My Father’s Sadness

Poem by Shirley Geok-lin Lim

My father’s sadness appears in my dreams.

His young body is dying of responsibility.

So many men and women march out of his mouth

each time he opens his heart for fullness,

he is shot down; so many men and women

like dragons’ teeth[[1]](#footnote-1) rising in the instance

of his lifetime. He is an oriental. He claims

paternity. But in his dreams he is a young body

with only his life before him.

My father’s sadness masks my face. It is hard

to see through his tears, his desires drum in my chest.

I tense like a young man with a full moon

and no woman in sight. My father broke

with each child, finer and finer, the clay

of his body crumbling to a drizzle of silicone

in the hour-glass. How hard it is

to be a father, a bull under the axle,

the mangrove[[2]](#footnote-2) netted by lianas[[3]](#footnote-3), the host

perishing of its lavishness.

1. Dragon’s teeth: an allusion to a Greek myth in which a dragon’s teeth, when planted, grow into fierce warriors. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mangrove: a tree that grows along the shore in tropical areas. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lianas: long vines that grow in tropical forests and often climb around trees. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)