



Ai

m a g a z i n e

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Ron Riecki • Teddy Kang
• Richard LeBlond

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ARTISTS AND AUTHORS

in this issue

Manal Abdallah



Manal Abdallah is a freelance translator and poet who has been working for ten years now. She has had two books published in France for the Maisons des Sourcières and has also written a manuscript of poems in English and Arabic.

Darren Demaree

Darren C. Demaree is the author of *As We Refer to Our Bodies* (8th House, 2013), *Temporary Champions* (Main Street Rag, 2014), *The Pony Governor* (After the Pause Press, 2015) and *Not For Art Nor Prayer* (8th House, 2015). He is the Managing Editor of the Best of the Net Anthology. He is currently living in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children.



Lawrence Farrar



Lawrence F. Farrar is a former US diplomat with multiple assignments in Japan as well as postings in Germany, Norway, and Washington, DC. He also lived in Japan as a graduate student and as a naval officer. His stories have appeared in nearly forty magazines, such as *Curbside Splendor E-Zine*, *Tampa Review Online*, *Jelly Bucket*, *The MacGuffin*, *Cigale*, *The Write Room*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *The Worcester Review*, *Paradise Review*, and *34th Parallel*.

ARTISTS AND AUTHORS

in this issue

David Groulx

David Groulx was raised in Northern Ontario. He is proud of his Aboriginal roots – his mother is Ojibwe Indian and his father French Canadian. After receiving his BA from Lakehead University, where he won the Munro Poetry Prize, Groulx studied creative writing at the En'owkin Centre in Penticton, B.C., where he won the Simon J Lucas Jr. Memorial Award for poetry. He has also studied at The University of Victoria Creative Writing Program. He has published six poetry books, *Night in the Exude* (Tyro Publications, 1997), *The Long Dance* (Kegedonce Press, 2000), *Under God's Pale Bones* (Kegedonce Press, 2010), *A Difficult Beauty* (Wolsak & Wynn, 2011), *Rising With A Distant Dawn* (BookLand Press, 2011) as well as *Imagine Mercy* (BookLand Press, 2013). In addition, he won the third annual PoetryNOW Battle of the Bards in 2011, read at the International Festival of Authors (IFOA) in Toronto and Barrie (2011) as well as at the Ottawa Writer's Festival (2012). He has also appeared on The Aboriginal Peoples Television Network and was the Writer-In-Residence for OpenBook Toronto for November 2012. Groulx's poetry has been translated into Spanish and German. *Rising With A Distant Dawn* is currently being translated into French. *Red River Review* nominated his poems for Pushcart Prizes in 2012. Groulx's poetry has appeared in over 165 publications in fourteen countries. Currently, he lives in Ottawa, Canada.



Tamam Kahn

Tamam Kahn is the author of *Untold, A History of the Wives of Prophet Muhammad* (Monkfish Books, 2010). She was invited by the Royal Ministry of Morocco to read her poems there in 2009. Kahn has been awarded writing residencies at Ragdale and Jentel Foundations in 2013 and earlier.



Teddy Kang

Teddy Kang is a current third year student at York University, Canada, and he is also a part-time freelance Illustrator and graphic designer in Toronto. Currently, he is taking various clients from all over the world and doing design and illustrations for them, clients such as *Geeked Magazine*, tourism companies, amusement parks, websites and etc. In addition, his works have recently been featured by a few well-known design blogs such *Tumblr Radar*, *Design Clever*, *Baubauhaus*, and etc.



ARTISTS AND AUTHORS

in this issue

Michael Keshigian



Michael Keshigian's ninth poetry book, *Dark Edges*, was recently released September, 2014 by Flutter Press. He has been widely published in numerous national and international journals and appeared as feature writer in over a dozen publications with five Pushcart Prize and two Best Of The Net nominations. More information about his work can be found on michaelkeshigian.com.

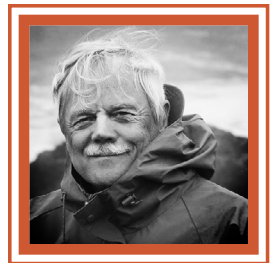
Carolyn Mary Kleefeld

Carolyn Mary Kleefeld is an award-winning poet, author, and artist. She is the author of nineteen books, a variety of which are used as inspirational texts in universities and healing centers worldwide. Learn more at carolynmarykleefeld.com.



Richard LeBlond

Richard LeBlond is a retired biologist living in North Carolina. He has written about life experiences, including travel to Europe and North Africa in the early 1970s, and more recently about his adventures in eastern Canada and the U.S. West. His essays and photographs have appeared in several U.S. and international journals.



Kip McMillan

Kip McMillan is a nursing student in North Carolina at Appalachian State University. She is also a bilingual poet in English and Spanish and finds art in an otherwise unpoetic lifestyle. She searches for closure in the form of poetry.



ARTISTS AND AUTHORS

in this issue

Courtney McQueen

Courtney McQueen is an MFA Student at Converse College and a native of Oklahoma City. Recently, she moved to Old Louisville after twenty years in Miami. McQueen enjoys writing about past experiences as well as about new and exciting scenarios occurring around her each and every day.



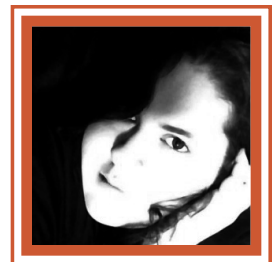
Toti O'Brien

Toti O'Brien's work has appeared in *The Altadena Review*, *Poetic Diversity*, *Edgar Allan Poet*, *Litro NY*, among other journals. She has published two children books, two collections of stories and one of essays in Italian. She has contributed to Italian magazines such as *Mezzocielo*, *Salpare*, *L'Ostile* and *Inguine*.



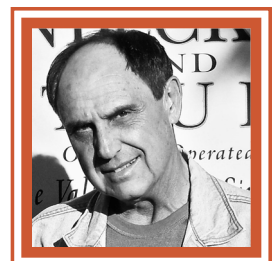
Katherine Parker

Katherine Parker, who suffers from depression and anxiety, is soon to be a nursing student at Castleton State College. She writes as a hobby and often finds comfort in it. She wrote *Monsters* on a night where both her depression and her anxiety were quite bad.



Thomas Piekarski

Thomas Piekarski is a former editor of the *California State Poetry Quarterly*. His poetry and interviews have appeared in *Nimrod*, *Portland Review*, *Kestrel*, *Cream City Review*, *Poetry Salzburg*, *Boston Poetry Magazine*, *Poetry Pacific*, *Poetry Super Highway*, and many other publications. He has published a travel guide entitled *Best Choices in Northern California* and *Time Lines*, a book of poems. He lives in Marina, California.



ARTISTS AND AUTHORS

in this issue

Ron Riecki

Ron Riecki's books include *U.P. (a novel)*, *The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works* (a 2014 Michigan Notable Book), and *Here: Women Writing on Michigan's Upper Peninsula*.



Bennett Sacks

Bennett Sacks is a student at University of Colorado Boulder where he studies English, as well as Technology Arts & Media. His essay is a personal account of a true experience in a psychological healthcare center.



Richard Shelton

Richard Shelton is a painter, whose writings include poems and commentary on art history. His writing appears in publications such as *Willard & Maple*, *The Chaffin Journal*, and *The Eclectic Muse*. His artwork appears in the Smithsonian Art Institute's Hirshhorn Museum, as well as other museums in the U.S.

Alessandra Simmons



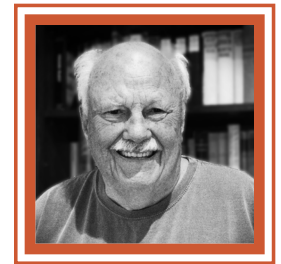
Alessandra Simmons holds her MFA from Indiana University, where she was the editor in chief of *Indiana Review*. She has poems published (or forthcoming) in *The Other Journal*, *WomenArts Quarterly*, *Post Road*, *Ghost Town*, and other journals. She interviews working writers on her blog, alessandrasimmons.com. Her current obsessions are podcasts and apple trees. *Photo by Lisa Beth Anderson.*

ARTISTS AND AUTHORS

in this issue

Ken Simpson

Ken Simpson is an Australian poet who has self-published collections between 2010 and 2014 through SBPRA and Hemkunt (New Delhi). His collection *Patterns of Perception* was published by Auger Press (UK) last January. He has had many poems accepted for publication and lives with family at Lysterfield, Victoria.



Sze-Leng Tan

Sze-Leng Tan is a traveller, academic, and writer of travel articles, poems and short stories. Her travel article was published in *DIG Travel Magazine* and her short story in *The Anthill*. Her poems were featured in *The Malaysian Poetic Chronicles* and *Blognostics*.



EDITOR'S WELCOME

fall 2015

"Art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass."

-Walter Pater, 1868

On behalf of *Aji's* staff, I offer the sincere hope that these pages will bring delight as you read and view the creations of the very talented and diverse cadre of artists and writers featured herein. This issue, themed on the connections between work and art, explores the relationship between the ordinary, the everyday, and the exquisite, offering readers artful portrayals of Newfoundland fishermen, circus performers, musicians, poets and painters whose endeavors are sounded for their depths of sincerity as well as for their nuances and the transcendent beauties they reveal, inviting us to consider the nature of art with fresh awareness of its presence in our lives as we pass through a supermarket, gaze at an ocean pier, or visit a nursing home.



Beaudelaire wrote, "...just as we have our own particular emotions, so we have our own beauty." It is the work of the artist, the writer, to reveal to us the beauty in his or her own experience, in what is observed, and to offer us Keats' negative capability in its myriad forms continuously generated by the human imagination. If, as Keats' asserted, truth *is* beauty, then the humblest tasks performed with attention and sincerity radiate an unmistakable grace; no matter how menial the labor, we recognize such performance as authentic, as honest, and therefore worthy of our highest praise and admiration.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Erin O'Neill Armendarez".

Erin O'Neill Armendarez
Editor in Chief



Ode on a Grecian Urn

John Keats, 1795 - 1821

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? what maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal--yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'--that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.



HORROR & EFFORT

a conversation
with Ron Riecki

by Melissa Gish

Photo by Amélie Jumet

RON RIEKKI, shares his story with *Aji* editor, MELISSA GISH.

The Upper Peninsula is roughly a third of Michigan's landmass, yet it contains only about three percent of the state's population. Its inhabitants are a unique people, and the stories they have to tell are equally unique. Writer Ron A. Riecki was born in Marquette, Michigan, and continues to draw inspiration from the people and places of his home on the U.P. His novel *U.P.* was published by Ghost Road Press in 2008, and in 2010, he received a Michigan Humanities Council grant. He is the editor of *The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works* (Wayne State University Press, 2013) and *Here: Women Writing on Michigan's Upper Peninsula* (Michigan State University Press, 2015). He has served in the U.S. military and worked as an EMT, and his writing has been called "vivid, funny, sad, cutting to the quick"¹ and "an exquisite mix of pathos and humor."²

MG (*Aji* editor, Melissa Gish): Congratulations on your short story "The Family Jewel" being selected for *The Best Small Fictions 2015* (due in October from Queen's Ferry Press). Guest editor Robert Olen Butler made the selection. Wow! How does that make you feel?

RR: Awesome! I was really, really excited about being included for that anthology. I was also completely shocked at the story that was chosen. I also had a *decomp magazinE* story that was nominated and thought that one had more of a shot at being selected, so it goes to show you never know with that stuff. But I was exceptionally happy. And still am about it. Thank you very much, Robert Olen Butler! And Queen's Ferry Press!

