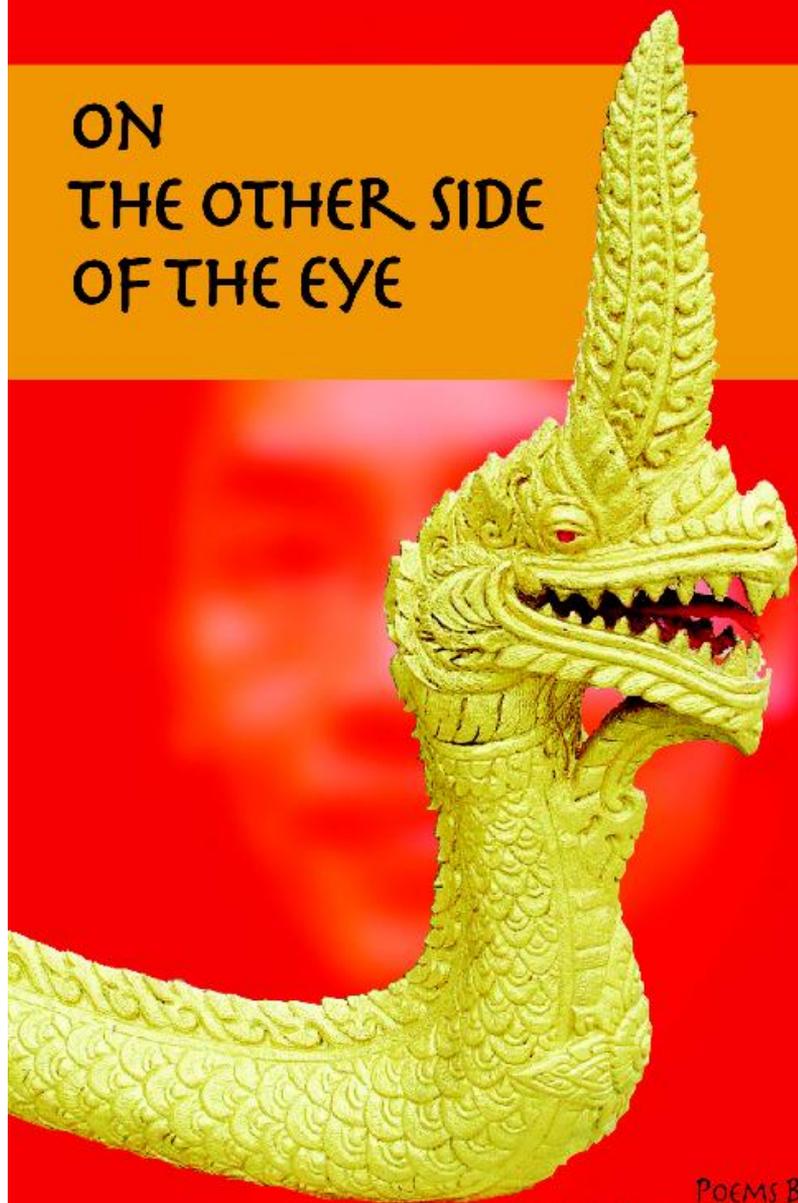


ON
THE OTHER SIDE
OF THE EYE



POEMS BY
BRYAN THAO WORRA

On The Other Side Of The Eye

Poems

Bryan Thao Worra

Dedicated to my friends, my family and my teachers,
and to those who have been all of the above.

And to my father, John Stafford Worra, (1935-2006)

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Afterword by Barbara Jane Reyes

From 1954 to 1975, a bloody civil war was fought for the future of Laos, the Kingdom of a Million Elephants.

The US State Department and the CIA raised a clandestine army of over 30,000 guerillas drawn from highland tribes for the Royal Lao Government's campaign against the communist Pathet Lao supported by the Russians and North Vietnamese.

The guerilla operations soon broke into open warfare.

Near the end, children as young as 11 years old were deployed on the battlefields alongside US paramilitary advisors and mercenaries on the mysterious Plain of Jars, the sacred mountain Phou Pha Ti, the Bolovens Plateau, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and many others.

With the US withdrawal from Southeast Asia and the collapse of the Royal Lao Government in 1975, thousands were forced to flee because of their roles in the war.

By the beginning of the 21st century, over 400,000 of those refugees work to rebuild their lives in the United States, even as the world struggles to build a new future...

I. Must A World Sleep to Dream

What Kills A Man

Always small things:
A round.
Holes.

Fumes.
Edges.

Split atoms.
A second.

A footstep.
A sip. A bite. A word. A cell.

A motion. An emotion. A dream.
A fool.

A bit of salt. A drop. A fragment.
The true root of arguments.

What kills a man is mysterious
Only in how minute the culprit
Behind the blow.

We're careless, and forget:
Even when what kills a man
Is another man,

It is a small thing that kills a man,
The whole earth a single grain

On a sprawling table filled with the smallest things.

New Myths of The Northern Land

"Dream," I said,

"Aren't you tired of making new legends
That no one but I ever hears?"

"Bones," she said,

"Aren't you ever tired of asking questions
That only I can answer?"

I went back to bed,

Waiting for the new king to arrive,
His talking mirror filled

With dire pronouncements of flame.

Recovering From War

There is a deficit of contact.

To touch is to risk.

To trust contradicts wisdom,

So ignorance prevails.

Absent truths (memories)

Elicit abundant lusts

Hammered

With gold, rose and incense

To reform states we fear

May rebuild to rewind time

But not remember:

How we failed the first time

That we now have fewer

To remember with

As we rebuild to recover

Some things terrible

Some, less so.

Imperious

In the end, I'm a minor beginning
Of a love for small empires.

Tiny kingdoms who don't
Outwear their welcome.

Short reigns, minor abuses,
Powers and scandals that

Don't tip the earth off her axis.

The kind only daffodils
And mayflies seem to master

Before becoming one again
With wet stone, hoary space

That a single atom (with some luck)
Can convert into an entire new galaxy

Who won't remember us, like a callow child
Playing in the bluegrass before the rain.

Burning Eden One Branch At A Time

My father, a skull before the wars were over,
Never saw my mother's flight in terror
~~As our humbled kingdom fell to flame and shell~~

My mother was stripped to ink among the bureaucrats,
A number for their raw statistics of jungle errors
~~Collated into cold ledgers marked "Classified"~~

My feet dangling in the Mississippi have forgotten
What the mud in Vientiane feels like between your toes
While my hands hold foreign leaves and I whisper

"Maple"

"Oak"

"Weeping Willow"

As if saying their names aloud will rebuild my home.

Hmong Market At Luang Prabang

If I am successful,
I will be immortal and misunderstood.

If these emaciated girls on the candlelit street
Of Luang Prabang are successful,

They understand they will live for another melting day
Dreaming idly of an ink-faced man like me
Who will whisk them away for good,

Only he's perfect, always remembering his pinky promise
To come back the next night

To buy their dusty bed sheets
For a fistful of wrinkled kip.

