

THE GRAMMARIAN
AND OTHER POEMS

CHRISTIAN WARD

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THE GRAMMARIAN

The logo on his bag says
Nantucket Historical Society, 2002
but his face shows no passing
of time; as if he just left a mould

and sits carrying out left-behind
instructions; circling the commas
scheduled for execution, sparing
a dash here, a parentheses there,

cleaning up the page like the way
he has organised his life. His glasses,
suit and umbrella follow *subject, object,*
verb. There are no adjectives

caught in his reflection. The world
is not a mosaic of memories, colour
and experiences but *subjects, objects*
and *verbs*, watching life only to correct it.

GOODNIGHT, MR PRUFROCK

Rain falls as the night unfolds,
glazing the fading cattle
with specks of starlight. We pass
rows of disappearing hedgerows,
unaware the world is shrinking
around us, until it is nothing
but the left-over memory
of our final journey
to the land of the naked dead.

THE YELLOW FOX

The forest is silent as an image
from a postcard, our only audience
here are trees and falling snow.
As we start to renew the tracks
we made yesterday, I hear sunlight
rummaging through the branches,
following us like an invisible fox
to places that will soon be forgotten.
And as the snow melts, all that's left is you -
a poem shaped out of things I never
knew I had.

AZALEAS

I watched their heads push
through the layer of thick
loam that you never bothered
to lay; imagining the sound

of *pop pop, pop pop*, filling
the air. But that never happened.
You never bothered to read the
instructions on the seed packet,

that was never you. You didn't
plant them all in the shade and I
watched them clamber out into
the sun, slowly wilting as sunlight

melted their petals. The soil was too
alkaline for others and they had simply
frothed away as they were born. I
couldn't resuscitate them that day

and wept as I buried them. But you
never did. You gave the survivors
too much fertiliser, thinking they
would live. But they retreated to grow

underground, free from you. And as
they slept, all I could think about was
how they would fall; their pink petals
clinging to night as they burnt.

THE KITE MAKER

I once knew a man who made
kites. Sitting in his workshop,
he glued the wooden diamonds
with spit and resin until his wife
called him in for tea. After stitching
on plastic coats and tails, they hung
upside down like bats; waiting until
he went to the hill to release them.
Some flew away whilst others got
caught in tree branches, waiting
for his words to carry them down;
never to fly again.

THE ARCHAEOLOGIST (HAIKU)

Brushes uncover
whispering footprints;
memories return.

SEASIDE TALES

I

A family of newspaper hats
burns as the pier melts
under the sea.

Gulls cry a eulogy
as her frame is buried
by swirling currents.

II

A fragment of a tabloid
lies buried in sand
next to broken glass.

Feet cut on its words
but the glass has already
been blunted.

III

Candy floss twirls like '50s
models. Toffee apples shiny
as lip gloss twinkle under
the morning sun.

Somewhere at the other end
of the pier, a man is considering
imitating Daedalus.

Only the sea will be waiting
to catch him.

FISHING FOR SHRIMPS

Wading into the empty sea
with nets thin as lace, we start
to scrape the seabed, dragging
our pile of invisible leaves
to the surface. But there's nothing
there. We pretend that shrimps
are crawling in the muck, clambering
over one another as they try
to escape. You drop the haul into
the pan and as the heat digests them,
we lay on the sand and watch the stars
tell our evening story. But that never
happened.

ON THE SEATED FIGURE BY MATISSE

I'd watch her wrap stillness
like a shawl around her body,
trying to keep every movement
warm, whilst waiting not for time
to end this session of ours
but for me to drop my brushes
and paint her from her lips
to her navel.

MR KURTZ

You saw him in a Brighton cafe,
sipping tea as the waves collided
with the beach. There was something
strange about the way he looked
you told me, as if he had escaped
from a film. You could see that in his
eyes, thin slivers of yellow, carefully
hidden under bug-eyed sunglasses.
You never did follow him. When I
asked why, you said you had seen your
reflection in him, curled up like a slave
trapped in a bamboo cage. And no one
was there to let it out.

BAT

I saw a bat crawling along
the railway tracks the other day.
The local lads started throwing
stones at it, hoping to break its
papier-mâché wings. It reached
a pair of coiled rubber snakes
and started to bite through
their blackened skin, immediately
releasing a cloud of bluish vapour,
which turned them into ash.

