

Death Wears a Dress

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Abstract

In many parts of Asia, female ghosts play an interesting role in how the supernatural is imagined and constructed. Whether she be the *pontianak* who waits for her victim by the side of the road, or the mother or lover who returns for revenge, the female ghost is often characterised as treading the line between agency and oppression. On one hand, she is an autonomous character who seeks justice on her own terms; on another, she is usually reduced to a victim of violence while she is alive, and her agency is only granted in death... in the transformation of her identity from victim to villain.

Death Wears a Dress is a collection of poems inspired by numerous female “monsters” central to Asian folklore, many of whom continue to reincarnate through horror films, pop culture and social media. Through poetic verse, I hope to centralise, re-imagine and humanise the experiences, emotions, desires, fears and regrets of these fictitious women in an effort to unearth possible insights about gender, power, longing and justice.

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Appetite

Every object I see makes me hungry
all over again. Don't make me explain
this emptiness: just feed me
what you have, your moist meats
ripening with age, your root vegetables
dark with soil. I want to be buried
in your leisurely lunches, champagne
brunches, snacks snuck between
munches, suppers slurped
past midnight. Give me gravy
trains of staple grains, the cookie
that crumbles, the bigger fish
to fry. The big cheese, the bread
and butter, the bad eggs whose names
you mutter. Pass me the hot potato, hard
nut to crack, the souped-up smart cookies
selling themselves like hotcakes. I want
the bun in your oven, the apple of your eye,
one woman's meat and another's poison, candy
from a baby, then the baby itself, sweet-
toothed and teething on the milk
of human kindness. I want to make a meal
of you, your calves soft like veal, want
to butter you up then see if I feel
any fuller after eating your heart out
after making you my sweet
and just desserts.

On Losing One's Head

In a former life, I'd get angry. My husband would say *Don't lose your head!* In spite of indignation, some of that stuck, because now my head is all I am. Sure, other parts still linger neck down: heart, stomach, intestines, bits of skin... ...it is the rest of myself I lose these day. Every time the sun sets, I rise above my grave, look down at stray limbs, digits, genitals, wondering whether every woman is doomed in life to lose bits of themselves to someone else, scour endlessly the flesh of other people for something that makes them whole.

Motherhood

This baby is the weight
of a neutron star: impossible
to cradle without breaking
oneself. Could you hold her
for a minute? Not so long, just until
her gravity becomes your coffin,
drags you down into the soil,
finds you buried alongside us.

The sky is heavy
with anxiety and rain.

No sacrifice is ever enough.