

The Fable of the Hungry Ghost

The Hungry Ghost has come to power. Other Asuras and Demons have drunk at that well before, and so gave form to Time before. But now is the Age of the Hungry Ghost, and the Flow that he drinks.

The Hungry Ghost drank a Flow. And as he drank that flow, she became all. Her abstraction bound us all to Her. And she bound us to the body of the Ghost.

We had lived in the headlands, high in the mountains, where the river began in ice. We didn't yet know that we lived in hunger, that the food we ate wasn't enough, that we could have more with less work. We lived in the void before plenty.

Meanwhile, as a child in the City, the Hungry Ghost had a small face on a small head with big juicy lips that turned blue when he got cold.

The Hungry Ghost was never a child. Because he was a ghost. He sprang from History, already grown.

The Hungry Ghost had a giant rotund belly with no organs in it at all, no kidneys nor livers nor stomachs nor bile ducts, because he was a ghost.

As a child—never a child—he was always so ashamed of his tiny face and his big lips and his big rotund body and his sometimes bedwetting. No one could understand how he got so fat while everyone else was starving, so they poked fun at him.

And then he found that raw river and he drank of her Flow. And he did so as a sign of power. And he did so because he needed to, because his belly ached for raw material. And so he never again spoke, as his lips were only engaged to drink. And so he lost his voice. And without a voice, he became ashamed again about his too-much belly and not-enough face. And so he became obsessed with saving Face.

He had never found that river, he had always drunk that flow. His umbilical chord had never been severed, and it led to his mouth, because he had no stomach, because he was a ghost.

As he began to drink more and more, his body began to grow, his flanks became fertile, and those that lived there began to get rich. Tall buildings were built to store and trade all the wealth. So many of us in the headlands simply swam downstream and made our homes on his body, where we also became unconcerned with our feet and then too concerned with our shoes.

As the Hungry Ghost continued to drink, some of us began to wonder why he did not explode beneath our feet. How he could simply swallow all that without ever filling up? Children asked their parents. Parents, unsure, just said that he was a Ghost.

No one of us knew for sure that the Hungry Ghost pees. No one knew because he kept it a secret. To save Face. Because he is ashamed that his waste is corrosive, poisonous, radioactive. He buries vast deposits of the stuff throughout the headlands in containers that he hopes are leak-proof. There is nowhere else to put it, there is only the Land and the Body. In his shame, he can only hope that the containers stay sealed. They do not. The seepage contaminates the headwaters of the River and the waste begins to flow downstream.

She has become impure, partially digested. As time passed in indifference, his poison, endlessly recycled back into the headlands, overpowered even her endless flow.

The Hungry Ghost began to expect that he is drinking his own waste. But he must save his face. He must trust in the integrity of his containers. He continued to drink, imagining a pure Flow.

The Hungry Ghost cannot sustain himself on its own waste. The Hunger demands only Raw materials and resources. And so he became sick. His waste became thick as sludge and he began to starve. And his face became shiny and slick.

And so, while in our naïveté, we were still debating why his body didn't fill up and explode, the body of the Ghost was wasting away beneath us. Where once there was nothing beneath our feet, there was again nothing. The void had never left us.

No one saw it coming when the belching began. Finally at a limit of disgust, the Hungry Ghost began to choke on his own waste, began swallow huge dry heaves that shook our cities, while he struggled to take a few more gulps of the rank flow.

Men in suits in tall buildings began to look out of their windows listlessly, dreaming of the jelly art their bodies could paint on the sidewalk below.

And then the vomiting began. And then, with the vomiting, the breaking-apart began. There was nowhere for the vomit to flow, no downstream from the Hungry Ghost, and waste continued to pour in from the Headlands. So it pooled at his feet. It was corrosive, poison, radioactive. It ate at his feet. It broke off his toenails from his toes and then his toes from his feet and his feet from his fat little ankles. And then the Ghost could no longer support his weight and he collapsed, retching, into the pool of vomit. His kneecaps came off of his shins and drifted away. And as the vomit ate him away, we could see that he had nothing inside at all, and we saw our void again.

Our cities became islands at first, then rafts, then nothing. Many drowned. Rumor says that a few of us managed to swim back to the corrupted headlands.

And so now I am only being I, and I am an island, floating on a sea of waste. The river has been dammed and she lies stagnant, as do I, penning mindless fables.