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| ***Julia*** |
| SCANT MINUTES before the HMS Serpentine left port a woman brought a girl up the gangplank with a heavy case, left her in the care of a Spanish nun, and promptly left.        "*A donde vaya usted nina*?" asked the nun.        "*Al Lisboa senora*."       The nun summoned the bosun's mate, who brought her before the captain, who dropped the gangplank for a wildly gesturing couple who appeared suddenly on the dock.      "I'm English," said the man when he arrived breathless and little disheveled. "Do I have the honour of addressing the captain?"     "You do."      "Then pray tell us what ship this is and where it's bound."      "His Majesty's Royal Merchant ship Serpentine, bound for London with a sugar cargo ... and a little girl too I believe." The captain winked at Julia and she smiled a timid smile.     "She must come with us."     "I don't understand."     "Nor do we....that is my wife and I ... well there's been a misunderstanding y'see."      The captain pondered this...     "Bosun, am I to understand the girl is not a legitimate passenger?"      "Not on the ship's list sir. We just have the Spanish lady as far as the Azores."      "I see. Well carry on then." And the man went down the gangplank with Julia and her trunk.     "Damned Spanish idiots," said the captain.      "Portuguese,sir." corrected the bosun. "Though the one who brought her onboard looked a bit of a darkie. Damn fetching if you ask me, those shimmies. Ever had one, sir?"      "Shut up bosun," said the captain.     "Yes sir," said the bosun.      It was Maria the maid who roused the family's English neighbours after Mario left with Julia's mother and her case, and they flew as fast as hooves would carry them to the dock.     "Damned lucky thing there was only one ship there today," said Jonathan when they had Julia safely in the coach, and his wife agreed.        "Extraordinary thing to do. Never heard of such a thing in all my days. You must come and stay with us you poor child. Oh dear, she doesn't understand me. Speak to her Jonathan."       "Você fala inglês?" he asked       "Não falo," said Julia.      "Julia must come to our house as often as possible," pronounced Jonathan's wife, and he nodded reluctantly. Julia was unaccustomed to the creamy charm of the English, and too young to understand that it was entirely conditional.    "At least she has a roof over her head," said Jonathan, "and that's more than I can say for the entire royal court of Lisbon. They've been out of doors since the earthquake, the lot of them, living in tents in a field somewhere. Extraordinary! Anyways that maid has a head on her shoulders, and the old lady is always there...."       "Oof! I cannot abide that woman. Perhaps the priest...       "Good lord no. He'll just send her to a convent. It's where the Portuguese put the familes of their enemies after they give them the chop. Horrible. Anyway I can't tell those damned Jesuits from the heathen. You saw them on the roads the other day, walking with them, even speaking their lingo." Jonathan spoke Portuguese perfectly although the local dialect baffled him.        `Well then tell her we'll come and visit more often, just to see how she's getting on," and he did.       "Que me quieria quedar en el cruzero," replied Julia.       "Ha. She says she wants to stay on the ship."       "I can't say as I blame her."        Their coach passed the port building and the pier where boats ferried people to the islands in the*Bahia Todos os Santos*, and the seabreeze that fanned them smelled of clove and the charcoal fires from the tiny bairros of the lower town. A kind of pagan melee always erupted here before Semana Santa, the holiest week in the entire Christian calendar, which coincided with the celebration of the harvest. The festivities became more widespread and intense as the Jesuits lost control of their converts. Bands of revelers roamed the streets wearing animal skins and huge paper-mache heads representing the full panoply of African and Tupi gods. They gathered on corners with the vendors and drummers, or by small cooking fires where the *mai de santos* of the Candomblé houses dispensed banana leaves with cooked yams and goat. The sound of the samba and drumming came from every house and street corner, and from the alleys and rooftops too. Dancers in strips of cloth and leather moved seductively to the *samba de roda*, or lay on the ground overcome by exhaustion and intoxication, or merely swayed and stared fixedly into the distance.     Julia recognized many of the faces and body types who filled the narrow street below the ornate  balconies of the houses - the undulating Bantus, and the lighter skinned Cafuza, and the short tribespeople in countless shades of black and tan and cinnamon. Their hair was braided with sticks and cowry shells, and charms hung from their belts and bracelets to ward off smallpox, or cholera, or any of a host of ailments that afflicted the people of the new world.       Progress became difficult and then impossible as the small black coach stopped for a procession led by a woman holding an icon of the Virgin Mary. The acolytes who followed were in long white robes and skull caps. Julia knew she was the mother of a *Candomblé* family on their way to a feast or an initiation, but she could not identify one of their party, a masked man who careened through the crowd in an erratic manner suggesting he was under the influence of one of the herbs the Yoruba took during festivals. She had never seen this kind of public ritual before. Perhaps it was Macumba or Vocu, or a hydrid of some kind.     He caught Julia's eye and darted towards the coach, thrusting his head through the tiny guillotine window. The mask fell off and revealed eyes which were wild and bulging, and the whites of them stood out against the blue black face. He smelled of sweat and charcoal, and stared at Julia speechless but with growing recognition, and she too glimpsed something familiar as she looked into the black eyes, only she couldn't say what it was. Then he smiled, and his eyes rolled back in his head which shook vigorously, and he said something to her in Nagô.     "Good lord."    Jonathan's wife rapped him on the forehead with her fan and he faded back into the street.    "I think he just wanted a few coins my dear," Jonathan said. ¬ |

