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The Art of Translation
Stacey Tran

Like a clumsy bumblebee
he alights on a flower
bending the fragile stem
he elbows his way
through rows of petals
like pages of a dictionary
he wants in
where the fragrance and sweetness are...

—Zbigniew Herbert, from "On Translating Poetry"

In recent months, I have found myself fascinated through and through with reading side-by-side poetry translations. This rather new interest of mine took root in a conversation with a poet-colleague. He asked me what I knew about the poetry of my native tongue. I was struck by this curiosity of his, pulled seemingly out of the blue, when I realized ashamedly No, I hadn’t a clue, nor had I any previous interest in digging through the literature of my own culture. I decided then to make a stop to the library shortly after this conversation, picking up for myself The Anthology of Vietnamese Poems (translations by Huynh Sanh Thong). In Vietnamese, poet literally translates to "house of poems." This beautiful discovery was striking, causing me to wonder Why hadn’t I taken a more critical note to this before? The introduction to this anthology helped me better grasp the art of translation in three words: fidelity, expressiveness, and elegance. This moved me to find out more.

While browsing familiar favourites along the Blue Room at Powell’s, I stumbled upon the Jewish-German poet Paul Celan at (my) eye-level — a collection dressed in white to duet with a broad forehead and playful yet deep-set eyes drawing me to take a closer look. As I carefully untapped Celan’s work, I found between these pages an abyss of awe and colour; whispered secrets faceted within extensive realms of vibrant lustfulness and poignant delicacy. “Reality is not simply there, it must be searched and won,” Celan says. His poems resonate with this yearning for a graspable reality, an eagerness to search and win. There is a dialectic of light and dark, life and death in Celan’s poems. They roar with the guileless rhythm of children’s hands, the darkness and remarkable bouts of light from a thunder storm, the crashing and breaking of waves, the patient erosion of pavement and mountain ranges, and the restlessly throbbing desire between lovers. Each stanza is enamoured by the ones surrounding it. Each line is a proclamation, calling the reader to celebrate in the ordinariness of the ephemeral world, to dance with the extraordinary background music that is lyric decorated in ecstasy, grief, and in between, the sour wine sitting in the reader’s belly.

Celan (born on November 23, 1920, in the city that is now modern-day Chernovtsy, Bukovina) was a Jewish-German poet of the post-World War II era, placed within the body of German imaginative literature. Celan, an anomaly at the time, went against the grain of the international Modernist movement during the first part of the twentieth century. Once he completed his schooling in Bukovina, he moved to France as a medical student, where he spent many year, and there he was most productive in his writing. Celan’s passion for poetry stemmed from the loss of his parents and the persecution he witnessed and was affected by war during his youth. As his life went on, he continued to suffer from personal and professional crises, as well as being relocated several instances in his adult life.

Celan’s work was heavily influenced by French, Romanian, Russian, English, German, and Austrian contemporaries; his writing style echoes the poetic roads paved by earlier German poets, from Klopstock to Hölderlin to Rilke. Throughout his professional life Celan also translated poetry, including the French poets Rimbaud, Valéry, Apollinaire, Michaux, Char, Andre du Bouchet, and Jean Daive; English sonnets by Shakespeare and poems by Emily Dickinson and Marianne Moore; Russian selections of poems by Blok, Yesenin, and Mandelstam.

Valzhyna Mort (Factory of Tears, 2008), a con-
temporary Belarusian poet known for her heart-rending performances, believes "a translation should be a new poem. My favourite saying about translation is that Poetry translations are like men—when they’re beautiful, they’re unfaithful. You have to choose the beautiful poems, or faithful poems...and of course the best is [if] you can merge beautiful and faithful as close[ly] as you can. But if you cannot, it’s better to make it beautiful."

There is mystery, as well as openness, in Celan’s work; deliberateness in each painful stroke, demanding the reader to take the initiative and apply his or her keen imagination to identify with the intricacies in the images presented. Celan’s poetry is indeed beautiful, as their translations are faithful; his poetry demands a special kind of attention as well as faith in the authenticity of what it contains.

Indulge yourselves in the original version of this poem in German among Celan’s beautiful collection (translations by Michael Hamburger), Poems of Paul Celan (Persea Books, 2002). For further translated gems, I highly recommend: Czeslaw Milosz, Rainer Marie Rilke, Vera Pavlova, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Cesare Pavese, Roberto Bolaño, Octavio Paz, Anna Akhmatova, Charles Baudelaire, Maria Tsvetaeva, Boris Pasternak, Zbigniew Herbert, Adam Zagajewski, Arthur Rimbaud, amongst others...

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**LES GLOBES**

by Paul Celan

*In the eyes all awry—read there:*

the sun, the heart orbits, the
whizzing, lovely In Vain.
The deaths and all that
to which they gave birth. The
chain of generations
that lies buried here and
hangs here still, in the aether,
and borders abysses. All the script
on those faces into which
whirling word-sand drilled itself - tiny eternities,
syllables.

