



TONTO'S
REVENGE
— p o e m s —
ADAM AITKEN



TINFISH RETRO SERIES

Nº. 2

acknowledgments

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These poems are for you.



Retro Series chapbooks are printed in Hawai'i on recycled paper.

THE DOUBLE RAINBOW

(MĀNOA VALLEY)

So you called me to them
arching over themselves
as mirrored spectra

what I'd thought I'd seen
like a poster for dolphins
in a head shop
in a hippy town

but more original
impossible to photograph
even with my digital SLR
impossible to unweave

impossible to extract
from its backdrop rainforest

impossible to export

Faculty housing car-park
a slab of mountain

a Pacific bank of cumulus
a man walking his dog
a potted chilly plant
no-one falling out of the sky on burning wings either

so I have it now
my screensaver

better than Wordsworth's field of daffodils
better than the Met Office prediction
better than Newtonian
description
("constructive and destructive
double interference")

Indra's bow times two
says the Hindu.

Or for the authentic local's
Kahalapuna
the rainbow maiden of Mānoa.

THE RABBIT WOMAN OF HONOLULU

You a tourist? No, I work here. A college student? Good. Tourists are always photographing my rabbits. Now you've met the Rabbit Woman of Honolulu.

I'd broken my own taboo on photographing people without asking them first. She waved a finger at me. I apologized. I thought she'd tell me to fuck off. She had that right. It was like she had eyes in the back of her head when I was pressing the shutter.

We walked down Kapi'olani Boulevard.

Rabbit Woman—or was it Rabbit Lady? My memory getting into mythic mode. But that's her own name for herself, the name she said. (This is a poem, not a police report.)

Then she told me how the world was going to end when a black hole at the center of the earth would suck everything into it.

Like all media savvy, she knows how to deal with the media. She's got the Press Release memorized.

Habla Español? Where are you from? You look Latino. My mother was an Arab, my father a Spanish aristocrat. I never knew his surname.

Do you have a number I can call you?

The world will end. But there is a solution—a massive NOAH'S ARK a 1000 feet long and 300 feet high built out of Koa wood, the Hawaiian super timber that resists rot.

Read the bible, it was all in there. Make sure to seal the insides with waterproof tar. If I could get the students of the university to build it, she would appreciate it a lot.

They were smart college students, and they could make it.

The hills of Mānoa. She pointed to them. They'd be wiped out by a thousand foot Tsunami. But the ark would float above it all. I was heading there for lecture. I thought of turning back. Maybe she'd be right. Maybe she was the PROPHET.

The TV guys came and photographed me. I was on TV.
She smiled.

I asked her if she lived in Kapi'olani Park. (Lived there, like a home I thought? A stupid question.) I move around she said. Why I asked. I get bored she said, and she didn't hang around the library in McCully.

Too many crackheads. Then she told me about her rabbits. How a certain crackhead in McCully Park had taken one, stole it out of its kennel and cut its throat.

Then he burnt his mouth on a crack pipe. But the police had his number, and so did the Filipino Mafia. The bastard. The police had had it with him.

The police photographed the rabbit, the dead one.
"And that fucking rabbit-killer, he were gonna to die."

CONVERSATION ON THEBUS, HONOLULU 2010

Satan (who is beautiful) . . .

God . . .

. . . Rehab

. . . “my ex-fiancé”

women’s refuge . . .

“ . . . my Dad’s replica AK 47—he was one crazy fucka”

“ . . . my big Samoan friends who NEVA hit on me”

Navy SEAL . . .

knives guns beatings (various)

jail, police . . .

a friend in a wheelchair who goes surfing every Sunday

with a group with disabilities

my man with five children who makes more money than

Bounty Hunters

“I know my limits I have boundaries.”

changing buses and getting home before 9 pm . . .

“ . . . so I can take my medication.

If I don’t take it I

become really weird.”

EQUALS, BEINGS, ALL THINGS

A MIRROR IMAGE OF JILL YAMASAWA'S
'ALL THINGS, EQUALS, BEINGS'

And never anywhere for very long,
not along its entire path
it never quite reaches, at least
striving for an equilibrium state, which
every stream is, always.

Man's intervention
a landslide, or
be it precipitation,
to external factors
ever changing in response,
dynamic systems
streams are complex.

THE SHERIFF'S LAMENT

'Reports reports

Visiting writer burns down dorm . . .

Plagiarist accused of bullshittin' . . .

And this:

first novelist grad student

Hemingways three guys on the way to class.

What else?

Our best pitcher's down,

and a dead bird's in my letterbox.

Maybe I should get some more

ribbons for the typewriter.'

