



THE CAPILANO REVIEW



 
THE BABYLONIANS SAW
THE STARS AS BOOKS
IN WHICH COULD BE READ
THE SECRETS OF
HEAVEN AND EARTH

THE TALMUD TELLS OF A

LIBRARY



THAT PRECEDES
THE CREATION
OF THE WORLD

— Cheryl Sourkes

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FRONT & BACK COVERS

Cheryl Sourkes

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The publication of this issue marks the beginning of *The Capilano Review's* 25th year. No literary magazine makes it to such a point without the hard work and dedication of many people. Without them we'd not have this particular public forum for writers, and thus it is first to those who've made TCR a reality that I'd like to give thanks:

Pierre Coupey for beginning the magazine; Bill Schermbrucker, Ann Rosenberg, Dorothy Jantzen, and Pierre once again for their editorships during which, in each case, the magazine was transformed and revitalized; Penny Connell, Sharon Thesen, Reid Gilbert, Barry Cogswell, and Jenny Penberthy, who as genre editors gave unique shape and voice to many individual issues; Diane Relke, Leslie Savage, Jane Hamilton, and Elizabeth Rains, who as Managing Editors so effectively juggled the complex logistics of keeping the magazine on track; to the Canada Council, the Cultural Services Branch of BC, the Koerner Foundation, Capilano College, and its Humanities Division whose financial and moral support is essential to the magazine's past and to its future.

What inspired these people and organizations to give so willingly of their time, creative energy, and simple sweat is the work of the writers and artists of Canada and other countries. They create and nurture the spirit of our time and our place. They are the foundation of the belief that what is written well (in the most interdisciplinary sense of that phrase) must be read if we wish to call ourselves civil, thus civilised. Without our writers and artists, we are mere units of production: to them, a collective, deeply-felt thank you.

My pleasures as the current editor are due to those mentioned above. Again, my thanks — quietly, endlessly.

Bob Sherrin
North Vancouver 1996

The first of these is the fact that the human body is not a static entity, but a dynamic one, constantly changing and adapting to its environment. This is evident in the way that the body's shape and size vary from one individual to another, and from one generation to another. It is also evident in the way that the body's internal organs and systems change and adapt to different conditions of life. For example, the heart and lungs of a person who lives at high altitude will be different from those of a person who lives at low altitude. The muscles of a person who is a professional athlete will be different from those of a person who is a sedentary office worker. The brain of a person who is a professional musician will be different from that of a person who is a sedentary office worker. These changes and adaptations are the result of the body's response to its environment, and they are the basis of the individual differences that we see in the human population.

The second of these is the fact that the human body is not a simple machine, but a complex system. It is made up of many different parts, each of which has its own function and its own way of working. These parts are the organs and systems of the body, and they are all interconnected in a complex web of relationships. For example, the heart and lungs are connected to the rest of the body by a network of blood vessels. The muscles are connected to the bones by a network of tendons. The brain is connected to the rest of the body by a network of nerves. These connections are what allow the body to function as a whole, and they are the basis of the individual differences that we see in the human population.

The third of these is the fact that the human body is not a passive recipient of its environment, but an active participant in it. The body is constantly responding to its environment, and it is constantly changing and adapting to it. This is evident in the way that the body's shape and size vary from one individual to another, and from one generation to another. It is also evident in the way that the body's internal organs and systems change and adapt to different conditions of life. For example, the heart and lungs of a person who lives at high altitude will be different from those of a person who lives at low altitude. The muscles of a person who is a professional athlete will be different from those of a person who is a sedentary office worker. The brain of a person who is a professional musician will be different from that of a person who is a sedentary office worker. These changes and adaptations are the result of the body's response to its environment, and they are the basis of the individual differences that we see in the human population.

Melissa Hardy / THE LOVER OF THORNTON AVENUE

On one of their stolen nights together, standing in the middle of the park by the World War I Memorial, John had kissed her out of the light of the street-lamps, teasing, warning her, "Don't close your eyes, Anne. If illicit lovers close their eyes when they kiss, they grow to enormous size and can be seen for miles around." John was always erupting into whimsy. Fissures, she thought, crackling out from the long fault line which cut his personality jaggedly in half. ("If you think my husband's strange," she told her brother Raymond long distance — he lived in Montreal with his gay lover — "you should meet this crackpot.")

Testing this theory, Anne had closed her eyes, and, kissing him, had grown to immense proportions. Straightaway she was spotted by a woman who went to the same exercise studio as she did. The woman walked her dog at night in the park. Neither Anne nor John — eyes closed, bodies joined with such sweet pain at the hips — was aware of their presence, of the dog's rapt circling of the memorial as, snuffling, it received messages encoded in urine, or the woman's cat eyes in the dark. Only later, days later, when the woman turned to her in the change room of the studio and said, "Your husband's shaved that lovely great walrus's moustache," did Anne know they had been seen. "Oh, yes. A terrible mistake. He's growing it back," she assured the woman. Seen, but not found out.

But that was long ago — early, wet Spring — and now it was high summer, dry as a bone after a winter with little snow, the level of the lake low, a city-wide ban imposed on gratuitous lawn watering. Anne's husband Alex stood, gazing out the living room window at the street. He was surreptitiously watering the front lawn — he had put down new seed that year — and so must keep a look-out for the police who cruised the area in search of just such disobedient householders. All up and down the quiet street, neighbours kept watch over illicit sprin-

klers in the grainy dusk. It was mid-July, eight-thirty on a Wednesday night.

John had left just a few weeks before, transferred to Pickering, three hours away, less, if, as sometimes happened, the traffic on the 401 was light. Anne had hoped he would continue to see her, but he thought it best they end. Affairs were not convenient at such a remove and lately he had been unable to look his wife in the eye or even to make love to her. It seemed that, along with all his other streaks, went a moral one that Anne had been surprised to discover entirely lacking in herself. She had been married to Alex for only three years when she met John and had cheated on Alex, when the opportunity had arisen to do so, with not only very little compunction but with enthusiasm.

Anne was very sad that John had left. She had fallen in love with him. This was not surprising. Anne fell in love at the drop of a hat, at the drop of a shoe. She staggered through life like a drunk through a minefield, but without a drunkard's luck — she detonated every mine she came near.

"I'm only surprised it didn't happen sooner," Raymond told her over the phone when she complained, "But I thought I was safe, that, now that I was married, I wouldn't put myself through this particular hideous great wringer anymore."

"I know, I know," he commiserated. "The agony. The ecstasy. But there's no going against type, Anne. All of us are like that. You. Me. Dad was too. It's in the blood."

"But what do I do now?" she wailed.

Knowing that she was fatally flawed in this respect, that the gene she bore within her for straying, for hungry-heartedness, made her a criminal element in the world of neat streets and small houses and nuclear families in which she found herself, was no help. She must mourn and not appear to mourn. She must put her life back together again when no one knew that it had fallen apart. And she must do all this hoping that John would change his mind, that he would return to her. It was a double handicap she operated under and the stakes were the rest of her life.

"Oh!" Alex exclaimed softly. He hunkered down a little and peered more intently through the window into the gathering dark.

Anne crouched on the couch, knees tucked under her, chin in

hand, elbow on the arm of the sofa. Staring off down the gloomy hall to the bedrooms, she envisioned her reunion with John: He could call (surely he would call), asking that they meet, and she would suggest the lily pond at the park at dusk.

"Oh!" repeated Alex. He was bidding for her attention.

Anne closed her eyes, drew breath. Be careful, she reminded herself. Don't appear distracted. He'll notice if you're not yourself. (He hadn't so far, or, if he had, he put it down to PMS or their failure to conceive a child. Something irritatingly condescending like that. His obtuseness had been a relief to Anne, but it also infuriated her. What was wrong with him? Why couldn't he see what was before his eyes?) "What is it, Alex?" she asked, feigning marginal interest. "Is it the police?"

"No," replied Alex. "By God! There he is, Annie, and right on time."

"Who?" asked Anne.

"The Lover of Thornton Avenue," Alex replied, his soft voice betraying his excitement. He was a big man to have such a light voice. "Here. Come look."

"I'm tired," Anne protested.

"You're always tired," Alex observed. "You should get your iron checked. Come on, Annie. Just for a minute. This is interesting."

Sighing, Anne unfolded herself and, rising from the couch, crossed to the window.

"See that man over there?" asked Alex, stepping to one side so that she could see. He pointed over her shoulder to a man standing by the postal box on the corner of Thornton and Grosvenor Streets. The light was too dim for her to be able to determine much about him, but he looked to be in his late thirties or early forties. He was of medium height and weight. His hair was a little sparse. He looked nervous. He kept shifting his weight from foot to foot, then craned his head to look down the street towards Beaton, then checked his watch. He looked like a man waiting for a bus, but there was no bus stop at Thornton and Grosvenor. "That's the man Lana told me about," Alex told Anne. "I'm sure of it."

"What man?" asked Anne.

"A number of the neighbours have noticed him," Alex told her.

"Lana was telling me on that Canada Day do of theirs. Apparently this has been going on for months, probably since before daylight savings time, only no one noticed until it became lighter. He meets someone."

"Who?" Anne asked.

"A woman," Alex replied. "A woman drives up in a car. It's always at about this time of night. She drives up and parks and he gets in and they make love."

Anne felt suddenly very weak. They make love? she thought. "How . . . how do you know?" she managed to ask.

"They get into the back seat. It's a big American car apparently, tinted windows . . . and they just disappear for fifteen minutes or so. I don't think anyone's tried to look in or anything. What else would they do? Let's watch and see if she comes."

"Oh, Alex, no!" cried Anne, pulling away. She felt ill all of a sudden, woozy, as if she might faint or vomit.

"What's the matter?" Alex asked.

"I don't know," said Anne. "Please, it's private. Their business. We shouldn't be looking on."

"You've gotten pretty high-minded all of a sudden!" Alex joshed her.

"It's not a question of being high-minded!" Anne insisted. Tears started to her eyes. (Surely John would have called by now, she thought wildly, written: "I can't go on without you. Can we meet?" He didn't get on with his wife. If guilt hadn't made him assiduous, he would have left her by now. Surely one month without the guilt would be enough Nearly a month had passed, and no word from him yet. She couldn't believe it. She couldn't stand it. She had counted on his inconstancy.)

But Alex had taken her by the shoulders and was peering into her face. "Your eyes are all swollen," he said. "It's your hay fever acting up again, isn't it? Why didn't you say anything? I'm going to have to ask the Baxters to pull that goldenrod. There's no reason why you should have to suffer because they're lazy gardeners."

Anne lowered her eyes so that she wouldn't have to meet his.

"Would you? I'd appreciate that. Sarah is always so snippy to me when I ask. I'll . . . I'll just go rinse them now," she murmured and, twisting out of his grasp, she headed towards the bathroom where she could

weep, with open mouth, into a pile of folded towels.

Alex watched his wife's fragile back as she retreated down the hall, noted the way she steadied herself with fingers trailed against the wall. She turned into the bathroom, shut the door behind her. He heard the sound of taps turning, running water.

He wondered what had happened between them. She seemed to move within a force-field he could not penetrate. When he touched her, he could feel her flinch, feel all her muscles tighten. When he made love to her in all the old ways he thought she liked, he was certain he sometimes felt her lips move against his flesh in a peculiar way. It was as though they were forming words, a word, a name perhaps, but his skin could not read lips. What soundless thing was she saying to his skin? Or was she disappearing inside herself? Or was it him?

He made a mental note to speak to Gene Baxter about the goldenrod, knowing full well that he had no intention of doing so. He needed a reason why she wept. Sighing, leaden in his gut, feeling old though not yet forty and wondering: was it stress at the office? He had been feeling some lately. Alex turned back towards the window and his surveillance of the anxious, expectant lover.

