

My first poetry collection, *Cities of Sameness*, was published in February 2012. It has just been reviewed by Michael Tsang in the most recent issue of [\*Cha: An Asian Literary Journal\*](#). Some of my earlier poems appeared in a number of online literary journals and magazines, including [\*Free Verse\*](#), [\*PANK\*](#), [\*Mead: Magazine of Literature and Libations\*](#), [\*Drunken Boat\*](#) and [\*Lambda Literary Review\*](#). *Time Out Hong Kong* also published an interview on me in their April 2012 issue, in which I mentioned my sexuality and readership in relation to Hong Kong/Chinese culture(s).

I can't pinpoint where my influence comes from because I still regard myself as a beginning poet, whose job is not to limit myself to one school of aesthetics. Yet, these are some of the poets I always admire: Dean Young, Alan Shapiro, Sandra Beasley, Kimiko Hahn, Track K. Smith and Mary Ruefle. There are some Chinese/Taiwanese poets whose works I always return to and they are Xi Chuan, Bei Dao and Hsia Yu. I have to admit I am also deeply interested in some emerging voices of my contemporaries, who include Tory Adkisson, Sally Wen Mao, Jason Koo and Glenn Shaheen. I am absolutely waiting for their first and second collections.

Ravi Shankar has helped me a lot with his comments on "Privilege of Morning", which starts kind of autobiographically. I wonder how many men in the world would start their day by sitting on the toilet, smoking and reading the newspaper at the same time. I can't also deny the laziness of my body for the need to actually sit right after waking up from the bed. Most mornings start with the intense unwillingness of going to work and entering the mad world. So the speaker of the poem finds refuge in the bathroom and isolates himself from the madness out there. He perceives the changing of the world as detached as possible by reading the headlines. Some incidents are 'true' (according to the papers) in the poem, such as the discovery of the thirteenth zodiac sign and the North and South Poles' swapping. And yes, there's really a mad woman from a few floors above my flat, though I'm not sure what makes her do that. The only thing I make up, as the poet, is "[i]n China, herbalists urge/ using urine to cure osteoporosis." But God knows if it can ever be true in China, where fakeness and genuineness seem to be identical twins.

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Three previously published poems to appear online in *NRD*:

1. "Ode to Objects" (first appeared in *Hawai'i Review* and a winner of the second place in the 2012 Ian McMillan Poetry Contest)
2. "Mirr-man-or" (first appeared in *580 Split*)

3. “Epoch of Metallic Migration” (first appeared in *The Portland Review*)

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## Ode to Objects

*“Man puts the longest distances behind him in the shortest time.”*

*Martin Heidegger*

We breathe into objects & pretend  
they have ears, brain cells, thus  
memory. Manure allures stories, re-  
-created, red,  
                        redeeming.

[sketch]

Skins of tangled lines, chaotic kin  
-ship subsides in eyes of a girl  
you once had. She knows neither  
the pain brought by labor  
nor your lack of which when she's ditched  
like a labrador. Graphite says  
*Grill the grief.* Paper approves,  
awaits a carnal hand to become  
                                a page.

Family always standard to draw: a roof  
pyramid-shaped, but this house  
doorless, windows barred, her face  
inlaid. Contour of her cheeks disrupted  
by a speech bubble,  
in which, two  
words, disjointed –  
*Mom. Home.* An urge  
or a denial.

[maps]

Your parents dead. You, an orphan  
in adulthood, start collecting stuff: coupons, coasters,  
origins.

In the kitchen, you become a genealogist,  
busy sketching migration  
routes of ancestors on atlas,  
hoping to know what they were,  
hence what you aren't.

Bits of penne on North America,  
aubergine blocking borders of Indonesia.  
An ant traverses oceans & continents  
in twenty minutes, claims  
your genomes are palatable.

[diamond]

It made your finger existential, which finally  
holds rancor in carats, despite  
its perfect cuts.

When he put it on for you,  
The *I* didn't apply – the rock free  
from inclusions, impurities. Years later,

you ask where the letter loops in you.

Perhaps earlobes – Listen hard,  
in your commitment, the difference  
between finial & final.

You regret misreading diamonds, their flaw  
of being plain carbon, like your cuticles,  
hopeless isotope.

## Mirr-man-or

Between my thumb and first finger, a pencil.  
I gently moved it on a paper.  
Two strokes, soft as hair, were about to fly.

That's how I learned my first Chinese word 人 (man).

During Chinese lesson, Miss Chan gave me a riddle:  
*man in a mirror.*

What is the answer, if not the self – a walking alveolus with invisible  
folding for the daily exchange of denials?

But teachers were tricky, things wouldn't be simple as you thought.  
So I drew a rectangle, in which I wrote a *man*: 囚 (prison).

She shook her head and said not all mirrors  
in the world had corners.

In February 1988, Michael Jackson released the single *Man in the Mirror*.  
It ranked 21<sup>st</sup> top in the UK Singles Chart. Critics blamed the title,  
too symbolic – “We refuse to look at ourselves in the mirror  
with music.” But the song denied,

found fault in the mirror instead:  
How can sound be reflected? You need to look *for* it  
before you can look at it.

To prove its existence,  
it breathed onto the surface, wrote its initial (a capital ‘S’)  
on the ephemeral vapor. Seconds later, the mark wiped itself out.

Miss Chan revealed the answer: 入 (enter)

You lost your key, so you weren't returning .  
I said, we don't need it to enter each other. Outside our heart  
a trench of skeletons waiting to be reorganized,  
but we're too busy opening each other.  
I'm a locksmith. Trust me, there's never been a door.

Still, you left. My heart seemed more spacious.  
But the absent content altered the form. Corners started  
growing, it's not an organ I wanted.  
I gave it up for transplant.

I walked past a mirror shop. Miss Chan was right,  
there're mirrors of various shapes. My right arm lifted,  
but the left one responded in the glass: 人 | 入.

It's easy to go mad. All you need  
is a mirror. Don't blink, stare deep into it  
until an imprisoned ghost shows you  
the opposite of what you once thought you were.

## Epoch of Metallic Migration

*After J.J. Abrams' Super 8*

[exposition]

Metals started vanishing  
after you read my poems

first your keys & fridge  
then the microwave

you leased  
the extra space  
to other men, mostly flawed

US\$60++/night, free towels  
mini-bar on request

inclusive of two orgasms

[denouement, misplaced]

Reading unpublished poems means

being cursed by cursive lines, hence  
two mottos to memorize

1. Separate love poems  
from lover(s)

2. Never underestimate first drafts

[plot point]

Over the phone, you confessed: *I dreamed of you, but  
it's him who lit the cigarette for me*

[climax]

The website said your place was vacant,  
I checked in, tendered  
on your breasts

You said the heart I knew  
was abducted  
since you read my stanzas

in fragments

you're ill of arrhythmia  
you had a cardiologist come over

& insert to your body

a penis & a pacemaker

He pulled out the former  
but forgot to sew up your chest

which now opened like  
a crushed

guava