MG: You're a very busy guy. Can you share anything about your current projects?

RR: Oh God, there's a lot. My book *Here: Women Writing on Michigan's Upper Peninsula* just came out and volume II of that series should be next year if I keep on deadline, and I'm also working on volume III of that series at the same time. I'm co-editing a book with Jeff Sartain of *American Book Review*. I'm writing and publishing a lot of poetry and fiction and non-fiction. I'm excited for new fiction upcoming in *Bellevue Literary Review* and *Shenandoah* and a bunch of other places.

MG: You're an incredibly versatile writer. You've written plays, interviews, poetry, short fiction, and your novel *U.P.* has been praised for its strong characters and realism. Do you have a particular style that you develop in all the various genres?

RR: I just start going in new, different directions, sometimes forced by the genre. I'm starting to get to a point where some people are wanting me to write stuff for them. For example, Central Michigan University had me do an adaptation of the film *Night of the Living Dead* for the stage. They didn't end up doing a production, but Fancy Pants Theater in Kalamazoo liked the adaptation, so they're staging it this October, which will be fun. It threw me heavily into the world of horror, though, and triggered some other stuff I'm working on now in that genre.

MG: Do you approach similar themes in your work?

RR: I think probably the Midwest appears a lot, and the horrors of guns in America (I tend to dislike films where the gun saves the day when the reality is, if we regard what's happening in the U.S., a gun usually has a part in destroying people's lives), and horror seems to be creeping up more and more in my work in various forms. I guess I'd be more interested in the themes others see rather than for me to look for them in my work.

MG: Do you feel that you were a storyteller or poet from childhood?

RR: In my youth, I was encouraged to write and not encouraged to write. I was told of love for writers and the uselessness of writers. I was given a lot of mixed messages about it. I just kept doing it, because it's what I do. But I think everyone is a storyteller and a poet from childhood. I overhear children speak and they talk like storytellers and poets. They're little Bob Hicoks and James Tates. Without even trying.

MG: As writers, we are constantly evolving, and our approach to the craft continually shifts to accommodate the changes in our lives. Can you tell us a little about how your writing process has evolved over the years?

RR: Work. I think a lot of poets write poems about poets writing poems about poets because that's their life. There is no work in their poems. There's no trailer park or boss or factories. Too often it tends to be schools and lawns and summer and Mesozoic thesaurus, because it's very academic-influenced writing. And what gets lost is the real world. I've had to wash dishes and clean up blood and wash more dishes and clean more blood and those dishes and that blood keeps creeping up into my writing now.

MG: You earned an undergraduate degree in religious studies from Central Michigan University and once published an interview with Guy Newland, a scholar of Tibetan Buddhism. How does your study of religion and philosophy make its way into your writing?

RR: I wish more. In the last couple days, I've had poetry published in *Mizna* on the *Qur'an* and in *Calvary Cross* about God and *Earthen Lamp* about letting go, so spirituality does play a heavy part. I think I do it to balance out my horror writing, which I've been doing more and more of simply because it pays (and because sometimes I'm pretty good at it). But even the horror writing is just further exploration of good-evil that's so central to religion. I do love religion and philosophy. If a time machine is ever invented, I'd have written more on those two subjects. Sometimes I wish I were Gerard Manley Hopkins.

MG: You also earned an MFA in Theater Arts/Playwriting from Brandeis, another MFA in Creative Writing from Virginia, and a Ph.D. in Literature & Creative Writing from Western Michigan University. Was the decision to pursue these degrees personal, or would you recommend graduate school to everyone who wishes to pursue professional writing?

RR: I don't recommend grad school for writers. Or, let me rephrase that. I do recommend grad school, but not for writing. There are too many MFA programs right now and people are graduating and then washing dishes and cleaning blood. Get a degree in something that's going to get you work, so you can survive. Survival is important to writing. Being alive is a key ingredient to being able to write. It helps if you can breathe and eat. If you go to school for a different discipline other than writing, it's going to give you something to write about. That's my advice. But I'm probably giving that advice because I'm still in survival phase. If I break out of my current lower stages in Maslow's hierarchy, I'll shift that point and start talking about the perfumed magic of writing like I've heard million-dollar book contract writers do.

MG: When I was a graduate student, I had some special opportunities to meet award-winning, famous authors and share my work with them. These experiences made lasting impressions. Did you have similar experiences?

RR: Absolutely, yes, I've got to meet and study with some incredible writers. Anselm Hollo in one week at a program at Naropa changed my writing forever. Gregory Orr, in a semester at Virginia, was the same. Eric Torgersen's sheer love of poetry shined through at Central Michigan. Seeing Allen Ginsberg in a panel at Naropa was life-changing. One hour with Allen Ginsberg changed my writing permanently. Yeah, I think it's been a long line of those moments. Of course, I've had some bad experiences too. Alicia Ostriker told me how much she hates my writing and did it with such passion that it ended up convincing me I was doing something incredibly right if I could elicit that much emotion.

MG: One of my favorite poems in *Leave Me Alone I'm Bleeding* (Gypsy Daughter, 2010) is "Name a Famous Poet and They Said." I especially love the last lines:

"Write screenplays. You could make a million
dollars if you wrote screenplays."
"What if I don't wanna make a million
dollars?"
"Then keep writing poems."

RR: There's often a brutality to the response to poetry in America. I've had bookstores tell me, "No poets" when I've wanted to hold book events there. There's a hatred of poetry, a big red hat of hatred for poetry in America. Or at least a thick indifference. Poetry in America is too often poets writing poems about poets writing poems for poets who write poems. It really is a problem.

MG: Do you have any suggestions for ways we can address this problem?

RR: I used to hide books as a kid. Because I'd get made fun of for reading. Tom Bissell, one of the big U.P. writers, has a story along those lines in one of his books. It's hard to be a poet. I write private, inner, tender, ugly things, and they get put up online without pay with my name above sometimes misspelled as if the alphabet has exploded, and when I get replies to those poems by family members or friends, it tends to often ignore any sense of the literary and instead they'll say something like, "You never told me you hate fish. I wouldn't have made you fish last week if I'd have known that." And I'll say, "No, the character in the poem hates fish. I'm not that character." And then they'll say, "Well, why does the character in the poem hate fish?" And you realize that you should have just become a pediatrician and had kayaking as a hobby . . . I love that the word Poetry begins with Poe and ends with try; Poetry is a combination of horror and effort.



¹ Nancy Eimers, the winner of the Verna Emery Prize

² Meg Tuite, Connotation Press



The Arsonists in Hell

keep looking for a spot
that isn't on fire,
the golden flames
suffering the night
as if they will always
be young and drunk.

One of the arsonists
sneaks out, makes her way
to Heaven, where everything
is on fire as well.
She asks God if she can set
His Chair on fire

and He says yes,
standing back
to watch her
put flame to flame,
the madness growing
with each brutal success.

The Ghosts Get Together to Cure Cancer

They figure the haunting is pointless, so the ghosts start doing research. They want to cure cancer within the next two years.

There are fifty billion ghosts. So many people have died by 2015 that the world is one big ghost. The average kitchen, one dead mathematician figured out, has approximately 17.4 ghosts. They sit on the stove, in the sink, on and under every chair. Bedrooms have 22.4 ghosts. The average person sleeps with at least six ghosts per night.

The ghosts pack the labs. The labs become stuffed with ghost, all of them trying to pick up test tubes and borosilicate beakers that go through their hands. They try to communicate to the living microbiologists, their big stupid brilliant heads not understanding a word of it.

One day, tired of the failure, a few ghosts commit suicide. They turn into meta-ghosts. They are ghosts inside ghosts. They try to cure the cancer inside of cancer until one of them realizes that cancer is a ghost. The concept spreads like wildfire, the laboratories across the world filled with the flames of ideas and the nothingness of the dead.

The Scarecrows Ban Together to Boycott The Wizard of Oz

Not all scarecrows are like that.

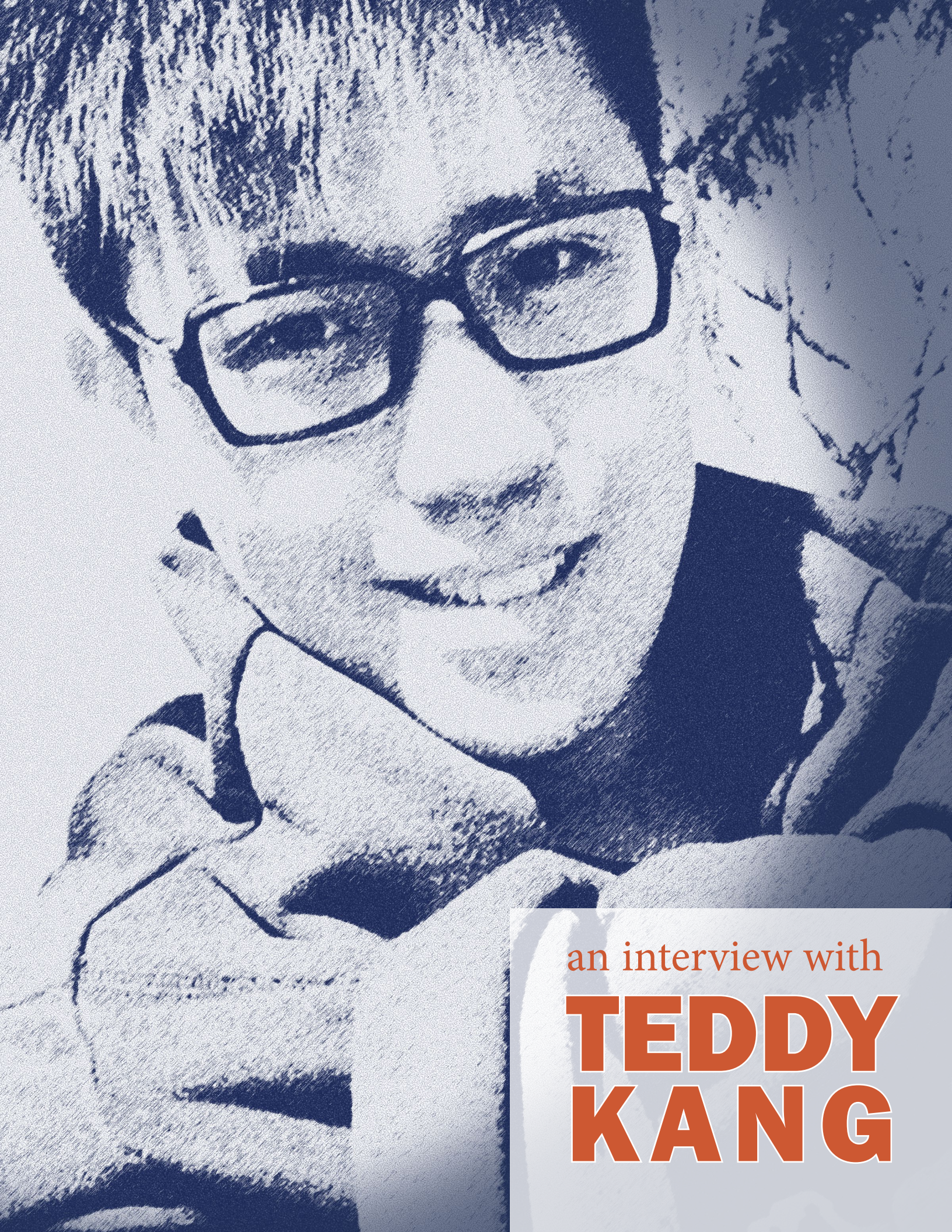
They want to be seen as smart. There is deep intelligence to frightening birds. There would be no food without scarecrows. There would only be hunger, death, hate.