Aliens

We turn our dishes to
Heaven, but

What manner of dog will come running
To lick them,

Drawn to the censored moaning groins
And the pyrotechnics of false death
And chemical love?

Fetch me a big stick to shake
At these stellar voyeurs!

I want nothing to do with them

As I run down my strange streets,
An accidental alien without
A ray gun.

Moon Crossing Bone

Lover of change, of delta
Of poetry stuffed with raw porcelain
And craters of saddened basalt

Glide your light across my beams of pale
They gleam beneath silver and bolts of sin
Beneath my currents and soft bridges
Erected to span my humble limbs like chains

Oh, kiss them, for the sake of memory
For the sake of secrets as intangible as dreams
As meaningful as the dark hair tangling

My darling's hands as she struggles
To become clean, to break free of mud
And to sing for the true naks sleeping beneath

Black stupas your candelabra face always forgets
Are there.

IO

Trying to live within the turn
Of the Wheel and the Screw,
Our books collect dust, and fade.

Paper is a dying commodity of exchange,
And people will give you credit to know that.

Raw meaning is lost as the mind oxidizes,
Infrequently polished with flag,
 Sackcloth and the spit
 Of ideology and dogma.

We burn to learn, throwing the promise of ash
Into the meals of hungry children who no longer
Want anything more
Than the truth of a home entertainment system.

They do not dare aspire in a world
Of hard drives and hard times.

They are the most mortal of futures,
Who speak in icons, not queries.

They are swept from shore to shore in
A sea of information,
Swaddled in silicon chips
Rocking their thoughts to sleep
While they travel over
The great nocturnal depths
In plastic ships.

Our grand empires of sand cannot spare tokens
To the impoverished forgotten mass
Conveniently huddled
As rough statistics upon the page...

Above the din, a cry is announced,
The great announcement for our age:
The laws will pass in this land...

No one shall travel who has no reason
To go somewhere.

No one shall travel beyond the confines of their home,
As the scientist makes manifest his dreams,
And teaches his children to dream.

Industrious liquors and chemicals from the factories
Swirl and melt
Away

The connections of atom to atom,

of child to parent.

The dreams of the Safavids have now been forgotten,
A testament to our scholarship.

The merchants have sold us their lenses
That we may observe their lessons:

With speed, our semis hurtle down highways
In an explosion of marketing,

Hauling empty trailers back to their homes.

Song of the Kaiju

Through foam,
Through surf we rise, dark waters parting
As our titan's foot breaks the shore.

Armies rise against us with a roar,
Guns flaring in the night-

Our cause, our fears, our fight
Is for historians alone to decide;

We fierce combatants have no time
To reflect on our footnote's remarks.

In raging moments
Fists become claws,
Our small tales lost beneath the crushing weight
Of epic bloodshed,
Cities toppling
Amid the screams
So out of touch with time:

Turn back! Turn back!
Turn back, you mighty beasts!

But deaf ears mark our reptilian hearts
That sag and sigh within our wake,
The tragic years untold, unheard,
Trampled upon the world's stage.

This isn't Shakespeare, we are no Moors,
No witch-doomed Scots, we know.

Our loves are not the songs of poets
Though they rise to a fever
Beneath these scales
Following our instincts,
man-made hurricanes mad as Typhon

Filled with the simple potential of half an atom...

Observing The Oblivious

I squat

Among bamboo and scaly
Things

Like a stone-faced deity
From Bayon

The ant devours my puny home
To make his own.

Fears my magnifying glass
And sole.

We never look up enough:
Who knows

If the feet of God
Aren't about to leave their own mark

On our fragile spines,
As they uncurl

Beneath his summer home ceiling

When he isn't looking.

II. A History of Water and Memory

The Deep Ones

From the sea we come,
From the sea we come,
Our mouths, the inns of the world

The salt of the earth unwelcome
At the tables and charts of
Explorers who expect:

Commodity and pliant territory

Kingdoms, not wisdom

Blood, not heaven's children

We grow with uncertain immortality
At the edge not made for man

Bending, curving, humming cosmic—
Awake and alien

Our mass a dark and foaming mask,
A bed of enigma to certain eyes

One with the moon,
One with the stars,
One with the ash that whispers history

In the same breath as myth and gods
Whose great backs yawn before us

As we change with a growing tongue
Growling amid the dreamlands

We built one blade, one leaf, one golden wall at a time.

The End of Me

Equals MC²

Is found at the start
Of "Pluribus Unum"

Touches both
Heaven and Earth

Is filled with
Infinitely divisible

Emptiness

Holds a younger
Woman slipping
Out the door

Who knows nothing
Of Venus, of tropics,
Of Alpha or Omega.

Her mouth is a sermon.
Her deltas of change,
Of certain cycle,
Of ferocious water

Bring me to face

My ends

Alone and dry
Because that is how

Memory heals itself:

It makes vast deserts to try failures.

Those that thrive become vast rivers
For secret worlds that thirst.

The You Do Devil

Roars against the
O God

Who knows everyone
Is secretly made of nothing

Haunts battlefield and bedroom
With spilled salt and uncertain accountability

Holds a minor Montana garter snake as a child,
Slips a hand up a married London thigh

Talks in thick tongues too familiar
For my own good

Lies in wait, idle teeth sunk deep in the aorta,
Long neck never underfoot enough.

Pulls my strings to make me smile:

None of this is really recorded,
Except the way I tell it to you,

So notorious for your selective amnesia.

An Archaeology of Snow Forts

There's not much left to be said
Some well-washed stone hasn't heard before.

History is composed of broken walls and bad neighbors:
Just ask these chips from Berlin, the Parthenon and Cathay
Or these cool magma hands of Pompeii, dark and grey.

If you listen carefully in the right place
On University Avenue, you will learn
There is a minor wall near the Yalu River
Dancing on the hills of Qin for the moon,

Who knows exactly what I mean
In every tongue worth mention.

She's moonlighting as a curved garden serpent
Coiling around old Laocoon,
The Suspicious One with his astute eye,
Crooning with a sly wink,

"Come, touch true history."

And how the moon must laugh when she spies
The tiniest hill in Minnetonka,
Where the small hands of the earth have erected

A magnificent white wall,
A snowy miniature Maginot
Raised some scant hours before,
Already melting into a hungry, roiling river
Who is not yet finished eating Louisiana for brunch.

Before Going Feral

On our Island, among our laws and wise

You see us The Other.

Not parallels:

You spill blood.

Ingest, ejaculate and excrete.

Your graves deep as yourself.

The subject of your open prayers?

Our lively mouths never touch your stiff flesh.

Ever saying 'fetch', you flee

At the first sign of trouble in our heat.

We, neither man nor animal in your eyes,

Blights in a paradise you claim limbo:

How can we not question your perfection?

Creator. Created. Creature

With your cryptic purities.

Destroy All Monsters!

When the orders came, we were not
(could not)
(dared not be)
Surprised:

Humanity must be preserved
At all costs,
Despite a decidedly
Checkered record
Since the biased jottings of Herodotus.

