

THREE POEMS BY TABAN LO LIYONG

Ministers to the Toothless

When I am old and my teeth gone or rotted
Let me age away near KFC or McDonald's hotel:
Potatoes have no fibres and just disintegrate in the mouth
When they are squared and fried hot you don't need teeth;
Finger-licking good spring chicken eaten hot is swallowed whole
The coleslaw in hamburgers is for additional salivation
It softens the bread and your gums can pound the meat
And you turn everything over in the mouth and swallow:
Nobody knows if you chewed or just washed it down
Especially as the salt on the potatoes, and drugs in the Coke
Contribute a lot to the salivation and gunning down.
The workers of the East with their poor dental care
The poor of the world who buy silence with sweets and ice-cream
Will keep McDonald and the General in business
Regardless of ideology, change of regime, whims of the boss:
When I have no teeth, apples are out, as are steak and ribs.
Fried chicken, eggs, minced meat, coleslaw and bread—
These I can eat with my gums, with my baby.

Writing Classes in Singapore

My friend has a fine set of writing students:
One has smuggled a cat into her dorm
It keeps her warm on days human beings are unkind;
One was on the editorial committee of the uni magazine
It only came out once in a year full of law and lit students' stuff;
One writes only when entangled in personal crises
It helps him to work out his angst metrically aligned;
One was quite serious and I found him munching sandwich
It reduced his anxiety whilst waiting for prof with trepidations;
One was disturbed because he could not impersonate
It disturbed him that he was autobiographically writing himself dry;