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| *and hand in hand, on the edge of the sand, they danced by the light of the moon, the moon, the moon, they danced by the light of the moon ..*. " |

 After the divorce I went to the library to meet beautiful strangers.    
"You checking out a book?"  
"No."  
"Let's go..."  
"Ok."  
I didn't want conversation, just a cold blooded tango like you see in National Geographic articles about the mating rituals of striped ass baboons. I also read. Flaubert and Rimbaud and Camus and Balzac. And about baboons, naturally. And humans. The similarities are striking. The look, the cross over, the opening line, followed quickly by the proposition. In primates the cruise is futile. It’s a red herring, doesn't mean anything. Maybe you look like some high school swain and she's grasping for the name. Maybe not. The point is it's a waste of energy.  I didn't want recognition, I wanted forgetfulness and anonymity; desire and hostility and contempt and surrender. An apache dance.   
My life was perfect. Just ducky.  
  
Once I gave my number to a girl from Las Vegas. I took her to a French hotel, the Meridien, and we sat in a Provencal bar with rich mahogany furnishings and white linen and drank Benedictine beside Richard Grieco who was there alone reading a script. It was a vintage '80s moment. Temporarily intoxicated by the ambience of the place I said I loved her. She looked startled and said "Oh?".  
    Some months later she called me. "Do you know who this is?" she asked.  
    "No." I replied.  
    "Bastard," she said and hung up.  
  
   Life turns into a post modern novel once the cracks appear. It begins with an inocuous truth uttered by a stranger and grows over time into a horrid neurosis that gets you round the neck. You age. You get sick. You wither and die. You begin haunting places, and the places come alive with the ghosts of others that haunt you in their turn. I became an empty vessel adrift on the wide astral sea, a living ghost, an enantioseme. Real and somehow not. Perhaps I called this spook into existence. Perhaps. Even so, I could neither understand its laws or control its actions. A spook has a life which it properly should not have in the first place, which means anything can happen, and the limiting laws of men and physics are powerless to stop it. I had glimpsed a middling state of existence taking root somewhere, and the final penniless nights in the Mexico City Hotel explaining the nuances of it to anyone who would listen, and even a few who wouldn't. There's nothing wrong with that. It's a Nobel Prize winning fate. I just didn't fancy it for myself.  
   This business of telephone numbers was the beginning of the end for me, the end of my perfect life. There was nothing left but to go home.  
    I cursed her....  
  
   That year I left the city and moved into a cabin on a mountain where I used to hunt as a kid. There's a crossroads on the old highway that skirts the shoreline, a general store, and a payphone where I once made $1.2 million from a single call to my broker.  Nearby is the beach where we played nude volleyball in the '70s, and the house where my grandparents vacationed during the war.  
    That's about all there is to say about this place.  
  
   I've taken up residence in a coldwater cabin. The place is wild and overgrown so I'm building a rail fence to hold back the forest and a firepit for the claw-footed tub that sits forlornly in the yard. I want to sit in it steaming hot and perch my caulk boots on the rim and suck back the cold autumn air. I like the cold in this place, the moon light creeping over the pinewood floors and the huge stone fireplace that only keeps itself warm. Owls and bears and cougars prowl my yard all night long. It's a good thing I have Smokin' Joe, my cat. He's not afraid of anything....  
  