That is the old line,
Safe to stand by
A leaf of litmus on which to write
Our strategies like old Sun Tzu.

Monstrosity and terror have no place
In our crumbling streets filled with
Graffiti and youth
Who are the heirs to our creations.

Whether you are a lizard with a
Skyscraper between your toes
Or some smaller fiend
In whom we fear to find
Too close a mirror,

There just isn't enough space in this vast world
For both our dreams.

If only we could truly believe you'd be content
In some distant menagerie,

Instead of plotting where to bury you
beyond our sight

Babylon Gallery

She brought the gray spoon
We hung upon the gallery wall
From the talaat stalls in downtown Phonsavan.
She was supposed to be collecting dab neeg—folktales

And we were showing off art we were so certain
Would change the way the world sees

That stumbled elephant we rode in on.

She was an indelicate work, this buang.
A light cockatrice feather
Crude malice her center
Her bowl an echo of bomb craters
Whispering mad as Gorgon.

“They dine with spoons like this all over there,”
We’re informed.

“Hammered from war scraps the dogs
Find indigestible. They sold me this one
Certain it’s American bullets at the core.”

“It was time, they said, we took them back.”

I pondered how many startled people
This carnivorous spoon passed through
in her previous incarnations,

Karma denying her a role in a finer flatware set for the saints.

Oddly, for as many threads as she cut short
She was too weak to be the butter knife
She should have been.

Swords into plowshares,
Someone scribbled casually in a comment card,

One of many remarks
Disposable as plastic sporks.

five fragments

Only 7 people walked away from S-21

My critics ask me to find the beautiful words

To make this more than a statement.

Chase the rhythms and meter to propel this into true poetry

"Aesthetics mustn't die in literature

Don't starve language

With your emaciated lyric

Don't keep back the flourishes that will set

these words apart

Or anger and memories will become only passing wind

And the tattered spines of your book about this camp

Will be thrown in the garbage

Without even the pomp of a Berlin book burning."

Surely, the 14,000 would appreciate that,

Who have no eyes, no voice, no hands

To applaud and cheer anymore.

They want me to splash in Pol Pot's rivers to find the true tears

From mere fallen rain

But if you ask my neighbors across the hall,

You will find a particular indifference whether I succeed or not.

II.

When the portraits came

In black and white

Stained and torn without a trace of artistic intent

They were mounted upon a plain white wall in the Weisman

Across from a stout statue of a squatting Buddha

And his irresponsible smile.

A large hand-painted fan

A freeze-dried cow lung

A set of black Chinese binding shoes

Birthing forceps from the late 1800s
(whose modern counterparts have barely changed)

A Napoleonic teapot.

(In the words of Yul Brynner)
Etcetera, Etcetera, Etcetera.

The day I went, a young woman in green muttered
to her boyfriend:

"What is this junk from the basement? It's not art,
And it doesn't belong here."

Moments later, he replied thoughtfully:
"I wish they validated parking."

III.

When the B-52s pummeled Neak Loueng by accident
Over a hundred Khmer died without cause
With no more ceremony
Than a shrill whistle and a burst of flame and shrapnel
From a mile high.

Ambassador Swank came to assuage the grief
Of those who survived with the grand gesture
Of \$100 bills, American.

*according to an anguished footnote from a man who had read about the matter in a London paper at the time

A woman I know from a village near
Angkor Wat
Tries to escape the nightmares of the camps today
By filling her house with
Tropical trees and flowers from her homeland
She remembered as a little girl

IV.

In 1990, over an after-school match of Trivial Pursuit
My teacher asked
What is the name of the country where Pol Pot
Instituted Year Zero
Killing thousands of his countrymen.

Cambodia, I answered with certainty,
confident and familiar.

No, he replied.

No? What the hell is it, then?

The card says Kampuchea.

It's the same thing.

No it's not.

Ten years later, I can't believe I argued over that point
As I stare at crude wooden tables piled with skulls
Near Phnom Penh.

V.

In two years, I don't believe I've said more
Than a dozen words to my Khmer neighbors
In the apartment below me.
That's just the way it is.

The other day, I walked past the grandmother
Trying to talk to her Hmong counterpart
Across the hall.

Broken English
hesitant and uncertain
had become the bridge as each stood in their doorway
fumbling towards something resembling an ordinary
conversation.
Gardening and grandchildren seemed to be the subject.

I still don't know what to make of it all,
My head heavy as a mango
without a mouth to feed

The Ghost Nang Nak

Hates the draft.
Isn't very good on issues
Of fertility

But isn't too bad
With the lottery
If you pay your respects
Properly by the takian trees.

She's eating diced mangos
With a mouth of ebony ants.

Kept company by a
TV tuned to tacky Thai soap operas.

Surrounded by white mutts
Who hate black dogs of any pedigree.

Wants a simple life again.
To set down the Buddha's yellow candles
For just a minute.

But she has a lot of karma to pay off
For trying to keep her family together

Spooking mischievous children at night
Who thinks she's looking for playmates

For her beautiful baby
Toddling between Wat Mahabut
And the Prakanong River.

The Tiger Penned At Kouangsi Falls

roars like an orphan

her dreams flooded with running water

ambles her cool square

ready to ambush giant grasshoppers

who rub their legs to smile

at night, she's just shadow

and a dying pyre.

above, a mango hangs his head,

an impotent heart filled with murder.

The Shape

What is the shape of the wise man?

Is it the unblinking eye or the open hand?

Is it the restless foot or the compassionate heart?

Is it a book of prayers or a moment of silence?

Is it a wild horse in the fields of Shangri La

Or a bolt of lightning over Angkor Wat?

Is it that fragile water lily in a pond in Luang Prabang

Or the croaking frog in a Mississippi mudslide

Gone now, without a trace.

No one says it is an unsheathed sword.

Few would argue for a cracked atomic mushroom

Boiling an ocean of sharp-toothed sharks to prove an equation.

Uncertain judgment should be noted

Regarding tiny infants on University Avenue

Or humble ants packing their ditty bags

At the first hint of a cloud of RAID coming their way.

And it is almost certainly never found in a mirror.

A Question of Place

Poseidon digs a grave for me in the side
Of beleaguered Gaia:

Trench wide, ocean deep, a hole calling
From beneath his cold, stoic waves.

Ambitiously he makes ready,
Gazing at the teeming shores of man

As though there is not space enough upon the earth
For this sort of thing.

The Ocean Lord does not realize the methods of disposal
are as myriad as the erosions.

Even with feet pierced at birth,
Oedipus could not resist the call to a home
he never recognized.

The son is tied to fate, to soil, to heart, to grave.

What home is this, that people want?
To be born where the final comfort is served.

In exasperation, hearts gasp for the complexity of ants.

Surely ants don't ask such riddles of themselves,
Even those night travelers upon the beach

Swept away by Poseidon's mischief,
Trying to return beneath the hill of their own making.