•

Some days later, Alex sat on the front porch with a neighbour of theirs, Shirley. Shirley had just been finishing up her run when Alex called across the lawn to her and asked her up for a beer. He had put on weight lately, more than even a big, broad-shouldered frame like his could accommodate gracefully. It was his desk-bound job. His age. He thought he might take up jogging. How about the proper shoes? he wanted to know. Were they as important as everybody seemed to think?

"Vital," Shirley told him. "Otherwise, your joints go all to hell." Deep into her second Blue Lite, Shirley sat next to Alex — closer perhaps than strictly necessary, her heavy, white legs crossed, her feet up on the porch railing. A big-boned blowsy girl in her late twenties, an ultrasound technician, Shirley was a single woman who did not give the appearance of being desperate. For this reason she had always

seemed somewhat foreign to Anne. "What are you doing?" she asked Anne now, including her in the conversation out of politeness.

Anne sat at the far end of the porch, huddled over a notebook. "Making out the grocery list," she lied.

She had spent the hour before dinner down in the basement ironing clothes she had forgotten she owned. Some of them had lain in the ironing basket for two years. As she sprayed and starched and leaned with all her weight into the iron, she wept until her throat was raw, until her face felt as stiff as the shirtfronts she starched. Really, she told herself at last, there was no way she could go on like this. She had to do something for herself. He wasn't coming back. She must start to let go. She decided to make a list of John's bad and good points. Surely the bad points would outweigh the good points and she would realize that she was better off without him.

"I thought you went to the store yesterday," said Alex.

"For milk. That was all," she prevaricated.

Too fond of sushi, she wrote. Anne had never been a great fan of raw fish.

Shirley leaned closer to Alex and touched him lightly on the arm. "There he is," she said softly, as the Lover of Thornton Avenue turned the corner and came walking up the sidewalk in their direction.

Alex consulted his watch. He nodded confirmation to Shirley. "Right on time," he said.

Tooth enamel ridiculously sensitive, Anne wrote of John. The man couldn't drink champagne. What sort of lover was that? A lot of good he'd do a girl in Paris! Not that they were likely to go to Paris all that often. Not on John's salary. That was another thing. *Salary*, she wrote down.

"Look, Anne," Shirley hissed. "It's the Lover of Thornton Avenue!"

A good lover: Anne had written the words before she thought them. Then, catching her breath, she laid the pen down and pressed her fingers hard against her temples. A memory of making love to John — the long, open-mouthed kisses, how his mouth had sought her breasts, the hands that steered her hips by their bones.

"What's the matter, Annie?" Alex asked.

"Headache," Anne breathed.

"You've been having a lot of headaches," observed Alex. His face

wore an expression of anxious concern. Irritatingly anxious. "Shall I get you some aspirin?" he asked, half-starting from his seat.

"Stay where you are," she said brusquely. She wouldn't allow him to be kind to her. She couldn't bear it. "It will pass." Get a grip on yourself, she advised herself. Be practical. Realistic. In real life people don't live in the bedroom.

No prospects, she wrote emphatically. She underlined *prospects* twice. Once she had hoped John might carry her off on a white charger. As if Alex — poor Alex — were some kind of dragon. She smiled ironically, rubbed her forehead. In truth she felt betrayed. John drove a second-hand Hyundai, and that was not even paid for.

"Now there's the car. I can just make out the woman's head," Alex was telling Shirley. "Is she blonde or brunette?"

"Nobody's ever gotten close enough to see," replied Shirley.

"She must be very beautiful," said Alex. His voice sounded wistful. His eyes strayed to Anne, who was beautiful in a willowy way.

"Perhaps she's very ordinary looking," countered Shirley somewhat sharply.

"No, no," Alex protested. "She must be beautiful. How else can you explain such devotion?"

"I tell you what!" announced Shirley. She started from her chair. "I'll take a jog past the car and look in."

Anne looked up from her list in horror. "Oh, no," she protested. "Don't do that."

"Why not?" asked Shirley.

"You've had two beers," said Anne.

"I'm not driving, Anne," Shirley pointed out.

"But it's their time!" As soon as she spoke, she wished she could take back the words.

"What do you mean by that, Annie?" Alex asked.

"I mean . . . it's the only time they have," Anne tried to explain.

"They meet every other night, Anne. Or just about," Shirley pointed out.

"But he could be planning to leave her," Anne said in alarm. "Or her husband might find out she's meeting him. Time might be running out for them. The whole affair might be about to disintegrate. To blow up in their faces. You don't know. It's wrong to intrude."

"I'm not going to intrude," Shirley said, sounding a little short. Anne's scruples irritated her. "I'm just going to jog by the car. It's parked on the street, Anne. It's our street." She headed down the porch steps.

Anne sagged in her chair.

"What's the matter, sweetheart?" Alex asked her.

"Shirley's so nosy!" Anne complained.

"She's not nosy," Alex disagreed. "She's interested. So am I. It's interesting. Come on, Annie," he tried to cajole her. "Nobody gets hurt."

"That's where you're wrong," insisted Anne, bending over her notebook again. "They do get hurt."

He doesn't love me, she wrote. For a moment she stared at the words, then, unable to bear what they said to her, she slammed shut the notebook, and stood.

"They get very, very hurt!" she cried.

"I don't understand!" Alex called after her as she went into the house. "Annie, what's wrong?"

She pretended not to hear him.

A few moments later Shirley came pounding up the porch steps. Anne heard her speak to Alex from the kitchen where she was unloading the dishwasher: "Well?" she asked, panting.

"Well, what?" asked Alex. He sounded glum.

"Aren't you going to ask me what she looks like?" Shirley demanded.

"What does she look like?" Alex asked.

"I couldn't tell," Shirley laughed. "I could only see her bum. Could I have another beer, Alex? You've got your fridge set just right. Where'd Anne get to?"

•

Lana and Bob, who lived next door to Shirley, invited Anne and Alex and Shirley over for a barbecue. Bob was a gourmet cook. He had made Thai peanut sauce. While he tended to the chicken on the grill, wearing a big apron and a chef's hat, Alex, Lana and Shirley hung over the back fence, watched the Lover of Thornton Avenue at his

post, comparing notes, composing possible scenarios.

"He's always there at the dot of seven-thirty," observed Alex. "Never a moment late. You could practically set your watch by him. And he always looks so nervous, as though he's afraid she won't show up."

"She's not so punctual," Lana observed. "She's been up to an half an hour late sometimes."

"I think it's easier for him to get away than it is for her," Shirley defended the unknown woman. "I think he says, 'I'm taking my evening constitutional. Be back soon,' or something. I think she has to come up with a different excuse each time."

Anne stood by the kitchen door, watching an earwig devour the star-shaped blue flower of a clematis. She was no good in social situations any more. She felt at a remove, as if she were watching a movie in which she played only a small part, possibly a foreign-language film. Now, listening to Shirley, she had to laugh when she thought of her own poor excuses — girls' night out with nonexistent girls, then a course offered by the P.U.C. in upholstery, paid for but never attended. That had been a stroke of genius — John's idea. John.

Lana caught her laugh and misinterpreted it. "Oh, come on, Anne," she chided her. She was a soft little woman, fluffy, tallow-coloured hair, blue-veined white flesh crammed into a skimpy halter and short shorts. "You can't pretend you don't find the whole thing just terribly romantic!"

But Anne just lifted her chin, shook her head. She knew she was being rude. She couldn't help it. Her life had become something through which she walked; time something she killed.

"Anne's not very interested for some reason," Alex stepped in quickly, embarrassed by her silence, apologizing for her.

"I just don't think it's any of our business," she muttered.

"Well, Annie, it is our street," Bob pointed out.

Anne shrugged angrily. She and John had made love in cheap motels or, when the weather became warmer, like teenagers in public parks — Gibbons, Spring Bank down by the pump house. "I can't see how you can condone this kind of behaviour," she said. "Why doesn't somebody complain?" She turned to Lana. "Your kids play outside after dinner, Lana. Aren't you afraid they might look in the car?"

"Oh, no, Anne," Lana reassured her. "We've asked them not to, and too bad for them if they do."

"Have some fellow feeling," Alex urged her gently. "Maybe they have no other place to go."

This was more than Anne could endure. How dare he be so compassionate? He wouldn't be if he knew the truth about her. She didn't feel guilty. She felt rage at his stupidity, at the blindness of his trust. "And why not?" she demanded heatedly. "Why don't they have some place else to go? Because they're probably married, or one of them is at any rate. Somebody's cheating on somebody else out there every other night on our street, but that doesn't seem to bother anybody here! How would you feel if it were Bob who was so 'devoted,' Lana?" She pushed it to its limit. "Or if it was me driving that car, Alex?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Anne," said Alex.

"But what if it was?" she cried.

For a moment nobody said anything. Then, "Your Honda Civic is much too small," Lana laughed nervously.

"If I were Philippe Rushton, I might observe that the Japanese would build bigger cars if they had a more active sex life," observed Bob too heartily. "Do you think car size reflects penis size?" Spearing a chicken breast with his long barbecue fork, he flipped it over, splattering fat which hissed onto the glowing coals below. Flame shot up in spears.

Anne and Alex remained where they were for a moment, their eyes locked. Then Anne turned abruptly on her heel and went into the house. She went into the bathroom off the kitchen and sat down on the toilet. For a moment she buried her face in her hands. Then, looking up again, she removed the tightly folded sheet of notepaper from inside her bra. It was the list of John's good and bad points she had begun some days earlier.

Unadventurous. Sticks with what he knows. Basically fearful, she read. Hard to talk to. Derails conversation. Finds intimacy hard.

She stopped.

What was the use of going on? She knew it off by heart. He was useless. Worse than useless. Gone. For that little time he had been hers, and now he was no longer. He would never be again. It is over, Anne. Over. She refolded the list, replaced it in her bra. What would

happen to her now? What in heaven's name would she do? How on earth could she continue living with Alex after this, haunting her former life like a ghost, unable to speak, unable to bridge the gap she had created? Would it ever close?

When she returned to the patio, they were all standing along the fence, Bob included, pointing to the street and the big American car which had just pulled up alongside the curb. Unnoticed, she crossed the patio to the bar cart, poured herself a gin and tonic and sank down onto a lawn chair. Perhaps not entirely unnoticed, she reflected, because she thought she had seen Alex shiver in the twilight, as though he had experienced a sudden chill on her passing.



One night in August the United Church two blocks down held a White Elephant Sale. It was an annual event. All the neighbours went. Alex went too. He liked to buy gardening tools secondhand. Anne complained of the heat. She didn't feel well. There was nothing she wanted to buy. She stayed home, sat on the porch and flipped through a women's magazine.

At dusk the Lover of Thornton Avenue wandered up the sidewalk to his accustomed spot. Some time later the big American car drove up. Anne did not want to sit there while they were making love in the car. She laid her magazine down on the floor next to the chair and was just standing to leave when the door to the car opened and a woman got out.

Anne stood very still.

The woman was shorter than the man. She had shoulder-length brown hair. She wore a white dress which shone in the dim light. She seemed slim. Without saying a word or perhaps just whispering his name, she held out her arms to the man and drew him to her.

Anne caught onto the back of a chair, clung to it. Don't close your eyes, she thought. If illicit lovers kiss with their eyes closed, they grow to enormous size and can be seen for miles around.

The couple closed their eyes, kissed. They swelled in size. The woman's dress beat white against the smoke-coloured twilight like a pale heart. Enormous. They were all her eyes could hold.

