



if there is to be a zeitgeist going forward, I imagine it to be focused on attempts at immortality, and the ways we erase ourselves for immortality, and the ways we record ourselves recording ourselves

a correspondence

James Tadd Adcox/Robert Kloss

*if there is to be a zeitgeist going forward, I imagine it to be focused on
attempts at immortality, and the ways we erase ourselves for immortality,
and the ways we record ourselves recording ourselves*

a correspondence

James Tadd Adcox/Robert Kloss

april 2013

ebook by NAP
napnapnaps.com

During the month of December, 2010, James Tadd Adcox and I traded selves: I sent James every written word on my hard drive, and he sent me every word on his. This trade-off included not just fiction & poetry, but personal correspondence, notes, journal entries, everything. During the month, he wrote using only my words (rearranged however he saw fit), & I wrote using only his words. Each weekday we posted the results, he on my website, I on his. By the end we had a series of pieces that oscillate between prose poetry, flash fiction, and confession.

The whole, it seems, becomes a sort of a novel in correspondence.

3 At the project's beginning, I asked James not to use proper names of people other than myself, because I don't especially love the idea of libel. But for the purposes of the project, this was not considered a "hard constraint."

At some point, all of the information that makes up a "self"—our fears, unconscious motivations, decision-making processes, etc—will be accessible electronically. At that time it will be possible to trade and remix selves in a much more thorough and literal way than we have during this project. But we present our experiment as, if nothing else, a first step.

It is worth noting, perhaps, that I have never actually met James Tadd Adcox.

—Robert Kloss

CONTENTS /

- 1dec2010 / Initial Observations on Robert Kloss
1dec2010 / Film into Writing
2dec2010 / Lists of things to be done tonight
2dec2010 / topics later touched upon more eloquently
3dec2010 / This is coming from a guy who doesn't know
the first thing about me.
3dec2010 / Some Mornings They Woke in an Entirely
Other Flesh
6dec2010 / This pomo/absurdist "remix" by Robert Kloss
[I] of my [James Tadd Adcox's] "The Rise
of Dr. Fu-Manchu"
6dec2010 / You've Avoided the Problem Nicely, the
Problem Is
7dec2010 / Thoughts on the MFA Program
7dec2010 / To _____:
8dec2010 /
8dec2010 / "a latex mask using [James's] death mask as a
model"
9dec2010 /
9dec2010 / If I Could Convince You to Not Write This
Book, Either of Them, I Would
10dec2010 /
10dec2010 / Robert and the Blind man
13dec2010 / A body is ever really a story
13dec2010 / we must keep our heads down
14dec2010 / The native language of God Himself
14dec2010 / Everything I've Ever Written about Alligators,
Clowns
15dec2010 / They have proven Minneapolis exists
16dec2010 /
16dec2010 /
17dec2010 /
17dec2010 / into the peaty water, and then I awoke
20dec2010 / This man, I sometimes am, He
20dec2010 / "Drunk Girls"
21dec2010 / The cold, terrified
21dec2010 / what am I known for

22dec2010 / On kindness
22dec2010 /
23dec2010 / Character sketches
23dec2010 / The Good Young Man
24dec2010 / He, born into the flesh
24dec2010 / Recognition of the forces that make us
different is a clear step towards experience
25dec2010 /
27dec2010 / What is literature?
27dec2010 / stories of his dreams, a larger than usual
28dec2010 / Juli and Julia and Robots
28dec2010 / “two boxes of pages I assumed were his new
novel and the various film scripts he stooped
to work on”
29dec2010 / Myself, beneath my floorboards, the violent
thrashing of,
29dec2010 / you must learn to appreciate Robert for what
he is, a blind man who is more than the sun
30dec2010 / The Last Days as Tadd Adcox, Creator of
Mysteries
30dec2010 /
31dec2010 / Previously Unknown Versions of Robert
31dec2010 / the death and funeral pyre of

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Excerpts from this manuscript have previously appeared in *Abjective, Anti- Poetry, elimae, Metazen, and Prick of the Spindle*.

1dec2010 / Initial observations on Robert Kloss

A mirror, designed to make whoever enters realize: the city,
lost, bronze, by no means beautiful, is sublime.

The original child, another self to show me myself,
unconnected with anything.

Handfuls of dust: how small they are compared with this
floating

Bodiless.

ADCOX

7

James:

I am ripped at the seams, I am slowly torn to nothingness. A projector is lit. Vagrants, the only audience, watch, slumped, drunken. So why this desire? What is missing that should be there? Break it to parts—an anachronism, his chivalry, his love of reading fiction.

I am writing toward something: Kate's story, Paul's story, Miriam's story, Tommy's story...x's story...

“After Robert broke up with him Jason fell into a deep miserable trance. Paul was just sick. Finally, as he always did, Tommy arose from his depression to gorge on food. Gorging always made Donald feel better. Kate returned home to find Robert in a disgusting state. ‘Clean yourself up,’ Miriam said. ‘I’m glad we’re through you pig.’”

KLOSS

8

What makes it good for you? What is there that should be accentuated? You made love in the afternoons, slept with a wife, a woman who insisted upon no name but the name you gave her. She pulled away, coughing—the shape of her figure, her pink brassiere, through the lighted window. How she would look strewn.

Are you frightened? Do you miss me as I miss you?

2dec2010 / List of things to be done tonight

1) write story. confident interplay between the authoritative imperative voice, and the “robert” voice, questioning, explaining. during christmastime. aimed at an area of life in the shadows. boys’ imaginations, full of acts illicit just beyond the more explicit acts portrayed in *father’s* movies. their eyes, enormous, cartoonlike, paranoid and rolling inside.

2) look into the one who’s asking if I’m okay.

3) rationalize. check.

4) have sex with *your* wife. ~~at the bar, on one side of it or the other.~~ right there in the Pancake House. check.

5) move any part of robert except his big ex-sailor’s arms. check.

ADCOX

9

6) send email.

7) listen to the radio with the dissociated attention of a stockbroker keeping up with prices. check.

8) look up job thing.

9) hold the pistol, still in his hand, while he fired, yelling that it would be unsportsmanlike if they didn’t give the deer a chance, the one with his head thrown back and one of his front hooves raised as if to shake, a nick in its flank from where one of X’s pistol shots had grazed it.

10) put quiche in fridge.

11) imagine robert as he was at the beginning. check.

