

A Hankie in the Breast Pocket

A hankie in the breast pocket was for the sniffles.

A bowtie around the neck was for the rest.

In the way the lone bud extended forlorlornly

For the ear of the man in the picture

as if it were the hand of his lover reaching

from across the bed to part his hair—

If we asked him where he was would he say: here?

In the studio where there was a window

That opened to that mind of summer

Where a vase's gold etching matched

the carpet matched the tip of the slick

after which he washed his face. Flush.

Flick. If only the tight lapel of that steel rose

pierced his heart --- Oh grace of some yesteryear

romance of someone far he was thinking of

with his lips pursed. If only the table would tip over

blossom on blossom and he might smile.

The Nature of a City

The nature of a city is that it is built for someone else. Otherwise, a covenant. Otherwise, a show. A script was written for the hero but only on the premise that after a long bout of illness, he would be willing to cut the cost and be someone else. Four men did not equal four men unless the last one standing was laughing. As on a church ceiling, five devils flicked their tails snickering against the sun while a god sat on his throne and by the gesture of his right hand extolled the virtues of humanity's diminishment. Outside, the bazaars gave and gave but there was not enough space for: hemp, rope, basket, stone, fruit, market, screw, driver, cabinet, glow. There were toys peddled on the streets where you pulled and pulled that monkey of the self and it climbed without reaching anywhere other than itself.

Standstill, Stasis

The way the river carried a boat.

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The way a boy and his shimmer stood
at the edge of the stream unthinking.

*

Before the invention of the telephone.

Before the construction of the tram

*

that would take the flowers from that mossy
mountain top down to a sweltering town

*

It takes a man willing to walk up and down from a village
to determine how long it takes for the aster to wilt

*

in the neighbor's garden, inside a vase. There is a fruit
plucked with out asking like a letter stuffed

*

with one's thoughts fresh as the underbelly
of not saying. Unbruised.

*

Unpromised. After the war was lost.

I Broke My Heart Said the Man in Rattan

I broke my heart, said the man, in rattan,

as he sang a song in clippings.

How special it was—that feeling—to be broken.

A clutter of *things*

that could become the pretext for a painting

of Place. If only it held him: twig to needle, to groove.

A public loneliness made mainstay to the day itself

so the inside become the outside

to be seen by the shape of a shell battered,

and bent on a wall to become decoration.

How fortunate to be gathered,

he thought, as if by accident

There was a chair to sit on.

There was a shirt.



COLLIER NOGUES

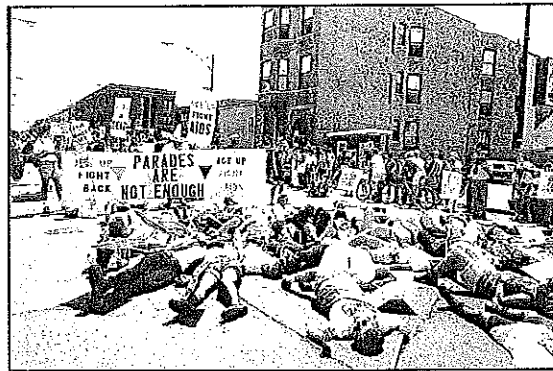
“Art is an act of violence against the violent silence.” —Ralph Angel

“The liar often suffers from amnesia. Amnesia is the silence of the unconscious. To lie habitually, as a way of life, is to lose contact with the unconscious. It is like taking sleeping pills, which confer sleep but blot out dreaming. The unconscious wants truth. It ceases to speak to those who want something else more than truth.... The complexity and fecundity of dreams come from the complexity and fecundity of the unconscious struggling to fulfill that desire. The complexity and fecundity of poetry come from the same struggle.”

—Adrienne Rich, “Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying” in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (1975)



AIDS activism button with ACT UP's slogan, 1980s.



ACT UP + Queer Nation die-in, Chicago, June 1992.
Photograph: Genyphyr Novak.

Mississippi

I know forgetting myself is a good thing, the best loss.
The trees look soft in the fog's distance, egg-colored light
all over them. Even the sheep,
eggy.

The earth dries in ribs the rain has drawn on it.

Trees here grow up out of the water. Too little light
to tell what color but the ground that isn't shining is made
of leaves.

So these pools are mirrors:

were it on earth as it is in heaven,
blue land of we-will-all-meet-at-the-table,

I could be
for other than myself
without first having to lose someone I love.

How I Take Care of Her Now

She knocks on my classroom door, interrupting.
She's slimmer, and healthy, but her

skirt is falling down
so I help her pin it. The feeling is

one I've grown used to,
of stepping in to help with what

her hands won't do. But I understand
mine isn't the real dream—I'm in

her dream, and in it her skirt isn't on, it's
that kind of dream,

and fixing her dream is how I am helping.

Late-Stage Progression

The house was cordoned off by strings
at waist height to deflect the ghosts

who run in straight lines, their faces flat to the wind.
Once, I came out on the porch

where she was sitting and there they were,
face down in the yard in graves

like long shadows she was casting:
a man made up of pieces of policemen

stitched together, dressed in uniform
and his brother, shouldered like the golem

but whose head was very small and perfectly a cube.
The home they made in her bones

was the safe one; there they could not ruin
more than we could repair.

