

john korn

FROM THE BACK ROOM



THE BACK ROOM IS

Shoe boxes with some teenage girl's letter to a boyfriend in prison.
"I broke a nose," he writes back, "I count my fingers. You still
Have red hair?"

The back room is red hair wigs in bags that covered cancer baldness
The back room is a harp in a briefcase with dusty strings strummed
tight notes like red embers lift and try to swell my emotion but fail
They fail and give me five minutes to a lunch break where deluded
coffee pools of isolation bloom brooding clouds in time lapse
photography, they roll massive and intimidate, under current of milky white
Half and half dream, half and half dreamed, half lied and who am I kidding
The back room is half of a lamp shade, half of a mannequin's arm,
The back room is half finished,
Half begun, it's no one to go home to
It is still, the back room, it's standing in your mind claustrophobic
with tall pillars of things used looming like owls perched on black branches...

The back room is a telephone without a plug
But still picking it up, holding it to your ear
and hoping...

Gillian Welch

on her back porch sitting
rain drop drum roof
and green july stems

i said 'my dogs are barking'
she said 'your dogs were barking'
i looked down

she was right
dogs were dead
at my feet, flies buzzed
in their hollow eye sockets

i went inside
made a sandwich
ate it next to her
with many cups of tea

she had on polka dot
dress,
sleepy, her limbs lazy
speaking slowly
she told me

of being younger
taking off her sandals
walking in river mud
where moss flowers grew
in bunches like grapes

she fell asleep curled
in cedar chair skirt lift
exposing bare calf
hanging off the armrest

silence
silk

i watch air
crowd her lungs
expand her chest

silence
cinnamon

red streak of lipstick
sliced over her
impossibly pale
curved cheek

i get the shovel
and drag two dogs
into the lawn...

cuban heel

brother bob is squeezed out
from this contracting universe
in which, he says, "stomped me
something awful. must've been
a cuban heel."

i watch him grab open air
shooing away a dazzled moth
attracted to the winking red eye
of his camel filter

his fingers trail in soft
ghost green streetlamp glow
on our coffin-wood porch.

said his left foot snagged
a rusted rail bush on the low side
and the wrong end of Maconville Hill

kept him back 200 clams
not to mention embarrassment
plus a realized state of this desperate
dilemma
Suzie hasn't called him since
as if it was his fault.

that was when the pipe froze
had to duct tape a sheet of plastic
for a car window
all winter long it was
witch cunt cold.

"and now this heat," brother bob says.
"can't sleep, mattress coils biting my back.

pale thin face of father henry
trailing like vapor through caverns
of thought. remembering things,
women and long stretches of track."

"but it ain't just me,
seems all the world is lonesome eyes
staring off into space.
we're all crushed.
splattered ugly. rolled out
thin across rim rose bay. must've
been a cuban heel." brother bob says

blowing out
gray cloud smoke toward
the sleeping shadowed hulk

of a box car...



John, when did you start writing poetry and what inspired you to write that first poem?



Would you prefer to go down in history as a poet or a screen writer?

History! Ha! That's silly. I'd rather be a decent person first. But I'm crazy, so I have to create stuff. I don't think I'm anything. I'm a cashier. That's how I make money right now. I stay up all night and create things. I think too much. That's about it.

First poem was written in grade school, maybe 1st grade, only because I had to. I remember it. It was about waking up, seeing the day was beautiful, but still wanting to go back to bed. We had to draw a picture for it too. I wrote other stuff around that time, but not poetry.

As a teenager I wrote some poetry. Any poetry written then was to a girl, because of a girl, or lack of a girl. Also because I was angry and confused. That stuff was really bad. Often times it rhymed. Mostly influenced by song lyrics, like Beck, but also Edgar Allen Poe poems. I read Bukowski then, too, because I liked the movie "Barfly" and related to his anger and isolation. But I was too scared to open that door in writing. I did try to mimic him in writing, but I would throw most of that stuff away. In fact I threw all that stuff away.

