

the kingsbury tales

OUYANG YU

— THE KINGSBURY TALES: FOR ONCE, THEY GET IT RIGHT

Master Cylinder Slave

Planetary System

Grease Nipples

And it is here that my interpretation made them all laugh:

An English grease nipple equals

A Chinese yellow oil mouth

But Mr David got the hang of it

For he immediately began

Addressing everyone by their first names:

Tomorrow when you go to Brisbane

Talk to Mr Ben my son

And if you go to Perth

Find out what's wrong with Mr Yong

Mr Sam here is in charge of spare parts

Mr Harry here looks after the crane hire

Indeed, that's what Mr David's Chinese counterpart

Called them all along

The Chinese have this knack of seeing the first name

And fixing a Mr or Ms or Mrs to it in the first instance

It's a mystery how Mr David found out about it

And took the reverse habit of attaching a Mr or Ms or Mrs
To every last name he sees on the cards at first sight
Hence Mr Hai whose surname is Shan
Or Ms Juan whose surname is Yan
Or Mr Gang whose surname is Ding
It's only when he gets to the important bit, part of the brochure
That he gets serious, tackling the Chinese-English head-on:

I'll give you one example where you say
'to keep the fart and sewage out of the system'
when all you meant to mean is clean up the system
I'm afraid this English is not up to scratch
Let's work to make this work
Remember? No profit, no job
In our crane
Business

— THE KINGSBURY TALES: COLD PALACE

In Kingsbury, in the early 21st century
One rainy afternoon
One writer visited another one
In his tiny little home
He talked about his manuscript
And offered free editorial advice
In return
The other writer
Used the word 'cold palace'
In his attempt
To describe the state
In which his manuscript went unwanted
And, briefly, told a tale
About the ancient Chinese emperors
Who would each reputedly have
A rear palace of 3 000 concubines
But could manage to visit only a fraction of them
Leaving the majority
To pine away

In melancholy moonlight
Or sad sunshine
A subject ancient poets never tired of writing about
'Their state has formed
what is later known as Cold Palace
once you are there
you'll never see the day
of an emperor's sexual favours'
The writer, on hearing this
And putting himself in their shoes
Too tiny for his imagination, though
Began sobbing
Thus bringing the generous afternoon of rainy chatting
To a fruitful close

— THE KINGSBURY TALES: THE ARTIST'S TALE

About nipples
Don't know if you know this
A white woman's nipples
Are so small they hardly ever show
The other day she lay
Down for me
I was so unhappy about her invisible nipples
I went over and pinched one till it stood out
For the effect I needed

And the skin
No-one is as white as a white
Man or woman
There are times when
You find a Chinese woman white
Till you compare her with a white woman
Then her skin is infinitely yellow
As contrasted with an almost transparent glow of a white

Last and the latest, the dicks
If a western man sits or stands in a nude pose
His dick goes left

A Chinese or Asian dick
Goes right
There is no significance in this
But if you get the hang of it
Or the drift of it
Your portrait will look more lively
Than if you deal in theories

— THE KINGSBURY TALES: THE AUSSIE'S TALE

I take a lot of pride in being an Aussie
I go to the footy
If you are an Aussie that's what you do
I go to the horse races
I always do for how can you go through life
Without betting on horses
I go to the pub every night
I do not stay home
With Aussies, you drink and you talk about women
That's what you must do
You've got to go to the brothels
Even if you are married
Life without sex, what life is that
Every colleague of mine
Has got heaps of porn mags
Not a problem
You think I look like an Aussie?
Of mixed blood?
I am as Chinese as you guys
But, honestly, Aussies are much less tricky
They don't have a long memory
They quarrel with you today
They make up tomorrow
They don't report on you
No, I am totally happy, cool mate
It's only when I go back to China
Then I can't stand it

I can't stand Chinese Chinese
Know what I mean?