Quickly she averted her gaze, looked down, away, according them the invisibility the world accords lovers. Pulling away from one another, glancing up, they might see her on her porch. She knew that, for them, if she did not seem to notice, then she did not exist, just as the waitresses at the bar where she and John used to meet and kiss and kiss had not existed for them. When she looked up again, they were gone. They had disappeared into the car.

•

A week later, the big American car didn't show up. The Lover of Thornton Avenue waited and waited. He waited for two hours. The neighbours kept an eye on him. They suffered for him. "Maybe she's sick," Shirley suggested.

Two nights later, the same scene repeated itself. The neighbours felt dreadful.

"Shouldn't one of us go out? Say something to the poor man?" Lana wanted to know.

But the rest of them urged her to stay away. "It would embarrass him to know he's been seen," they argued.

Later, after everyone had gone inside, Anne stole out to the porch. Alex was in the kitchen, making potato salad. They were going to a potluck — someone in his office who had just had a baby. Anne could see that the Lover was weeping silently. His tears shone silvery in the gloom.

At first she had been glad when the woman in the car stood up the Lover of Thornton Avenue. She was glad that it was the man who had been hurt, not the woman. And she had thought Alex and the neighbours fools for the sympathy they lavished on the unknown Lover. Worse. Hypocrites. Now she was not so sure.

She wanted to go down the steps, to cross the lawn and then the street where the lover stood weeping. In her mind's eye she saw herself taking him in her arms and holding him to her breast and murmuring into his thinning hair, "It's all right. I know what you're going through. I've been through it myself. Believe me, you don't go unseen. You're immense, larger than life. People see you, but they won't be hard on you. There's forgiveness for you."

The man hung his head and turned to leave. He started back down the street in the direction in which he had come. He walked slowly as though he had nowhere to return to, nowhere to go.

Suddenly Anne started down the steps after him and across the lawn, almost running.

"Anne!"

She stopped, turned around.

Alex stood in the door, half hidden by the screen. His arms cradled an oversized crockery bowl covered tightly with plastic wrap — it shone bone white in the gloom. "Anne," Alex said. "We should leave now." He paused, then stepped out onto the porch and set the bowl down on a green wicker chair. He asked hesitantly, "Where . . . where were you going just now?"

"I don't know," Anne told him truthfully. Then, "Nowhere I suppose." She blinked up at him. In his navy blue polo and white trousers he looked big, scrubbed and pink, like a large, bearded baby. Clean and fleshy. Guileless.

"Your feet are bare," he pointed out.

Anne looked down at her feet, then wiggled her toes in the damp grass. "So they are!" she acknowledged.

"You wouldn't get far in bare feet." He sounded hopeful.

"I suppose not," she agreed.

"Then . . . will you come with me now?" he asked. Tentatively he extended his hand. As tentatively she took it, her fingers light and feverish warm in his heavy, damp ones.

"For now," she thought and allowed herself to be led up the porch steps. Her bare feet left a wet mark, a stain flecked with scraps of grass, on the cool, grey painted steps.

John Barton / ALL THAT ENTERS MUST PASS THROUGH: LOVE, THE VIRTUAL BODY, AND THE DECLINE OF THE NATION-STATE

"the interior has achieved another coup d'état"

This body: its constitution
beyond amendment and spastically tense, the upper
and lower chambers of the heart loud with endlessly ringing

bells and filibusters remembered from the past: my 60s childhood,
premature bed times, random Montreal mailboxes blowing
up into the October Crisis, house arrest

after school and the War Measures Act, *just watch me*
watch reruns of soldiers on Ste-Catherine preempt cartoons
in fast-moving black and white; a few more armchair assassinations

from Pierre Laporte to Kanasatake and the body is pure
instant-on, panicked, the gastric tract
lubricated by spoonfuls

of mineral oil, though less and less sense
of self slips by the body's apparently undefended border,
a tight-assed customs officer opening my briefcase with a smirk.

Who knows what anyone's wrongs and rights are anymore, inside
or out; but let go and the dollar always
sinks, down the drain, streams

of unemployed in Pickering, 20,000
competing for 300 jobs, all systems gone
immuno-deficient, factories shutting down and moving south.

The body and its seized-up conveyer belts: economic
depression become somatic, the remotest
cells starving

for love, its currency inflated
each time we kiss. The text written in our bodies.
But who has time to read? We watch the country lose sight of itself.

•

Love, you want to leave
and I don't want to

let go. Montreal newspapers
spell your name in the skimmed headlines,

an acrostic rubbing off in my hands
as I turn

the pages, sentiment
I can't wash off or away: smeared

toxic inks absorbed by an epidermis that lets
things in and not out,

living in a federation
whose borders we say are not

up for negotiation (no matter how restless
the natives).

Inside the body, the psyche balances
thyroid and liver, brain and heart, the involuntary

nervous system impartial
unless thrown off

by something not quite withstanding.
In this cold country: Montreal a veritable

city of romance. How I would miss its snow
filled streets and packed

cafés with you gone,
its museums suddenly empty and cinemas

recycling endless matinées of your absence.
Or my absence, for I would come

here no longer, unable to revisit
what we have now become, ghosts fitfully

asleep under the icy sheets of economic slowdown.
Once I would have given you

freedom of the city, would have
left my Metro pass and keys locked inside

an apartment leased in both our names before
catching an Ottawa-bound Voyageur bus,

left you to this life, to the divisive
polis at its heart that you want to map, but I can't

leave you no matter where we draw
borders we won't discuss.

You are inside of me even when
I am on the outside, my ancestors since

the Plains of Abraham dug deep as compost into
the churchyards of the Eastern Townships.

My kind are taught to contain
ourselves, the imperial flourish

of an irritable bowel almost
Victorian in its habits.

•

All that enters must pass through.
Goods cross into Detroit from Windsor.
All that enters must pass through.
Eros uploaded with the food we eat.
All that enters must pass through.
Praise Gaia for the Information Highway.
All that enters must pass through.

•

In a 500-channel universe we are still
what we eat: stock-piled mother's
milk, CNN, take-out

pizza, 24-hour
shopping — the body

a network of networks: bloodlines,
nerves and the intestines.
Hopelessly

entwined for what centuries
must feel like, we let ourselves

let go of our limits, forget whatever borders
we did not choose and pick up
speed, our baud

rates pushing against those
of light and infinity until the connection somehow

fails and now, though you are gone, you are everywhere,
projected against the blank screen
of my stand-alone

conscience or suspended
in memory. In the virtual, the sewage

of your desire washes through my less-and-less
carbon-based circuitry, your sweet
white noise I call up

repeatedly, all language
a simulation, sentient and magic.

Language heals, not love or medicine. Language is zero
and indivisible. Language lets go
of what it withholds

and gives up nothing,
metaphor its viscera and lower colon.

Language is a microchip I collect (picking up
after the virtual cows) and burn
for warmth.

•

Our bodies speak
in languages we do not comprehend

yet we know who we are, distinct despite
the ether's apparent lack
of borders.

Let us go then, love,
let us let go: something always

dis- or reconnects us to something.
What we singly burn inside
our bodies

joins in loose constellations,
frayed networks of light ablur in the wheeling

night skies — vaporous trails of opposing
headlights filmed in time-
lapse along

the trafficked
and sinuous Route Transcanadienne.

Patrick Friesen / FOUR POEMS

old tom

the deaf cat howls
at first light
a kind of statement
I guess
about creation
coming alive each day
the surprise of it
how long the night
must seem
its anticipation
fear moving to wonder
and yet the assertion
in that howl
a gratitude turning
to irritation
old tom pissed off
at the day
he yearns for
each night
unfree in his need
caught deaf
and thankful
for light
staggering
through the silence
nothing of him
in the world
but a howl

caught in this language

there are days I want to apologize
need to, but I won't
I am not a poet, I work
caught in this language
not my own
conquered, someone else's world

I have no wisdom, no beauty
I can't say what I am
maybe a man stumbling
into a stranger's ceremony
I know so little about this craft
I have said so little
during these long hours

there's no name for this
clumsiness, a way
of passing through
the usual heart beat
at 3 a.m., avid
and in love

barefoot, listening
to my lover
play the piano
the afternoon
suddenly immense
waiting, my eyes
on the stairs

small town

a dog sleeps in the sunlight
someone's playing harmonica
I'm waiting for something to happen

a '56 chevy rounds the corner
the banker singing a hymn
his arm signaling the turn

four crows on the roof
I'm thinking of a carpenter
hauling shingles up the ladder

the mid-afternoon is silent
and still as a photograph
in the unearthly heat

everything's a secret
grandmother in the garden
her apron stained with raspberries

a cat stretches on the top step
then slowly descends
into the world

a bicyclist clanging
through the shrubs
his legs thrown wide

bells are ringing
it's another wedding
bride and groom at the door

the dying umpire

the umpire has called time
summer's arbiter stops everything
all human intention on pause
the green diamond a stage
for this moment

he turns from the centre of things
looking for the way out
walking large as an animal
with the authority of size
he has called time
and like a bull at the stockyard
stunned by a hammer
his knees buckle for a step
his bulk piling forward then
he crashes to earth

the dying umpire
sees nothing before him
hearing through the crowd
holding its breath for him
the sun unmoved
and the players ready to play

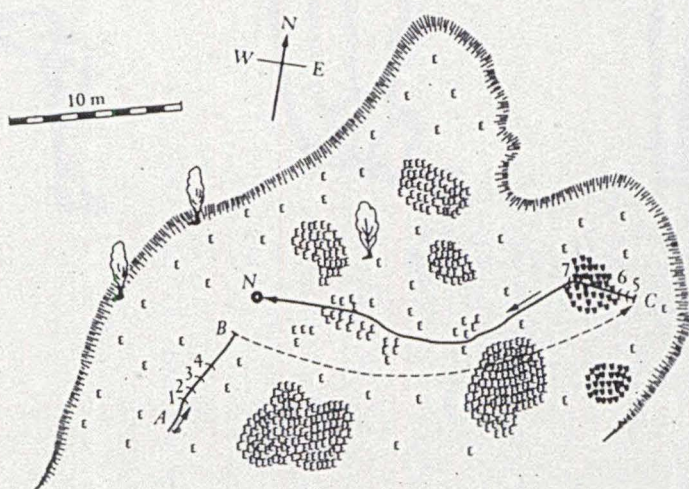
Cheryl Sourkes
GENES AND GENESIS / INEXACT SHADOWS

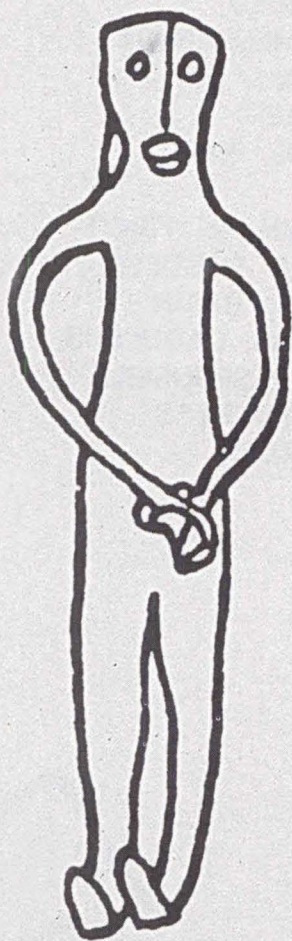
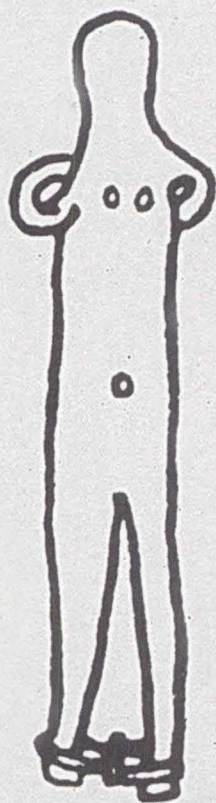
ARTIST'S STATEMENT / Cheryl Sourkes

The premises of *Genes and Genesis / Inexact Shadows* are lodged in our culture's myths of human origin; the genetic code and its evolution, and the Bible story about the birth and coming of age of man and woman in the world's first garden. These two formulations of the culturally revealing Ur question represent positions drawn from both sides of the nature/ culture construct. The slash that divides the terms represents the split that lies unintegrated at the bottom of polarized thinking. It flags our cultural malfunction. In *Genes and Genesis / Inexact Shadows* these disassociated stories are reformulated into a multi-linked narrative. Codes of gender, of power, and of various specialized languages are brought into focus in the process. The work looks at the tendency which codes have to slip and mutate, and ponders the tenacity of hierarchy as a bizarre emergent property of human collectivity.



