
Shirley Geok-lin Lim

Six Poems

Otherness

is all around us, at us: unremembered
familiar. Entering the woods each day,
leaves, thorns and boles remain unnamed.
Outside, demanding ears, the highway's

eight-wheeled trailers, motor-homes utterly
other to our destination. Americans
at home in their Americanness, struck by
immigrants, like Earth comet-stricken,

other to the universe outside, like we
are other in ourselves, our bodies growing
estranged kin, other kinds dangerous
to selves, this other common family,
Death, and even before, to be walking
someday and seeing only otherness:

Where am I? Where the way home? Who am I?

How To Find Your Things

Put everything in its place. A place
for each thing. This box for keys--
automatic garage doors, repurposed

rooms, front house entry in another state.
This drawer for napkins, unmatched, threes,
nines. Cable wires, coiled serpents in baskets

nestle, unpowered. Places proliferate
like tumors, each thing falling out of place.
The more places the more hiding spaces. Yet

you remain a pair of hands, two cranky
knees, one crumbling spine. A box to save
boxes in. Bin for cloth, canvas, plasticky

bags printed with wise sayings, bearing years
(twenty ten, nineteen eighty six),
sights (Paris, Seoul, Berlin, Syria).

Everything in its place—extinguished
time, urgent papers, name cards--faces mixed,
fleeting, blurry, unrecognized. Vanquished

spaces not for repurposing—pleather
buttoned-up pocket purses, water-proof-lined
for sea crossings (documents unzipped

push open port gates across borders),
tissues for when the crying begins,
bread rolls from the last breakfast cover,

in case lunch and dinner will not appear,
the road you will be walking
holds closed doors of homes--there, here--

that want nothing to do with you, a thing
without its place in a world settling
and selling a place for everything.

The Hat

Rabbit jumps out of his hat:
a hard pea in a soft breast.
She sweats on her Princess mattress.
Horsemen of the Apocalypse
gallop twenty-four seven
when Rabbit jumps out of his hat.

Rabbit is sprung from his hat:
mushrooms glow on the roof of the world.
Who knows where the kingdom's keys are kept?
The kleptomaniac gives
versions for hares to chase
as Rabbit is sprung from his hat.

Rabbit escapes from his hat.
Claws unclipped for millennia
dig through clay floors and skitter
on marble. Pandora sleeps
now her box is empty and
Rabbit escaped from his hat.

New Old News

The card I needed to address and sign
and post was under the book I needed to read
for the footnote I needed to complete
for the paper I needed to submit,
the book that was under the Ipad I needed
to update for the apps needed to find
for the travel I needed to view
for the flight to Canada under the clippings
I needed to toss along with the news
they covered, old news of an old American
Western Civilization I'd swept under the carpet
of myth and history, that now covers
the card, the book, the Ipad, the clippings,
today's new old news there's no overtopping.

Daylight Saving

I've lost an Hour. Has anyone seen it? It seems to have slipped away, a runaway child. I call Amber Alert but the handler laughs at my urgent request. Then he says politely, keeping his chuckle down, *Your Hour left of her own accord. Can't make her stay home if she doesn't want to. Besides, the whole country's lost an Hour.* The whole country? I thought it was only hard ups had lost their rights, couldn't pay for a hole-in-one. The last I listened to cable, a minority had lost hold of their right to rights. A larger party of us in fact found more rights stashed in the right wing of our house. *You see, ma'am,* the handler says, *your Hour is small potatoes. Count yourself lucky your health is good. Emergency just lost many more hours, you understand me?* His voice gets low, a whisper, a growl. *If you know what's good for you, you'd stop calling the Amber Alert people. See what I mean? Missus Constitution has been found and is now in the hospital. Don't call again for her, OK? We're all taking good care of her. Twenty-four-hour police by her bedside, so no one's gonna take her. She's under protective custody. Homeland Security's in on the matter. She'll be going through surgery, see, and when she comes out, no one's gonna recognize her, because she won't be looking like a two hundred and forty year old crone. She'd be so botoxed you'd think she was an under-aged minor. And she won't need those robes to hide her weight. They can do amazing things with silicone gel. So she's not lost, ma'am, just a small alteration, you know, now she's being fixed up real good. So, yeah, suck up your lost whatever, and don't call us again.*

The Hoarder's Dream

Hoarding's what I do like Nature weather:
bric-a-brac particulars, kitchen ware.
Nothing's waste. As in dreams, all things matter,

even what breaks. Keeping has its pleasure.
Why toss when I can mend again to wear?
Hoarding's what I do like Nature weather.

Women before fleeing hide scant treasure
from ruinous men, bodies left to bear
the nothing that's waste, when few things matter.

Lost lovers' letters as tarnished silver
undiscarded: stuffed closets declare
hoarding's what I do, like Nature weather.

Is saving trivia like turning chatter
to pure drama? Alchemically, where
nothing's waste, dreams (but which?) matter.

Mindful hands, as detectors that hover
in fields, pile on piles that are spilling there.
Hoarding's what I do, like Nature weather.
Nothing's waste if things in dreams matter.