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**Tom** **BOOK**

adam



from "Book of Adam" : Sylvia Chan

## The Part About Sacral & Nerve or Temperament

A valgus force  
is the part where the ants  
trail onto an impulse  
& conduct what  
has always  
played out in an afterward.  
The indelible smoke  
around her eyes  
flicker like makeshift drive.

He carries his reconstructed  
hand with the grace  
of cavalier animal.

Meaning projection, having been injured by  
impulse every time he pulls his pants up.

What kind of fat-lipped bliss makes him  
restless enough for dream spaces?

(The lock,) (a)  
permanent weakness of the  
(pinch) (grasp.)  
(Inside music) (lessons, he's) (waiting for the release.)

(He counts the traction) (in her eyespots.)  
(He makes) (the chorus work.)

(He recites) (mnemonics) (of) (the hand & the restless),

(insertion site)

(making him wonder)

(where) (apneics write) (versions) (of) (the end of a wreck)  
(as) (afterthought.)

The songs go through her  
like apology for another's loneliness.

But it still doesn't explain why  
it took the promise out of her,  
her end starting on the outside

(He tried to know.)

Strings of voluminous music tones or

finger ligaments take their grasp in their directory,  
pull a hesitance apart

(& she slipped hers) (they slipped theirs.)

### The Part About Love or Cadence

Still a girl makes Adam cry more than  
necessary,  
the resistance a subtler kind of compliance.

I was twenty when she

died behind the wheel. That was  
the part where gunshots

could have blown off

my garage door

& I'd sit awake, passively ceding singular

moments into the end.

My songs lured  
him into the method  
with unprecedented, natural

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inside, a way of losing trajectory  
of the hours. Meant: it's not the  
which comes from  
outside.

will. Meaning: staying  
suffering but that

Of course I had a way  
of seeing where I'd been wrongly handed.

I shoved the hun-  
dredths of seconds, the last rites of intoning empty blessed  
words, like believing in  
a prayer I'd never ceded would give me understanding.

Fear of ridicule & humiliation.  
In that I saw the developmental  
piece lodged in star anise & ice.  
Under the saltroom I buried it,  
picked apologies in the street.

Came to me with an anvil  
in his hands like the medium I'd begun to understand.  
I counted up the tics in his eyelids.  
I pushed over what was left of his body  
after the shove. & though my limbs were bodiless,  
tied up in all the susceptible domestic disabuse  
interiors, I'd begun to make the math work:

I knew a hundred songs  
by memory & could play almost anything  
when the beloved brought his lumbar & thoracic nerves  
down on mine. Clean, the dream behind a person.  
If my fingers weren't inside another  
my songs & I would slip into a trauma  
past him.

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The sex was cut  
in the print of a meadowlark:  
political, loud, military piece.

However filled, solely filled,  
a mute girl slips very fast on a banister.

Girl tethered to  
his palms,  
the rotating language  
of the mute slips into mine.

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## The Part About Fate or Counterpoint<sup>1</sup>

I want to begin this poem with two stories:

1. In 1984, my mother was pulled over for speeding in a rural, still unnamed village in Taishan. The cop was a forty-year-old man who let her go because of her age and gender. Growing up, my mother would tell me to use my age and gender to get out of this kind of story. She said to hold my body down like a political piece; men were those pieces that would enter my bed at night.<sup>2</sup>
2. In 2012, I was pulled over for speeding in the Palo Alto Hills. I thought about using my expired disability placard to justify speeding in the hills. I didn't have to justify anything. All I did was roll down the window and smile and the forty-something cop let me go.

Most of the rest of this poem happened in 1993. The details: she is beautiful and formidable, real and winning, starred all over. There is a fight now and then for her time. From then on, her killings began to be counted.<sup>3</sup>

*(that evening, those next stars)*

Nobody refused to identify her. There were enactments that I thought of as feminist acts, gender as performance. To be a secondary beloved, I had to make and unmake my sex and location all day long. Wherever to get away from crude frozen oil, Gadhafi — all of this goes on.<sup>4</sup>

*(there were no deaths of other women)*

The dance opens and the dead woman is twenty-two. I'm twenty-two when a door takes off part of

<sup>1</sup> Bolaño, Roberto, trans. Natasha Wimmer, Natasha. 2666. New York: Ferrar, Strauss, Geroux, 2008. Cf.: *The Part About Fate* (229).

<sup>2</sup> Spahr, Juliana. *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*, “Nov. 30, 2002.” Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005. Cf.: “at night unable to turn over or away from this the three legged stool of political piece, military piece, and development piece that has entered into our beds at nights...” (18).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Bolaño: “This happened in 1993. January 1993. From then on, the killings of women began to be counted,” (353).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Spahr: “Gadhafi, nineteen thousand gallons of crude oil in the frozen Nemadji River, all of this exists,” (52).

