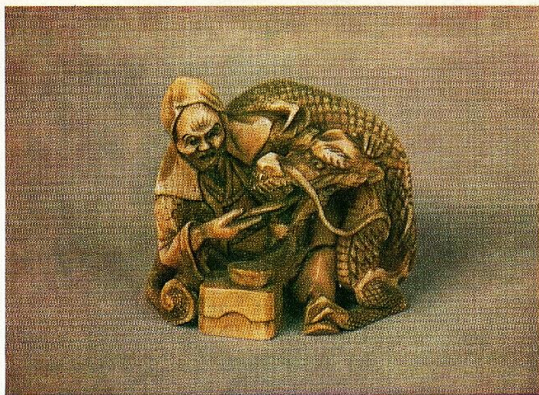
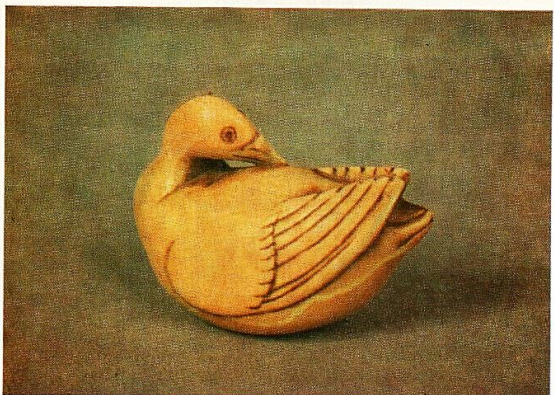
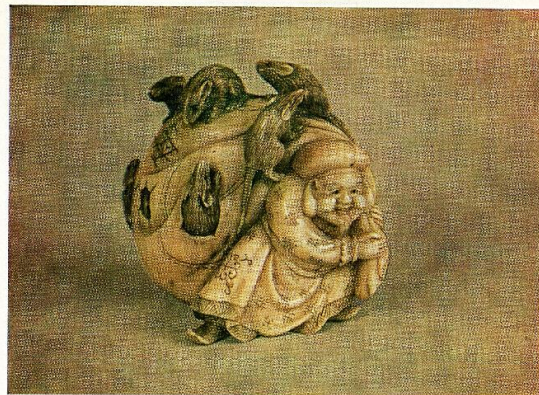
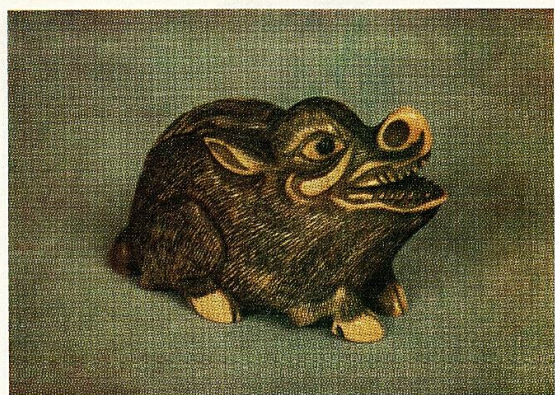
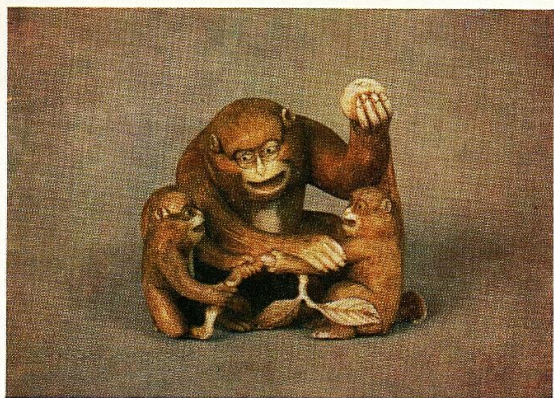




HPEN7018 WRITING WORKSHOP:
RESEARCHING & WRITING TO A
SINGLE FOCUS
THE ROLE OF OBJECTS & THINGS

WATER THROUGH POETRY

Alice Oswald, *Dart* (Faber, 2002)