All things,
even the heaviest, were
fledged, nothing
held back. 🌍

---

Transcendent Series #3, Yukiyo Kawano
The first thing you'll need to pretend is that the capacity for knowledge grows much like we do individually. That is, it develops over time through experiment and experience. Got that? Ready to go on? I can wait.

Okay, let's begin.

IN THE EARLY YEARS WE DRAW ON WALLS

When a man first decided it would be of some value to draw pictures of something on the wall of his modestly furnished cave he broke new ground in cognitive thought.

It is certain, in most academic circles, that he was not immediately catapulted to international fame and fortune like we would expect. In fact, the common viewpoint suggests that he may not have reached the peak of his success until a great number of thousands of years later. And when a distant relative of his had developed what would later come to be known as "the drum," he too was guilty of pushing the primordial cognitive envelope further (though, possibly, to slightly more immediate fame and fortune).

Today, sometime later, a quick survey of the humans on this little planet of ours will result in uncovering a very large catalog of pictures, prose, paintings, poems, percussion, and photos (to stay just within the letter "p" for sake of brevity). Some of us will spend our lives diving into one form of expression or another. We breathe in the wonders of that form while we still have breath. Then, quite anticlimactically, we die and add another poorly finished entry into the catalog of our choosing.

Yes, but for what purpose? (Ah, I'll come back there. Slow down, this is my article to heckle, not yours.)

It is also commonly believed that the previously mentioned cave dwellers lived before you and me. Naturally, that is how time works. It keeps going in that direction, correct? (If you disagree, I wonder, at which sentence did you start reading this paper?) Good. So, to recap:

1) Humans have cognitive thought.
2) Humans make things.
3) Time, for the sake of clarity, moves "forward."

WHEN WE LEARN TO WRITE:

Ah, now on to the heresy:

The second thing you'll need to pretend is that man was not limited to cave walls and drums. He had a world to create upon. His cunning was not limited to the tangible. A reliable source shows me that he developed speech, superstition, sacrifice, sorrow and (s)ivilization (to stay in the letter "s" for sake of brevity)...

He could grasp at straws and pull down horses. He was a doer of great things. No, I'm sorry, he was a doer of horrible things. Scratch that, he was a doer of things in general!

Yes, but for what purpose? Exactly! We may begin to ask this now.

HELLO, WONDER, MEET WORDS:

For what purpose did man become a doer at all? Well, man was not entirely foolish; he knew early on to ask that question of himself. He came up with
reason after reason. He tried them out in the art of Ethics. He found explanations where there were seemingly none; he could grasp at stars and pull down curses. What power he exhibited! What power he witnessed! What power he slowly came to fear! Eh hem ... Before I get too far ahead of myself, allow me to remind you that you are pretending that the capacity for knowledge grows much like we do individually, through experiment and experience.

So there man is, trying out different Ethics. His cognitive mind is growing at an incredible rate! He tries Pantheism, the Vedanta philosophies, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism, Divine-Rule, Judaism ... Platonic thought, Christianity ... Islam ... Philosophy, Imperialism, Science, Progress, Humanism ... (some of these brands may sound familiar to you). It was a smorgasbord of Ethical explorations and offshoots for him to try. And it was amazing to watch because all of them, to one extent or another, worked. So imagine his surprise when, slowly, some of these Ethics stopped working as well as they had originally. The foreboding curses began to, urn, lessen in severity; his tribe's deities grew quiet in the presence of other tribe's deities. The graceful fluidity of faith became a brittle business of belief. It split and folded over itself in so many ways that it forgot it's nobler origins on cave walls and drums.

Naturally, there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth over this apparent decline in Ethics. Man, for centuries, had gotten in the habit of blaming other's tribal Ethics for the cracking and crumbling of his own tribal Ethics. You see, something strange had happened when Wonder met Words: man forgot Wonder and, instead, worshiped Words. He had built his world on dust (in the shape of books with breakable bindings) instead of letting his world build him. So he would grasp at straws and pull down straws because he had forgotten how to pretend.

The stars, once again, were a long, long way away.

YOU AND I HAVE THINGS TO LEARN:

Now, we are still pretending that the capacity for knowledge grows much like we do individually, through experiment and experience; and we are also still pretending that man is not limited to cave walls and drums. The last thing I'll ask us to pretend is that there may be a significant number of things that we claim to understand that, in reality, we do not. And this is okay. I mean that. It would be wise of us to admit that we do not yet fully understand what we are doing with these cognitive powers of ours.

Allow that to marinate for a few moments. If it's too thick, try some water and stir it around a bit. As it marinates, allow me to add some spices:

(following spices optional: recommended for use after multiple readings, or to be considered by experienced chefs.)

