

# Hotel

## Cyril Wong

*Cyril Wong has been called a confessional poet, according to The Oxford Companion to Modern Poetry (2013), based on "the brutally candid sexuality in his poetry, along with a barely submerged anxiety over the fragility of human connection and a relentless self-querying". He is the Singapore Literature Prize-winning author of poetry collections such as Unmarked Treasure, Tilting Our Plates to Catch the Light and After You. He has also published Let Me Tell You Something About That Night, a collection of strange tales, and a novel, The Last Lesson of Mrs. de Souza. A past recipient of the National Arts Council's Young Artist Award for Literature, he completed his doctoral degree in English Literature at the National University of Singapore in 2012. His poems have been anthologised in Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia and Beyond (W. W. Norton 2008) and Chinese Erotic Poems (Everyman's Library 2007), amongst various journals and publications across the world.*

In the cupboard, bare hangers are skeletons  
for future selves; a complimentary bathrobe  
waits like a new and better, even purer, skin;  
fresh pillows are the unformed bodies  
of lovers yet to be born; bedroom slippers  
become footwear for shuffling up  
an airy flight of stairs free of this life.  
Open the fridge, lean past the overpriced  
chocolate and the smugly settled soft drinks  
and tune in to voices from the god-realm,  
where beings reminisce, not unfondly, about  
past desires and mistaken attachments.  
On the bed, our bodies stay unentwined

in rest because love is in a different room  
in a faraway country; but beneath us,  
cowering children press ears to the floor,  
absorbing the footfalls of fathers retreating,  
heads lowered in shame or shaking with disgust;  
these trembling versions of us reach  
for each other now, smaller hands taking hold.  
In reality, the air-con sighs as discreetly  
as possible; behind translucent curtains, night  
slowly lifts; nobody expects the morning  
to be spectacular; although my eyes are  
reluctant to close, still hungry for the ever-new;  
while another stranger beside me sleeps and sleeps.

# Literature

Cyril Wong

When we dated, I was impressed  
by how much you read: from Angela Carter  
to Arundathi Roy; I thought it was cute  
how you'd keep score, as if reading  
could be a competition.  
How do you live with yourself; I mean,  
how do you live with contradiction:  
Good Muslim boy and Mathematics teacher  
in a "respectable" Junior College  
with a voice lowered a few notches  
by day; vain, ketamine-high slut-bottom  
by night? Have all those narratives  
taught you nothing? Sure, we all  
have layers; but surely you could grasp  
that the ones we wear on the surface  
aren't real? These days, you're still  
a private reminder that literature  
can make no difference in the world.  
Have you forgotten that bad trip  
when we dragged you off the bed, naked,  
and into the shower, as you chanted  
Quranic verses, believing you were in hell?  
(Your eyes were wide open –  
this stayed with me for some time.)  
The next time I saw you, long after  
things between us went south,  
you were at a café, reading,  
the armour of your body thickened

by more muscles than I last remembered.  
I left you with your books in a hurry.  
The last instance was at the airport. *How clichéd*, I thought, sipping coffee  
with another lover, as you walked past,  
unseeing; the sight of you helping  
me to part with you inside my head.  
I wondered what novel you had been  
finishing that day, or if you had given up  
on books altogether. I saw  
how as you hurried to meet whoever  
you were late for, the mask of your face  
was slipping; and under that page, another page  
was rising, full of a darker realisation –  
at that moment, I realised you'd become  
the unhappiest man I'd ever known.

# Mindfulness

Cyril Wong

There's the smaller mind  
caught up in the operations  
of tongues, hands and lower parts.  
But what turns it off?  
Just as somebody's finger is required  
to flip the switch, surely the mind is incapable  
of shutting itself down.  
So I suspect there's a second mind  
behind the first, a bigger mind  
of sleep and deeper desires,  
supervising the traffic of breath and blood  
and the heart's continuous labour.  
Eventually the first mind  
must return home like a child from school,  
the other mind like its knowing parent  
waiting in silence at the door;  
or the partner already in bed  
but not asleep, as the lover who has strayed  
slips back under the covers to enter his arms again.