice at the end is like a dusk sky turning sick shades of green. "Who have I suffered for?" To delay another's death, I told a lifetime's worth of lies and promises. A passing dog bit my shin, the most foreign of my limbs. The wound was not deep, yet it remains. A deeper wound would be like absence. I have not mastered absence. I walk along rivers pocketing stones. I cannot bear myself in. I need a volcano, a swallowing like a door without a doorway.

{☂}

A banner :

我

要

真

普

選

When all but the top is torn off, what remains? "I."\* And above it, a symbol. I've moved and moved, but from every sublet, from each butchered bedroom, I can see a smokestack, a crematorium across the way. My latest window stands between a pillow and a highway. Cars shake up the dice in me, my sum unsettled. Some nights I wander in dry weather raising a yellow umbrella. Sometimes someone yells at me to die. *Someone* is the fourth-person pronoun. I ask someone which is harder, true love or true suffrage, and someone is unsettled. Eventually, the I is torn off.

\* (My translation.)

## 6.

"Grief Calls Us to the Things of This World" (2009)—Sherman Alexie

The morning air is all awash with angels

—Richard Wilbur, *"Love Calls Us to the Things of This World"*

The eyes open to a blue telephone

In the bathroom of this five-star hotel.

I wonder whom I should call? A plumber,  
Proctologist, urologist, or priest?

Who is blessed among us and most deserves  
The first call? I choose my father because

He's astounded by bathroom telephones.  
I dial home. My mother answers. "Hey, Ma,"

I say, "Can I talk to Poppa?" She gasps,  
And then I remember that my father

Has been dead for nearly a year. "Shit, Mom,"  
I say. "I forgot he's dead. I'm sorry—

How did I forget?" "It's okay," she says.  
"I made him a cup of instant coffee

This morning and left it on the table—  
Like I have for, what, twenty-seven years—

And I didn't realize my mistake  
Until this afternoon." My mother laughs

At the angels who wait for us to pause  
During the most ordinary of days

And sing our praise to forgetfulness  
Before they slap our souls with their cold wings.

Those angels burden and unbalance us.  
Those fucking angels ride us piggyback.

Those angels, forever falling, snare us  
And haul us, prey and praying, into dust.

## 7.

"All Had Dreams" (2010)—Akin Jeje  
*Five years after the start of the Iraq War...*

All had dreams  
that revealed themselves to us in streams  
over burning sand, still scorched from shells,  
spent, gasping bitter cordite coated with benzene

All had dreams  
That relieve themselves in crimson streams,  
Over the blackened ruins, hissing  
Metal, sizzling rubber, weeping gasoline.

All had dreams  
That relied on electronic streams,  
Through now-molten wires, crackling,  
Sound gnaws, screen jaws, talking head squeals  
From a plethora of e-zines

All had dreams  
Emanating from an unseen,  
Irreverence at the pulpit,  
*Mullahs* roaring at the *fellaheen*.

Now only a few have dreams  
Sputtering from between  
The rehearsed lines that wed black gold and death,  
As poppies flourish and multiply,  
Nourished by growing streams.

**8.**

"Constituent Command " (2014)—Jason S Polley

I have this friend

Former friend

Actually

Now

Actually actually is one of my favourite Hong Kong words

*Kei sat*

*Kei sat* as step back

A rhetorical revising

On second thought

Yes

For real

Honesty actually is instantly forthcoming

ASAP

For real

*Kei sat*

Actually actually is as emblematic of Hong Kong as are its umbrellas

Show

Actually show

Don't merely tell

Umbrellas in the sun

Umbrellas in the rain

Umbrellas in the shade

Actually

For real

Look

See the sea

Look look

See

Umbrellas at dusk

Umbrellas at dawn  
 Umbrellas in shade

Umbrellas in the hands of  
 Umbrellas in the face of  
 Umbrellas on the cover of

Of  
 For  
 Against  
 In defense

Let's actually return to the reason  
 The reason for the friendship forsaken  
 pihsdneirf nekasrof eht rof nosaer ehT

Here are the keywords to our

Our  
 The friends forsook  
 Aken  
 Aching

Final final words

Hong Kong and CY Leung  
 Cantonese and overseas  
 Museum and requiem

But  
 Actually  
 Requiem is evoked not be

Spoke like this actually did she

Hong Kong for me  
 (A five-year resident of the place  
 Of  
 Of this special administrative region  
 Is she)  
 Is not special

Though  
Actually

I could only ever live in Hong Kong  
Or in my unspoiled village in interior Taiwan  
Where I can still speak my dear dear undead dialect  
A dialect in danger

Endanger  
Ed  
Educa  
Shhh

Plus  
Actually  
I only ever speak English in Hong Kong

Mandarin is too too  
Actually  
You know  
To speak Mandarin in Hong Kong is to  
People would think I was  
Actually

Vocal pause

And you said See Why Long

CY Leung

Actually I don't know who's she

He

I don't know what this particular chief of  
Of

Vocal pause

And the protests

The umbrella uprising

Yes

But actually in Mong Kok too I didn't know

No

Yes

I live

Really

Near

There

Actually

So

Cantonese can be

People will

Cantonese people can actually leave

Speak it overseas

Festivals

Museums

As

A

The

Preserve

Enough

Drama

Tic

Democratic

An irony schmirony symphony

A coughing choir cacophony

A conservation that kills

Pandas in plexiglas prisons prefer not to procreate

A conversation that

Umbrellas for  
In defense of

Peaceful  
Passive  
Pacific  
Polite

Defense of  
Democra  
See

A Bruce Lee jeeting

*Jyut*  
*Ng*

The sound the sound  
The Cantonese resound

Umbrellas  
Confronting  
Interrupting

*Jyuting*

Boys in blue  
And pro-Beijing bylines  
And censoring presses censored

*Jyuting jyuting*

Pepper spray  
Tear gas  
Batons  
Brutes

Umbrella made verb

To serve and to protect

And to take umbrage

To umbrella

Against

Offense

In defense of

To defend

Votes

Voices

Choices

From the sterile bureaus of cold elites to the cleaner publics of street-sweeps

Forced

Mong Kok

Where actual unarmed students actually hold actual mirrors in front of actual riot police

*Et tu, Custode?*

Say four say *say*

*Yat yee sam say*

And *ng*

Add *ng*

Add oil

A perpetuation

A persistence

*Pengyau*

*Ga Yau*

A resistance morphing exhaust-toxic motorways into sculpture-park boulevards

So the public can

Mongkokers

May

Sit  
Wait  
Walk  
Wander

Can persist to resist to  
In order to  
Exist

Us as

Us is

Not  
Us was

Here  
Hear

The people sing  
Actually actual  
Umbrellaing