

New Fiction by Christopher Clifton: “Three Fictions”

written by Guest Contributor | October 11, 2017



[Image Credit: “Small Self Portrait, Lauren Aristizabal”]

Textual Analysis

The text was written simultaneously with the life for which it stands as an account to be assessed for the potential to be financed. The identity to which it is attributed has continued unaware of its continuous recording, but has made an application for emergency relief for what he tells us are “unbearable commitments,” and has clearly been informed that his submission to the process will involve a comprehensive estimation of his assets and capacities, and ways of getting by. While it has to be acknowledged that the information drawn is not an adequate description of his life as it is lived, in that the text may be subjected to alternative constructions, nonetheless it has allowed us to discern a clearer image of this man, and of his struggles to survive, and to find meaning. The most relevant dimension of the multilayered data for our purpose is that data which relates to his repetitive behaviours, or that aspect of the data that reveals the hidden patterns of his lifestyle. For example, his dependence on a certain brand of chewing gum, which he chews with constant frequency, from morning until night; and the limited selection of comparable news sources, which he reads all day with frequencies that correlate to levels of anxiety, and appear in turn to feed into those feelings, in a complicated cycle of dependency; and the hour of the day in which he enters an establishment to drink, which is the same hour and the same place every day, although the quantity of beer may vary widely in accordance with those levels of anxiety, and the number of the characters he meets in there on any given day; as well as the accumulated map of his trajectories, which reveals a well-worn figure, without many variations of itinerary, and extends in three directions from the place of his abode. These constructions of the text have served our purpose not

because they have enabled us to analyse a pattern of expenses, in relation to the level or the lack of productivity and income, but because we have been able to derive an explanation for his failure to fulfill what he describes as obligations. For the image we make out is of a pattern of defences, which protects him from the world and what might help him. We accept that such a programme be the ground on which his sense of self arises, but inflexible commitment to this sense of self prevents him from being able to imagine an alternative existence. He may find that by allowing it to open to what otherwise disturbs him he will find a way to flourish; and that what he now perceives as obligation to fulfil will be dissolved in a new image to commit to. The finance will depend on his capacity or willingness to leave himself behind. We have given him a summary of our findings, to reflect on and respond to.

An Envoy

The arrival of an envoy from an isolated country on the far side of the planet was a curious event that caused no little apprehension to the members of the antibanking union. She had made her entry to the building in the middle of the lunch break, when a group of contract lawyers and accountants were enjoying an imprudent conversation on the matter of a recent application they had wanted to approve for nothing more than for the fun it seemed to promise to provide them, and their idiotic laughter was abruptly interrupted by her sudden exclamation: "Just when I believed that I had reached my destination, I can see that I was wrong." The hall fell silent, and they looked at her with shame. She was dressed in black, had thick black hair, and wore dark glasses. She had ears, like the ears of a monkey. She took the glasses off, and the eyes that were revealed appeared to glimmer in the light like little diamonds. Beneath these eyes there were dark rings, and her face was drawn in sorrow. A young accountant broke the silence: "Can we help you?" "I had thought you could," she said, "however now I'm not so sure." There was a murmur in the hall, as a crowd began to gather at the scene. "I have in any case been sent to you to ask for your assistance," she continued. "Your renown has reached our borders, and my government believes that there is nowhere else to turn to. Our country has been ravaged by a fire that has been burning for three years. Our cities are destroyed, our economy has collapsed, our people live and die in desperation, and the world has looked away. Our country is a wasteland. However could you help us?" Then a voice came from the middle of the crowd, to give this answer: "However it may be, having heard your tale of suffering and sorrow we now find ourselves obliged to find a way." The people cleared, to see that it was Edmund, the director, who had spoken. "What would you ask, if you could ask us?" "At such a time, when interest rates are so extreme that they prohibit new investment, we need finance." "I believe that we can help you." Then turning to the crowd, Edmund asked them as a group: "Is there anyone among you who is capable and willing to accept this strange adventure, and contract yourself to help this gentle lady and her people?" The crowd began to whisper, and the volume of the whispering increased, until a single timid voice took up the call: "I would be willing, if you thought that I were able." It was Owen, an accountant, who

had shown a strong potential to draft terms and see the details, though still young and not yet worldly. "There is only one sure way for us to know," responded Edmund. Then he turned to ask the lady: "Would you be willing to accept him at his word?" and she responded with a nodding of her head. "Then the matter is resolved. The two of you may sit down to negotiate the terms of this provisional commitment, and I will give the guarantee that our resources and connections will be placed at your disposal, to ensure that this adventure be successful. I wish the both of you good fortune." Then the building was returned, as if to normal.

Joseph

His mother looked on little Joseph, who was naming things and joining them together with the syntax of his legs and pointing hands, as he was walking round the garden. She had heard her husband say that he could see him as the body of the contract, and she saw that now herself, in her amazement at the way that he unfolded on his own, in a continuous approach to that without him. There were changes every day, and it was difficult to bring again to mind how he had been not only months ago, but days. She took her telephone from the table, and opened to the images and videos it stored, which she had captured since the day he had been born, and felt estranged as she went through them. From the image of the eyes as they first looked into her own, to his first laughter, which had turned into a cry as if in shock from the sensation, to the day he sat alone, and the day he said "hello," to the day he started moving on his own across the room towards an object; it was difficult to recognise the boy she came to know, and she felt grieved by all the Josephs she had known and left behind her. It was strange to feel this grief, because her love had only grown, and every day had only added to her joys; but at the same time he was living as a consequence of loss that she was yet to come to terms with. She felt guilty when she thought what she was feeling, not only for the fact that she was feeling this, but also for the fact that it appeared to be inevitable that his innocent existence would be helplessly exposed to her realities of loss, and she felt powerless to keep him from the feelings of the future. At this stage he was prohibited from knowing what it meant to be alive, and what it meant to leave behind; but there was nothing she could do to stop the coming of the day in which this happy limitation would be broken. She felt sad, for she believed that it was really from herself that he would need to be protected. However she was taken from these thoughts by her awareness of a pulling at her skirt, and sound of "mama." She looked down to see him smiling, with his arms outstretched towards her. His deep blue eyes proceeded from a depth that went beyond imagination, and the promise they expressed was irreducible to any way of thinking. They exceeded her existence. She bent down to pick him up, and pulled him tightly to her chest. His skin was soft and overwhelming. She kissed him on the face, and on the neck. And the closer she approached him, the further she would feel from him away.



Christopher Clifton was born in Australia. His treatise *Of the Contract* is published by Punctum Books.