- Relatives of our friend the cave drawer pepper streets, buildings, and people with bullets in disputes over pieces of land that have been claimed, named and rearranged for a variety of reasons.
- Certain salt of the earth believers are praying fervently for total destruction with no regard for collateral damage if the bets are wrong.
- Time and Thyme again we see man claim a deeper root than is provable in attempts to justify major and minor Ethical atrocities.
- Economies conjure monies from the mint to cover gaping holes in their precious wallets, putting more worth on wallets than wellbeing.
- Rarely is the sage sought unless his wisdom can be packaged, processed, and preached from a pulpit for considerable profit.
- Basil.

Now, back to the main dish.

What is the purpose of all this pretending? It is an attempt to get some of those juices in our brains flowing again. At some point we forgot that we are each growing through individual experiment and experience. This was a critical moment that few of us seem to remember: that moment when we put away our sketchbook and picked up a paycheck, or when we traded our Wide-Eyed-Wonder for World-Wide-Webs. And if we cannot recall that natural, native Wonder and acknowledge that it is the root of all the Words that make up or Ethics, then we will only be fighting with our drawings and drums without ever really seeing or hearing.

Ding! Ah, it's done. I leave you with this to savor:

It seems unlikely that the man who first drew on his walls was found dead clinging tightly to his art. 🌠
Ally Funk
Colin Fisher

Jen Bass’s dad wrote *Rain Man*,
which made him extremely wealthy,
which made Jen wealthy too,
which made me and Lou Perrizelli extremely lucky.
We had been at her place for a month now,
Bard College, in upstate New York.
On weekends she took us into the city
where we bought bad LSD and broke hotel rooms.

We had a Halloween Party with lots of boys and not lots of girls.
In fact Jen and Ally did not know lots of girls.
I was dressed in legs and make up,
and played a game of spin the bottle.
The rules were that you had to finish a beer and then spin it.
I finished 6 beers and kissed 6 boys before my aim hit Ally.
She was waiting, I was waiting, my arrow was correct
I had to kiss her. I kissed Ally all night,
she was wearing wings. We talked and drank,
she gave me a copy of *Pimp*, by Iceberg Slim,
then we listened to the *Plastic Ono Band*,
as we cuddled, I said, “purr, purr, meow, meow.”
I was never going to leave.

Jen had great lips and great plump toes,
I could have had a foot fetish for her.
But it was never Jen it was always Ally Funk.
Ally let me sleep next to her and cuddle and cry
while Perrizelli was in the living room trying to penetrate Jen.
Ally called me her cat and I said,
“purr, purr, meow, meow.”
If Lou and I were the jesters in this court
then Ally was the maid, a professional roommate for Jen.
Was it wrong for a jester to love a maid?
Posed on a floral bedspread inside her newly converted jet in Mississippi, a woman stares coyly at me. The caption underneath her reads, “Rather than buying a mobile home, the owner purchased this Boeing 727 for $2000 and had it remodeled to her living specifications and taste.” The book features an assortment of cultural snapshots - bleach-blonde Ukrainian women sunbathing by the Black Sea, Indian kids hanging from Ferris wheels in Mumbai, and Americans lifting off in hot-air balloons in Albuquerque - but the photo of the woman in her airplane-home especially impressed me.

I hated it at first. The uniform aisles of seats had been removed and replaced with stiff, ugly furniture, tacky floral tapestries, and plush pink carpet. The ceiling was low, the windows were tiny, and the oxygen masks had been removed so only strings remain hanging from a hollow square next to the flight attendant call button. But after staring at it for a moment, I understood. The woman found stability and comfort inside an object designed to fly at unimaginable speeds, 30,000 feet in the air, through temperatures and oxygen levels that could kill a human being in a heartbeat. I admired the woman’s courage and imagination. Most of all, I admired her ability to transform a vessel of travel into a stationary habitat. I wondered how she felt about flying. I wondered how she felt about home.

When I was two, my parents decided they didn’t like being married to each other and moved to separate states. So I had earned frequent flyer status by the time I was four by travelling between Washington and California to visit each of them respectively. My mother has lived in fourteen different houses since that time. My father has lived in six. Home was just another outfit that I changed every couple of years. It was nothing more than a temporary container for my body - never getting a chance to grow on me. And after a while, it didn’t matter if that outfit was a rustic cabin in Leona Valley, a funky prefab in the Mojave Desert, or a quiet ranch in the Pacific Northwest. They would all wear out one day and we would find a new one that suited us better. I grew to believe that home is like happiness - fleeting. They need to be. Otherwise we get so comfortable that we lose interest in the rest of the world - the world we don’t identify with - the Ukrainian women sunbathing by the Black Sea, the Indian kids climbing on Ferris wheels. The problem with this constant changing of clothes, changing of homes, and changing of planes is that when we’re ready for it, home doesn’t exist.

As an only child, I had no siblings with whom to practice social skills, so I developed complex relationships with objects. Eventually, after so many trips to the airport, I was convinced that passenger airplanes, like people, had desires and destinies. An airplane was a unique object in that while serving its ultimate purpose, 100 to 600 human beings were captive inside of it and subject to its every success and, most troublingly, its every failure.