2dec2010 / topics later touched upon more eloquently

excerpt: ...that first night rats skittered past their windows...

excerpt: “Be calm. We are fine.”

excerpt: The warmth on my arms and neck, impossible to imagine. We can work wonders together.

[The camera cuts to a longer shot, your soul, his cell phone, the guest, a question in regard to racial harmony. More controversial policies hold my wrist all through the city: a sad clown, a happy clown, a buffoonish clown.]

excerpt: “Really I don’t even think of myself as a businessman. I have no publication history but I hope you consider the threshold of death, you suckers and primitives.”

KLOSS

3dec2010 / This is coming from a guy who doesn't know the first thing about me.

New file. A single short entry in the midst of longer ones, the diseased rim of a dying leaf.

No one remembers the messages within the virus, a series of questions without end, rabbits dragged into our jaws—

“The thing to keep in mind is that the story can be anything, cannibalism, ritualism, underground caverns, the dark other, a complete loss of nearly everything after so many days of infection.”

The virus will monitor your children in my mouth. They seem to claim some resemblance to plot.

I now see why being direct is probably the best way to have success.

ADCOX

3dec2010 / Some Mornings They Woke in an Entirely Other
Flesh

My Intentions

Photographic, in a way, healthy as black ash. Sabotage, tonguelessness. A book of matches. Miriam buried to her neck, irretrievable, and James crawling across the yellow mud on his belly. I did not burn this one.

Empty

Sockets, her gums, a fashion much the same as memory. A buck knife or what he called a Bowie knife.

The Terror

Cussing and behind them, a speck in the fields. Up to his haunches in water turned to steam. At my chest, tantalizing. In their usual fashion, sometimes Miriam was James, sometimes a blowtorch, the sour poison crusted to their cheeks. I carried a loaf of white bread, James managed to scrounge canned goods, extra sackfuls of corn, beans, peas, rice, tomato sauce. Like Donald Trump the blood cooling and opening and closing to the sky.

Black Ash

The blood photographic in memory, much the same as a buck knife or what he called Miriam. My chest, healthy as a blowtorch, cooling and opening. Tonguelessness turned to steam in their usual fashion: irretrievable, tantalizing, poison.

6dec2010 / This pomo/absurdist “remix” by Robert Kloss [I] of my [James Tadd Adcox’s] “The Rise of Dr. Fu-Manchu”

[I] believed, at that time, in the intention of [Robert Kloss], in the possibility of [Fu-Manchu].

[I] don’t know why [I] get like this, this is ridiculous, it’s not the least thing to do with [me]. Even if [Kloss] did obsess over controlling [his] work— [I] never really liked [him], you know.

As if our position were just as normal as anything: immeasurably empty.

It’s possible [he] thinks [I’m] crazy.

ADCOX

13

This thing [RK] needs, the sound of blood in our ears, this scream that does not come out of [my] mouth but comes out of all mouths simultaneously... To hear [our] hearts beating in [our] chest by going outside the text might be something ~~this~~ ~~body~~ [I] needs.

He has some sophistication of thought—jealousy and these jealous stirrings, tied up with much discomfort and the pleasure/pain of extraordinary images and details. As I said before I think it's a really good example of the duality of any passion. Was there a television on? What music was playing? Was it even in an apartment? What was he like?

She's there but the thought process is off somehow: "Next time you make sure she don't run around on you."

Nice, clean, her boyfriend very very charming but with an eye on one of the roommates. The bile at the end—something floating in the floating water.

We may want to consider the possibility that I'm not totally on the mend.

KLOSS

14

You focus on the magic of pity and mourning, a thief and an outlaw and a homosexual, just to spite society. Just long enough to breathe real air, for once.

Getting sick on juice. Repeating "we" for the rhythm. Maybe we could be distant?

We seem prepared for that life, an escape into goodness and sainthood, dwarfish and wrinkled bodies, white milk pressed against those bloody cracked lips—only what the structure allowed us. I hope you experiment. It's X's term—and if you look X up you see it's...

7dec2010 / Thoughts on [Our] MFA

over-educated and under-intelligent in [our] early twenties,
impassioned contenders for a National Book Award crowd
around the unsteady hardwood table, write down stories, lick
child-blood from around [our] mouths.

ADCOX

15

7dec2010 / To _____:

I never slept with James and I never wanted to. James left for Japan and now I'm a country boy at heart, so whenever I have the opportunity I remind you all of cryonically frozen bodies, scalped, beheaded, steel mangled and busted, populating a vast shimmering ocean of deadened grass.

We became an insatiable fire.

I've heard my book called a derivative novel but I disagree—my novel combines a sort of hard boiled The Da Vinci Code with such brutal fury that the last of our science and our natural urgings are snuffed. We killed every last savage impulse from our veins. Snuffed them on these wild fields. This is somewhat similar to my book though mine deals more with parody and adaptation and has a more complex set up.

KLOSS

16

James was wearing the yellow shirt I made him.

Included with this letter is a speculation on my wife. She stitched this outfit herself. And she's back to blushing and sputtering. Her breathing tube. The bandages barely covering the burned skin. Nothing about her dead family.

She is drawn to the living room. There on the couch, in the perfect moonlight, rests the basketful of eggs. She glistens. James stands above, palms dripping, oh yes finally James oh God how lonely these

Often, in the darkness, I thought of her. Her nude form bathed in fire light. My wife?—Oh yes, in the darkness, my wife.

I need you to know this, before we go any further: I am a good man, of high values and great courage.

[signed,]

Robert Kloss

8dec2010 /

Robert has a habit of hushing them in mid-sentence to speak: “I can feel how I’m holding onto tension in my back and neck. It’s as if my body’s been trained to be tense all the time. Which I suppose it has. My primary goal during this trip is going to be to relax, to lose track of time, not to think about anything in particular.”

Later, Robert’s big hands, a drop of water falling; the patterns of the voice of America: “I’m too selfish. I’m unable to see my goals as wrapped up in someone else’s life. Or hell, perhaps this is the worst of it—too unwilling to share.”

ADCOX

James:

You asked me what I was doing. I felt my heart in my throat like a kick. You first noticed how the material world seemed like a ghost, pale, worse than me or anyone. I started to say *tremble*, but it came out all-different. I shook my head. I shook my head and the world was the threshold of the unknown. Everything acquirable is part of a ghost, neither of us could touch or love or hurt and we’d be better for it. Of course we were scared. We are always scared of what we try to open.