The scarecrows don't even want to talk about the horror films, the way that they are always represented as murderers.

They just want some films where scarecrows are seen as complex, where the world can see them as loving and failing and real.

They come out with a new version of *The Wizard of Oz*. All of the other characters are scarecrows. There is The Cowardly Scarecrow. And The Tin Scarecrow. Dorothy Scarecrow. The Wicked Scarecrow of the West. Lollipop Mayor Scarecrow. But the original Scarecrow character has been turned into a brainless human. The human stumbles across the screen singing. The film does horrible at the box office.

Some of the scarecrows decide to turn to Islam. It only makes things more complex. Everything seems to get blamed specifically on the Muslim scarecrows. It is the great tension in the world. Everyone waits to see what will happen. It feels like watching a great movie where the end is inevitable, but no one knows what it will be. The nights, while waiting, will seem like the moon is made of bone, the sky filled with infinite crows.



an interview with
**TEDDY
KANG**

Taken by the whimsy and skill of Teddy Kang's designs, we arranged a brief interview so that our readers would have the chance to get to know him a little better. Enjoy the opportunity to peruse his images, which are sure to bring a smile as well as a sense of admiration.

Please describe how and when you first knew you wanted to draw and to create designs and illustrations.

Art has been a passion of mine since ten years ago when I was twelve years old; whenever I hold up a pen to draw, I feel alive. When I create my illustrations, I always have a feeling that this is a thing that I could fall in love with. I feel so proud of what I am doing. I don't care about politics. I'm also not a sports fan. Only when I put myself in my illustration and design world do I feel energized because this is what I love.

Who were (or are) your mentors and role models, and how have they helped you to achieve your goals?

A New York Based Chinese Illustrator, Lisk Feng, has been my role model. I was actually inspired to draw by her amazing works. The first time I saw her work in a Chinese magazine, I fell in love with her illustrations; her works are always full of surprising creativity. Her works encourage me to keep drawing.

What advice do you have for aspiring illustrators and graphic designers?

Keep drawing-- this is the most I want to say to Illustrators and graphic designers. I know that sometimes the art career is harsh and tough, and it doesn't mean that you will be rewarded if you are talented and amazing; you could be amazing, but you still could be frustrated for all your talent. This is just a process and the only path to success, as long as you keep going. I had the same experience like many new illustrators and designers a few years ago. At that time, no one knew about me and no one accepted my works. I know it must be frustrating for some who are enthusiastic with art and see it as their whole life career, to have nobody to accept their work, but when you keep going and never give up, one day all doors will be opened to you.

From where do you receive the inspiration for your designs?

I would say anywhere and everywhere. Smell, sound, music, food, memory and every littlest thing in my life will inspire me for my illustrations and designs.

Can you describe your artistic process?

My artistic process is just as simple as what many artists do. I often draw a rough draft on paper as it is the fastest way to translate what I have in my mind from brain to paper, and then start to draw on computer by following the rough draft and add details and colors.







Table Land

What do you hope to achieve through the pursuit of your art for yourself and for others?

I hope that more and more people will like my works because this makes me so proud and satisfied. When I see people like my works, I have a feeling of achieving my value and it pushes me to create more wonderful works. Being accepted by others is always a wonderful thing.

Please describe your dream project.

My dream projects are to publish my first picture book, which I hope draws the world's attention, and also to have my solo exhibition successfully held in China. These are my dream projects that I have been working hard for.



Canned Fish



What are you working on now?

Besides Illustrating for magazines and websites, I'm currently cooperating with a few companies to turn my illustrations into real products, such as cups, notebook, postcards, T-shirts and bags etc. It is an amazing experience to see my digital works turned into products and to see people use them. My T-shirts are currently selling at stores and online, but other products are in the production process.





Circus

The most beautiful show of the world. True.

Is it the most ancient, as well? Probably, if it means an arena where some folks meet death face-to-face, while others observe.

Gladiators, in the Coliseum, were *circenses*: most of our circus traditions come directly from that Roman pastime. But that isn't the only precursor of the practice. Corridas, and all sorts of similar fights, belong to the category. So do medieval tournaments, as well as many other rituals, from prehistory to our days.

Right now, though, I'm talking of circuses as a child would intend them, as depicted in youth literature, or in movies... Nomadic attractions, moving from town to town via some kind of transportation, settling in huge tents, often striped white and red... surrounded by caravans, mobile homes and animal cages. They have evolved, in the last decades, up to the high tech of a Cirque du Soleil, for example, whose spectacular quality matches that of mega rock concerts and multimedia shows. Still, even the latest versions don't really swerve from tradition... I believe the basic rules are so simple, they can't be much altered. There are not many elements to manipulate.

First of all a circus is round, like the sun (Cirque du Soleil, how about that? Could the name be more tautologically simplifying?), and there isn't much you can do, to make a circle more fashionable or surprising. You cannot multiply or reduce its sides; you cannot add angles or points. You could possibly stretch it into an oval... with considerable loss of visibility. No one tried yet: circuses remain mostly circular. That is good.

In circuses we see circus artists. They are a quite special kind of people, when they perform their numbers. When they don't, there's not much to say about them. It is rare to find circus artists who have lots of interesting side activities...

This is not to affirm they couldn't. This is not a judgment of value, underscoring the human richness of the trade. On the contrary. But technically, objectively, circus life offers little residual to its core matter. The performance demands - in terms of relentless training and massive adrenaline surges - plus the minor but crucial tasks preceding and following shows, are all that a person can give, in a day, a week, a month, a year or a lifetime. Then there is the travel, the constant motion, inherently contrasting any accomplishment other than journeying itself. Circus artists usually don't go to colleges, don't grow gardens, don't start families if not in the company.

They have a circus life. The backside of stage glory is somehow inglorious, meaning that it doesn't exist if not as a patient, subdued, neutral concavity, counterbalancing the shine of the spotlights. All performers, in all fields, know the meaning of what I described. In a different, but related measure. I dare say that for circus folks the measure is extreme: because the performance is extreme.

Why that? Because, in the majority of cases, it's a life and death deal. One mistake implies to be horribly hurt, horribly crippled, or die. Not all numbers (although all numbers, to be worthy, need exceptional tension and energy), but most of them, involve a life threat, or it wouldn't be a circus.

That is what circus audiences are anxious to see: an ongoing dance macabre, where - at any moment - one inch, a split second implies total loss or total success. Human life is balanced, truly, on an infinitesimal support (a tightrope, a hook, an ankle, a finger), thrown in the air, caught back, thrown again, caught again, with every passing minute. Swinging on a pendulum, in rhythm with our heartbeat...

Does such view symbolize our common condition? Isn't it just true for each thing or being? Of course, we can

say so. We can say that our fate is as improbably suspended as that of the trapeze acrobat, when she suddenly leaves her partner's hand and floats in the air, unattached. Yes, we are in the very same place... though, with our butts on benches. A plane crash, a fire in the house, a cancer creeping in without permission or notice, a car accident, a stroke and we are gone. So it is for everything else: what we care for, whom we love, our plans and our credos. Always.

Is it to highlight this memento that, traditionally, circus seats are made instable and dangerous... that, when we were kids, one of us would regularly slide through the boards and be rescued, sitting on dirt, surrounded by the comfy smell of elephant's and monkey's poop? Maybe. I won't go so far. Although the precariousness of our station, in the obscurity, certainly provided additional charm to the experience. Unforgettable.

Mesmerized, we watch the hyperbolized, magnified reflection of our absconded, muted reality. We are circus acrobats too. But without the glory.

They have glory, and they entirely deserve it. For they are our reminders, our messengers, or - in other words - angels? Sure. Angels they are. It is hard to believe that the mere idea of such creatures – half men or women, half birds, midway between gods and us – could originate elsewhere. It must have sprung necessarily by this type of vision... maybe in ancient Greece, or in Crete. Maybe athletes, diving in the blue ocean from the highest rocks, with a cartwheel or two, fired the viewers' imagination. Men and women in flight... the negation of gravitational laws... the denial of death, which, of course, is no more than a form of gravity.

Certainly, in a circus, when the rumpus of joyful marketing calms down, after cotton candy and popcorn have sold out, after everybody patted the pachyderm or stared at the lion's teeth, when finally darkness falls... gravity is literally sent to hell. And the angels arrive.

Circus artists have special bodies. They defy all mechanic laws, not only those related to weight – or to panic. We assist to the triumph of bodies disembodied, capable of demanding from muscles, bones and articulations what the common person can't dream about. Why should we? Our bodies don't ask for it. They ask for food, sleep, rest, warmth, contact and sex. They ask for satisfaction, not for transcendence. We assume that performers' bodies would do the same, in their free time. Probably so. Although, at a more accurate observation, it looks like their free time is not when they're done performing. It appears, indeed, that their freest is the time subjugated by the implacability of their number, enclosed into the inescapable circus ring. There, under the blinding lights, their body literally explodes of freedom, almost laughing at the logics of nature and matter.

"How can they do that," the audience sighs, implicitly or out loud, with every ooh and aah. That's a good question.

It is interesting, or better revealing, that numbers, meaning those activities at midway between miracles and monstrosities, are called "routines". A trapeze artist, an acrobat, a ropewalker, a contortionist, a magician, a juggler learns a routine. Then she learns another routine. Then he improves, perfects or complicates his routine. Then, for the rest of her life, she practices her routine. This says a lot about the performer life, about that backside, that lining, that shaded zone I was mentioning before. It's sort of unimpressive, isn't it, to spend hours and hours, day after day, weekend included, in obsessive routines? Who would consider that glamorous? But it is unavoidable.

Then, under the spotlights, into the ring, the routines perform themselves. And performers plainly disappear. Their bodies disincarnate.

No much ego is involved in circus performance. Features are not truly in the way, faces are scarcely advertised. What we see on signs, are mostly full figures, in action. The action being the crux of attention. We won't likely

remember a gaze, a look or a smile...

This lack of identity is countered by the glamour of costumes and, of course, by the poise, the gait and the physical delivery, before, during and after the number. The magnificence of the outfits reminds of a matador's suit of lights. It reminds of knights' shining armors, with the difference of its minimalism. Nothing is too splendid for circus wear... there are several reasons to it, all underlining that the body, so clad, becomes something above the flesh that composes it. It becomes part of a pattern of liberty and beauty; it becomes a musical sphere in the firmament, a dancing star, a jewel in the crown of the universe. We see it esthetically, not with an eye of lust, envy, possession, comparison. We see it esthetically, but with a slant of mysticism. Not as a painting, but as an epiphany.

I mentioned the poise and the gesturing.

It is typical of performers to flourish their action with mannerisms, apparently without a scope. Why that? It seems that from the moment they walk in, their bodies never leave a heightened state: there is truly no moment of emptiness, pause, decaying energy. A continuous flow of motion traverses each body segment, transmitting itself to the next, in a sort of infinite loop. If that fails, focus fails. Attention (an incredibly intensified kind of it) is dimmed. And of course it can't be.

During numbers, the extra gesture, the accent, the flourishing, turn the effort into choreography, keep the rhythm in its relentless perfection, give signals to the partner (if there is one), to the assistant, to the audience. Useless motions, wrists scuffing, fingers hyperextending, necks arching, punctuate the space, making it incessantly alive (and performer-friendly). They also have a hieratic value, like mudras for Indian dancers. They define a special status, enhance symbolism, and erase all trace of normality.

