

## What Use Are the Humanities?

Sunday looms like a day at the beach,  
the pleasures of more being than being conscious.  
Imagine: to stand at the shore of Sunday  
and gaze at wave upon  
bending wave of days,  
their curl and thump  
and the splattering taste of salt  
so perfectly repeated, so patterned  
that their movement could seem  
constant, absolute.

A physicist would walk along such a shore  
murmuring about gravity waves,  
those long elongations of air  
that might exist  
only in imagination, but  
that might measure out  
a time before time began

while we merely look forward to Sunday.  
How we got here and why  
put behind us. Hours spent  
treading down the uncountable, fibrous sand  
will pass like no time at all  
into the urgencies of measurement,  
cling to the sight of curling salt.  
Yet on the packed granules of uncertainty  
Sunday's meaning shines, inconstant,  
immeasurable, on the waving beach of ourselves  
almost numb with light.

Dennis Haskell

Graham Hough: "... unskilled literary discussion quickly short-circuits literature and becomes an ideological wrangle."

(*An Essay on Criticism*. London: Duckworth, 1966, p.175.)

T S Eliot:

Coleridge "established the relevance of philosophy, aesthetics and psychology; and once Coleridge had introduced these disciplines into literary criticism, future critics could ignore them only at their own risk."

(*"The Frontiers of Criticism"*, *On Poetry and Poets*. London: Faber, 1957, p.104.)

Terry Eagleton:

"... literary criticism seems to be something of a dying art.", p.1.

"What threatens to scupper verbal sensitivity is the depthless, commodified, instantly legible world of advanced Capitalism, with its unscrupulous way with signs, computerized communication and glossy packaging of 'experience'." p.17.

"Poetry is an image of the truth that language is not what shuts us off from reality, but what yields us the deepest access to it." p.69.

(*How to Read a Poem*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007)

Michael Hurley & Michael O'Neill:

"... the great challenge facing critics, after the rise and fall of New Criticism and 'High' Theory alike, is finding a way of revaluing the aesthetic as something other than the trace of a concealed ideology... There is a danger in contemporary criticism that the aesthetic qualities of verse are recognized only as they purportedly register political or cultural significance... even the most penetrating studies of versification as political or cultural production say little about why poetic form is central to the experience, value and meaning of poetry as poetry."

(*Form: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University P, 2012, p.14.)

## **God, the Devil, And Me**

A long time ago  
As a child in the Mission  
Oh, how I cried when I was told  
That God and the devil  
Will always be by my side  
I tried and I tried  
To be a good little Nyoongah boy  
But these religious people  
Was always tellin' me  
That there is always gonna be  
God the devil and me

I've always longed  
For the bush that I see  
But I keep hearing  
God the devil and me  
All I want is to be free  
From this Mission  
With my mother I want to be  
But these religious people  
Keep insisting I see  
God and the devil with me

When I'm in a position  
To be out of this Mission  
Then I'll be free  
Free from God  
Free from the devil  
But being told as a child  
All I hear  
God the devil and me

Even today as a man  
I can still hear and see  
Those terrible words  
God, the devil,  
With me.

Alf Taylor (*God, the Devil, and Me*. Broome, Australia: Magabala, 2021)

### **Candles for a Local Osiris, v**

This city which whitens before mid-morning  
into the furnace of the overhanging sun  
is place of your absence. All is adrift:  
mazes of short streets; sudden intersections  
where the traffic, stalled, is laid out in miles  
of fuming junk; lopped trees; steam-hammers blasting in  
more certainties for the spreading landscape

of towers, bridges, car parks, overpasses... Dust  
swirls in the clear, hard fire of the small noon sun.  
Your absence leaves this city to the governance  
of men who know no surprises in their waking dream –  
or touch of sun. So in the happy hour, the rush  
begins of massed vehicles pressing for the outer darkness  
or westward to suburbs among low hills  
set hard against the soft, red, gigantic ball of fire.

Wong Phui Nam (*Ways of Exile*. London: Skoob,  
1993)

from "The Teacher"

"Look," said the teacher to the colleague who was sitting beside him in the staffroom.  
"Look at this composition written by a student in Secondary Four. She's supposed to  
have had ten years of studying English, and see what she's written! I'll read it to you.  
The title of the composition is 'My Happiest Day'."

The teacher read, pausing at those parts which he wanted his colleague to  
take particular note of: "*My happiest day it is on that 12 July 1976 I will tell you of  
that happiest day. My father want me to help him in his cakes stall to sell cakes and  
earn money. He say I must leave school and stay home and help him. My younger  
brothers and sisters they are too young to work so they can go to school. My mother  
is too sick and weak as she just born a baby.*" Can anything be more atrocious than  
this? And she's going to sit for her General Certificate of Education in three months'  
time! And listen to this:

*'I was very sad because I don't like to sell cakes I like to learn in school. But I  
am scare my father he will beat me if I disobeyed him so I cannot say anything to  
him. He ask me to tell my principal of my school that I am not going to learn  
anymore. I was scare my principal will ask me questions. Lucky my mother came  
home from the hospital where she born the baby, and my mother say to my father  
that I should learn in school and become nurse later. So I can earn more money. She  
begged my father and at last my father agree. I think he agree because he was in  
good mood. If in bad mood like drunk he will beat my mother up and make trouble  
in the house. So my mother told me I was no need to stop learning in School. And  
that was the happiest day in my life which I shall never forget'."*

The teacher said slowly and meditatively, "I wonder why most of them write  
like that?..."

Catherine Lim (*The Best of Catherine Lim*).

Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1993, pp.110-111.)