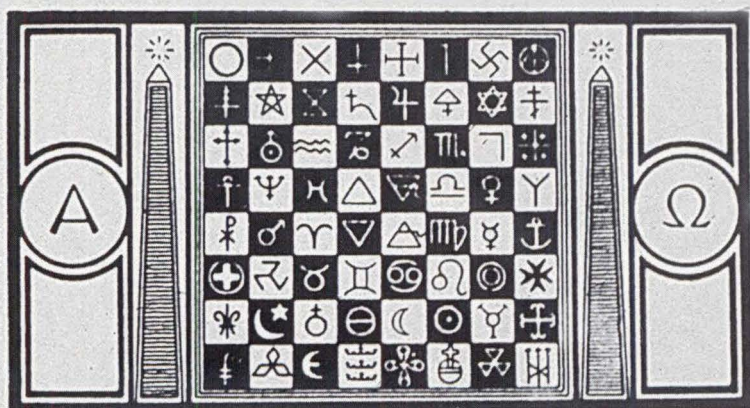
EVE REMEMBERS:
INANNA, ISHTAR AND PERSEPHONE.
WERE NOT TO EAT
EVEN ONE SEED
OF THE POMEGRANATE.
BUT THEY ALL DID
AND SUFFERED
AND BECAME WISE.
DEMETER,
ALSO KNOWN AS VIRGO
THE MOTHER GODDESS,
WITH WINGS, GRAIN
AND HEALING CADUCEUS,
WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE
FOR FRUITFULNESS
IN THE GARDEN.



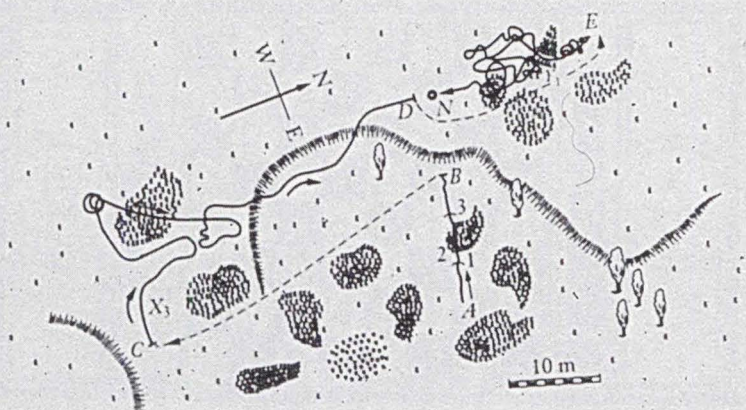


THE EVIDENCE OF EVOLUTION INDICATES
THAT DIVERSITY IS LIFE'S STRATEGY

ALONGSIDE OF ADAM AND EVE
CREATION BRINGS FORTH
MEN AND WOMEN OF EVERY GENDER

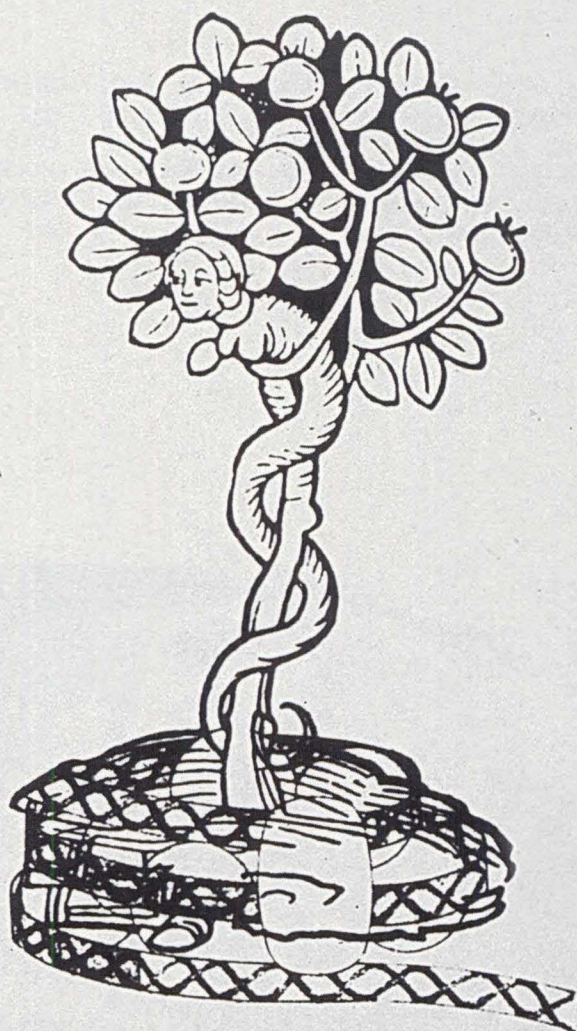


ADAM,
NAMED FOR THE SOIL
REMEMBERS:
GAINING DOMINION
OVER ALL LIVING THINGS.
GIVING THE ANIMALS
THEIR NAMES.
BEING SEDUCED BY EVE.
FEELING SHAME.
GETTING EXPELLED
FROM THE GARDEN.



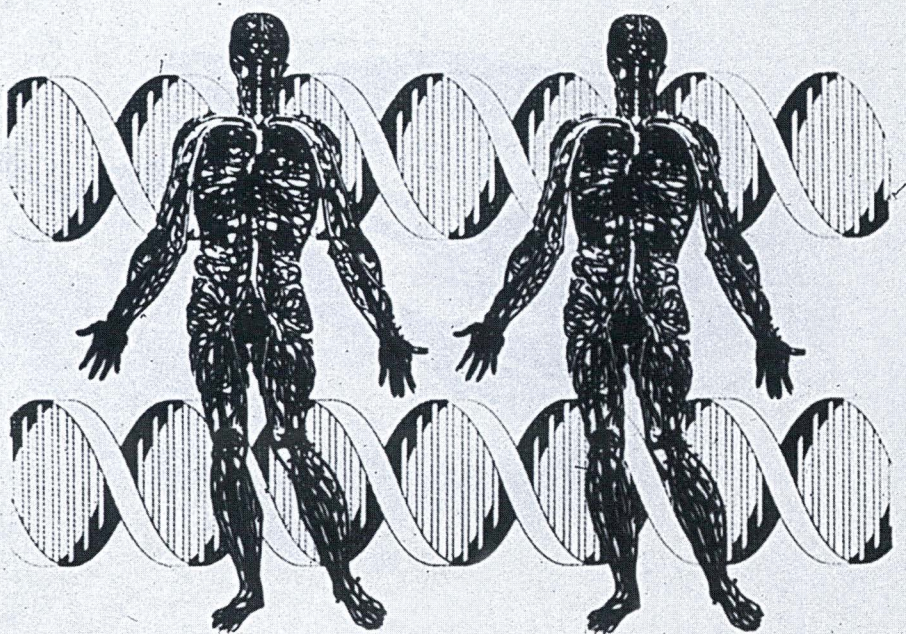


THE SNAKE IN THE GARDEN
REMEMBERS:
BEING THE GODDESS CONSORT.
EXCITEMENT.
SEXUALITY.
RAGE.
REPTILIAN BRAIN AND SPINAL CORD.
UMBILICUS.
EMBRYOLOGY AND INFANCY.
THE HELIX OF DNA.
GUIDING SOULS.



DNA IS A TEXT WRITTEN IN AN ANCIENT LANGUAGE. COMPARATIVE SEQUENCING SUGGESTS THAT ALL LIFE IN THE LAST FOUR BILLION YEARS HAS EVOLVED FROM A SINGLE ANCESTRAL FORM AND EACH AND EVERY LIVING CELL HAS CONTAINED A MUTATED VERSION OF THAT PROGENITOR'S DNA.





ACH LIVING BEING IS A VOLUME IN THE DNA ARCHIVE



THE SUBSTANCE OF HUMANITY IS BOUND UP WITH
LANGUAGE.

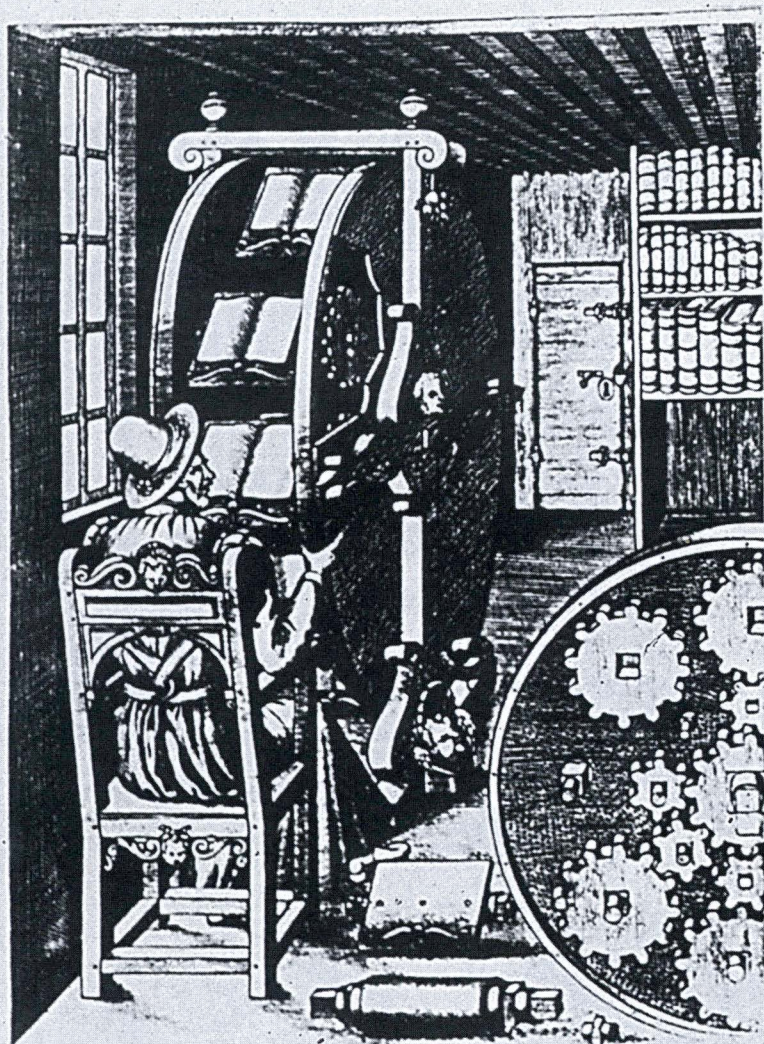
THE LIVING BODY IS A READOUT OF A DNA TEXT IN THE
INTERACTIVE CONTEXT OF A CULTURAL TEXT.

LANGUAGE MAKES LIFE BEHAVE AS MIND, AS DNA MAKES
MATTER BEHAVE AS LIFE.

PICTURING
IS ONLY ANOTHER FORM
OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
GENETIC CODE AND LIVING BODY.



