

## Thai Palace

A Toronto writer has come, like a wise-man from the east – to read at the Wash-house in Vancouver. But first the inner circle will dine with him at the Thai Palace. They will embark on a little trip to Prathes Thai, the kingdom of the free. They will meet an emerald Buddha, some teak-bearing elephants, or guar, seladang, banting, gibbons and flying-foxes, not to mention gondolas of bread-fruit, damar oil, sirih, and sapan crowding the canals of the floating market. King Ramkamhaeng who made the Siamese alphabet may be receiving. Or King Rama, founder of Bangkok. Or the poet King Narai, who brought Pra Maharajkru, Pra Horatibodi, and Sriprachya to court to compose verses in the Klong and the Kap – ordering the Chindamani so Thai children could learn Thai things instead of Jesuit things.

They will meet the princess beloved by a crocodile or the princess given away before birth to a yak, her mother exchanging her for her favorite fruit. They will glimpse Krung Thep, City of Angels, Phu Ping Palace at Chiang Mai, or Wat Arun, the temple of dawn. They will attend Kathina and watch the king offer robes at the end of vassa. They will see Mount Inthanon and the rich rice fields of Chao Phraya river, the fabled Khorat Plateau with its cattle, horses, pigs, cotton, peanuts, corn and hemp. They will buy some freshly mined rubies and sapphires. And some shiploads of tin just in from bucket chains and jigging tables, from gravel pumps sucking ancient river slurry, running it through baffled palongs. They will meet a shaman or a hunter with his blow-gun. Or a wild Wa, who collects human skulls in order to bring himself good health and crops.

Among the gold lions, glass dragons, and elongated cats, six guards, in black trousers and white jackets stand watch over the only occupied table in Thailand. The other tables, on the balconies, in the courtyards, under the gold arches, tiled huts and marine painted skies, are all empty. For the visiting Toronto wise-man, the two Ks wear red. L sports a green shirt with white stars. Y has donned a yellow turtleneck and a lump of turquoise.

Beers and martinis are ordered. Peanut sauce discussed. And the department store that used to make Vancouver's very own peanut butter, empty for 10 years except for pigeons and squatters charged with trespassing. City in a stew, whether to make it 400 condos, a hundred tossed to the poor. Union organizer mentions 2000 food and cleaning workers fired from hospitals will not be hired back, even at low wages. They're "tainted." Peanuts gone bad. Like Anna Goodman on KPFA asking Bill Clinton about Shell Oil and 90s greed. And he saying, Look, you're not supposed to be interviewing me!

In Thailand, unions and strikes are forbidden, says the encyclopedia.

The palace guard in their black and white uniforms with brass buttons arrive, carrying bowls of rice, curried chicken in coconut milk, prawns and noodles and chicken on sticks with peanut sauce.

## **We make what we are here for**

Corner of Hastings (Vancouver mill) and Hawks (John Francis, 1890s stockholder, Coal Harbour land syndicate). In the parking lot of the Astoria Hotel stands the grey trailer-hut of the Sheway Community Project for Women and Children. A She, in shiny lo-slung pants, drifts past the door, fingering her spaghetti strap, her top hanging down below the bra hooks crossing her back. She shuffles back and forth for the passing cars, thighs pinched together as though she doesn't want them to part. Another She stands, bulldog body, at the bus stop, all black and leather – leather jacket studded and flapping, crooked-cut leather skirt – black boots. Black thick socks. Sooty matted hair.

We make what we are here for. But who is We? and what was here before?

Do you say Kee or Kway, asks the bus-driver/ Us-driver, with long white braid curling round his shoulder. Sure, three bucks'll get you the seabus to Lonsdale. Arthur Heywood L, held the mortgage on Moodyville Mill. Foreclosure got him a chunk of waterfront city. Fond of prize-fighting, he refereed a match at Hart's Opera House, with the Marquis of Queensberry. Is it pugilism or boxing?

Seabus heads into sawing, shipping, docks, loading, unloading, grain, planks, steel containers. Blue sheds belt yellow hills of sulfur. Cranes and ramps clamber at mountains of sawdust. Long black hull of a freighter lounges in the sea before the city blocked, cubed, terraced out of black-green forest on the mountains of mountains of coast. Then the freighter bow looms over the squat sea-bus – The Pacrose (Nassau), red stack and orange lifeboats. Yellow cranes and container-brackets laddering its superstructure. Seabus floats past a Seaspan barge-heap of soggy woodchips. Past blackened pilings and booms of logs. *This little wooden world*, said Captain Jack Aubrey, Master and Commander.

