

jam. ismail / from SCARED TEXTS

- a. 1. at dinner they sit facing the tall windows. hillside's
pulsing & billowing trees.
i like that so much (one thinks).
there must be much life there, & families (two murmurs).
of course there is (three chimes), what d'you think,
only families have trees?
2. flora was kettling water for herbal tea & assembling caps
of greenstuff & earths of several colour.
elder said: each morning, when i wake up, i consider
how i should feed myself today, i think of what i've
eaten yesterday & other days.
3. hibiscus mentioned that mushrooms are good for
cholesterol.
jaggery scoffed: what d'you mean, good for!
chestnut dehisced: she means good against, good against
cholesterol.
flame-o'-the-forest said to jaggery: we know you speak
better english & that you know what we mean.
4. . mean pause .
said : menopause .
said : hm . men pause.
said : me no pause!

5. visiting a married couple, ivy got all wisteria about couples.
cypress observed: you seem to think that married people practise marriage.
6. swordfern said to the family: i'd like you to meet my frond, aloe.
papaya said to the clan: this is aloe, sword's companion.
7. your grandchildren are better behaved this year, laurel said, they're less rambunctious.
no, holly demurred, they have their own beds.
- a. 8. gardenia the mother of friends phoned from afar: have you heard the one about the ventriloquist who was dying & wanted to say a few words to her family?
chickweed smiled: alright, tell me.
gardenia concluded: so they gathered in the room next door.
not long afterwards, chickweed attended the funeral.

- b. 1. on waking in the mornings he would first hum a little.
looking around the cot from its turned wood spindles to
the carousel overhead of animal-shape pastels, he would
remove thumb from mouth & practise language.
hello, he would say to the air.
a little bit more.
not yet.

one day, age 2, he said: what's in a boook?
a b c d e f g , he continued, his little
hand twinkling star.

2. in chinatown whenever bosan said (in cantonese): can't
read chinese, chinatown storekeepers would scold.
in cheung chau* they would say: oh another (denatured
returnee from overseas).
in hongkong marie-claire said: you should say you don't know
how to read, not, you don't know how to read chinese.

oh, sorry! the waitress apologized, rushed back with
the english-language menu, & waited on bosan most sympa-
thetically.

* long island, an hour by ferry from hongkong

3. in vancouver, the professor from lebanon spoke infuriated
impassioned english about the war-torn condition of his
country, the lack of education, the he said *illitricity*.

in the audience bosan lit up.

4. hah? bosan crossing georgia street said, to the driver
who'd muttered something.
the light turned amber.
he stuck his head out the window, yelled: hey ricie!
grinned, & zoomed off.

bosan cracked up: ricie! it's pretty-funny!
sum wan said: hey, you just got insulted.
ginger smiled: we've always had to tell bosan how
oppressed she is.

- b. 5. jianada 'canada' seems wellliked in this part of china.
hun how (very good)! said the pork-pie hat
in the muslim eatery in dali, thumb-up.

canada hah? nods the uniform in kunming. china likes
canada number one! he says.

on the street the money changer hustles: you from where?
bosan said: jianada.

jianada? she points to bosan's hair & lifts her own in
rhyme rhyme.

katib translates: she didn't know there is black hair in
canada.

6. we've during a break at the gathering of first nations
in vancouver, they say to bosan, come along,
we're going to the sub (student union building) for lunch.

jeanette orders rice with her bacon & eggs. stories are
swapped of food combos that boggle anglo-cans. robt is
seen wandering, plate in hand, & waved over. to make
space, chairs snug up, it happens, all to the right.

is this how the wheel was invented, bosan flashed.
round table laughs.

7. staring at the typo 'accumiliate' made by a chinese from
zimbabwe, bosan grimmed: yeah, accumulate + humiliate.

another time someone returned from paris said: we saw
the agh de triumf.

it often happened to bosan
this way: new word one
day, twinning another.

accumiliate: agh! de triumf

- c. 1. ratio quality young ban yen had been thought italian
in kathmandu, filipina in hong kong,
eurasian in kyoto, japanese in anchorage, dismal in
london england, hindu in edmonton, generic oriental in
calgary, western canadian in ottawa, anglophone in
montreal, métis in jasper, eskimo at hudson's bay
department store, vietnamese in chinatown, tibetan in
vancouver, commie at the u.s. border

on the whole very asian.

- c. 2. rubber could never remember the meaning of 'aporia' (a
moment of difficulty or contradiction or doubt).

magnolia said: you don't remember the meaning because
you doubt it!

3. remarks had been exchanged about the irish epicist james
jokes.
in between turns at pingpong, the talk turned to local
(canada) poetry.
a transplant from hunan asked: what's happening in the
united states?
xylem twigged: i like your name for the government !

4. the newspapers were full of praise about a head of state.
 gee, periwinked, is he really squeaky clean as all
 the journalists say.
 ohyes, peregrinned, rats squeak.
5. cockleburr hooked up with this word 'autonomy': *autoe*,
 that's greek for . . . self. *self* in north american
 means . . . me. does *autonomy* mean . . . *metonymy*?

the dictionary slipped, as if its heaviest corner wanted
 to thump toesie, but burr grabbed the small print: *me*
 is a . . . pronoun, nagged burr. so, is the ques-
 tion: autonomy, what am i *pro* ?