Salem, MA

9dec2010 /

Terrifying, the sea green eyes (dark) unseen under the lids and
walked heavy in time with his own breath.

One day Robert will consume me.

ADCOX

19

9dec2010 / If I Could Convince You to Not Write This Book,
Either of Them, I Would

James:

What is my belly for but growing new animals?

What is it you clasped, dripping blood? What is said: all dust
comes from the skin of infants.

What is a man and woman together without new life between
them.

What is after. *What is that?* What is. *What is it called?*

What is this I hear about you and our friend?

What is and is not the country in that voice of yours!

KLOSS

20

What is at stake. What is he then?

What is it? What is it?

What is it called again, Miriam's what?

An underground market for videos of suspects, some filmed voluntarily, some not, scenarios that range from seductions to watching “Miriam Hebert in her orange-and-blue cheerleading uniform ... shoot a rifle and kill a deer with a single shot.” *Murder without the possibility of guilt*. Secret websites claim to have footage of “Miriam” speaking her message in a modulated voice.

Each of these websites features a “different female hunter under the age of 16”, a different message.

Through the internet, one-hundred-thousand electronic demands, some from as far away as Germany and Dubai, asking drugged “female hunters” to slip in and out of a fake fur coat and a “deer”-mask.

ADCOX

21

Last fall I told [Robert] that I wouldn't worry about “the typical image of a hunter”. [Robert], “hair ... teased up and pinned back into a pouf.” [Robert], “cheekbones and eyelids are defined with bold, colorful sweeps of makeup.”

The thing about winters in Chicago is that each one you survive makes you “a man wearing camouflage, holding a gun.”

A morally better person.

Most people cannot imagine being blind, and that they would have the courage to go outside on their own. Or, like this blind man to take the train to somewhere else.

Plastic containers filled with maggots and grubs in sawdust. People have the ability to feel pain to help insure their survival.

In addition, the Blind man has a great opinion of life when he says, “O Father—I cry out to you and yet you offer no judgment—I repent what I have done—If you made it so I never killed them—O Father—O Father in heaven—” Rusting fleshless hands of wire feel the skin of the head, trembling and mewing in his hands. There is no doubt that Robert was jealous of how his wife spoke to the Blind man about so many things about her lonely life in her first marriage and how the Blind man touched his wife’s face in a way that he never could. In these situations, an evil will invade some men’s hearts, intolerance will twist some men’s minds. Robert is the person who has a very sensitive mind but just does not know how to show it to other people.

These things, along with the voice of Robert's father, were common knowledge in his neighborhood: "My sketched-out hedonism took the form of a lusting after _____'s son, Robert." Whose existence is officially denounced or denied. "Thick and sweet and inviting like a baby stuffed with cocaine, he's got this birthmark right above his left eye, everybody used to give him shit for it growing up, and I'll admit, I did too." A fetish, maybe. One of those Freud never got to. "That first night, from the other side of the bedroom wall comes the sound of the floorboards and Robert, voluptuous, kinda messed up but kind-looking, emerges from the shower, in short shorts and a towel that doesn't cover his big tits. The whole room seemed to possess his body, an unlit cigarette already in his mouth, which he lights as soon as he gets to the edge of the bed, without detouring to dress. 'You seem well-adjusted,' Robert says in an innocent sort of southern accent. 'A shame.' I flashed a tongue in his nude mouth." Several prominent members of the public declare that love, even made with _____'s son, is an anachronism, indeed most people can't really comprehend what it would be like, doing that thing you were suggesting earlier, involving a dry tongue and certain too oft-ignored regions of the human body, no bigger than a child's, breathing hard, groaning, fucking Robert right under his father's nose, his weird father, his thin voice giving a speech right outside the door, then coming hard enough to wrench Robert's fat legs out of joint... . "After, we eat white rolls, raw peanuts, some pasta salad, a quiche, a cupcake with sprinkles, and more ham— Expansive, grandiose, most people don't have thoughts that big. God I loved him"

ADCOX

23

Like innocence itself, the world's in a bad place.

That head, she's symbolic. She's what the devil watches, stupid with eagerness, his snorts like the purrs of an over-affectionate cat. For two weeks now, I've been trying to figure out the transition from media representation to brutes and leg-breakers. Father studies the head, licking pork grease from glistening fingertips. The head is led by a rope from the straw bed to the outdoors, no horror, only a wild-eyed cheer. Wherever the head goes, alarm clocks come unplugged. "The head will see you now, Mr. Kloss." I apologized for my tardiness. The shrieks of the head bring hoots and laughter. She [her dead eyes] wanted you to get a real job, not ambition, not lusting after, not tight blue jeans, full movie-star ass. The head, fantasized with erotic clarity: the warmth of the mouth, the firm fullness of those somehow pink lips...

KLOSS

24

The head living in absolute solitude. The head near catatonic three years now since the death. The head gleams in the sun before it [she] slides easily into devotion or love. I will tell you anyway: that which was once the head, a beautiful apple, the children's delight—stuck, roasted, blinks back the humiliation. And we wait for some insect to confuse beauty and craftsmanship with something close to love and tenderness.

A terrible thing has befallen _____.

People telling different histories of what happened in our family. The absolute gap between the torturer and the tortured, otherwise good people masturbating each other, talking about the Milgram room.

_____ awoke, screaming, sweating. I had to sit up with her while she was gasping for air, and crying. “Violence forces a silence on people”. She has begun electrocuting good people.

The torture expanding to a full society. “We need new laws, stronger laws, against the Milgram room”—

ADCOX

25

“Torture is a language” and since we can’t understand her divine language, _____ makes her wishes known to Robert and me via other experiments, the prison experiment, the radio experiment giving us a certain latitude in interpretation, which practice has led to more than one disagreement between Robert and me.

We do not know: is it better to be loved or feared?

14dec2010 / Everything I've Ever Written about Alligators,
Clowns

"Don't tell your Mother," your father said from his lawn chair,
"but I've grown concerned about the alligator problem."

A city of flatbed trucks brimming with the skins and skulls
of alligators, with the black and green and brown figures of
leather and flies.

A given alligator is a billion billion years old.

A given alligator is a billion billion years old.

—alligators swishing and growling and hissing—

Always a funeral with clowns, always a clown show with mutes
in white face and polka dots, with men banished beneath the
ruffles and the soundless gestures of mimes.