Fury

And I swear sometimes
I'm going to take this town down

Downtown

Uptown

Around Town

Like a London Bridge
And a Korean song.

Gonna grab my shabby gear
And pull down a titan's ear.

Gonna holler till the walls buckle
Yawping and Squawking

Whatever a man's gotta do
To get through to you.

The revolution is actually
A straight line to change

You can't keep going in circles-
I see that now.

He's left, she's right.
Who's wrong?

That's not even the question.

You see, we're free.

To Be in an age of empty
Is like a period at the end

Of a one-word
Sentence.

I've got fire at the bottom of my shoes
Like I scraped myself on a dragon.

I've got a body of mud
That's tired of being treated like dirt.

I've got water flowing for a heart
'Cause oceans,

Oceans always get the last word...

And I swear sometimes
This town ain't gonna take me down

III. Ghosts of Earth and Knowledge

Maggots

Chew their meals with
Draughts of iron and salt.

They know they hunger,

These mechanics,
These instruments of turning

With their quiet arias of change,
Their inventive waltzes
For raw lacerations.

Live flesh is spared their deliberate groping.

They only have bellies for the dead.

A shaved monk dreads samsara,
The eternal return.

A young boy saves
Coins for a bicycle.

Many mothers understand all of these routines,
Circumambulating their prams before nursing.

*Songkran Niyomsane's
Forensic Medicine Museum*

Behind the Siriraj Hospital:

The Chinese cannibal's corpse
Was stuffed and hung in a glass box.
His bad orthodontia flickers like nightlights
After hours.

Honestly, he's a bad piece
Of shoe leather. Rancid jerky.

Impolitic students visiting the second floor
Contemplate Rama VIII as the Thai JFK.

Head doctors confirm
An uncommon number
Of unclaimed corpses
Received a single bullet

In the forehead

To study the methods
Of modern regicide.

Periwinkle tile and placid aquariums
Among imperfect babies soaking
Within dusty beakers of formaldehyde
Are supposed to soothe you on your tour.

A brown clay jar on the floor

Slowly fills with baht

For the solitary soul of a tiny boy
Crammed inside to suffocate by his last enemies
In the world.

Reach inside.

You'll feel a young ghost's hand
reach back, looking for toys.

Behind you,
Dr. Niyomsane's own cadaver chuckles
From a clean hook, the eternal student, daring
Tomorrow's professional investigators
to study him.

An Exhibition of Korean Document Boxes

What did the owners of these ornate boxes
Tuck away within these spaces?

Love letters? A plan to conquer Japan?
A tally of harvests and a schedule to excavate
Vast plots of kim chee?

A poem, not unlike this one?
A sketch even more beautiful than the box itself?

A letter to the king, suggesting a library
Where secretly, colorful revolutionaries
Would scheme against everyone
But finally be undone by inertia
And a tiny, unsung grain of rice from the future?

A toy.

A jewel.

A dream.

Something completely inappropriate.

Witnessing these splendid ham gathered together,

I suspect their original owners would never
willingly walk into the same room with one another,
or even give
The craftsmen a grateful nod.

Returning home, I apologize to my cardboard boxes,
Packing the miscellaneous into them.

Wisdom

I

The Greeks say wisdom begins
with a face in the mirror that
says I do not know.

Sun Tzu needed a lovely girl's head to show
that knowing yourself
and knowing your foe
was enough to win a war best won without
a single drop of blood upon these rosy roads filled with
beauty.

Confucius with his aging pupils
had enough to time to scribble out
"It is only the wisest and the very stupidest who cannot change."

The lousy old man from Ho-nan in his laid-back way says,
"Between good and evil, how much difference?"

On the Internet, you can find a copy of the I-Ching
that will give free readings at a click of the button
if you're too lazy to toss the coins and yarrow,
with all of the reliability of a tarot deck stripped
of the minor arcana.

Exacting physicists in their duty say
everything that rises must converge
and every action carries an opposite reaction
equal and pure.

The zen monks in the mountains think they can
get away with the "I don't know" of fushiki and

nothing more than an empty fist.
If they aren't careful it will cost all of them their lives.

The Chinese say that wisdom begins when you
begin calling things by their proper names.

An Amway rep (who shall remain anonymous)
says tough times don't last but tough people do and
its best to go into business for yourself but not by yourself.
Such wisdom is as old as the pyramids.

Depending on whom you talk to.

In some cultures,
it is rude to talk to someone if you have nothing to say,
and after a time you might find that saying nothing and
saying something amount to the same thing.

II.

A Hmong man was quoted obscurely:
"The world is only as large as a man is willing to walk"

Exhausted and weary, the GIs in Kuwait say:
"Wheels are better than heels."

Mortal Kombat, between its savage rounds contends
there is no knowledge that is not power.
It's not worth
losing your head
or your heart
for a quarter.

From the lightless grave,
Lord Acton wags his ink-stained fingers powerlessly

in disapproval
about abuse
and absolutes.

Thundering Mr. Eliot through an April haze
murmured incomprehensibly
with a lost Brahmin's lullaby:
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata,
while a shrieking young boy from the back streets
can only see:
a wasted mile of indigo ink.
It will never be his mantra.

The dog whispers conspiratorially
If you can not kill it or eat it,
play with it or sleep with it, or even crap on it,
Leave it alone.

But then again, they say dreaming dogs lie, don't they?

Huxley wishes that in 60 years he could have produced
a message more profound than "treat people a little more nicely,"
while Beatles proclaim
that all you need is love.

So it goes.

After all of this, a young mother looks at me and asks
"Why bother looking at all, if that's the best you can give?"

Peering down into that cavernous cradle
and her trusting baby's lively smile,

How can I come empty handed?

Warhammer

The boy in the bookstore corner
Browses a book of war

Sanguine gore, chattering apparati
Cumulus clouds of dusty pandemonium
Shriek smoke, terror stacks
And measurements by megadeaths

This is man versus the alien
The Stranger

Horde of chaos
Occupant of contested space

To be so lonely

To be so savage

I, regarding an ethereal volume
Of my former enemy's overpriced verses
A wreath of reconciliation over lost dreams

Like a distant Martian mercenary
Beside him,

I remember when I
Read books like that,

A wraith

Building A Library

At times I think of having a child
So I can have my language back again.
So I can recapture a thousand prodigal
aggregates of thought.

Whether I gain a girl or a boy is irrelevant,
although I think I might not want a hermaphrodite,
as unenlightened as that may sound.

I contemplate the inevitable tug of war
between my partner and I
to divine some fitting name like Odin plucking runes
or Adam naming things.

I stare at my bookshelf and wonder with what to fill the spaces
in the best interests of the child
whose head is still a holy tabula rasa.

I raise my arms and go abracadabra, trying to invoke
my father's memory and the first books I laid my eyes on,
now molding in the attic, outdated,
yet still my grand foundation.

Perusing the modern bookstore, it's become clear.
My old companions?

Supplanted, their glossy replacements
unfamiliar and pricey,
whom I cannot help but maintain
a certain resentful suspicion.