Around age twenty I began reading fiction. I had previously only devoured the occasional book, I was more into movies. But I got sick of only watching movies, and suddenly books seemed more attractive. I read a lot of horror fiction, and wrote short stories. This led to some poetry.

Stephen King's writing led me to the poet and fiction writer Stephen Dobyns, because King had quoted a poem from him in a book I was reading called "Insomnia". I started reading Dobyns. I loved his work, and I still do, and in researching him I was led to Raymond Carver. So reading influenced me, and just the general feeling of wanting to create something. Just to express something. Reality and fantasy.

But after becoming friends with Bart Solarczyk, who is a great person and poet, I began writing more poetry. He pointed me in the direction of The Hold, where Cait Collins welcomed me warmly. Then I went to Ron Androla's Pressure Press Board, and became a full blown addict.

Recently I see something else emerging.... something I feel would make a very good manuscript for a book. Do you have plans on putting together a manuscript or have you had any offers to do so?

I did make an effort recently to go in a different direction. So, I'm glad it shows, because it's hard for me to see it. Um... I guess I'm trying to take more time now. I've tried to merge a few things together. But, you know, it's that thing: the more you learn, you see there are vast amounts of things that you don't know. I'm still very much a rookie. Hopefully with better aim. Reading is very important.

Ha! No, nobody has made me offers that I can think of at the moment.

I would like to write a book or a screenplay someday. I have ideas that won't go away, but they also keep changing. They are not sure what they want to be yet. I'd need time to explore that.



A God and His Dirty Tricks

In a white shirt and tan pants with his hair done with gel and a look about him that was desperate. I was pricing jewelry, stuffing the bracelets that I liked into my pocket, when he came in looking like he did. Anytime a person walks into a store and starts looking at the employees that means they want to ask a question concerning the place of business. Most likely they want to talk to a manager.

“What’s up, man? Need some help?” I ask him.

He kept lifting his eyebrows and looking at the service center which has a door and a little window next to it. Everybody can tell that’s where the managers are. So far he had said nothing. He came in, looked around, looked at me, stuffed his hands into his pockets, pulled them out like something in there bit his fingers, eyeballed his wristwatch, then looked at the service center about ten times in four seconds.

“Manager’s in there, man. Just go up to the window.”

He went up to the little window, which has a space under it where the manager can slide papers through, stuck his mug in there so Susan, who was talking on the phone, could see him. All managers love to talk on the phone. They talk on the phone to other managers in other stores. Then they hang up and tell you to do stuff.

Susan hung up and opened the door and started talking to the guy. I listened from my counter. Picked up fragments in the conversation. There was polite confused tone coming from both sides.

Man: “Are you sure?”

Susan: “Yeah, I mean... Right here... I see you filled it out... but I haven’t even gotten to it yet...”

Man: “... left a message... could’ve sworn... ten thirty... sure... not some mistake?”

Susan: “... maybe another store... have you... other applications?”

Man: “All over the place.”

Susan: “... maybe Denny’s down there... like I said... sorry...”

Man: (intake of breath filled with anxiety) “Well... thanks anyway... I’ll go... maybe... thanks”

I watch the guy slowly walk out the door staring down at his cell phone pressing buttons, looking all tangled in thought. He paused in the lobby for moment and I talked to Susan who explained that the guy thought he had an interview at ten-thirty. She does the interviews but said she had no interviews set for today. That the man had applied at the store a day earlier but she hadn’t even looked at his application yet. Then he had got confused, said someone left a message saying that he had an interview, and that he could’ve sworn that it was this place. She told him sorry, but no, not here.

Apparently he applied to lots of places and now he had no idea which one had called him and left the message. It was ten-twenty in the morning. This poor mother fucker had to be some place in ten minutes for an interview. For a job he needed. Bad. But he didn’t know where. And he thinks he erased the message. You see, he has a criminal record. Drinking under age, I think it was. So he’ll take anybody that’ll take him.

