

Kai Ren Tan : The Masque

Performance Poetry

Script

The Chorus

Welcome to a world that you'll find
Neither now or in the past
Endowed with the power
To see through the façades
The air shimmers with this magic, see
Except there's nothing comedic
About the scene of this tragedy
How could one really feed this?

We glide down into the theatre of truth
Past the slowly filling stalls and the darkened milieux
Beyond the red velvet thrones with their manicured weight
All eyes turn towards the dimly lit stage

It's a play titled 'Life'
And above, ever present is a giant
Who was forged from our hands
But survives through our compliance
His heart of the city beats. Listen
We act in his domain and
Speak refrains to its rhythm
And if you play well, he'll gladly name it wisdom

Our cast now enter this scene,
They shuffle out onto the floorboards,
Under the oppressive shadow
Of his industrial backbone and glass.
But their heads are entombed by masks
Which represent a dream,
But it's not theirs.
They're shielded from this theatre of truth
And so about one another,
They do not care.

These people; both male and female
Masked heads hang low looking at the floor
They can't raise their skulls and
See the reason they've done this all before

There's a youth, standing self consciously

Someone from the lower classes with torn and tatty property

They've done this every day of their lives
And done it solemnly

Before the play;
They stand on the stage,
Each spaced equidistant
The masks prevent them from asking,
By whom their part was written

But hush! See the curtains fall
And the crowd's crowned heads rise
For what they've known but never seen
With their very eyes

Act 1: Scene 1

And now the light shines bright and aside flies the curtain
The musicians in the pit play with the angst of this person
The youth stands masked. Two hands clasped.
Like fists at the crowd but they're just paying to do it

That's where the confusion is, teenage rebellion
Has been assimilated into business and computer chips
[She's/He's] lived around the stage, while the same scene repeats
T.V. voice tells [her/him] [she's/he's] happy living [her/his] dream
of sheep

It's that racy tune, embodying mass consumer culture
So you'll forget the problems kid and accept the politics
Except all of a sudden, the lights get colder
Safety blanket falls, the mask is unlocked of its

Power, the magic of the theatre shows the youth the sour
Truthful picture, behind the Photoshopped façade
Now only the spotlight hits [her/his] real face, and makes
The crafted darkness of the stage into negative space

The mask clatters to the floor and [she/he] sees
How [she's/he's] been preconditioned to buy that self-conscious,
moody jaw
The anger from the years past, against establishments
Now [she/he] only emulated these TV characters

The girls are misinformed, trying to be miss universe
They're told beauty is pain, it must be less than the truth'll hurt
She wants to crave these proportions, the daughters
Face a hunger which in other countries turns babies to orphans

The boys are being men, drink another beer,
Watch your passive sports and don't think about the fears,
The youth looks at the floor to see the taped marks mapping
Individuality in privatised rites of passage

And living like this [she's/he's] destined
To be criticised for making the same mistake as [her/his] parents
[She/he] 'learns [her/his] lessons' in under-funded schools
So a lack of education makes [her/him] the giant's tools

The mask grows like a shackle, wrapped around the teen
The first three-year-olds targeted by marketing schemes
The youth stumbles round the stage, disbelief, harsh
This set is a setup telling them what their dreams are

'NOW I SEE!' The youth screams an Oedipus scream
[She's/He's] married to the same body who suckled [his/her] beliefs
[She's/He's] disgusted at the selfish way [she/he] clings to the
giant
Lulled to forget reality but now [she/he] wants silence!

Act 1: Scene 2

[She/He] speaks.

'This is all misdirection, focusing on me
And us, we're too caught up in what we're expected to be
But now I'm aware: the "masque", the smoke, the screens and the
mirrors are pretence for the scene.
But I don't even know to what I'm asking why.'

And the youth stands broken, with two hands open,
Trying to grip the theatre under the giant's shadow.

[She/He] weeps.

For the freedom which was taken to the gallows in [his/her] teens
Hung from the chains on the giant's fingers. In this theatre of truth
The youth, now says, like a hypnotist's pendulum
[She's/He's] unsupported by the mask
[She/He] falls to the floor boards, where [she/he] peers out of the
dark

Crouching blinded in the obscured understanding

And the next player meets their reality. {Tock}

Act 2: Scene 1

Wake up. Work. Sleep. Wake up. Work. Sleep.

Wake up. Work. {repeat}

Out of the wings hobbles a haunted person
Past the crouching youth with a face that's deserted
The worker stands masked, with two hands clasped
Around the tools of the trade because they've gotta pay to do it.