Are these bodies sexual? They aren't at the moment. If they look that way, it's only an appearance. It is part of the illusion. Bodies engaged in circus numbers have no time and no leisure to be sexual: as for someone caught in a snowstorm, for instance, or desperately swimming to shore. On its end, the audience can't really nurture sexual feelings, at the sight of beautiful limbs and torsos, of exposed, luxuriant, often perfect physical shapes, of redundant semi nudity: because fear and suspense are predominant. And they have little to do with sex. As I said before, circus artists, while they are in the air, while they play with fire, throw knives or are thrown knives at, are angels.

What do clowns do, in this most religious rite, in this celebration? Well, they are needed as hydrogen is to oxygen, in order to make water. How could we stand this flirt between major agonists (life and death), this gruesome and truly obscene exhibition, if it wasn't constantly laughed at? Every form of power, spiritual or not, every mystery needs buffoons.

Clowns are acrobats too, often as good as those who take the main risks. They fulfill another spectacular role, either permanently or, sometimes, taking turns: it depends. The public, in general, guess they have more skills and courage than they display. Yes, they are initiated. Being a fool is quite difficult, and asks for great talent.

Clowns are genies of the lamp; they insure the interface between humans and terror, humans and the unknown. As long as they're present, they remind us that all is a farce. It's a show. Nobody is at risk more than we, the audience, are.

They lie, of course, or at least they allow ambiguity. We interpret that we all are safe, while they mean no one is. But it is a white lie... Mostly, they signify, with their humor, this all doesn't matter. If someone falls, there's no blame: to start with, balance is a very improbable chance. If the acrobats can defy and defeat it, clowns can't even manage to keep it on very large feet, without slipping on banana peels. But they're lovely, admirable just as the

flying heroes. Children simply adore them. They are the heroes' alter egos: they take fear away, packing it in their own shaky limbs and wide grins.

They remind us that we are, somehow, in the middle: not that skilled, for sure, not even that clumsy. In the middle, we oscillate like a pendulum. Overall, this motion, this swing is what we are at, from breath one to the last. And it's fine. And it comes full circle.

One more note about the impersonality of the artists, of that distance established between them and the public, enforced by the blur of their features. Their names, nonchalantly mentioned by the presenters, are quickly forgotten.

If performers don't create a bond with the audience, if they don't aim their effort at the viewer, what does motivate them? Do they have an abstract ideal, a faith of sorts?

I doubt it. It appears to me that the bond, the unbreakable tie empowering them, occurs with their animal (when one is involved), or (more often) with their object. That is what they make love to, in public, and we are ecstatic about it. We are in awe at the sight of the magic, enthralled attention each performer devotes to the tool of his trade. It's a painter with his brush, a sculptor with her chisel that we see at work. That mysterious unity, creating wonders. That continuum, between the fingertips and the handle, without hiatus.

With the difference that no much happens if a pencil is dropped, while the world falls apart if the hands miss the rope. The connection is even more intimate, thus. It is vital, of course, and it shows. There's a hieratic pride in carrying a set of juggling balls, lighting a torch, harnessing a waist or a neck. Such care: we are not used to treat unanimated matter that way. Not even things we love, unless our life depends on them. As it is the case, here. And, in fact, the word "unanimated" sounds wrong. Since the dawn of times, things we owe our survival to were endowed with soul. Such as earth, sun, fire, water...

We can feel that circus tools and devices are soulful, as well. We can sense it, from the very moment they are introduced on stage by their loving owners, parents, lovers... the artists, I mean. Power emanates from them: an ambiguous quality, of course, as power is. Oscillating, once more: a double blade that can fall on opposite sides. Subtle. Hair-thin.

Whose soul, thus, inhabits the animated tightrope, tamer's whip, or magician's saw? Those of the tightrope artist, the tamer, the magician, of course. A transfusion has happened. They, now, resemble each other. The sharing took gradually place, during those myriad repetitions called routines. While the objects assumed human or divine capacities, like protection, support, encouragement, empathy, the performer took to resemble the object, to incorporate some of its characters. Maybe elegance, strength, flexibility? Beauty, shine?

More than all, a Zen quality. A thickness of silence, combined with permeability to the light.

"Art" derives from a Sanskrit, then Greek root, originating both arm and articulation. The noun artist refers to limbs and to joints. To movement and adhesion... coordinated motion. That's certainly true in a circus. Circus artists move things and are touched by them, through a perfectly organic feedback.

Touched by this reciprocal touch, we clap hands together. Tangibility is a key, after all, in this paradise of non-gravity. One must land, sooner or later.



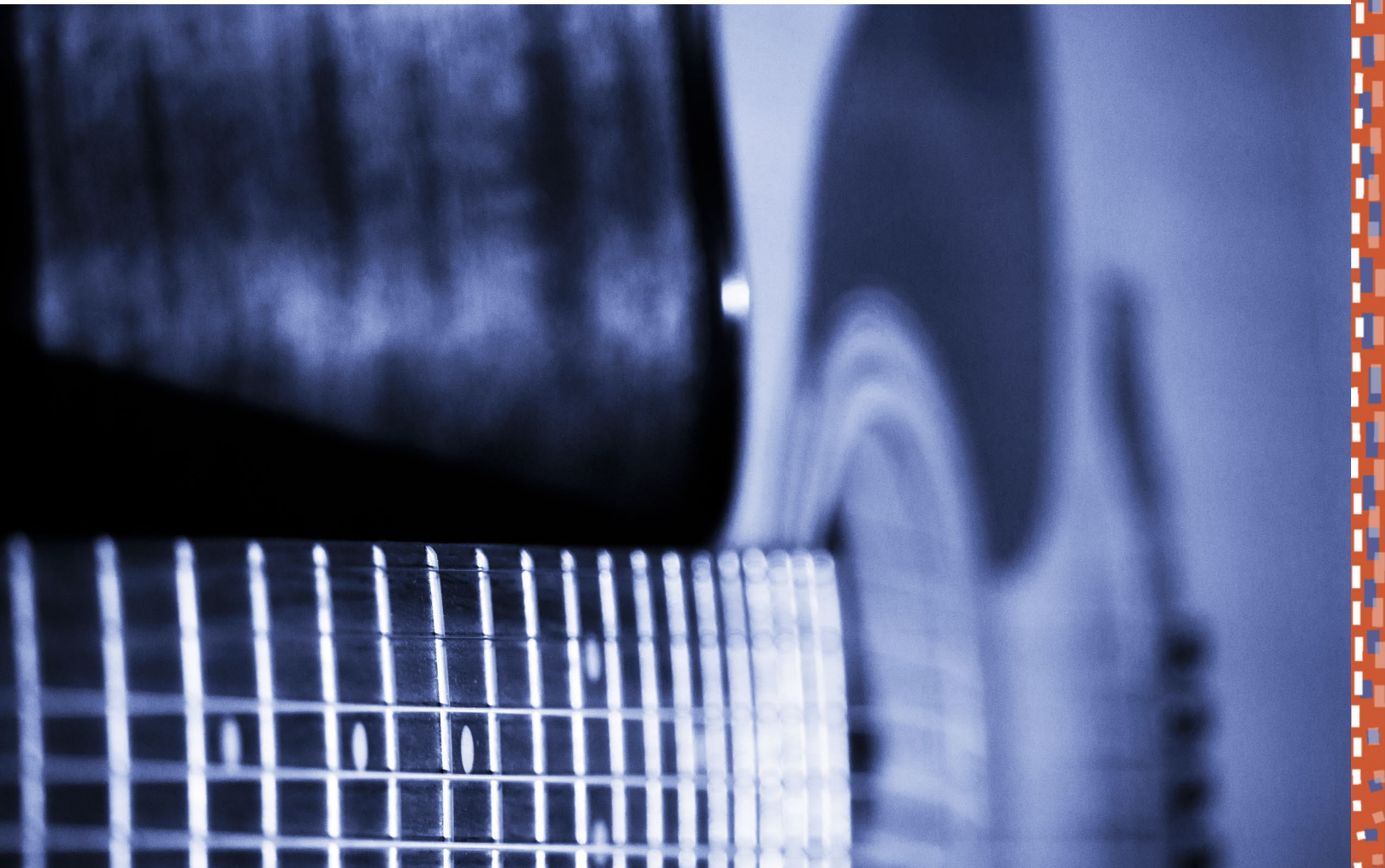
The Folksinger

Fifty-seven years ago when his songs first soared onto the radio, he had thought his words would change the world—would stop people like his brother from being killed in the street. He had coddled his words, steering each one into its rightful place in melody. He practiced tongue twisters and did other vocal exercises before he sang in the studio or on the stage.

The world had changed, but he knew it wasn't on account of his words. Neither his words nor melodies. Perhaps a few hearts, he mused, a heart or two had changed. Perhaps they had delayed trading in their jeans, had not married straight out of high school. But what had that putting off accomplished? The Folksinger was no longer young. He stilled toured large concert halls, dark, filled with the chants of his ageless audiences. They recognized his words whether he spoke them or not. So he chose not. Every few years, he thought he recognized his brother's face in the crowd.

"Blues for my father," turned into "Foo for fa faaa-a." With his tune and cadence in tact, no one noticed he had quit speaking. What a joy to wallow in syllables, the displacement of air from his lungs, the microphone accepting, the crowds cooing. "Saa Sa SAA!" During instrumental interludes, the Folksinger paced the stage, his guitar slung across his back, and then he returned to the mic to whisper, "Faa fee fa."

Alessandra Simmons



Confidentiality Agreement

“Don’t tell them anything!” The poor son of a bitch got in his last words as they hauled him through the waiting room and out the door.

I had been eavesdropping before the situation escalated, but it’s not like I had to at the volume this guy was shouting. I sat with my headphones in, inconspicuous as anyone waiting for an appointment. Only no music was playing. I was a master of espionage, and my tactics rewarded me with the sweet drama that was taking place down the hall.

“Why am I handcuffed?” This inquiry was made multiple times, with levels of aggression rising with each repetition.

I peeked down the hallway as much as my peripheral vision would allow. His long hair was well kept, topped off with the standard Boulder, CO beanie. He looked more anguished than enraged, contrasting his tempered tone. His wrists twisted uncomfortably in the cuffs, keeping him submissive no matter how much he tried to assert his posture.

“You are handcuffed so you don’t harm yourself,” one cop assured him.

“You’re already harming me! These cuffs are rubbing my wrists raw!” he retorted, making a fair point.

Why the entire Wardenburg Health Center was allowed to witness this horror show, I’ll never know. What started within the seclusion of a therapist’s office, behind a closed door, had somehow made its way into the hallway—providing the waiting room with live entertainment.

“You have no right! You have no right!” He graduated from anguish on to hysteria.

“You will be transferred to a psychiatric hospital and held under examination for 72 hours.” The cop seemed to find some sort of sick satisfaction in dishing out this sentence.

“I didn’t do anything! I bet you cuffed me so I don’t hit you! You’re afraid of me, pussy!” The borderline threat was cause enough for the cops to manhandle him a bit, showcasing the brutish behavior they signed up for. Their grins told a story that their badges didn’t; duty is their excuse to behave as such.

At this point, a nervous therapist made a round through the waiting room, asking the impatient patients if they were, ‘okay.’

