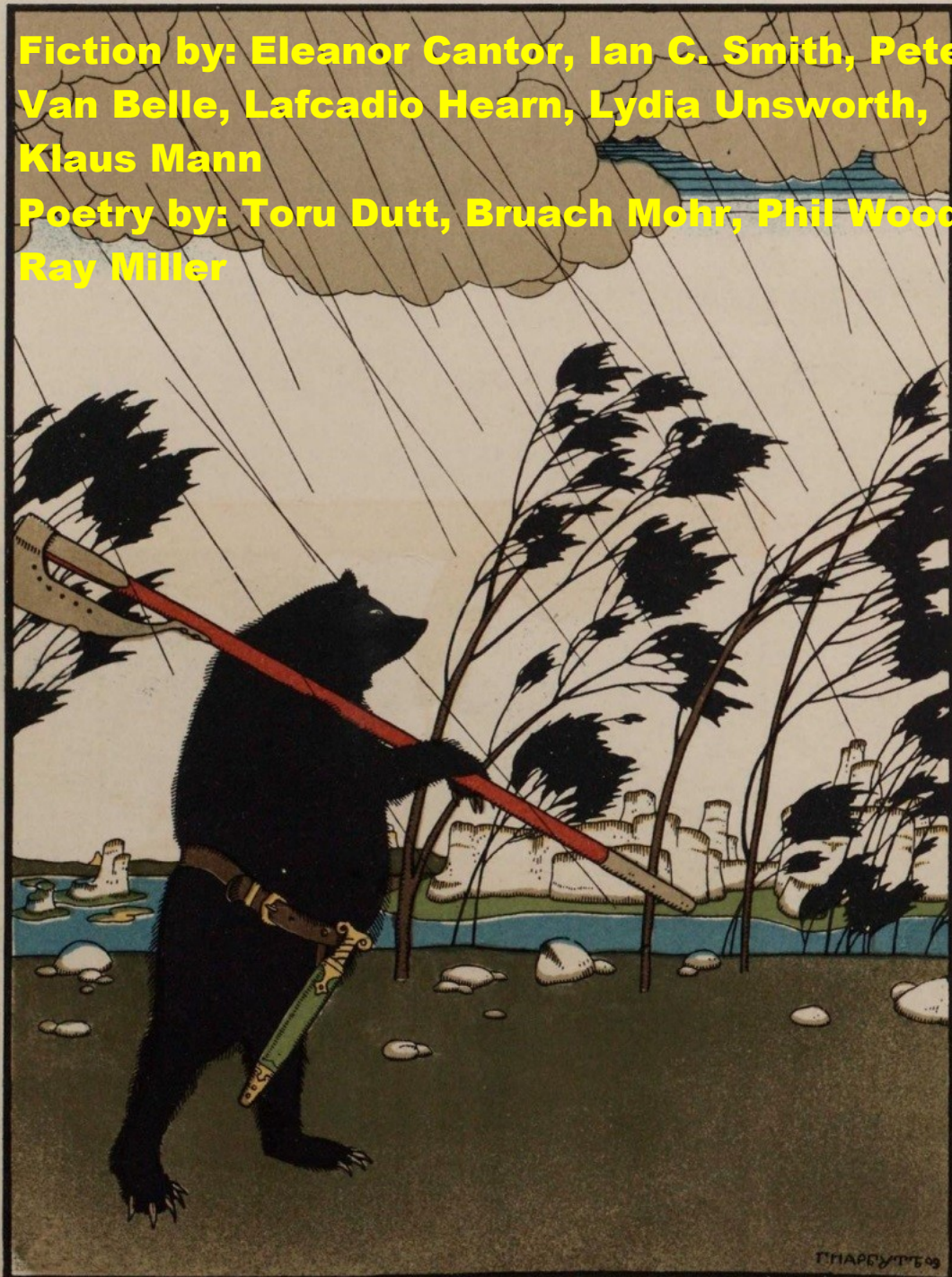


THE KLEKSOGRAPH

An International Review of Art and the Subconscious

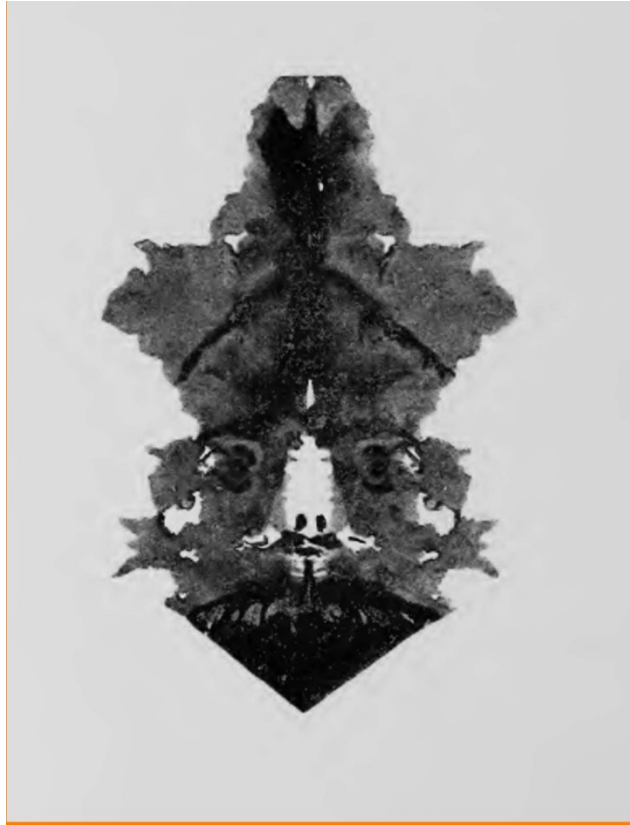
Issue 8 May 2022

Fiction by: Eleanor Cantor, Ian C. Smith, Peter Van Belle, Lafcadio Hearn, Lydia Unsworth, Klaus Mann
Poetry by: Toru Dutt, Bruach Mohr, Phil Wood, Ray Miller



THE KLEKSOGRAPH

Editor: Peter Van Belle



ISSUE 8

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In the mid-nineteenth century, Justinus Kerner, published his book of “Kleksographien”. Later psychologists used similar ink blots as a means of accessing the subconscious of their patients. The Kleksograph (Klecks is the official German spelling) is dedicated to exploring and celebrating the relationship between the subconscious and art.