PLATH

I

You caught a wild salmon
and watched its blackened
carcass drip over the coals.
The stars watched you eat
away the last of your innocence.
But you never noticed.

II

You once caught lightning
and stored it in a bell jar.
You stood mesmerised
as it danced and slowly died
in the vacuum.
But still you stood there,
watching.

III

Snow brushed its hand
against your green shroud
as you were carried out.
The night uttered a silent
eulogy as your ashes were
scattered
but no one could hear you
still weeping.

THE DESERT AT THE END OF THE WORLD

Violets bloom in the tungsten tundra,
curling up every time snow falls.
There's nothing here anymore -
no flags, no footprints -
only the violets,
chattering forever at the sky.

SENTIMENTAL FASCISM

Conscience blares from her iPod
like a sermon for the opt-out generation.

She just ignores it, preferring to concentrate
on smearing lies across her lips.

Wipe it off,
wipe your hand across your mouth
and laugh.

'You are not
deemed worthy of such things'
the face in the puddle says,

'The world revolves around ancient women
gathering fuel in parking lots,
not premature marionettes
still carving out their identity
in steel and concrete.'

THE GIFT

I was looking in my drawer
for something I hadn't seen
in years, when I found it,
wrapped in its tissue paper
shroud. It was a wrinkled
leather book, an old relic
from my grandfather. It still
had his scent - that old musk
I still remember him wearing
when I sat on his knee. I read
the words, the expressions
of thought and feeling he saved
for me. I guess he'd thought
they'd be my compass, guiding me
to places I'd know like a map
of memories, leading me
to where I need to be.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Christian Ward is the author of five chapbooks, including *The Sea* (Scars Publications, 2007), *Goddess and Other Poems* (Scars Publications, 2007) Slippage (Erbacce Press, 2008) *Dark Matter Lullabies* (Why Vandalism?, 2008). His sixth, *Bone Transmissions*, will be released in March 2009 courtesy of Maverick Duck Press.

His poetry has appeared in publications such as *The Kenyon Review*, *Diagram* and *Denver Syntax*. He was shortlisted for the 2007 Plough Prize and nominated for a 2008 Pushcart Prize. You can find his website at www.myspace.com/wordfuck

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Compact Discs: *Mom's Favorite Vase* the demo tapes, *Kuypers* the final (*MFV Inclusive*), *Weeds and Flowers* the beauty & the desolation, *The Second Axing* *Something is Sweating*, *The Second Axing* *Live in Alaska*, *Pettus & Kuypers* *Live at Cafe Aloha*, *Pointless Orchestra* *Rough Mixes*, *Kuypers* *Seeing Things Differently*, *SD/SD* *Tick Tock*, *Kuypers* *Change Rearrange*, *Order From Chaos* *The Entropy Project*, *Kuypers* *Six One One*, *Kuypers* *Stop*, *Kuypers* *Masterful Performances* *mp3 CD*, *Kuypers* *Death Comes in Threes*, *Kuypers* *Changing Gears*, *Kuypers* *Dreams*, *Kuypers* *How Do I Get There?*, *Kuypers* *Contact* • *Conflict* • *Control*, *the DMJ Art Connection* *the DMJ Art Connection*, *Kuypers* *Questions in a World Without Answers*, *Kuypers* *SIN*, *Kuypers* *WZRD Radio* (2 CD set), *Mom's Favorite Vase* and *The Second Axing* *These Truths*, *assorted artists* *String Theory*, *Oh* (audio CD), *Life At The Cafe* (3 CD set), *DMJ Art Connection* *Indian Flux*, *DMJ Art Connection* *Manic Depressive or Something*, *Chaotic Radio* *Chaotic Radio Week #1*, *Chaotic Radio* *Chaotic Radio Week #2*, *Chaotic Radio* *Chaotic Radio Week #3*, *Chaotic Radio* *Chaotic Radio Week #4*, *Chaotic Radio* *Chaotic Radio Week #5*, *Chaotic Radio* *the Chaotic Collection* *Collection #01-05* (5 CD set) *etc.* (audio CD, 2 CD set), *Chaotic Elements* (2 CD set), *Chaos in Motion* (6 CD set), *SD/SD* *Screeching to a Halt* (EP), *PB&J* *Two for the Price of One* (EP), *Kiki*, *Jake* and *Haystack* *An American Portrait*, *Kuypers/the Bastard Trio*/*Paul Baker/the JoAnne Powlers Trio* *Fusion* (4 CD set).