

# funeral rites

*Mint Kang, 2004*

He died  
last month after a long and fruitful life  
filled with health and prosperity and adoring grandchildren.  
They carried the bright funeral banners  
and walked behind his coffin dressed in white  
and wailing for his passing;  
banged gongs, burned incense, paid temples to pray for him.  
After he was buried they lit the pyre  
of his belongings:  
a mansion, two Rolls-Royces, dozens of servants  
and hell money in huge piles of gold;  
at midnight of the time he died,  
three great crackling bonfires to light his way in the netherworld.  
The night breeze sent sparks whirling to the clouds  
and they said:  
"Look, the guardian spirits are carrying our offerings  
to grandfather."  
And later the fires burned out and the grieving family  
went home to wash ashes from their hair;  
while the smoke of his happy afterlife stayed  
to sting the eyes of sleepers  
and set off the fire alarm in a house nearby.

*Written for no particular reason during the seventh lunar month; at a time when I was influenced by the urge to go local and write blank verse about aspects of life in Singapore that Westerners would be unfamiliar with. Ah, the pretentiousness of catering to an international audience. But I got a punchline in anyway.*