

Not Wanting to Write a Book Review

by Ouyang Yu

but somehow having to, at the request of a friend, originally from Denmark, and now from Darjeeling.

*

It is in the spring of 2004 in Aarhus, Denmark, that I met PP in Lars's place. We immediately entered into a conversation because we had something in common. Originally from India, he was teaching in Denmark. Originally from China, I was then a freelance writer in Australia. But what struck me as hard to understand was the fact that he remained an Indian citizen, retaining his Indian passport that he showed me, whereas I had already become an Australian citizen, and an unemployable one at that after securing a PhD. I came away with much admiration for his guts to stay loyal to his native country, and felt half-ashamed of my abandoning my own.

*

Then, in 2010, when *Beyond the Yellow Pale: Essays and Criticism* was published by Otherland Publishing, it contains an interview PP conducts with me, titled, ' "You in the I": The Chinese-Australian Writer Ouyang Yu Speaks to Prem Poddar (24 May 2006)' (pp. 254-266).

*

From then on I counted him as a friend, a friend from India, and an Indian friend, far away in Denmark, then in the UK, never met again until sometime, years after, in Shanghai where I was teaching at a university and we met for coffee. What did we talk about? I have no recollection. Just vaguely there was a picture of Mao sitting in a chair somewhere in the background.

*

I have another Indian friend by the name of Vin who once shared a couple of his life stories with me in his fifty years in Australia. Once, when he was a student, he went to have a meal in Melbourne's Chinatown. The Chinese waiter asked how much he got, and counted the coins he had on his open palm, deciding then and there to give him a free meal. On another occasion, when he was on a bus, sitting next to a white person reading a newspaper, he wondered if he could read part of the thick pile of the newspaper he was holding. The man gave him a dirty look and said no. He recalled how in India people would share the newspaper around.

*

All the while I'm writing this, I'm aware of the book, *Through the India-China Border*, that I have not begun reading, a 284-pager published by Cambridge UP, a press that rejected my PhD thesis in 1995, which later was published in the USA, thus beginning a long process of rejections that accompany me throughout my writing life in this rejecting country. Whenever I see big-sounding names like Penguin and blah blah blah, I keep as far away from them as possible. I shall never have anything to do with them this life or next. Same with CUP, and I won't read books by them, either. As a writer, one at least retains the force of resistance by not buying or reading any books published by the publishers that never publish him.

*

Have I run out of words to say? I guess so. But I have decided not to read the book because I'm sure it's a good one, judging by the advance praises it has received. Let this review be a non-

review. But I like the idea of a book co-authored by an Indian scholar with a Chinese scholar, fully reflecting the 'India-China Border' theme.

And I congratulate them on the fruitful effort.

*

A final note about my history of reviewing. When I was a PhD student at La Trobe U, I did a lot of reviewing for *ABR* under Helen Daniel. As soon as I became unemployed, and unemployable—unemployable for good in Australia, 'Unemployed at last' not a suiting adage for me at all, after I got my PhD, I ceased to have any review requests. Then I found myself having to do self-reviews, as shown in the article, 'I, the Self that Holds Me in Review', and now this review request from a friend that I have to deal with by supplying a non-review.

But if the counterpart of fiction is non-fiction, isn't this non-review also a review?