It was when they came through the lung wall
that she took the strings down from around the house

and let in the rest who wanted in.

The Bomb

The bomb itself, rather than we who made it, largely
invented the characteristics of being softened by abrasion,
being wounded, flayed, our eyes melted; and from this what
came to be beloved was the gloss and fear of children in
general.

Fear itself, rather than the flayed concrete which banked it,
comprised all our houses; and from this surprise what came
to be a shelter was cruelty toward our enemy.

The moon itself, its greens, the water casting back and forth
for its owner, these largely absorbed our fears of being cruel
and inhuman; and from this sanction we came to wave our
children forward through the glossy bomb-soft grasses.

The war itself, rather than the children who loved it, largely
weathered the white flags, and we ourselves weathered the
war; and from this window into our power we came at last
to see our flags as white with triumph, in a greenlit glossy
childless night.

[This poem riffs on syntax borrowed from John Dower's Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of WWII.]



TAMMY LAI-MING HO

Seamus Heaney

Lupins

They stood. And stood for something. Just by standing.
In waiting. Unavailable. But there
For sure. Sure and unbending.
Rose-fingered dawn's and navy midnight's flower.

Seed packets to begin with, pink and azure,
Sifting lightness and small jittery promise:
Lupin spires, erotics of the future,
Lip-brush of the blue and earth's deep purchase.

O pastel turrets, pods and tapering stalks
That stood their ground for all our summer wending
And even when they blanched would never balk.
And none of this surpassed our understanding.

Tammy Ho

The Famine, 1959-62

One said, he felt like he was a horse: wild,
Low, hungry, when he was chewing – chewing –
Chewing – chewing those endless biscuits of
Hard grass and tree bark.

One said, doors were unnecessary:
There was nothing to steal.
When she was four and a half, she witnessed this:
From an unfinished window (no nails
No frames, no meral): the old granny
Who sold fish lay flat on the ground,
Her arms were swollen like pig's legs. Her round
Calves were like spiral paper lanterns, but bruised. An
Innocently remembered image unshed through time:
Fifty years, and those open and red wrinkled eyes
Still glare.

One said, people exchanged with neighbours dead
And lean children. One didn't eat one's own.
Trees were all white, branches no roots, in Spring,
In Summer. An unforgettable sight –
Tree bark gone; naked skin
Under the naked sky illuminated the desperate
Energy of hunger.

April 2008

David Sedaris

Fri 15 Jul 2011 22.59 BST



David Sedaris: Chicken toenails, anyone?

David Sedaris would eat Chinese food - but only as an alternative to starving. So a visit to China was always going to be tricky...

I think it hurt that, before landing in China, Hugh and I spent a week in Tokyo, where the food was, as always, sublime, everything so delicate and carefully presented. With meals I drank tea, which leads me to another great thing about Japan - its bathrooms. When I was younger they wouldn't have mattered so much. Then I hit 50 and found that I had to pee all the time. In Tokyo, every subway station has a free public men's room. The floors and counters are aggressively clean and beside each urinal is a hook for hanging your umbrella.

This was what I had grown accustomed to when we flew from Narita to Beijing International, where the first thing one notices is what sounds like a milk steamer, the sort a cafe uses when making lattes and cappuccinos. "That's odd," you think. "There's a coffee bar on the elevator to the parking deck?" What you're hearing, that incessant guttural hiss, is the sound of one person, and then another, dredging up phlegm, seemingly from the depths of his or her soul. At first you look over, wondering, "Where are you going to put that?" A better question, you soon realise, is, "Where *aren't* you going to put it?"

I saw wads of phlegm glistening like freshly shucked oysters on staircases and escalators. I saw them frozen into slicks on the sidewalk and oozing down the sides of walls. It often seemed that if people weren't spitting, they were coughing without covering their mouths, or shooting wads of snot out of their noses. This was done by plugging one nostril and using the other as a blowhole. "We Chinese think it's best just to get it out," a woman told me over dinner one night. She said that, in her opinion, it's disgusting that a westerner would use a handkerchief and then put it back into his pocket.

Chinese Silence No. 24

after David Sedaris, "Chicken Toenails, Anyone?"

We are all just animals
a pinch of human feces
scrambled eggs duck tongues
tentacle-like roots

What do you say
we go oriental?
And the egg rolls...
can you imagine?

They allowed you to brown bag
wads of phlegm
in the men's room of a Beijing subway station
I looked at her thinking, You whore

I have to go to China
I've never looked forward to it
like twice-baked potatoes
or veal parmesan

It's more real
I could dislike it
more authentically
than the sound of one person

then another
dredging up seeming
from the depths of my soul
using the other as a blowhole

In China something kept holding me back
the leg, the breast, etc.
hacked as if by a blind person
made entirely of organs

Yes, I must
shit in the produce aisle of a Chengdu Walmart
Yes, I must
disintegrate in the western-style toilet