

Handout 2: Poems in English Translation

First reading: What is clear? What is confusing?

As a class, listen to the audio recordings of *A Story, or History, Perhaps?* and/or *Chinatown, I* on the *little red comma* microsite. Use the English translations in **Handout 1** as a guide. As you read your assigned poem,

- a. identify the stanzas which you feel you can visualise and make sense of, which you find somewhat vivid and clear about. Mark them with a “ 😊 ” emoji.
- b. identify the stanzas which you feel you cannot visualise or make sense of, which you find either confusing or unsure about. Mark them with a “ 😞 ” emoji.

Second reading: Annotating for Connections to Themes

Read your assigned poem once more. Using the notes on the themes of social history and urban development from Handout 1:

- a. highlight phrases, lines, or sections of the poem which you observe have connections to the two themes.
- b. jot down notes alongside the poems
- c. if you are feeling unsure about a possible connection, you can always add a “?” next to your annotation for now.

Sebuah Cerita Atau Sejarah, Entahlah?

Abdul Ghani Hamid

Di sini dulu hadir pasir yang memantai
panjang menyambung Padang Terbakar, Bedok, Siglap dan Katong
dan jauh ke Kallang Rokok,
telah merakam sejarah yang lama terbenam.

Aku masih segar mengingatkan pantai nelayan ini
yang tidak dalam benak generasi Marine Parade Road
dan Parkway yang menghidu bayu laut dan melihat riaknya
dan tidak memahami mendaki Bukit Siglap dulu.

Di sini, kerenungi alam dulu
dan dikatakan mengusap panorama silam
tetapi Makam Tok Lasam di Jalan Sempadan
adalah catatan terlalu sukar dikikiskan.

Di sini, buminya kian usang dan tenggelam
ceritanya kian tak bernilai
bagai zaman datang membawa perubahan
yang mengghairahkan naluri murah.

Di sini dulu hadir pasir yang memantai
terdedah dengan rakaman tua dan kisah kini
akan terbenam selama-lamanya
kecuali ada yang mengasihi nilai budaya.

A Story, or History, Perhaps?

Abdul Ghani Hamid

Translated by Annaliza Bakri

Here lies a sandy strip of land forming the shore then
stretching into the distance, connecting Padang Terbakar*, Bedok,
Siglap and Katong
all the way towards Kallang Rokok*
recording history that has been submerged for so long.

Unfading, I remember this fisherman's beach
that's absent in the mind of Marine Parade Road's generation
and of Parkway who inhale the sea breeze and observe its ripples
and not understanding the climb up Bukit Siglap then.

Here, I ruminate on the preceding environment
what's said to have caressed the panorama of the past
but Tok Lasam's shrine at Jalan Sempadan*
is an account that's too difficult to erase.

Here, where the earth is crumbling and sinking
its story is becoming worthless
like an epoch bringing about change
that excites vile instincts.

Here lies a sandy strip of land forming the shore then
uncovered with recordings of past and present narratives
that will be buried forever
unless someone appreciates the value of culture.

Published in *Aku Bukan Penyair*, Abdul Ghani Hamid. (Singapore: Angkatan Sasterawan '50, 2008)

***Where are these places? How were they significant?**

[1] Padang Terbakar: Padang Terbakar village was a mainly Malay coastal village, near present-day Changi Business Park, which had its shoreline extended further out to sea in the 1970s in order to build East Coast Parkway. In the 1980s, the village was acquired by Jurong Town Corporation (JTC) for industrial developments and its residents were resettled into HDB flats. See also:



and



[2] Kallang Rokok: One of the riverine communities at Kallang Basin was Kampong Rokok. It was named after the traditional hand-rolled cigarettes made by the Malay villagers at the turn of the 20th century. Unfortunately, Kampong Rokok and surrounding villages were uprooted in the 1930s for Kallang Aerodrome. Most were resettled to the Malay Settlement in Eunos. See also page 74 of the The Kallang Story Booklet:



[3] Tok Lasam's shrine at Jalan Sempadan: On a patch of open grassland behind Villa Marina, a low-rise private condominium, lies the grave of Penghulu Lasam. "Pengkulu" is the Malay term for "headman" or "chief".



《牛车水》

陈志锐

必也牛乎
不仅水也

曾经一牛车一牛车
载来生命之泉
连水也在此扎根

根深得
连舌头也灿开
福建人的香铺在广东话的豆腐街
自在地烧香添油点灯求签圣杯
拜着语言天才的神明

我们用福建话买
你们用潮州话卖
还是吃到一盘声色俱佳的
地道海南鸡饭

说着说着
瘠就老了
听着听着
方言的耳朵
也老了

会不会有一天
只能用一种语言点海南鸡饭福建炒面广东饮茶客家酿豆腐潮州粥
即使
在牛车水

再后来
连最夯的政府组屋
也到此扎根
不再平民的平民住宅
连景色也要收费

最后的牛车水之后

还有没有
水车牛的后缀
牛车水呵牛车水
再牛
也牛不过
半杯历史之水
一车时代之薪

只是
我的老家曾经在那里
我的味蕾还停留在那里
我方言的口语习得
还稀稀刷刷流利在那里
我的童真还懵懵懂懂
根植
在
那
里

那里
还在我们
心底

Chinatown, I

Tan Chee Lay

Translated By Teng Qian Xi

where there are bullocks
there must be more than water

once, bullock cart after bullock cart
brought the fount of life
even water
has sunk its roots here

these roots are so deep
that even tongues gleam
the joss-sticks of the Hokkien people
are spread along Cantonese-speaking Tofu Street*
at ease, they
burn incense
refill and relight oil lamps
tell fortunes with moon blocks*
worship gods with a genius for language

we buy in Hokkien
you sell in Teochew
why not have a plate of classic chicken rice
invitingly redolent with Hainanese

as we talk and talk
houses grow old
listen up listen up
the ears of dialects
are ageing too

will there be a day
when only one language is used to order
Hainanese chicken rice Hokkien mee Cantonese yum cha Hakka yong tau foo
Teochew porridge
even in Chinatown

after some time
even the most ungainly HDB flats
have taken root here
no longer the public's public housing
they even charge for the scenery

in the end, will
water
carts
bullocks
still be a postscript to
Chinatown?

Chinatown O Chinatown
no matter how smart you are
you cannot get the better of
a half-cupful of the waters of history
a cartful of the wages of an era

it's just that
my old home was once there
my insides are still there
my everyday dialect
has been scoured into fluency there
my childhood innocence is still
unsuspectingly
putting
down
roots
over
there

deep in our hearts
that space
still endures

Translator's Notes:

*[1] **Chin Chew Street**, which is now pedestrianized and located inside China Square shopping mall.

*[2] **Moon blocks**, or jiaobei blocks, (筊杯, jiǎo bēi, lit. "bamboo cups") are wooden divination tools originating from China, which are used in pairs and thrown to answer a yes or no question. They are made out of wood or bamboo and carved into a crescent shape. Each block is round on one side (known as the yin side) and flat on the other (known as the yang side). It is one of the more commonly used items found in Chinese traditional religion and are used in temples and home shrines along with fortune sticks, both of which are often used together when requesting an answer from the gods.

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