When I turned five, I was old enough to fly without my parents. I would walk from the airport terminal to the gap that separated the doorway of the plane from the jet way. Each time I boarded, I superstitiously looked through the gap at the pavement below, then up the left side at the long reflective airport windows, across the top, and back down the right side, catching a sliver of the tarmac in the distance. This was part of a series of rituals that accomplished nothing aside from establishing a secret safety agreement between me and the aircraft - a safety I needed while my parents weren’t with me.

Once inside the plane I would peek into the cockpit. The orange lights glowing against the black surface of the control panel reminded me of how an evening maze of streetlights look from 10,000 feet in the air. If the pilot caught me looking it was bonus, because then he would know that I knew the about the secret agreement. Pilots were built into the plane just as the wings and the engine were; pilots never left the cockpit.
I knew this because I had never seen a pilot in places like grocery stores, libraries, parks, or schools.

When I found my seat on the plane I would immediately pull out the safety card, read it front and back, ponder it, and stick it back in the seat. An airplane evacuation on water meant deploying the big inflatable yellow slide. So at playgrounds and on backyard swing sets I would practice jumping onto the slide from a standing position, just like in the safety card pictures. In swimming pools I would pretend kickboards were seat-cushion flotation devices and paddle my way to shore against ten foot waves. I wasn’t sure what an evacuation on land meant, but I imagined it would be bumpy, especially if we fell into a canopy of trees in the dense Oregon wilderness.

I knew the important part of these rituals was my conscious effort; the plane had mind-reading senses that its mechanics knew nothing about. When the flight attendant performed the safety demonstration, I would watch her closely, scrutinizing the round yellow mask suctioned to her face with the off-white elastic band, sizing up the tiny translucent air bag attached to it, imagining how many breaths I could get out of just one. And even though I had no clue what “cabin pressure” meant, I nodded my head as if I understood. If I didn’t do these things, the plane would surely crash, just like in La Bamba, one of my favorite childhood movies, and my short life would come to an abrupt and tragic end. But it wasn’t the crash or ensuing death that worried me - it was the helpless sensation of free-falling.

I used to believe that man-made amalgams of aluminum, steel, and titanium needed to express themselves, because when microscopic flakes of skin, sweat, and saliva get stuck in the seams and nail holes during the manufacturing process, it would cause a glitch that endowed them with human-like wants and needs. Airplanes then developed a desire to connect with the people who crawl in and out of them every day, because keeping themselves at a safe distance from all the other planes so not to cause a collision was emotionally exhausting. They got tired of treating intimacy like gravity – muscles getting knotted from the repetitive motion of rippling its weight off the earth over and over again like Velcro. They got jaded after moving from place to place their whole lives, not knowing where their real home was. I identified with them.

Airplane existence is characterized by shifts, transitions, and fighting against natural forces. Complacency and inactivity makes them doubt their self-worth because their nature thrives in constant movement. Airplanes are anxious in quiet, still environments. And they know that humans love objects so much that they are often more loyal to them than to other humans. Even an inanimate object is confused by this behavior. Humans replacing humans with objects is a glowing, beating, buzzing, blooming symptom of their frailty.

That said, I never felt as close to my homes as I did to my airplanes. I took houses for granted because they were the opposite of danger. I felt safe inside of them and had no reason to make negotiations. I disrespected houses because they never performed their function of permanence. And because of this they did not warrant the respect of my sharpened focus. Hundreds of flights back and forth along the spine of the west coast taught me that giving special attention to the things that were bigger than me, things I could not control, and things that scared me, was crucial to my survival.

One Christmas when I was seven years old I flew back to visit my mom in Washington. As part of my allegiance to airplanes I wrote a poem for the flight attendants and crew. It was an acronym poem made from the words: “A-L-A-S-K-A-I-R-L-I-N-E-S.” It started, “A-ways accomodating, L-ove the food, A-irliner of my dreams, S-ewardesses are polite, K-eep flying, A-laska is my favorite,” and so on. After handing the poem to a flight attendant, who received it amicably and later showed her gratitude by letting me serve cookies and eggnog to the first-class passengers, I went through my usual routine with the safety card. I fell asleep after take-off and dreamed that our plane had flown into heaven. The interesting part of the dream was not the image, but the background noise. Amidst all the biblical scenery was the loud hum of the engine punctuated by a “thump,” “thump,” “thump,” “thump.” The airplane in my dream had a heartbeat.

