

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/4

W<|>P Newnham

<X-MAS IN PENANG!>

“One morning you wake up sick and you’re an addict.”

— William S. Burroughs, Junky¹

And That’s Exactly How It Was:

He Had Partied Hard Up and Down the Peninsula from George-Town to Singapore in Dubious Company with Disreputable Characters: True Seamen of Yore with The Yen for The Sirén Call of the Opium Pipe and Sweet Dreams Echoing Down Through the Ages: Junkies One and All.

They had rolled down the coast, a flood tide of cheap Pink-Rock-Shit², to Singa-Pura where sick and unable to score he was forced to acknowledge his³ growing Yen and catch the ebb tide train back to George-town: shivering and shaking and shitting all the way as he began to take the cure.

It is the early nineties and the peninsula is awash with shit, Pakistani, Afghani, all funding and funded by the Islamic Insurgency aimed at the Might of Soviet Expansionism and, regardless of cost, covertly and tacitly aided and abetted by American Foreign Policy- it makes sense and is in keeping with policy where costs are mitigated by the use and sale of locally sourced resources.

He had been discreet as he had been taught by the Elder Hands and avoided the Smacked-Up-Tram-Track-Arms of the novice preferring toes and groin for that old bring the rush home as the opioid haze blows the eyes and Woooooooooooooooooshhhhhhhhhhhhh: High!

He had passed back and forth over - borders relying on scripts for Ta-Maz-A-Pam cadged from Chinese Apocatheries; he never carried en-route: Old School found it rude; Down-Right-Stupid!

¹ <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/24861-junky>

² <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mhdao/Factsheets/Factsheets/heroin.pdf>

³

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He had been well coached:
It was all "Bill's "fault
The romance of the ocean
And the yen; always!

"Doctor Yip Say:"

What You Want?
What Wrong with You!

He expressed a concern that he had in his travels [he listed the countries all rife with malaria, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and how he had forgone the prophylactic use of Lariam⁴ [as it had made him ill] he had contracted malaria- such were the fevers and distempers.

No. No Malaria-
You No Look Toxic Enough-
You Hay Yen Sickness-
Too Much Party-
Too Much Lock-N-Loll!

He struggled with laughter at Doctor Yip's indignant pronunciation with 'Lock and Loll' being almost too much; he covered his face with his hands bowing his head in what would be seen as a penitent act and one well worthy of healing and help; Hippocrates! do thus thy duty and write!

Doctor yip counted out Valium from a large jar and administered enough for 10 days at 10 mg three times daily. He advised fluids and the need to stay proximal to amenities as cramps and diarrhoea were endemic to the condition he diagnosed:

You Junky Now-
You Sick for Junk Every Day Sick;
You Want Get Well; Suffer...
Only Answer Even with Valium

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mefloquine>

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*You Must Suffer and Only With
Suffrage Will You Have Release.
You-Hear-Me-Boy-
You Gon' Be Velly Sick Now
Chop Chop!*

The Rooms

Lorong Love
Pulau Pinang Malaysia
OLD PENANG GUEST HOUSE

[Love Lane]

He took to his rooms, a trimester of sickness and yen and want as he held himself accountable; he shivered his Way straight as the fevers and distempers griped through his bowels in a wet season of runny black stools as if distilled from all the bad-smack-juju, distilled to the very essence of the Gear-Djinn itself. He is the Pooh-Bear, treacle flows from his nether regions as the air above sets like humid mattresses basted as it were in the buttery slip and slide of fuck as the brothel rocked and rolled around him, the solidified layers of air rose into the fan to be sliced like Patty-Cake Patty-Cake falling from the sky: he swims upwards through gelatinous layers, he is again coated in sweat and semen and tears and snot and shit: he is reborn again and again till expiation seems at least an option as the Valium runs low.