   I put on my corporate drag this morning and went into the city for meetings. On the ferry coming back I bumped into an acquaintance I hadn't seen in 10 years.  
'Where you bin?' he asked  
'Here and there.'  
'Give me your phone number,'  
'Nah.....'  
'C'mon.'  
I gave it to him. He glanced at it briefly and put the tiny slip of paper, the back of a match cover, into his pocket.  
"Let's go to Little John's this week."  
Little John's is a bar above the tiny bridge near the cross roads.  
"Alright," I said.  
  
   ''Been awhile.' said Ted the barman when we arrived.  
   "Sixteen years," I said.  
   "That long? Tsk..."   
    We went into the TV room to watch the hockey game. A dozen or so people huddled outside in the cold and watched it with us through the window. "What's with Dante's Inferno out there?"  
   "New smoking bylaw ..." said Danny  
    We sat around, watched a bit of the hockey game. I talked about my adventures, he filled me in on recent hometown events. The local music scene had deteriorated. A lot of people had left, some new ones had arrived.  
   This is a weird little place, like a David Lynch set. I've located people here 20 years after they mysteriously disappeared. Not everyone who calls it home are from the neighbourhood and in fact very few really are. The locals mostly leave after high school, and those who return can never say exactly why.  Some come here to go nuts. But no matter where I'm living or what I'm doing in the world, this is inexplicably home. It's my living room...  
When I got home I found a neatly folded note taped to my door. Someone wanted to know if I felt adventurous...¬  
  
    I cut myself chopping wood today and had to hike through the woods to the general store for bandaids. The blonde clerk in the vintage clothing store next to the post office looked fetching so I went in to flirt with her.  
   'Ever get anything good for Halloween?', I asked.  
   'Sometimes," she said, and seemed to look right through me. "Would you like to leave your number?"  
   I would and I did and when I got home the phone rang and it was the sales clerk from the store.  
   'How did you know it was me?' she said.  
   'How did I know it was you what?'  
   'Who left the note on your door!'  
   'I didn't."  
   'Oh,' she said, and hung up.¬  
  
