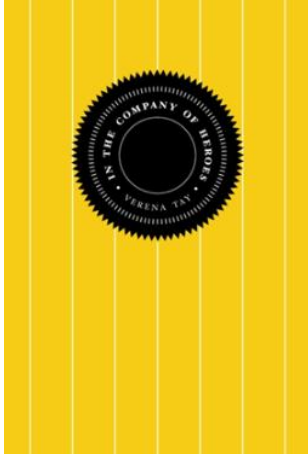


# *In the Company of Heroes*

## by Verena Tay



Singapore: Math Paper Press/  
BooksActually, 2011

ISBN: 978-981-08-7782-8

Price: SGD22.80

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### About the Book

*In the Company of Heroes*, an anthology of seven plays by seasoned theatre practitioner Verena Tay, taps into the realm of myth and archetype, while still being firmly rooted in the reality of living day-to-day in modern Singapore. Comprising the award-winning *The Car*, and the critically acclaimed *Bumiputra Cina* and *The Lunar Interviews*, plus other plays, *In the Company of Heroes* promises to warm your heart and ignite your imagination—an essential volume to any library collection of Singaporean plays.

### Contents

- *Bumiputra Cina*

Originally a process-based performance collaboration between writer and performer Verena Tay, and interdisciplinary artist Noor Effendy Ibrahim that was performed in May 2009. This multilingual play explores the conflicted sense of belonging and identity of a contemporary Chinese Singaporean woman coming to terms with the fast-changing landscape that she grew up in. The text and physical theatre performance investigated issues of home, generations, family, growth, marriage, longing, desire, and what it means to be 'bumiputra' or 'prince of the soil'. *Bumiputra Cina* travels through time-space, looking at the idea of rootedness and connections from the perspectives of the ever-present land, a Chinese coolie, the life and death of war hero Lt Adnan Saidi, vignettes of contemporary life and cyberspace chats. Come journey with us and discover for yourself what it means to be 'bumiputra'...

- *The Car*

When her father dies, a young woman is left with his favourite Fiat Marvellete, a car ancient by Singapore standards, but by no means in pristine condition. She recalls the sometimes joyful, sometimes painful memories of sitting in the car, and is torn over keeping, selling or destroying a major link with her father. (*The Car* won ACTION Theatre's Theatre Idols 2005.)

- *The Lunar Interviews*

Through seven monologues, *The Lunar Interviews* interweaves real life vignettes and moon goddess myths—Chang Er, Diana, Hina—exploring the themes of creation, nurturing, writing, men-women relationships, solitude, loneliness, exile and the Moon. Provocative and captivating, *The Lunar Interviews* humanises the mythic and brings the mythic into everyday reality.

- *Right and Left*

When a woman wishes to lose weight, how does her right and left feet cope with the effort?

- *One More Chance*

Michelle dreams only of rollerblading. Her mother wants her to study. Despite their conflicting wills, will they give each other one more chance?

- *Queen Sophia and That Dog Buster*

Sophia the cat rules over her household domain. Or so she thinks? A challenging play for physical theatre enthusiasts.

- *Imperfect Family Recipes*

An elderly lady, a stroke victim, dreams of eating her favourite chicken dish.

## **What the Critics Say**

### ***Bumiputra Cina***

"In masterful strokes, the piece excavated possible permutations of belonging through the physical and visceral means of a body bathed in earth... Tay's sensual writing intertwined the stories in an intimate way. Like earthworms they burrowed, finding resonance in the different strands which make up one's identity."

~ Tara Tan, Life! Section, *The Straits Times*, 16 May 2009, p.E8

"I felt that this small, low-key play...examined the relationships Singaporeans have with their country with sincerity and earnestness, if not necessarily great theatricality and flair. The theme is a pertinent one in the context of our immigrant, multi-racial society – who can call himself a true Singaporean and what does that phrase even mean? - and I appreciated how playwright Verena Tay made the political personal with semi-autobiographical details being woven into her story about a contemporary Chinese Singaporean woman searching for her identity. I also liked how she opened up the narrative by introducing vignettes involving war hero Lt Adnan Saidi (who was born in Malaysia but died for Singapore), poetic monologues by the earth itself, etc. Her well-intentioned attempts at comedy, usually through self-deprecation, often felt awkward and a little too raw, though."

