

Part Four (A)

William Havell, illustrator (1816)

Lift the anchor and set the sails flying:
To what wonders, O eternal water,
What crisp new land and wild horizons, you bring
as men sail to see the Eastern daughter.
Sever me from the silver-mirror lake
Where the grey clouding mists veil all that lives,
Tear me from the thrush and the familiar choir,
from moss, stone, forest and fell me sunder,
Open my eyes, O ever-flowing water,
To foreign hues, and my canvas on unknown soil.

O bountiful water! The sights you bring
Of sapphire waves rolling on endless blue,
Of tempests, like beasts, howling through the night,
At last, solace, cascades of winning grace.
Against all odds we crushed the mighty tide,
Who, in its greatest depths holds lives galore
Who, in fury, took men and drowned them.
The same tide that guides me here: are you good?
Are you evil? Moreover, are you aware
Of your beauty, finer than any work
Made by man, or art of paper and paint?

Alien water, from the distant shore
shining golden under the midday sun,
“I am here”, the water roars—can you hear?
Know the sound of its valiant spirit.
Grandeur thrives by a humble fishing port:
Emerging amid the lush, grassy heights,
Falling, crashing, tumbling as if to earth’s core,
Then, weaving lightly across stone and sand,
Makes its way back to the old briny sea.
Water, like men, journey to pond and stream
Just to return to the ocean’s embrace.

Brush upon palette, I laid out all the colours:
for thinning waves that crosses blue with jade,
for mellow-green giants sitting motionless,
for the pillar of pearly-white water
Pulled by gravity, tinted by light this day—
Faintly conjuring a soft-pedalled charm.
I will wield my brush and remember here
Where men in straw hats share life with the sea
And rest by the fall, O heavenly retreat,
Only when my art parallels your allure
Will my quest on this strange terrain be complete.

Aberdeen pier and Lamma Island, I steer the ferry from point to point.
It's not boring, but like maths, you know, you have to calculate the wind.
Look at the harbour, busier than ever, more and more ships.
It's good. Ha Ha! My *so-ha*, just 3 months, cries
Every day, louder and louder. I've got to work harder to answer
For his future and life; education or a path less delicate?

1874. Nobody saw it coming. This matter, how to put it, is rather delicate.
The harbour was full of debris, homes battered and water to the rafters. At that point
people buried alive, bloated corpses, black flies over 2000 bodies! No answer.
I saw a mother and a son, lying under a fallen cable. Merciless wind!
For a long long time, day and night, I seemed to hear the pitiful cries
Of ghosts who couldn't escape the sunken ships.

Not a single ship in port left undamaged. How many ships
had been dashed on the rocks, like eggs cracked on the floor. So delicate.
Silence for a while, then came the overwhelming, distressing cries.
People say we can start again, but I've lost him; sometimes I feel there is no point.
Should I vent my anger and grief at the wind? That September wind?
I prayed. I would do anything, anything if only the Heavens could answer.

What more can I say? Forever reminiscing, flashbacks, seeking signs, an answer.
There was no observatory then. But we knew, harbours and ports full of ships.
Yes, everybody could tell. That kind of atypical irregular storm and wind.
Above, the inky sky; below, cockroaches and rats scuttling, a situation most delicate.
It started, the attack at night, remember this point:
the barometer fell drastically, the sea started to roil, the wind howled frightfully, we heard its cries.

It was the last to-and-fro of my work, the waterfall volume had increased. A passenger cried,
Called for her 90-year-old mother. Thunder rumbled. An ear-splitting answer.
Waves slamming the ferry; winds ravaging. I anchored the ferry at West Point.
Still, out at sea, gigantic steamers and some big ships.
On the shore, things were battened tight, things that were delicate.
A sleepless night, only the raging, howling, appalling wind.

At forenoon, ships were smashed to pieces, some blown ashore. How deadly was that wind!
Searching for anything valuable from the ruins. From each direction, came the cries.
Flood, garbage and the dead, dark brown water, a smell not at all delicate.
Poor men clung on to their destroyed sampans, waiting still to receive an answer.
Hundreds of lost boats, my ferry too. Unrecognizable ships.
Looking at the leaden sky, I wondered. Was it a trial of god? What was the point?

A delicate past. Tin Hau temple survived the wind
of 1874. A point of no return. People's cries and unending sorrow.
A nun told me 'the statue had fallen over'. So have ships ...and souls.

Beneath the falls, the Lyon Light's
harsh eye is glarin' at the waves
We kept it bright, lest Nippon ships
came stormin' up the bay.

At last they came. We could not hold,
more guns than we could number.
Faced with death, we met the charge
as they came like roarin' thunder.

So beneath this foreign waterfall
where the water drinks the sky,
Steel shells score the pillbox walls
and good men fall and die.

Vickers was a Tyneside lad,
Williams hailed from Hull.
Good men from English waters
left here to feed the gulls.

A Cheapside man myself, I long
for the soothing Thameside breeze
Though the water here is beautiful,
it is not home to me.

To stay here was the detail,
to guard was the command.
And so I stayed, and gave my life,
bled out on foreign sand.

For all the prep and all the waiting,
with sea-breeze dripping on ya' face
For all the walls and all the fightin'
One shot is all it takes.

To die here in this foreign bay,
this barren patch of land,
To keep the honest folk above
safe from Jap'nese hands.

I scarce regret my death for them.
No debt to me they owe.
But how I wish the place I rest
was somewhere close to home!

Though our names be wiped from history books
by your gov' ment's cunning hands,
we salt this sea with English blood,
we live on in this sand.

Remember us. Four score years ago
our English blood was shed.
The history of these falls is marked
by the cries of English dead.

The Selfie-taker

I went to the waterfall
to see the sun, to get away,
to chortle and chuckle
To take a break.

Click.
Trying to see the distant shore,
To get close to the sea,
To step onto the sand
And to feel the breezes.

Click.
The water enraptured me
How splendid it'd be
If I could just capture it
hold and retain it - with me in it.

Then my legs gave way,
I tumbled,
Falling,
Hurling,
Crashing,
Colliding,
Until all went black.

Click.
It was supposed to be quick.
Click,
I should've used a selfie-stick
Click.
I needed to have this pic.
Click.
I hit my head on a brick.
Click.
That was the last of it.

Who'd have thought this would be the end of my days,
My last breath, no more sun shining on my face.

The last time for me to chortle and chuckle.
I was just taking a break.

Who'd have thought this was my last day
The day when I would, forever, go away
Go away so quick
All because of that click.

An old Wah Fu resident

A heavy flow of water crashing into the pool ... cooling rocks...best days, childhood days.
Now, fifty-five years later sitting on the steps ...a small stream ... once a mighty
waterfall...overlooking the great sea ... salty water, fresh water... the horizon filled with
history and legacies.... play jook kei ... ocean to my right, waterfall to my left... Wah Fu.

Old fisherman's ghost

Now, child, you have heard the story,

Yes, I did.

Are you still in fear of history?

What do you mean?

The waterfall is old.

And lives pass as swiftly as this water falling cold.

So sad is that

But blame not the waters

I have learnt and seen what I didn't know existed
in this place of memories and stories:
artists, soldiers, ferrymen, and more.

Spend time with water, it cleanses.

Spare time to touch the water.

The waterfall is neutral.

No judgements, all are equal.

Sweat, teardrops, gentle rain.

Now with new stories you've grown.

This waterfall has been your wake-up call.