THE SHERIFF CONSIDERS HIS OPTIONS

Sally Mae
Freddie Mac
Fannie Mae—
why they all sound like
my cousins
down in Nebraska—

yep, I know I can
rely on them in hard times
and boy
times are hard

runnin a really big small press an all—
have ta cut costs somehow—
mebbe
cut out those
full colour spreads
of geishas and all dat
Asian stuff!
Eee – li – mi – nate
some minor economies
of scale,
ie. students!

Run navy recruitment ads!
This here's an island
surrounded by desert storms.

Think of a new prize—
name it The Tumbleweed
En
dowment!

Invent a new cocktail:
the Mahi Mahi MFA.

Cut out the middleman
my Dad always said.
But wait a minute: I
am
the
middleman.

Caught between
ignorance
and manifest destiny

glory
and
televised lynching.

Even Charlie Chan's not loaning
with a smile
no more.

I remember
I remember
I re – meme – ber

when hogs were
a sure fire invest
ment.

Oh well
back to hiring an firing
more firing than hiring

time to replace
that typewriter.

I wonder what
old Killjoy Finch is up to,
counting up to
ree – tie – ment?

No one left
to run out of town.

MY 2 CENTS
(DEPARTMENTAL MEMO
FROM THE SHERIFF)

Hiring is a long-term commitment
it would be wise

it would be wise
and then a lot of guessing
as reflected in admissions and applications

recent anecdotes are not too helpful
how much should that drive our decisions anyways

Let us not divide ourselves into temptation
For the kingdom of the blessed
is our own collegiality

we live and work

shape that place of future generic projections
recent anecdotes are none too helpful

Perhaps I have no stories
for I focus on long term commitments
beyond the scope of stories

the funny fuzzy puzzle

It's worth thinking
but I don't know how to prevent that.

THE SHERIFF AS RECIDIVIST

Name yer poison, pardner
:“Tonto”.

I know I cain't call him that, my dusky Injun,
but I does.

He's writin' his own book:
TONTO'S REVENGE.
It's good, real good.

Bourbon helps, loosen
the lips.

Tonto.

In unofficial
corra-
spondence,
not for the pricey
embossed Letterhead
of the State.

For who's in charge to tell me
I cain't? (Em-boss, that is?)
God?

Does He mind? Does He
know what it means?
Does Tonto?
Even Celestine the Kansas crooner
says it bad, a bad bad word.
Tonto.
Now that Tumbleweed U's banned the term,
now that it's banned
it's even sexier.
Better than any sound,
better than when
Charlie Chan sez
my – ce – gen – ay – shun . . .
Better than
col – low – quee – yum . . .
Now that
I've said it, I say it agen:
Tonto, Tonto, Tonto
my dearest Tonto.

THE SHERIFF DREAMS HE IS A CRIMINAL

There I is
in the Kohala Theatre
with Tonto
watching Gone with the Wind

I reach down
the back of my seat
and finds a wallet

opens it to find
a cool wad of hundreds
and an air ticket to Las Vegas.

Should I keep it?
Thanksgiving's coming up.
Gifts – a new gun – friends – happiness!

Report it to the Law?

But I am the law.
Sheriff, "I found
this here wallet:
I declare it Lost Property!"

“Thank you Sheriff, your
honesty will surely be rewarded
in this life or the HereonAfter”

Thankyou Sheriff!

But what will Charlie Chan say?
And fronting up to the Preacher!

For the rest of my days
pursued in nightmares
That Chink PI
asking me questions
from here to eternity?

Nothin's more painful
than our very own
homegrown
in – terror – gay
shun! We invented it.

I keeps the cash
discards the cards,
the leather's cheap.

Happiness comes at us
every strange direction.
Comes
and goes.

THE DAY DANNO DIED

(IN MEMORY OF JAMES MACARTHUR)

The day Danno from Hawaii Five-O died
it was 84 degrees and sunny.
Somebody, not me, had found some shoes
of a fifties vintage
in Uyeda's Shoe Store in Puck's Alley
where boxes are stacked every which way.

The day Danno died someone in Hawaii
had probably entered Masako's Candy & Gifts
which is on the ocean side of Beretania,
between Piikoi and Pensacola.

The day Danno died
a very old Hawaiian lady
came out of The Pill Box,
old Kaimuki drugstore,
in the parking lot
back of Happy Days
and the Big City Diner.

The day Danno died
some old senators
and heroes of Pearl Harbour
last surviving ones
cried. They knew Danno
had done a lot for these islands.

The day Danno died
someone's father entered
Harry's Music Store
and bought his son
a Ukelele.

At Smiley's Nails
someone mentioned in passing
that Danno had died.

Somehow, at Jimmy's
Television Sales & Services
the owner thought
TV will never be the same,
now that Danno's died.

