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CURRICULUM CURRICULA

D. J Enright

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CURRICULUM CURRICULA

Abstract

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What was the point of pointy feet? You couldn't even play hopscotch
with them. Three-inch lotus petals my foot!

D.J. Enright

CURRICULUM CURRICULA

— running, skipping, barefoot on the covered pavement of the shophouse where they lived; her mother not best pleased: unholy infant! No one reports seeing her walk like a tender young willow shoot in a spring breeze exactly. What was the point of pointy feet? You couldn't even play hopscotch with them. Three-inch lotus petals my foot!

Born in the Year of the Tiger (inauspicious for members of the officially gentler gender). Obscurely named after some ancient agriculturalist, or perhaps an earnest work of fiction described by its author as 'unromantic as Monday morning'. Also known mandarinly as Zhou Lan. Native (watch your language!) to Zhongguo, centre of the known world and (so some say sometimes) source of all civilisation and culture, although domiciled in Singapura, Lion City, where the only lions are paper ones.

By which time it was possible for Chinese women to study and do well in the examinations without disguising themselves as men and getting executed. This was just as well since (quote unquote) 'I liked sitting and passing exams'.

At the Holy Infant Jesus the Irish nuns of a French order who taught English were not altogether convinced that it was better to raise geese than girls. Girls might conceivably be maggots in the rice, they were sometimes nuggets in the classroom.

'I vow to thee, my country,' they chanted. Which country would that be? Golden daffodils (white man's yellow culture) were infiltrated via Wordsworth, whereas decent homegrown orchids are not given to tossing their heads in unsightly prance. On the whole the authorities frowned on strange fits of passion. But so what? You can't keep a good colonial down.

At the U, all those expatriate lecturers (often spelt expatriot) including mendicant professors, outcasts of academe, unwitting relics of the Raj, hatching vain empires in the staff club, neither imperial nor empirical. 'Land of our birth, we pledge to thee, our declining years as an OAP.'

Then an interlude at Oxford. But all roads lead to Leeds. And William Walsh, the Muse's judge and friend, who justly knew to blame or to commend, to failings mild, but zealous for desert, who when he saw one knew a cert.

The chair she sits in.... Were it anyone else you'd take the view that she'd bitten off more than she could —. But it's time for a tiger. Mistress of magical methodologies! (Madness in them?) Worlds are moving! Elide the l, it does as well. Watch out for the daughters of earth. 'History must be paid with history,' observed our Malay poet (we taught him English and how to profit...). The empire writes back. You can't keep a good colonialist down.