

## Noon

*Wong Ming Yook*

It is a long seashore.  
Miles of sandy stretch, as far as the eye sees,  
and on the horizon, distant, tiny dots of children play in the sea.  
My eye is shut against the sun,  
hard light too bright to face; I am all squints today.  
I push my big straw hat down,  
my head already hot from noon-time heat.  
There is no respite from light or heat,  
and I look down at tiny crabs shelling sand from wet holes,  
thinking, where can I find the dark?  
On the horizon, tiny dots fade into the shade, as  
parents call to naughty children to come in from the sun.

I used to love the sun, and sat in its glinting gaze unmoving, unmoved  
by shy sorts who hid behind their lotions and their shades.  
*Puteri lilin*, I would call them, half-derisively because they could not tan.  
But it has grown too hot of late,  
the sunny glint is golden, but it hurts my eyes.  
Today I walk about in bare feet toasted in the sand,  
a big straw hat crammed on my head to shut away the light.  
I ask, where can I find the dark?  
No one answers me, not the swaybacked coconut trees,  
nor the scuttling crabs, nor the red sea-worms I sometimes see.  
Sleepy in the harsh noon-time, it seems the sun has  
burned a hole in their heads,  
making them forgetful to answer questions  
thrown their way by random travellers.

I cannot help the zigzags that my feet print on the sand.  
Travellers walk that way, leaving proof that all their life  
has been a question that the tongue can taste ...  
No one answers, though the answer lies in the space of air.  
Sometimes though, the waves raise their hands, eager  
in the rush to tell all, like children clamouring  
to give the right answer in a class. *Just so*.  
But with the slicing wind against my ears,  
I could not hear them even if I liked. (Not that I like.)  
And strangely,  
if the night did come, hushing the sun's resentful cry,  
I would not rest within its womblike dark, or prefer  
Its shaded coolness.

That is the self, contradictory and spare.

Unable to bear the sting of light, I still walk in the sun,  
with my big straw hat that shields too little, too late.  
I jam it on my head, hoping today it will give me more relief  
from too much day.