

Ouyang Yu

FROM P.R. A NOVEL IN PROGRESS

It was a typically Melbourne day. Clouds were all over the Melbourne sky. Trees outside the window stood still as if frozen. The only living thing was a stray dog that kept running in the front yard. It was exactly two thirty in the afternoon. The telephone had been mute. He stood against the desk littered with books, translation sheets, bunched business cards, scraps of paper, dictionaries and a combined phone and fax machine. He stood gazing at the web-like branches of the frozen trees for a long time. Then he did not know why but he went back to lie down on the sofa in a corner. He just wanted to sleep. It was like the first few days when he was in Melbourne. He used to go to bed very early. There was no television set. There was no one to talk to. In an excited moment, he had rung up all the friends he knew, in and outside Melbourne, to inform them of his coming. They did not ring him back. He did not know why. He bore it patiently, believing that they would call him one day though exactly when he did not know. The difference now is that he is here. This is his permanent address. There was going to be no thrill associated with the thought of moving to another new place and with the prospect of changing himself again. Melbourne is as good as its word: the most livable city! If the world had chosen this city to be the most livable, where else is worth living? He felt drowsy. Without putting on the heat, he lay on his full length on the sofa, clothes and all. He said to himself: damn it all! I don't care whether I can get a job or not. The word "long-term unemployment" crept into his consciousness and he realised with a sharp sting of pain that he could be living like this for the rest of his life. I am a futureless Australian. A futureless Australian. He saw in semi-dream himself swearing allegiance to the Queen and the Australian Prime Minister. When he woke up one hour later, the world had not changed a bit from its total wintry greyness but he had made the decisions. He went over to the desk, picked up the application form containing a copy of position description and teaching portfolio and chucked it into the rubbish bin. He had never done this before. Every Wednesday and Saturday, he loyally read the *Weekend Australian* and the *Saturday Age*. His collection of employment clippings or photocopies piled high on top of his overflowing bookcases. He would try anything to do with Chinese. In his hungry search, he would even include kindergartens. He was acutely aware of the difference. The salary for a university post was 40 to 48K/year while that for a kindergarten was A\$12.00/hour. He wrote the letter and got the job, the so-called "bilingual worker," for which he was paid fifty bucks for a one-day training session and there was never any follow-up ever afterwards.

In this damned teaching portfolio they asked for things like “teaching qualifications” and “philosophy” and “research papers and conferences related to teaching” and some such nonsense. He had never known such stupid people in all his life. By their stupidity, they succeeded in turning the profession of teaching into something most tedious, most boring and most destructive. To be a teacher is to be an impersonal instrument, like a kitchen knife or a t.v. set. You turn it on and watch it to get what you want to know and you turn it off when you have had enough.

His world should consist of much more than the drudgery of teaching pundits and idiots. He would not let it go so lightly. There was something he must do to spite them all. He took out the second letter from W.A. University which informed him of the interview to which he was invited. He sat down in his easy chair the way a general might have done before a battle began and switched on his computer.

The letter he wrote runs as follows:

Dear Professors and Administrators of the Judging Panel:

I won't thank you at all for your shortlisting me in yet another one of those boring professional interviews designed to fail genius and to include people who can't do anything else but be slavish academics in a hostile environment to the development of intellect. I am fucked off by your unintelligent, computer-designed, bureaucratic questions like “how would you teach a mixed class of students” or “could you tell me what post-colonialism means?” Let me tell you this that the fact that all of you sit here today, white and Australian, judging someone like me from a coloured background is what exactly post-colonialism means. Unless half of you are of other colours, whether they are blue or purple or brown or scarlet, this will only be pro-colonialism, not post-colonialism. Do you think I can put up with your mediocrity like that?

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