— THE KINGSBURY TALES: AN ABORIGINAL TALE

In my 15 years in Melbourne I have only ever met
One Aboriginal person, an old lady who I saw get on the tram
Somewhere near the city
As soon as she sat down a white lady next to her rose from her seat
And went down the aisle and found a seat more relaxed and comfortable
The Aboriginal woman, as I could see, took no notice of this

When I related this little tale to a friend of mine she told me
A similar tale of her experience in Toorak
For when she sat down next to an old white lady
She could hear her muttering distinctly and darkly
She would have none of that but she did nothing
Like the Aboriginal woman, my Chinese friend took no notice

Yesterday when I met an Aboriginal singer and songwriter
I did not tell him about these; instead, I asked if he had read *Capricornia*
And *Poor Fellow My Country*, as I was curious to find out about
How Aboriginals responded to that sort of thing
His answer in the negative disappointed me but our smoking session
Outside Federation Hall gradually drew him out on a number of things:

He originally came from Murray Island then he went to college
Intending to become a teacher he told me that that was not going to be
Because they did everything 'by the book' not allowing him to wear his beard
Nor his dreadlocks and he said Townsville is 'the worst' where
They run them over if they see an Aboriginal person on the street
By driving their cars directly towards them

I loved his music and his words in the music
Although I found his voice gentle and subdued
Looking in vain for the outburst of anger
And for any subsequent buyers of his music except myself
But he didn't carry any
Nor did he have any access to the internet

I put down the name of the author of those afore-mentioned two titles
As he said he'd like to check them out
As he put down his address for me to get in touch
Last night I thought of photocopying the pages where Suvitra
Is killed, raped and eaten by the Aborigines in *Poor Fellow My Country*
And mail them to him but, in the end, I gave up on the thought, putting the book away
Never to be read again

— THE KINGSBURY TALES: AH YU'S TALE

I am Jade
My father is a fisher
man
When Robert first
comes into
my life
I am totally surprised
He is so tall
Taller than most of my
townspeople
he seems interested in me
but I am repulsed
by his overwhelming smell
his eyes like the
ocean
his nose so
high
you could hang
a basket of local
produce from
he speaks Chinese
not perfect
but with his hometown accent
I can't produce the word except that it sounds like Ah Mah
He who writes through me
Please say it for me
I do not have bound feet

I fish
with my dad
Robert says
that's what he likes
about me
I bear 3 kids for
him
live with
him
for 8 years
then we part hands

Aside: This happened in 1857, when, amazingly, an Irish semen met a Chinese egg
And Robert Hart had been born in Milltown, County Armagh¹

— THE KINGSBURY TALES: AH SIN'S TALE

To Kingsbury he comes, from Kingsbury he goes
Ah Sin is the guy who is never far from the Australian memory
Back in 1888 when there was no Kingsbury, only the *Bulletin*
And JFA, the guy who ran it, whose name when expanded becomes French:
Jules François Archibald just as Ah Sin's name when expanded becomes Australian:
Anselm, not far from Archie really, just a few doors away from where
The magazine was based. One day, according to Anselm, or Ah Sin is it?
It's one and the same anyway just like Archie who is both Irish and Scottish
With a little bit of Australian that he wanted to claim for himself so that he
Could get rid of people like me and, with that in mind, he came to my shop
In Little Bourke Street, the shop by the name of Bashan Night Rain
Not to buy my tea but to push a subscription to his *Bulletin* on me
This gentleman in his box hat, his black suit and tie, carrying a *wenming gun*
In our language, a Civilized Stick, or their lingo, stick
He waved a copy at me and said: You should subscribe to this
For it is the Bushman's Bible
I took a look at the cover and saw myself featured prominently
With an Irish girl, possibly a prostitute but looking so nationalistically prudish

That reminded me of a visit I paid to a white whorehouse lately
Where I made love to a white girl with mottled skin, who helped me smoke a pipe
Of opium. Hey, I said to Archie, it is nice of you to put me on your cover
Although I do not have a clue as to what you say here. Please tell me.
Archie said: Don't worry about what we say or Phil (May) portrayed
For it's all out of kindness that we featured you guys, coming out of China
Like this, not easy. I'm sure Anselm did eventually take up a subscription
And take home a copy to his family and relatives in Fukien province when
He was eventually chased out of Australia by Archie's *bushido*
I mean Bush(i)do and you guys who write stuff like *The Archibald Paradox*
Should really go to his village and interview him
If you can't find his address just email my writer at Kingsbury

