

From the Book of Inundations

“Slippery God”

On a bus on the Korat highway,
I had just received a call on the mobile
from my estranged wife (a novel enough event),
when we passed God on a motor cycle.
He was playing it safe and wearing a helmet,
but his black tee shirt was clearly marked, “God”.
So I pondered if He was pulling the strings.
Divine intervention certainly
hadn’t featured in our relationship before;
but maybe this was a new phase,
and, as a crush of clerics told me in my youth,
God works in mysterious ways;
and this seemed suitably ambiguous.
Moses got a burning bush that talked;
how would he have responded to the Godhead appearing
as just another Thai motor cyclist with his head up his arse?
Inadequacy is scarcely adequate to describe my feelings.
Why this call from my wife (estranged)
followed by Jahwe (retired) on a Honda?
A deluge commenced, intense even for the rainy season.
Cement factories glowed in the storm like...
like fiery arks. Was ark building an option?
I took some pills and hoped for a second visitation.

An SMS rustled in my pocket.
Said an angel was waiting for me at Korat bus terminal.
She was going to take me to a hotel and open the Ark of the Covenant.

I felt something like awe stirring.
The storm swirled round a broken-down bus,
hazard lights sunk beneath the Stygian flood;
lost souls on the hard shoulder, Third Circle of Hell.
Hey, maybe it was time for more revelations.
I was beginning to realize that they're invariably problematical,
and a new respect was forming for Moses.
Forget about tablets of stone, I'll have some more of these.
The bus laboured past trucks of cinnamon and rosewood
climbing the rain-soaked Mount of Venus,
slippery with prophecy.
Gas stations blazed on a neon tide, pock marked with divine tears.
Now, along the serpent straight, a sudden bright kilometer
of forbidden fruits under canvas,
Eden's offerings brought to market, swallowed by the dark.
Divine tears began dripping through a lamp cluster above my head.
I felt fingered by God, though I couldn't rule out my estranged wife,
and with an apologetic look at my fellow voyager,
chilled to the crotch with a primal stain,

I erected my umbrella.

We slowed to a crawl in a world over its hubcaps in pain,
trucks with a bow-wave, motor cyclists become canoeists,
people in fluorescent rain-capes, waving flashing batons,
symphonic confusion.

Hailed Klongpai prison, barbed, deadly; breaching like a sea monster
before sounding into blackness, freighted with souls.
Soon a temple, glimmering like Atlantis, sank in the Sargasso night,
drowning prayers, as scaly serpents thrashed below our wheels,
devouring Korat Highway in my sight
coiled slimy round my element, they made it theirs.

And the Flying Dutchman's bus drove by,
no lights, black windows, and a sign that said,
"You think it's Korat, but you're over your head.
It's all phantasms and finny dead,
where land sinks and the sky rains dread,
and divine tears stalagmite your head,
and God appears, as the good book said, on a humble motor cycle".
Slippery God on a motor cycle.
Slippery God , slippery God , slippery God on a motor cycle.

John Gartland

GP ESCHATOLOGY

We have your co-ordinates, and know precisely your destination.

It is election time, and in the street of the plastic surgeons,
posters of men in white uniforms and fixed grins flap in unison.

This is a one way street, and a u-turn invokes serious penalties.

Traffic proceeds at breakneck speed through the great arch of autocracy.

By the pantheon of patriarchs, diseased birds slumber on the frozen plumes
of bronze headgear, mildew eating at ceremonial swords. Stay in lane.

The great highway of charlatans is multi-lane, crowded at all hours
and will bring you invariably to hypocrisy monument , where all roads meet.

One way. Vendors swarm with incense sticks, crystal meth and dreams,
goldleaf to flatter a glowering idol at the revered corner of errors;
a bottleneck, as many pilgrims buy merit from the four faced god here;
dead slow as beggars kneel in the road, abandoned to divine protection.

Proceed by the grand plaza of pointless purchases, and slow down for
heavy traffic at narcissus mall, street of six names for your inferior.

You must pass through the groveling gate, temple of the abject loop;
this is street of six titles for your superior, leading to the institute
of impregnable ignorance, graced with a royal charter. Take a right
on the grand drive of distracting flags, to the causeway of embalmed kings.

Go forward to the mall of the eternal flame. At karaoke heaven,
superlative banality may cause your ears to bleed. Accelerate away.

Proceed. Traffic circles perpetually round the academy of harlots;

whores, constantly renewed, wind silk around the sacred trees,
disrobe, and leave a mekong to appease priapic spirits.

You must drive through the emporium of envy and unsatisfied desires,
bypass the chaotic terminus of transsexuals for denial drive,
speed on past guess wat buddhist theme park, en route for meth mall,
where it is always rush hour, and the men at Jamaica corner sell oblivion
in small packs to foreigners, who are ransomed by the tourist police.

Near the fountain of corrupted thought, pass beggar children
fishing for coins and fever in the catfish dark of drains:
at last you are near your destination, on a street of fortune tellers.

Here, gamblers with their cards and severed fingers,
taking pains to keep their face white and uncompromised,
play endlessly, and disregard their loss.

Your tinted windows let you pass unrecognized.

This dusty cul-de-sac is yours. Abandoned
lottery tickets blow across the nameless street,
and withered wreathes are strewn
about some broken idol's feet. It is election time.

New posters of the white and smiling uniforms
wallpaper every space. This final cul-de-sac is yours;
self-hatred and the breath of street dogs, foul upon your face.

John Gartland

Late Afternoon, Soi Cowboy.

Ahead of the convulsions of the party,
vendors push disintegrating carts
on bike wheels and a rusty prayer,
cook noodles for the shift of brown skinned
whores who stretch and sashay, careless there,
already undressed for the evening,
shrieking Lao and Issan while
the knife eyed mama-sans turn on their radar, smile.

Rats, happy to grow fat on spirit food,
feast at the animists' dusty shrines,
although, they always leave the shot
of Mekong and a glass of coke behind.

Among the whores, the motor cycles, and more whores,
that is the spot, someone points out,
where, nights before, he saw the drunken foreigner
felled and kicked to death by bouncers.
The turgid street flows over it; more hookers come and go.
This soi's an operation, sterile ground,
and without the local anaesthetic of the dark,
without the neon sorcery,
this infamous address aches like a wound.
The turgid street flows over it; the hookers come and go,
the vendors push their bogus Raybans, Rolex,
and no one is *talking of Michelangelo*.

John Gartland