

“Nature and the Urban Dweller: A *Cha* Reading”
(Friday 12 April 2019 | Swing A Cat)

MARC NAIR

Chief Gardener

There is a censored garden inside of me
— Laura Kasischke

We were clothed in swamp, pidgin-tongued; our
pale language rankled from bazaar, native stickers
slopped on foreheads. Our jambans haunted banana
trees, our roots dredged from a tangle of mangroves.

When he seeded a country, he saw the city that
could rise from common weeds; he watered us with
words, plucked our hearts after each rain. Taught us
that not all harvests are equal, and not all men too.

We set the clouds to stunning white, acres of glass
trees rose by our hands, penthouse currencies occupied
the upper floors. We cannot have rest, so the land
has no rest, and we are always in a season of growth.

Exercise Rights

Helix Bridge, Marina Bay Sands

The runners are white, male and going bald,
their marathon singlets a lunch hour pass.
rough the casino where croupiers call,
sprinting softly on corporate carpet grass.

As distances close with muscle-bound minds,
they cross the bridge, jogging their good genomes,
while underneath construction workers find
an hour's sleep, a sunburst sigh of home.

For theirs is the garden, theirs is the toil,
not an office of air-conditions.
And theirs is the portion of rice and oil,
sometimes a bottle of inhibition.

Some hearts are dominant, some silent,
some remonstrate, and some are violent.

Fences

Perhaps you have not seen the bhatura,
how it rises like a blimp, this Indian
miracle filling space with leavened bread.
Perhaps you feel the need to chain-link it
with a ring of chole helmets, pressure
cooked to curry flavour; a ring point
to deflate this aggravation, a rise of
plebeian bombs, importunate pooris.

On your night vision screens, communes
of carrom men slam across back alley
boards, floating on powder, striking at the queen,
finding pockets where the netting's been worn
away, so that no one catches them when
they fall into fenced fields, a sense of home.

THE FUTURE

Everything consists of the future.

Man-made futures and naturally occurring futures extracted from the earth have contributed greatly to increased prosperity.

Some futures have caused serious damage to human beings and the environment.

Not all futures are hazardous but they can still pose a risk if handled incorrectly. A future product such as time consists of chemically balanced elements like chance and nuclear codes.

Examples of futures in daily life are gambling debts, rising temperatures and the persistence of reality TV.

Materials that are manufactured from or with the aid of the future are replacing to an increasing degree the natural materials found in substances such as satire, books and honey.

Such substances may be treated with augmented realities to make them future-proof and trump all unforeseen circumstances.

Over the past fifty years, the future potential of the world has decreased many times over and we no longer have the same hope for the future that we used to have. Some futures emit harmful storylines and others do not pass naturally from our narratives but accumulate like bad omens in the body.

Many of the futures we commit to daily are premised on toxic circumstances. Some futures may trigger allergic reactions such as daydreaming and shallow breathing. Some islands may disappear as the future erodes everything below present sea-level.

Children and the elderly are more sensitive to the future than are adults.

This may mean life-long consequences if too much future occurs during childhood or is absorbed in vast amounts over a certain age.

As a consumer of the future you have the right to receive information on whether the future contains any substances of very high concern. If 0.1% of the future is found to be flammable or violates existing rules based on the past as presence, you may raise your concerns to the future, much like a toast, or as an admission of infinite failure.

The future leaches into the present through a variety of ways.
It sours the soil and proselytises water, carbonates our fish and coats our vegetables.

The future is on our dinner table.

We eat the future every night.

LIAN-HEE WEE

Cha: An Asian Literary Journal Reading Series:
Nature and the Urban Dweller
12 April 2019
Part for Lian-Hee Wee

Preamble: As a boy, I wanted to live in the woods, and actively acquired skills to do so. Then I came to love the city, which I now find less appealing. So, I am now very much in a loss, but hope that wherever I live, civil liberties extend not only to human dwellers. This selection, I hope, will make us less human-centric in our lives.

Item #1

they help the flowers bloom

June 5, 2009 at 5:45pm

"Can you see that grandpa?" the little boy asked, pointing to a bunch of frangipani blossoms.

The old man nodded in agreement, and drew a deep quiet breath, enjoying the sweet fragrance that decorate the evening.

"They are called egg-flowers", the boy added in Cantonese. "The white surrounding petals with a yellow centre make each flower look like a sunny-side-up."

Again the old man nodded, but his nod was broken when his eyes followed a swift brownish body that darted across from a nearby tree, in a silent flight that is also curiously clumsy. The child's gaze followed the old man's.

"What's that bird?" asked the child, eager as always. "There are so many of them, but they fly so quickly and I never see them clearly."

The old man smiled. "Ah... They help the flowers bloom. They are the reason why Hong Kong's streets and parks have these beautifully decorated trees, giving us something nicer to smell at other than the fumes of cars and the human chimneys smoking death sticks."