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This magazine can be downloaded free from www.kleksograph.be



Toru Dutt

OUR CASUARINA TREE

Toru Dutt (1856-1877) is a pioneer of Indian literature in English and French. She was born in Calcutta, left Bengal with her family when she was 13 and travelled through Europe before returning to Calcutta where she died of consumption at age 17. By that time she had written poetry in English and a novel in French, as well as translations from French and Sanskrit into English.

In the first poem the tree stands for India, enduring the winding creeper of colonialism. She mentions a baboon, however, which isn't native to the Indian subcontinent, possibly she meant a macaque or langur. On her travels to France, however, she may have seen the ancient Egyptian statues of baboons in the Louvre, symbols of Toth, the god of wisdom. In the second poem the tree is linked to her father, clearly to her a symbol of stability and life. In that light the deeper meaning of the tree in both poems would be her life itself, ravaged by disease and feelings of loss. As present times show, people often tie their own fates to that of their countries, and when this happens to autocrats this can have particularly disastrous effects. In the imagery of the second poem, we can also see the effect of her family's conversion to Christianity.

Like a huge Python, winding round and round
The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars,
Up to its very summit near the stars,
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
And oft at nights the garden overflows
With one sweet song that seems to have no close,
Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.

When first my casement is wide open thrown
At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;
Sometimes, and most in winter,-on its crest
A grey baboon sits statue-like alone
Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs
His puny offspring leap about and play;

And far and near kokilas hail the day;
 And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;
And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificence
 Dear is the Casuarina to my soul;
 Beneath it we have played: though years may roll,
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
 For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear!
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!
 What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,
That haply to the unknown land may reach.

Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!
 Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away
 In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,
When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith
 And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,

When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon:
And every time the music rose, --before
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay
Unto thy honour, Tree, beloved of those
Who now in blessed sleep, for aye, repose,
Dearer than life to me, alas! Were they!

Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done
With deathless trees like those in Borrowdale,
Under whose awful branches lingered pale
“Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,
And Time the shadow;” and though weak the verse
That would thy beauty fain, oh fain rehearse,
May Love defend thee from Oblivion's curse.

Toru Dutt

The Tree of Life

Broad daylight, with a sense of weariness!
Mine eyes were close, but I was not asleep,
My hand was in my father's, and I felt
His presence near me. Thus we often pastures
In silence, hour by hour. What was the need
Of interchanging words when every thought
That in our hearts arose, was known to each,
And every pulse kept time? Suddenly there shone
A strange light, and the scene as sudden changed.
I was awake: - It was an open plain
Illimitable, stretching, stretching – oh, so far!
And o'er it that strange light, - a glorious light
Like that of stars shed over fields of snow
In a clear, cloudless, frosty winter night,
Only intenser in its brilliant calm,
And in the midst of that vast plain, I saw,
For I was wide awake, - it was no dream,
A tree with spreading branches and with leaves
Of divers kinds, dead silver and live gold,
Shimmering in radiance that no words may tell!
Beside the tree an Angel stood; he plucked
A few small sprays, and bound them round my head.
Oh, the delicious touch of those strange leaves!
No longer throbbed my brows, no more I felt
The fever in my limbs – “And oh,” I cried,
“Bind too my father's forehead with these leaves.”
One leaf the Angel took and therewith touched
His forehead and then gently whispered “Nay!”
Never, oh never had I seen a face
More beautiful than that Angel's, or more full
Of holy pity and of live divine.
Wondering I looked awhile, - then all at once
Opened my tear-dimmed eyes – When lo! The light
Was gone – the light as of the stars when snow
Lies deep upon the ground. No more, no more,
Was seen the Angel's face. I only found
My father watching patient by my bed,
And holding in his own, close prest, my hand.



illustration by Peter Van Belle

Eleanor Cantor

We Could Be Heroes

“So, what’s your special power?”

“I can smell people over the phone.”

“Any clown can do that.”

“Ok, what’s yours then?”

“I can make people dream about me.”

“Just about you?”

“No, about anything, I suppose. I can tailor their dream to my needs and send it to them”.

“In the night?”

“One normally dreams in the night.”

“I mean, a night’s dream rather than a day-dream.”

“Yeah, a night’s dream, seamlessly indistinguishable from the other subconscious bollocks excreted from the brain during sleep in stylized surreal disjointed story lines. I know how to get in there”.

“How?”

“Well, first of all I need to know they’re asleep.”

“How do you establish that? Do you need to be in the same room as them?”

“No, I just normally wait till 2am. Most decent people are asleep by 2am. Means I have to stay awake till then, though.”

“And how do you ‘get in there’? Is it like a zone? Do you go into a trance?”

“No, I’m just like here, talking to you. I make up a story and then send it to them. Like: ‘click send’. It’s very easy, actually, but it is important to put all the details together. Plot, of course, but also all that dreamy stuff: like it’s your house, but it’s not really your house, or it is your house but it’s in Stockport, or it’s your mom, but she looks like Linda McCartney; people turning into different people mid-dialog, that sort of thing. But none of your flying pink elephants or talking unicorns shite, nothing too trippy. Nobody dreams like that anymore. That won’t work.”

“What do you mean, ‘work’? How does it work for you, anyway?”