— THE KINGSBURY TALES: THE AGE OF DIVORCE IN CHINA

It's a pity that so many men and women divorce these days
That you hardly know whether you should congratulate them on their wedding
Or say good luck when they go bust or vice versa
China is catching up and surpassing the easily separable people of Australia
With this couplet that goes: *shi yi ren min jiu yi li*
hai you yi yi zheng zai ti
Ah, let me attempt a translation even though English as I know of
Does not have such happy rhyming coincidences:
Of the 1 billion, 900 million people have divorced
and the remaining 100 is talking about it
As if this is not enough, Mr Ding is telling me another similar thing
That is *shun kou liu*, something that slips easily off one's tongue
About how beautiful Shanghai women rate themselves
According to their preferred nationalities
To save your time and mine, I skip the Chinese language
Something less easy to make love with than the Chinese pussy:
1st-rate beauties marry Americans
2nd-rate beauties marry Japanese

3rd-rate beauties marry Hong Kongnese or Taiwanese
4th-rate beauties marry overseas returnees
5th-rate beauties marry the locals

ah, ah, ha, ha, the age of divorce
coupled with the age of marriage
downwards and upwards, in piston movements²

— THE KINGSBURY TALES: DIEGO DE LANDA AND SOME IN AUSTRALIA

Perhaps I'm stretching my imagination a bit
But let me first go to de Landa
This Spaniard, this Franciscan friar
Alive in 1549 or 1562
Dead for many centuries but
When he is alive he does not tolerate any Mayas being idolaters
And he 'order[s] the torture of over 4 500 suspected idolaters' (p. 101)³
With the result that some suicided, some crippled for life and others burned in public
Then he confiscates and burns 'thousands of manuscripts
In which the Maya had recorded their history, art, mythology, science, astronomy
And medicine' (p. 101)
Because he detects 'the work of Satan' in them (p. 101)

Now let me come quickly to my point
Today, in 21st-century Australia
There are still quite a few de Landas, of Anglo-Saxon or other white abstraction
(you think it should be extraction, don't you, Grammarian?)
Who will do anything to burn
Me and manuscripts like me
Although they are much more subtle than that
Diego de Landa
For they will simply get someone to write an anonymous reader
's report
Or get a white woman to pen a letter saying:

I'm sorry but the current market situation doesn't justify etc etc etc
De Landa dead many centuries but
Still alive and kicking, in today's multicultural Australia

— THE KINGSBURY TALES: THE BIBLIOPHILE'S TALE

It has just come to the bibliophile's attention in Kingsbury
That critics, either here in Australia or there in China, constantly get names wrong
And without knowing what he is doing he finds himself putting down a list below:

François Cheng (France): Cheng Baoyi (Cheng Embracing One) 程抱一
Frank Chin (USA): Zhao Jianxiu (Zhao Healthy Pretty) 赵健秀
David Wong Louie (USA): Lei Zuwei (Lei Ancestor Powerful) 雷祖威
Marilyn Chin (USA): Chen Meiling (Chen Beautiful Jade) 陈美玲
Lan Samantha Chang (USA): Zhang Lan (Zhang Mist) 张岚
Amy Tan (USA): Tan Enmei (Tan Graceful Beautiful) 谭恩美
Jish Jen (USA): Ren Bilian (Ren Jade Lotus) 任碧莲
Gus Lee (USA): Li Jiansun (Li Healthy Grandson) 李健孙
Lilian Ng (Australia): Huang Zhencai (Huang Chaste Talent) 黄贞才
Clara Law (Australia): Luo Zhuoyao (Luo Excellent and Precious Jade) 罗卓瑶
Ouyang Yu (Australia): Ouyang Yu (Ouyang Brilliant) 欧阳昱

At the end of the list
is a note that the bibliophile attaches,
to the effect that, for example,
in the Australian publications,
critics constantly call Mr Yu instead of Mr Ouyang,
and it's worth pointing
out that all the above
-named have their surnames preceding their
given names, a lesson that the English
-speaking people never learn whether they
are professors or working-class. In this regard, this regard alone,
they are equally ignorant and equally reluctant to learn.
The same can be said of their Chinese counterparts.

