



**Jerrold Yam** is the author of *Chasing Curtained Suns* and *Scattered Vertebrae* published by Math Paper Press and he is also a law undergraduate at University College of London. He shuts his eyes during trailers for horror movies and loves the smell of rain, but not rain itself. Pets terrify him, except for ones that can be enclosed, like koi. All the furniture in his room is white and he decides where to eat based on a restaurant's dessert menu. Neighbours often complain about his singing in the shower.

**Tell us about your one of your first poems.**

The first poem I ever wrote, in Secondary 1, was about the Amazon. Not only did it have fancy words like "giraffe" and "cake", it also rhymed. I started to write seriously as a hobby during National Service, when booking out was as close to freedom as possible, without responsibilities such as school or work. It was during that period of precarious transition from adolescence to adulthood that inspired my debut collection, *Chasing Curtained Suns* (2012), which charts a struggle for relevance amid the transience of modern Singapore.

**From your work, which poems are your favourites? Tell us more about them.**

From *Chasing Curtained Suns*: 'Inheritance' and 'Visitor'.

'Inheritance' is about the risks that my parents, as young newlyweds, had to brave in order to bring me into this world. 'Visitor' illustrates my Grandma's reaction towards her husband's death, and contemplates the possibility of being too long in love.

Poems from *Scattered Vertebrae* (2013) are harder to select because each documents a different portrayal of the nuances surrounding my attempt to reconcile family, religion and sexuality. However, if I were lowered in a cave full of spiders and had to choose some poems in order to get out, they'll be 'Alias', 'Audition' and 'Trinity'. 'Alias' chronicles the process of sexual awakening and its accompanying emotions of guilt, longing and repentance. 'Audition' questions if one could possibly be left out and intentionally marginalised by a religion that brags of love. 'Trinity' is about prayers my parents have showered upon my sister and me since birth, as a testimony to their unconditional love (or as unconditional as mortal love can be).

Here is also a poem on something we have not really talked about: romance. It was previously published by *Coldnoon: Travel Poetics* (Issue 2.4) and *Kitaab: Asian Writing in English* (September 2013).

*Trajectory*

*Four days after we first met in that café  
I used to avert each morning  
with guarded indifference I mistook  
for courage, I am on the plane home,  
suspended hours  
trailing in your wake, time  
a circuitous ritual christening  
my inability to forget. Who found  
the other? I was so sure that my eyes  
could not confront yours  
for long, escaping to the display of cakes  
and exotic teas, their need of anchorage  
fulfilled, sated as lovers. Maybe  
we found each other, how fickle  
paths on a map seek solace  
at a well or marketplace, but the finding  
came too late, or too early;  
you with your boyfriend and I  
not returning for three summer months.  
Maybe this shall not endure, brief  
as a kiss or handshake. In my seat,  
I find myself rehearsing  
our armoured embraces,  
liquid caution. How my heart  
hastens to keep up each time  
I see your silhouette outside the restaurant  
where we are supposed to meet  
a half hour ago, your smile  
like the curve of an upturned palm  
in worship. And below the baggage  
shelves  
looming dense and whitewashed  
as hefts of shale, I am ready  
to love again.*

**Tell us more about your personal writing style.**

The only thing I bear in mind now when writing is honesty. I have no conscious stylistic requirements, and believe them to be more deleterious to writing than helpful, though critics have pointed out imagery as a more distinct feature of my work. Both my collections are very different in style; *Chasing Curtained Suns* is more varied, post-modern and experimental, while *Scattered Vertebrae* comprises free verse entirely. My third collection, due for publication in 2014, presents another flavour. The style is simpler than before, stripped bare, minimalist and capitalizes on the economy of words.

**What are some things that inspire you?**

Family is my eternal inspiration. They have taught and continue to teach me all I need to know about living; everything else like school, work, café-hopping, snorkeling and tying shoelaces only serve to augment these lessons by providing platforms for experimentation, affirmation and understanding. I particularly love my Grandma's hands, my father's astute sense of responsibility and my mother's Christian humility.

**What are some things you might have given up in order to pursue writing? What are some things you have gained?**

Time is the only rarity. Opportunity costs for my writing involve school commitments, internships and time with family and friends. The past summer was exhausting (with the launch of *Scattered Vertebrae*) and I barely had time to have meals at home. Earlier this year, the London Book Fair took place around the same time as my final exams but I managed to squeeze some time off revision to read at the events. In November 2013, I missed a trip to Morocco with my London friends for the Singapore Writers Festival.

What have I gained from writing? The list seems endless: a whole new circle of friends in the arts community both in Singapore and abroad, confidence, unbridled fun, excellent conversation, socio-political awareness, opportunities for reaching out, a more complete understanding of who I am and what I value, diversity, motivation and catharsis.

**Is there a poem that you've written that makes you laugh/smile/cringe/feel embarrassed when you think about it?**

'Alias' seems to be a favourite at poetry events. Editors have specifically requested for it to be read, especially in London. The first time I read it in public, I think my face was so flushed that any passing car would halt for fear of beating the red light. Some parts of the poem still make me cringe.

**What are some of your plans for the future? Where do you see yourself in the next, say, 5 years?**

Get my law degree and work as a lawyer for at least 5 years. Perhaps it is the fault of Western media, but many of my peers believe following one's dreams to be an entitlement rather than a luxury. I am aware of my familial responsibilities (as well as creature comforts), and I am willing to work hard to fulfill them. Who will get a job on mere personal choice? I also am very passionate about the law and believe it possible for human beings to be passionate about more things than one (i.e. writing). In fact, it seems incredible how studying law has helped my writing. There is definitely a big change from *Scattered Vertebrae* to my forthcoming third collection.

*To me, writing is about life. The more you experience life, the more enriched your writing. Let me also add that age and experience are at best fallaciously connected since it is not what we have done, but how we emerge from those experiences that makes us who we are.*

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