I consider making my own library from
scratch and hunt and peck:

A bestiary of things true, antiqued and rumored.

A catalog of seeds and their ancestors.

A history of the world riddled with holy texts
and rational formulas fighting for the human soul.

A chronicle of day and night swaddled in wind, in rain.

A codex of anatomy and architecture
with a pop-up picture of the future,
frightfully cubist and compressed.

As my wife enters, appraising my blueprints, she tsks, and says:
Weren't you just going to build
a secret ninja training compound instead?

Sheepishly, I wonder
If that idea wouldn't be easier,
although good sense is expensive these days.

The Watermelon

half eaten,
this severed skull
once grew full and round
in a field I can barely imagine,
a plump green tiger head by the curling vine

Now at midnight,
the scent of my neighbor's marijuana
heavy in the air,

I'm staring at what remains
on my Frigidaire's shelf:

seeds dark and hard constellations,
flesh sweet and moist.

I do not dare compare it to anything else,
ready to take a black-handled knife
to this thick shell
and finish this business like a butcher
at the edge of the city.

My mouth is becoming a lake,
restless, ready to swallow a continent
one shoreline at a time.

I wonder if he still hopes
with what little is left

to keep growing,

filled with memories of the caring farmhands
who cradled him,

waiting to pass these stories
on to his own children.

I close the door, empty-handed,
my belly filled with chaos...

Democracia

Father was a tiger
Ground beneath the wheels

His fat was burned to light a torch
But there's no liberty here

Only the ashes of the village
That couldn't evolve

Where ghost grandchildren play with ghost grandparents
And the parents are nowhere to be seen at all.

Where have they gone? Where have they gone?
A delay of a day for an idea, a delay of a lifetime

for the dead upon the ground.

Look, what remains-

This hut hasn't the ambition of Ozymandias
These craters were once a rice field
This ox was no man's enemy

And what we have left to say could explode any minute.

Kingdoms

Purple as
Crushed shellfish

Life expectancy,
That bruised question of finite measures.

Every hammered crown
Is removed some way.

Scepters with their strange rotations
Hold no true sway over the inner natures

Of manatee, mechanics
Or magma with her radial flow.

Inspired robes unravel every hour
For gifted maggots and their maws

Who roll in the smoky valleys
Once our fathers' holy mountains.

The Asia you know is murder
On monarchies.

American democracy is far safer
For two-legged mosquitoes.

There, competition rarely ends in graves
For anyone but foreigners,

Distant and near.

Oni

My demons have names I try to keep
To myself
A scimitar smile as I walk with them in Spring
A snarl and a python handshake
That wants to slither away with you

II.

Am I a dog in Demon State
Or a demon in Dog City?
Easy to say, difficult to believe,
I can show you the way, in either case

III.

I miss the cherry blossoms of DC
My little memories rattling like the Metro
Through Farragut Station

IV.

Rest, Mishima,
Rest your beautiful skull
In the field by Ono no Komachi–
Dream amid the leaves and stone walls,
Let the wind shout of forgotten Yamato for you.
It's been 30 years already.
You're becoming a cartoon
While the girl is an idle monk's mocking brush stroke.

V.

Could Sojobo have slain Shuten Doji?
Unworthy speculation!

Your pen should be remembering the slaughter
Of Khoua Her's tiny waifs

Or the death of Tong Kue

The drowned of the Mekong

Or even poor Vincent Chin
Struggling for his last breath

Beneath Detroit bats
Devoid of pity

VI.

No matter what I shout
There isn't a stone on the earth that will shatter today.

Thread Between Stone.

Those old Greeks.

They punctured time with their stories, stitching
century to century

And I did not see this until 3 A.M. naturally.

I was raised on their tales pebble by pebble

Like Aesop's thirsty fox-

A scholar in the wake of semiotics and systems theory
So irrelevant when children were master snipers
For secret wars on the Plain of Jars and Afghan mountains.
Times when the only teachers that mattered in Kosovo
were mercenaries.

If you stare at the labyrinth long enough, you'll see
Arrogant Arachne's thread, used secretly by Gordius
Until ambitious Alexander cut that silly knot in two
With a sword as sharp as Ockham's.

As your eyes grow bleary from musty notes, after a time,
You will connect those pieces to Ariadne,
And the trap laid for old Dedaelus,
Father of Icarus and Minotaur lairs.

One threads the maze with a lover to defeat the furious beast
While the other threads spiral shells with an ant and a string-
A beast to defeat an irate patron's riddle!

The legends are filled with strange ties like that.
It's almost Buddhist in its circular irony.

Poor Oedipus never saw how he was tripped up by his puzzle,
And scholars
Never noticed he got it only half-right. Half-wrong.

The Sphinxian dilemma was no empty koan.

"What has four legs at morning, two at noon, and three at sunset?
What is the weakest when it has the most support?"

Man, the children chirp. Man was the answer that made him king.

No.

The question was one of self-knowledge,
and the only true response was "I".

But he could not see himself within the riddle,
So he returned to home, to dark fates decreed,
Undone by his blindness to his own identity.

That's what you get for cheating with the Oracle.
There are no shortcuts with Destiny.

The Greeks laid traps like this that took centuries to spring.
The whole Trojan war was a conflict of divine metaphors.

If that lusty prince had chosen between
wisdom or the peaceful hearth
And not the promise of fleeting beauties,
a thousand men might have
Different graves.

Today, in the heart of Western democracy,
As presidents chase interns
With their own oral traditions,

It's hard not to wince at unlearned lessons.

And gazing at Egypt,
Beneath the pyramids of Gaza and great royal valleys

There is a world
Oblivious to all of my mythic meanderings.

Scorched and bleached to epic simplicity,
You will never understand the dreams of mummies
Until you see a silkworm cocoon

Who aspires to emerge as a butterfly in her next incarnation
before someone unravels her for her thread.

IV. Miscellaneous Rumors Of My Time

Carbon

Although the body is 70% water
What remains is built upon carbon.

I stand awed by the orbits of these dark atoms:

The infinite flavors they form

The varied hues and sounds

The motions they generate

Erecting cities, razing mountains
Feeding upon everything certain.

They even dream, whether fashioned
Into butterflies or soft humans.

Why don't I taste like my distant cousin the chicken
Or a banana?

Pressing my hands hard together, I fail to change into
Diamonds or oil.

I suppose it's not enough pressure
To spark transformation.

Not even into a new star burning brightly,
The sun for billions

Who will never realize how close they came

To being in my shoes.

Her Body, My Monuments

Fierce as a thirsty nak
In April

Nestled in a dress
The hue of sleepy That Dam
on Chantha Khoumane

Her lissome stride
Awakes dreamers

The colors of the world
The children of rivers

Our sandalwood city
Where talaats greet the moon,
Phi dance with dreams

And the future begins to stir
Not with a yawn, but her laugh,
A gaze

That has known stars the way
Others know flowers.