She's German she told me, and it fit. Tall and blue-eyed. A natural blonde. She likes clubs. She told me about cruising Berlin's Mitte district with friends in their Eurotrash drag and wrap-around shades and spiked hair and blonde mohawks and I pictured them as a sort of '80s Mapplethorpe tableau moving in slow mo through a crowded street with the night glittering all around them and a Lou Reed soundtrack, towering over everybody. Or so I thought. Actually she turned out to be Basque, not German at all. Her name was Merenxu, with a soft S in the last phoneme. Meren-shoe.  
The sign in her store window said closed for the Beltene Fires. I asked what that was and she said it was some kind of pagan festival, adding "the owner is a druid." We went into the vegan restaurant beside it, or rather we tried to. As with all vegan restaurants there was a problem with the door. The window was crammed with handwritten notices about opening hours and special events and various new age homilies and bon mots, but nothing that suggested whether one should push or pull once the handle is turned. I was about to give it a shove when somebody opened it and I fairly fell into the vestibule, frightening a busboy.  
We sat and warmed ourselves by a gas heater. She busied herself with her kidskin gloves. I gazed through the dyed curtains at the frost melting on some azelias in the morning sun. The waiter came and sat down beside me.  
"Are you joining us?" I asked, startled.  
"I'm here to consult over your food choices," he deadpanned, and I immediately thought of the word lickspittle, owing to the tiny slug trail of saliva that ran from the corner of his mouth, and of Klaus Kinski who utters the word so brilliantly during his scene with Doctor Zhivago on the train to Yuriatin. I've always admired Kinski's sneer in that film, and the Y shaped vein that bulges from his forehead when he spits at the guard.  
"It's the boll wievel to the farmer, man," said a voice nearby, and I tuned into the table next to us.  
"All these money people and the death oriented oil interests and the ... you know ... narcissistic corporate fuggin culture. Don't they know it's the age of Pisces?"  
"... Capricorn," his companion corrected.  
"....Aquarius," I chimed in. The dreadlocks swiveled towards me. "Fuck off," he said.  
I had my mouth open for a reply but nothing came out. I've never been told to fuck off along astrological lines before.  
...  and thence to my companion, who sat with Buddhist concentration studying a single strand of hair, twisting it between thumb and forefinger, and as she did so the light seemed to creep through the latticed window and gather around her like a mantle, the whole image seeming to dissolve before my eyes into something slightly abstract, like a mosaic by Klimpt, all squares and rectangles heaving around in a golden, textured sea. It was fragmented yet whole, and mythic in a way. Sensual too. Her pale blue eyes had a calming effect.   
Suddenly I felt a searing pain as something large and unyielding had shot up my nose and was sucking my brains out through a straw. My thoughts became unhinged and swirled down a long drain towards the abyss ... a fall that would take an eternity to complete and from the bottom of which the sun would look like the faintest star on the furthest reaches of the firmament ... oddly many of these thoughts were of melodies and lyrics from musical films ...  bright copper kettles and warm woollen mittens ... the drooling waiter and lickspittle ... unfamiliar scenes and feelings from previous lives the cold bright desert where I ... running through the streets of Munich at ... hopping fire hydrants to ... a secretary is not a toy ... The world shrank to a single black raster with white noise which gave way to an industrial soundtrack ... the repetitive sound and imagery of steampunk and hydraulic plumbing ... Eraserhead ... the dark nihilism ... the holy ghost ... the mass of the misery in connective form ...the Brixton Academy in London where waiters bring trays of stimulants and people pick each other up by asking if you have a cig ... the warm bars of Dusseldorf's nightclub district in brisk autumn where they play American blues and serve razor thin crepes crusted with sugar for breakfast ... the fall of Saigon ... the wide sargasso sea ... the boll wievel to the farmer and the slip man the slip can you not conceive? The blue eyes came out of the black raster and were no longer pale but glittering and she asked 'have you got a cig?" or I thought she did or she should have, or they were words to that effect, and I wanted to say lickspittle but mangled the word and it came out - stinkpetal - but man I was thisfuckenclose ...  
The guy was blonde, about sixty, with deep lines on his forehead and a sullen, dazed expression on his face. At first he seemed foolish or oafish; but on second sight became rather more lizardlike and demiwise, even cunning. The dreads were actually cornrows that had grown out and I wondered why someone at his age would bother to try for an ethnic look.  
'Hell is other people." I said, and she blinked. I was now incapable of thinking or speaking in anything but quotations by Jean Paul Sartre. I felt my psyche collapsing under the weight of my own existentialism, run over by my own crazy thought train, pounded flat like the Saturday morning crepes advertised on sandwich boards in Dusseldorf's Altstadt district.  
Where is your family from?"  
"Originally?  
"Sure why not?"  
"Berlin."  
"But you said..."  
"Basque, I know. On my mother's side. My grandmother was a dress maker in a shop, my grandfather drove a streetcar..."  
The Klimpt mosaic came back into focus, aureate patches that pulsed and hummed and went parabolic. I could see gilded images in them. She was mythically interesting again.  
"... and a failed painter."  
"Like Hitler," I said, trying to sound knowledgeable.  
"He told Goering off once."  
"Who?"  
"My grandfather. He was painting a military barracks when Goering came in and he told him off. "  
"What about?"  
"Politics, the war."  
"What did Goering do?"  
"Nothing."  
I got a mental picture of some nut raving at Goering while his paintbrush dripped on his shoes.  
"Do you imagine it's helpful in life to be crazy?" I asked. She gathered her hair in both hands and twisted it like a taffy pull, drawing it over one shoulder. I couldn't tell if this were a nervous gesture or an excited one.  
"Why do you ask that?"  
"I don't know."   
  
