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‘cultivated, / Wild, exotic’: Nationalism and Internationalism in the Poetry of Shirley Geok-lin Lim

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Shirley Geok-lin Lim could justifiably be regarded as the most important writer to come out of Malaysia and Singapore. She is the author of award-winning poetry, novels, short stories, a colorful memoir, and of critical studies in both book and essay form and has long been a major figure in Asian American Studies. My phrase “come out of” is carefully chosen, for she left Malaysia in 1969 for postgraduate study in the USA and has resided there ever since. These simple factual statements provide an oversimplifying impression, not least because in her professional life she has been a perambulating professor, taking up visiting positions and delivering invited papers in Australia, Austria, England, France, Hong Kong, India, Lebanon, Nepal, Spain, and many other countries, including repeated visits to Malaysia and Singapore. She has been an immigrant and expatriate of a particularly complicated kind so that she seems a transnational writer par excellence; this description suggests an easy cosmopolitan identity, which may be true of her now, but if so—and it is still an “if”—it has been hard won. The terms of her own identity are a subject she has grappled with in much of her writing. Any individual’s sense of identity involves complexities but this is especially true in Lim’s case; the New York edition of her memoir, *Among the White Moon Faces*, is subtitled “An Asian-American Memoir of Homelands” and the plural should be noted.¹

Home or homeland is one of the key sources of individual identity, for identity is formed in relation to others and to place, for a child largely in concrete terms and with the crucial importance of family. Lim’s memoir details how tortuous these were for her. Born in Malacca in 1944 during British colonial rule, her early years precede the formation of the nation Malaysia. “Country is important, / It is important. This knowledge I know” she writes in the poem “Bukit China.”² However, this is a poem written as an adult when returning to Malacca after her father’s death. Country is of limited importance to a child; the repetitions here suggest a lesson she was hectored with. For

her as a child the idea of country was especially complicated. Malacca, with its history as a Malay settlement then an important trading port and consequently successively colonized by the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, the Dutch again, and lastly by the British again, could hardly be considered homogeneously part of Malaysia. It is in many ways its own place, with its *Peranakan* culture deriving from the intermarriage of Chinese and Malays. Lim's writing draws strongly on her personal history, and her poetry is often driven by it. She was the child of a Chinese father and *Peranakan* mother, and the only daughter amongst sons. Her brothers were older and so she tried to copy them even though excluded from many of their games. She became a tomboy and later something of a teenage delinquent. She was educated at a convent school in English, which largely deprived her of the Malay and Chinese (mainly *Hokkien*) languages which were spoken around her. Her father was enamored of many elements of Western culture, especially films—"Shirley" is a nickname, (bizarrely) taken from the Hollywood actress Shirley Temple. In Lim's poem "Learning English" she says learning the language "was like learning / to let go and to hold on," providing her with "an orphanage of mind" alongside "technologies of empire."³ But English was also "an engine / of desire... / carrying the child / to foreign countries."⁴ In *Among the White Moon Faces* she describes how "[p]acing the walled garden of the Buddhist temple to which I escaped from the disheveled two bedroom shack in which my five brothers and I barely breathed... I somehow made out the sturdy figures of the English language."⁵ One of those "sturdy figures" was Tennyson, whom in the poem "Monsoon History" she recalls "[r]eading... at six / p.m. in pajamas," in the "wet," "tropical" air of Malacca.⁶ This odd conjunction is one shared by many readers and writers who grew up in the British Empire. "We studied," Lim recalls, "mysterious volumes in which alien humans wandered through mossy churchyards, stood under strange trees called elms and yew trees, suffered from dark, cold, gloom, and chills, and [quoting Tennyson] hailed 'the splendour of the sun.'"⁷

As an adult scholar, Lim recognizes that in studying in the English language, there "comes with it British and Western traditions and ideals"; for a time in Malaysia, and still to some extent today, it was "feared as a language conveying Westernized debased values, whose use would lead to the eventual destruction of 'Asian' identity and virtues" (115). Despite the language's role in cultural imperialism, Lim readily recalls the liberating role that English and its literature carried for her in her formative years. Childhood library visits meant that the "world around me vanished into the voices, the colors, and the dance of language. I gazed, dazzled, into interiors that Malacca never held."⁸ She discovered "in books how large the world was outside of Malacca" (75). Later, she was so engrossed "within my love of the English language" she was unaware of "the increasingly hostile language debates breaking out all over Malaya" (121), so she certainly had no identification with the nationalism associated with the chauvinistic promotion of Malay language and values. The poem "Song of an Old Malayan" begins, "Will you sell me, also, down the river / of nationalism, my sometime brother."⁹ Rajeev Patke and Philip Holden have accurately observed about the