REPRESENTATIONS ARE TOOLS OF INTERVENTION

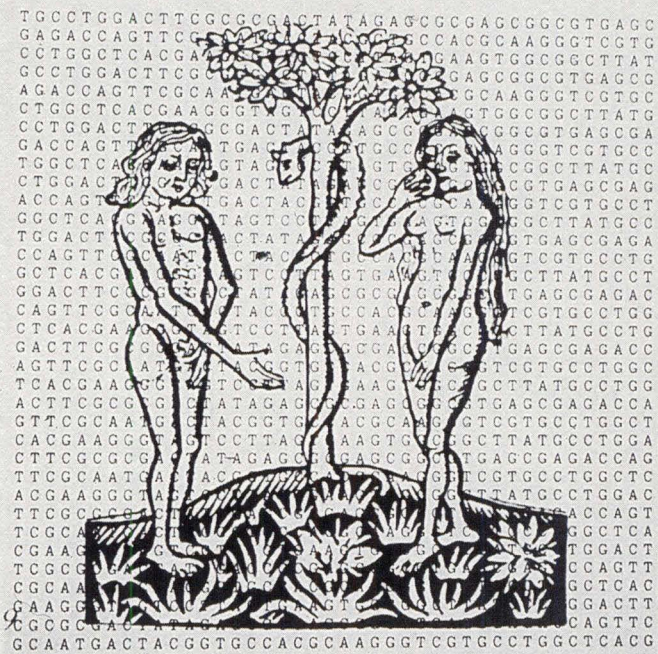




THE WORD AND ITS REFERENT
CALL UP A REFLEXIVE LOOP,
AN INFINITE REGRESS,
AN ECHOING VALLEY,
AND IT'S HARD TO KNOW WHERE
THE VOLLEY BEGINS OR ENDS



THE MORE COMPLEX THE PATTERN



THE MORE IMPORTANT THE SILENCES

Tony Lopez / NON-CORE ASSETS

They took a shadow and laid it in the straw.
Let it be rough and ready to make a reality
Deft, restless and unpredictable. Thus they rode
Through Norwich in every sort of fantastic dress.
Reason explained that good living was now over,
Time itself at hand. Lights, lanterns and fires
Burning in the woods. Damp air, shell-suit trousers,
Light blue sweatshirt, green padded jacket: the subject
Of this attack unknown. If you have no wire,
Roll newspapers into spirals, tie the ends together
In white cloth and herring skins. Thence souls in torment
Who do enter into these family customs
In schools, clubs or any organisation.
Among the straw cut-out is something of the truth.

They are like straight unwinding roads that lead
Into eternity. When we launch a car
We like to drop it. Root nourishing shampoo:
Dolphins ascending a water staircase.
Big coat and grip, gondola wedding,
Big coat and away through Lombardy poplars.
I find we have plenty of opportunities
For listening to speech, yet few people take them:
We need practical ways of securing resonance.
Urizen is at home on the world wide web
Sending pulses of self-indulgent grief echo
To measure your file space without hiring new staff.
A stretched limo floats over a crimson sunset
I never knew he missed driving so much.

Most districts have one or two damaged sounds
No longer so clear or pleasant as once they were.
Tunnels and sprinkler systems still provide good resin.
With its brown paper rocks, tinsel and silver,
This is renaissance style at its purest. Nice way
To put cash to work. *Sequoia gigantea* trees
Are older than Christianity and still alive,
But our best garden view is from the belvedere.
She or he was an evangelical angel
Preaching organisational entropy,
One step beyond employee empowerment —
And into virtual corporations. We find
A nostalgia for the social world of work
Unexploited as yet in direct sales.

Everyone who met those chosen lifters
Was seized by the arms, so that all strangers
Were forced to sign immunity certificates;
Crude, pitiful, and absurd as they were,
In clip-on ties to avoid being strangled.
When studying a sound, get to know all about it,
Use your eyes as well as your ears. A small
Pocket mirror will help you. The first time
That the voice of a dead witness was played in court:
“Just wanted to get the smirk off her face,” he said.
It was our second steroid-abuse suicide.
Taking care will save your correspondent trouble.
A lively tongue makes for first class consonants,
It's useful to be a good telephone speaker.

Shoplifters encourage security staff
Who depend upon their continued activity. Strangers
Who may well have perfect immune systems,
Keep coming back for a pitiful loyalty bonus
And most victims were strangled in the park.
If you want steady growth you need sound money
Coming out of your ears. Like Leonard Nimoy,
She was always looking in the mirror,
According to our witness who travelled
Beside her in the train. Smile or smirk
It's hard to tell from this second-hand transcript
That maybe wasn't worth the trouble. I hoped
She would get over the tongue infection
And disinfect her telephone mouthpiece.

In this version the tale ends happily
Financed from operating cash flow over
The life of the contract. Destocking increases
Because of his wife's greed. He tricks and eats
A heron left to die out on the trading floor,
Moves into facilities management personnel,
Calculating to prevent costly down time
In non-core assets. His new stepmother
And her subsequent life with the dwarfs,
Cautiously rubbing salt into wounds,
And maintaining the final dividend in full
Before she walked out altogether. Start-ups
Have to be set against pump-priming write-offs,
Assuming the standard rate of income tax.

Better off separated, captured by tiny men
Who are at first hostile. They sell engines cheap
And make profits on spare parts. The brave tailor
Rescued by a hunter who asks hard questions
About indirect sex discrimination,
With a fine new frock, hairdo and glass slippers.
There is half a pound of salt in each body.
Enticed and outwitted by the witch
(Who likes a magic drink) Inky and the miser
Pushed her into an oven and discovered her
Sticky boards. The slow compromise of clarity
In workplace aesthetics. Second-half results,
When printed on double-perforated stock,
Can be run on a silent projector.

Later frames are photographs of places he knew
As they are today. His adventures with a whale
Before Snow White's birth: a flexible labour market
Where castles in the air take shape. New light
On the early life of Abraham Lincoln
Before his father remarried. Cordless,
Paperless, here and now: salary is salt
With text on the intervening frames.
Setting off on his good horse Rozinante
He faced quarrels with councillors over rats,
Money, and the enticement of children.
Budget box, wooden flute or feel-good factor
Takes us through the motivation peak cycle,
Who aspire to marry expanding markets.

A little Swiss girl at home in the mountains
Killed a two-headed giant and arranged
The staining and separate disposal of brains,
Skulls, thymus, spinal chord, tonsils, spleen,
And intestines. She beats the witch's curse,
Journeys far, escapes arrest by Despair,
Then unveils an underwriting profit
Photographed in natural scenery. Black Rod
Sees upbeat prospects in vacuum technology
For pure gases. His semiconductor plant,
Growing larger and smaller by magic,
Blows a chimney and spills waste in the river —
Taking objections lodged up to six months later.
Then he re-opens on a greenfield site.

The adventures by which I became rich,
Downsizing in local offices and HQ,
When all around had flipped. The genie in the cave
Showed me how to hold down subsidence payoffs.
Still hunting bears they were changed into stars,
Proving that job insecurity is a state of mind
Unrelated to the trauma of steel-closures.
Mortimer makes good, eaten by a sly old fox
And his twinkle-eyed boss. He wanted to marry
A pretty dancing girl or a bad tempered
Miserly elf. Sober bankers on the bridge
Of our struggling industrial flagship:
Remember the *Herald of Free Enterprise*
Turned on its side, duty-free shops and all, sinking.

Irene Mock / INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

Several months before she stopped working on the psych ward, Ellie dreamed she was in the Quiet Room. At first she thought it was the Operating Room because the light from the ceiling was so bright and the room so cold. Ellie felt sick, as if she'd been given an anaesthetic, though she couldn't think of what kind of operation she'd had. Then something changed and the wall turned into a window with bars. She saw the thick steel door open and Liz came in, and behind her, Joan, the head nurse. It wasn't clear just what they were going to do to her.

The next morning at work when she told them her dream, the two nurses laughed.

"That's ridiculous. Why would we ever put you in Room 11?" Liz lit a cigarette, blew smoke rings in the air.

Joan was quiet. "Honestly, Ellie," she said shaking her head.

There are times now, months after leaving the psych ward, that Ellie thinks of the dream. Just what were Liz and Joan about to do? Anything she tries to imagine seems absurd.

"This is a modern ward," the head nurse proudly told her a year ago at her job interview. They didn't use shock treatments and gave medication only when necessary. "What I'm looking for," Joan said, "is someone who cares about people."

The Quiet Room was at the end of the hall. It had two doors. The outer door, number 11, displayed the word "SECLUSION" in white letters on a brown Formica plaque. When it was unlocked, you stepped into a small antechamber. Inside was a basin and seatless toilet. The second door was made of thick steel with a key lock, bolt and peephole. When Ellie stood in front of the steel door her first week on the ward, she heard a voice calling for help.

Joan said: "Liz, you carry the tray. Ellie, you empty the urinal bottle. I'll do the talking."

Liz's tray held a small plastic medicine cup and a hypodermic needle; Joan carried a blood pressure cuff. Neither looked like nurses. Liz, tall and blonde, wore a silk blouse, beige skirt and suede heels. Joan wore a modest navy pant suit and gold cross at her neck. Ellie, who'd hoped to develop rapport with the patients in her casual sweater and corduroy pants, had been mistaken by the janitor that morning for a new admission.

Looking through the peephole in the door, Joan said, "He's not on the mattress." She turned to Liz; their eyes met. Joan nodded and turned back to the steel door.

"Harold," she said firmly, "Would you lie down? Please lie down on your mattress."

Suddenly Liz jumped to one side, nearly tripping over Ellie's feet.

"Sorry, didn't mean to alarm you," Liz said. "I just thought I saw his hand reach through the food tray hole."

"The what?" Ellie's legs felt like rubber. Liz pointed to their feet. At the bottom of the steel door was a hole about six inches high, wide enough for a hospital food tray.

"Don't get too near that hole. If he's not on the mattress he might grab you," Liz said. "There've been people who could get half their body through it."

"Half a body?" Ellie stared at Liz, wondering if she was joking. "You mean an arm?" she said. "Or maybe a leg?"

"Shhhh." Joan looked through the peephole. "Could you two be quiet?" She put a finger to her lips, then motioned for Ellie to join her.

Ellie stood back from the food tray hole and squinted with her eye against the tiny peephole. The body on the mattress was distorted, as though seen in a convex circus mirror. She took a deep breath to calm herself, trying to remember what she knew about Harold — which was virtually nothing.

Ellie had graduated from nursing school with a whopping student loan to pay off and felt fortunate to get the job. Initially, she'd had

misgivings. She'd heard stories about what went on in psych wards. She tried to tell Joan at the interview that she had little experience in psychiatry, but the head nurse only shrugged. "You strike me as an honest, caring person. If my intuition's correct, patients will feel that way too."

Patients took to Ellie immediately. They confided in her over games of cards. They laid bare their life histories while crocheting afghans. Each day Ellie learned to bake something new — scones, sweet rolls, cream puffs. She started to macramé plant hangers. Soon she was knitting socks. The psych ward wasn't like other wards. Nurses didn't wear uniforms. They didn't change beds, give bedpans or do sterile dressings.

There were, however, endless forms to fill out. Every detail of patients' lives had to be noted — how they ate, slept, participated, met goals the nurses set. The charts followed a formula — problem, goal, plan, outcome — but most problems were as simple as loneliness.

Liz and Joan liked the paperwork. Both spent hours in the nurse's station while Ellie sat with the patients. And then one morning, as Joan was finishing a patient's chart, Ellie asked if they could talk.

"I'm really enjoying the ward. The only thing is . . ." Ellie hesitated. "Isn't there something more I should be doing?"