The thing about children and airplanes is that when grown-ups aren’t there to give them the answer, they make it up themselves. If grown-ups don’t give them a stable home, they will build one in their imagination. It might not look like a home, or make sense as a habitat at all, but it keeps the dizzying adult-world slideshow at bay. At seven years old, I knew that airplanes had intrepid hearts and controlled human destiny on two hour flights between California and Washington. At seven, ten, or twenty years old, airplanes have no idea that children are listening to them. What I know now is that human-human relationships will always be more complex and scary than human-object relationships, but we should still opt for the former. And homes can be made as long as we stick around, and we will stick around as long as our home is remodeled to our living specifications and taste.
He tries to explain what it is to see the best flower on earth while her limbs stretch wide across the grass. She tries to catch butterflies on her tongue but they just land in his hair, perched like paper cranes. "It might be useless to describe." He runs a finger over his eyelids and a centipede slides across her wrist. She feels each footstep. "Blue whales," he says at last. "It's what it is to be very small. It's how round this stone is." He places a stone in her hand and she feels its cool edges curve in a circle.
Flowers Cut Too Soon
May Still Bloom In A Vase
Brandon Christensen

The sun illuminates the windshield and I see every speck of dust like the freckles on your face.
The box of vegetables in the back seat is peppered with dime-sized shadows. The radio: busted.
You answer your cell phone and laugh at the absurd new mission. Your sister’s friend — I’ve con­
vinced myself he’s a degenerate — wants us to grab a vibrator for his girlfriend. A strange request, but
how could I refuse on a nice day like this? The white tank that we call a car squeezes into a compact
parking spot before the glass doors of the sex toy store. Jerad, at the register, is eager to show us how
to use his devices (after properly checking ages, of course). He is a fluorescent-dwelling taxidermist
for the living. A rain-soaked woman prowls into the shop and finds her way to the leather swings. We
get out of the shop as fast as we can, but still we miss the rain. The drive back: countryside. I turn
the engine off and let the car meander itself down the driveway, stopping at your porch. The flowers
are blooming in the lawn now, and for good reason. I cut you a flower yesterday, but these ones show
more flesh in the petals. The scent of spring is nothing like the air freshener advertised. The windows
and doors are open to let the day in. I walk outside your bedroom and climb through the window.
You give me a confused look, but really, how could I refuse on a nice day like this? There are rab­
bits are on the floor, nibbling on tufts of carpet. Someone let them out of their cage. The television is
on, looping a scene from a 1994 amateur porno. When I glance back at the room, the rabbits from the
floor have assembled themselves into the shape of your father, sitting in his favorite chair, watching
the film, in a fit of uncontrollable laughter. Hesitantly, I seat myself on the floor beside him. “What are
you doing?” The rabbit collective breaks its laughter to ask. I think and I say, “how could I refuse on a
nice day like this?”
to the drunk man who while walking home from the pub pisses on the old oak tree that is rooted beneath the balcony where I smoke—

hello, kind sir: I can see your tiny penis. please go home now.

Australia, Hoiven Cumbersplut
Dichotomy
Megan Jones

I.
There is no in
between this season –
I’m either jumping
three stairs at a time
or dragging weary
bones, pulling my body
along by the guardrail

This brutal dichotomy
leaves me light,
driftwood spinning on
a precarious axis
between the poles chosen
before my birth

Wondering if there is hope
in the waiting

II.
I skip abnormal
psychology only to find
an unshelved book on
birds – flip to a section on
boobies – the facts
school skims over

I learn the blue-footed booby
marks its nest-site with
a ring of guano,
and once settled
on the eggs, will not
cross the line –
imprisoned by its own shit

Broken faith
whimpering, each winter
brings the question –

Will I perch maudlin
warming my hates or
will I piece myself
together,
toe the line, cross it,
letting my tiny hurts hatch,
and ride the chill
east wind out and away
from me
Playing Cowboy
Ayla Rose Gilbert

I sought asylum at a dude ranch in Death Valley where I hoped the heat would purge me of my sins. I played cowboy, hoping I could sweat it out like a sauna of life and justice. I met a woman, a girl so beautiful she could sprout laced wings out of her slender perfect shoulder blades without skipping a beat. I ate flan from her belly button and we dreamed of Tokyo and blowing it all to smithereens. We made love on the floor—the rug made of cowhide scratched her ass and left red marks on each cheek. Later I kissed the marks, my jeans around my ankles, following the pattern of scratches like a map of our torrid lovemaking.

I came to love the desert—its pumpkin-colored sunsets and the way the pervasive dirt settled into my pores.

The woman, who in my head I called Mother Goose because she described life like a fairy tale, brought me fresh-baked sourdough bread on Sundays. The bread was still hot and I lathered butter into its fluffy flesh. Then I’d catch her making some poker face at me over the table so I got on my knees and pulled up her skirt to kiss between her legs with my butter-soaked tongue. I held on tight to her boot-straps and pulled her closer while I buried my face in her warmth. Her inner thighs squeezed my cheeks.

The following week I had to leave. She called me a bastard but I gave her a wink and kissed her goodbye.
I choose lovers the way
I pick lucky numbers

Always looking for the primes,
the space between nothing and one

Shape, symmetry, internal harmony,
the \{absolute\} values –
but angles of silt and shame

Bisect at despair,
straight angles twisting
into fractals, null hypotheses,
increasing doubt exponentially,
every relationship tracing, crisscrossing

Functions of wh(y), a romance of
divine proportions always bloated
beyond recognition by our salty algebra,
chaos theory predicted well the
demise of my obtuse love triangles,
the asymptote of stability
never attained, only approached,
and I am but a little girl lost in numbers

A zero slashed through

1. “In the forest of numbers, a little girl lost”
   - Federico García Lorca

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Zombi
Zachary Huber

Mosquito nets and ivory sheets hang
on breezy palms
to protect the dead bodies
being buried under the avocado tree.