Malaysian situation during this period that “ethnic Chinese poets struggled to recuperate a sense of community in a condition of isolation aggravated by the politics of ethnicity.”¹⁰ They quote Lim writing that “[a]fter the disillusionment of the May 13 [1969] riots ... I had no nationalist idealism to imagine.”¹¹ A month later she left this political situation for America, and although she completed her undergraduate degree in Kuala Lumpur, her Malaysian identification has always been with Malacca.

As a child, books and the English language in which they were written were especially important for Lim because of the difficulties of her home life. In her memoir Lim recalls, with vivid agony, how her father became bankrupt, the family’s home and other assets were repossessed, and the family had to move to shared small spaces in her grandfather’s house, where after his death uncles would smoke away the grandfather’s wealth in opium. In an aching poem titled “The Debt” she contemplates “[t]he stink of suffering” and how “the children, squeezed bony / Faces” felt a “burden, stretching pastwards to dead / Rotting fathers and mothers, / Pinched, careless as poverty.”¹² Each night was “[a]n end, each morning for nothing” (8). Her father was sometimes violent; poverty and violence led to the greatest shock of Shirley Lim’s life, something she spent many years coming to terms with: Her mother abandoned her husband and children and fled to Singapore.

Especially as a daughter, this shocked her sense of self, of what family and motherhood meant, and not surprisingly induced contradictory feelings of betrayal and guilt. In “The Debt” she agonizes that “Love without rescue grinds salt, / Grinds my heart” while in the poem “Reading” she remembers “best friends keep / their mothers while yours went / down a rabbit hole” as if it was her responsibility to “keep” her mother in the family.¹³ In *Among the White Moon Faces*, Lim reflects that the “self is paltry, phantasmagoric; it leaks and slips away. It is the family, parents, siblings, cousins, that signify the meaning of the self, and beyond the family, the extended community.”¹⁴ She also recalls that long after settling in America “I woke up at nights, heart beating wildly. Oh Asia, that nets its children in ties of blood so binding that they cut the spirit” (164).

“The Windscreen’s Speckled View” is a long poem generated by her mother’s death.¹⁵ In it Lim remarks on “the mind’s rich ironies” and, blaming herself, thinks “I have never loved you enough, / resenting your life’s mistakes— / needy self-love, blooming late / rotting into religion” (48, 50). In the poem “American Driving” Lim suddenly feels:

... My mother’s hand is reaching
From fat autumn clouds. “Where
Are you going? Who are you?”
She moans through windowed glare.
But I drive on¹⁶

Lim has “wildlife memories / of other children’s mothers” in the poem “Inventing Mothers,” recalling “heaps of broken / promises from the world, shattered / china cups, and father’s thrashings” (147).

Living in poverty and hunger after her father’s business collapse and her mother’s departure, the adult Lim remembers nights when “my body hummed its hunger in an underkey I was beyond crying ... curious about who I was in this world where everything had shut down except me.”¹⁷ Living in a crowded, one-room shack, she found “[t]he more crowded we were, the more distant I felt from everybody” (50). She loved walking the five miles to school on her own. “Walking alone through unfamiliar streets returned an identity to me” (50). In many ways, the streets of Malacca became her home: She describes her early “strong attraction to the sensate world, the world of play, activity, intervention, the rough coarse world of my brothers who ran wild in the narrow back lanes of Kampong Pantai.”¹⁸ She was “a vacuum of energy, restless, unsettled, unbelonging, neither girl nor boy. Subjectivity is still to me a kind of drift, an active with-holding of identity ... letting your shape of your experience of this world shape your knowledge of your self” (17).

There is a lot to be drawn from these comments. Lim’s “with-holding of identity” is an equivalent of Keats’s famous negative capability, a valuable form of awareness for a poet. Also Keatsian is her “attraction to the sensate world”; in *Writing S.E./Asia in English: Against the Grain* she describes walking down “the narrow unpaved lane” with “outhouse openings”—there was no sewerage system (16). “Fat flies with purplish-blue iridescent wings buzzed in and out ... and a heavy fetid odor hung over the air. I did not find the odor then unpleasant. It was strong, like the thick sandalwood smoke that hung like a frieze over the inch-fat joss-sticks” at the nearby temple (16).