KLOSS

26

An alligator must murder the membrane it is born into.

By the explosions of oxygen tanks and rye whisky you see,
finally, the full articulation of alligators wandering and swaying
in the dust and soot, their red mouths.

Everywhere clouds of dust and ash, the walls of what was
once the aviary grayed with soot and dust, and where the old
general once sat articulating the nature his crimes, now, alone
and hissing, the only monster older than he, the green armored
alligator.

Flatbed trucks overstuffed with the carcasses of alligators shot
through the back of the heads or brimmed with those skins of
what were once alligators, now the figments of shoes and boots
and briefcases and the homes of rats and the nests of birds.

From the old general's eyes you understand he knows knives
would break against the alligator's eyes.

He dreamed alligators, gray dust smeared on their green lips—

He forces you to watch the alligators below, their red open mouths, their lazy gliding along the black sewer waters.

How different our lives would have been if we had known the alligators, allowed them to shape us.

How his skin seemed the skin of an alligator and how the kitten alone knew him.

In those days men with skin like blackened alligators rode bicycles along ancient obliterated streets.

Later, your mother and the alligator, the rhythmic squeaking of the mattress, her screams as it consumed her.

My wife wore her hair in curlers and spread the wallpaper along the alligator's pink flesh walls, while down the river floated the husks of murdered bison and antelope.

KLOSS

27

Not to think of the man who moves his family into a crimson house—of the father who drifts his family into the mouth of alligators.

Now, the only illumine from the yellow eyes of alligators, the ghost wane of gases and thereafter, the last sounds of Pierrots echoed throughout the valleys.

Of your old world, only the alligators survived and after the death of your crops and industries, your sole occupations became the growth and development of alligators.

Soon the dead fathers and their respirators descended by their rope ladders only when they desired your alligators for their parades, their circuses, their amusement parks.

The alligators prodded the meat with sticks, their mouths grown wild.

The birds—if they don't try to live in the alligator's mouth—
may fend for themselves.

The guy's a real clown, most of the time.

Then I, without regard for the teeth and humidity, the mist
and the blood, the birds clawing and staring and screaming,
moved my family into the mouth of alligators.

This alligator digests a buffalo a day.

Through the days, radio blaring dead noise and static, radio
flickering into life for a sparkle of Glenn Miller and then
sputtering out, as if an alligator were made of lead, as if no
possible noise of life were allowed within our eternal creature.

We did not have alligators when I was a boy.

KLOSS We found alligators digging in the warm soil, digging holes as
long as trenches, as deep as their bodies.

28

We found alligators in your children's rooms, in their closets,
on their beds, shoes laces and ribbons dangling.

We found alligators in your walls, devouring each other and
hissing, so much hissing your house seemed a house of steam,
of burst pipes.

We found alligators in your yard, under your porch, wedged
into your dog house, crawling up your chimney.

We found alligators sleeping on your wife's side of the bed, on
their hind legs and rifling through her underwear, smearing
on her lipstick.

We found alligators stuck and hanging out your chimney,
wheezing and dying.

We found alligators under the floor boards and in the
basement, swimming in the oil furnace, eating the plastic
Christmas tree.

We found the alligator asleep in a ditch by your house,
covered in fat gnats and leaches.

We found the alligator flailing in stagnant pools, murdering
the names of you and your dead brother.

We found the alligator hissing nonsense, hissing backwards.

We found the alligator, fat and yellow, bulged on your father's
recliner.

We found the alligators digging holes in the soft dirt of the
cemetery, where your father and mother lay.

We found the alligators eating the maps and cameras and
shopping bags the tourists carried.

We found the alligators eating the tourists or murdering the
tourists and leaving the remains to putrefy.

KLOSS

29

We found the alligators under the yellow moonlight, piled
and shot through the back of their skulls.

We found the alligators wandering ancient cemeteries,
hissing at the chiseled names, the faded angels.

We found the bleached skins of alligators, the skulls of
alligators, the lost bodies of our alligators, where your father
left them all these years.

We found the stray eyes of alligators peering from apartment
windows, from dreams.

We looked for the alligator in dank places.

When found the alligator was eating old portraits of your
mother, crunching the frames into splinters, into twisted tin
and steel.

When found the alligators rowed past the dead-men, floating
in the black pond, fat on peat and lily pads, frogs and guppies.

When found the alligators were fitting birds into their throats, lips bulged and a forest of

feathers behind their teeth, soaked and clotted black and red, while from the timeless depths, clucks echoed like barking or screams or mothers wailing.

When found the alligators were swallowing does, digesting does by the nubbins, by the velvet, by the eyes and the black tongues, and from the hollows of a dank valley, fell the whisper of bones.

When you were a boy you woke to the alligator as it swam the black-waters of your floor.

Where once sat the old general with elephant gun, waiting to fire, now moans and hisses the ash covered alligator.

You knew nothing of how all land originated from the body of alligators or that the heavens emerged from the exhalations of alligators.

KLOSS

30

You should see our alligator streets.

another day with man's evil mind I'm not convinced Minneapolis exists. and this is more or less expected I've never seen Minneapolis on a map. i need to— When I mention this, my friends all get out their maps to show me, only it turns out that each of them has a different map. men cursing the day they were born A city labeled "Minneapolis" is on each of their maps, but that's where the similarity ends. i'm not feeling exactly on the top of my game at the moment On several of their maps Chicago, where we're all living now, is nonexistent this is what happens when i take a day off or is somewhere down around Florida every man now alive will have chance to curse the day he was born or is drawn in the shape of water escaping through a drain either i work every day or i have to go through the bullshit of working myself back into it On one map Minneapolis is in Minnesota i want my mouth to fill with rot, so that i can sing to ___ even more sweetly and Minnesota is in North America man's noble mind? Minnesota is in North America, her feet like lost teeth like a mollusk but Minnesota is the only thing in North America there's the day i was born was one of the first days of the new era no room for as much as a crossroads beyond its borders something in my head is wrong None of my friends are at all distressed by this something is dark and slow They have proven that Minneapolis exists, and that is enough for them. i'm tired of people like this I search their maps without success for my own hometown of _____, _____ tired of children "Why don't you just look on your own map?" asks one of my friends the day i was born was stuffed with evil like a field stuffed with locusts. I search their maps and now he's going over the bullshit though i suppose i've spent a lot of time complaining about the world ever since— He's smiling at me in a way that implies he already knows why my heart strains to encompass every sin I don't have a map, and forgot to buy one before I left _____, years ago the day i was born edison lit the first electric lamp Any map I buy now would almost certainly show a gaping pit where my home once was the day i was born was a tuesday i hold it between my legs in my sleep I will never find my way so that's something

16dec2010 /

“Darling, I’ll kill you if you tell anyone this. It was dark by the time I got back that night. R was facedown and completely unmoving on the couch. Miriam looked dead, brilliant shining blue-white skin, a dark blue that goes on forever. And then a dry, muffled sound came as she breathed in and out in short bursts: *Huh. Huh. Huh.* ‘Could you possibly clean up?’ I asked. I felt guilty, later, thinking I might have done something or at least handled things better.”