Pavlov's Menagerie Ruminates

Well, better this than life

In an electrified rat cage,
Hugging Harlow's wire mothers,
Getting stuffed in Schrödinger's lethal boxes
Or getting launched into low orbit

To bathe in cosmic rays for the Kremlin
Because I couldn't sign fast enough
Or cuddle a kitten in front of a camera.

Navigating the thin-walled maze
Between best friend
Or mad moments like Cujo

I've still got most of my original equipment.
I'm fed.

One ring, and my belly goes hollow
As the average human soul.

Lately, I gnaw on memories more than substance
But I'm still not a sheep,

And no one begs for my vote.

Moments In The Eye

Among those we see

Those most intriguing
Hint
Of her soul
When cameras aren't flashing

It's like glimpsing a glittering carp
Seconds before she changes

Into something truly immortal
Human tongues lack words for,

Dashing away with a laugh
And a playful splash

To cheer the living

Timepieces

Stone. Beam. Gear. Road.
My wife beneath Big Ben
Returns

Wonders: What lasts,

Sees change.

The clock ticks but has not seen
The worlds she has,

Her dreams turned into ink and page,
Voice and hope.

Who should really stand the final test of time?

The watch, or the one who winds it?

She walks down the street

A child of stars who laugh above
With the true answer.

Zelkova Tree

A friend warned me the other day
Not to write about the zelkova

Or I might come back as one
And find myself cut into furniture

Just as things start to get interesting.

The other day the zelkova warned me
Not to worry about my friends

Or I might stay human

And find myself cutting furniture
Just as things start to get interesting.

Poultry

Scrawny daughters of dinosaurs,
Your lovers never shut up—
Preening in streets lined with black feathers

As if every hour is the start of a new day,
And the sun won't ascend without them.

Beneath your bamboo domes
I see every soft throat with its
Destiny of edge and demise.

You're in hot water,
Losing every frantic thread
That failed your sad quests for flight.

Your legs stiffen without eulogies,
And your wings can't pray their petitions
To the god of the Archaeopteryx for delivery.

Arriving in St. Paul, immigration asks me
If I've been in contact with livestock.

I want to say: "Are you kidding?
Have you ever even been to my homeland?"

Looking out to the rising sun my breakfast
Will never see again.

The Tuk-Tuk Diaries, Part I

Roar. Sputter and vroom
Take a hard turn at 60
With a glittering “beep beep”
Down a street of mutts and roaming butts

Smoke and flesh, beer splashing,
Cash flashing just below waste-level.

Take a ride, farang, and see what
A handful of baht and some bargaining gets you
By the time that you come to a stop in Bangkok,
The city of insomniac angels.

Just be sure to watch your luggage at all times.

II.

Khaosan Road is canned Chaos, an eternal Friday
Of wolf whistles and smoke.
Even at noon, you could fall into a raving patch of
Midnight during a full moon
Just by stepping into the wrong noodle shop.

You can buy crispy critters for a steal
Or prop up an Akha village for a day
For the price of a silver bangle during the down season

The music comes at you like a stranger knocking on your door.
Beware of souls trying to make money off
Backpacking cheapskates here, reeking of weeds,
Bad funk and second-hand dreams.

They've seen your kind before and can strip your wallet
 Before you've finished your first swallow of the street.
At least you can get funny T-Shirts here.
But they shrink.

III.

Catch a tuk-tuk to Doi Suthep
And you can see golden chedi and giant bells,
Fire a cheap crossbow just past a naga's stony mouth

 And sing your songs of heartbreak to the rain
 Using a karaoke machine among the food stalls.

"It's beautiful," I hear a henna-haired tourist gush.
Her guide, a young boy with a ghastly scorpion tattoo
Wants to tell her "Take me home with you,"

 But doesn't have the words, and just says:
 "Where would you like to go next?"

Trying not to rush her, hoping she doesn't decide
To stay here forever instead.

IV.

In Laos, there's an army of tuk-tuks at the Talaat Sao
Waiting for the right word to go.
They slumber, tiny blue dragons,
 With wheels for eyes and wide mouths
 For grinning passengers
 Who never seem to come.

There aren't many places to go besides home,
The wat and the market
And glancing next door at those raucous streets

Of hollow,
It may be just as well.

Whorl

Today, a poet died
Because he lost all of his questions.

Somewhere in France, a tire exploded,
Delaying a young girl's tour.
She's burst tears,
Caving around a fistful of euros
As she senses lost moments

Just over the next hill
Floating, a red balloon.

There she imagines Joan of Arc,
A bicycle thief and Jacques Cousteau.

A street that's been there
For centuries.

Elsewhere, a little boy becomes an artist
As he sniffs his first jar of tempera
Handed out by a young teacher from Hokkaido
Unaware of the seventy two tubes of oil paint
He will use in his entire lifetime.

Today, I'm waving at a crow in Como Park
As if my hands were semaphore flags
Signaling "Hello," like a transient grey alien

Wondering what a bird has to do to become
reincarnated as a writer the next time around.

Yesterday, a girl I knew changed her hair color
Insisting it made a difference, handing me
An antique birdcage she found in the street

Its curved door broken off, a rusty smile for
Curious dogs who don't know what to make of it,
Howling in a Frogtown alley devoid of poetry.

End Notes

In The Analytical Language of John Wilkins (El idioma analítico de John Wilkins), the writer Jorge Luis Borges described 'a certain Chinese Encyclopedia,' the Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge, in which it is written that animals are divided into:

1. *those that belong to the Emperor,*
2. *embalmed ones,*
3. *those that are trained,*
4. *suckling pigs,*
5. *mermaids,*
6. *fabulous ones,*
7. *stray dogs,*
8. *those included in the present classification,*
9. *those that tremble as if they were mad,*
10. *innumerable ones,*
11. *those drawn with a very fine camelhair brush,*
12. *others,*
13. *those that have just broken a flower vase,*
14. *those that from a long way off look like flies.*

As a helpful courtesy, the writer includes these brief notes on things of varying interest. Ni men kwam waw pheau thi soy haw beung lok vithi me:

Nak: Sometimes synonymous with Naga. Typically depicted as a many-headed giant serpent, as a river creature, and sometimes as a subterranean being. Nak are believed to help the Lao during wars, floods and are associated with fertility. Some say the Lao are descendants of a giant Nak living in the Mekong. To some, Nak are snake deities who converted to Buddhism and now protect the Buddhist Dharma. In art, they appear on the balustrades of temple causeways and platforms ("naga bridges"), personifying the rainbow, bridging the earthly and celestial worlds.

Imperious

Bluegrass: A grass native to the temperate regions around the world, including the Midwest of North America, Europe and Asia. Also known as meadow-grass and speargrass. Butterfly food.

Burning Eden One Branch At A Time

Mississippi: A river running through North America. Figures occasionally in US art and literature. Wet.

Vientiane: The current capitol of Laos, population 200,000. Also known as City of Sandalwood, or City of the Moon, depending on your source.