While she was a “wild girl who ran around with boys and alone through the streets,” Lim was imbibing sensory impressions that would be stored within her for life, and all her writing is replete with sensory images, many drawn, apparently effortlessly, from her Malaccan childhood.¹⁹ For example, the poem “When” recalls:

When I was a child, I would watch the spray
Break phosphorescence at my feet then run away.
There was so much sea, always rhythmically
And gently pulling to the horizon.
There was the enormous starry clarity
Of sky and, sharply, carried upon
The breeze, the smells of pines and salty sea.
It was a child’s preoccupation
To stare at the yellow coin of moon,
To crumble pine needles between thumb and finger,
Not thinking anything particular, to linger²⁰

Later, with intense sensory awareness, in her poem “The New World,” she writes that near Californian roads “Jacaranda petals lift and fall / in the wake of wheels, / late May’s purple drifts” as she writes of “the same English, /... new / worlds and ones given up.”²¹

Shirley Lim has written that “For the Asian woman poet ... her ‘bio’ must largely remain on the ground floor of experience, the daily unfolding of smells, bustles, sensations, endless movement, those pressures of personalities on the self as receiver.”²² This passage is a feminist response to the general exclusion of Asian women from public life, a situation which did affect her as a young woman in Kuala Lumpur and in America; as a poet I think it suited her, for her poetry is profoundly sensorily and experientially based. In a striking poem, “I Defy You,” which is almost a “*J’accuse*” she confronts the aesthetics of the favored poet of American academic Modernism, Wallace Stevens.²³ “There is something else / than mere vision, mere imagination, / fat man of language,” she cries, intent on facing real blackbirds rather than “exquisite” poetic ones, and insistent about harsh, worldly realities (93). Reviewing the work of Edwin Thumboo, Lim found that his writing of a public, national poetry after his first collection came at the expense of “spontaneity, naturalness, simplicity, and private emotions,” suggesting that these are the values by which she would like her own work judged.²⁴

Keats’s delineation of negative capability is often taken to indicate a complete passivity but there must be some degree of conscious self in the receiver of sensory impressions to select from them and organize them into meaningful significance. Lim was by her own account a rebel prowling the streets, conflicting “with teachers and reverend sisters ... throughout my years at the convent,” amongst her aunties in a shared house speaking her “mongrel tongue” of English, and as a teenager attracted to young men on motorbikes, “those gleaming black and silver machines whose giant beetle-bodies lured me like pheromones.”²⁵ A rebel is not a passive figure; even as an adult she refutes conventional materialism, in the poem “Shopping” describing herself as “an elegant starling / Coxcombing the alleys.”²⁶ As a child and young woman Lim had experiences difficult enough to break many, perhaps most people of her gender, age, and caste but she is a fiercely determined personality. Seeing a woman weeping outside a shopping mall in Hong Kong she recalls in the prose poem “Sister Exile”: “I’d sat on the step of stairs in another city, sick and afraid, but I had never wept—those salty fluids wrenched from the gut and chest would not rise for me; I’d clenched them till they evaporated, condensed into grains of words.”²⁷ In the 2010 book *Walking Backwards* Lim recalls:

... a half-century and more ago
Under an equatorial sun,
Walking unfed, ill-clad,
Determined, without a sense
Of determining what I wanted.²⁸

Moreover, her intellectual ability saw her through, carrying her to scholarships at the University of Malaya and subsequently to Brandeis University in the USA.

Difficulties did not dissolve when she went to Brandeis as a postgraduate student; in an alien country with an alien climate she suffered a degree of sexism and racism, not viciously but of the patronizing kind. Nevertheless, the deprivations and cruelties of her early life taught her self-reliance, the will to succeed, and consequently feminism, although of a kind complicated by her ethnicity. They also, I suspect, heightened her love of nature, which engenders so much of her sensory imagery. When children have jumped into a pool their “Blue faces drifted under water / Like swamps of lotus”;²⁹ actual lotus is an “Etch of purple, pink or yellow / Overtaken by noon—the blister / Of lotus in klongs”;³⁰ a pantoun (sic) about the Chinese infanticide of girl babies declares “Women are made of river sand and wood”;³¹ when giving birth to her son, Lim recalls “I willed my body to relax, to float like the lotus yielding its seeds to the light.”³² There is nothing sentimental about this: the poem “In Defence of the Crooked” begins, “In nature nothing is simple.”³³