6. it had come to a vote.
 willow swayed & bent & shivered with strain before snapping
 upright into a stand.
 cascara saged: there is beauty in struggle.
7. cabbage said: the students were unreasonable. of course,
 that's not how newspapers sell, but many folks in chinese
 street think so. the gummint had already been so patient,
 letting them mess up the capitol so many weeks without
 punishing them. really, what did they expect!

sorghum laughed: ya, the radicals certainly succeeded in
 forcing the gummint to show a bad hand. you think people
 now wanna shake that hand?

d. 1. what, déjà sighed, do you have against the word 'consciousness'?

bonsai frowned: anglomerican cultural imperialism.
mediacrity!

i prefer the word 'awareness'. i like the where in awareness,
i like the space & nothing of it. 'consciousness' is too
visible, positivist, also i don't like the sound of it, *shush*,
it's sticky!

doji said: i like it because that sound is like where one has
to go, deep, inside. to me it has the same meaning as 'aware-
ness', it's everything!

binosa said: going into the whirlpool may be why i don't like
the word. 'awareness' seems cleaner, airier, roomy.

dai ji said: aware*shush*!

you sniper! biosan laughed, a bit wet.

2. bison got into trouble & was hurting pretty badly. effendi
rallied round.

syringa said: you love pain !

nettle said: repression & rationality are your specialty.

bramble said: feeling that you're learning something is your
historical way to cope with being shat on.

juniper said: the world is very big, bison.

3. bassoon
transmutes
analects
9. xxx
with the
help of a
morning-
glory in
kathmandu

a r d e n t , f l o w
er , of the mil k
wh it e throa t, morning
glo ry bl oo
m ,
sweet art ?
smaller than the purple
how i've not . missed . you

4. batter batter batter batter batter batter batter batter: buffoon
couldn't take the boredom of waiting to die from a broken
heart & one day a vowel changed: better.

e. 1. moby dyke turned sceptic around the harpoons of erudition.
merlin said: what marlin said to me was, you must
learn to use the master otherwise he will kill you.

2. another time off brighton park a wave rose & dipped with a
duck. it was fine day blue light muscly water.
sea-squirt burbled: i don't know how to see better.
be-bopped beluga: in order to see, you have to love looking.

- e. 3. sapporo they noticed it on the way to the airport, name of
 a restaurant.
strange word, kenjie prairie mused, those letters p p
 o o.
yeah, as if they're a different language, abu hong pondered,
 then caught the drift: korean.
4. this work is magic, native said, except for that
 part about 'shush' being sticky. how can you say such
 a thing, i'm really angry! shush is the wind in the
 trees, we have that sound a lot in our language! whereas
 'awareness', is, maybe the sound a horse would make,
 but it's not one of our sounds!
nomad winced. 'salish', 'snohomish', 'squamish', came
 to mind.
native smiled: just because you're scared, doesn't mean
 this work isn't sacred.
5. llama said: consciousness is what we share with everything.
uh! camel oofed, & wondered: is that what 'universal
 consciousness' means.
6. a master announced failure, disciples sluffed it off as
 senile depression.
i have not conquered mount avarice, the master said.
drop-out hummed: the up-&-coming should heed this, legacy.

7. mice'tro long days late nights got nowhere. bosun fed up
scrunched up sheets of writing & hurled them
all over away. now the table was clear, bosom worked afresh
till, tired hours later, one of the crumples scuttled across
the floor. bazoom stopped typing & watched it dot out of
the room.

the next day b. complained about mice
gā je said: who are you that you shouldn't have mice in
your house.

8. at cappucino in joe's cafe gā je said: what is this iridology.
bassoon said: various organs & functions have nerve endings
in the iris, so it's possible to read the condition of the body
right there in the eye.
dai ji said: that's why, looking is a lot of work.

f. 1. prism said: space is profound, it's the spiritual.

2. cirrus synthesized necessary tears with stories such as the
following:

there once was a child-princes, whose random fought
brutal forces. she comes to know that her beautiful
princess belongs to another; so he becomes a little
sad level kind & frees her to her chosen.

but it's too late! the princess cries, he's
just been sent to the front!

up front, the princes is shocked to find he's saved
the enemy agent, the big, top, spy. too much is at
stake for her to go back on his word. how is it
solved? he appoints a regent to carry on the good
fight, & abdicates, goes off into the desert hills
alone.

condor shook off the sunset: you managed, to forgive the
child, & feel sorry for the father, & feel sad that the
secession of the sexual & revolutionary from the moral &
greater good meant you had to abdicate, & be free of the
mother, &, did you have fun in the desert too ?

- f. 3. attic said: do you ever get tired of being clever?
4. they'd been talking about feroze, whose heart had failed
just when the emphysema seemed to ease up.
there's no learning how to die, bee mused. people don't
come back & pass along the knowhow.
pollen laughed: then there's no envy either.

g. 1. ginger, m.c: so we'll end up with a lil' more country-
&-eastern:



tune by jam. ismail (1966) to 'tall trees there be in
south countree' (I.I.ix. of *see ging*) by ezra pound
(*confucian odes* (1954), 5 (new directions paperback
1959)). transcription by diana kemble (1989).

g. 2. feeding rosemary, thyme, & grape, rice-washing water.