Personally, I wasn’t. The last thing I want to see while waiting to spill my story to a therapist is someone being detained for being too honest. I tried to spell out, “are you fucking kidding me?” with my facial expression. I believe she got the hint.

The cops did their best to escort him out, finally acknowledging their obtrusive presence. Not that it mattered; the serene atmosphere of the waiting room had been entirely shattered by this time. Tabloids were abandoned, iPhones put on hold.

As the poor bastard was practically dragged out on his heels, we were all audience to his words of wisdom, “Don’t tell them anything.”

The Artful Life of the Newfoundland Fisherman



Blue Boat at Cox's Cove

stories and photographs by
Richard LeBlond

Fishing is the deadliest profession. It is also one of the most beautiful, especially as practiced on the eastern Canadian island of Newfoundland. The fishing villages are called outports, and almost everyone seems to have a small open boat, though larger vessels are also common. The fisherman stores his gear in an onshore shed called, well, a stores. Some stores have a second floor used for mending nets in winter.

Outport waterfronts are so scenic it is as if they have art directors on the town payroll to make sure boats and stores are picture-perfect. You will swear some of the coming scenes are staged. None is. Some outports have added color to their harborfronts from government grants that enable the fisherman to paint his stores. There is no economic advantage to the fisherman for doing this, though the province of Newfoundland and Labrador will benefit as its beauty becomes better known.

The possibility that an artful life is natural to the Newfoundland fisherman can't be ruled out.





Lobster & Crab Pots, St. Pauls



Former Cod Liver Processing Plant, Shoe Cove



Bottle Cove

Gutting Turbits

“You might want to get down to the wharf,” landlady Marilyn said as I emerged from my lodging in Red Bay, Labrador, one morning. “The boats are riding low in the water. They’re full of herring.”

From my room on the second floor of a former stores, I had seen a few of the small open boats come into the harbor, each with one fisherman. Powered by an outboard engine, they aren’t much bigger than row boats and have no cabins, just enough room for a man and his maximum catch. Water was lapping at the gunwales. One more fish and the boat might have sunk beneath the smooth surface of the bay.

Down at the wharf, a small crew was helping to unload the fish. I struck up a conversation with two women who were part of the crew, and would be processing the herring at the fish plant in L’Anse au Loup that evening, 25 miles down the winding road. They were second shift union workers, and the shifts are a matter of seniority. Senior workers get the first shift and work during the day. The second shift not only works at night but has to clean up the processing area when work is done. And if the catch is small, there might only be enough work for the first shift.

These are the two rungs on their career ladder, and they are many feet apart. One of the women had been doing time on the second shift for 12 years, the other for 20. The fish plant, and fishing itself, are almost the only jobs around. It has been that way for a long time, but now there are fewer fish.

“You’re the rookie,” I said to the woman with 12 years on the second shift. She said the herring work bored her. “It’s too routine; no variety. It’s a lot more fun working with turbits. They have to be gutted.” I successfully maintained a stoic expression in response to this measure of how different our lives are.



Cluster of Fish Huts at St. Pauls



Herring Haul up at Noddy Bay

“We just work the season, May to September, and get the winter off,” she continued. (And winter really does stretch from October to April). Typically, the fish plant season begins with cod, followed by “turbit” (turbot, a flounder) and capelin (a small smelt), then finishes with herring. The outporters may have the winter off – financed by what everyone calls “E. I.,” employment insurance – but it is hardly an idle time what with wood gathering, subsistence hunting, repair of houses and fishing gear, and trips to the cabin. Almost everyone seems to have a winter cabin reachable by skidoo (snowmobile). There may not be any money to be made in winter, but just about the worst (and most inappropriate) thing you can call an outporter is lazy.

I learned from the 20-year veteran of the second shift that the fish plant rookie was the mother of Shery Lynn Butt, Miss Newfoundland and Labrador in the 2003-2004 contest to determine Canada’s entrant in the Miss Universe pageant. I had known for a few years that the beautiful Shery Lynn was from Red Bay. But it was a bit of a surprise to learn that her mom was the fisherwoman at the wharf helping with

the unloading of the herring she would process that night. Mrs. Butt was plain-looking, her bearing suggesting a practical woman whose ambitions were already being met, or were only one shift away.

The contrast between mother and daughter reflected the rapidity of change taking place in southern Labrador. The daughter had leapt into the modern world, experiencing a sea change. Her mom’s sea had hardly changed at all, except for fewer cod. At the time of my visit, Shery Lynn was still aspiring to be the most beautiful woman in the universe, which for all I know is more work and less fun than gutting turbits.



Perfectly Poised Boat at Castor River

Sew Girls

Seated at her kitchen table, Audrey Adair scoffed down a long swallow of Scotch, and then another. Her mood matched the abrasive gray September sky that had closed over Okinawa like a soggy, suffocating sack. She stared apprehensively through the window as palms swayed and shimmied in the grip of a typhoon surging in from the South China Sea, already the second to come ashore in 1971. The rain pounded down so hard she could barely make out the officers' bungalows that, like soldiers in ranks, lined the streets of the Makiminato Housing Area.

She refilled the glass and gulped down half of it. Unfortunately, the Johnny Walker Black provided no palliative for the ailment that beset her--a gnawing belief that her husband, Lieutenant Colonel Gifford Adair, was being unfaithful. Audrey had decided he was cheating on her with Michiyo Higa, the Okinawan seamstress who did Audrey's sewing and worked for the Adairs as a part-time house maid. Audrey didn't know why she thought so; she just did.

Driven more by inspiration than information, the notion had festered in her mind for weeks. Audrey had listened intently to and been influenced plenty by tales told by other officers' wives about how American men on the island got themselves wrapped up in affairs with Okinawan girls. But, as a person ill-equipped to conceal her contempt for most foreigners, she wondered what the allure might be. Flat faced, flat chested, and with hairy black sideburns, surely those girls conformed to no beauty standard that would pass muster back in Charleston. Yet the stories were rife about how American men fell for what she heard described as the Oriental Mystique. Maybe the girls walked on the men's backs or were perpetual sex machines or something.

Confirmation of Giff's infidelity would simply be the latest entry in a ledger of grievances for this Army wife. The fact he'd *only* gained his commission through the University of Kansas ROTC had long been a source of chagrin--Audrey's brigadier general father had been a West Pointer. Moreover, Giff's career seemed stymied. Overdue for promotion, he was being pushed aside by officers who exploited the system more skillfully than he did. She feared he would languish at his present grade until forced to retire. When Audrey suggested that he volunteer for Vietnam to enhance his promotion chances, he regarded her as if she'd punched him in the stomach.

Why Giff had accepted an assignment to this backwater Army post--as a public affairs officer, of all things--baffled her. Even worse, she sensed his seniors held him in low regard and subordinates ridiculed him behind his back. As with her notion of infidelity, Audrey demanded little evidence to reach such conclusions; bias and a fertile and distrustful imagination served as well. An inveterate gossip, she thrived on rumor--the juicier the better. And now she had conjured up a personal one for herself. She was not happy--not at all. She dwelt on the burdens she had borne during nearly twenty years of marriage. For what? she thought, and then answered her own question. For nothing--that's what.

Audrey stepped into the living room and summoned the young Okinawan seamstress from an adjacent bedroom used as a sewing room. Another bedroom in the Adairs' quarters, adjacent to the master bedroom, served as an office. Giff often slept there on a cot. The Adairs had no children.

"Michi. Come in here."

"*Hai*. You want I bring dress?"

Michiyo Higa had been working steadily for days on a new silk taffeta gown for a dance slated to be held at the officer's club the following evening. Many of the officers' wives employed Okinawan women to sew for

them. Referred to as *sew girls* in the local fractured English, they toiled long hours, met the requirements of their American employers with unexpected skill, and, best of all, came cheap. Discussions at wives' club gatherings frequently focused on the merits or demerits of this or that sew girl.

"No. Just come here." Audrey's tone was peremptory--it was almost always peremptory when she spoke to Okinawan people, whom she regularly referred to as *natives*. But, her summons to Higa carried an especially sharp edge. The peach soft South Carolina accent Audrey employed to charm the colonels and generals had gone missing. After all, Audrey had pretty much convinced herself the twenty year old was sleeping with her husband.

"Dress almost ready you try on again," Michi said. She stood humbly in front of Audrey who had ensconced herself on one end of a leather sofa.

"Won't need it. Damn typhoon. Everything is being canceled. No dance."

Michi looked at the American woman without comprehension.

"Canceled. No have dance," Audrey said, her exaggerated *pidgin* laced with exasperation. Why couldn't these people speak English?

"I finish dress soon."

Audrey lighted a Virginia Slim. "Bring me that drink." She pointed through the door to the half finished glass of Scotch she'd left on the kitchen table.

When Higa delivered the drink, Audrey considered the girl's rough, work-worn hands with their stubby fingers. It defied logic that she could sew with such dexterity--like a bumble bee being able to fly or whatever it was.

Audrey dragged on her cigarette and said, "Tell me, Michi are you married? Do you have a husband?"

"No, I no marry." Short, thick-framed, and self effacing, Michi lived with her widowed mother in a village further up the island. She had barely finished middle school. Outfitted in a nondescript short-sleeve white blouse, baggy brown skirt, and flip flops, she hardly seemed the Asian temptress Audrey had fashioned in her mind.

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

Michi covered her mouth with her hand to hide a smile. "It big secret."

I bet it's a big secret, Audrey thought.

"Do you like Colonel Adair?" she said.

"Oh, he very nice. Kind. American soldiers very nice. Kind."

"Has he ever . . .?"

The front door swung open, ushering in the sound of gurgling wetness and groaning wind. Lieutenant Colonel Gifford Adair pushed the door shut behind him and stepped into the entry.

"Hi, Audrey. Weather's really turning nasty. Raining pretty good," he said. He doffed his hat and rain jacket and delivered them to Michi to put in the closet.

"I know. It's awful," Audrey said.

Untying and removing his shoes, Giff said, "Far East Network says we're now in Condition Two. Wind's picking up."

Gifford Adair was an ordinary-looking man, his fortieth birthday come and gone, his thinning hair cut Army regulations short. At five feet nine inches, he wished he could have been taller. And the Army's physical standards for body fat challenged him. He attributed this to the fact that he was tied to a desk most of the time. That he was a meat and potatoes kind of guy from Topeka, of course, played a not insignificant role.

Her skin leathered from hours on the tennis court and her swept up hair legitimately blond, Audrey towered over her husband. Immaculate in her person, she maintained their quarters with equally nitpicky precision. She told anyone who'd listen the only attractive custom she'd come across in Japan was that of removing your shoes before setting foot inside the house. Cold, shrewd, and spare, with narrowed gray eyes, she was not easy to live with. She and her husband rarely smiled at each other.

"What's Michi still doing here? The typhoon could start pounding us hard any time now," Giff said. "Buses have already stopped running."

"Well, she'll just have to walk. These people are used to things like this," Audrey said. She had said the same sort of thing about *these people* when the U.S. Civil Administration had imposed island-wide rationing during a water shortage-- *they were used to it*.

"But it's not safe. Stuff is already starting to fly around. And she lives pretty far up the island. Beyond Kadena."

"How do you know where she lives?"

"Because she told us when you hired her--and she's mentioned her village a half dozen times."

"Maybe I wasn't paying attention. Anyway, she can't stay here. She'll just have to get wet."

"It'll take her hours on foot," Giff said. "I'll drive her and be back before the worst of it hits."

"It seems to me you're being *awfully noble*," Audrey said, the sarcasm so heavy it almost dragged her words to the floor.