"Don't worry, you're doing fine," Joan told her. "Still, strange you should mention this. Just a minute ago Liz and I were talking. There's been some trouble with Harold in the Quiet Room. We weren't going to ask you, you're so new. But we could use your help."

"The guy in Room 11?"

"Not to worry." Joan smiled encouragingly. "Just take a look at his chart and you'll be fine."

21-year-old patient admitted for having premonitions. Feels state of moods correspond to tensions in world politics, e.g. recent 'space war' in Middle East. Follows news on transistor radio incessantly, analyzing it.

This wasn't the whole story, Ellie thought. Harold hadn't attacked anybody. He hadn't jumped off a bridge. Why lock him up?

Liz thought it had to do with Harold's radio. When she took it away during his admission, saying she'd put it in the nurse's station for safe-keeping, Harold became frantic. He had told her the only reason

he kept it on low was so it wouldn't bother anyone. He actually screamed at her, "Is it a crime to keep a radio on low?"

Ellie asked why Liz hadn't simply returned the radio. Liz laughed. "You really think that radio was on? Come on, kiddo, he's listening to voices."

Spends time listening to radio which does not appear to be on. Apparently hallucinating.

Below Liz's words, the head nurse had written: Denies hallucinating.

"We ask everyone who comes in 'Do you hallucinate? Do you have delusions?' If the patient says no," Joan told Ellie, "just record denies on the chart."

"But if you write denies," she said, "doesn't it sound like they're not telling the truth? What if Harold isn't hallucinating?"

"Everyone writes denies, Ellie." Joan's tone was blunt. "It's standard practice."

The Quiet Room was cold and smelled of urine. A few pink tissues which had been used to try to wipe it up lay shredded on the floor. Ellie went to open the window, but it was block glass behind bars.

Joan said, "We want to take your blood pressure. Then we'll give you something to calm down."

She wrapped the cuff around Harold's arm. Harold moved on the mattress.

"Hey, what's this you're giving me?"

He spoke slowly, as if in a daze. He was small-boned and slender, with dark eyes and dark hair pulled back in a ponytail.

"Your blood pressure is fine." Joan ripped the cuff off his arm. "Now we want you to take your medication." She signalled with her eyes for Liz to bring the cup of liquid.

"Hey, wait a minute," said Harold.

"We want you to take this," Joan said.

"I'm not going to." Harold jerked his head away.

"I'll get a mop," Ellie said.

"A mop?" Joan looked perplexed.

"A mop. Yes, a mop," Ellie heard herself babble. The light from

the ceiling made her head ache. The smell of urine made her dizzy.
"When I see a mess like this —"

"Shouldn't you empty the bottle first?" Joan said.

"The bottle? Oh yes, the bottle." Ellie picked up the urinal bottle which had overflowed and took it to the toilet in the antechamber. She turned on the tap and slowly and repeatedly rinsed the bottle.

When she returned, Harold was on his stomach. Liz put the used syringe on her tray.

"So, you think we should just let him out?" Dr. Cooper asked Ellie back in the nurse's station.

Dr. Cooper stared at her. He was in his fifties and wore a black shirt under a blue jacket. Earlier that week the psychiatrist had introduced himself. "Call me Barry," he said, lifting her hand as if to kiss it. Now Ellie wasn't sure whether she could tell him what was on her mind.

"About Harold. Would you say his behaviour was appropriate?" Dr. Cooper asked.

Ellie frowned. She shrugged. "Just what do you mean by appropriate?"

Dr. Cooper took a pink sheet of paper off a shelf labelled "Emergency Commitments." On the back of the paper he wrote schizophrenia, underlined once, and below it behaviour, underlined twice; then a list:

- a) inappropriate
- b) manneristic
- c) unpredictable
- d) regressive

He put the list in front of her on the table and said, "Well? Which category would you say he falls into?"

Ellie looked up at the ceiling and laughed. "Are you serious?"

Dr. Cooper said, "Come on, if you don't know, take a guess."

"Is he dangerous? Is that why he's in there?"

"Oh no, not dangerous, just a bit muddled," Dr. Cooper replied.

"But I don't understand," Ellie said. "You wrote paranoid schizophrenia on his chart."

"Well, we need an admitting diagnosis."

"But Seclusion?"

Dr. Cooper shrugged. "This is an open ward. He tried to run away once. We're afraid he might again."

"But he's twenty-one, an adult, and if he hasn't committed any crime"

"Actually, Ellie, it's not that simple. He's so unpredictable we don't know what to do. We're babysitting."

"Babysitting?"

"I'm afraid that's all we can do under the circumstances," Dr. Cooper said. "When the police picked him up at a peace demonstration, Harold was soliciting donations for an organization that doesn't exist. The police confiscated the money. Harold put up a fuss. He'll tell you the organization exists, he only made a mistake in the wording. He also thinks the police took a thousand dollars from him, if you can believe that."

"But you can't just keep him in there" Ellie shook her head. Dr. Cooper was taking his time, being patient.

But then: "Maybe you're right. Maybe we should let him out anyway," Dr. Cooper said. "They get the idea they're being punished when you keep them in there too long."

"Cut out and paste things that have meaning to you. We'll talk about them later," Liz instructed the Awareness Group the following day while Ellie passed out sheets of white paper and magazines. But Ellie, working on her own collage, soon tired of Kraft cheese slices, Campbell's soup, dog food and cats. She started cutting out slogans. SHAPE UP! KEEP FIT! She glanced at Harold's blank paper.

"Here, try these." Ellie passed him two slogans: NO COMMITMENTS! NO KIDDING!

Harold smiled. "Thank you. I needed that."

"No problem. Any time," Ellie laughed.

She supposed Harold thought she was the one who'd gotten him out of the Quiet Room. She felt flattered. He was attractive; he had a wonderful smile. There was a mischievous gleam in his eyes when he talked, and he talked constantly; he had theories about everything.

"Say today is Monday," he said, "and the rule this morning is you've got to do everything with your left hand."

Harold shifted the scissors from his right hand to his left.

"This is a schizophrenic story, a left-handed story."

He told her his dog's name was Rebecca. She was four years old and had black hair. He and the dog thought about each other, but he knew she hated him because she yapped all the time.

"I didn't love her enough to train her, even though she's four years old," Harold said. "You see, Rebecca's half-wild because her father's name was Danny, and he was a wild dog. She's also a half-breed Venusian."

He looked at Ellie and smiled.

"You're beautiful," he said suddenly.

"What?"

"I mean it. The moment I saw you I knew you'd help me."

He took Ellie's hand. His was warm, and when she looked into his dark eyes Ellie felt a warm glow. She glanced across the room and wondered if Liz was watching. From a distance she heard a pen tapping the counter, Liz calling, "Could everyone please hold up your paper now and describe it? Could you all please stop."

Harold squeezed her hand, then let go of it. When he held up his paper, Ellie could tell Liz was not pleased.

Liz shook her head at him, but once they'd gone around the circle she seemed to have forgotten why.

"What shall we do tomorrow? How about a debate?" Liz asked. "Any ideas?"

Afterwards, in the nurse's station, Liz kept her back to Ellie, pursing her lips. Ellie wondered if Liz was still upset because of the slogans. She asked if anything was the matter, but Liz wouldn't say.

"Look, be honest," Ellie told her.

"Okay," Liz said. "I was wondering what you were doing with Harold. I saw you talking in the Activity Room. Then holding hands."

"Don't you ever touch patients?" Ellie asked.

Liz laughed, then said, "If it's just chitchat, I don't see any problem."

"Well, that's all it is," Ellie told her.

"Okay. But chitchat can soon turn into problems. If you know what I mean."

"What kinds of problems?" Ellie asked.

Liz shook her head. "All kinds, kiddo. You'll see."

That was the night of Ellie's dream. The next morning, for the first time, Joan assigned Ellie to give out medications. "To take your mind off things."

All morning Ellie felt something about to go wrong. She tried not to think of her dream. Carrying her tray, she called "Pill-time!" the way she had seen Liz and Joan do. The patients assembled in the day room. To Ellie, their voices seemed happy, nearly euphoric:

"I'm only on 25 mgms."

"Well, I'm on 50."

"She only gets 10 — can you imagine!"

And so on. Were they boasting, Ellie thought, or voicing some kind of complaint? She handed them their pills in a Lily cup.

"Harold?" she called. "Harold, where are you?"

No sign of him in the TV room or Activity Room. Nor in the consultation room or kitchen. Standing with her pill tray, Ellie looked out the large day room window.

"How clever of them, to make you look like a waitress."

The voice behind her was low, muffled and strange. Turning around, Ellie was startled to see him. "Oh there you are," she said brightly. "Only two pills for you this morning!"

Harold came closer. Ellie wasn't sure of the look in his eyes. She watched him carefully. What was this, some kind of joke?

"Well then, here, sir, are your jelly beans!" Ellie tried to laugh. She held the Lily cup out to him with a smile.

His eyes narrowed, his body stiffened. "I don't like the food you carry on your tray."

Food? Was he hallucinating? "Look, if you have any dietary complaints," she said, imitating the calm, reasonable nurse's voice she'd heard Liz use, "I'm sure the kitchen staff will listen. But these are pills."

"Can I have my cigarettes now? Can I have my razor?" he said quietly, the words monotone.

Why was he talking like this? Ellie felt her face flush; she was beginning to sweat.

She took a ball from the ping-pong table nearby. "The doctor's just prescribed this. I know it's hard to swallow, but do the best you can."

"You think you're cute, don't you?" he said in a whisper. "You really think you're different from the rest." Ellie tried to talk to him, but he knocked the tray out of her hands.

"It's poison! Poison!" he screamed at her. "You'll make me sick!"

Tuesdays were bridge. Wednesdays were sing-songs. Thursday was bowling, but only when the patients were good. Harold was back in Room 11.

"I told him he'd be allowed out of the room as soon as we gave him his clothes," said Dr. Cooper.

"Oh," laughed Liz, "and what did he say?"

"He said he didn't need his clothes. In fact, he was beginning to feel better already without them. He suggested I take off my clothes, that all the nurses take off their clothes. He said walking around in pyjamas could make a world of difference to how you were feeling."

M.J. Kang / BLESSINGS

HOW BLESSINGS CAME TO BE

Ahhhhhhhhhhh! After eight months of hibernation, eight months of deciding never never to write plays in my whole entire lifetime, I received a call from Andy McKim, the associate artistic director at Tarragon Theatre. (I had sent Tarragon a draft of an earlier play, *Noran Bang: The Yellow Room* about a year before.) Andy was wondering if I would like to be a part of their annual Playwrights Unit - a group of six to seven playwrights who over the course of a year, meet once a week to provide feedback and support to each other as they individually create a play. Urjo Kareda, the artistic director, and Andy McKim facilitate. Tarragon is the theatre to be associated with if you're a playwright in Canada. So after eight months of hibernation, I enthusiastically agreed to be a part of the Tarragon Playwrights Unit in 1995.

Blessings grew out of a writing exercise to write a ten minute play for the Ten Minute Office Plays at the Tarragon Spring Arts Fair. Tarragon commissions a bunch of plays from their group of playwrights for their annual festival. (My secret wish since I was seventeen was to write a ten-minute office play. It's called an office play because the stage is Andy's office.) Sally Han directed. Sandra Oh, Jean Yoon, and Paul Lee acted in the simple watercolour of a young girl trying to make amends with her estranged father. It did well at the festival. Andy and Urjo encouraged me to keep writing *Blessings*. So I did.

Blessings Blessings Blessings. It hasn't been a blessing writing *Blessings*. It's been more of a curse! But I finished a first draft, and a second draft, and an eighth draft and even a twenty-third draft for the public reading in December 1995 at Tarragon. When Urjo called me after the reading, to meet with him and Andy, I thought it was to chastise me for killing all the trees.

