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Jerrold Yam, a sage for our times

by Venus Tan (User) | Mar 31, 2014








Jerrold Yam bares it all in his poetry collections: *Chasing Curtained Suns* and *Scattered Vertebrae*. An old soul residing in a young Singaporean, his poems compelled me to relive past experiences in a whole new different light.



Few collections speak to me as directly as *Chasing Curtained Suns* by 23-year-old Singaporean poet **Jerrold Yam**. With themes on letting go and moving on, among others I am also grappling with now, the collection felt close to my heart. As I look back on my own childhood while lifelessly typing my aspirations for university applications, I am glad to have had Jerrold's collections by my side.

A law undergraduate at University College London, Jerrold is author of poetry collections *Scattered Vertebrae* (2013) and *Chasing Curtained Suns* (2012). His third collection will be released this August. In 2011, he won the National University of Singapore Creative Writing Competition and at 20, was the youngest Singaporean to be nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2012.

JERROLD AT THE SINGAPORE WRITERS FESTIVAL

PHOTO CREDIT: JERROLD YAM

Reading *Chasing Curtained Suns* was like entering a metaphorical dream. It draws inspiration from National Service, celebrity culture, young love and Upper Thomson Road (Jerrold's favourite area in Singapore), and sheds light on growing up in modern Singapore. The poem *Idol*, lends a phrase to the title: "Before we were even kids/ made obedient by chasing/ curtained suns". *Chasing Curtained Suns* is exactly what I have been doing as a child. I have been told all my life to pursue certain things for my own good, for a bright future. But they never seemed that bright to me.

CHASING CURTAINED SUNS BY JERROLD YAM

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No matter the actual circumstance of the poem, I could superimpose my experiences onto the poems and experience them in a wholly different light.

Still, he maintains an unassuming disposition, opening *Scattered Vertebrae* with "I don't pretend to know why we are here".

SCATTERED VERTEBRAE BY JERROLD YAM

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Scattered Vertebrae, split into five parts, touches on family, religion and sexuality with a recurring theme of creation and reproduction. It questions what love means, within families and between lovers.

Jerrold said: "I hope readers are able to suspend judgment long enough to appreciate an alternative viewpoint, and realise that the truths we are accustomed to are not the only truths in the world."

While *Chasing Curtained Suns* commented on Singaporean society, *Scattered Vertebrae* focused on the individual and according to Jerrold, is more personal.

It is much bolder as well. The poems gradually unhinged me. I did not expect the poet to disclose such private details about his life and I felt almost undeserving of knowing.

I felt the same steely and irrepressible anger welling up in my throat as I read about the quarrels with his parents, then quietly braved through the strained atmosphere dwelling in his family during 'quieter' times.

He writes in *Piety*, "Twenty/ years and counting I watch the faults go/ unaffirmed, unwatered" and goes over the edge in *Monologue*, "But you already/ won, from the beginning, your/ trump a declaration of bondage, the well-played *I am your/ mother!*"

Jerrold writes with such fluidity and intensity, I often found lines from his poems resonating in my mind hours after I have read it.


The collection displays deftly controlled but highly intense angst right from the outset. It then calms down towards the end, weary from all the pain and emotions of the journey, vividly captured in *Archaeology*, "Something tells me I'm ready for/ the better nature of distance, I want to gather their/ ashes before the plane reconciles with earth."

A reader could not ask more of a poet. His sincerity, generosity and honesty has brought me to places I could never dare to venture into and left behind a melancholy that is weirdly comforting.

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