"They help the flowers bloom?" the boy wondered aloud in marvel, thinking in his head that those must be the most beautiful birds in the world, with the sweetest songs.

"Yes, but they are also blind and you can't hear their songs," added the old man with an air of mystery.

The boy looked confused as he searched the sky for them, but was about to interject that they can't be blind since none were falling off the sky from crashing with the branches ...

"You like them?" asked the old man.

"Yeah. I'm glad they are here. And they are not bli ..."

"They are not birds. They are bats. They eat fruits and also help spread seeds and pollen. They are an important part of the ecology. They help make Hong Kong beautiful. You know, up close, they have little teddy-bear-like faces."

The boy kept quiet, and for the rest of the walk home panned his eyes in hope of seeing another one of these silent and unassuming mammals with flight. He went home puzzled at why so many silly adults have poisoned his thoughts with the false impression that bats are scary and evil. In his little journal, he wrote, "Jun 4, 2009. People gathered at Victoria Park to call for freedom and democracy as I write this. I want freedom, but I cannot get it if I am misled by lies. I need evidence to understand what the real picture is. This is what I learnt from the bat today. Whoever made the bat scary and evil had tried to pass on a prejudice. How terrible if I had believed that lie and threw a stone at the bat which made my home the nice place that it is!"

They helped the flowers bloom that evening, and all other evenings. What did I do?

Item #2

Haikus on Daily Enhancement of Climate Change 6 Sep 2018

Air-con with hotpot
Expounding on climate change.
Time for cigarette

Boy girl in courtship,
Displaying care and promise,
Dress, eat in excess

Public toilet time.
Haphazard hand-rinsing,
Pulls three paper towels

Eager mom in shade
Appeases toddler with sweet
Plastic tossed on ground.

Creative children
Must learn without boundaries.
Waste becomes virtue.

Item #3

At the Unholy Court of Humanity 5 Sep 2018

Thank you for letting me speak.
I suddenly do not know where to begin.

My home set ablaze, together with my clan, in fact, my nation,
To make shampoo and cookies, that could have been made differently.
In your language, you call your species Orang,
and distinguished your tribes as Asli, Laut, Hulu, ...
And you called mine, Utan, marking us a tribe like yours.
We respect your wish to breathe foul air and to poison your own children.
Can you not just let us watch in a distance?
Why torch us in our lush tropical homes to create your fumes?

My friend, Elly, comes from a family revered as godly by you, Orang Sivil.¹
But she bears scars of torture, stolen as a baby by killing her parents.
Her career forced into lumber, to destroy more living spaces,
Then when weakened, she was burdened with rides for her vain enslavers,
Before being neglected in isolation for the next 30 years of her 70 lifespan.
Her kin in Africa sends word of unspeakable genocide.
With 32 teeth that many of you cannot properly care for,
is that the psychological underpinning for the want of tusks?

I remember trying to fish in my river. I partook of a piece of plastic,
mistakenly partaken of by my fish,
because someone, not saying which species, lest I slander,
tossed the wrapping of the chocolate
made from the blood of my family.
Did you say it was delicious?

Harimau was a prowling flame I feared, but Harimau is no more.
At our forest, Harimau sometimes stopped preying to drink
Fermented coconut and gourds at our forest bar with the Barbie Babirusa.
That’s when Harimau purred like a kitten,
and we saw innocence under the striped coat of magnificence.
Our bar, now your waterhole where I overheard,
“With the maids, and off with their heads.
Ay, the heads of maids or their maidenheads,”
Sampson of Capulet flourished.

Vlad the Impaler would pale to hear of the Buaya’s suffering
A steel rod through the head running along the spine, so that frayed alive,
The leather is then washed with poisons that seep to our soils and streams,
Luxury money vessels may feature the patterns
Which hint at our common history beyond the Jurassic.

¹ Homo civilis

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How sweet that you encourage your children to appreciate dinosaurs!
A great LV bag that would make, would it not?

Have I become delirious? I cannot help it.
Infection has eaten me from my furless burnt skin
And scorched lungs filled with particulates, micro- or pico-
My mind frenzied with the silent screams
That come from my clan, interspersed confusingly with some of yours.
Everything is so simple,
But you insist nothing is,
And your arguments so compelling,
They fail to explain Life
before you, your economics, or your philosophies.

Show me an immoral vermin: snake, centipede, bat, lizard, frog, or rot,
Oft cited to fill tomes of your righteous metaphors.
Show me an example of cruelty that compares perhaps,
To how you have treated your own kind,
Because even that,
Is not justification.
Because even that,
does not absolve your ungodly tadpole-aspiring seed.

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Plea: Thank you. Wine is vegan, but check to see that there is no egg-white added. Many things we don't need hurt our world. Leather, fur, plastic, cigarettes, fireworks, milk, meat, ... By giving up some, we help many. Then, help some more. Let my plea not be weakened by your knowledge of my sins, I plead on behalf of those who cannot. May you be strengthened by wisdom and compassion.