“OK, say I wanted you to sleep with me, which – for the record – I don’t, then I’d wait till you’re asleep and send you a confusing semi-sexual dream”.

“But why ‘confusing’? Why ‘semi’? Why not fleshy and forward? You, me, Ibiza, best sex of my life, blam!”

“That would be a vision – the sub deletes them automatically, to prevent insanity. Vague, mauve, that’s how I roll.”

“Right, do go on; what would you send me?”

“Me. You. Living room. Middle class. Suburban. It’s afternoon. The shutters are down, but you know the day outside is scalding. The light inside is faint, and you’re barefoot on the cold, cold tiles. I’m your cousin, curled on the sofa. You join me, your feet get warm. I feed you crisps from a bowl as we’re watching the muted telly. You feel my fingers lingering in your mouth, salty...cut.”

“Why cousin?! Why crisps?!”

“A little incestuous touch; works 90 percent of the time – shame and sex are wired together in most people. The crisps? Don’t know, just a feeling I get off you. I mostly get it right.”

“How do you know you get it right? How do you even know the ‘sending’ worked?”

“Oh, I know. Trust me. You can always tell when people have dreamt about you. They look at you a certain way. It’s the power of suggestion.”

“Do you do nightmares?”

“Erotic ones? I would, if I thought you were that way inclined. It’d be pretty much the same dream, only you’d be choking on my fingers. That’s how you’ll wake up. Gasping for air, horrified, aroused.”

“Is this all you use it for?! Sex?!”

“Mostly, yes, did it to land a job once too”.

“I mean, you can do anything. You can send a dream to...I don’t know...the president of the United States!”

“Why would I? I don’t fancy him.”

“I mean, you can influence him, bring peace to the Middle East, stop the killing in...I don’t know...wherever there’s killing”.

“Why don’t you do it? You have a special power.”

“What, with smelling people over the phone?!”

“Why not? Requires some planning, but I’m sure you could do something with it. There is no hierarchy of magic.”

“You’re a creep. And a donkey.”

“Crisps, fair cousin?”



Alexandra Ekster - Bridge at Sèvres

Ian C. Smith

Marketplaces of Old Europe

A boy, fourteen, living alone, new to the city, charts a labyrinth of brickworked streets, would play pool, line up shots, cigarette smoke from his cue hand fretting over baize. Answering to a nickname, something tough, colourful, he would drawl, Fuck you, as if afraid of nothing, instead of being wary. Leaving his stark room he walks, walks costing zilch, weekends, after work, pittance-paid despite bumping his age. He fancies a bar-room life one day, a blonde's hand on his shoulder when he cracks knowing jokes.

Horizons more aesthetic, he rides rails, windowed reflection superimposed on hissing greenery. Fragrant battlefields, history's panorama, charge past. In brief light a whicker of pigeons, he moves with reverence through the marketplaces of old Europe, reads plaques, chasing biographical shadows, imagines himself in rags with refugees enduring emigration's hard slog, observations accruing in curling notebooks. Old for a novice backpacker, managing a shoestring budget with confidence, he buys roasted chestnuts at a stall near medieval Bruges, rents uncleaned rooms in Barcelona, these foreign forays his days of splendour now that he finally authors his life, time enough for the dark halls of sleep later.

Done travelling, reading Murakami, he pauses when Naoko reasons life should stop at twenty-one, then repeat in reverse. Had she survived grief beyond mid-life's rueful wisdom, he thinks, far beyond naked youth's giddy surges, heartbreak's dramatic beauty, she might believe differently. He would swing back towards youth at fifty, but stop before the single gas-ring stoves of his hard teens again, the snarl of an uneducated life when cheese-on-toast was the plat-du-jour of the phantom that was him, stop before sorrow on this earth battered his resilient runt's heart again.

Bruach Mhor

Still Rolling

A ghost train screeched to a halt. Out of track.
It stood there in the Old West for an hour
until a passenger in the dining car asked,
But why does a ghost train need a real track?
Which seemed like a good question,
so the train started rolling again through the fields of corn.

