

The Apple Appetite

by Ngoi Hui Chien

We are handed the fruit
which we munch and regurgitate
loyally, in warmth
each bite a little world
sluicing with alluring juice—seeping into our speech
sounds, twitching our lips
slathering our tongues
with syllables slobbery

A solemn feast
orchestrated by a crunching rhythm
of phonetic flesh, /e/ for /epɜ:l/
no, no, no—it should be
/eɪ/ for /'æpl/
listen carefully, /eɪ/ for /'æpl/, /eɪ/ for
/'æpl/, chew seriously

Until we finish the murmurs of Adams and Eves
until we wrest the secrets from the larynges
until we spit out the seedy teardrops

Our spectres in a sacred spring
that architects a trajectory
to the centre of the earth

The earth which disintegrates the harsh climate
into dreams, where our voices will
germinate and grow into
a sky of fruit
crimson, tempting
children who are tied to
the gravity

Les Pommes de Terre

by Ngoi Hui Chien

Growing up, the potatoes bought from pasar pagi
always had to be peeled clean
for the soil stained stubbornly
only then could the crunchy flesh be deconstructed by the knife
pale yellow, like apples
of soil, les pommes de terre
an expression learnt from the French textbook

It was only in Britain that I knew potatoes are edible with the skin on
packed neatly by supermarkets, their surfaces bright and smooth
like les pommes on the racks nearby
apples unburdened by soil
of inheritance, wherever that might be
crunchy promises of wisdom
edifying aroma in the rumination of heat

So, upon returning home, I eagerly showed people around me how to cook potatoes
unpeeled, but thoroughly cleansed, like apples from afar
chunks and dices of different sizes
different views nurtured in different soils
though still stir-fried in kicap pekat
they seemed to exude a different air, as though a new mist of skin
was sprouting from some formless feelings