— THE KINGSBURY TALES: THE NON-ACADEMIC'S TALE

Critics are not above criticism
They, of all the people, are the ones who deserve criticism, if not carping
What if they keep calling me Mr Bai, not Mr Li
Because my Chinese name is Li Bai and keep putting me under B, not L
In the bland and mostly blind bibliographies

If they know Bai in Chinese means White they are committing an even worse crime
Which I would call, not racism, but namism
And, believe it or not, critics can even pretend they know a language
That they don't know at all but let me tell you how
If someone has written something on, say, a Greek poet
Let's assume he is Cavafy
And has quoted him and included him in his footnote
Next time I quote the quote or the quoted I simply include the info. in my foot
Note I'd read it in the original
Isn't that simple enough? Critics
Please stop this lazy practice
For you'll be caught out one day
Even though no one will openly write about it
There are other critics who will write about one
As if they know everything
By relying on a fashionable theory that will one day become a
Theoretical stereotype
And by adhering to the merely publisheds
(ah, so much unpublished is so exciting but did they know that? Who knows?!)
But they can't even ensure that they have got their facts right
Avoid, at any cost, the prevalent academic laziness
That I see on a daily basis
Regardless of what large amounts of quotations are quoted
And what a long list of reference books is compiled
For the fact remains that it's a shoddy piece of academic business
That forever keeps me out of business
And forever helps people get to the top
Beware of academic businessmen and businesswomen
Who sell their wares successfully in refereed journals
That no one reads
That are only refereed
As another dead piece goes down
The drain history

— THE KINGSBURY TALES: THE WHITE WOMAN WITH BOUND FEET

I must write about her regardless
She must have a name like Foot

Miss Foot
Let's call her that for the moment
Later on we can call her something else
Like Ms Fu Te, happy and special or Miss White
She is white which normally means she isn't white
For her skin is mottled, or better still, freckled
Rough, with so much perfume that the original smell
Is still there
When she first comes to our village
In the early 1830s
A period I give at random
As later you can alter it to the 1930s or 1890s
But not 1950s onwards, oh, no
Unless she manages to live through the Revolution with her lotus feet
I remember holding her feet up, one placed nicely in one palm
And looking down where it is open and opened
Gosh, what a cuntinent there is!
A cuntinent underneath and a cuntenance above

I must write about her, Miss Bound Foot
Or should I say Miss Bund Foot?
After so many decades of slumber
I now come alive in search of her eyes
Full of pleasure and pain
At the thought of her crying to see
Her feet becoming tiny
Like a toy, a man-made penis
Held in a man's hands
To masturbate with

OUYANG YU has to date published thirty-six books in English and Chinese in the field of poetry, fiction, literary translation and criticism. He is currently Chair Professor of Australian Literature in the English Department, Wuhan University. <youyang@bigpond.net.au>

1. Sir Robert Hart (1835–1911) spent twenty-five years in China as Inspector General of the Chinese Customs. During his stay in China, he had an affair with a Chinese woman by the name of Ah Yu, more stories about them to come in this sequence.
2. The couplet and the *shun kou liu* are, respectively, quoted from Ding Zijiang, *zhongmei hunlian de xingxue fenxi* (A Sexological Analysis of Sino-American Love and Marriage), Chinese Workers' Publishing House, Beijing, 2001, p. 269 and p. 258.
3. Quoted in a book titled *Tattoo History: a Source Book* by Steve Gilbert, published by Juno Books, Rockville MD, 2000, translated by Ouyang Yu and published in 2006 by Baihua Literature and Arts Publishing House, China.