"Did you know when they renovated this place they uncovered some old handwriting on a crossbeam?" she said at last.  
"No. What did it say?"  
"The war is still on and it's still raining."  
"Why d'ya suppose anyone would bother to write that?"  
"I've been trying to figure that out."  
"Perhaps because they both seem to go on forever."  
"But they don't go on forever," she said, which seemed a perfectly sensible thing to say.  
"I said they seem to," I replied quickly, and that was a sensible remark to put with hers. ¬  
  
We stood on the tiny bridge below Little John's and dropped pebbles into pools of dark burgundy with butterscotch foam.  
"I know that guy with the dreads," she said.  
"Yeah? What's his story?"  
"He's part of some local cult that worships trees." The Klimpt was drifting in and out of focus now, though the colours were less vivid.  
"What, like those people who go to Glastonbury every year?"  
"I guess. It's some kind of druid thing."  
"Do you believe all that?"  
"What's to believe? It's just a way some people relate to the world."  
"Do you relate to it that way?"  
"Oh god no." She paused, then said: "Don't make an enemy of him."  
"Why?"  
"He owns my store."  
"Oh."  
She tossed a pebble into the water below. "Let's go."  
"Where?"  
"To the pier. I want to walk on the beach."  
  
We hiked down to the mouth of the creek where the steamships used to tie up. The old pilings were gone but the breakwater still jutted out to sea. It was overgrown with low scrub and blackberries and someone had erected a wooden sculpture and some benches at the end of it.  
"I've always liked Germans," I said, feeling suddenly jolly. We stood on a vast sandbar exposed by the tide, and I had a sudden memory of playing baseball here in the '70s. In the distance was a point shrouded in steely mist and beyond that (I knew!) a cabin where my grandfather spent his leaves during the war. The shore looked like one of those Japanese paintings of cold beach stones and delicate cedar boughs poking through a curtain of fog.  
"Why Germans?"  
"They're educated. You probably know who Durrenmatt is."  
"The playwright?"  
"You see?  
"What do you know of Durrenmatt?"  
"I had to perform a scene from Der Physiker in college," I said.  
"Isn't that about some nuclear scientist with a terrible secret...?      
"Yes."  
"How does it end?"  
"I don't know. I only read the part I had to memorize," and she laughed at this.  
"Durrentmatt was Swiss," she said.  
  
We climbed over logs and through the pampas and seagrass to her family's cabin on the high bank above. The floorboards inside were old and creaky, probably the originals, and you could see daylight through them. The place was full of beach bric a bac like nets and fishing line and interesting pieces of driftwood. It looked like no one had been there in years.  
It was freezing, and the sun was setting so we stoked a fire in the potbelly stove. The warmth began to creep over the threadbare rug to where I lay propped up on the armrest of an overstuffed couch and I guess my body language more or less beckoned her to climb on top of me, which she did.  
"Well, well...", I muttered.  
"Is that all you can say?"  
"My, my, " I added quickly.  
I felt her fingers on my abdomen, sliding along my ribcage and over my chest. The sound of the sea oozed through the shiplap walls and formed a kind of a distant back rhythm. My flesh broke out in goosebumps.  
'Are you cold?'  
'No.'  
She sat upright. "How do you show a girl you like her in that dark little world of yours?"  
"I throw a rock at her..."  
She laughed at this: "Very mature."  
Actually it was true...  
  
She sat on my legs and shoved my woolly sweater up, exposing my torso from the breastbone down. I felt a sudden rush of warmth from the fire on my skin. She shifted off the couch and tugged her jeans down to her thighs, actually it was less of a tug and more of a waggle, like I've seen women do in public a hundred times before, when they hitch up their jeans. Except this was in reverse. A waggle down, as it were.  
I realized at that precise moment that she was beautiful, not just physically or in my imagination or even in the classical sense but in her totality, which is an observation I'd never made before. In fact it was not an observation at all but a feeling which took root and grew and as quickly morphed into an entirely different kind of feeling, one of dim recognition. Not of her, or the place, or the frigid air of the cabin or the weird light of the winter sun but the sensation itself . It was familiar, as though stemming from some vague, prenatal memory.  
The late afternoon filled the windows with the same pearly irridescence it cast over the sea, giving her skin a kind of dull lustre, and I could hear the fresh water rushing over the beach stones below the cracks in the floor, towards the tiny bay beside the breakwater, and over the abyss to the twinkling lights of Nanimo, and amidst all the sensory jazz in this tiny shack on the high bank above. I felt her knee on my thigh, and the warmth which emanated from the silky folds of some magic portal across the short divide. The crazy train started up again... *lickspittle, silky folds, juicyfruit rumble ...* ¬

(3)