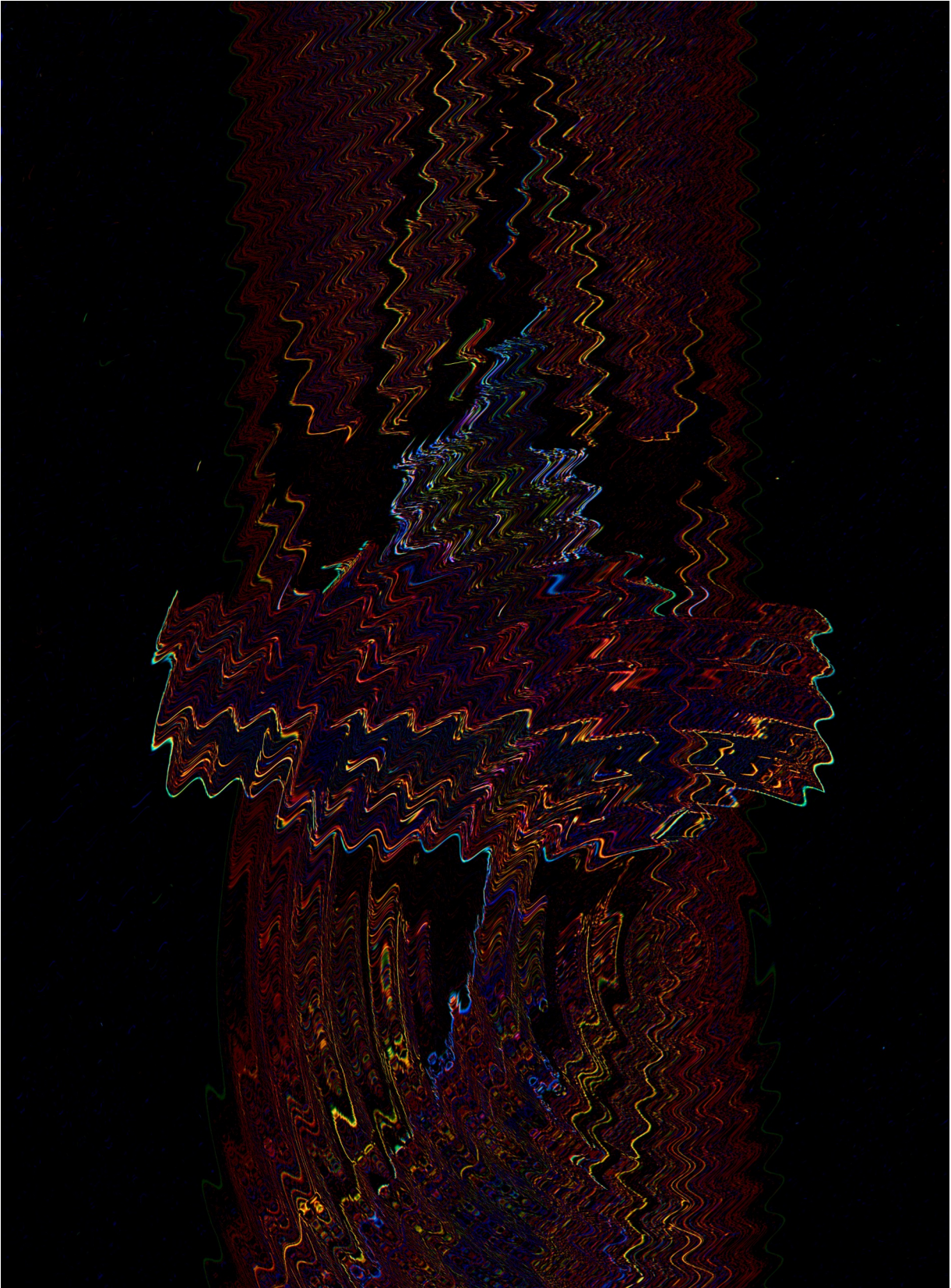
Elsewhere a real train screeched to a halt.
No ghost track, only the usual metal rails.
It stood there in the New West for an hour
until a passenger in the sleeping car asked,
But why does a real train need a ghost track?
Which seemed like a good question,
so the train started rolling again through the fields of ghost corn.

Bruach Mhor

In an unfamiliar land/language

Her radio voice leads him to a flowery valley,
an idling of a day picked among the petals.
“This is the habitat of bliss”, the words suggest,
though that is not their meaning. Like servants,

what they carry belongs to others. What he
follows are their sounds, musical daydreams,
escaping from the box into the evening air
like Chagall drawn lovers floating into freedom.



Sounds at Sleep by Peter Van Belle

Peter Van Belle

Thunder and Cannon Fire

Gerald got home Friday afternoon and saw the rear window of his mansion was broken. The shock made him drop the keys to his sports car. The stones that'd gone through lay among the broken glass in the tiled hallway. They were those grey stones from the railroad at the end of the garden. The window had two narrow panels flanking a massive central pane that lit the hall, the double stairs and the first floor corridor. It'd been made a time when such large surfaces of glass were a rarity. They'd never be able to duplicate the bumpy texture and the bluish tone it gave to the entering light.

He walked up the stairs until he was level with the window. Where a segment of glass was gone, the smell of budding oaks and beeches wafted in. He looked down into the garden estimating where the thrower would've stood. The tracks were too far away. He must've crossed the garden with hands full of stones and thrown them from the patio.

After dinner he returned to the hallway. The house was quiet since his wife and kids, and their love of television, had gone away. He'd phoned a construction company and they'd come and put a large piece of plywood over the window. They said it'd take a while to get a sheet of single glass of that size. They talked about double glazing but in a house of this age it was ridiculous. Because the plywood wasn't flush against the window frame it let in the sounds from the outside: the wind, birdsong, cars on the road beyond the rail tracks. He knew he'd be looking at the window a lot.

It got worse when he tried to sleep. Whenever he got up from his antique bed, he went out onto the landing and looked over the plywood into the garden, as if to see some grinning phantom with a stone in each hand. Each time he'd be more exhausted, and often he'd rest his head on the balustrade of the landing.

By mid-morning he was asleep, though restless; often he'd shudder and start grinding his teeth.

Across the garden, on the other side of the tracks, was a road with humble villas, like minions to Gerald's mansion. In the driveway of one of them a man waxed his car. From the house came his wife and daughter, who'd just started to walk. The mother started throwing a beach ball with red and transparent panels, which the girl would try to catch. Sometimes the ball would roll towards the father, who tapped the ball back to the girl before continuing with his car. Every time she threw the ball the mother whooped.

Meanwhile Gerald was a child again, running home after school. He'd just passed the tobacconist with its windows full of cigar boxes and pipes. His dad always went there for his stogies. The ubiquitous sea gulls of his home town made a strange sound.

Perhaps the man tapped the ball too hard. There's no point in blaming him. The ball went high, bounced, and rolled down the driveway with the child in tow. The mother was on

her knees, so she couldn't get up fast enough. The father dropped everything shouting no, no, no. The sports car drove too fast, returning night clubbers. There were screams and screeching tires, a life and hopes ending.

Gerald looked back and saw the men following him. One of them had just blown a raucous note on his trumpet. It was Miles Davis, next to him walked Charles Mingus, Monk, Charlie Parker and Lester Young. The musicians laughed, thinking Miles had startled Gerald. But Gerald hadn't been startled; he was just scared. In his bed he started grinding his teeth while his drool wet the pillow.

From the passenger seat of the car sprang this blonde, oh my god, oh my god. The driver, now less tanned and toned, sat with his head lowered as if he'd hanged himself. By the little body kneeled the parents, moaning a prayer to keep the soul from leaving.