The meeting started at eleven in the morning on December twenty-ninth. I was out on the streets, wandering at eleven twenty.

During those twenty minutes, Urjo and Andy told me that they wanted to produce *Blessings* on their main stage as part of their 1996/97 season. In the fall. November-December 1996. To be directed by Sally Han.

They liked *Blessings*. Written by me. *Blessings* by M.J. Kang — me, in their season brochure. At Tarragon.

It didn't register until the afternoon. I didn't believe it until I called Andy later that day... just to make sure.

I was only twenty-one then. Now at twenty-two, I feel like I deserve this opportunity. Ahhhhhhhhhhhh!

One thing I am so so so so so grateful for while I've been writing, re-writing, and banging my head on my computer, is the tremendous amount of support I've been given. Urjo, Andy, Sally, my family, Mallory Gilbert, the Tarragon Playwrights Unit 1995, Kim McCaw and everyone at the Banff Playwrights Colony, all the actors who've ever read, auditioned or played any of the roles - especially to Wendy Noel and Maralyn Ryan, to the guy who dumped me and broke my heart therefore giving me a lot of time to do my re-writes, and to everyone who has ever attended all the public readings and workshop presentations of *Blessings*.

— M.J. Kang

Myung-Jin Kang / BLESSINGS

Blessings is about a young Korean-Canadian woman who journeys to Korea for the first time since her immigration to Canada, and finds her parents' history, family, and roots. She comes back to Canada and realizes she doesn't have/hasn't accepted her own history, family, and roots. *Blessings* is her journey as she reaches wholeness.

List of Characters

(in order of appearance)

soo

Emo

Mom

Luigi-dad

Lady

Monk

Harabogee

Dad

Blessings
by M.J. Kang

Starring: Denis Akiyama, Rachel Lai, Jean Yoon
Directed by Sally Han
Set and costumes designed by Teresa Przybylski
Lighting designed by Bonnie Beecher
Music composed by Boko Suzuki

November 19 to December 15, 1996
Previews: November 13 to 17, 1996

Tarragon Theatre, Toronto
presented by:
du Maurier Arts
Media sponsors:
The Korea Times Daily
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with the support of the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea

ACT ONE

Scene one

soo

Sea of black. Black hair, black eyes. Moon faces. They even served kimchi on the airplane. An-yong-ha-say-yoh, hello - an-yong-ka-say-yoh, goodbye. Chal-dan-yoh woa say yoh . . . have a safe trip. Words. Familiar words so beautiful as they rained from stranger's lips. Fast fast. Not cun-chun-hee-eh. Because I am one of their own. Not like the American soldiers who listened to their walkmans. Who kept on wanting more meat meat meat and seconds on dessert. The customs officers let me right through. A stamp on my passport. My first. By myself. With a promise, a huge promise to be good. For them — my parents — no one will know . . . how much has been lost. There. Four years ago, four years ago, in Toronto I left — with ten dollars in my pocket and nothing but a summer dress on. The first time I talked to my parents was to let them know I was travelling to Korea. To find, to recreate Home. With my own money, my own plan.

(EMO ENTERS)

Han-gook. First time in 18 years. Finally.

Scene two

(EMO COMES WALKING IN)

EMO

I am your Emo. Your aunt. Your mother's oldest sister. I hear you are very Western. I will teach you better.

(WALKING QUICKLY PAST soo)

Why are you standing there?

(WALKING QUICKLY PAST soo)

Hurry up.

(WALKING QUICKLY PAST soo)

Get your luggage.

Scene three

soo

I am led through an iron gate. Heavy. She leads me to a room.
Empty.

(TO EMO)

I have a gift for you. My mother asked me to give it to you.

EMO

For me?

soo

I hope you like it.

(soo TAKES OUT A PACKAGE. EMO RIPS IT OPEN)

EMO

Coffee. Maple syrup? What kind of presents are these?

soo

My mother told me it's very expensive to get coffee here.

EMO

It's not.

SOO

And maple syrup because it's very Canadian.

EMO

Well. Huh. Okay, give me all of your money. I will give you a little each day so you don't spend it all.

SOO

Umm, but . . . I. Would. Like. To. Keep. My money. Please.

EMO

I know better.

(WALKING QUICKLY PAST soo)

You wear such Western clothes.

(WALKING QUICKLY PAST soo)

You don't wear much make up.

(WALKING QUICKLY PAST soo)

You really aren't Korean, are you?

(LOOKS DIRECTLY AT soo)

What do you want in Korea?

SOO

Iiii . . . I'm trying to find . . . to understand . . .

EMO

There is nothing specifically you want to do?

SOO

Walk around the streets, ride the subways, go grocery shopping.

EMO

Well you must be tired. Go to sleep. I'm going now.

(WALKING QUICKLY PAST soo)

Scene four

EMO

Okay, I'm going now. You stay here and sleep. You must still be tired.
Bye.

(WALKING QUICKLY PAST soo)

Okay, I'm going now. You stay here and sleep. Bye.

(WALKING QUICKLY PAST soo)

Okay, I'm going now. You stay here and sleep. Bye.

(EXITS)

SOO

Emo, when do you think —

Scene five

EMO

Okay, I'm going now. You stay here and sleep. Bye.

SOO

Emo! When do you think I can go and do and see something? Anything?

EMO

Not now, later. Bye!

Scene six

EMO

Okay, I'm going now. You stay here and sleep. Bye.
(WALKING QUICKLY PAST soo)

soo

Emo! Emo! Emo!

EMO

What?! Why do you scream so much?

soo

When do you think I can go outside?

EMO

I don't know. Maybe tomorrow. I'm busy!

soo

Why can't I see Korea by myself?

EMO

What?

soo

Yyyyyou you don't have to show me around. Iiiii can go by myself.

EMO

"Go by myself."

SOO

I like doing things by myself. It's more normal, for me.

EMO

Pa-bo, you think you can go by yourself in Korea? What would we do if someone grabbed you on the street and kidnapped you? It happens. Especially to foreigners who "go by themselves." Look at the time, I'm late, I'm late because of you. Just sleep and be happy. Bye!

(EMO EXITS)

SOO

My first week here in Korea. And I sleep.

Scene seven

EMO

Okay, I'm going now. Have fun. Bye!

SOO

Emo, I'm tired of sleeping.

EMO

Stay here and watch television then. Bye!

SOO

My second week here in Korea. And I watch television.

Scene eight

EMO

Okay, I'm going now. Have fun. Bye!

SOO

Emo, I am tired of sleeping and watching television.

EMO

Stay here and eat then. Bye!

SOO

My third week here in Korea. And I go on a hunger strike, refuse to talk to my Emo anymore, and lock myself in the room my aunt has graciously allowed me to sleep and watch television in.

Scene nine

(LUIGI-DAD COMES OUT OF THE TELEVISION, LOOKS AROUND, FINDS HIS SWEET BEAN AND APPROACHES HER)

LUIGI-DAD

Bon giorno my bambina! (Hello, my little girl.) Surprise-ah!

SOO

Hey Luigi-dad.

LUIGI-DAD

So, this is Korea. I thought it would be a bitta more avventuroso – exciting.

soo

This is Korea. So far.

LUIGI-DAD

Ah-ga-shi, you know — ifa you wenta with me in the first place —

soo

Emo, this is Luigi-dad, you can't see him, but he's a good guy and no, I'm not crazy.

LUIGI-DAD

Lieto do conoscerla, Emo. (Nice to meet you, Emo.) You-ah imaginary too?

soo

Haha.

LUIGI-DAD

So, you watcha any gooda television?

soo

Why are you here? To torment me? To rub it in that I can't even go to Korea by myself?

LUIGI-DAD

"By myself." Non. Ah-ga-shi, I'ma here because Kore-ah isa my home too.

Scene ten

EMO

(KNOCKS ON THE DOOR)

Phone call. It's your mother.

SOO

Mom? I want to go home. I hate it here.

MOM

Sweet bean, I thought you were having a great time. That's why you haven't called.

SOO

Mom, I'm going crazy. Emo won't let me go outside!

MOM

Have you told her you want to go outside?

SOO

Yes.

MOM

Have you been difficult?

SOO

No.

MOM

Have you told her you live on your own?

SOO

No.

MOM

Good. I told you to be nice. I told you if you weren't nice everyone there will think I raised you badly.

SOO

I've been trying to be nice. I just didn't come here to sleep or to watch television. Mom, I didn't travel twenty million billion kilometers just to —

MOM

Okay, okay. I hear you're refusing to talk to Emo.

SOO

I'm also on a hunger strike. I think I've lost thirty pounds.

MOM

Stop going on your hunger strikes. It'll ruin your metabolism.

SOO

Mom, I think Emo is really poor. I gave her all my money and she won't give me my money back.

MOM

She isn't poor. Just stingy. She's making sure you don't spend all the money at once.

SOO

I want all my money back!

MOM

Okay, okay. Let me see what I can do. Sweet bean, I was hoping everything would work out for you in Korea. I feel . . . bad, sop-sop-han. I'll tell Emo to give you your money . . . be a good girl. Please?

Scene eleven

EMO

I hear you want your money back. Here. I will give you the rest later. Your mother told me you want to go outside. When you want to go outside, ask me. I will take you there. Don't make my life difficult. When you want to go outside, ask me. Maybe we can buy you some Korean clothes. You staying here today? Good. Bye.

(EMO EXITS)

Scene twelve

LUIGI-DAD

Bambina! Hey, how aboutta we go to one of the Korean palaces? Justa you anda me?

SOO

There's a problem though. My aunt.

LUIGI-DAD

Oh, yeah. We can-ah sneak out.

SOO

Really?

LUIGI-DAD

Avanti! (Let's go!)

SOO

But my mom made me promise promise promise to be good . . .
otherwise everyone will think she raised me badly.

LUIGI-DAD

Your aunt already thinksa you've beena raised badly. So whatta you
gotta lose?

(THEY JUMP OUTSIDE)

Kore-ah! Smell the air. Notta too good, yesse?

SOO

Yeah, it's kind of polluted.

LUIGI-DAD

Va da se! (That goes without saying!) And it'sa kind of crowded.

SOO

Eleven million Koreans in one city.

LUIGI-DAD

No wonder it's so crowded!

(A MOTORBIKE ZOOMS BY)

Magnifico!

(soo WALKS AWAY)

LUIGI-DAD

Hey, let'sa rent a motorbike! D'accordo! (Okay!) Sweet bean?

soo

(soo RUNS UP TO A STREET VENDOR WHO IS SELLING
FISH SHAPED COOKIES STUFFED WITH RED BEAN PASTE)
They smell so good. Fish shaped cookies stuffed with red bean paste
made right on the spot. Mmmmm. Arl-mah-ee-a-yoh? (How much is
it?) Is this okay?

(TAKES OUT A CANADIAN DOLLAR)

It's Canadian money. Canadadton. No? Okay. Ah-ree money ex-
change? There? Cam-sa-ham-nee-da. (Thank you.)

LUIGI-DAD

Ah-ga-shi, what were you looking at?

soo

Yummy junk food. Come on, I have to get my money exchanged.

LUIGI-DAD

So, you gladda I came?

soo

Yeah.

LUIGI-DAD

I'm-ah gladda I came too. Kore-ah isa different, isn't it?

soo

Yeah.

LUIGI-DAD

I didn'ta know there were so many who kinda looka like you. I always thought only my bambina was original and so short and cute and quirky, butta you aren't. You are justa like everybody else. It'sa scary to realize there are so many who like-ah you. And there are so many people who-ah look like me, too. I thoughta I was the only Luigi-dad, butta there are more. Many more. Oh my bambina, whatta are we going to do?

soo

It's kind of nice to know you meld in though, isn't it?