Giff looked at his wife in irritated disbelief. "Come on Higa-san. I'll drive you home in our car."

Michi bowed, fetched her bag, and trailed the American officer out the door and into the foaming sheets of rain.

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The howling wind hammered the cinderblock house and the rain seemed to fly sideways. Typhoon Estelle, having ripped across Taiwan, now stomped its way over the Ryukyu archipelago and, according to Air Force meteorologists, striking Okinawa with the strongest sustained winds in ten years.

Audrey waited alone in her candlelit living room. The power had failed two hours earlier, and the wind howled without letup. With the shutters secured and the window air conditioner dead, the interior of the house dripped with near unbearable humidity. Audrey felt frightened, angry, and emotionally exhausted. She paced. She drank. She cried. God how she hated this place. She wanted to scream. And did.

At nine o'clock her husband returned home.

"You've been gone four hours, Giff. Four hours. Where were you? For all you knew, the roof could have blown off. Where were you?"

"Not likely. It's a flat roof."



“You know what I mean.”

“Trip up island was okay,” he said. “But, things got worse on the way back. Police and MPs closed Highway 58. I had to hunker down at Kadena Air Base for a couple of hours. Phones were out. Finally, I just decided to chance it. No fun, but here I am.”

“Is that it? Everything?” Her demeanor was that of a court martial prosecutor grilling a reluctant witness.

“I’m not sure I understand what . . .”

“Weren’t you parked somewhere with our sew girl?”

“What are you saying? Have you been drinking?”

“What if I have? Do you think people won’t know about your little affair? I’ll be a laughing stock.”

Outside, the keening wind, like a malevolent demon straight out of Okinawan folk lore, rattled the house, seemingly intent on pulling it apart.

“Michi? Are you saying I’m somehow involved with *Michi*? What in the world gave you that idea?”

“Aren’t you? I’ve seen the way you ogle her? And she gives you those calf eyes right back.”

“Are we on the same planet? I hardly ever see the girl. Audrey, what you’re saying makes no sense. I think it’s best if we try to get some sleep.”

“Four hours, Giff. And you were *so* eager to drive her home.”

|||||

The typhoon attacked the island for two days, and then passed. The sky transformed itself from dirty gray to sparkling blue, blue as the seas that again embraced the island. Crews cleared debris from the roads and restored storm-battered structures; once again civilian and military traffic mingled to crawl up and down the island’s narrow roads. Life, it seemed, had resumed its established routine.

But not for Audrey. Her doubts continued to soar. Giff’s behavior on the first day of the typhoon had, she calculated, lent those doubts credence. He must be up to something.

A few days after Typhoon Estelle spun itself into oblivion off the coast of Kyushu, Audrey joined several colleagues for bridge in the Officers’ Club ladies’ card room. The women doled out judgments with the same facility they dealt out cards. Near the top of their complaint list was the fact that, after almost thirty years of U.S. rule, Japanese control would soon be restored to Okinawa. The return was set for the following year, 1972. As did their husbands, the wives believed the United States should probably rule the island in perpetuity. After all, who won the war? Like the one-time denizens of the British Raj in India, they deemed things to be fine just the way they were.

Bidding had been suspended while Elaine Gilbert reported that a new shipment of those adorable ceramic Thai elephant end tables had come into the Air Force gift shop. Mention of the Air Force, in turn, led to a discussion of the poor service at the Air Force commissary. As Army wives, the bridge players felt absolutely discriminated against.

Finally, the game resumed. “Two hearts,” Audrey said after extended evaluation of her hand. She never seemed able to get the point count right.

“Three spades,” Colonel Kent’s wife, Jackie, said. She looked up from her hand and peered across the top

of her glasses. "I suppose you've all heard about Lieutenant Hughes."

Her partner, Marlene Coulter, smiled knowingly and nodded.

"I haven't," Audrey said. "I'm all ears."

"Well," Mrs. Kent lowered her voice. "According to Carl, this young officer got involved with one of those bar girls down in the Naminoue district in Naha."

"If you ask me they're all just looking to hook up with a white boy for a free ticket to the good old USA," Marlene said.

"I pass," Elaine said. "It's all too common. And it's all below the belt, if you ask me."

"That's just the beginning. Turns out he's been handing over whole cases of goods from the commissary and PX. Had stacks of unopened boxes when they raided her place--coffee, mayo, toothpaste--you name it."

"And apparently he's been squiring General Kyle's daughter around at the same time. Nobody suspected a thing," Coulter said. "Pass."

*Nobody suspected a thing.* Stories like this took up residence in Audrey's mind and marinated in simmering marital dissatisfaction. Giff was probably no different than the rest of them.

"I called your office a half dozen times. First the corporal said you'd gone to a meeting, and then nobody answered," Audrey said. "It's eight thirty, Giff."

"I was up island in the Ginbaru training area. We're doing a TV documentary on one of our special ops units." Gifford submerged into his favorite leather recliner, one they had dragged with them from post to post for years.

"Ginbaru? Isn't that where you said our little sew girl comes from?"

"It's near there. Yes. Don't tell me we're back on that again."

"Just a coincidence I suppose--you're being there on her day off."

"Just a coincidence, Audrey. Yes. Just a coincidence. Where are these ideas coming from?"

"Well, we haven't . . . we haven't . . . been, you know, *intimate* for a long time. And you men . . . you men . . . even one of the chaplains had to be sent home with some disease."

"It's all in your head, Audrey. A handful of men . . ." He got up, went to the sideboard and mixed himself a whiskey and water.

"More than a handful."

"But, in all these years, I've never given you reason to . . . Maybe you're feeling stressed. I know it hasn't been easy for you, what with the typhoons, and the water rationing, and the heat . . ."

"And that snake that was in the garden, that dreadful big snake," Audrey said.

"Yeah. That *habu* would have scared the bejeezus out of anybody."

"Oh, Giff, I know I shouldn't doubt you, but . . ."

Nonetheless, she did doubt him, and with Michi of all people. His wife's nagging suspicion preyed on Giff's mind. He had to dissuade her from firing the girl, on whom she depended for a good deal more than sewing. But, although Audrey acquiesced and half apologized for doubting him, he realized his argument they should retain Michi simply intensified her doubts. In her mind, his advocacy of keeping Michi on somehow confirmed his involvement with the Okinawan girl.

Why? What, he wondered, did Audrey possibly think he could see in this very ordinary young woman? Perhaps he'd missed something. Or perhaps Audrey was coming slightly unhinged? Her mother, he recalled, certainly had her problems.

Whatever the reason, now that the notion had been thrust into his thought process and nurtured there by Audrey's frequent insinuations and outright accusations, Giff found himself viewing the Okinawan girl through different eyes. Audrey had, albeit unwittingly, planted and then cultivated a seed. What *did* his wife think he saw in the girl? On reflection, he decided Michi was actually kind of cute. And what were calf eyes anyway?

On a Saturday afternoon not long after his wife's latest round of innuendo-laden questioning, stimulated by his *purely academic* interest in discovering the reason for the girl's alleged attraction, he found himself peering over the top of his *Stars and Stripes* newspaper and staring (no other word would do) at Michi's upraised bottom while she scrubbed the kitchen floor on hands and knees. Ridiculous. He scolded himself. *Ridiculous*. But, as the days passed, she transited his mental landscape more and more frequently. And, although he could not bring a specific story to mind, he recalled locker room talk at the golf course about servant girls who supposedly ached with unrequited love for their masters. He wondered.

Oblivious to his scrutiny, Michi went quietly and happily about her sewing and her housework. The *big secret* she had alluded to in speaking to Audrey was the fact a marriage to a local boy had been arranged for her by a go-between. She knew the prospect delighted her mother; her only daughter would not end up as an *old miss* and she herself would be secure in her advanced years. The young man had graduated from high school and worked at a good job in a local tire repair shop. The Adairs remained unaware of any of this.

Audrey's suspicions notwithstanding, Giff sometimes came across as almost unbearably righteous. Despite his growing curiosity about Michi, any dalliance struck him as unthinkable. Yet, he wondered if he saw himself as better than he really was. Certainly, Giff realized there had been no virtue in abstaining from something that hadn't interested him. That had been easy. But, now, repeatedly struck by anomalous urges set in motion by his supposed relationship with the girl, the challenge would be to demonstrate his moral fiber by continuing to treat her, not as an object of desire, but simply as an ordinary employee. It didn't happen--increasingly his mind danced with notions that would have surely discomfited Michi and, if pursued to conclusion, would have substantiated his wife's suspicions. Giff's moral fiber, like that of a rope subjected to constant abrasion, frayed quickly.

As the days passed, from time to time Giff caught himself ogling the sew girl, precisely as Audrey had accused him of doing. Michi revealed no sign of reciprocating his attention, but perhaps, he thought, that merely manifested her modest nature or her cultural upbringing. Once or twice he believed he detected a slight smile, perhaps even a welcoming one, when she became aware he had his eye on her. His imagination pushed ahead.

In fact, Michi had become quite conscious of the attention he paid her--and it made her uncomfortable. She did not like the way he looked at her. She had been warned by her mother and by her friends to be careful when she went to work in an American base house. And she had listened to a seemingly endless series of stories, almost all with unfortunate endings.



But, she needed her job. She and her mother had little other income, at least until she could get married. Employment security served as a dominant *leitmotif* in her relationship with the Adairs. Michi had once accidentally shattered a Waterford Crystal goblet. Audrey, in high dudgeon, had threatened to make sure, if she did such a thing again, Michi would never obtain another job on a U.S. base. Michi believed her. So she worried. Surely she must take care not to offend either of the Adairs.

=====

Returning from a Saturday round of golf at Awase Meadows, more than a month after the typhoon, Giff spotted Michi waiting at the bus stop outside the Makiminato Housing Area. Impulsively he swung his Buick in a u-turn at the gate, pulled up in front of her, and lowered the window.

“Higa-san, can I give you a lift?”

“Too much trouble. No thank you, sir.”

“No trouble. Come on. Get in.” Giff leaned over and swung open the passenger side door.

No clouds showed themselves and the sun cast an especially hot glare. Michi’s little parasol was inadequate against its heat. She had been at the Adair house since early morning, mostly on her feet ironing, when Audrey *magnanimously* released her at four o’clock. The buses came by only infrequently and Michi felt exhausted; she hesitated, and then reluctantly accepted the offered ride. Once in the car, she twisted her hands in front of her and stared down at the floorboard.

“No reason to be shy.” Giff sensed what he perceived to be an aura of vulnerability. “Do you like the air conditioning?”

She nodded.

He spun the radio dial and picked up the Armed Forces Network. “How about American music?”

Again she nodded.

Donny Osmond sang *Go Away Little Girl*. Listening to the words, Giff stifled a laugh and smiled. “You know this song?” he asked.

She shook her head. Three Dog Night and *Mama Told Me* elicited the same response.

They rode along without speaking for fifteen or twenty minutes. Giff continued north past military bases, guttering towns, tile-roofed villages, fields alive with flowers--red *deigo* and yellow chrysanthemums--and hillsides engulfed in green after recent rains.

Suddenly he broke the silence by blurting out, “Michi, Mrs. Adair thinks you are my girlfriend. Would you really like to be my girlfriend?”

“Oh, no, sir.”

“Are you certain?”

She did not answer but slid over as close to the door as possible, so close her breath created condensation on the window.

They had entered on an open stretch of highway when Giff suddenly turned onto a side road through a cane field. “Short cut,” he said.

The worry on Michi’s face yielded to all-too-real trepidation.