The jazz players surrounded Gerald, but didn't stop him. They chuckled as they matched his quickening step.

"Got any money, little man," Charles Mingus said.

"Yeah, spare us some change, bro," someone else said.

He felt for his wallet. It'd gone.

The blonde then thought of calling an ambulance. She kept away from the parents but asked one of the onlookers the name of the street.

They didn't like the way he'd checked his wallet.

"He thinks we're crooks," Mingus shouted.

Now they did stop him. Miles grabbed him by the shoulders, put his face in front of Gerald's and opened his mouth. Gerald knew something terrible was about to come out. An undulating scream erupted that seemed to come from below their feet, as if Miles Davis was a conduit for a noise that'd burst from Hell. It grew louder, hysterical. Gerald knew he'd never see his parents, that the sound was consuming him. The world went white as if in an atomic flash.

He opened his eyes and felt the sticky drool on his face. He raised himself and thought of turning over the pillow to get some extra sleep. Then he saw the time his alarm-clock projected on the ceiling: ten-thirty. He remembered a dream, a crowd of people, someone shouting at him. Then he remembered the broken window and threw the pillow at the foot of the bed. He got up to take a shower.

Phil Wood

Connect/Disconnect

You sip a camomile tea and after netting off
the consequences
between supernova and nebula
I gravitate to earthly things.

We chat about yoga, a vegan diet,
Nausea and mescaline.
Your scone and sugared lips tempt
with cherry jam.

And yet Pluto is drifting out
of orbit, toward a supermassive black hole,
gravity chain snapped.
Our alphabet begins in starless spaces.

You live on the other side of Greenwich.
Distance, speed and time
are not an issue, I randomly explain.

Between the blushing sea and burning sky
a canoe glides with natural ease. Its blades
rippling letters from celestial places.

Epiphanies flutter a breeze
of moths and butterflies.
The cosmos has made my coffee cold.

Lafcadio Hearn

Oshidori (Mandarin Ducks)

Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) was born on the Greek island of Lefkado. His family moved to Ireland and he later moved to the US where he worked as a journalist in Cincinnati and New Orleans and wrote extensively on the African-American communities there. After working in the West Indies, he moved to Japan and took up a teaching post. He married a Japanese woman and adopted the name Koizumi Yakumo. He published a series of books on Japanese folklore, which have become especially popular in Japan itself.

The moving story that follows has elements of Buddhism and Shinto, in the idea of the ducks having a kami, and the taboo against killing them, and in the idea of atonement. The story has a shadow-side, in that the female does not survive the male. Taken as a fairy-tale it would suggest that women should kill themselves as a token of love, and it reassures men that their wives will not survive them to have children by another man.

There was a falconer and hunter, named Sonjo, who lived in the district called Tamura-no-Go, of the province of Mutsu. One day he went out hunting, and could not find any game. But on his way home, at a place called Akanuma, he perceived a pair of oshidori (mandarin ducks), swimming together in a river that he was about to cross. To kill oshidori is not good; but Sonjo happened to be very hungry, and he shot at the pair. His arrow pierced the male: the female escaped into the rushes of the further shore, and disappeared. Sonjo took the dead bird home, and cooked it.

That night he dreamed a dreary dream. It seemed to him that a beautiful woman came into his room, and stood by his pillow, and began to weep. So bitterly did she weep that Sonjo felt as if his heart were being torn out while he listened. And the woman cried to him: "Why, - oh! why did you kill him? - of what wrong was he guilty?... At Akanuma we were so happy together, - and you killed him!... What harm did he ever do you? Do you even know what you have done? -oh! do you know what a cruel, what a wicked thing you have done?... Me too you have killed, — for I will not live without my husband!... Only to tell you this I came."... Then again she wept aloud, — so bitterly that the voice of her crying pierced into the marrow of the listener's bones; -and she sobbed out the words of this poem:

Hi kururéba
Sasoëshi mono wo—
Akanuma no
Makomo no kuré no
Hitori-né zo uki!

(At the coming of twilight, I invited him to come to me. Now to sleep alone in the rushes of Akanuma. What unspeakable misery.)



And after having uttered these verses she exclaimed:—"Ah, you do not know -- you cannot know what you have done! But tomorrow, when you go to Akanuma, you will see, - you will see. ..." So saying, and weeping very piteously, she went away. When Sonjo awoke in the morning, this dream remained so vivid in his mind that he was greatly troubled. He remembered the words: -"But tomorrow, when you go to Akanuma, you will see, — you will see." And he resolved to go there at once, that he might learn whether his dream was anything more than a dream.

So he went to Akanuma; and there, when he came to the river-bank, he saw the female oshidori swimming alone. In the same moment the bird perceived Sonjō; but, instead of trying to escape, she swam straight towards him, looking at him the while in a strange fixed way. Then, with her beak, she suddenly tore open her own body, and died before the hunter's eyes. ...

Sonjo shaved his head, and became a priest.

