The Future

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in the photos of your weekend lunch  oat noodles float like gnocchi in tannin broth  your mother plucks morsels of gristle with chopsticks  son gnaws a dark barbecued beef bone sea buckthorn juice half-drunk  green straw an extravagant tendril twining out of your glass of sunset nectar  don’t worry my dear

I’ll wait for you  with fragrant-flowered garlic greens  dim sum baskets  chili tofu  sour cherry jewels  little mugs of beer amber  and steady  and lazy  as the Yangtze through Nanjing your promise is very precious to me  more precious than any gift

trending ironically east  15 ks from The Lakes  (that once were)  today the wind is kin to York rain—petulant, inconstant, heavy  but to you this metaphor is meaningless  do you care that I have a son? in the West, there aren’t the stigmas you suffer  but there are others and you will learn these vocabularies  just as I  learn how lichens punctuate the shedded skin of wandoo  and will learn  where to buy size 48 shoes in your city and how to savour the smell of silk  your heart is clarion  but your loneliness is not profound  not pernicious like mine  nor has it ever been a soft smile that is nuclear!  on the street there are many beautiful women  everyone is beautiful everyday is 32–35°C  your father, a kung fu master in Shanghai  wears prayer beads, a jet black shirt  deftly steers a paddle boat with three fingers  as melting ice cream streams down the stick you grasp  like a fountain pen  gushing vanilla ink  you gaze to your son  your pink pants glistening at night I must enunciate and listen closely otherwise rain pelting tin obscures your sighs silences hesitations sudden lapses into Mandarin you don’t need my language to know I am not a figment  my photos are of earth:  spindly trees of roos posturing like teenage bodybuilders, females in summer heat with a tuft of face staring from their pouches of ivory sand beaches Down South  wild cerulean seas  butterflies lifting on leaf trampolines

but at Jinghai  we will stroll Ming City Wall  on Emperor’s concoction of lime and yellow soil  glutinous rice and Tung oil  as Nanjing irrupts like fire around us honey-comb apartment slivers  sleek bridges over Yellow River  I’ve been alone a long time  now I see the future waving to me  this future is you

John Ryan is Honorary Research Associate in the School of Humanities at the University of Western Australia. From 2012 to 2015, he was Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Communications and Arts at Edith Cowan University. His most recent books include Posthuman Plants (2015) and The Green Thread (2015, co-edited with Patricia Vieira and Monica Gagliano).