

## A Life is Theft: a Cremation and a Birth in Singapore

for Koh Tai Ann

This time you took no chances — no flowers,  
no formal announcements, only the word  
of birth passed to those who asked,  
and were pledged to silence — as if this  
second child must be slipped past the public  
notice, the papers, doctors, or the claws of God.

Last time was an ambush: the Chinese  
rituals, the naming, the first week  
visits and the one-month gifts — the  
metaphysical publicity. The safety  
of all those toys and clothes! I wrote  
nothing then. Perhaps this now is a blessing  
against fire, short lives and burning toys;  
and mah jong players bored with other  
people's grief, who wait, clicking tiles,  
to sweep the ashes left by mourning,  
in government chapels, institutional  
green, too empty or too full of God.

Arthur Lindley