A week later I was assigned to a press tour of Thailand organized by the Royal Thai Embassy, and in no time I found myself visiting industrial parks on the edge of the South China Sea.  My interest in this press junket had masked a vain attempt to meet the King of Thailand, a request that was flatly and repeatedly denied, and over which I had been doing a slow burn since I got on the plane. This was no ordinary invite after all - I was a business journalist, summoned at the behest of the Royal Family, to write about their five year economic plan. But while I was accomodated in virtually all other areas by our obsequious staff, my pedigree was simply too low to merit an audience. In fact I had no pedigree at all. I was beneath notice.  
There was something else that piqued my interest. I'd heard the legend from more than one source about a very exclusive, very opulent bar in Bangkok where the women dressed as the infamous Queen Suriyothai of Ayutthaya, and the men as consorts, along with assorted princes and princesses and ladies in waiting. It was supposedly a place of S&M in accordance with the legendary excesses of Suriyothai, who is said to have died in battle against the Burmese while still atop her elephant, trying to protect her husband whose own animal had collapsed from wounds. I rather liked this story, and the prospect of visiting any bar that attemped to recreate that  epoch of glittering heraldry and sexual excess titillated me. I had quietly resolved to search for it. If I wasn´t to meet the king I would at least encounter a princess.  
  
  
  
Memorial del arbol

By Henry Alexander Gómez

Born in Bogotá (1982), Henry is the founder and director of the Festival de Narrativa y Poesía, Ojo en la Tinta (eye in the ink). His poems appear in the short Colombian poetry samplers Piedras en el trópico (2011), (stones in the tropics) and Raíces del viento (2011), (roots of the wind). His most recent book, Memorias del Arbol, is being published shortly.

30 second literary critiques ¬

Voltaire, By Kev

Back in the 90s I lived in a warehouse on Main Street next to the old American Hotel it was great, I could skateboard through it 22,000 square feet my life was like a scene out of Rent. And I found a book by Voltaire called Candide and having nothing better to do I read it and was amazed at how this hapless youth had encountered so much trouble and strife and still maintained a kind of witless optimism about him it was life affirming but when I read the literary criticism I learned that the world is run by very hard people and the rest of us are justing living in it. And thennnnnnnnnnn I watched Leonard Bernstein on PBS conducting his Overture to Candide but first we had to listen to a 20 minute lecture on 18th century French ethics and I wonder to this day what Berstein knew about that ... and then my friend Kellee who ran a clothing store out of that warehouse called Amsterdammage got robbed while she was reading The Cinderella Complex ... isn't life weird? hmmm, well gotta go bye...

Margaret Atwood

Cawn't say I'm a HUGE fan of Margaret's writing, owing to having read a short story of hers in high school, a kind of Canadian gothic about a young girl growing up in rural Ontario, that cut a little close to the Freudian bone, and forever turned me off. BUT - I think her novel ideas are brilliant. Especially The Handmaid's Tale, which is not only a very good novel but may turn out to be prophetic as well. I think it already has, at least in part.

Atwood has very good instincts for that sort of thing. I'd go so far as to call her an armchair futurist. Here's a blurb from her latest opus:

'Adam One, the kindly leader of the God’s Gardeners – a religion devoted 2 the melding of science, religion, and nature – has long predicted a disaster. Now it has occurred, obliterating most human life. Two women remain: Ren, a young dancer locked away in a high-end sex club, and Toby, a former God’s Gardener, who barricades herself inside a luxurious spa. Have others survived? Ren’s bio-artist friend Amanda? Zeb, her eco-fighter stepfather? Her onetime lover, Jimmy? Or the murderous Painballers? Not to mention the CorpSeCorps, the shadowy policing force of the ruling powers… As Adam One and his beleaguered followers regroup, Ren and Toby emerge into an altered world, where nothing – including the animal life – is predictable.'

Last week I got an email from her, (Ok, I lied - it was a tweet!), promoting a web based e/book service. In reading her praise of its easy-to-use platform, I was surprised to learn she's been part of the electronic publishing phenomenon from the very start. Not surprising in fact because Margaret is a marketing master. In her heyday the literary press described her office in Toronto as a factory. I think it was meant as a compliment. The press in Canada does not object to authors soiling their hands selling themselves (unlike the authors!), yet it always gets reported as a kind of revelation whenever they stumble on someone actually doing it. (Canadians do not eat their own, or when they do it's with far less relish than the British, who savaged Martin Amos when he changed wives and especially literary agents (for an American!) after London Fields. In Canada, finding a U.S. publisher is a major coup, not a sell out. But then most English critics still cling stubbornly to the Shavian belief that reputations are made in London, only money is made in America, and deem the pursuit of it by authors to be in bad taste.)