Who's this moving alive over the moor?
An old man seeking and finding a difficulty.
Has he remembered his compass his spare socks
does he fully intend going in over his knees off the
military track from Okehampton?
keeping his course through the swamp spaces
and pulling the distance around his shoulders
and if it rains, if it thunders suddenly
where will he shelter looking round
and all that lies to hand is his own bones?
tussocks, minute flies,
wind, wings, roots
He consults his map. A huge rain-coloured wilderness.
This must be the stones, the sudden movement,
the sound of frogs singing in the new year.
Who's this issuing from the earth?
The Dart, lying low in darkness calls out Who is it?
trying to summon itself by speaking ...
An old man, fifty years a mountaineer, until my heart
gave out,
so now I've taken to the moors. I've done all the walks,
the Two
Moors Way, the Tors, this long winding line the Dart

this secret buried in reeds at the beginning of sound I
won't let go of man, under
his soakaway ears and his eye ledges working
into the drift of his thinking, wanting his heart
I keep you folded in my mack pocket and I've marked in
red
where the peat passes are and the good sheep tracks
cow-bones, tin-stones, turf-cuts.
listen to the horrible keep-time of a man walking,
rustling and jingling his keys
at the centre of his own noise,
clomping the silence in pieces and I
I don't know, all I know is walking. Get dropped off the
military
track from Oakenhampton and head down into Cranmere
pool.
It's dawn, it's a huge sphagnum kind of wilderness, and
an hour
in the morning is worth three in the evening. You can hear
plovers whistling, your feet sink right in, it's like walking
on the
bottom of a lake.

What I love is one foot in front of another. South-south-west and
down the contours. I go slipping between Black Ridge and White
Horse Hill into a bowl of the moor where echoes can't get out
listen,

a
lark
spinning
around
one
note
Splitting
and
mending
it

and I find you in the reeds, a trickle coming out of a bank, a foal
of a river

one step-width water
of linked stones
trills in the stones
glides in the trills

eels in the glides
in each eel a fingerwidth of sea
in walking boots, with twenty pounds on my back:
spare socks,
compass, map, water purifier so I can drink from
streams, seeing
the cold floating spread out above the morning,
tent, torch, chocolate, not much else.

Which'll make it longish, almost unbearable between
evening meal and sleeping, when I've got as far as
stopping,
sitting in the tent door with no book, no saucepan,
not so much
as a stick to support the loneliness
he sits clasping his knees, holding his face low down
between them,
he watches black slugs,
he makes a little den of his smells and small thoughts
he thinks up a figure far away on the tors
waving, so if something does happen,
if night comes down and he has to leave the path

then we've seen each other, somebody knows
where
we are.
falling back on appropriate words
turning the loneliness in all directions . . .
through Broadmarsh, under Cut Hill,
Sandyhole, Sittaford, Hartyland, Postbridge,
Belever, Newtake, Dartmeet, the whole
unfolding emptiness branching and reaching
and bending over itself.
I met a man sevenish by the river
where it widens under the main road
and adds a strand strong enough
to break branches and bend back necks.
Rain. Not much of a morning.
Routine work, getting the buckets out
and walking up the cows — I know you,
Jan Coö. A wind on a deep pool.
Cows know him, looking for the fork in the dark.
They know the truth of him — a strange man —
I'm soaked, fuck these numb hands.
A tremor in the woods. A salmon under a stone.
I know who I am, I
come from the little heap of stones up by

Postbridge,
you'll have seen me feeding the stock, you can tell it's
me
because of the wearing action of water on bone.
Oh I'm slow and sick, I'm
trying to talk myself round to leaving this place,
but there's roots growing round my mouth, my foot's
in a rusted tin. One night I will.
And so one night he sneaks away downriver,
told us he could hear voices woöoo
we know what voices means, Jan Coö Jan Coö.
A white feather on the water keeping dry.
Next morning it came home to us he was drowned.
He should never have swum on his own.
Now he's so thin you can see the light
through his skin, you can see the filth in his midriff.
Now he's the groom of the Dart — I've seen him
taking the shape of the sky, a bird, a blade,
a fallen leaf, a stone — may he lie long
in the inexplicable knot of the river's body

