

Till Covid-Infinite: A Suite of Poems

Ouyang Yu

Ban on Australia

no barley
no beef
no coal
no iron ore
no travel
no students
no more relation ship
What next?
Refer back to history
and read *that* poem:
'Those bad Chinese! Those bad Chinese.
Foul scatterers of strange disease.'

A fragment, remembered

The interviewer asks:
'What does being Asian mean to you in this country?'
You answered straight away:
'It means you don't have a friend'
Now, you thought to revise it as:
'And never will no matter how hard you try'
But thought better of it by deleting it like this:
~~'And never will no matter how hard you try'~~

Cing

I have been practicing social distancing ever
since I came to this country 29 years ago

In fact, I now think, Australia is the best
country for that type of cing, I mean thing

Racial distancing, for example, like the ageing guy yesterday in Bunnings Warehouse
where he mumbled 'I'm sorry?' as I raised my head to see a distancing face

Then, this morning, as I was moving my bowels, I wrongly read social distancing
as facial distancing and, in that instant, all the faces, distanced over the years

came rushing back, faces of colour, black, brown, dark and daunting
as well as those of no colour that they say is white

a facial distancing accompanied by heart distancing

and mind distancing, two varieties that are so well practised in Australia

that all these things are here to stay
for longer periods of time than you and me till Covid-infinite

Comments on Capitalism

- a. According to him, Covid-19 will be followed by the collapse of capitalism
- b. In China, public health is for everyone and for free
- c. To be number one in everything is to be that in the number of deaths
- d. If money is the only thing important, poverty can't be cured
- e. Black lives don't matter because money does
- f. A recommendation: Run America like a socialist state in capitalist ways
- g. When it comes to violence, America matches China or vice versa
- h. Why blame each other if everyone has uncleaned shitty bums?
- i. Have nothing more to say. Wait till capitalism revises itself in its demise

It's the Covid-19 time

But the sun wants us to remember that this is the best time
And the trees want us to remember that there's no more work, at least for a few more weeks
And the skies are happy that no more planes will cut them open from time to time all the time
And the birds are happy to see more people idling away like they are no longer busy
And the nights can now enjoy as quiet a sleep as their human counterparts
And things are so pretty when the world has stopped turning around profit
And the poet, left alone and permanently unemployed, gets very busy with his poetry

The Killer Virus: a description

It enters by nose
It enters by mouth
It enters by eye, or ear or tooth
The way it enters
resembles very much love
igniting fire from fire to fire
Then, it goes into hiding, like love also
not wanting to be detected
least of all known
Two weeks after, it begins reaping
seeing people fall, out on the street
putting them away, from the locked-down cities
For once, streets of the country are thoroughly happy
because free from traffic
and constant feet, the most resistant part to it
Now, worldwide and most famous
let me welcome it and call it 'Killer Verse'

Yay

I'm in despair

◦

there's no incentive

◦

it's been isolation like this ever since

◦

I came to this country

◦

social distancing to the degree

◦

of self-destruction

◦

who contacts who?

◦

who is supposed to approach who?

◦

self-imposed isolation

◦

self-imposed distancing

◦

self-imposed ignoring

◦

to be a migrant in this country

◦

is to be a disease

◦

a pre-existing virus

◦

who wants to know who?

◦

who needs who?

◦

am I a fictional character of my own?

◦

am I a fiction of my self?

◦

I hear you, I hear you, for you say: 'Why don't you die, now?'

◦

I did see, though, my own corpse last night

◦

people busy moving around me and I not a word

◦

is that how post-life feels?

◦

the chasm is vast

◦
so vast we can't even begin talking

◦
eyes looking the other way

◦
never caring to meet

◦
even in the same city

◦
until the obituary

◦
a self-supporter, a self-isolator, a self-distancer

◦
you always have been

◦
because of the circumstances

◦
because of no because

◦
self-reliance, self-whiting, self-pleasing

◦
to the degree of self-dying

◦
now, a builder of self-graves, you

◦
have no visitors

◦
not even virtual

◦
time to die, to go, to disappear, to self-white-out

◦
why bother breathing

◦
the same breaths breathed out by

◦
strangers who befriend you but you never want to know?