371, Chulia Street,
Pulau Pinang
Malaysia

*Each day he
is abler to
stand and
walk for
longer*



periods until he can make it up Love Lane to Chulia Street and the Hong-Kong-Bar where he spends longer and longer each day pouring over the

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old polaroid collection off every night's clientele at 21:00 hours for reveille purposes as the bar serves the AJ set: militaria and brigade plaques, life rings purloined from naval vessels and brass-ware art works both trench and trenchant; the walls of the small bar packed with a history of the RAAF and RAN deployments to the various south east Asian crisis and conflagrations. He sees AJs and Jar Heads, Navvies and Fly-Boys resplendent in blue and as he trawls back-wards through the years their hair grow shorter and their eyes seem cleaner and somehow calmer as if accepting o their lot in the face of overwhelming hardships and sacrifice. He is able now to eat; small portions only with a preference for grilled cheese sandwiches washed down with weak sweet tea. The barmaid sends out for both and insists he purchase a drink which he does and then ignores as he sits waiting for his repast trawling forward through the collection until he finds the start of the fishing invasion in the late eighties where exploratory trips were made in search of new grounds over which to rumble the chains. He noted crews and skippers and engineers taking names and counting the losses of those dearly departed and those more good-riddance-high-way-to-hell-mother-fuckers that deserved everything they got and then some. He reads the guestbook notations matching faces to signatures and commentary occasionally finding himself moved as drunken scrawls speak to some form of truth in self-awareness:

"A new stack of photo albums sits under the counter stuffed with innumerable polaroids of troops with their arms around the thin waists of "German Tourist" and any other number of unnamed, sun-bleached European women.

Peering into them is a glimpse into the little traditions that earned the Australian its reputation for decency and fraternity. There are pointless wars, the cheapening of every story of nobility, gallantry and sacrifice in the name of political capital and foundation myths—but in those photos and on those walls, you see the kid who would've otherwise spent the rest of his working life doing day labour in a dying country town, becoming the man who realises that everything he's been told about the outside world is wrong.

You see minds opening.

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You see young men, one arm clutching a beer and the other around the shoulders of their commanding officer, their faces brimming with the knowledge that they are custodians of a history that is bigger than themselves.⁵

He finds himself in polaroids from previous sojourns and notes his ability to mask his face in every shot so that he is only recognisable to himself due to the size and shape of his favourite T-Shirts announcing Sigha, Tiger, Bintang or San Miguel Beers or others for the Sari Club or Teddy's Bar or Johnny-Two-Thumbs Tattoo, Bras-Brasah Road, Singa-Pura!

Pengkalan Weld

George Town, Penang

WHARVES AND SHEDS

His health continued to improve with the cramps and diarrhoeas and distempers faded leaving only the yen. He began walking as a way of re-building both stamina and appetite. He would walk first to the Hong-Kong-Bar where he would take tea and South-East down Lebah Chulia until He reached Peng-Ka-Lan-Weld. He wandered the wharfs looking for fishing boats and men. He sat with Malays and demonstrated dexterity with a net needle assisting the repair of netting and trawls. The locals name him affectionately as Orang-Nelayan-Gila: it suited him to have sobriquet of Crazy-Fisher-Man as He laboured at the needle and the sheet bend. The Malays are surprised at his dexterity and speed as He busts mesh and lays down job after job completed. They offer him cigarettes and tea which He accepts; offers to Chase the Dragon which He declines. He spends hours each day down amongst the clan jetties with the fisherman and his strength is rebuilt. He feels the pull of the diurnal tidal phasing in the briny wash as the ebb flow empties the harbour with the days' effluent output washed out into the Malacca Straights only to be replaced on the flood with waters only slightly less tainted; sand banks are skinned of water; crabs' scuttle the refuse for shelter.

XMAS IN PENANG

⁵ <http://asianwhitetrash.com/2015/05/22/hong-kong-bar-penang/>

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He had spent the day wracked with the fever as his sheets wound and unwound his shroud of greasy sweats of mucoid exudences. He is at the end of his Valium and rather than ration relief he swallows them 1.2..3...4. The desired effect is achieved at last and he sleeps.

He is woken by the quiet- the lack of usual noise; with all the window shutters closed in containment his cognizance of time is blurred and he is unsure whether it is day or night: he feels that time that must have had past recognizing something like hunger in the pangs.

