

That Final Place (For Edwin Thumboo)

Cyril Wong

We were alone in the car.

He went on as usual
about a trip to Vancouver,
about a paper he would give
to four thousand people,

when everything broke upon
a single sentence, “I have cancer,”
barely heard over the dirge
of the engine, the silence
opening up between us
and inside me like a fissure.

But then he talked about China,
other countries he longed to visit,
one hand on the steering wheel,
the other already in the air,
the road stretched out before us
towards that final place.

— *The End of His Orbit* (2001, firstfruits publications / 2017, Math Paper Press)

Author’s note: The professor had been driving a handful of us creative writing students from Singapore and towards Kuala Lumpur to meet Malaysian writers like K. S. Maniam and Lloyd Fernando (both now deceased). In the car, he mentioned problems regarding his health in a passing, matter-of-fact way that I suddenly felt the need to mirror and document in a poem—any surplus of emotions is entirely my (un)doing.