

## Twenty Sixteen

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“It’s literally people’s lives on the line here.”  
Elizabeth Warren, June 9, 2016

Twenty sixteen was when the rot showed up.  
Folks you thought nice folks turned mean and prodded  
other folks. Like Doberman Pincher pups

that’d nuzzled, warm and sweet, now muscle-cusped  
and fanged: kind neighbours who’d waved and nodded.  
Twenty sixteen was when the rot showed up.

First it was laughs, the comic turning up,  
the way folks mouthed off, the lowly lorded  
other folks, like Doberman Pincher pups

get all the attention, doggy treats, cups  
of ice cream shared, and marrow-bones hoarded,  
till twenty sixteen when the rot showed up.

Suddenly it wasn’t funny – *hup hup*  
of militia, empty houses boarded  
of other folks. Doberman Pincher pups

full grown, barking, growling, the flip no flub,  
all votes intended, America guarded.  
Twenty sixteen was when the rot showed up  
in folks sweet as Doberman Pincher pups.

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<sup>1</sup> **Shirley Geok-lin Lim**’s (Research Professor, University of California Santa Barbara) *Crossing the Peninsula* received the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. Awarded the Multiethnic Literatures of the United States Lifetime Achievement Award for her critical work, she’s published 10 poetry collections; 3 short story collections; novels *Joss and Gold*, *Sister Swing* and *Princess Shawl* (a children’s novel); and *The Shirley Lim Collection*. Her memoir *Among the White Moon Faces* and co-edited anthology *The Forbidden Stitch* received American Book Awards. Email: slim@english.ucsb.edu.

## Value

Mongering had gone out of cycle:  
fishmonger who'd tossed slippery flounder,  
ungutted, into my mother's basket;  
ironmonger who'd soldered her battered  
pan with a fiery rod; my favourite,  
the newspaper monger who rang his bell  
for the month's old news, mere cents to the weight,  
to be carted away on his bicycle.  
Today, new mongers get into the news  
with old venerable gods – Fear, his troupe,  
Rumor, War and Hate – borne into view  
and traded hourly in our households, grouped  
as saviours for a souvenir picture:  
branding with burning cross the world's future.

## Malacca High School, A Commemoration

For Bien Mei Nien (October 24, 2016)

Do you really wish to recall  
Class of sixty-three, Malacca  
High School *keuching kurap*, when all  
we lower sixth formers were afraid  
from sticky Monday to stickier Friday  
of Miss Navaratnam and Mister Wade?

And do you really want to remember  
crammed weekly, monthly tests, final exams,  
supply-demand Econs and General Paper?  
Who was the puff-chested prefect  
who sat on a tack? Who scored B's and C's  
when no essay could ever be perfect?

So many gone to hereafter  
and thereafter. Too many eulogies.  
Dozens flown to Australia or Canada.  
How many knew then such geography  
was important? Who here can now pass  
a quiz on British Imperial history?

Think on the girls and boys you'd kissed.  
Too late to regret the ring not offered  
or taken, the love of your life missed.  
You're done with white socks and tennis shoes  
(except in gyms). Done with heartbreak.  
Buy another drink. Nothing left to lose.

Still, among a life's untarnished treasure  
shine lifelong friends: Mei Nien, Yong Ai, Annie,  
Mister Goh (keep calling!), old Malacca.

## Missing *Nyonya* Poster

(May 11, 2018)

Where is the *nyonya*  
    in me  
gone missing?  
Where is the cheeky  
    chattering  
girl child born smiling?

*Saudara Emak Bibik*  
    scattered  
                    last century.

Where is the daughter  
    loving,  
beaten bitter?

Woman in the poster  
    tatters fading  
so long missing  
she does not see  
    herself, *nyonya*,  
    in the figure.