Their souls falling like stars
into the ink that surrounds the island
The blind man thumbing dominoes
with his
clairvoyance—

morbid
Funneling
through the streets; awash in
the tropical sun. And a bright-eyed student
climbs the barren hill to his home
made of Crisco cans.

His father fresh from the batey
soaks his feet, ridding them of the
pangs of picking sugar cane,
over and over.

He stares (his heart burns a hole in its cage)
at his mother’s crooked form, bent
over the black pot of rice and beans.
Chicks peck at his barefeet

The moon slices through the back
of a jittery bokor;
Scratching the damp Earth
with his spike.

The boy lay supine,
his dimples glowing as
metallic as the spoon that his
rigid hand
dropped in the dust
Coup de poudre—
searing his soul that
belongs to the lwa.

Languid groans emerge
from his chalk lips;
numb, he grips the chains that moor
him to the clay.

They say, when a farmer is successful,
he is thought to have many zombis
working for him.

So the boy
bends his back over the rice,
and doesn’t feel sweat
forming lakes on his back.

Until...

Salt,
zest of reawakening,
touches his scarred tongue.

And tears
drench his eyes,
clawing their way home.
First, I asked casually,  
the suffering made me,  
it's the law here anyway,  
to assist the dying to kill themselves.

Later I offered and meant it.  
Chest crushed,  
shallow tight love fear.  
I offered to just kill her  
no red tape or  
permission.

No honey,  
pinched eyes  
watered, I couldn't let you  
live with that knowledge  
the rest of your life.

Three weeks later,  
three May weeks,  
still dark dawn,  
the birds had returned  
and were singing for their lives,  
when she was trying to breathe  
what they called  
Death Rattle.

I pulled the dropper  
from the white bottle  
with all of its tiny warnings  
and plopped, plopped, plopped  
four months worth of  
dose under her  
bark-skinned tongue.
A Shared One Bedroom

Nicolas Walker

I was unarmed, left with nothing but a photo of a younger, thinner Sam Bettinger. He was photogenic too. I’d guess two hundred and fifty. Maybe.

The photo was cut from a family portrait taken from his desk. You could see the torn fragments—an outline of his wife, tweed jacket and curly black hair, standing to the right of Bettinger’s round frame. His sons knelt before their parents. Clenched, uncomfortable smiles smiling at the photographer who shifted their jaws into awkward upright angles before instructing with an expressive sigh, “just be natural.” Bulbs flashed in their eyes as their father’s sweating palm grasped the shoulder of the eldest.

I wonder if she ached for a daughter. Some morsel of estrogen to share the sadness with. Boys should be taught by their father, those weird things of manhood. Not by their mother.

She was smiling too, but what about? It almost made me feel bad. The kind of bad that knocks on the door in the back of a mind. The one that houses regret, guilt and empathy in a shared one bedroom. The justifying kind of bad.

The city hung like a wet rag. A sliver of sunlight cut through the drizzly morning. I hailed a cab, and jolting over potholes the driver and I made our way into the city, dodging beggars and bicyclists who stumbled through the road as if the road belonged to them. Homeless lay on the streets like bags of tea.

I wasn’t in one of my good moods.

I ducked, or rather, walked into a restaurant. The parking lot filled with Sunday fanfare. I read “WANG’S” in bright-red plastic capitals. The sign lay above the tall doorway into a Bingo waiting room. Table numbers were called out and I took my seat near an elderly Chinese couple. I always felt uneasy in places like these. I seemed to always catch someone looking at me, smiling, then whispering to another. It was irritating. Almost irritating enough to make me learn Chinese.

It’s neither the destination, nor the journey, it’s just my job I told myself, as I waited for my number. Families with smiling children sat waiting. Even the babies held excellent posture. A large screen television hung on the wall advertising the restaurant. Wait staff ushered in and out, but I’d be damned if I noticed anyone get a table.

The wait was brief, for me. The same faces that watched me enter the BINGO room, watched me leave. Is this how they treat their own kind? I racistly wondered.

I was escorted to a large table, partly occupied by two younger Chinese couples. Large hot pots wheeled through the restaurant provided the visual dictation in lieu of menu. I chose the chicken and fish options offered. The food was either much too spicy, or much too cold. I was certain that my water glass was refilled at least twenty times. Like any special treatment received I felt slightly unnerved and partly complimented. What had I done for such notice?

After a number of food-rounds, the waitress approached my table and asked if everything was all right.

I whirled around, partly frightened, mostly annoyed, and splashed a cup of hot green tea onto my khakis.