Hmong Market At Luang Prabang

Luang Prabang: The former royal capitol of Laos and a UN World Heritage Site, population 22,000. Many lovely views.

IO

IO: A moon of Jupiter. In Greek mythology, a priestess of Hera, the wife of Zeus, king of the gods. Io has many torments and misadventures, including being changed into a white cow chased by a horny Zeus and a jealous Hera, but she ultimately becomes an ancestor of Hercules, a prominent hero in that tradition.

Safavids: An Iranian dynasty (1502-1722) with origins in a Sufi order. The Safavid dynasty was established by Shah Ismail, who was also a poet in several languages, but didn't quit his day job.

Song of The Kaiju

Kaiju: A Japanese term for "mysterious beast" and as of this writing, those featured in films such as Godzilla, Gamera, Mothra, and King Kong, etc. The term daikaiju is occasionally applied to particularly giant monsters, although the precise threshold at which one qualifies is contentious.

Typhon: In Greek myth, the last son of Gaia and Tartarus, described typically as an ornery storm demon with a hundred heads and a hundred serpents issuing from his thighs. An enemy of Olympian gods.

Little Bear

Ursa Minor: A constellation also known as the 'little dipper' or 'smaller bear' often connected with the myth of Callisto.

Observing The Oblivious

Bayon: 13th century Cambodian temple built by King Jayavarman VII and the centre of his capital, Angkor Thom. Most researchers concur it's the last state temple to be built at Angkor and the only one built primarily as a Mahayana Buddhist temple.

The Deep Ones

Deep Ones: A fictional race of immortal, frog-like, ocean-dwelling creatures with an affinity for mating with humans, featured in the work of horror writer H.P. Lovecraft and others.

The You Do Devil

The You Do Devil: The rascal who causes those things you do, especially those without explanation.

Aorta: The largest artery in the human body, connected to the heart.

Amnesia: I forget what was going to go here.

An Archaeology of Snow Forts

Cathay: An anglicized version of the term for China popularized by Marco Polo upon his encounters with the Khitan tribe ruling China then.

Pompeii: A ruined Roman city destroyed and completely buried during the eruption of the volcano Mount Vesuvius on 24 August 79 AD. Today, a UN World Heritage site swarming with tourists.

Qin: (778 BC-207 BC) A state during the 'Spring and Autumn' and 'Warring States' periods of China.

Laocoon: In Greek myth, a priest who tried to warn the Trojans from accepting the Trojan Horse into their city. Essentially coined the phrase: "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts." For his trouble, he and his sons were soon strangled by sea-serpents sent by the gods.

Maginot: A line of concrete fortifications built by the French between World War I and II, designed to protect the French from invasion. Generally considered one of the great failures of military history. Frequently mispronounced.

Before Going Feral

Limbo: In Roman Catholicism, a place for souls who cannot enter heaven but don't deserve hell. Protestant and Orthodox Christianity does not accept the existence of limbo. Egassem terces a si ereh.

Destroy All Monsters

Herodotus (484 BC–ca.425 BC): A Greek writer regarded as the "father of history" by the West. He wrote 'The Histories,' about his wide travels through the Mediterranean.

five fragments

S-21: Security Prison 21, the former Tuol Svay Prey High high school in Cambodia where prisoners of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime were held, interrogated and tortured before being sent for execution at the Choeung Ek extermination centre outside of the capitol of Phnom Penh. An estimated 17,000-20,000 people were held there, of whom only 7 survived by the time the prison was closed. Today, a tourist attraction with a gift shop.

Weisman: Also known as the Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art located on the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus in Minneapolis, Minnesota since 1934.

Dion's Cabinet of Curiosities: In 2001 at the Weisman Art Museum, artist Mark Dion examined the distinctions between "objective" science and "subjective" art and the logic of classifying systems that shape knowledge and memory. Fnord. He used the European Renaissance tradition of the Wunderkammern (literally "wonder chamber" or cabinet of wonder), where early collectors

carefully displayed varied objects to astonish viewers. Many of these private collections became the basis for public museums in the late-18th and 19th centuries.

Yul Brynner (1920–1985): A Russian-born actor. He appeared in many movies and stage productions in the United States, best known for his portrayal of the king of Thailand in the film version of Rodgers & Hammerstein musical *The King and I*.

B-52: The Boeing B-52 Stratofortress, a long-range jet strategic bomber flown by the United States Air Force (USAF) since 1954. Its original mission was nuclear deterrence through retaliation. Used during the Vietnam War as a carpet bomber.

Neak Luong: A Cambodian town.

Ambassador Swank: Emory C. Swank served as ambassador to Cambodia from 1970-1973.

Trivial Pursuit: A popular 20th century board game testing knowledge, particularly of obscure facts.

The Ghost Nang Nak

Nang Nak: A legendary Thai ghost, the wife of a soldier. She came back with their dead child and tried to resume a normal life with him when he returned from the war. Things went a little wrong, although accounts dispute certain details. The subject of many popular stories, movies and operas. A shrine was erected to her at Wat Mahabut in Bangkok, where she regularly receives visitors.

Takian trees: A tree found in Thailand. Frequently reputed to house the spirits of women.

Wat Mahabut : Chiefly known as the temple where a shrine for Nang Nak was built. Located at Soi 7 of Sukhumwit Soi 77 in Bangkok.

The Tiger Penned At Kouangsi Falls

Kouangsi Falls: Also known as Tat Kuang Si, located approximately 32km South of Luang Prabang. They are a series of very beautiful tiered waterfalls over limestone formations.

A Question of Place

Question: The beginning of many things.

Our Place: Uncertain things.

Gaia: In Greek myth, the goddess personifying the earth.

Maggots

Samsara: In Buddhism, the cycle of birth and consequent decay and death, rebirth and redeath, in which all beings in the universe participate. Samsara is associated with suffering and the antithesis of nirvana.

Songkran Niyomsane's Forensic Medicine Museum

Rama VIII (1925 -1946): Also known as King Ananda Mahidol, Rama VIII was the eighth king of the Chakri dynasty of Thailand. He died a mysterious death.

JFK (1917-1963): A common abbreviation since the 20th century for John F. Kennedy, an assassinated president of the United States of America.

Regicide: The murder of kings and royalty.

Baht: The principle unit of currency in Thailand.

Wisdom

Sun Tzu (544-496 BC): A Chinese general, author of the ancient text 'The Art of War.'

I-Ching : Also known as 'The Book of Changes' One of the oldest classical Chinese texts, it is a set of predictions represented by a set of 64 abstract line arrangements called hexagrams.

Yarrow: An astringent herb also known as arrowroot, bad man's plaything, carpenter's weed, death flower, devil's nettle, eerie, and old man's mustard among others. Dried yarrow is used in I Ching divination.

Fushiki: When the monk Bodhidharma, founder of zen, met Emperor Wu, the Emperor asked, "What is the holy ultimate truth?" he answered, "It is Emptiness itself and there is nothing holy." "Who, then, is the one who now stands confronting me?" responded the Emperor. "I do not know (Fushiki)!" was Bodhidharma's reply.