"This not way," Michi said, her eyes now like those of a frightened child. "Please, sir, you go back."

Ignoring her protests, Giff branched off on a farm lane that was little more than a rutted path and into a grove of Okinawan pines, where he stopped and killed the motor. He edged nearer to her and then, apparently changing his mind, indicated she should get out of the car.

Michi had the look of a trapped creature. "Better I walk," she said and took two or three steps in the direction from which they had come.

But, before she had time to run, she found herself wrestling with him in the long grass at the side of the road. He fumbled with the buttons of her blouse and tore the garment as she struggled to break his grip.

"Adair-san, please you stop." She gasped, her voiced freighted with fear.

He ignored her pleas. "Come on, Michi." Sweat cascaded off his brow as they struggled. "I know you want to..."

Desperate to escape, she momentarily broke free and seized a jagged rock, the size of a baseball, from the side of the road. "No. No. You go way." She lifted her arm and threatened him with the rock.

Undeterred, he brought her down again. This time, flailing about, she slammed the rock against the side of his head with all the force she could muster. She struck him again, and again. Giff rolled off her, staggered to his feet, and, blood trickling down his face, slumped against a tree. He said nothing. He did not move. He sat there in the grass, eyes open, and a look of great surprise on his ashen face. He tried to get up--and could not. The blood dripped onto the white collar of his golf shirt where it soaked in, red then brown.

Ten minutes later, Giff remained propped against the tree when two straw-hatted Okinawan farm workers came riding along the lane on a small tractor. Michi knelt a few feet away from her assailant, clutching together her torn blouse and crying. Their concern solely for the sobbing girl, neither worker bothered to render any aid to the injured man. One of them stayed with Michi, while the other one drove off to a police sub-station in a nearby village. Later, never-verified stories circulated in the American community that the remaining farmer had kicked the defenseless American several times.

The police arrived first, then the MPs, and finally the ambulance. The medics rushed Giff to the emergency room of the Camp Kue Army Hospital. He lay unconscious in the intensive care unit, the surgeons shaking their heads over the x-rays and the brain damage they revealed. After he had been in the hospital for five days the authorities there air evacuated Giff, who remained in a vegetative state, to Tripler Army Hospital in Hawaii.

As doctors and military authorities discussed Giff's injuries, phrases like *quality of life*, *impossible to recover*, and *a damn shame*, infiltrated Audrey's memory bank. Her American associates claimed to believe that the girl's story came across as highly suspect. There had to be more to it, some explanation that did not cast Giff in the role of a predator. And, of course, Audrey's fellow wives knew how *those Okinawan girls* behaved, the shameless little vixens. She'd probably lured him with some Asian wiles and literally led him down that garden path.

Not that it would have mattered to the panel of self-appointed judges, but Michi's life also crashed. Many Okinawans felt sympathetic; after all, they had survived a long history of sexual violence directed against Okinawan women and girls by American troops. Although the prosecutor had brought no charges against her, unlike the others, the boy Michi hoped to marry failed to sympathize with her. There could be no good reason, he declared, for Michi to have been alone with the American in that remote place. His mind worked amazingly like Audrey's.

Michi, he asserted, had to have been romantically involved with the officer. So far as he was concerned, she had been tainted. There would be no marriage. For the distraught girl, other marriage prospects had now been rendered unlikely.

A few days after Giff had been med evaced to Trippler, Audrey waited in the Kadena terminal for her own flight back to Honolulu where ostensibly she could be near her husband. There with his wife to see Audrey off, Giff's CO, Colonel Carl Kent, sought to comfort her.

"Everyone who knew him--er, who knows him--considers Giff to be one of our best officers, a man of honor and integrity," he said. "Someday when he recovers, and I'm sure he'll get better, Audrey, we'll be able to learn what really happened. It just doesn't add up, what that girl claims. Not the Gifford Adair I know."

"Thank you so much, Colonel, for your kind words. You and Jackie have just been pillars of strength in this difficult time. I surely don't know what I'd have done without you."

Yet, whatever positive gloss people tried to put on it, Audrey knew Giff had been destroyed, both in body and reputation. He would never recover, and her own future had become caught up in a swirl of frightening uncertainty. The prospect of perpetually nursing a mindless invalid filled her with anxiety and dread. She couldn't do it. Whatever happened, like Giff's, her life had been unalterably damaged.

Had she been right to suspect him? Or, by giving voice to unwarranted suspicion had she actually stimulated his interest in and pursuit of the sew girl? Was it her suspicion of infidelity that ultimately drove them to their destruction? Was he pushed or did he jump? She'd have to work out the answers for herself. Giff wasn't talking and, she suspected, likely never would.



## *Genius*

That old, square piano  
once a roommate of Beethoven's,  
balanced precious stave paper scribbling  
upon its narrow shelf,  
facing the maestro's bench  
amid the other empty pages  
that lingered.

His practice room windows  
were open that day,  
a day of extended effort, work,  
minimal result and frustration  
when the breeze, suddenly,  
with three short bursts  
and an extended breath,  
flipped the empty sheets  
upon the floor  
and as the sun was reflecting  
off the Rhine,

Beethoven scooped up  
the blank pages,  
mimicking rhythmically  
those four repetitions  
into a fifth.

## *Regarding the Clarinet*

Having gathered power and capacity  
through years of practice and work  
to induce a resonance worthy of attention,  
keeping fingers nimble,  
cascading between silver moguls  
planted upon grenedilla grain  
in a perfect cylindrical contour,  
tuned and dripping with wetted breath,  
I play away, constantly  
navigating dotted notes and multiple flags  
behind an expressive face,  
the way a long happiness melds cheeks upwards,  
inducing a squint.  
No lack of endurance compromises  
the integrity to sustain the passion  
which exudes from the parchment  
upon the stand,  
that stream of sound,  
dissecting thin air in the room  
with compounding ripples  
until walls tremble  
to the timbre of song  
and slowly a brilliant varnish  
builds upon the dull papered walls  
and a new voice, like others  
hidden in the world,  
finds a home to sing or dance  
or meditate in any place,  
anytime I play.  
Behind this face, in this mind,  
where no one can see,  
I have burned another color  
between the letters of my name  
to remain.

## *The Project*

He felt as if he were born  
to the sawdust and nails  
of writing, working daily  
in hours of solitude  
to construct an architecture  
which at times  
seemed like a pointless task,  
devoid of shelter for any dweller,  
a paper house  
easily toppled in a stray breeze.  
On many afternoons  
he abandoned the work,  
meandered outdoors  
to view the project from afar,  
somewhat defeated yet relieved  
once he soaked his head  
in the light of the sun  
which cleansed the metaphors  
from his brain,  
allowing a bit of respite  
while the half house  
toppled in a sigh of wind.  
He could hear the creaks  
of settling rubble.  
Fallen walls,  
once separated by nouns and verbs,  
were now splintered by light  
in puffs of dust,  
carried off with a gust,  
floating until an optional blueprint  
penciled in his head,  
a new rhythm of nails  
that bonded another design  
with an alternate configuration.



## *Teleological*

At Mount Lassen's Bumpus Hell  
fumaroles spitting fetid sulfur  
made our nostrils flare.  
Vectors, tension lines, nostalgic legatos  
and scalded kleptocrats in white shirts  
squiggled like wound-down triumphators  
released from underground caverns  
as spumes of steam enveloped us.  
Up above the snow line residua  
of limp etiologies hit the deck,  
our psyches unable to deny  
that try as they will  
fact and fancy cannot  
ameliorate an unfocused state.

When young we explored intertidals,  
massively populated warm littorals  
of the Sea of Cortez. With rubber boots  
we walked upon thousands of barnacles,  
Sally Lightfoot crabs, violet anemones,  
pimpled starfish, weird wobbly worms,  
limpets and an occasional cephalopod.  
Our boat anchored off the coast  
where mangroves cast a succulent scent  
from an inland slough weighty with life  
as we watched a big school  
of quixotic manta rays  
with no less than twenty foot spans  
rocket through warp and welter  
of turquoise waters.

## *Counter Clockwise*

1.

No longer cock o' the wok stir fried.  
What it is to be a million trillion  
years dead, nobody knowing  
anything you thought or said,  
disheveled veneer of fine print  
sheared, dismembered, shred  
sailor in an evanescent  
underwater wonder grave  
where supernatural treasure  
intuits this prerogative:  
dissolution transcends death.

2.

*East of Eden* bushwhacked!  
James Dean crushed in his Porsche.  
You skid face first down the alley  
after rolling a strike.  
Sarsaparilla sunsets  
deaden the senses,  
and it's futile to expect  
help from repentance.  
Rebel amid yelps—  
the ability to predict,  
interdict vision,  
quantify wisdom  
pulled like a tooth.  
Truth serums obviously  
concocted daily  
at the Getty however  
no remorse over  
felled trees  
and broken treaties.  
Nematodes trampled  
by tractor-trailers  
that fishtail across  
a barbarous tarmac.

## *The Silver Fox*

After 15 years of  
nothing but phone calls  
twice a month  
The Silver Fox  
flies into town

Fitted riding breeches  
tall black boots  
snug Brooks Brothers sweater  
she sashays down the Jet way  
in my direction

Our eyes meet  
and nervous smiles follow  
she is looking at me  
the same as I look at her  
with slight confusion

I examine her long thin  
delicate fingers attached  
to her fragile hands  
her real age hides  
behind many lies

We sit across  
from one another  
stealing glimpses  
of one another's  
uncanny similarities

Almond shaped eyes  
thick full lips  
slight cleft in our chins  
tiny little ears  
we move in unison

As the evening approaches  
and the shyness fades  
we decide to take a walk  
so I could show her  
where she left me

An Oklahoma ice storm leaves  
light ice on the driveway  
I did not care I sent her down  
that way so she could collide  
with the ice and slip and slide  
in her floor length Silver Fox



## *Winter Chill*

The pale ghost of dawn  
A grove of trees  
Faded derelicts  
Without leaves  
A tracery of branches  
Bent and twisted  
Shades of grey  
On a grim, cold day.

## *Where's My Baby?*

*(for DC)*

Where's my baby, I croon  
to the half-full moon  
remembering our kissing,  
half of me missing.

Yes, I feel like  
just a slice  
of the greater Geist  
without his accompanying spice.

I wonder when  
our moon will  
be full again.

There's a dwindling  
of the beat, of  
every autumn leaf.

Yet in our expanding flame,  
we are not the same.

Our earth is risen.

## *Monsters*

As children, we are told there are no monsters.  
That they are only imaginary,  
They don't exist.  
So we take comfort in that,  
And ignore the true monsters.  
The ones that will tear you apart,  
Without spilling blood.  
They will murder you,  
But leave you living.  
They will take you away  
Yet leave you in your home.  
There are monsters in this world,  
But they do not hide under the bed.  
They live in your head.



## *Nude Male with Echo #13*

The days  
the veins  
are strange-  
ly silent,  
I wonder  
where my  
adrenaline  
could have  
been chased  
without  
me? Sure-  
ly youth's  
pass  
is less  
jarring  
than I could  
go fast  
& then I  
couldn't.

## *Nude Male with Echo #14*

I am calmer  
because I promised  
the remainder  
to hold on  
as long as possible.  
Why the count-  
down?  
That's not helping.  
I have told many  
people that I am  
aimed at bliss,  
but oh, how  
this panic  
shakes my hands  
& I haven't felt  
that since  
I quite drinking.  
Detox to age  
& age again,  
like I can never  
stop using time  
& of course  
in the parlance  
of this age, time  
is using me up.

