

Two Lion Cities

Mycenae

A billion stridulations fill the ovened air,
and almost drown the clanking bells
of scattered flocks of goats and goatlike sheep
that graze on meagre dusty grass
and spiky skeletons of shrubs.

Brown and dry the circling hills,
the great stones of the citadel
seem no less ancient;
it's as if the wind and sun
have carved them by abrasion —
shabby jade from Greece's bones.

Above the gateway's massive lintel
rests an asymmetric triangle
of wind-worn limestone;
on it in relief a central pillar, flanked
by two huge lions in heraldic confrontation.
Rearing up, their fore-paws rest upon an altar,
heads and manes long lost —
yet entering beneath them takes some nerve.
They guard the treasury and tombs,
the royal palace, house of columns,
and the long descent to life in times of drought,
ghost-ridden by the centuries of violent death.

Singapore

By bumboat from Boat Quay
along the *Sungei Singapura*;
thick, hot, humid, heavy air sprawls out
upon the brown and sluggish river.
Now and then a hint of breeze
swirls round, from who knows where.

We putt-putt past the riverside
coincidence of opposites:
the glass and concrete needles
full of office-workers;
godowns and shophouses,
brightly renovated;
neo-classical displays
of pomp and circumstance;
and polymarble Raffles
resolutely turns his back upon us,
dazzlingly white.

As we trace the river's bends, we suddenly
emerge from under one last bridge
into a broad, bronze, burnished lake.
To starboard, gushing water from its gaping jaws,
and staring out to where the sea should be,
beyond a ship dry-docked among the clouds,
the great merlion rears upon its scaly tail,
a marketeer's mythology in concrete.