

THREE POEMS BY ARTHUR YAP

Paraphrase

when one wonders how to begin to talk
about something, the word swallows the world.
the word comes close to carrying its own ontology,
its own reward for being:

all the way to hakōne
words were hung on every tree. the most striking,
startlingly orange, tuned by the breeze.
words, maple leaves. words were brown moss,
mellow sunlight with soft hair.

words were on the lake; sea-mews spanning circles,
white on white foam of the boat's wake. a translucent mist
held the banks in check. then, a sudden reined splash
of muted colour, a shape proffered itself. the image beckoned
the eye, a word whispered itself : it's a blue moored boat,
a clump of willows. words were a crocodile of schoolboys
jostling & laughing on the deck.

the lake was a sheet of glass; everything a smaller mirror
beneath. on the surface, a catamaran floated us,
words, all the way to hakōne, words were.

A List Of Things: a market at Ueno

gesticulating fingers of lentil, unwriggly eels,
spearheads of bamboo shoot, soothing water chestnuts,
green snakes of cucumber, jetsams of seaweed,
wrinkled-nose pickles, earspans of brown mushroom,
calm persimmons, outlandish roly-poly apples,
air-licking clams, dry earth-crusts of fish,
icy-eyed bream, powdered kabuki faces of cake,
paragraphs of beancurd, exhaling piles of garlic,
enpurpled piccolo noses of aubergine, lazy grapes,
no-nonsense tangerines, arms-folded-over squid,
shrine-pillars of celery, bullets of green chillie,
hibernating squares of handkerchief, fat tabi,
expandable sweaters, ventilated t-shirts, healthy cod,
alliterative clogs, knobbly topshell, discuses of sole,
lumpy puffy octopus, cheap skate, tight-jaw oysters,
brisk aprons, tough-guy pork, sectional ropes of radish,
whispery crinkled lettuce, placid sweet potatoes,
smarting capsicum, defiant crabs, sensuous musk melons,
humpy peanuts, leathery heels of abalone,
aerial spring onion, hour-glass pears, rotund avocado,
rib-caged pumpkins, chlorophyllic piles of iparella,
grumpy red mullet, macho beef, sassy tomatoes

are all there.

Exchanges

because he was so old & inexpensively untidy,
the alliteration of the cash register & the fingerer's
ice-cube laughter. she thought the cans of dogfood
were for himself, a damn silly old sod.

she was so painted & bouffant, & her escutcheon
of a skirt wouldn't have hidden a can of worms;
he thought her a whore. up there, dogs, catfood.

through all the month of days, the silent exchanges
raced with the clarity of cellophane over fresh-cut ham.
when he bought watercress, he was a drowning man,
an old dog with a granite collar, a seaweed stew.
her heavy breasts over the keys; no wonder cows play
the yamaha with their udders. what's this chalky liquid
in the plastic bottle? have you given it your all?

to celebrate the cerebral prior to physical potentials:
here's a pot of green syphilitic-looking ceterah,
cakes like trod-on dung, pneumatic mangoes, choices galore.