Huge tractor tires guard the bows of spanking red and white tugs. Beyond them, skeletons of the old Burrard drydocks frame the sky with empty roof rafters and wall studs. Shipbuilding's gone. History repeats. Land cleared for condos, marinas, cafes, potpourri shops, postcards, t-shirts. Lonsdale Kway/ Kee Market – a giant barnacle, cruise-ship/ cruishop, feeding on the human tides flushing in and out the seabus terminal.

What would you have instead of all this eating and sitting?  
Theatre, painting, dance, maybe. Or Sheways?

Three unwhite nannies with their white charges occupy a bench on the dock near the Market – one nanny spoon-feeding a three-year-old in a yellow shirt. He runs to the edge of the dock, looks through the mesh at the spanking big tugs, then runs back to the nanny for another spoonful. No words pass between them.

The tug shop has decorated its grounds with a pipe-smoking wooden sea-captain lounging in a dory. Round the corner, the obligatory repro totem pole: a bear wearing a salmon like a bow tie, just west of the old Moodyville Mill and a slough the Squamish called Uthkyme, meaning serpent pond. *We had a teacher at the school named McMillan and he whipped the Indian boys*

*unmercifully* (the Archivist recorded Mrs. Alice Crakanthorp in 1936). *He would go out in the bush and cut a switch and whip them with it. The Indian boys showed their resentment by draping an apple tree in his garden with dead snakes. When the tree was shaken the snakes began to wriggle and drop to the ground.*

## Lovely Drive

The City raises its totem coat of arms, heralding its dreams: a tall ship, some felled logs, a choo-choo engine with cowcatcher sweeping the tracks, balanced round the axis and spreading branches of a Douglas fir. Incorporated A.D. 1886. Motto: By sea and land we prosper. A city of fishing and hewing. But the City has nightmares. Fishing and hewing are not enough for a trademark in corpo-reality.

The City writes itself over, with bearded men, one holding an axe and limbed tree, the other holding a paddle and net; the two supporting (like lions and unicorns) a shield of wavy lines and winged caduceus. *Axis mundi* (wand of Mercury), main highway between heaven and earth into west-coast forest. With curling snakes: fire and water, sulphur and quicksilver, tying/ untying waking and sleeping. The herald's pole claiming power, transcendence. But the City wishes for more and tops the pole with a knight's helmet (place of hidden thoughts), tops the helmet with castle battlements – a walled medieval town. The whole phallic tower topped again with a sail and mast waving a flittery pennant.

Dream on, oh City, for the third time, for the College of Heralds, London England, suppressing hacked tree-trunk and primitive paddle, compressing lumberjack and fisherman to clean-cheeked boy-scouts proudly standing on either side of waves and dogwood flowers. Each man rests a hand on the shield, a well-beloved horse, while holding in the other his axe or his net. Displacing, subverting what libidinal histories – wrapping the knight's helmet in lambrequins' feathery feminine banners, and launching the whole mobile contraption of sail/ crown-castle/ helmet on a spikish triangle to cleave the waves with a Kwakiutl thunderbird totem pole. Sea and land not enough: the City takes air, too, to bellow its prosperity, its pro hopefulness, smiling in its sleep, thinking, A Queen's grant of armorial bearings (this Kwakiutl pole on Squamish land) lasts *forever*.

The last chief Khatsahlano remembered the first order of City business: claiming a military reserve (his Squamish homeland) for a giant park, a giant memoir of perished forest. *It being of more than local importance* (or exportance), the City called on Lord C.P.R. Strathcona to name said park, and *he* named it for Governor General Lord Stanley of Preston, who went down in history for a hockey trophy.

September 27, 1888. Lord Stanley not present. It was Thursday. A procession to open the Park formed on Powell's street (17 years Superintendent of Indian Affairs, invented industrial boarding schools to destroy his charges' ways of living). Then down Cordova, 46<sup>th</sup> Viceroy of Mexico. Along Granville, Lord Large-Village (valuable in matters needing diplomacy and good breeding), along King George's Street, across the bridge over the lagoon, and around Lovely Drive to Chaythoos, home of the last Chief, where his father Khaytulk and grandfather Chief Haatsalahnough were buried. Mayor Oppenheimer standing beside Khaytulk's tomb, a little house (glass windows, red blankets) raised on poles where Khaytulk lay in a canoe, Mayor Oppenheimer dedicating the park to Lord Stanley.