I knew a heron once, when it got up
its wings were the width of the river,
I saw it eat an eel alive
and the eel the eel chewed its way back inside out
through the heron's stomach
like when I creep through bridges right in along a ledge
to see where the dippers nest.
Going through holes, I love that, the last thing through
here was an otter
(two places I've seen eels, bright whips of flow
like stopper waves the rivercurve slides through
trampling around at first you just make out
the elver movement of the running sunlight
three foot under the road-judder you hold
and breathe contracted to an eye-quiet world
while an old dandelion unpicks her shawl
and one by one the small spent oak flowers fall
then gently lift a branch brown tag and fur
on every stone and straw and drifting burr
when like a streamer from your own eye's iris
a kingfisher spurts through the bridge whose axis
is endlessly in motion as each wave
photos its flowing to the bridge's curve
if you can keep your foothold, snooping down
then suddenly two eels let go get thrown

tumbling away downstream looping and linking
another time we scooped a net through sinking
silt and gold and caught one strong as bike-chain
stared for a while then let it back again
I never pass that place and not make time
to see if there's an eel come up the stream
I let time go as slow as moss, I stand
and try to get the dragonflies to land
their gypsy-coloured engines on my hand)
whose voice is this who's talking in my larynx
who's in my privacy under my stone tent
where I live slippershod in my indoor colours
who's talking in my lights-out where I pull to
under the bent body of an echo are these your
fingers in my roof are these your splashes

Everyone converges on bridges, bank holidays it fills up
with cars, people set up tables in the reeds, but a mile either
side you're back into wilderness. (Twelve horses clattering
away.) and there's the dipper bobbing up and down like a
man getting ready, hitching his trousers. I'm crouching, I
never let my reflection fall on water,

DART end

PROSE & WATER

Graham Swift, *Waterland* (Macmillan, 1983)

GRAHAM SWIFT, *WATERLAND* 1983

Fairy-tale words ; Fairy-tale advice. But we lived in a fairy-tale place. In the lock-keeper's cottage by a river in the middle of the Fens. Far away from the wide world. And my father, who was a superstitious man, liked to do things in such a way as would make them seem magical and occult. So he would always set his eel traps at night. Not because eel traps cannot be set by day, but because the mystery of darkness appealed to him . And one night, in midsummer, in 1937, we went with him, Dick and I, to set traps near Stotz bridge. It was hot and windless. When the traps had been set we lay back on the riverbank. Dick was 14 and I was 10. The pumps were tump- tumping, as they do, incessantly, so that you scarcely notice them all over the Fens, and frogs were croaking in the ditches. Up above, the sky swarmed with stars which seemed to multiply as we looked at them. And as we lay, Dad said: do you know what the stars are? They are the silver dust of God's blessing. They are little broken-off bits of heaven. God cast them down to fall on us. But when he saw how wicked we were , he changed his mind and ordered the stars to stop. Which is why they hang in the sky but seem as though at anytime they might drop...

Under normal conditions the sluice remained lowered, almost to the River bottom, its firm blade holding back the slow flowing Leem, making it fit for the passage of boats. Then the water in the enclosure above it, like the water in the lock pen, would be smooth and placid and it would give off that smell which is characteristic of places where freshwater and human ingenuity meet, and which is smelt over and over again in the Fens. A cool, slimy but strangely poignant and nostalgic smell

Once the shallow, shifting waters of the Wash did not stop at Boston and Kings Lynn but licked southwards as far as Cambridge, Huntingdon , Peterborough and Bedford. What caused them to retreat? The answer can be given in a single syllable : Silt. The Fens were formed by silt. Silt , a word which when you utter it, letting the air slip thinly between your teeth, invokes a slow, sly, insinuating agency. Silt: which shapes and undermines continents; which demolishes as it builds; which is simultaneous accretion and erosion; neither progress nor decay.

It came first from the coast of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, born on the inshore currents which flowed southwards into the ancient Wash. In the blue-black clay which lies under the soil of Cambridgeshire are deposits of silt containing traces of shells of a type occurring on the beaches and cliff-beds of north east England. Thus the first silts came from the sea. But to these marine silts were added the land silts carried by the rivers, the Ouse, the Cam, the Welland, which drained, and still drain, into the ever-diminishing Wash.

The silt accumulated, salt-marsh plants took hold, then other plants. and with the plants began the formation of peat . And peat is the second vital constituent of the Fens and the source of their remarkable fertility. Once it supported great forests which collapsed and sank when climatic changes caused water to re-immense the region. Today, it forms the rich , black, beet- and potato-bearing soil which is second to none in the country . But without silt, there could have been no peat.

...

Vermuyden did not foresee one other thing. That reclaimed land shrinks - as anything must shrink that has the water squeezed out of it. And peat, above all , which absorbs water like a sponge, shrinks when it dries. The Fens are shrinking. They are still shrinking - and sinking. Land which was above sea level in Vermuyden's day is now below it . 10s of feet below it. There is no exaggerating the dangers.