~ Kenneth Kwok, 'First Impressions', *The Flying Inkpot*, 14 May 2009, <http://inkpot.com/> (last accessed: 3 June 2009)

"In a series of twenty-over vignettes the question of what it means to belong, to be rooted in, or tied down to a piece of land is explored with wry humour and at times cutting accuracy. Accuracy at least in the context of a Chinese female in Singapore. Verena's examination of her own experience, is extended into that of the everywoman, and further questions as well the nature of the relationship of the term „bumiputra“ to even those „native“ to the crumbly earth with that raw smell that frankly we do not have a very intimate relationship with these days living in boxes in the sky (flats) where soil is found in pots that line the corridor walkway, an attempt possibly on our part to connect with the land, yet one that is frowned upon within housing board regulations that champion regularity and concrete... Earth in all its deep, mysterious, dark and organic glory took centrestage in the performance, with each character sweeping, scooping, toiling at it, lying in it or just letting it trickle through cupped hands. Its presence kept the performance and the abstracted observations about belonging grounded. Soil - what seeds would you plant here... The verdict? 4.5 out of 5 chungkols! Digg this!"

~ June Yap, 'Bumiputra Cina: A Chinese Child of the Soil', *ARTERI*, 15 May 2009, <http://www.arterimalaysia.com/2009/05/15/bumiputra-cina-a-chinese-child-of-the-soil/> (last accessed: 3 June 2009)

### ***The Lunar Interviews***

"...an extended poetic essay on the relationship between women and language.

My favourite of the play's seven segments has to be the first, where the three actresses describe the difficult process of textual creation using the dense, visceral imagery of childbirth. I'm also appreciative of the stories of everyday women who talk too much or too little, sandwiching the stories of the goddesses, cementing the lot into a modulated whole that transcended expectations...

Undoubtedly, the star of the show is Fanny Kee, who makes the most of her monologue as the Chinese moon goddess Chang-Er, giggling, simpering and dancing her way into our hearts. Tay does a good job rewriting this familiar character as a court lady thriving on gossip, selfish and occasionally bawdy - quite unlike, and yet not alien to the ethereal archetype we've seen so often on mooncake boxes...

Still, I'm definitely impressed with the work as a whole: it's the first time in years of reading and watching Verena Tay's works that I've seen her tapping into such a wellspring of poetry for a script...

Verena Tay's *The Lunar Interviews* (\*\*\*/1/2), on the other hand, is modulated, delicious and intense: using the recurring motifs of the moon and the goddesses thereof, the playwright describes a complex of relationships between women, language and power, drawing on a wellspring of poetry I've never seen before in her writing. A few clumsy moments pop up, stemming from inexperience in physical theatre and some extremely cumbersome props. But at the end of the day, I'm satisfied: this is a good piece of theatre."

~ Ng Yi-Sheng, *The Flying Inkpot Theatre Reviews*, Review of 24 Aug 2008 performance, <http://inkpot.com/theatre/08reviews/0821.bloodbind.ny.html> (last accessed: 3 Jan 2009)

### ***The Car***

"A feel-good piece about the sometimes tense relationship between daughters and fathers and the allure of being tied to the past, *The Car* was quite often touching, and always unpretentious."

~ Hong Xinyi, Life! Section, *The Straits Times*, 1 Aug 2006, p. 7

"*The Car* was equally well done, a poignant tale of family told through a conversation between a woman (Noorlinah Mohamed) and her late father's beloved ageing Fiat, played by Gene Sha Rudyn. ... but neither detracted terribly from what was a powerful look at the problems people face, both in the past and the present."

~ Aaron Lye, *The Business Times*, 4 Aug 2006, p. 29