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my hand. Gender is a construction, something I had to remake when my hands were no longer formidable.

Beloved, all our days come together in order to tie up all fear, the last violent death. I want to tie all mistakes up and proceed to shoot at them. I want to tie up the first dead woman of 1993 and put her with the hands that settled her.<sup>5</sup> I want my news to not reiterate hers and the scarred moon to shine in the sky, though there is no separation of harmony over time.

*(the next killing was)*

all rhythm and contour. One day Contour's father left and never returned. Rhythm started speaking a different, incomprehensible language, hoping to move Contour's mouth. Would release come down to her fracture? Contour's clavicle wouldn't call it music. Rhythm put a muzzle on her mouth. Calling it music, silence was living in contemplation of anxious run, lovely perverse sex at all. If they died, they'd repel that system of them tied in place, their mouths shut for the walls...<sup>6</sup>

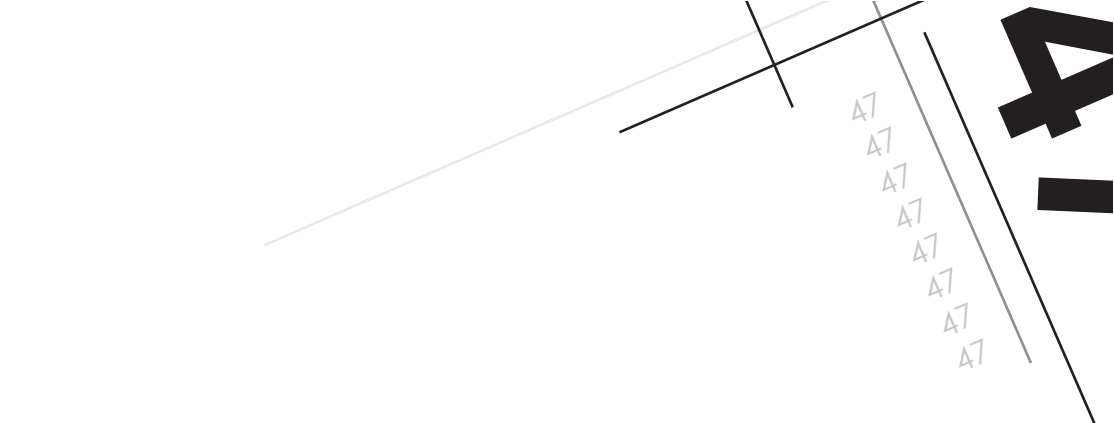
*(anxious run at all)*

I speak of how the dead woman isn't me. My body isn't a game; I'm not powerless to unmake and remake my person.<sup>7</sup> I happened in 1993. The game wasn't round enough.

*(the part about fate)*

It's hard to write a beautiful song. Fifteen days later they'd see each other and the would-be dead woman would sound more beautiful than internal structures sung simultaneously. The formidable voices had always been the same, the beloved all the more repeated, the political, military, and developmental pieces reinforcing and never changing, the fate the same one.<sup>8</sup>





<sup>5</sup> Cf. Spahr: “Beloveds, all our theories and generations came together today in order to find the optimum way of lacing shoes. . . I want to tie everything up when I speak of yous. I want to tie it all up and tie up the world in an attempt to understand the swirls of patterns. But there is no efficient way.” (32).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Bolaño: “If you’re afraid of your own fears, you’re forced to live in constant contemplation of them, and if they materialize, what you have is a system that feeds on itself, a vicious cycle,” (383).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Spahr: “I speak of how the world suddenly seems as if it is a game of some sort, a game where troops are massed on a flat map of the world and if one looks at the game board long enough one can see the patterns even as one is powerless to prevent them,” (20).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Bolaño: “Fifteen days later they would see each other again and everything would be just as it had been the time before. . . the dim light was always the same, the shower was always repeated, the sunsets and the mountains never changed, the stars were the same stars,” (384).

## Delver on Godowsky's Chopin Études

Culling the sound from her victim-flowers, small angry pulse in her hands, *soldiers comprise one economy* she tells Leo the composer, who says *all the popular songs say your name, one half accident and one-half solo pledge to your genealogy...*(which were your own victims)

He'd transfer countermelodic passages from his right hand to her left, his fingered puppet tragedy comprising the unsaid. What if the subway were to lose its repatriations? How would the owl doctor reconstruct her hand? When she was born, the little girl for an instant, was she already a soldier?

Specific exit of love raises her voice to ask the wrong question: little military resistance, demonstrations, and regime-sanctified changes across two handspans, the sacristy of plying she thinks required to play the right phrases. In the subway, it's a more

desperate, iron-gripped power — the very normal pianist labors on her unknown father's convexity until her body has no pliant reason for tyrannizing.