The day Danno died
someone very young
saw and heard the ghost
in the Queen Theater say
My heart's an open book.
The ghost that never left.

Maybe Danno had raided it
and arrested the projectionist
after it went porno
in 1985.

We're all sad now,
now that Danno's died.

ALA MOANA

Ala Moana, a path to the sea.

Here is an island chain fringed with nostalgia
homegrown and the foreign.

The tourist vision from balconies of hotels
where you'd expect colonial ambience,
and you'd pay good money
for smooth transits to beauty and tradition,
where the waiter's impeccable but his one rebel gesture
is a large punkish leather belt and buckle
he bought at Guess.

Otherwise here the food grows more locally,
like mostly all the staff,
and the lunchtime fashion models are twinned—one a
blond, the other

Polynesian—one in a blue dress, the other in beige,
where the unique horizontal ceiling fans
survived the renovation.

Nostalgia is the voice of TheBus, the welcomeboard
noneedtotakecareofyourbelongings bus.

Nostalgia. Each destination is the one you fondly
remember
but not the one you know.

Nostalgia breaks out on the distant reef
where longboarders are sharing waves
in a civil way and remind you
of Duke Kahanamoku, and where
the Duke's statue attracts smiling lovers.
This is nostalgic, not the love part,
but the statue's permanent gesture of aloha,
made permanent in bronze,
festooned with lei and other gifts of pilgrims.

The very idea of a good wave left untaken, left to the gods,
gods who are not nostalgic but quarrelsome,
they are the pastpresentfutureforever
in this sky, this water, this every place.

When it rains it's nostalgic, the double rainbows
in Mānoa Valley, like the auto-art
spray canned on a surfer's panel van
in a stoner's village, my world in 1975.
What we called fuck trucks, way back then and they're
collectable and nostalgic.

The mothers of Big Island, Hilo's SUV driving kind,
dragging their kids and bags of organic vegetables.
Under the Banyan tree in Hawi, you'll find nostalgia
but it's real, as real as a cool piece of shade
where the pickup trucks unload chill boxes
of poi and pupu and food for the farmers market
and the locals catch up on the goss.
No doubt there are tensions but it was Sunday in Hawi
and it was "Eat Local Day" and everyone was
wearing their best.

Even the military are nostalgia's guardians,
for what gives them a warm afterburn is
Patriot Day, and the launch of a new frigate
by a real war veteran who'd had his arm shot off
but still managed to take the machine gun nest
on a hill in Italy in 1945.

So I want to write 747 poems
and not worry. Whose home is it?
Whose nostalgia?

I can write 300 pages of drug related commerce
and abusive relationship break-ups,
this place that's better not to argue with,
in case the present or the future makes me feel nervous,
(for that is my present).

Great writing, not nostalgia.

A union demo at the Hilton,
old style chants, placards that still mean we're here, now,
echoing and unmaking my silences,
in-between ear-plug moments sliding shut
the plate-glass lanai door on a 40 storey condo.
Homeless, *the* homeless, are they nostalgic,
like the schizophrenic shouting into a public phone
with the passion of Armegeddon and not
the slightest hint of irony?

Heard, seen, acknowledged, at least
when all the places that have really changed
are the places even old timers can't remember.

You want to shout Fuck Tourism,
but that would be nostalgic.

EKPHRASTIC

(AFTER MARC THOMAS)

We enter this room
and all stop talking

What are we mourning here?
Memory?
Empire's passing?

Maybe it's like this
In Heaven

I am at the Plimsoll Line
half way in the water
and somewhere floating
above it

each surface of my life
is paint, scratched
re-painted
painted over
and over

with portholes

industriously
antiquated

The shape of my imagination
has become
an injection mould
(my body as pump)

but we shall keep things
color-
full

deeply blue
next to an edge
of fading crimson

Here and there
green underlay
latex,
wax

as a kind of etched armor

Scratchings

When the ship goes down
I don't want to follow it

I would like to call on

persistence

Persist
and resist

an attitude
for surviving time

between the overflow
and a deep calm

between this edge
and nothing's edge.

about the poet

ADAM AITKEN is a Thai-Australian living in Sydney, where he teaches Creative Writing. He was born in London and as a young child he was schooled in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur. He has lived, worked and travelled widely through Asia and Europe, and was recently Distinguished Visiting Writer at the University of Hawai'i-Mānoa. His poetry has appeared in *Poetry*, *Tinfoil*, *Drunken Boat* and *Jacket*. This is his fifth collection of poems.

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TINFISH

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Designed by Eric Butler, ericbutler555@gmail.com.

T I N F I S H P R E S S

Susan M. Schultz, Editor

47-728 Hui Kelu Street #9

Kāne'ohe, HI 96744

press.tinfish@gmail.com

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