Khaytulk built a barn there for cows and horses. And a house covered in cedar shingles (Chief Haatsalahnough's house stood there before it), Corporal Turney of the Royal Engineers marking

it on his survey map, 1863. *We was eating in our house*, the Archivist records the last chief, *Someone make a noise outside; chop our house. Surveyors come along and they chop the corner of our house. My sister ask whiteman what he's doing that for. The man say, "We're surveying the road." My sister ask him, "Whose road?"*

The road came, it knocked down the house. Squamish having lived there from time immemorial. Cutting a tree to make a canoe, they'd found a mask inside. They'd called the place Whoi Whoi (masks). They'd scattered clouds of eiderdown before the British boats of George Vancouver. At Whoi Whoi, they left acres of white-roasted shells and the bones of ancestors, a midden, eight feet deep, a thousand years old. Park builders dug up the midden, spread the shells on the road – the Lovely Drive. For Lord Stanley, the Earl of Derby, the Mayor, the City Clerk in their carriage.

## Vancouver Centre

At Pacific Centre mall, red and gold characters on stilts sidle around marquees – what’s the Pacific, the grand pacifier, doing in the centre of Vancouver? Entrance at King George’s and Howe’s streets (he, nickname: Black Dick, led English channel fleet against Spain warring over Nootka land). Glass domed rotunda. Conservatory for soft cellular mottled plastic plants, splotchy green under shiny lanceolate leaves of unreal trees. Wire-mesh seats and Fruitopia. Constant door banging. Black spiked hair sleeps with chin on chest. Woman carrying red balloons into tunnel/ underground ant-nest. Two seniors gaze into space. Man in black wakes, looks at watch, heads into tunnel. Another cloud of red balloons walks in. Then another. Some sort of protest, woman laughs, leaving the

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stenciled with increasing volume around rotunda walls. The I of shopping a woman’s skirted silhouette, like toilet icon, but taller, skinnier. Protest becoming art-gallery con/ pro-test to Draw Your World, with crayons and pencils. Harry Rosen, Holt Renfrew, Esprit, Rogers TV. A boutique selling sunglasses on walkway over coal-baron Dunsmuir’s Street. To atrium roof – three stories down, people gliding up/ down moving stairs/ food fair/ warrens of merchandise.

Refuge Area. For wildlife. Offers telephones/ toilets.

Down Escher’s never-ending up/down stairs, two-storey fountain sprinkles rain. Ants in architect-model modernism crawl past huge white columns on graph-paper ramps. T-square water-feature falls over beige tiles below banners festooning the sky with Tommy Hiflier. Longine’s watches. Lancome cosmetics.

Along tunnel benches, listless ant-people loll among pull-out displays of Shakespearian costumes. La Jolie Madam and Eddie Bauer – what do they do at night when no one’s around? Go to Athlete’s World? Don’t take your body for granted. Drink milk, say two heads, bald, grey, shrunk to their shoes before a telescope on a parapet. Their camera on the paving stones. Elegiac is an attitude: Longine’s ad – no, it’s elegance, that’s supposed to be an attitude.

Tourist props himself on backless bench, head sagging, nodding off, lulled by incessant splash of water jetting into air, then falling falling. The mall, like a giant dumbbell, connects two atriums. No centre, the centre’s gone – a giant donut on its edge where ant-people circulate in moebius tunnel round and round over the street, down the escalators, under the street, back up the other end, always coming out on the same side. Teens, tourists, old folk flâneurs, tired mothers with strollers and toddlers. Flowing through. Eddying in refuge areas, benches, corners then out again in the flowing current of footsteps. Shopkeepers roll their wares upstream luring flow-through ants with carts of ties, belts, sunglasses, a cushion for the divan, a vase for the coffee table.

## **Siwash Rock**

The world is in hungry plates – a Eurasian plate, an African plate (Please, Sir, more), an Arabian plate, a Caribbean plate. Vancouver's on the edge of a North American plate, grinding relentlessly westward. Forcing Juan de Fuca's plate down into molten magma. The magma comes up. Disgorged in volcanic dykes, cooling to cores of basalt that split the sandstone and mudstone at Siwash Rock. Words too erupt, crystallize, morph, fracture. Forming rifts and faults, jostlings of clastics, irregular belts of turbidity. Eroding to isolated outcrops.