He completes his ablutions splashing tepid water from the Mandi⁶ over himself to flush away the greasiness of sleep. He wonders again at the quiet; he could hear lone mopeds idling on the street and snatches of conversation in Bahasa: clearly, loudly. The Brothels on Love Lane are no longer Lit Then Dark Then Disco, nothing is Thumped and Pumped through the stereo, there is no reflected flash and staccato of Rotating-Strobe-Lights and Disco- Balls nor dazzling party effects appearing and re-appearing like frozen vignettes.

It is as if the world has stopped and he ponders this as he dresses and exits into the street and a sudden change in the wind direction, backing and veering with the ozone smell of distant lightning. Come cloud-bursts, pissing down rain and streets are awash with cloud-fall; heavy precipitation soaking soggy newspapers and litter with mulch running across the asphalt and down into drains. Dirt washes down the buildings as leaden fumes wash down from the sky. Locals hurrying, faces up laughing in the rain; a People In Transit in a sea of un-furled umbrellas. Soon Cleaner Streets Remain, Streets That Are Empty;

Empty, Quiet and Quick:

It is raining in Penang

The streets are quick and quiet.

Too quiet.

He senses this vicissitude like the taste of sin and as 'Gods Lonely Man' is gripped by yen and homesickness. He knows instinctively that it is Christmas day and that he must ring his mum if only to let her know he was still alive.

⁶ A traditional style of [washing](#) oneself in [Malaysia](#), scooping water out of a large container and pouring it over the body.

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And yet the Yen the Yen The Yen

The Yen

The Yen.

He walked up Love Lane onto Chulia Street finding the Hong Kong Bar dark and closed. He feels lost; un anchored and adrift. He heads North-East along Chulia Street walking far beyond the boundaries of his usual territorial boundaries; new Grounds, fresh shops.

And yet the Yen the Yen The Yen

The Yen

The Yen.

He purchases an international calling card from the only shop that he has seen open and enquires in broken Bahasa as to the nearest public phone. He is invited to, for a small fee, use the shops phone.

He asks:

hari apa itu?⁷

The shop owner is puzzled, shaking his head in disbelief at the ignorant 'Órang-Gila'.

The owner replies:

*Itu Adalah Hari Natal!*⁸

He asks:

dimana semua orang?⁹

The owner replies:

Di Rumah Dengan Keluarga!

*dimana lagi?*¹⁰

After several attempts to remember the number he finally gets through and speaks with his Mum saying Merry Christmas and Penang and yes he was ok and no he really had no idea as to when he might be coming home and that yes he was looking

⁷ What day is it?

⁸ it is Christmas day

⁹ Where is every one?

¹⁰ At home with family! Where else?

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after himself. She spoke of relatives and siblings and he had trouble remembering some or even how they were related. As his card credits began to run out he quickly told that he loved her and she began to reciprocate to tell him that God still loved him but was cut off with a click.

And yet the Yen the Yen The Yen

The Yen

The Yen.

He decides to catch a rickshaw back to his rooms rather than walk; one appears as if summoned. The Rick-Shaw-Driver is known to him and speaks some English. Rather than enquiring as to his destination The Rick-Shaw-Driver offers heroin and clean picks.

<the Yen the Yen the Yen the Yen the Yen the Yen>

An offer to which he submits.

In his rooms he prepares his shot telling himself one more for the Christmas and the loneliness. One more for the lack of Valium to sleep. Once more for the lack of will-power. He cooks up his shot using the bottom of a Coke can as a spoon as the mixture bubbles and foams. He pinches a small wad of the filter from a cigarette and draws the solution into the syringe through it. He ties off with his belt and ignoring all previous training and admonitions he shoots to thrill in the crook of his arm where fat veins wait hungrily for the sudden relief of pain as the needle finds its mark and a small flower of blood blooms into the syringe as he draws back on the plunger. He depresses the plunger he tasting aluminium on his tongue and bringing the rush home as the opioid haze blows the eyes and

<finis>

Dedicated to all the Robbies and Ockers.