“Oh, are you okay?” She asked, throwing a cloth napkin towards my crotch as I sat, still dumb-founded and unaware of the hot, liquid pain I inflicted on myself.

“Yes. I’m sorry,” I hushed at the waitress. The two couples at the table cocked their eyebrows.
"I'm so sorry," the waitress responded, pressing the napkin on my pant-leg. Her smile held a noticeably adorable minute gap.

"No. I'm sorry, shhhh..." I looked down again at my pants, knowing that I might as well have pissed them. It would’ve given me the excuse to bolt out the door.

"It is okay. I'm sorry to have startled you," she responded with a politeness normally foreign from regular English conversation. I noticed the name on her tag. Wendy.

Inside my right jacket pocket my damp hand cupped Bettinger's body. I placed it on the table with nothing more to lose. The entire banquet room already knew where I sat.

I waited for the check, feigning a casual pose while my right foot shook erratically under the table. She set my card down in a black-plastic American Express tray, complete with a fortune cookie and my receipt on top of the smiling, fat, photographed face.

"Thank you very much," she started back to the room. "Wait, hold on a second," I called her back in a panic. "Yes..." she turned toward me. I motioned back to the table. Her pace was stilted and confused, as mine would have been if I had known what I was going to ask her.

"This man," I slid the picture toward her, "have you seen him?"

"I have, yeah, he comes in here, like, all the time..."

"Interesting," I nodded my head. She shot me a glance.

"When does he come in?"

I asked. Any sense of her suspicion was over-powered by my awkwardness.

"All the time, I don’t know... I have to get back to work."

"Okay. Does he do anything weird?" I asked.

"Weird?"

"Yeah, when he comes in, like, anything weird?"

She tapped her foot.

"Well, he talks a lot, flirts a lot, with me. Other waitresses. He’s not that weird."

I signed my receipt as she was again swallowed by the banquet room.

"What are your hours?" I called out to her.

"They’re on the door."

She responded with her eyes at the cash register. I liked her.

And there they were, each word ending in "-day," each day ending at 8 PM.

Cars splashed by as I walked toward the sardine-box of a bus-shelter. I’d have to squeeze to be comfortably out of the rain, and that wouldn’t have been comfortable at all. So I carried on, my hatred toward the drivers kept me warm. I carried on past the paint-chipped fences and used cars. Past the dive-bars and neon Amstel lights shining through the rain. I came to a stoplight and hit the "WALK" sign and proceeded to wait until my patience imploded and I pounded the button. My right toe made enemies with the steel-light pole, and I limped toward the flashing green man ahead.

The next shelter was full; the street lamp acted as my umbrella.

The longer one is forced to be in an enclosed public setting, the less private hobbies become. A woman stood above me, her voice bleating into a phone, voraciously devouring any possibility of peace. I glanced around the bus. A grizzled looking man carrying a bag of cans stared erratically in my direction. Midway through the drive, his uneasiness was distributed on to the other passengers, which was nice of him.

The next day I took a taxi to WANG’s. I assured myself that my senses were too bedraggled for another bus ride, as we blasted through potholes and stop signs with the attention an infant holds for manners.

Shaken, I got out and took my seat in the BINGO room. Wendy, calling out numbers at the podium, called me over with the flip of her hand.

"Hey," "He’s here."

"Where?" I asked.

"At a table. Can I ask what this is about?"

"Yeah, you can."

I ushered myself into the banquet room, my eyes searching for a mouth filled with Chinese food.

The sheer anxiety of reality overcome me. I attempted to swallow it. That dried out the retaining moisture in my mouth. Like a vacuum, I sucked air before I began gagging and convulsing into my jacket sleeve. I ran toward
the bathroom and stuck my head underneath the sink, inhaling a hot stream of water.

I splashed my face and wiped my eyes. The loud, mechanical hum of the air-dryer filled the room, deluding my attention from the obese man passing behind me into a stall.

It had to be Bettinger.

As the air died down I heard his movements in the stall. The undoing of the belt, the crisp crackle of sanitary paper.

I hit the button of the dryer again. The noise cutting into any embarrassingly audible bodily functions. I wasn’t going to stand and judge the fat-ass as he did his business. That was a man’s privacy. Plus, it smelled like farts in there.

I waited outside the bathroom door. I stood with my back to the wall, as he hustled past me quicker than expected.

“Sam Bettinger!”

He gasped with a whirl of top-heavy momentum spinning him back around.

“Jesus,” he gasped.

“I’m here to murder you.”

A desperate fear awakened beneath those brown brows. He smiled for a brief second before his mouth dropped like an anvil.

“Oh God.” Tears began to well up. His mouth began to mutter.

“I’m just kidding,” I said. He was sobbing as I approached with my hand out. He placed his limp-fish in my open palm.

“I’m sorry,” the bumbling mess tried hard to straighten himself out. “Who are you?”

“You don’t know?” I asked in a tone of goofy excitement – my business casual voice.