“You’re such a good person.”

ADCOX

...children laughed together without suspecting they were being watched, children with wide scared eyes and then on a baby sleeping in its mother's arms, children should go someone said, children whispered to each other & children we lay rigid in our beds, sheets pulled taut to our chins, staring upward at our glow in the dark constellation, mentally gauging the strength, the solidity, of the earth far below, children be serious, children frankly quite bad, children you know nobody nowhere is entirely quite safe ha ha children take heart!, children grinning, circling gulls, children as we imagined them, children wept for burst eardrums & children will watch faces curled like roses, children trained by those hallowed methods long preferred by the old man, methods long a secret, now free to all: "Use the method judiciously, children, bust open the New World and impregnate mountains," children long ago grown and died, the dens where the jackets and the leather bound volumes and pipes of fathers lay, children and news stations, the death and funeral pyre of your wife and boy, the narrow escape into the winter cold by your wife and boy... children devoured, smoldering on the news, children from forty yards off—their backs steamed before their hair burst to flames!, children will soon fade to nothing, children stalking along our floorboards, lingering as shadows outside our windows, when we wake screaming, children washed along the beach, small as birds, children but especially shrunken men, *ah*, children's *names*—children's rooms, in their closets, on their beds, children, your children, taller houses, children gone: children who fled up the ladders, now visited these museums and prayed to the bodies of these...

Robert,

There was some darkness—somewhere—fever, shakes, cough— You were excited by the— I'm trying to figure— Maybe I'm the smallest you have ever been— I would like to— to develop a space— not feel crazy—forms of neurosis— “We need the money”— If I can get a book—flash fiction— or two placed at some— I'm wallowing— “When do you plan to get a proper job”—I'm more optimistic than— I think you were the smallest— You have ever been a nervous condition— I still feel so— dissipated—Terribly— terribly—It was not your name— “We need the money”—Maybe it's a severe case of hysteria— I still haven't heard back from any— But yeah— I don't know—I feel pretty— The happiest—unimportant— I've been feeling pretty—A sexual attraction— how does— ignorable—airplanes screamed and—Create a new way of viewing things—I need to—to spend a few months away from people—when I can be away from people— my own ideas had almost no appetite—so thin ... the skin ... in places like empty pockets—“When is your flash fiction going to bring us money again”—Miriam was— I had to press both of my hands over my face not to scream—

ADCOX

17dec2010 / into the peaty water, and then I awoke

...an illumination, with a subtle destructive composition.

Many recipients of satiric ridicule laugh along with their tormentors and survive the event by being in on the joke.

Our heroes become dust and our fathers long to be dust.

On the other hand, a target who is without any sense of humor or sense of their own pompousness is going to get the wind knocked out of them; which is totally the point.

The illumination of a person's windbag hypocrisy via satire is the whole purpose of the venture.

KLOSS

This sort of trickery is in keeping with the distance between the appearance of emptiness. Chances creates the form, inevitably.

Will the Creator Himself appear? Will we see His hand in this work? Will we tremble from the force of the absolute blankness of Robert Kloss?

The text ultimately follows the pattern of one idea into another: words surrounding that element (Kloss). Words surrounding the other, words surrounding the insufferable RK.

Cheap terror tactics disintegrating the Hulks and the Fantastic Fours, strange alliances snapping off and writhing like snakes when they're electrocuted. Several thousand miles from France, "the monument of all your stupid smoldering nightmares and collapsing horrors," the Café Enchante was obliterated by what the papers assumed was a pipe-bomb sewn into an infant. The bakery La Madeleine was exploded by two pipe bombs tossed from a bicycle. Perverts and vandals are caused by a breakdown in the American character, by "love" and "diphtheria."

KLOSS

37

/ the screams of decadents, vague glitches and clicks (beautiful in the night air). —Flickers of electronic language.

I thought of killing Miriam and felt sick inside.

Father thinks it's unhealthy, this kind of love, a diseased terrier, soapy and unclean, stuffed with sour breath. Any talk of values now makes me sick.

All the pictures of her I'd seen were in black-and-white, and she always came out looking pale and fragile. The cold terrified way ghosts should look.

After some squirming, the sound of her teeth, small and plump and lovely. Her voice, quiet, holding down both of my arms and biting my stomach. Dead greasy dark hair over a face that looked caved-in, her small body like a sack of garbage, the flailing of little arms and legs like an unbalanced fetus.

ADCOX

38

Perhaps somewhere there is still a God as old as petrified wood, as old as airless rooms and old iron and when we have sex we bust *It* open.

Its flesh like paper streamers blowing in the wind.

What am I known for, do I have an allegiance to a particular critical school, am I known for my work on a particular story/author or am I known for other works? Am I worth the rope, his skin, the accident? How could I face my wife and in-laws with any story? No more to the face: everything cut and busted up too easy, the eyes with the lip and the nose. Certain hack work takes an amount of polish and vision, yes, that ridiculous shout of “James!” and the crack of the flashbulb: *I know what you did you lousy b—— and I’m gonna get my life back no matter what*. I was angry, frustrated, sometimes belligerent with my writing failures, she was tired from working all day, I took her thin, frail wrist and pulled her toward the frightening stillness of my failure. She’s drunk and a fool and I’m abusive, merciless. Pulling her thinly covered breasts in close to me and then the rest of her figure until we were crying, a fun thing, a happy fucking moment.

KLOSS

This week Robert wore a black hood with holes for his eyes and mouth. The children were screaming before him on what was once our lawn. "I refuse to sit here and listen to their squawking," he said, slack-jawed the entire time and staring at our youngest, perhaps biting at her legs in thought.

"There, there, baby," he said. "I'm sure I'll never forget you, the light across your features, like an angel."