OBJECTS:

Edmund de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance*, (Penguin, 2010)

Though Japanese were extremely rare in Paris in the 1870s - there were delegations and diplomats and the odd Prince - their art was ubiquitous. Everyone had to get their hands on these *Japonaiseries*, all the painters Charles was starting to meet in the salons, all the writers Charles knew from the *Gazette*, his family, his family friends, his lover, all were living through this convulsion. Fanny Ephrussi records in her letters shopping trips to Mitsui, a fashionable shop in the rue Martel that sold Far Eastern objects, to buy Japanese wallpaper for the new smoking-room and guest bedrooms in the house that she and Jules had just finished building in the place d'Iéna. How could Charles, the critic, the well-dressed *amateur d'art* and collector, *not* buy Japanese art?

...

In the Parisian artistic hothouse it mattered when you started your collection. Earlier collectors, *Japonistes*, had the edge as they were men of superior appreciation and creators of taste. De Goncourt, naturally, managed to suggest that he and his brother had actually seen Japanese prints *before* the opening up of Japan. These early adopters of Japanese art, though fiercely competitive with each other shared their discernment. ...

When you held a Japanese *objet*, it revealed itself. Touch tells you what you need to know - and it tells you about yourself. Edmond de Goncourt offered his view, here, in respect to politeness, gentleness, unctuousness so to speak, of perfect things in one's hand: an aphorism. Touch - it is the mark by which the amateur recognises himself. The man who handles an object with indifferent fingers, with clumsy fingers, with fingers that do not envelop lovingly is a man who is not passionate about art. (pp.48-50)

I am anxious about where my boxwood wolf and my ivory tiger are moving to. I book a ticket to Vienna and set out for the Palais Ephrussi.

This new home for the netsuke is absurdly big. It looks like a primer in classical architecture; it even makes the Paris houses of the Ephrussi look demure. The Palais has Corinthian pilasters and Doric columns, urns and architraves, four small towers in the corners, rows of caryatids holding up the roof. The first two storeys are powerfully rusticated, surmounted by two storeys of pale pink-washed brick, and stone behind the fifth storey caryatids. There are so many of these massive, endlessly patient Greek girls in their half slipped robes - thirteen down the long side of the Palais on the Schottengasse, six on the main Ringstrasse front, that they look a little as if they are lined up along a wall at a very poor dance. I cannot escape gold: there is a lot of gilding to the capitals and Palais is now the headquarters of Casinos Austria.

...

Except that it is a windingly ambitious street, breath-catchingly Imperial in scale. It is so big that a critic argued, when it was built, that it created an entirely new neurosis, that of agoraphobia. How clever of the Viennese to invent a phobia for their new city.

The emperor Franz Josef had ordered a modern metropolis to be created around Vienna. The old mediaeval city walls were to be demolished, the old moats filled in and a great arc of new buildings, a city hall, a Parliament, and opera house, a theatre, museums, and a university constructed. This Ring would have its back to the old city and would look out into the future (pp.112-3)

THE WRITER AS WITNESS TO THE WORLD

Medieval: *The Visions of Piers Plowman*

PIERS PLOWMAN (William Langland.)

IN a summer season · when soft was the sun,
I clothed myself in a cloak as I shepherd were,
Habit like a hermit's · unholy in works,
And went wide in the world · wonders to hear.
But on a May morning · on Malvern hills,
A marvel befell me · of fairy, methought.
I was weary with wandering · and went me to rest

Under a broad bank · by a brook's side,
And as I lay and leaned over · and looked into
the waters

I fell into a sleep · for it sounded so merry.
Then began I to dream · a marvellous dream,
That I was in a wilderness · wist I not where.
As I looked to the east · right into the sun,
I saw a tower on a toft · worthily built;
A deep dale beneath · a dungeon therein,
With deep ditches and dark · and dreadful of sight

A fair field full of folk · found I in between,
Of all manner of men · the rich and the poor,
Working and wandering · as the world asketh.
Some put them to plow · and played little
enough,
At setting and sowing · they sweated right hard
And won that which wasters · by gluttony
destroy.

Some put them to pride · and apparelled
themselves so
In a display of clothing · they came disguised.
To prayer and penance · put themselves many,
All for love of our Lord · living hard lives,
In hope for to have · heavenly bliss.
Such as anchorites and hermits · that kept them
in their cells,
And desired not the country · around to roam;
Nor with luxurious living · their body to please.