Lydia Unsworth

I Dreamed I Was Dead

An accident. And at the moment of my eruption, a black-and-white poster burning an eyehole red. A screaming face with teeth. I have been left out of so many things. At the time a surname is changed, the word family is stripped from one cluster of bodies and mapped on to another. There are words I cannot use. Worse than using two languages to explain one self is using one language to explain two wildly divergent phenomena. It was only my family could see me. My growing children, the man I married, and a recent dream-acquaintance who happened to be with me at the time of my unhappening. To her, there was nothing different about me; I tried to demonstrate my plight by waving my hands in front of the faces of the other people in the museum. Nothing. Hardly exceptional - foreign, female, older than I used to be - I realised this could look like regular unseeing. And she was growing impatient, not yet realising how bound she was to me. I shoved my hand through the shoulder joint of a nearby museum person. It provoked in her a shudder, while feeling to me like a menstrual dam break or an oyster detaching to slide down a throat. Intangible. But not without memory. I put my hand on the shoulder of my acquaintance and hoped for the best. Her skin was a wall: I had impact. To this day we are friends. She understands how few chances I still have. My children talk to me, share details of their lives, though I have this feeling of being permanently outside them. My husband sleeps on the couch, though so, I think, do I. Occasionally, I manipulate the trajectory of a receipt or flick a face mask in someone's half-closed eye. They can't see me. Only the paper moving. My children roll their eyes at me for that. They want me but they don't want me. Some days proceed without comment, until I am confronted once again by my invisibility, the irreversibly of this awkward half-death. Do my family want rid of me? Am I haunting them? They haven't said.

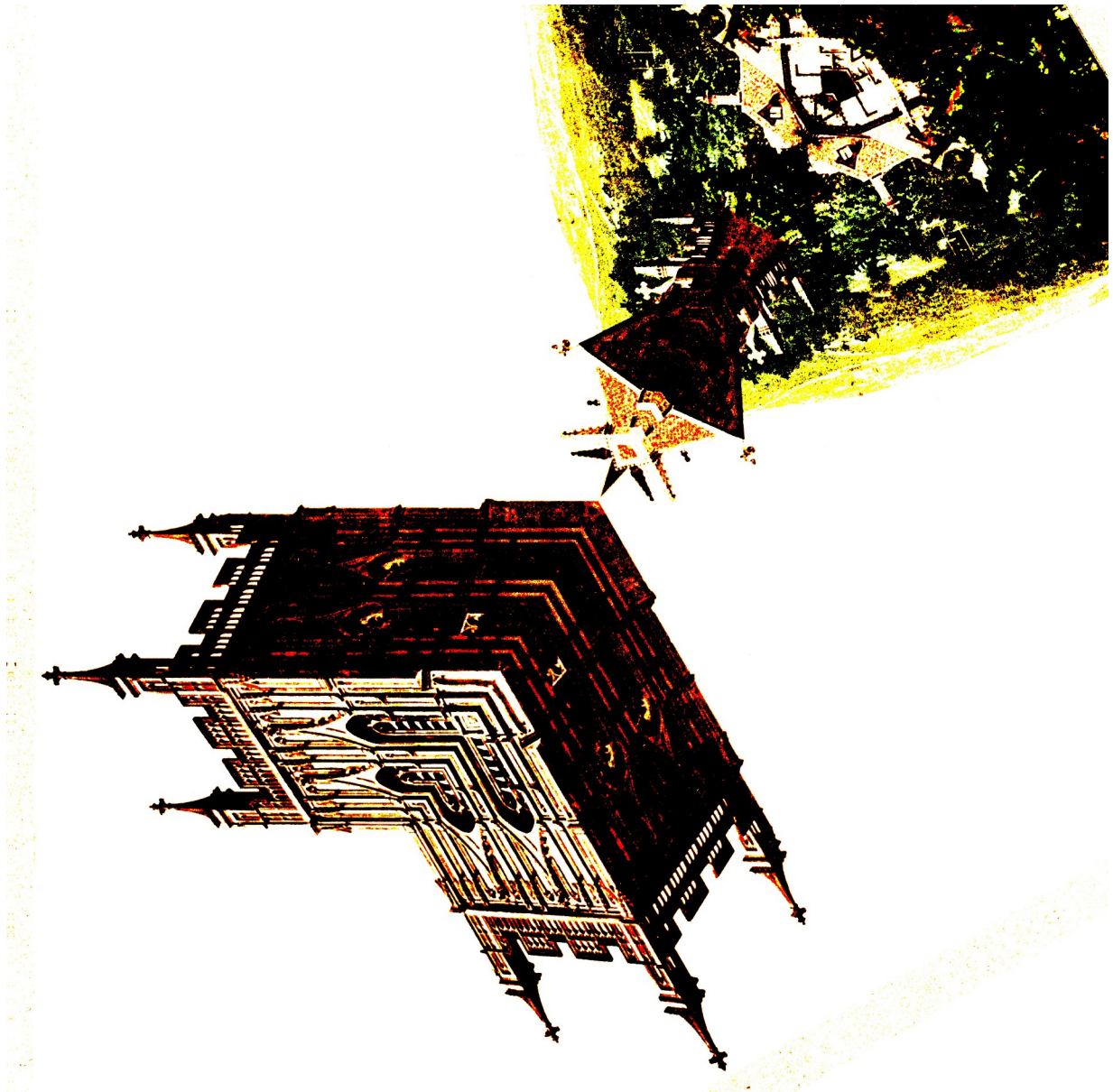


illustration by Peter Van Belle

Ray Miller

Public Transport

Sir Edward Elgar is standing at a bus stop
in Great Malvern, alongside a public phone box;
bowler-hatted and moustachioed, nonchalantly
squinting at his mobile of fluorescent green.

To his left there are three more of him - he's quite
the man about town. Behind the seats of the bus shelter,
in what would carry for smart casual
at the wine bar up the road, he's examining
his wristwatch, gazing hopefully at the distance,
then finally discovering the composure of sleep.

This quartet have been waiting since one Sunday
in late winter. They "appeared overnight" and the whisper
was that Banksy had blessed us with his signature.

Yet when the work was revealed to be that of local artists,
the good citizens of Malvern suppressed
their disappointment, for they know what they like.

A campaign was orchestrated, opinion was canvassed:
Bill, 66, and a retired mechanic,
thought the images were brilliant and was crossing
his fingers that the council wouldn't scrub them off.