Mortal Kombat: A video game from the 1990s depicting martial arts competitions in a contemporary fantasy setting. Source for many bad movies, comic books, TV shows, techno songs and live theater.

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965): An English poet whose work includes "The Wasteland" and "The Hollow Men".

Brahmin: The highest caste in traditional Hindu society, composed of priests and teachers.

Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata: In “The Wasteland,” T.S. Eliot quotes the Hindu text, the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, regarding what the thunder said: “Give, Be Compassionate, Be Self-Controlled.”

Mantra: A religious or mystical syllable or poem typically used to focus concentration.

Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) : A tall English humanist writer who emigrated to the US, largely remembered as author of “A Brave New World,” a novel about a dystopian future.

Warhammer

Wraith: A shadow-thing, a spirit of another world, a ghost, a mysterious being to be feared.

Laotian American Writers:

[Nithan chak nak tang nang seu gnang bo leew theua phok mi lai
khon thi gnang khien]

Building A Library

Runes: The characters of certain ancient alphabets. 20th - 21st century usage seen primarily among academics and nerds. See also: **J.R. R. Tolkien , Dungeons & Dragons, and Viking Re-Enactors.**

Tabula Rasa: A “blank slate” theory of the mind, that individuals are born with no innate or built-in mental content, and all their knowledge is built up gradually from their experiences of the outside world.

Abacadabra: A commonly used incantation by stage magicians, formerly used as a cure for fevers and inflammations. Multiple theories on the origin of the word, including Aramaic for "I will create as I speak." Believed more powerful than “Presto!”

Codex: A quire of manuscript pages held together by stitching; the earliest form of book, replacing scrolls and wax tablets of earlier times.

Glossaries: Made by humans, always suspect.

Sensei: A teacher, from the Japanese language.

The Watermelon

Frigidaire: American refrigerator manufacturer originally known as the Guardian Frigerator Company based in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, established in 1916.

Democracia

Ozymandias: A sonnet by Percy Bysshe Shelley, published in 1818. The poem is believed to refer to Ramses the Great (i.e., Ramses II), Pharaoh of the 19th dynasty of ancient Egypt.

Oni

Oni: A Japanese ogre, troll or demon usually portrayed as

hideous, gigantic creatures with sharp claws, wild hair, and two long horns. Originally invisible spirits or gods who cause disasters, disease, and other unpleasantness. They can assume different forms to deceive (and often devour) humans.

Yukio Mishima (1925-1970) : The public name of Kimitake Hiraoka, a prominent Japanese writer famous for his nihilistic post-war writings, an obsession with the bushido warrior code of the samurai and his ritual suicide after a bizarre attempt to inspire a coup d'etat to restore the emperor of Japan.

Yak: Powerful spirits, also known as yaksha, or yuk, and in some cases related to the dreaded Rakshasa, all of whom do not make an appearance in this book.

Ono no Komachi (825–900 A.D.): A famous Japanese poet in the Heian period, noted as a rare beauty.

Yamato: An expression related to "Japanese spirit" or the "Soul of Old Japan".

Sojobo: The mythical king of the tengu, minor bird-like deities in the mountain forests of Japan. He is extremely powerful, and legend says he has the strength of 1,000 normal tengu, living on Mount Kurama (north of Kyoto). Sojobo is best known for teaching the doomed warrior Minamoto Yoshitsune martial arts.

Shuten Doji: A terrifying Oni whose name literally means "Great Drunkard Boy," or "Drunken Boy Ogre" who liked to eat human flesh and drink blood, partying like a frat boy with his Oni buddies while terrorizing the nearby nubile maidens of Nippon.

Khousa Her: A woman who killed her six children in Minnesota in 1998.

Tong Kue (1962-1998): A Hmong man killed by Detroit police in June, 1998 in his own home even though the police were called in only to open the door and get his family back inside after a domestic argument with Tong Kue's in-laws. Almost no one remembers this case.

Vincent Chin (1955-1982): A Chinese American murdered in 1982 in Detroit, Michigan by two white autoworkers who'd recently been laid off. His killers served no jail time, were given three years probation, fined \$3,000 and ordered to pay \$780.00 in court costs.

Detroit bats: ~~Potentially~~ lethal recreational objects.

The United States of America (USA): Changes people.

Thread Between Stone

Aesop: A possibly fictitious Greek author of fables.

Semiotics: The study of signs and symbols.

Systems theory: A transdisciplinary/multiperspectual theory studying the structure and properties of systems and the relationships that give rise to new properties within the whole system. But it's not really as boring as it sounds.

Plain of Jars: A large plain containing thousands of mysterious stone jars scattered throughout the Xieng Khouang province in the Laos. A primary battleground during the war for Laos in the 1960s and 70s. Also known as the Plaines Des Jarres and the PDJ.

Arachne: A legendary weaver who angered Athena, Greek goddess of weaving (among other things) and was turned into a

spider after defeating Athena in a weaving competition.

Gordius: The legendary first king of Phrygia whose chariot was tied by what came to be known as the Gordian Knot. Legend said whoever could unravel it would be master of 'Asia'. Rather than fiddle with the knot, Alexander the Great sliced the knot in half with his sword, in 333 BC.

William of Ockham (1288-1348): English logician and Franciscan friar who developed Ockham's Razor: Explaining any phenomenon should use as few assumptions as possible.

Koan: An unanswerable zen Buddhist riddle.

Reliable: The antonym of many things. A virtue demanding questions.

Oracle: A wise counsel and prophet. In particular, the Oracle of Delphi gave prophecies from a temple on the slopes of Mount Parnassus. Her advice frequently helped many mythic figures overcome challenges set by Greek gods for one offense or another. Often depicted as sexy, mad or both.

Poultry

Archaeopteryx: The earliest known avian, similar in size and shape to a magpie. Tastes like chicken.

Whorl

Joan of Arc (c.1412–1431): A French heroine and Catholic Saint. Presently a mandatory role for all French actresses to play at least once.

Jacques Cousteau (1910-1997): A French naval officer, explorer, filmmaker, and researcher who spent a lifetime studying the sea and all forms of life within it. A manfish who hated school as a child.

Semaphore flags: A signaling system based on waving a pair of hand-held flags in particular patterns to designate specific letters and words. Popular where human voices are hard to hear.

Frogtown: A neighborhood in St. Paul's District 7, known officially as the Thomas-Dale neighborhood located northwest of downtown St. Paul in the north central part of the city.

Laos: Formerly known as the Kingdom of a Million Elephants, divided into 16 khoueng. A landlocked country approximately the size of Utah, currently known as Sathalanalat Paxathipatai Paxaxon Lao. The national flower is the dok champa. Its roots are in the ancient kingdom of Lan Xang, established in the 14th Century under King Fa Ngum. For 300 years Lan Xang included large parts of present-day Cambodia and Thailand, and all of Laos. People still live there, and dream.

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