And some chose trade · they fared the better,
As it seemeth to our sight · that such men thrive.

And some to make mirth · as minstrels know how,
And get gold with their glees · guiltlessly, I hold.
But jesters and janglers · children of Judas,
Feigning their fancies · and making folk fools,
They have wit at will · to work, if they would;
Paul preacheth of them · I'll not prove it here --
Qui turpiloquium loquitur · is Lucifer's hind.

Tramps and beggars · went quickly about,
Their bellies and their bags · with bread well
crammed;
Cadging for their food · fighting at ale;
In gluttony, God knows · going to bed,
And getting up with ribaldry · the thieving
knaves!

Sleep and sorry sloth · ever pursue them.
Pilgrims and palmers · pledged them together
To seek Saint James · and saints in Rome.
They went forth on their way · with many
wise tales,
And had leave to lie · all their life after --
I saw some that said · they had sought saints:
Yet in each tale that they told · their tongue
turned to lies
More than to tell truth · it seemed by their
speech.
Hermits, a heap of them · with hooked staves,
Were going to Walsingham · and their
wenches too;

THE WRITER AS WITNESS TO THE WORLD

Contemporary: *An Atlas of the Difficult World.*

I

A dark woman, head bent, listening for something
- a woman's voice, a man's voice or
voice of the freeway, night after night, metal streaming
downcoast
past eucalyptus, cypress, agribusiness empires
THE SALAD BOWL OF THE WORLD, gurr of small planes
dusting the strawberries, each berry picked by a hand
in close communion, strawberry blood on the wrist,
Malathion in the throat, communion,
the hospital at the edge of the fields,
prematures slipping from unsafe wombs,
the labour and delivery nurse on her break watching
planes dusting rows of pickers.
Elsewhere declarations are made: at the sink
rinsing strawberries flocked and gleaming, fresh from
market
one says: "On the pond this evening is a light
finer than my mother's handkerchief
received from her mother, hemmed and initialled
by the nuns in Belgium."
One says: "I can lie for hours
reading and listening to music. But sleep comes hard.
I'd rather lie awake and read." One writes:

"Mosquitoes pour through the cracks
in this cabin's walls, the road
in winter is often impassable,
I live here so I don't have to go out and act,
I'm trying to hold onto my life, it feels like nothing."
One says: "I never knew from one day to the next
where it was coming from: I had to make my life
happen
from day to day. Every day an emergency.
Now I have a house, a job from year to year.
What does that make me?"
In the writing workshop a young man's tears
wet the frugal beard he's grown to go with his poems
hoping they have redemption stored
in their lines, maybe will get him home free. In the
classroom
eight-year-old faces are grey. The teacher knows
which children
have not broken fast that day,
remembers the Black Panthers spooning cereal.

An Atlas of the Difficult World

I don't want to hear how he beat her after the earthquake,
tore up her writing, through the kerosene
lantern into her face waiting
like an unbearable mirror of his own. I don't
want to hear how she finally ran from the trailer
how he tore the keys from her hands, jumped into the truck
and backed it into her. I don't want to think
how her guesses betrayed her - that he meant well, that she
was really the stronger and ought not to leave him
to his own apparent devastation. I don't want to know
wreckage, dreck and waste, wild tree frogs calling in
another season, light and music still pouring over
our fissured, cracked terrain

USING A SINGLE IMAGE TO OPEN OUT
TO THE WORLD

GIRL BY EDNA O'BRIEN REVIEW – A MASTERCLASS OF STORYTELLING

A girls' dormitory. Men burst in, claiming to be soldiers come to protect the sleepers from a local insurrection. But they are not. They are militants in disguise, on the hunt for boys to pressgang, supplies to plunder. Finding neither, they decide that "Girls will do", and they abduct them. So begins Edna O'Brien's terrifying, lurching novel, a story set in an unnamed but recognisable Nigeria terrorised by the thugs of Boko Haram; a story that keeps faith with the novelist's determination to cross continents and cultures to describe the pain and suffering of women and girls, and which also profoundly echoes her work of nearly six decades ago, the Country Girls trilogy.

Everything that O'Brien does memorably throughout her novels, she does here. There is the blend of economy and lyricism, vignettes tumbling over one another to disorient and energise the reader. There is the intense focus on the emotional lives of women on the sharp end of mental and physical incarceration or constraint, broadening out to sketch in the patriarchal and theocratic structures that hold them there. And there is the constant presence of bodily sensation and distress.

Alex Clark