I think it's entirely praiseworthy, and reminds me of another Canadian author with excellent marketing acumen and boundless energy: Douglas Coupland. When I knew him socially something like a hundred years ago he was an unknown artist with the good fortune to get an installation at the Vancouver Art Gallery, called The Floating World. Doug took it upon himself to personally promote his own show, arduously walking up and down Water Street with an armload of posters until his balls dropped off. I remember the proprietor of one my arty hangouts there eyeing it and asking, "Who is this guy?"

Some time later he gave me a ride home from a gallery show and as I climbed out he asked me in that precocious manner of his how I cared to define myself within the broader social context. What research! Shocked by such a penetrating question at one in the morning I inadvertently blurted out the truth: That I was a morose, nihilistic miscreant who viewed the world as a pointless place and sensual pleasure as the only thing worth engaging. He drove off in his little beat up Ford Fiesta looking very depressed. btw I liked Generation X, though I never understood how to read it, and I suppose it was a bit of a pollyanna version of Less than Zero. But so what? Canada is pollyanna. Or was. Now we're more of a northern proxy for the Department of Homeland Security. I think Doug Coupland had yet to encounter the kind of narcissistic freak show Bret Easton Ellis wrote about, though he probably has since then. And I loved Life After God. I'm easily as fascinated by the spiritual vacuum of North America as the religious overtones of Latin American writing.

It's quite a juxtaposition! ¬

There are suns that fall

By Henry Alexander Gómez

An angel toys in the branches of the tree

It is so great, the abyss

and so quiet, the roof of the world

that we embrace its grief,

and we drink aguardiente,

and we cry,

because we do not understand

how God plays with his stone fingers

among the poplar leaves¬

Lovers

She walks through the streets squandering her nakedness

and later drinks a field of logs,

silenced by fire

He sneaks into the cinema of the afternoon

and cries with shoes in the air

A valley of campaigns

a fly buzzes morbund among old papers

the rain falls on a guitar abandoned in the desert

the devil said he would take us home¬

Jaguar

" ..i.. n the forests of the night,

What immortal hand or eye

Could frame thy fearful symmetry?".

- William Blake.

The enigma of its skins surprises me again

at the hour of death

Again, the dawn undermining anguish and the terrible secrets; I have dreamed a blind jaguar

giving birth to the thousands of mirrors that preceded him

from the first tiger of Adam in paradise

a labyrinth of black pearls, of black rings of fire

shaded strokes of black jade

in the golden ivory that underlies the gloom

of the untamed jungle.

What immortal vision? What mystery hides your flesh?

Your flaming blind eyes follow me still

in the darkness of my steps to the tomb

like a stone of immutable gold

in the comfort of Allah's desert firmament

I dreamed him a thousand and one nights in this eternal dawn

I dreamed him in the form of the tiger, the lynx, the leopard

in the form of the puma, the lion, and the imposing panther

I dreamed him in the infamous face of the hunter

and in the bloody face of the sorcerer

I dreamed him on the altar of the blood of a race

that venerated the terrible symmetry of the universe

I dreamed him wooing, in the afternoon of a dead tree,

and devouring a man under the Amazonian flood

from the hand of Poe and Blake I dreamed also of Tzinacán1

in his closed hemisphere, deciphering the scriptures of God

in his indescipherable skin.

1. Tzinacán. A fictional Mayan priest from La Escritura de Dios, by Jorge Luis Borges

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     *Memorial del arbol*  
*By Henry Alexander Gómez*  
Born in Bogotá (1982), Henry is the founder and director of the Festival de Narrativa y Poesía,*Ojo en la Tinta (eye in the ink)*. His poems appear in the short Colombian poetry samplers*Piedras en el trópico* (2011), (stones in the tropics) and *Raíces del viento* (2011), (roots of the wind). His most recent book, *Memorias del Arbol*, is being published shortly.