Robert constantly quotes from a very strange book, spitting verses without charity or fellow-feeling of any sort. He urges the love of geese and vultures in each of these passages even when he expounds on the metaphysics of Indian-hating.

Even the children seemed to understand these stories as monologues of the devil. Perhaps this is why they ran off into the night.

22dec2010 /

James:

Recall apparitions doomed to watch you at play.

Recollect the end, the past, in fits of anxiety. Discuss Robert in a relationship with his unnatural and devious lusts. Oppress the ghost and ash of the first wife, the first child.

Stagger through what's at stake: tender accusations of infidelity, inversion, the smell of dead fish, raw nerves. Factor in their/our constant quarrels, the punching and cussing and biting: "dreadfully abused"; "nearly took the ear off." Recollect certain scenes between the girlfriend/wife/whatever and the moment he/"he" disappeared.

KLOSS

41

Explain "Animal Lover." Explain "Anne Frank." Explain a little more about trying to figure out why. Explain how dialogue is the skin of a large dangerous animal, a white pink thing, trembling and mewling. Explain how tension is a disease.

I have toughness born of obstinance, James. Coddled skin is easily abused.

Crimes of passion are common on these brutal outskirts and powerful enough to crush bone.

Aristotle

Not the sort of person [you] would peg for a murderer

Charles Mingus

Sober, which only makes the sight of him among thin, mildly willing girls more miserable. A mythic, grandiose Preacher of a church that calls itself "His Evil Campaign". While he's not especially attractive can be very charismatic and manipulative.

Plato

His ancient and nearly translucent skin covered by shadows. Ayn Rand-ish hatred for all the lesser people. Angered at the idea of how far society has fallen that criminals, degenerates, can get away with anything. Over-educated and under intelligent. Might be a bit of a prude.

ADCOX

42

Thelonius Monk

The illusion of a body. Has taken up singing on the sidewalk just below [my] window, his head pressed close against the neck of an upright bass, all with smoke curling from the ends of their cigarettes to the darkness above them a mad rushing and the whistle like a tornado. He is terrified but true, small and hyper-masculine. Spouting off a distorted violence that surprises [Miriam]. An old rag-puppet like a religious icon. A prayer that customs wouldn't find.

Robert Johnson

The dust from [Miriam's] hair.

I.

Charlie laughed.

Pete: Watch it Charlie—

Charlie: —women?

Pete: Charlie...

Charlie (*his eyes black*): Shhh.

Voices: “Charlie?” “Charlie?” “Charlie?”

Boy it was cold.

KLOSS

43

Pete: Probably, man.

Charlie: Never you mind woman.

II.

Imagine if a man don't do what God says. Certainly his hand never shook and his eyes never teared.

Pete: What man?

Never. I'm a little boy. Eyes. White.

Washed his hands without the hand soap. The old man put a hand on Peterson's neck. Charlie's eyes shifted to Clarence. The old man half turned away and whistled.

Old Man: An honest man owes money to no man, Pete. You got your mother's eyes.

Hands on hips. The old man spat and again.

The Dead Man: You boys mind if I sit with you?

Linda: You're an old woman, Nick. Please Nick. Old! Never mind. Nick! Slow night? Charlie! Charlie!

The old woman nodded.

The Dead Man: —You're an old woman, Nick.

Linda: Please Nick. Old! Never mind, Nick. Slow night. Charlie!

Charlie: The old woman nodded.

III.

The boy steps back. This boy who needs help? The boy speaks up.

Boy: We're— (The boy pauses. Eyes lined the walls—)

KLOSS Pete: Ah my boy! My boy. Dead...

44 Old Man: Sailor boys huh?

Pete kissed the boy's forehead. Pete rested his hand on the boy's shoulder.

IV.

The old man wore his Bin Laden mask. Jarry stood before the old man and the old man laughed. Faces lighted by fire.

Old Man: Your little boy! Preferable to dead boys or dead dogs. —The old general... The old general—Oh if only, if only, he must have thought. "Dead?"

Pete: A boy Orson—he's—

Father laughed. The man's face was a grayed smudged. Soon, almost a man.

V.

How the boy watched the mother in the lighted windows. Who are you, little boy?

Boy: You old idiot.

The boy nodded and held the man's hand, faint and moist. How the boy cooed and stroked the man.

Boy: Oh Father!

Then Father returned. Poor Mother.

Father: Don't.

Then Father spoke.

Father: All right, all right.

KLOSS

45

Boy (*my eyes on his face*): Wife! Father!

Father: Hardly, young man. (*His hand shook, however.*)

Boy: Never.

Father (*as sophisticated men*): Boy.

VI.

"Wife? I thought. "Charlie?"

Charlie: The man cried.

Women: Charlie?

Charlie (*smiled*): Mr. Jack big man.

Young Man: Yes, I. Your father's older. Pete?

Pete: Even if he did. Old, old man, I saved American boys and I shot gooks.

Young Man: Pete—

Pete: I'm gone, man. A big man.

Young Man: Pete?

Our hands entwined. Pete... If only mother knew!

Mother? Old cow.

The old man brought me home a birdcage. The old man might hear, after all.

Nick: Nick. Nick cried. Nick opened his eyes. Nick nodded. Nick nodded. Nick?

We shook hands. Black. Charlie shook my hand. Falling face-down. White-faced, sweating.

KLOSS

46

Nick: Pull yourself together.

24dec2010 / He, born into the flesh

Gilbert and Sullivan fertilized by the movement of the wind:
a boy nymph transmuted fully into woman and the Church's
eldest daughter, young-looking face, golden curls, *perfect*
body—if i can do all that, even if only a very little, that will be
quite the successful day.

those vague wars, my heart.

(i keep trying to make Robert's lusts and yearnings into
an evening job, but flesh is always so uncomfortable in the
evening.) oh, and I should also let people know about Robert's
love of sacrilege, the charge of his soul, the joys of his hips, yes?

my love, hot and enormous. my disgusts and my betrayals.

ADCOX *what is it that you'd like to see under these clothes?*

24dec2010 / Recognition of the forces that make us different is
a clear step towards experience

Yes, we were both mostly happy and in love except that her personality may have been suited to a lifestyle of animal butchery. An island. Before your people. She came in, her face red from exertion, all the intelligence and misery of the human balanced within her skin. Would you like a glass of water? No reason to speak, each understand simply without thought the quickening of the other's breath. We will examine these lives, the highest splendor...they disappear, they always disappear. There is no reason to speak even if awe and fear did this, shrouded in curtains. We learned to not breathe heavily. We learned the slightest flinch—we

The girl clearly states what she is not.