S'i'lix, the Stó:lo called it. The Squamish word whites spell Sl'kheylsh. Slahkayulsh, said the last Chief Khahtsahlano – "He is standing up." A seastack wearing a headdress of scrub fir, standing in the waves, face to the west. Beside a brass plate "In memory of Robert Dennis Tribe, age 17, of North Vancouver who at 3:15 p.m. Sunday June 5, 1966 failed to notice it was low tide. . . ." Another brass plate says the rock's a monument to Skalsh the unselfish, turned to stone as a reward.

*You'd have to go east to about a mile off Siwash Rock about opposite Hollyburn before you could look back and see the old potlatch house, Chief Khahtsahlano told the archivist. If you didn't know about first narrows you'd think it was a big bay and Siwash Rock was a sharp point – George Vancouver missed things when he rowed past Pookcha, the floating whale back, or Khapkhepayum, the cedar place, 1792. In the 1860s they called it Nine Pin Rock. Its head and shoulders a manikin to knock out with bowling balls.*

Mother was telling me, Miss Crakanthorp said (first white child born at Stamp's Mill, Alberni 1862), they never called the Indians Siwash unless they were annoyed or disgusted with them. Mrs. Eihu said she was brought up by her grandmother at Kanaka Ranch – *Grandmother talked English. She had small feet and always wore boots, and a hat. Try and do like the whiteman does, she would say – copy him – don't be like a Siwash.*

*Siwash had a wife, the Archivist records Chief Khahtsahlano, Just this side, about eighty feet from Siwash Rock, it's a rock, sharp shape at top. High at top. Like woman's got peak hat, it's got mouth and eyes. The Archivist drew two headstones on watery lines, for graves in his sketch book, the small one Siwash Rock's second wife. Above which he wrote, Siwash Rock's other wife, Sunz, is below Prospect Point, near Lighthouse. Sahunz, some called her, a woman kneeling, washing her hair. If you start going from one to the other, Chief Lahwa said, you have to keep on going.*

Back and forth, One to the Other. The bowling ball comes down the alley.

*Sunz is not Siwash Rock's second wife (Chief Khahtsahlano) he didn't have two wives. Siwash Rock's wife is right beside him. Sunz may be Chunz. Chants is a big sandstone rock covered with water at high tide (Andrew Qoichetahl of the Squamish Council) – Chants is Siwash Rock's fishing line rolled into a ball – also a big hole in the cliff nearby where he kept fishing tackle and did his cooking.*

Quite by chance, he brought his instrument. Among the Ankomenums, Rev Thomas Crosby called his missionizing memoirs: The coast Indians are spoken of generally as Siwashes, a term which the more intelligent resent. Some think the word is a corruption of the French *sauvage*.

Dear Sir, You published on March 13 an illustration of a very interesting Totem from the West Coast of British Columbia. But why is it described as the work of Siwash Indians? During my residence among these Indians I was never able to locate any tribe by that name. If a Coast Indian was called Siwash he resented it as much as any coloured person would resent being called Nigger. Siwash is used by white men contemptuously but never by Indians themselves (The Rev. F.S. Spackman, Vicar of Marple, Cheshire, formerly Principal of the Indian Residential Schools, Alert Bay).

*When whitemans call me Siwash I say Go to Hell (the Archivist recorded Chillahminst; working in Hastings Sawmill the day Vancouver burned). Siwash Rock was once an Indian man. I think one man make the world, but some people say three men. They go out sturgeon bank, out Point Grey. They wash themselves, wash themselves, wash themselves, make themselves very clean; keep themselves very clean. They get very powerful. The three great men go all around the world making it. If they find poor people, they give them stuff so they no more poor; teach them how to do things better; show them how to get food; but if they find people too smart, too clever, they say, You go to hell, we not trouble about you. That's how Siwash Rock came to be where he is; he too smart, three great men turn him into rock so people see not much good to be too smart.*

To kill stupid cleverness. Is it necessary. Or wait for plague, drought, greenhouse to eat humans.

Siwash Rock, the guidebook says, a Vancouver landmark located in Stanley Park.

“ . . . . This plaque erected by Bob's friends as a reminder of the danger of diving from Siwash Rock.”