

Ee Tiang Hong, "Tranquerah Road"

Poor relative, yet well-connected,  
same line, same age as Heeren Street  
(more or less, who knows?),  
the long road comes and goes –  
dream, nightmare, retrospect –  
through my former house,  
self-conscious, nondescript.

There was a remnant of a Portuguese settlement,  
Kampong Serani, near the market,  
where Max Gomes lived, my classmate.

At the end of the road, near Limbongan,  
the Tranquerah English School,  
our alma mater, heart of oak.

By a backlane the Methodist Girls' School,  
where my sister studied  
*See me, mother,*  
*Can you see me?*  
The Lord's Prayer, Psalm 23.

The Japanese came, and we sang the  
*Kimigayo,*  
learnt some  
*Nihon Seishin.*

Till their Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere  
collapsed, and we had to change  
our tune again – God Save the King.  
*Meliora hic sequamur.*

The King died when I was in school,  
and then, of course, God Save the Queen.

While *Merdeka* inspired –  
*for who are so free*  
*as the sons of the brave?* –  
and so *Negara-ku*  
at mammoth rallies  
I salute them all  
who made it possible,  
for better, for worse.

A sudden trill,  
mosquito whine  
like enemy aeroplane  
in a blanket stillness,

the heave and fall of snoring sea,  
swish and rustle of coconut,  
kapok, tamarind, fern-potted,  
where *pontianak* perch  
by the midnight road.

Wind lifts its haunches off the sea,  
shakes dripping mane,  
then gallops muffle-hoofed,  
a flash of whiteness in sparse bamboo  
in a Malay cemetery.

*Yet I shall fear no evil  
for Thou art with me  
though the wind is a horse  
is a jinn raving free  
Thy rod and Thy staff  
they comfort me  
and fear is only in the mind  
as Mother said  
why want to be afraid  
just say Omitohood Omitohood Omitohood  
Amen*