This sense of a complexity inherent in the world—her volume of selected stories is titled *Life's Mysteries*—is heightened by the complexity of identity engendered by Lim's difficult upbringing, her crossing cultures in adulthood, and her conducting of a transnational academic career. One of the acknowledgements in her 2015 collection, *The Irreversible Sun*, is to the University of California, Santa Barbara “for the home where these poems were found.”³⁴ Yet the introduction to another collection published that year, questioningly titled *Do You Live In?*, expresses a more variable sense of “home.”³⁵ The introduction, titled “Home Stretch,” poses the question, “why do I persist in what must appear to many as aimless wandering, an unreasonable itinerary of jetting to and fro ... ?” (10). Her answer is that in the contemporary world “migration is often indistinguishable from re-migration and expatriation” (11). Being older and more aware of “approaching mortality” makes her want to defuse the psychological power of a specific home: “Perhaps there is a universal home for every sentient being, although the temporal places we had lived in or now live in are always provisional and transient” (11). While she claims that the volume contains “poems of different homes, written in the present tense” (11) that “[p]erhaps” makes the claim of a universal home less than convincing.

Nevertheless, this seems a far cry from the Afterword to the collection *Monsoon History* (1994), published when Lim was living in New York. In a fascinating essay she ponders the extent to which she feels she is “in exile.”³⁶ Writing at the time of the Malaysian government's discrimination against English-language users, she writes that “[m]ore separates me from my original place than distance” and that “English is too much a part of my identity, confused as it already is ethnically, racially and culturally, that I cannot abandon it” (169, 171). She argues that English is no longer “a tool of western imperialism but ... a medium for trans-national species communication” and declares that “I have for a long time seen myself as nothing but an individual”

(172, 168). Further, “This self-image of ‘an individual’ is the bottom of a descent, from nation and community” (168).

Lim recognizes “the risk that Third-World English language writers take ... the possibility of alienation from their native cultures, of losing one’s way home” (172). This comment comes late in the essay and implies a certain bravado about the declaration of just being “an individual.” She further comments, poignantly, that “[t]he child who leaves home, seduced by a stranger’s tongue, and never returns is to be mourned for” (172). Lim has avoided this by often returning to Malacca, where two brothers and their families have always lived, and to nearby Singapore—where Chinese and English are predominant—and where she rediscovered her mother as an adult. She says that this has helped “to refresh my spirit and my original literary identity.”³⁷ The collection *Ars Poetica for the Day* includes the poem “Homeless” which provides thirteen ways of looking at homelessness, none of which apply to Lim.³⁸ One reads “[h]omeless is a people looking for a history”; the problem for a transnational writer is not that of lacking a history but of having too many histories to meld into coherence (102). The volume *Do You Live In?* includes a poem titled “1Malaysia,” which announces:

The power of one
is also the power
of once: once one sea,
...
one town, one country,
one story. Once upon
a time.
Then is also
the power of many
...
woven as one. Once.³⁹

In the preface to *Against the Grain*, Lim writes that for her “the identity of ‘one’ ... has grown progressively more shaky.”⁴⁰

At the end of the essay in *Monsoon History* Lim chooses English-language identity over geographical identity. She defiantly declares: “To remain faithful to my origins, I must be unfaithful to my present. To be constant to my Malaysian identity, I must continue [the word is notable] to be a stranger in a strange land. Still, I have a language in my hand. To me, it is a language where the idea of freedom is broader and stronger than it is in any country.”⁴¹ This sounds definitive, but identity is such a slippery and complex concept that no psychological theories—and there are many—have ever captured it. While the transnational writer might claim the English language as a source of identity, with a touch of contradiction, Lim recognizes “that language is never enough” (173). A sensory-oriented person, she sees that the “whole of a person is of sights, sounds, smells, notions, tastes, a community of sensations we call country”

(173). This may be especially true for women. Lim is keenly aware of her Malacca/Malaysian origins: “The naming is in English, but now the objects for naming are no longer at hand” (173). Even if she had stayed this would have been partly true: In *Against the Grain* she says, “My story as a writer is also that of a colonized education in which the essential processes of identity formation are ironically the very processes of stripping the individual of Asian tradition and communal affiliation” and creating “a crackpot culture.”⁴²