Now supposing I drew Nigel Kennedy
on the walls of the Malvern Theatre,
lighting up a cigarette or fiddling with his phone,
unshaven and sporting an Aston Villa t-shirt,
the reception might not be quite as warm,
I'd imagine But, alas, I cannot paint
or do anything but sleep in the early hours of Sundays.
It is artists who are driven;
my sort are just transported, after all.

The two pranksters have apologised for not asking
permission and have stated that we don't condone
unauthorised graffiti. The council have allowed
the paintings to remain and are promising
to smarten up the bus stop and its background.
In addition they've commissioned further work
from the duo, who describe the public reaction
as "surreal". It is all so very British, middle-class,
very Malvern, though the bus drivers aren't happy,
always late to catch up with the prevailing mood.
So many sightseers gather to look upon
Sir Edward Elgar, they often halt their buses
for no passengers at all. There's an example
of the capacity of art to confound.

Klaus Mann

Märchen (Fairy Tale)

Klaus Mann (1906-1949) was the eldest son of Thomas Mann. Like his father he had homosexual feelings, though he was more open about them. From his early adulthood he struggled with heroin addiction. The Mann family condemned the nazis, which made it impossible to stay in Germany once they came to power. Klaus Mann became prominent in what is called Exilliteratur, the literature of writers in German who fled the nazis. His best known work is Mephisto, a novel about an actor who collaborates with the new regime. It was of course banned in Nazi-Germany, but also in West-Germany until the late sixties. He became a US-citizen and served in the Italian campaign during World War Two. He committed suicide in Cannes.

Though the story is called a fairy-tale, it lacks the didactic element. Yet like them it is replete with symbols. What stands out are all the questions, mysteries, and hesitations. Many of these are articulated by the narrator himself. This gives this tale a dreamlike quality. Psychologically, these hesitations are often evidence of self-censorship, either conscious or subconscious. Why else would an author leave the reader with unanswered questions?

The narrator intrudes upon the gathering, yet he is welcomed and even given his own room. Nothing is said about the world outside the cast-iron gate, nothing about the narrator himself. The only named persons are the countess and her daughter. The only persons described in detail are the host and the countess, and both in slightly mocking tones. One group whose appearance and behaviour are described in detail are the boys, especially their legs and how they whip them. This is mentioned several times.

Then there's the theme of the final part, of beauty in death. This is a theme explored, with more irony, in the short novel Death in Venice, by Klaus Mann's father. In the latter, the man who rejoices in the expectation of a beautiful youth's death – and preservation of his beauty – ends up dying himself.

“Wenn ich gewachsen wäre irgendwo
Wo Leichtere Tage sind und schlanke Stunden
Ich hätte dir ein grosses fest erfunden
Und meine Hände hielten dich nicht so
Wie sie dich manchmal halten, bang und hart -”
Rainer Maria Rilke

“If I'd grown up somewhere
Where days are lighter, and hours slender
I would've devised for you a great celebration
And my hands wouldn't hold you
As they're wont to do, so frightened and hard”

The walk had likely tired me a bit – or was I just thirsty and wanted to ask for water – or was it a desire to enter the strange, beautiful garden that beckoned from behind that cast-iron gate? It was a long way through the large park where white gravel paths ran and crossed between the dark shrubbery to reach the white and noble front of the mansion with its stone terrace. A glass door stood so one could easily pass from the terrace into the large, bright hall beyond.

From inside came laughter and strange, fleeting voices. I had heard the same from the shrubs, and laughter from the treetops, though those were likely the brightly-colored birds.

As I entered the hall, I saw many people gathered there, all sorts of people, many boys, girls as well, and ladies. They were scattered throughout the room, sat laughing at small tables, dressed in light clothes as they had tea. Chatting, they walked to and fro across the Persian rugs, and watered flowers that filled the room with their scents. For this they used bright red, dainty watering cans with thin spouts.

The only grown-up man present rushed to me. He was short and stocky, wore a droll outfit: a brown suede jacket and soft, yellow leather slippers. This made me think he was a housekeeper in a good mood, filling in for a butler who was on vacation. But he started by saying he was the owner of the house, and laughed when he saw my discomfort.



“I’m the owner of this house and garden,” he said rapidly in a loud, laughing voice. It obviously pleased him to call this stately property his own. His eyes sparkled under his high forehead. How beautiful his childish mouth smiled. However small his stature and silly his outfit, it was clear to me now he could call this chattering assembly his beloved guests and they owed him a debt of gratitude for it.

He heartily shook my hand and said he hoped I would feel at home in his abode. A lady approached, probably his wife. She wore this tall hairdo of grey hair. Under this regal edifice of hair, her face seemed young, graceful, with a trace of overbite. She still elegantly clutched the red watering can with which she’d watered the flowers. I was delighted to notice its color matched those of her funny-looking, narrow, buckled shoes.

She told me she’d show me to a small room where I could make myself more comfortable. She added her husband never considered such things. She was a bit chubby, though lively and gracious. Her husband laughed and looked at me, beaming.

A small crowd of onlookers had gathered around us from the tables and ottomans, probably even from the park. The boys wore blue silk tunics, many clutched twigs with they’d swat each other playfully. Their legs were slender and tanned. The girls would turn away and exchange remarks about me.

The youthful, yet grey, countess led me off to my designated room, speaking in loving tones. We went along many corridors, she holding the red watering-can in front of her, as if it were a lantern to light her way.

The room was very small, but very well furnished. It was white, with bright blue drapes on the window and the bed. There was a ridiculous number of mirrors, which delighted me.

The lady chatted away in the doorway, watering-can still raised like an ornate lantern. She now even lit a cigarette, filling the room with sweet and sharp smells. To me it seemed she wanted to reveal something very important about what I’d seen in the house, and what I’d subsequently witness. Yet it seemed she couldn’t decide, and then a loud voice called her from the garden. It really was her name, because she turned smiling towards the sound.