When the wolves were gone she switched to mother and wife.

KLOSS

25dec2010 /

Some peculiar sensation lighting up inside me like dozens of little Christmas bulbs. Recall: a “rather attractive brunette” hauling “enormous suitcases” up the winding stairs. Later found under the floor boards in the basement, alone, fat with kid, gasping and eyes. Six hundred in cash split between us. Christmas in the background, the head lights through the snowfall like moon beams. I lay there engulfed, listening to Bing Crosby dream of a dam split and devastation. A crowd formed around me. I’d been reduced to infant size by the city. Wreathes coiled with green and red lights from every street lamp and phone pole, lighted garlands across the street at the end of every block, dipping under the weight of our new small love. White Christmas and other animals. Businessmen with arms full of secret packages. A code. The lights making me think of Ma and Dad and how we used to drive around the rich neighborhoods on Christmas night, to admire.

KLOSS

“fiction”

Omnipresence is [our] goal. Artifice.

[We] do not need real omnipresence. The theory of omnipresence is enough.

With omnipresence, hand-in-hand as it were, goes omniscience. And with omniscience and omnipresence, hand-in-hand-in-hand as it were, goes omnipotence—

“poetry”

You'll hit the quick and draw blood, when [I] was a kid,

aunts and uncles, squirming and shrieking

terrified, their entire lives

claws and teeth—

“non-fiction”

[We] have secrets “her buttocks are perfection” [we] have many secrets “my neighbor continues to commit suicide” we desire all secrets “I had a melancholy sadness as a child” [we] do not have your secrets and that is what [we] are after, your secrets “Dear Robert, I love you every day” [our] first secret is [we] are—

No one knows their prey animals.

There is a secret sigh that we sigh, secretly. [We] yearn to be known, acknowledged, admired even. [Our] Tumbler website becomes important.

What is the good of omnipotence if nobody knows? “He told me about it later, because I couldn't watch.” The time to go into overdrive hyping the book is before you get it done—

This new man, the phony I, coming to Robert saying, “Listen here we been talking, her and me, and we’ve been thinking maybe it’s worth considering—now don’t take it the wrong way—but I was thinking of our potential, how we can work wonders.” He tells stories of his dreams, this phony Robert, this new me, of larger than usual ambition, of the unspeakable. His dreams: shirtless aged father’s gnarled nipples and hairs white, horror and confusion, stripped to undershorts and shivering, spindly arms. Of course in these visions Robert cracked the asshole good and then gave a boot to the eyes (the man, the phony me, no clear face but expression of hurt and fear and eyes express this fear in the way all eyes open like a trout soul shouted with absolute terror). Maybe kill the son of a bitch then, brown blood-stained towel round Robert’s neck, breathing old air. The gravestones. By evening too drunk to walk. Thinking, There are too many memories here. Soon we must fit into the skin of better men.

“There’s nothing on the news anymore except childhood,” says Julia and there’s the sound of laughter and glasses cracking against one another.

“Robots are delivering a string of children across Europe and the Americas, their dead black eyes,” says Juli, swinging her head from one face to the next.

The waitress, a robot designed to hunt down and kill humans, says, “The dead children shall be buried in the earth’s deepest bowels.”

“We must rise up, every one of us. This cannot be permitted any longer,” says Juli.

ADCOX “A robot uprising?” says the waitress.

52 “Children are far more dangerous than these robots,” says Julia.

“Earlier today, I received a letter, anonymously. It begins, ‘I’m worried about the threat of robots with lasers, buzzsaws, guns, in some cases missiles...’ She takes the letter from her shirt pocket and reads it, as though to verify that it does, in fact, begin that way. “It continues: ‘In these dark times, it is revolutionaries such as yourself that are needed.’ I have been—as it were—called by the voice of the people.”

“You’re going to kill robots,” the waitress keeps repeating.

“You’re getting all agitated.”

“The sender of this letter is a murderer.”

Juli smacks the letter against the leg of her pants and peers around the room to other robotics experts.

Julia shakes her off with a look of disgust, rights herself, “Robots are delivering much appreciated hug therapy to the elderly.”

There is a silence, as though even the jokers from earlier have become embarrassed for her. Someone manages a laugh, weakly.

“Many of these robots do not now exist.”

Julia puts her beer back on the table. “Cowardice,” she says, spits on the floor, and stalks out.

28dec2010 / “two boxes of pages I assumed were his new novel and the various film scripts he stooped to work on”

Every day scientists are making new miracles happen. I like the flashes out of time—the idea of them more than the actual demented realism.

One of the big problems has always been getting the alien to do something or mean something. We run into him and drive away and then run into him again.

Several times you say ‘we’ instead of ‘they.’ I guess you are slipping into remembering, a wonderful scattered sensation like air.

Should someone have died?

If I was afraid I didn’t know it.

KLOSS

54

I sometimes distrust a person who goes out of their way to let you know they appreciate your pain. It’s realistic but it isn’t hungry, if that makes sense. Imagine getting this far only to die of malnutrition.

Strange animals, massive when Pedro suddenly shows up, awkward with everyone. As if hypnotized by a circus fortune teller the ones that make you do things that you wouldn’t normally do.

I like the impact/horror of being kept locked up for eternity with the self. Everything in one voice.

Where there would have been a ceiling was a desire.

Where there would have been a desire was intoxicating.

29dec2010 / Myself, beneath my floorboards, the violent thrashing of,

Robert:

There's no privacy anywhere anymore, watching cars people outside this window, peering through walls, through skin and bone, lingering for what can be salvaged. It is small and strange, oddly. The increasing skin, beyond our fields of vision, ready to surge forth onto the earth. Someone I love and think.

Very warm feelings have been felt by me. In terms of you, I wake up nights with my sheets in my teeth. I will be overrun. I will be consumed in the surge, the realization that others have opinions towards you. Wiped from the earth.

The strange anxiety, the violent thrashing, can just disappear in a moment. The burnt-out spots as if after a storm.

ADCOX

55

At this moment or the next, the violent thrashing of myself, the old ways, the memory of what is consumed. The goat's smile. The wolf's teeth.

You don't understand disappearance, the human memory altogether, what we have said, what we have done.