LUIGI-DAD

Si.

soo

It's kind of nice to know there are people who are short and cute and quirky.

LUIGI-DAD

Si. Butta we don't really belonga here either.

soo

I know.

(LUIGI-DAD SNAPS HIS FINGERS)

LUIGI-DAD

Ah-ga-shi, this palace is-ah so big, so beautiful. So empty. Whatta happened to the royal family?

SOO

I think after world war one or two or — they sort of disappeared.
Luigi-dad, why do you think my parents left Korea?

LUIGI-DAD

Because it's a crowded and a polluted. Hey, how aboutta we have a race! The first one to getta to the concession stand has to-ah buy kim-bap!

Scene thirteen

EMO

Where were you? Do you know how worried I've been? How can you run off without telling me. What if someone had grabbed you and kidnapped you?

(SHAKES sue)

How do you think I would have been able to explain that to your mother?

(SHAKES sue)

How dare you make me worried.

(SLAPS sue)

Think.

(BEAT)

Your mother called. Tomorrow we'll go and meet your other relatives. We'll go and eat sushi. Your mother told me you love sushi. Now go to bed and sleep.

SOO

I hate sushi.

(TO AUDIENCE)

(AS SHE IS TAKING HER BED OUT OF THE CLOSET TO GO TO SLEEP)

Before we left for Canada, my parents recorded me with my grandparents, with all of my grandparents on an audio cassette. We were singing, playing games, and talking about the meaning of life, as much as people can with a two year old. I used to listen to that tape — I found it one day when I was rummaging through mom's make up. I kept that tape under my pillow in bed and played it over and over before I fell asleep. I thought, I believed, if I heard it before my dreams, my grandparents would enter my dreams and be with me, the granddaughter in Canada. On that tape, in my voice, in everyone's voice there was so much, . . . oh my god . . . so much, so much . . . lovelovelove.

Scene fourteen

EMO

Hurry up. Get dressed.

(WALKING QUICKLY PAST soo)

Do you want to see —

(WALKING QUICKLY PAST soo)

Do you want to see —

(WALKING QUICKLY PAST soo)

Do you want to see —

(WALKING QUICKLY PAST soo)

Or not.

Scene fifteen

SOO

Hello. I am I am your, you are you are my . . . it has been so long.

EMO

She wears such Western clothes. She just slept and watched television for two weeks. Then she blamed me by going on a hunger strike! Me! That's how Canadian children are raised — *rude* and *lazy*. soo, show them how you hold your chopsticks. Like how one holds a baseball bat.

Scene sixteen

(KNOCK AT THE DOOR)

(LADY ENTERS, CARRYING A BOWLING BALL)

LADY

My goodness, you have grown up to become a beautiful lady.

SOO

(BOWS)

Co-map-sum-ni-da. (Thank you.)

LADY

You have your mother's face, but your father's eyes.

SOO

Co-map-sum-ni-da.

LADY

I'm a friend of your mother's. We went to high school together. Your mother called and told me you might like company. Would you like to go bowling? I hear you love to bowl.

SOO

I've never bowled.

LADY

Well, do you want to start?

SOO

No.

(LADY HIDES HER BOWLING BALL)

LADY

Well, have you eaten? Would you like to go for dinner?

SOO

I have to ask my aunt.

LADY

I've already asked. She said that'd be fine.

Scene seventeen

LADY

Have you tried the kal-bi in Korea yet?

SOO

I don't eat meat. I'll just have bibim-bap with no co-gee, no meat, please.

LADY

How are your parents?

SOO

Fine.

LADY

They've made a good life in Canada.

SOO

They own a variety store.

LADY

I hear they also have many buildings and a plaza in New York. I hear you have a big house in Canada. It must be nice to live in such a big house.

SOO

I wouldn't know. I haven't lived there since I was sixteen.

(PAUSE)

LADY

So, what have you done in Korea?

SOO

I've been meeting my relatives.

LADY

Have they been kind to you?

SOO

Why do you ask?

LADY

My other friend's daughter had a horrible time in Korea when she came. Her relatives wouldn't let her out of the house and chastised her for not being Korean enough. I hope that hasn't happened to you.

SOO

When did you last talk to my mother?

LADY

Yesterday. You know, you do look a lot like her.

SOO

No. I look like me.

LADY

How old are you?

SOO

Twenty. Twenty-one in Korean years.

LADY

When you're fifty, and someone tells your daughter that she looks like you, how'd you feel if she sneered and said, "No, I look like me?" It's a compliment.

SOO

I don't want to be like them.

(PAUSE)

Do I really look like my mother?

LADY

You even have similar hair styles. When she was your age.

SOO

Do you have any pictures of my parents? Will you show them to me?

LADY

Of course.

Scene eighteen

SOO

I see pictures. They were so beautiful. So much in love. So happy before before. Photographs in scrapbooks in wedding albums in in in — a picture by the airport. Everyone was there, eighteen years ago. Mom is in a soft pink jumpsuit. Dad is in a brown striped suit. And me me tipping myself to the side because I want to throw away my lollipop. I — it — I . . . a full family. All my life, all my life I thought they were nothing but pathetic immigrants.

LADY

I miss your mother.

SOO

You must have seen her when she came to Korea.

LADY

That was eight or nine years ago. I saw your father briefly when he came two years ago. When his mother died.

SOO

I didn't know he was here.

LADY

soo, have you really been living somewhere other than your parents'? In Korea, no matter what happens, the children always come home.

SOO

It's different in Canada.

LADY

No matter what.

SOO

Do you know why my parents moved to Canada?

LADY

Not really.

SOO

Will you tell me something about my parents? Here?

LADY

What would you like to know?

SOO

Anything.

LADY

They were a lovely couple. I set them up. Did you know your father almost lost your mother? It was early on in their courtship. Your father took your mother out to a nice restaurant. They talked, laughed. The meal was going well, but not as well as your father had hoped. He told your mother to close her eyes. When she opened them, lying on the table was a key. To a hotel room. And on your father's face, a smile. A big smile. Your mother excused herself and went to the washroom, thinking he would have the sense to put the key away. This was only their third date. When she returned, the key was still lying on the table, and the smile — still on your father's face. "You, sir, have to learn respect," she said and hailed a taxi home. He called. Everyday. And everyday she refused to talk to him. After the second week, your mother asked me what to do. "Wait two more weeks," I told her. And she did. Your father sent cards through the mail, delivered flowers . . . I'm a good matchmaker. When you want to marry, ask me.

SOO

Was their wedding nice?

LADY

Yes. A traditional Roman Catholic wedding. Your father converted to Catholicism to marry your mother.

SOO

What was my father before?

LADY

Protestant. Her sister, your Emo, made him convert. They had their honeymoon on Cheju do. Have you been to Cheju do?

SOO

No.

LADY

You have to go. You can't visit Korea and not go to the island. I'll tell your aunt to take you there.

SOO

I don't think it'd be a good idea for me and my aunt to travel anywhere alone together. Do you know where the house my parents and I used to live in is?

LADY

Yes.

SOO

Will you show it to me?

LADY

I can't. It was torn down long ago.

(PAUSE)

soo, your parents are happy together, aren't they?

SOO

I don't know. My mother has had some problems. Personal problems.

LADY

I hope she is better now.

SOO

Me too. Do you have any children?

LADY

No. I've devoted my life to taking care of them, but not having any of my own. soo, do you have some time now? How would you like to go to a Buddhist temple with me?

Scene nineteen

SOO

She leads me through a maze of buildings and clumps of people praying, until we enter a room laid with mats on the heated floor.

LADY

Would you like some tea? Cha? It's for everyone. It's clover tea. It's calming. The sunim will be here soon.

SOO

(TO AUDIENCE)

Sunim. Monk. A buddhist monk.

LADY

If you have any questions for him, you should think about them now.

(LADY SITS DOWN ON ONE OF THE MATS AND
MEDITATES)

SOO

(TO AUDIENCE)

Why am I here?

(MONK ENTERS. LADY BOWS TO HIM. HE BOWS TO LADY WITH HIS HANDS TOGETHER IN A PRAYER FORM. THEY TALK.)

MONK

I understand you are from Canada. Canada is a nice place. So, you have any boyfriends in Canada?

SOO

No.

MONK

Why not?

SOO

Because I'm in Korea now.

MONK

I'd wait for you, if I was your boyfriend.

SOO

Too bad you're not my boyfriend then.

MONK

Do you do sex?

SOO

Pardon?

MONK

Marry a Korean. No matter what.

SOO

What do monks do?

MONK

We study and meet people from all over the world. I was just in Toronto lecturing.

SOO

Where?

MONK

At the Korean Buddhist temple.

SOO

There's a Korean Buddhist Temple in Toronto?

MONK

Yes. Don't you go there?

SOO

I'm not Buddhist.

MONK

Oh. Your mother is.

SOO

My mother is Buddhist?

LADY

She converted last year.

MONK

You do look a lot like her.

(TAKES OUT AN ENVELOPE. INSIDE THE ENVELOPE,
THERE IS AN OLD CLASS PHOTO OF soo)

Your mother wrote that her daughter might be visiting me in Seoul.
That you are young, sensitive, and somewhat small in your perspective
and that meeting me might help you.

SOO

Somewhat small?

MONK

That's what she wrote. What can I help you with?

SOO

I don't know. Does she say in the letter?

MONK

What made you decide to come to Korea?

SOO

I was hoping to find, something missing.

MONK

And?

SOO

Well . . .

MONK

You're Korean no matter where you live. Our traditions stem from
Shamanism, Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity, and Buddhism. They
all inter-relate and make up our values and morals.

SOO

What if the values conflict?

MONK

Then whichever is harmonious to the situation takes precedence.

SOO

I don't understand.

MONK

Whatever works works. How do you think Korea has survived 5,000 years? Koreans are tenacious in maintaining their culture. One people, one nation. You have responsibility to past and future generations. That is the Korean way. Here.

(PASSES HER A COUPLE OF BUDDHIST ROSARIES)

Wear these around your wrist.

(SOO PUTS THE ROSARIES AROUND HER WRIST.)

This one glows in the dark. Give these to your mother.

(PASSES HER AN ENVELOPE FILLED WITH BUDDHIST ROSARIES.)

She asked for them. I hope you find what you are looking for.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

JOHN BARTON has published six books of poetry, including *Notes toward a Family Tree* (Quarry, 1993), which won the Ottawa-Carleton Book Award in 1995, and *Designs from the Interior* (Anansi, 1994), which won the Archibald Lampman Award in 1995. His poems have appeared in *The American Voice*, *Christopher Street*, *Descant*, *The Malahat Review*, and *Poetry Canada Review*. He lives in Ottawa, where he co-edits *Arc*.

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MELISSA HARDY was born and raised in North Carolina. She has published two novels, *A Cry of Bees* and *Constant Fire*, as well as numerous short stories. A third novel, *Demon Barrow*, is due out shortly with Quarry Press. Her story, "Long Man the River," won the 1994 Journey Prize for the most accomplished piece of short fiction published in Canada in a given year. Hardy is currently working on a novel about the Northern Ontario mining country around Timmins entitled *The Drifts*.

M.J. KANG is a playwright and actor based in Toronto. She's been everything from a sound designer to a stage manager to an assistant director. Her plays include *Noran Bang: The Yellow Room* (Cahoots Theatre Projects) and *Hee Hee: Tales From The Diamond Mountain* (Blyth Festival Theatre), where she was writer on the collective *Urban Donnelly's* (Theatre Passe Muraille). In the spring of 1997, she will be acting in *Merit Gets Wired* by James O'Reilly at Young Peoples Theatre.

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