

Words for E.T.

Robert Yeo

Words have found him again.
After a decade's dearth, dry years
Slogging with rice-and-curry number
Words now renew their faith desirous of gain.

Aridity behind, all is green now.
What intervening scars there be
Have enlarged voice and tone to a degree
Words have their way of being kind, you know.

Gestation for a second birth it was.
Yet there was a time when he thought
The desert was within, not without,
And dejection had no ode, though it had cause.

Our climate is the insouciant sun.
Winter has leisure for Santa Claus –
But we, recovering freedoms robbed from us,
Suffering, fuming for saviour or strongman,

Have little use for men or ideas
That do not manifestly move, as Marx can,
To stamp the Union Jack or shoot the Governor's man.
The fault is History's, not yours.

He's at the roundabout and Nehru's gone.
Our radio blares, the world is tuning in,
Government and people keep their transition trim;
They both have volume but they need your tone

Now to interpret and stress
Searchlight a neglected alley
Provide a tongue not hoarse with party
To keep the individual warm and fresh.

Always to pull down national lies
Hoisted abroad by those who presume to know;
Record the rise and fall of towns through flux and flow
Erect monuments in our memories:

Like the wave of merger and its undertow
The age of Lee Kuan Yew, the red retreat
The crunch of tractors, the sea's defeat ...
The driving euphoria, the sixties' glow.

You are now where you should have been
After a second try, ten years too late
In a department the most expatriate.
One countryman left before another could come in

And then it is your turn.... Ah, slow this process
Of adjustment to the tropic tide
Which had nineteen years to stride.
But you have arrived at last. Yes.

— *The Best of Robert Yeo* (2012, Epigram Books)