A sense of home is important for anyone’s sense of identity but for Lim, at least for much of her life, it has been, as she says in the poem “Home Stretch,” “a word with no / stillness, no stand still.”⁴³ She is drawn to think of its variables, such as “[h]oming in, homely, homesick” plus “[h]oming / device and where the heart is” but “neither [is] infallible / for the home stretch” (85). In his foreword to this collection, *Ars Poetica for the Day*, Boey Kim Cheng describes Lim as a “cosmopolitan writer,” “resolutely nomadic and marginal,” an “internationalist and displaced traveller-poet” whose “life and work have been defined by border-crossings from the beginning.”⁴⁴ These views are supported by a poem written much earlier than Boey’s essay, “Identity No Longer”: “Identity no longer carried in a card, /

her passport declares ‘dare to believe’. / Citizenness of the world, she approaches the Republic / of feeling.”⁴⁵ However, one’s sense of identity is never static, and it would be misleading to simply draw quotations dispersed over time from Shirley Geok-lin Lim’s writing as if she were a Whitman blithely contradicting herself. In her memoir she describes herself as a “resident alien” in the US, for whom memory is necessarily “a great mourning, a death of the living. The alien resident mourns even as she chooses to abandon.”⁴⁶ Further into the book she writes, “[t]oo much can be made of homeland” and that “[t]here are homelands of the memory and homelands of the future, and for many of us, they are not the same” (191). Reinforcing this statement, a few pages on she notes, “[n]o matter how urgent my struggles to escape childhood poverty and the country’s racial politics, I have continued to feel an abiding identity with Malaysia’s soil, not only its shining waters, lush growth, and multiracial colors, but even its polluted streams, back lanes, and communal quarrels” (209). Yet in the memoir’s last sentence she declares, “[i]n California, I am beginning to write stories about America, as well as about Malaysia. Listening, and telling my own stories, I am moving home” (232). So too with her poems: *The Irreversible Sun*, published in 2015, is resolutely set in California.⁴⁷

Yet in the same year, the poem “Saying Yes” in *Ars Poetica for the Day* speaks about “the gravity / of the unmade I.”⁴⁸ All this is not so much contradiction as a reflection of Lim’s complex identity; in the preface to *Against the Grain* she notes her “multiple and shifting subject positions—woman, Chinese Malaysian, Asian, postcolonial.”⁴⁹ In the *Ars Poetica* foreword, Boey observes that “a more contemplative mood has displaced the recurrent binaries of home and away, place and displacement, travel and return.”⁵⁰

Lim's work does show, I believe, a gradual identification of America, specifically of California, as home since she "[c]rossed the big water, / Married a big nose" but it does not displace her "sense of Malacca as my home" or her international cast of mind.⁵¹ Lim's individualism makes American philosophies more conducive to her than the communitarian values of Malaysian society, with its strong adherence to established gender, ethnic, and class roles. In many ways, Lim's childhood rebelliousness prepared her for America.

The last poem in *Walking Backwards* is titled "Sacrament" and begins, "Who was I to say who I am? / Nobody knows, least of all me," and a poem, "Feng Shui," in the earlier *Monsoon History* asks "[w]here is the stir by which we know / our own?"⁵² Her poetry I think is the answer to these questions; it provides the "[e]stranged yearning" by which she, and her readers, will know.⁵³ This personal drive of her poetry, her fundamental interest in sensations and the imagery which might render them, the exploratory nature of her work, her interest in negative capability and in the natural world, and her individualistic rebelliousness all point to her affinities with Romanticism. One of the last poems in *Ars Poetica for the Day*, "Wordsworth and Coleridge," admires Wordsworth and Coleridge for being "Two against the world of letters" and asserts "to see is to think, / to think is to know Nature's loyal / beauties"; she sees them as picking "the quiet flower / for your tremulous memory, / leaving it for another, who'll / be walking this self-same trail."⁵⁴ Modernism sought an aesthetic of impersonality in the face of unprecedented complexity and the limited power of the individual in the modern world, while Postmodernism has academicized it through entering into language as a self-referential world in itself, but Lim will have none of it. Rather than deny personal emotion and sensory awareness she relishes them, and displays no worry that language might not be able to embody them. Despite the complexities that contemporary transnational existence involves she finds, refreshingly, in English language poetry, wherever written, "[s]peech which is sufficient enterprise."⁵⁵

Notes

¹ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces: An Asian-American Memoir of Homelands* (New York: Feminist Press at City University of New York, 1997).

² Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Bukit China," in *Monsoon History: Selected Poems* (London: Skoob Books, 1994), 3.

³ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Learning English," in *Monsoon History*, xxiii. The poem serves as a "Foreword" to this *Selected Poems* collection.

⁴ Lim, "Learning English," xxiii.

- ⁵ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces: An Asian-American Memoir of Homeland* (New York: Feminist Press at City University of New York, 1997), 4.
- ⁶ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Monsoon History," in *Monsoon History*, 17.
- ⁷ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, *Writing S.E./ Asia in English: Against the Grain* (London: Skoob Books, 1994), 6.
- ⁸ Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 74.
- ⁹ Lim, "Song of an Old Malayan," in *Monsoon History*, 36.
- ¹⁰ Rajeev Patke and Philip Holden, *The Routledge Concise History of Southeast Asian Writing in English* (London, New York, 2010), 116.
- ¹¹ Lim, "Song of an Old Malayan," 36, qtd. in Patke and Holden, *Routledge Concise History of Southeast Asian Writing in English*, 116.
- ¹² Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "The Debt," in *Monsoon History*, 8.
- ¹³ Lim, "The Debt," 8; Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Reading," in *Ars Poetica*, 60.
- ¹⁴ Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 164.
- ¹⁵ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "The Windscreen's Speckled View," in *Monsoon History*, 47–51.
- ¹⁶ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "American Driving," 147.
- ¹⁷ Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 50.
- ¹⁸ Lim, *Against the Grain*, 16.
- ¹⁹ Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 49.
- ²⁰ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "When," in *Crossing the Peninsula*, 9.
- ²¹ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "The New World," in *The Irreversible Sun*, 12.
- ²² Lim, *Against the Grain*, 11.
- ²³ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "I Defy You," in *Monsoon History*, 93.
- ²⁴ Quoted in Patke and Holden, *Routledge*, 119.
- ²⁵ Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 72; Lim, *Monsoon History*, 145; and Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 89.
- ²⁶ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Shopping," in *Monsoon History*, 124.
- ²⁷ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Sister Exile," in *Do You Live In?*, 68.
- ²⁸ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Between Women," in *Walking Backwards*, 72.

- ²⁹ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "At the Pool," in *Monsoon History*, 110.
- ³⁰ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Lotus," in *Monsoon History*, 4.
- ³¹ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Pantoun (sic) for Chinese Women," in *Monsoon History*, 7.
- ³² Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 197.
- ³³ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "In Defence of the Crooked," in *Monsoon History*, 107.
- ³⁴ Lim, "Acknowledgements," in *The Irreversible Sun*, 9.
- ³⁵ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Introduction," in *Do You Live In?*, 10.
- ³⁶ Lim, *Monsoon History*, 167.
- ³⁷ Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 209.
- ³⁸ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Homeless," in *Ars Poetica*, 102.
- ³⁹ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "1Malaysia," in *Do You Live In?*, 14.
- ⁴⁰ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Preface, in *Against the Grain*, xi.
- ⁴¹ Lim, *Monsoon History*, 173.
- ⁴² Lim, *Against the Grain*, 25-26.
- ⁴³ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Home Stretch," in *Ars Poetica*, 85.
- ⁴⁴ Boey Kim Cheng, "Foreword: The Hiding Places of the Imagination," in *Ars Poetica for the Day* (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2015), 9-10. It might be noted that Lim's first poetry collection is titled *Crossing the Peninsula*.
- ⁴⁵ Lim, *Monsoon History*, 52.
- ⁴⁶ Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 160.
- ⁴⁷ Lim, *The Irreversible Sun*.
- ⁴⁸ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Saying Yes," in *Ars Poetica*, 66.
- ⁴⁹ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Preface, in *Against the Grain* xi.
- ⁵⁰ Boey, Foreword, in *Ars Poetica*, 12.
- ⁵¹ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, *Walking Backwards*, 51; Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 20. The "big nose" poem is "Feng Shui", in *Walking Backwards*, 51.
- ⁵² Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Sacrament," in *Walking Backwards*, 84; Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Feng Shui," in *Monsoon History*, 114.

⁵³ Lim, "Feng Shui," 114.

⁵⁴ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Wordsworth and Coleridge," in *Ars Poetica*, 105.

⁵⁵ Lim, "Adam's Grief," 3.

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