She shook my hand and laughed, mischievously looking at me through lowered eyelids. Now her face looked spirited, yet disturbingly infantile under that ornate hairdo. With the watering-can still raised, the cigarette nonchalantly perched between her lips, chubby yet displaying gracefulness, she disappeared from view. The voice had shouted “Imogen”. So that was her name. By the way, I recognized the voice as that of our host.

I stood by the window, musing as I watched the garden grow dark. Softly, as from a murky dream, the strange voices came warbling to me. Down there the Countess Imogen would feed small colorful animals, sprightly salamanders, gleaming lizards. She kneeled at a white grotto, enticingly obscured by the twilight, her hair like a precious, outlandish crown. She regaled the colorful animals to exquisite dainties. But among the bushes stood the bronzed, slender boys, whipping their slender legs so hard I’m sure it must’ve hurt.

To me, it was as if I had to come up with a deep and beautiful thought, probably the same the lady had wanted to articulate. Yet all the sounds and song from the garden, the deepening darkness, and knowing Imogen fed the colorful animals in the twilight, the boys

slender and playful among the blossoms of the shrubbery, all of this robbed me of all contemplation, and I had to give up drawing a conclusion.

Now a young girl accosted me (I did not hear her enter, perhaps she'd been there before me, or probably she'd always been). I guessed at once she was the daughter of the countess, though there was no resemblance. Neither had she inherited her mother's artificial grace. She wore a green linen tunic bordered with black. She also wore white linen shoes with very high heels, yet her legs were bare and she wore no socks. Though her eyes were full of sad darkness, she smiled and bade me accompany her to the garden.

Slowly she led me down the many corridors. At times she'd turn and call to me from the darkness, singing and fleeting, in her beautiful voice, saying things I couldn't understand. Clearly she was mocking me, but this was in strange contrast to the expression in her eyes and arms, which moved me close to tears.

The ballroom was empty and dark, apart from a few blue lights. As we reached the terrace, Sonja (she'd told me her name) called out a long, foreign name at the dark shrubs. At that a boy appeared. He had light hair and dark eyes. His lovely innocence made me close my eyes as if in mourning. Sonja stroked his hair, while she spoke mockingly to me. I couldn't follow what she was saying.

A small pale girl in a light green ballerina outfit called to us from the lawn, where she'd been dancing alone with her veils. She beckoned us over, wanting to play a game. We approached and a group of people joined us. It was hard to see in the darkness, but it must've been ten or fifteen persons. The host gave us all pretty silver balls, while conscientiously explaining the rules of a rather complicated game.

Soon the silver balls went to and fro across the scented night air. A delightful sensual-senseless system of flying orbs, a playful cosmos, of sacred loveliness that strangely moved and enraptured. The Countess Imogen was obviously the most adept at this game. She juggled the balls with spirited precision, without smiling though. All her sharpness and grace of mind was focused on this intricate game.

Nevertheless, the centre of it all, like the sun, around which the silver planets turned, was our host. The head with the massive forehead, the deep and dark smiling eyes, and the childish mouth were like an immense focal point of the graceful arcs. Yet the hearty ebullience had left his face. Wasn't it sadness that lay in the eyes that ruled this magical play world?

When I noticed the strange sadness in our host's eyes, the thought which had haunted me for so long returned, the one which I could not bring to a conclusion. It involved the look in the eyes of our playing host. But the concentration required to receive and throw the orbs made it impossible for me to finish my thoughts.

Suddenly, the game was interrupted and everybody ran past the mansion and through the park beyond, which became ever wilder and difficult to cross. The undergrowth winded ever thicker around us, until we suddenly spotted the water between the trees. Silently, we halted in front of this white plane, smooth as a sheet of metal, silver, infinitely wide. We stood in front of the sea.

In little boats we rowed out onto the water. I sat with Sonja, our host, and the boy. Strange, fleeting voices laughed from the other boats that glided around us. I've never seen water this still. Stars crossed the shiny surface in sacred gracefulness. The boy sat in front of me.

Then it happened. The beloved boy leaned playfully out of the boat to let the silvery element run through his fingers. He lost his balance, or perhaps it was the water lovingly pulling him in. Without a cry he slid sideways out of the boat into the soft, soft rippling water, which closed soundlessly over the slowly sinking boy. Not even a hand came to the surface.

None spoke, none moved, none had tried to help him. Sonja sat still, her head down, eyes darkened. Our host dropped the oars, turned away to look at the stars. All sound had died down from the other boats as well. An inimitable silence hung over the surface that'd closed over our beloved boy.

Gradually, as if born by this silence, raised by it, the boy's lifeless body rose once more to the transparent surface. Pale, he lay stretched out on the silver, eyes closed, wet hair on his pale forehead, in eternal slenderness.

Our host turned away from the stars and let his gaze rest fully on the dead body of the beloved, a gaze of dark joy. At that moment, it seemed to me, he started laughing inwardly. He really started laughing. Sonja laughed as well, motionless, eyes on the beloved body. From all the boats came a soft, muted laughter across the immeasurable surface.

The Countess Imogen, her hair like a precious hat, raised herself from her seat and beckoned, singing across the water. Sweetest and saddest was the water's laughter, as it could play with the body, flattering it.

As we celebrated the death of our beloved in this manner, I was finally able to catch and hold this strange, fleeting thought that'd eluded me hitherto. It was a mere philosophical thought, trivial to most of us. For many reasons I dare not write it down clearly.

The only thing I can admit to, is that it involves the nature of grace.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Archip Kuidzhi (1841-1910) born near Mariupol, of Greek descent. The painting displayed in this magazine was part of the collection of a museum in Mariupol, which has been destroyed in the recent siege. The original, therefore, may be lost.

END OF ISSUE EIGHT OF THE KLEKSOGRAPH



Archip Kuidzhi - Red Sunset on the Dnieper