In the lobby standing next to the Coke machine looking like he was disappointed and fucked. He walked out into the parking lot. I watched him. He stood. His cell phone was useless. The message was gone. But you know we all wish magic at desperate times, and he pushed more buttons like the message would re-appear. He even looked at the sky. No matter how many times we want a god to be there, it’s not. Just like no matter how many times we don’t want a god to be there, it is. A god doesn’t want us figuring it out. It ain’t what it is and never was.

I start thinking on some things. I’ve read too many horror novels and watched too many horror movies. And I can’t help but to make up a little one in my head. Where this guy gets this mysterious phone message for a job interview, but when he goes to the place they claim he don’t have one. And it’s all this dark fate thing, like maybe he’d done some evil deed, and death left the message. And it’s all one elaborate plot to get him to stand in one place at a certain time so he can get struck by lightning or smashed by a bus.

But that’s not it. That just was in my head. The story was what it was.

Most people seem to think it is these real exciting things, or heavy things in life that define us. Like butt banging Mary-May in her parent’s bed. Like getting married, or landing a good job, or losing a good job or saving someone or beating someone, something all dramatic like that. Like big triumphs and huge crushing failures. And that’s true, I guess. But I think it is little lumps in your gravy train like this that can tell you a lot about where you need to be if you let it. But that’s not easy. I personally, am aware of these times, but rarely my dumb ass figures anything of them.

You can normally tell you’re in one of these moments when you go from being in a state of anxiousness, hurrying off somewhere important, but not extremely important, following a string, hoping it turns out, but on your way, something folds over, the string snaps, and you’re left holding it, standing, looking around perplexed.

The place you were going never existed. It was like ghost flame down the far end of the road you were walking. A glare in your eye that you thought was a light turned on for you. But instead you just found more road. And that can be good.

the jellyfish push

Edgar Allen Poe

empty Doritos bags
push up gutters
like mindless
ghetto jellyfish

in this retirement
duplex of an age
past its age

I walk

some of these buildings
have been many
different things

drug store
pizzeria
hair salon
video store
comic book peddler

I know this place
I stare at it
but I never lived here

only a branch
growing
strangled in chicken wire
fence section

where cars push
up jellyfish flowers
and kids swing in

the park to watch
their shoelaces
dangle to see
their feet touch sky

Slumped,
Me
a piteous placeman
Selling broken legs &
Thumb-less mittens
To foggy-eyed cats
with no tongue

But hey

Lady,
In this state
I'm not worth your earnings
Wait five minutes
Enlightenment comes

Wheel my somatic womb
Strain on it's hinges
Mercy should subtract

I'd want to burst
Broom dance on your porch
Shake dust from the panels

Though I get a feeling
I'd just brood
Leaving your cold September
Carcass floating devil green
Through fungi wet waters of
Monongahela,
Allegheny, and Ohio too

Ahh, but what if
We migrate
Our fluttering fuck-ups winged now
Form formations that show direction

Well then I'd silk sultans upon
You by night
You'd quiver in Quasimodo bells
Shattering bow legged
Heaped on
Slouched out

Comfort

Fucking shit! I say
My 6 dollar paychecks are enough
For 7/11 coffee
Slip on your rag bow
I have an hour
To exaggerate!



Saint Cathy Let Me Be

I'm having A-sexual sex
in a bathtub coffin

Saint Catherine calculates
The angles of the hot and cold
Knobs.

We play don't touch. I brood
And self loathe. What a pity
I say.

She approves.
She's vacuumed.
She's eternal.

They keep her in Europe.
Her finger
Nails are shiny.

Bells ring.
People
Emit sorrow in knelt configurations.
They genuflect deflected growing genitals.

I pray for a silk bed in Memphis
bouncing with company
Beaded jewels and joyous sacraments

love



John Korn works in a second-hand store in Pittsburgh. This is his first appearance in MiPO but certainly not his last.

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