“No,” the pouty mess of his face began to form suspicion. An edge took form in his eyes. Unpleasant body language coupled with his unpleasant body odor.

“Mark Ramirez,” I began truthfully, “I’m supposed to look over the Whitney account – with you.”

“Oh, okay. I think I remember hearing something like that.” He hadn’t because I was lying.

“Have you eaten yet?”

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“Wendy’s the best waitress here, and that’s some stiff competition.” Bettinger’s eyes affirmed the statement as she filled our water glasses.

“I can see,” I played along. “Ain’t the only thing stiff here.”

He let out a hearty, heart-failure laugh that echoed throughout the room.

He named his family with no real love or devotion, just names with tags like “Darren, my youngest,” as we extracted small talk between inhalations of greasy chow mein.

Sam Bettinger was a simple man, likable in a business sense. We shared a smoke outside on the sidewalk, and as the flame neared his lips, the overwhelming burden of my mission began to grow inside me. My hesitancy shifted to panic and I reached for a drag. He has fumbled the cigarette toward me. His body teetered toward the sidewalk.

“Wow, huh,” he chuckled.

The burden was lightened as the downtown-bound 35 sped down the street. He stumbled off the sidewalk. The bus connected with his right shoulder. He looked at me on impact, his eyes wide, and he mouthed something I hadn’t heard in a long, long while.

“Aw, shucks.”

He was not dead on impact, the doctor informed me. But the sheer head-trauma hemorrhaged his brain so violently his inards practically drowned in blood. I repeated the diagnosis to my employer on the other end.

“At least you managed not to get your hands too dirty,” he responded. I hung up the pay phone and rubbed the grease onto my khakis. ☞
In a Little Apartment on Yamhill
Melody Pasqualini

their love is from a world where giraffes are simply palm-sized pets, where daisies and their petaled acquaintances flourish in the swirling oceanic abyss,

their love has lived one zillion years, exhaled by neon-colored stars, breathed in by mystic mouths of wanderers,

it is a love that is soft, intelligent, untold, imaginative, a love that uses one’s hands to paint, without brushes, a love with pictures and a love with words,

and all of this - rests just behind their eyes, in matching creative minds they journey through unknown lands and times, by song, by book, by heart and back again,

tiny folded paper boats on tips of fingers are enough transportation for these two to travel

but they’ve also been seen moving by grander means, silhouettes in the window of a secret submarine, known to sink and swim through boundless, countless nations of fish and fortresses of Mermaids with their castles constructed of sea glass and sea shells,

they have stood witness to an octopus as he played a background of sultry spanish tunes on a guitar built especially for him and his eight lovely legs,

and on their return they always write the words, they come together like a tumbling circus of baby panda bears, swirling, twirling, black letters on white pages, and in the end they tell a story,

sometimes of clouded coasts, and other times of places covered in endless layers of snow,

but now, now, they’ve come to share this story with us, and we listen as he says, ‘I do’ with a voice that he has manipulated many a time, in order to give life, and we watch her blue eyes and sweet eyelashes as she looks into the face of her best friend and promises forever, and near the doors fireflies drift beneath the mistletoe with misty eyes, applauding, and we are blessed by Love
Portland Fall
Colin Fisher

Sitting sipping, red boxed wine.
The light from my Mac has all of my own words,
and the sun is still slumbering in the clouds.

She is awake and stretches straight,
do elves make her clothes?
She pulls up her underwear, decorated by little whale babies.
She lights a cigarette, opens a beer;
it's almost time for school.

Leaves attack the windows.
Landing wet, displaying yellow and red faces of death,
but we are not afraid.
Pat Robertson appears on television,
he is saving lives again.

We walk out, to the new chill that demands more garments for fashion.
The sun is sullen and grey, as she walks using four steps
where I only need two.

She is coats and buttons.
She is scarfs and flowing wind.
I am sweater straight up and down,
but I stay focused, on the whale baby panties.

Suddenly the Philippines are upon us.
Sideways rain, warm scented bananas.
We only need a few more steps, and we are back to the cold coated air.

We are collected onto a bus, that is called a shuttle, though it's never been to outer space.
The Sun and I are forced to stand.
She tells me that my crotch is at perfect level of the face, for the sitting man, who is trapped in his ipod.
Fairies escape from her mouth, they will never return again.

The green bicycle man challenges the bus, to a battle for existence.
He is dressed as a neon lizard.

Water slides off his sleek slimy skin.
But the bus never even notices.
Green bicycle man is left behind, as we climb a hill that takes us from the city.

The sun becomes silent again, as hail tries to stop us, from reaching the school hidden inside the mountain.
She is thinking of all of the objects, trapped in the over-light reflection back home.
Or is she thinking, of a wind-up star, boxed up only ever played for the enjoyment of fickle spectators?
I will never know.

The bus stops.
The sun comes to her senses, she shines brilliantly through the rain.
Everyone is happy, except for the bus driver, who only lives to drive, and drives for all his days.