

Three Poems from Shadow Play

**ATM**

so lonely he pushed  
his card into the ATM  
not for the cash but  
for the conversation

so hungry he hungered  
after the bowl of the sky  
the clouds of billowing rice  
mocking and out of reach

all other food had disappeared  
gone the way of discourse & dogs  
even the parking meters  
cold shouldered each other

so cold he wrapped  
his body in wool  
his face in his hands  
his breath in his fingers

so reasonable he  
hoped to die in the  
cemetery to save  
the hearse the bother

when asked if he wanted  
another transaction what  
else could he do but press  
that yearning arrow marked yes

and yes he whispered yes  
wrapping his arms around  
the soft yellow light glowing  
behind the plastic cowling

First published in *Gargoyle* (USA, 2008)

**the Empress Cixi among the lotuses**

on delicate stems

the moon-coloured petals  
unfold to the sun

the same sun which  
burnishes the bronze  
backs of my eunuchs

they hate me  
they stand waist-deep in hate  
slashing with their machetes

their hate burns like the sun  
which burns their backs  
and opens these flowers

they cannot see how  
(sun-shaded under my parasol)  
I love their hate

how the swing the heft of it  
the faint whistle in their breath of it  
caged like an oriole  
opens me like a flower

Note: The Empress Cixi (1852-1908) was the last Qing Dynasty Empress of China and was known for her ruthlessness in pursuit of authority.

First published in *Island* (Australia, 2006).

yet another poem about a giraffe

pity the poor giraffe  
lost on the frozen steppe

his wishbone legs  
make pipe-holes in the snow

the stunted furze  
laughs at his reaching neck

for Africa is  
sixty degrees below

the hoarfrost catches  
in his soulful lashes

his brown eyes lost  
beneath the arctic moon

his blotched hide a map  
of hopeless wishes

the swishing tail  
a pendulum of doom

so he stands withstands  
the bitter polar blast

that rips the fluttering  
pages of his dreams

the flickering pixels  
of a brilliant past

when the world was warm  
and still and green

**Note:** the Russian 'Acmeist' poet Nikolai Gumilev wrote a famous poem about a giraffe, possibly to cheer up his wife Anna Akhmatova. His giraffe was imagined in Chad. Perversely, I imagined mine in Russia.

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University Press, 2010)