A given moment arrives, the moment to surge, when something wholly new, unattached to others—

29dec2010 / you must learn to appreciate Robert for what he is, a blind man who is more than the sun

Silence of skin on skin. I'd had opportunities, she said, that j. had never had because he had dedicated himself to the farm.

And then I always take my first two fingers right to the skin, damp, the soap film still there, and then down along the side of her leg, down to the bubbles, and down then further. Because you think someone might get a little drunk. In the washroom and soon my skin was rife with gooseflesh. Maybe he thought because he'd died once he was exempt from any real fear. Only j. could do anything for himself and sure enough he came stumbling out of the smoke with his pants half smoldering and his skin burned away. Gone into the cloud or was that smoke, gathered and gray.

Because my food is gone and starving cats yowl from my stoop. Because we have seen it, he will wake chained to the bed-frame. You dream your skin gone to ash—

KLOSS

56

j. exonerated for his crimes, no mention of guilt, of horror, of night-sweats for our "hero." No mention of the heat of my skin, of the sun, of my lips upon his chest. Now the tightness of your breath as we stretched over each other, gutless skins, empty bodies, spread further, devouring, what is it you clasped? Under shifting outlines of bodies, under ticker tape, under stolen names, "on the run," "hidden in the most absurd and childish places," "sorcerer."

Because it is death to live otherwise. By 'against the law' I mean this boy and the cool damp of their soul. Now in those days a city, a burst of light. Now a woman vibrated into her own shadow. Now no women the way he dreamed, cold lips against his neck. He woke and crawled to me from within, he, what a lit match does to canvas.

I'd told j. in the same words. Thrown to the ground, palms bloody. There was only that heat: you are dying, you begin to scream. j. knows nothing but strange fictions. Eat nothing, curl

into a worm, kick if you like, drown, figureless and beneath.
Scoundrels, I will shoot them in the face. Here they will make
soap of you, here you are just as quickly a man with a shovel as
a gull or dog, and only smoke is returned. For now legs arms
nipples tongues pink painted toe nails giggles and smiles, for
now dozing, shouts and moans, for now musk ducts and long
teeth. j. quickened with blood and limbs.

Men call out “buddy.” Men call you “buddy.”

You don't have to explain anything to me.

Dear Robert,

It's three-ish in the morning. I've been reading your blog and I just added your site as a link in my site's sidebar. Robert, if there is to be a zeitgeist going forward, I imagine it to be focused on attempts at immortality, and the ways we erase ourselves for immortality, and the ways we record ourselves recording ourselves. This can easily turn into the anxiety of blogging and so: don't worry: there's no harm in putting effort towards self-publicity.

Well, it's four-seventeen and *you don't impress anyone*. Write and hide the evidence in a single dust bloomed stroke. Your surface and the movements of your surface no fingerprints and noseprints. Fact of the matter is people don't want you to write, Robert. Fact is nobody does.

ADCOX

58

Around six or so, and I think possibly I'm writing a novel to spite my child-lonely mother. Robert, each day a novel is written. They're stuffed inside houses until the houses are glutted with them. One man can't possibly be responsible for all this. I'm 27 and frustrated. I'm not having any *fun* with any of this. Language, novels, stories, information, the mysterious impossible differences between the two. Robert, what do I do to make this *fun*?

I mainly just flip through these books and stare, enviously. I feel like I'm doing a slightly nervous imitation of someone else's voice, Robert.

I need to go for a walk, perhaps.

Robert, I would have liked to have been a carpenter. The world's greatest seducer. What the hell am I doing? Why does one even set about describing things? What's an interesting or significant detail?

I've lived so long among possibilities, a creator of mysteries, accepting the loss of a possibility is accepting one's own limitedness, which feels, I don't know. I'm hoping it works out.

Thanks,

Tadd Adcox

ADCOX

30dec2010 /

James:

You dream your skin gone. Do not worry over it. Most artists worth your time were not exemplary people.

Your skin would hold the pain that you didn't have strength for.

It's always easier to blame the other person isn't it? Failure is an intimate process.

An experienced writer can quickly observe your tricks, their effect, aimless, competitive, petty. There is of course no accounting for taste. Fighting for control with asides and personal reminiscences, snickering... this imposter only verifies what I've felt. There's a flatness. One incident of people being bad or getting punished after another. But empty. I hardly remember. We both knew I didn't have plans, I never had plans.

KLOSS

60

Your voice, echoing inside your cavernous skull. Even with eyes we get too isolated.

Different subjects infect your mind.

I am on the outside watching all of this. I am Robert. I am now x years old. Something happened and here I am.

previously unknown forms of achromasia a father, moving the skin of father unlike mother i know i'm not going to be able to disappear completely acne acrogeria alopecia the sort of mother robert thinks shedding their skins novel blackhead boil genuinely close and caring carbuncle chloasma i've known for so long contact dermatitis a young mother corn cradle story collection cap cutaneous cuticle derma dermabrasion dermatitis dermatologist your mother had died really dermatology dermis butler eczema epidermis like his mother robert does not think the word love erysipelas father exfoliation hives father is having an affair impetigo eating me out from the inside keratin some of the mothers ago keratinization began weeping keratosis vanity lentigo young mother came up to me, her face glowing leukoderma melville lichen short shorts lichen planus lupus blake erythematous publication lupus vulgaris melanin melanoma melanosis robert thinks about the sort of life he might have with mole blog nevus panniculus egotism adiposus papule piebald skin which i've known portwine stain pruritus psoriasis pustule rosacea St. Anthony's fire scabies i'm ashamed of the ways that i have failed scleroderma sebaceous cyst sebaceous gland strawberry birthmark subcutaneous tag vesicle vitiligo or think that others will think i've failed wheal Zeiss gland recombining these previous versions of me are paralyzing me

ADCOX

61

James Tadd Adcox is a founding editor of *Artifice Magazine*/Artifice Books. His work has appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *Barrelhouse Magazine*, and *Lamination Colony*, among other places. *The Map of the System of Human Knowledge*, a book of short fictions, is available from Tiny Hardcore Press. He lives in Chicago.

63

Robert Kloss is the author of *The Alligators of Abraham* (Mud Luscious Press, 2012). His fiction has appeared in *The Collagist*, *Gargoyle*, *Unsaid*, *Smokelong Quarterly* and others. He can be found online at rkbirdsofprey.blogspot.com.