

阿濂：如果我也有根

If I Had Roots Too

By Ah Lian

Translated by D. E. Pollard

IF SOME SUPERMAN uprooted a whole tower block from the ground, what would the tower block's "roots" be like?

First, the reinforced concrete piles, evenly spaced out, as straight as nails.

Second, the steel baseplates around the foot of the tower, like a skirt covering the building's hemline; they are used to repel water and mud.

Of course there is a third, though these have nothing to do with mechanics: the electric cables, water-pipes, waste pipes, gas pipes . . . this bundle of things is the most like roots.

If a tower block were pulled up, it would be plain to everyone that these blocks are not built up like toy bricks. They all have roots.

Coming back on the ferry from the outlying islands, I like to lean on the ship's rail and look at Hong Kong. I can hardly believe it, do all those slabs of buildings like matchboxes have roots?

Supposing I myself were Superman, I could cross the water to the seafront of the Western District. There are lots of huts there, standing on piles in the sea. If I pulled up those piles, ah, I would discover that all the bits and pieces that had clustered round and entangled their base—seaweed, shells, rope-ends, rubbish—were all roots.

If I clamped a whisker on my chin between two coins and pulled it out by brute force, I would find roots there too. If you had a microscope you would be able to see beneath the hair follicle a mass of blood vessels, nerve fibres, sweat ducts,

Ah Lian is the pen-name of Zheng Yinglian 鄭穎濂. Born in Macau and brought up in Hong Kong, he is a school teacher and a columnist. This essay is collected in Xianggang zuojia zawan xuan 香港作家雜文選 [Selected zawan by Hong Kong Writers] (Hong Kong: New Asia Cultural Foundation Ltd., 1987).

adipose tissue. These are all roots, too. If you pull a hair out by its roots, it will hurt. It will hurt because it is connected to the nerve fibres.

It would be wrong to think a hair of no account. Its nerves link directly with the cortex of the brain; its roots reach to the very centre of the human body. Hence the saying, by pulling on a hair you send a tremor through the whole body.

I stand on the ground. I wonder, have my feet got roots too?

I raise my head and look at the sky. I stretch out my hand, and can nearly grasp the sky. I look down at the ground, and the earth stretches out under my feet. I think, if I had roots, where would they extend to?

I put on roller skates, and skate over the ground. Obviously I have no roots. But then I think, if I did have roots, would those roots connect with the central nervous system? If somebody pulled me up by the roots, would it hurt?

In ten years' time, everyone in the streets will be wearing roller skates, and will skate back and forth rootlessly, without let or hindrance. It is just that I can't work out, how is it that people whose roots have been cut off can get away with feeling no pain?



阿
五

By Ah Wu