

That Child Who Smiles

That child who smiles from within four
corners of this photograph embraces
the rough bark of a tree at a forgotten
park, in a moment like the thumbprint
of an illiterate swearing earnest money
for the bearer. Even now, seventeen years
later, two scarlet insect bites scar
the chubby arm that clings unselfconscious
to the trunk, immediate and near
as his milk teeth unevenly grown.

Calcium returned to earth. No scabs remain.
Only this round-cheeked photo propped between
audiotapes and cd's, a Grecian urn
bright after-vision in a general
blankness. Justice of a sort, I suppose,
generation after generation
disappearing at each end. A stranger posed
tall, rough as that trunk on which the child
rests his cheek, is vanishing. Coming behind,
all motherhood stops, all Eve is fallen.

SHIRLEY GEOK-LIN LIM