

Two poems by Jennifer Lee Tsai

Mersey River

I swim towards the coastline
clasping mementoes from my grandfather
a Chinese passport
papers from the Blue Funnel Line
photographs in sepia
my child's jade bangle, translucent white-green
blemished entities rise and dissipate
twist and untwist
speckles split
the coastline
beyond waste chemicals
breaking stabilities
on the scour
like phonetic entities
one pulse
through the murky field
alluvium birls
listen
I want to hear you speak to me
I do not want the city to forget you
or the other Chinese sailors of Chinatown

Soundings

A Certain Purity of Light

I

Where was I?

And what was I?

Standing in the umbra of your shadow, your conjurings.

Forgetting my own magic.

I descended so deep

into darkness, black on black.

A cloud of not-knowing, wandering in a fugue. The sacristy of my mind
overcame me, and yes, I admit – I was truly lost.

The nigredo of your corvine heart fucked me up for years – ten, to be exact.

I should have heeded those spindrift voices.

II

My grandmother that I never knew,

how I miss you.

How and what were you?

I invoke your spirit

make offerings

to the Three Mountain Kings.

III

The white morning

curdles its fury

as only October can.

I assemble fragments in disarray.

The light coruscates in the Georgian quarter.

I'm on Hope Street.

Before me, the Anglican cathedral looms; Gothic in its brown façade.

Seagulls flutter by.

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IV

On Huskisson Street, they say there's a ghost – a man with no face.
On some nights, you can hear the ringing of sword blades duelling.

Once, in your attic, I saw pieces of the women you had loved
and who had loved you.

I had no designs on you.

Half-crazy, because I've been made to feel so.

V

I had abandoned myself utterly;
I was a paper doll.
If you had held me up to the light,
it would have shone through.

Now all I can do is laugh.

The dragon in me has returned.

VI

There is a certain purity of light
that arises
on these almost-winter days,
violet but not quite.
Times, when the past and the present collide.

VII

The day slides into view.
My love arrives.

Soundings

On Catharine Street,
we drink a beer or two.

VIII

Sometimes, there are nightmares still.
I wake up suddenly from a feeling
that I'm *there* again.
Trapped in that red attic room.

IX

The curtain sways in the night.
I reach over,
feel the warmth of your nakedness,
your body next to mine.

Jennifer Lee Tsai is a British poet of Chinese heritage. She was born in Bebington and grew up in Liverpool. A graduate of St Andrews and Liverpool Universities, she completed an MA in Creative Writing (Poetry) with Distinction from the University of Manchester's Centre for New Writing in 2015. Jennifer is a fellow of the acclaimed national poetry development programme, The Complete Works III, which promotes quality, innovation and diversity in British poetry: <https://thecompleteworkspoetry.com/>. An earlier version of 'A Certain Purity of Light' was published in *Ten: Poets of the New Generation* (2017), which was featured in the last issue of *Soundings* and is edited by Karen McCarthy Woolf. In 2017, she was selected as a Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critic, an innovative mentoring scheme founded by Sandeep Parmar and Sarah Howe to encourage diversity in British poetry reviewing culture: <https://www.poetry-festival.co.uk/ledbury-emerging-critics-programme/>. Jennifer is currently working towards her first collection.

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