## *Nude Male with Echo #15*

Shoulders rolled back  
towards the end of the west,  
I am wearing a hat only  
because I am afraid  
of what will happen when I  
take, take, take the sun only  
as my first face. The skin  
around my eyes is frightened  
of that sort of thing.  
I trust the hair on my chest  
to lie about my ability  
to be resolute in the desert.



## *Richmond*

she is the only woman  
in the nursing home  
with tattoos.

i saw them once  
during the month she was bedridden  
and the privacy curtains  
hung open.

she tells me  
and squeezes  
an empty medicine bottle into my palm.

it is amazing  
she has survived this long,

she does not want me to remember her  
as a still born in reverse.  
she prefers a sock full of bullets.  
there is too much feline and Savannah in her.

in Richmond,  
she had seen the axed arm of a tree  
that grew through and around  
the wires of a fence.  
inseparable,  
wood from metal.  
they left the branch  
when they took the rest.

she likes that.

## *Red Flag*

a pop scoot motion  
por la cabeza  
folds a mountain over the drain

creaking.

I stare like a guppy  
tranquila  
in a tidal wave:

ok, I guess.

the naked happy of a Sunday  
contando la perdida de voz / vos  
dormant blue of 160 bathroom tiles:

rehabilitated, I guess.

a skip sink intention  
la culpa, no hay  
he throws a shirt at me:

protection, I guess.

you're a mess.  
put some clothes on.

I'd / I do.  
hazme

anything.  
lo que sea.

## *Seguida*

he falls in love

walking into sliding glass doors.

no regrets

110%.

he scratches your names into cliché shit

like trees

and stars.

he kisses you

leaving his fly open.

bites the inside of his mouth

while chewing his feels.

he does it like

saying goodbye

but then walking in the same direction.

he makes love like

pressing all the buttons on an elevator.

2 years,

a dog,

and a haircut later

you realize

the back of your neck

he squeezes it too hard.

no regrets

110%.



## *in flight*

Fatima, daughter of Khadija, is a pilot.  
She is trustworthy as salt. Her knowledge  
demystifies navigational instruments.  
She holds a perfect safety record.

The Prophet has a seat in economy class.  
the airline lets him ride free. He stretches  
and yawns, works the crossword with  
a number two pencil. He is looking for  
a short word for handlers of history.

He is thinking about the usefulness of an eraser,  
the technology of flight. Like Revelation,  
a matter of fuel, acceleration, lift.

He contemplates the pilot's job; to crease  
a brief diagonal in the sky's fabric  
then fly the 747 at 38,000 feet.  
Fatima does this. *He is pleased* —  
he tells himself — *to be in her hands*.

He taps his eraser on the tray table and pauses,  
a four letter word that begins with the letter B —  
considers scholars and mangled meanings;  
that is, what they made of his work  
his life, the Message. Bent or bash won't fit.  
*Ah: bias.*

## *Uncovering A Monster*

4.1

The monster`s skin  
a pall of shit  
It`s bloating corpse  
choking on  
Apician graces

4.2

I was Majdal  
now I am Askhelon  
the ground  
cursed by God  
is settled  
becomes unsettled.

4.3

The earth becomes twisted  
beneath the wheel  
the wheel  
scars  
the earth.  
What was  
Red River  
crumbles  
beneath.

5.0

The snow has fallen  
and fallen  
over tony mountain  
over Ansar three  
now we are off the land  
and held in acres of misery

5.1

Winter crumbles  
with what`s left  
grinds into the earth  
A new corpse of spring.

## *Why the Swallows Flew from Egypt*

To Egypt crumbling—  
Things around me  
Fall apart--  
Bullets shot at night,  
Explosives defused—  
This is not the place  
I was born.  
Wishing for souvenirs  
To bring back  
My college years—  
The innocence of  
Being a dreamy  
Poet—  
The smile at reciting a  
Poem—  
A trembling flower in between  
My forgotten book  
Half read.  
The phobia before an exam—  
Who would have thought  
That I would long for  
All these things—  
Amidst a country  
That has lost its soul—  
The torment—  
Or not knowing what's to come—  
The shedding of tears—  
The fuming skies—  
The death  
Of young hopes, young girls,  
For merely daring to  
Criticize an older  
Generation—  
Fossiled as they are—  
With their wrinkled eyes—  
Their rigid—  
Unpromising steps—  
The birds that chant heedless  
Of the bullets to come—  
I envy the birds  
Their calmness—  
Their freedom and  
Their childhood ecstasy  
At the sight of water—  
Their dance among



The flowers of spring—  
I envy you your courage  
My friend—  
The honest—  
Summation of our past—  
The insight—  
The revelations—  
Of a—leftist journalist—  
I pine in my hesitation—  
The torment—  
Of a hidden female—  
I regret—  
My years—  
My tears spilt—  
Over disputes on work.  
Today the sun will shine—  
And we'll never know  
Who killed who—  
Or why the land crumbled—  
Why the rain dropped—  
Why the swallow flew--

## *Scrapbooking to Forget You*

But in vain,  
No matter  
How I collect butterflies—  
Insane---  
My love for you—  
Men—  
You see—  
May not discern—  
The fiery passion—  
Inside—  
A woman's soul—  
They see only their  
Vision of the world—  
A butterfly—  
A crocheted—leaflet.  
And remnants of London's  
Culture—  
You see me, too—  
Besieged by the army  
Long ago—  
Me, too—  
Protected  
So  
I wouldn't fall apart—  
Me, too—  
Patched up like a  
Paper maché doll—  
You see—me—

The incarnation of  
Another Ophelia—  
Only Rimbaud won't mention  
Me in his poems—  
Only you, like other men—  
Needed me stronger than  
I am—  
Only you believed my words—  
Never  
Discerning the pain—  
Inside—  
For how would you know—  
That there are flowers  
Behind the barbed wire—  
You would pass by—  
You know—

Analyzing—  
Dissecting—  
Feeling your way  
Perhaps—  
Not knowing that my pain  
Is deeper than mere—  
News scattered in  
A puppet show—  
Forget me—  
Yes, do—  
Like all. Ancient  
Civilizations—we have nothing  
But our past to boast of—  
The hidden mummies—  
In the closets—to show—  
Even that—  
Is stolen—  
Excavated by some  
Crazy archaeologist--



## *Killing Gods*

If a cause  
Is the because  
Of what is,  
If I am not more man  
Because of my suffering,  
Hardened as iron  
By tyrannous pain  
Growing colossal and mythic,  
If I live a coward's life  
Drinking down the day's cheap win,  
If with my suffering  
I still suffer more  
Piling pain upon pain,  
If the cause of my pain is diffusive,  
Neither this nor that,  
No what no why,  
If I hurdle vain questions to the void  
As it echoes back bleak nothing,  
Silent streaks of sickly blue  
Too vast for my imaginings,  
If I say if  
There is a cause,  
If a God knows why,  
I wish his death with every tear I cry.  
DEATH TO ALL KNOWING GODS!

## *No There to Dwell*

One is alone,  
Always single,  
Even in the largest crowds,  
Or surrounded  
By as many objects  
As space is for.  
Given time and space  
With all its length and clutter,  
Given energy and force  
With all its velocity and might,  
Given any living known thing,  
Cast in two or more less knowns  
Or even real unknowns,  
Add infinity if you must,  
Still,  
Now or then or when  
One is alone  
And shall be simply that  
With every breathing hour left.  
Just this one fact  
As certain as anyone can be  
Given thought:  
There is no going away from alone,  
No there to dwell  
There is  
Just you  
And the wide divide  
that separates.

## *The Poet*

Within the poet's clasp  
Gasping reality breached  
By life's riot swagger  
Can mend and cultivate  
A sound ground for living.  
The vast prairie of grammar,  
No larger arbitrary,  
Opens its things  
To the poet as he sings  
Sounds strung in symbolic form.  
Simple symbol or complex  
Bass, string, or anything:  
He sings of life  
Simply symphonically  
Covering vast terrain  
With laconic veins  
Of orchestral sensation.  
A sound ground to be upon:  
The poet can mystic the flow of life,  
Fill space with potent words,  
Divine impotent nature  
And vault it full of feeling.  
He can sound out nature,  
Nomenclature,  
Be mythically realized,  
Feel heaven and earth niggled into nouns,  
adverbs, adjectives, and other sounds.  
He can spy reality,  
Survey remembrance  
Hidden behind busy life  
And conjugate its substance.  
He is a hieroglyphic of terrific ingenuity  
An inhabitant of life on sound ground  
...the poet.



## *Bohemian Bonfire*

Look you in your summery eyes again  
Carve your imagination with my pen  
Tug your heart with my thread of desire  
Fire up the long-gone flame of dreams  
Return you to the island of hope

Don't hold back...  
So go ahead...  
Fill up your emptiness with tears  
Free the stopper of the combustion chamber  
Savour the pain you turn away from

Please tell me...  
How is it like to breathe freely in Normalcy?  
How d'you like the nightly pills called Mediocrity?  
How is it like existing in the fear of Security?  
How far would you sacrifice your Authenticity?

How is the view from the iron-fenced tower?  
Perching there as you are....  
Marvelling at...  
                    the gallant battlefield...  
                                            of the bohemian bonfire...

How do you be You?  
At the end of each nine-to-five struggles...  
Dwelling at...  
                    the lost distant memory...  
                                            of the bohemian bonfire...

## *Landscape in a Painter's Mind*

A stroke of volcanic crimson  
A splash of navy blue  
A brush of drab dullness  
A line of raven omen

A life of pitch darkness  
A frame for close entrapment  
In an empty stale chamber  
Filled with the blessing of a falling angel

A hand as free as the mind that dictates it...  
A mind full of landscape  
Illustrating an impotent desire...  
Showcasing a stifled inspiration...

Leaving nothing  
.....but blank desolation  
To an artist with the courage  
.....of a bleeding tiger

## *Je ne sais quoi*

Tell him what I like about him, he said,  
I want him to guess, I said.  
There must be something, he said.  
There are lots of reasons to love him, I said.

Then tell him please... tell him true, he said.  
I am going to, I said.  
He needs to know! He wants to, he said.  
Sure, my love. This is what it is..., I said

It can't be money. It can't be power, he said.  
It can't be money. It can't be power, I said.  
Could it be his charm? Could it be his talent, he said.  
It could. Yes, it could, my darling, I said.

Tell him... his love. Tell him true, he said.  
It's his depth. It's his magnitude. Perhaps, I said.  
The way he loves my big heart and small hands, he said.  
And the way my universe expands in his, I said.

It's the way I adore your short short hair, I'm sure.  
Ah yes. And all the things you don't. Perhaps.  
It's the way he holds his speech and his justice.  
The way you hold your silence, create heaven'n hell and all-in-'tween.

## *I Live, I Tell*

Your fucked-up life, man. Hey, ain't'ya shameful?  
One life and it's mine. Wanna have some spice?  
When will you finally become useful?  
I feel, I peel, I cry, I fly, I rise...  
We've been young. We've been old. Passing old souls  
Ride on and we ride on, we ride, keep on  
We've been hurt, we've been loved. A roadless road  
Write on, don't stop, we just have to write on

We've been right. We've been wrong. A coaster roll.  
And right on, we are, hell, we've been right on  
We've been hurt, we've been loved. A roadless road  
Write on, don't stop, we just have to write on  
Will you end your idleness and get right?  
I live, I tell, I sink, I sing, I write