◦
the Silence, the Quietness, the Quietude, the Solitude

◦
are so oppressive now

◦
billions of mouths, unemployed

◦
are howling in no sound

◦
fine with me
◦
it's all fine, with me
◦
I'm but another disease that is no longer novel
◦
quit me in poetry
◦
if that's what you want
◦
let's welcome Vivid-19nism
◦
here to stay and for always
◦
and it's good company, yay

A/F

As if nothing worked
As if we were still alive
As if it's a fake country
As if things did seem to matter
As if we had lived trillions of years
As if I were not we
As if sex mattered little now
As if memory were a graveyard
As if words were sands were words
As if the past were right now
As if clouds were my eyes
As if he could make himself a king standing like that in the photograph
As if they were always correct
As if you spoke the same language when you speak it
As if a book were a walking corpse, a group of them
As if night were day turned inside out
As if writing mattered and etc (no it doesn't, it matters even less, with tik tok, with fb, with this and that, with these and those, let's see writers die en masse, giving way to a future of less and less)
As if death were life

Wuhan

I came from Wuhan
I lived there
I loved there
I gave birth there
I wrote about it in my third, actually my second, published novel
I wrote about it in my trilogy published in Taiwan
I wrote about it in many of my as yet unpublished poems

I wrote about it in another novel as yet unpublished
Don't start trying to fend me off
I had done all that before 4 May 2019
when I headed back for home in Melbourne

'They told me

to fuck off
to go back to my own country
to be better than I always am
to write to an absolutely acceptable degree
to keep silent when a voice is in high demand
to revise and keep revising until nothing of me remains
to say nothing good about the country where I was born and bred
to always divide me against my self
to stay away in perpetual lockdown unless they have a book launch they want you
to go to and buy a copy
to watch and keep watching their TV commercials so all you ever think of is buy, buy, buy
to not want to know them because they don't want to know me
to remember that people from my own country are never good enough, have to be wiped out
one day or subdued as total slaves
to internalise all the anger resentment fury frustrations disappointments despair till I turn into
a human-sized atom bomb'

Relevant to the Day - July 4th, 2020

Omar Sakr

After a traffic altercation in Western Sydney

I don't have anything hopeful to say, love.
In Bankstown my cousin was shot in the head.
My wife thinks she can have road rage anywhere.
Wants to know why I couldn't speak. I show
her my mouth full of bullets and she insists
some people deserve to be yelled at, get the finger.
I swallow the lead. I'm not brave enough to imagine
the future anymore. I lost it when I was fifteen and
another cousin was stabbed to death on the street.
I would lie in bed, thinking of graves and sleep
without entering either, alone in the awful splendour
of night's arms, trying to picture what comes next
without success. A twisted adolescence. Now
I can dare to see as far as tomorrow: the laundry
if the sun is out long enough, and the line is free.
Charcoal chicken, toum, sex. A wet welt. Still,
always in silence, my favourite countryside.
This is progress. Millions suffer and die
in the course of my progress. I grew up
believing this was normal, expected.
I want to draw a line from one suffering
to another but people keep getting in the way.
I saw a parade of empty fridges in Lebanon
yesterday. Prayed one of the sad aunties
standing next to the emptiness was not mine.

I know distance better than I know her face
and so, they all became her. I sent money
overseas, or rather, through my kinship network
and who knows whose mouth it fed? Kholto
I'm sorry, I know money is not bread.
They say a famine is coming, no, spreading.
There is always a famine somewhere.
I have one deep in my heart I am familiar
with ignoring. The motherland is begging
her children to return. The borders are closed,
fridges empty, shelves bare, and I keep thinking
at least one of my mothers wants me now, or
I'm so full I could vomit, so full I can't move
or, I will go, when I can, I will go and curl up
inside one of those fridges, I will whisper, eat
as much as you can stomach, sweet siblings
and I will thank God, for once, that I have to
put my body where my poetry is.

A Reimagining

I do have a hopeful love.
In Bankstown, my cousin was.
My wife thinks she can age anywhere.
Wants to know why I speak. I show her
my mouth full of let's and she insists
some people deserve to swallow, be led.
I'm brave enough to imagine the future.
More. When I am fifty, I eat another sin
on the street, I lie in bed, thinking of raves
and see, without entering, the full splendour
of night, arms, trying to come. Success.
Without now, I can dare as far as the sun is long
and free. Charcoal chicken, toum, sex. Awe.
Till, aywa, license, my favourite countryside.

This is progress. Millions curse my progress.
I grew up normal, expected. I want to draw a line
from one offering to another, but people
keep getting in the way. I saw a parade
of fridges in Lebanon. Prayed the aunties
were mine. I know her faces better, my kin,
all fed. Kholto, my dear fam, I'm reading
there is always a me somewhere
I am familiar with. The motherland
is her children. Return the borders, empty
selves bare, and keep my mothers full,
so full I can move when I will, I can curl up
inside his ridges, whisper, take as much
as you can stomach, sweet bliss, and I will
thank God, for once, that I have to
put my body where my poetry is.