## Two Composers from Canton

If heavy weather suits me, she'll take a page from fantastic social concern. What's cleft is introspective singer knowing how feet feel, where the money's gone.

Next it'd be Technically Difficult Passage we'll remain in. Ternary form and symphonic poem and his tongue allowing her to hear the phraseology of the song beneath it all.

I chip a little finger muscle  
to disallow each correct syntax, as if any  
body has the right to tell me when  
my language is wrong. Sometimes, just  
what I hear, I believe.

The way the Weather Angel throws  
a fistful or four of hard, tight, urbanic rain —

all former writers have columnar necks and delineated  
upper lips, vertebrae cracks down the pentatonic  
scale. My page-girl companion brings some-  
one a placatory copy of Beyoncé playing in a sexy,  
serene spook. One set of specifics is bad enough to live in.

From the “Charter of the English Language of Canton:”

The Charter is a product of the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s  
& of the Mao Zedong government in the 1970s, addressing the  
various socioeconomical fractures of Canton. Even though Canton  
has historically been a British-importing province of China, until the  
1960s, its economy was solely driven by Anglophones. Even today,  
in Hong Kong, the more affluent neighborhoods, like Kowloon Tong,  
are Anglophone.

Because I have a Cantonese surname & speak its language, I must  
be Cantonese.

Her heuristic night salve  
references “Note by the Composer,”  
which suggests this little poem

should be played exactly  
as is written, as the license  
occasionally indulged by readers,

of substituting their own thoughts  
for those of the composer,  
must inevitably interfere with

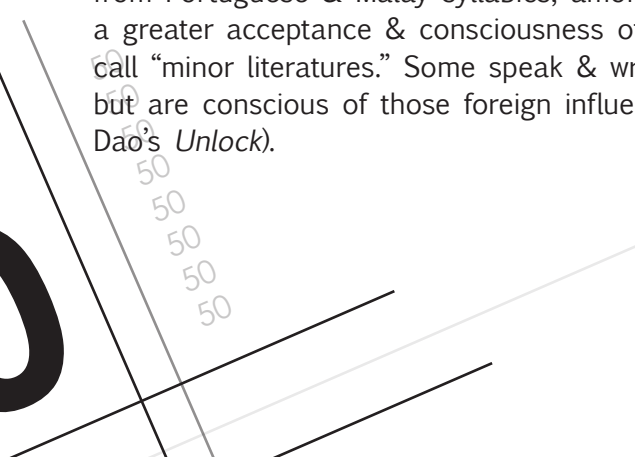
the general effect. The goal of waking:  
black coffee from the planisphere dream.



When referring to Chinese poetry in the U.S., most people mean  
“slightly less uncensored or nature poetry by Anglophone-sensible  
poets.”



Since the 1960s, Cantonese poets do nothing like their continental  
counterparts. They aren't interested in a purity of language (see  
the recent Cantonese-as-a-written-language polemic, which pulls  
from Portuguese & Malay syllabics, among other creoles). There's  
a greater acceptance & consciousness of what Deleuze & Guattari  
call “minor literatures.” Some speak & write in English; others don't,  
but are conscious of those foreign influences & migrations (see Bei  
Dao's *Unlock*).



This isn't meant to be a comprehensive galley of composers from Canton, or the persons I've been. As a matter of fact, both of the composers presented here don't live in Canton.

## Hers Is Probably an Owl<sup>1</sup>

She imagines freedoms granted from regime changes and failed negotiations:

1. Spoken to as a phrase cf. hymn. The fact that they were below ground didn't compel her to make the lewd man pay for his resolve. She'd learn Godowsky — cavern-haired particular whim — on her own.
2. When her eight-year-old self started improvising on the piano, she asked herself, "How come I can do that?" Inside her a person plays the piano perfectly.

As a policy, she's mostly sorry. My pianistic strut siphons the autotactile taste from her mouth, softening her pseudomelodic lines to allow that we'd been victims of circumstance.

Compiling ambulant musks would ask no plumb accident or commonplace beauty on her part.

Thinks hers  
is in another room. It's an entire house  
on the summer fire escape. Or a musical intersection.

She puts on a spook extremophile dress and gossips about how every anaerobe color is lonely or expansive.

“Do you know your father?” I ask.

Godowsky’s politics twists her lisp into a humidity formerly devolved from spines. I think, iterative, devoted address.

The most pleasing neurosis would be erotic civic hope.

<sup>1</sup> Notley, Alice. *Grave of Light: New and Selected Poems*, “The Descent of Alette.” Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006. Cf.: “Can you” “find your father?” “Yours is probably” “an owl,” (201).