

1999

DEAD MAN'S DISCLOSURE

Stephen Gray

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>

Recommended Citation

Gray, Stephen, DEAD MAN'S DISCLOSURE, *Kunapipi*, 21(3), 1999.
Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol21/iss3/11>

DEAD MAN'S DISCLOSURE

Abstract

My soul to keep in a coffin, trod beneath (bare) (foot) people (my mortal remains), sloth-bear pads, goats graze (pressed in wood) roots entwine (casket) (cask) this where banyans walk in Muybridge locomotion reco(r)ding their raiders' myths of succession: Taprobana Insula (Ptolemy) for Roman turtleshell Serendib for silk, Kandy for ruby Copra from Ceylon, Beira (Slave Island) Lake

Stephen Gray

DEAD MAN'S DISCLOSURE

My soul to keep in a coffin, trod beneath (bare) (foot) people
 (my mortal remains), sloth-bear pads, goats graze
 (pressed in wood) roots entwine (casket) (cask)

this where banyans walk in Muybridge locomotion
 reco(r)ding their raiders' myths of succession:

Taprobana Insula (Ptolemy) for Roman turtleshell
 Serendib for silk, Kandy for ruby
 Copra from Ceylon, Beira (Slave Island) Lake

from rank mud ((lotus unfolds, their long Buddha
 (1) in meditation (2) in blessing (3) robed to recline,
 like elephant skulls, from paddies, freckled hills arise,
 (moo) moonstone: fortunes picked in
 broken orange pekoe (A1) fannings, plantations

(rimed recipes) (sun) stored in fruit: brinjal
 I did know, (papaya) (tobacco): not toddy-tappers
 cinnamon-peelers, jaggery-makers (low classes in their *Gazetteer*).
 Down Aloe Vera Avenue, Armour Street
 Britons speedy where Britishers meet: plant

rain-trees and bo-trees (Boer): (Anglo-Boer) war-time
 (prisoner). From my fever-ridden body grows
 saffron and sage... capsicum of chilli... and pepper, clove...
 cocoa, coriander, vanilla, mustard... ginger... gin
 from my body: (star sapphire) (blue) (((pearl)))
 – the *Phoenix* and her fraught – cargoed
 anti-clockwise from the Cape, this British lake
 between monsoons, between the Indian and the Bay of Bengal.
 So I was captured in fair battle, once turned-about,
 beyond Pretoria (in chains)... like coolies
)take me back(enclosed in (Diyatalawa)
 (Mount Lavinia) (Ragama – hard labour)
 (Urugasmanhandiya): mean death, we die like flies...

Some do escape... through birdsnest and staghorn,
 like a white-eye, sunbird, flycatcher, roller,
 kingfisher, bee-eater, lorikeet, minivet, grackle
 (canary)... the long, slow sleek fish-eagle
 swoops its prey from the shine of an artificial tank...
 where today a pilgrim shampoos his Yamaha
 flops like a buffalo, his sarong a bandage unwinds

(Some died: I was one of the first and quickest to go):
 Kanattha Cemetery, among those gracious Dutch Burghers,
 Anglican Section... on LP gas their cremation takes 2 hrs.
 (I'd have preferred ash)... where keepers with matchets
 under Oriental weeping-willows under umbrellas hack flame-
 lilies from our disregarded tombs.
 The jumbled roll-call of the dead and dying (in any order):

Leon Kock, Kruger, Joubert, Massyn, Smuts, Scott,
 Oppericht ten Gedagtenis aan...
 Nel, Foley, Uys, Eckhardt, Kachelhoffer, van Biljoen,
 Rust in Vrede, Overl. te Selon (all present),
 Oud 20 Jaar... An only son from a Household Gone,
 A Voice we Loved is Still, A Place
 is Vacant in our Home, That Never Can be Filled.

Take me back to my renegade home... all we had to show
 (in the Colombo Museum, oil on canvas):
 foreground, a commando with watering-can pours into a sloop,
 me in my smasher-hat with pipe, foot against the wire,
 the sentry box... rows of military tents on the ridge
 where a mighty strangler-fig (holds)... (artist unknown).
 Whippy king coconuts lift, majors with swords trepan.

Among contesting Lion People, Tiger people, at night mosquito coils,
 I lie so restless... drilled by croton, would like to learn to
 treddle a sewing-machine, palm-paddle waylaying touts,
 like cows chewing newsprint begin to speak,
 say: *Take me back to the Old Transvaal*, say:
 Honeymoon Hairstyle, sup at All Night Restaurant,
 shave and dress in robes over a shoulder, scratch my Dreamland,
 sing the Sweet and Sour Serenade, find lost addresses:
 Perera, Ferera, de Silva, Hulftsdorp, Graylands,
 fling at the devil firecrackers... Drive Him Off... Greet
 the dog-faced Andaman as friend. Those I would liked to have done.

But the order of procession is declared: I am no longer part,
daar waar... my mother weeps and dies alone...
and awful death is no escape, from this lonesome (cell)
(tibia) (socket) (jawbone) (dust)
(unto dust) I had hoped... remote past tense, done...
her only support, her soul to keep in the rule of the gun.
Peace I would have made, justice practised, loved and bred.

I had hoped we could overcome the metal barb, the nameless trench...
soldiers dig graves to dump in... their duty undertaken
I'd planned on amnesty... But now the slaughter's even worse, I hear.
Better out of it, they say, better dead. So it's not fit
to live in, so join me here. (Join me.) Once, like you,
I was all young blood and hopeful vision... Now:
disconnected calcium (homesick) (rotting) (spiritless):
stripped even of metaphor and syllables, ah-ha...
a song like a T sunk in my unravelling lung...

(i.m. of Ferrar Reginald Mostyn Cleaver,
State Prosecutor of the Witwatersrand, d. 18 November 1900, aged 30)