They're wearing a mask that's made for the worker
Taught to accept their fate behind the curtain
Grown from the youths, becoming trapped in their lives
With a face of chasing jewels that's reflected in those jaded eyes!

[She's/He's] a cog in the set, she lives within,
A slave toiling every day for that pyramid
Alphas, Betas, part of a greater whole,
Forced to pretend they're not expendable ...

The mask is a forced, smile of acceptance
Scarred from social and economic oppression
That's where the confusion is with rising living standards
Working class rights are still facing uselessness

[She's/He's] lived around the stage, the scene repeats
T.V. voice tells [her/him] [she's/he's] happy living [her/his] dream
of sheep
Except all of a sudden the theatre lights blaze
And melt away the shadow beneath the giant's gaze

The clasps melt too, dripping to the floor
The mask falls like a tear for what [she's/he's] never seen before
The worker turns to the set, now profound
Spins around in horror to the crowd!

[His/Her] clothing is tattered, and [his/her] eyes are worn
From working extra hours under IR laws
The giant speaks in authoritative overture
That all I do is good for you, yes, it's good for you

But now there are a lot of things which you used to do,
Which you can no longer do anymore.

[He/She] cannot argue for [her/his] rights without risking the sack
But would they even be heard over the widening economic gap?
{inhale}

[She/He] cannot afford to breathe {repeat}
[She/He] cannot afford to eat {repeat}
She cannot leave, regardless of feminism
Dual income may not even then grant a better living ... {noise}

The worker declares wearily 'that's us
The middle of the road overlooked in tax cuts''
But when [she/he] speaks it's not loud enough
Silenced by the apathy of eyes locked to TVs!

It's the demoralised way, every day
If the sloppy façade of the set falls away
The worker shies away, living the youth's lives again
Change channels, and forget global conflict {repeat}

Force fed fast food troughs to eat easily
Join hospital queues for a quick fix for obesity
While Medicare is neglected like childcare clients
And the only decent services are private!

The worker stumbles round the stage, disbelief, harsh
This set is a setup telling them what their dreams are
'NOW I SEE!' the worker screams a smoker's scream,
'I'm hooked on the same things that are killing me'

[He/She] despairs at the way [she's/he's] locked in the cycles
Of subservience, but now [she/he] wants silence!

Act 2: Scene 2

[She/He] speaks

'I've grown into submission, acceptance of the status quo,
Of unconsciousness.
Of ideals so I don't know what the problem is, and then I'm just not
interested.
I've been a child taught to close their eyes, through the scary parts
of the play,
Except they're open now.
Now I'm aware.
But I don't know what I'm looking at.'

And the worker stands broken with two hands open,

Trying to hold on to some self-determination.

[She/He] weeps.

[She/He] collapses like so many unions
Under the pressure of the giant's abuses
[She/He] falls to the floorboards, where [she/he] peers out of the dark
Crouching blinded in the obscured understanding ...

But the theatre's magic shows them how to comprehend the bad things

A wind picks up to blow at the castles
Made by the sands of time

The worker crawls to the youth
And grasps [her/his] broken hands, hope growing in [her/his] eyes

They look up.

And the players meet their cold reality.

The Anticlimax

Above ever present is the giant, who views their defiance
Their broken silence. Come! He rises.
His torso is the government, lips are the media
Limbs are big business united to breed hysteria

His eyes are controlling, casting fear in their hearts
They realise the giant's face, is the mask
He stands above the players, head grazing the roof
Inhales a fetid breath then exhales a worse truth

'We forged this mask to give you limits!
To construct a population from our own image!
Playing god, nailed the people to the cross; and yes we get off
Cause over half the senate saw there was no witness

We don't justify actions, we sell you happiness
Sold the idea that good things only come in packages
Freedom {mute} of speech, you don't know we're containing it
We don't outlaw humanity, just label it unaustralian

I've replaced why's with wants, made facts easier
We've watered down the truth and replaced it with mass media

The mask has eyes but you won't see the tyrant
The mask has a mouth but we only want your silence!

And the giant stretches down with two hands open
Grasps the unmasked players in cages of hopelessness
It was always this way from the start
Their crying faces have been replaced by smiling masks

How could one really feed this?

You don't. You're choiceless and voiceless.
The players are now hidden inside the giant, cloistered.
The audience applaud, their faces are masked too
The giant grins, returning to domestic and international agendas

The lights dim, and the crowd falls hush!

As the giant demands silence ...