

JOHN ADAMS



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I developed a habit of rising at dawn to watch the fishermen trying to land sea bass. One old man was friendly but although I laughed at his jokes, nothing he said made any sense to me. Eventually I bought a dictionary and a tape recorder – one of the small jobs that tabloid reporters use to shove in the faces of disgraced politicians. After that I would tape his stories and spend the rest of the day trying to translate.

One time he said, 'As usual I was fishing at dawn, when the light is still purple and red! My line got caught on something in the water – a very heavy thing! I managed to pull it in – it was a struggle! At first I thought that it was seaweed but suddenly I realised that it was the head of a man! As you would expect the head was lifeless but curiously, the hair was several metres long! I was very afraid and ran to call for help! Eventually the police came and asked many questions! The sergeant told me that the night before, they had found a female torso washed up on the beach! My wife works in the hospital and the pathologist said that the head and body matched *exactly!*'

I don't know whether I translated his story correctly but it sounded like an urban myth to me. I forgot all about it until a few days ago when I was reading this catalogue.

Anyway, I came back to England eventually to face the music. On the plane I read that book one last time. It seemed like the ending had changed again and I still can't recall the title.

They stopped him at Customs as they always do and went through the passport thing. The guy said, 'What exactly do you grow as a gardener?'

He said, 'Well, I grow Mandrake plants, mainly for export.'

'You mean the *Hanged Man Flower*, otherwise known as the *Devil's Apple*?'

The Customs guy gave him one of those long looks and said, 'Would you mind opening your bags sir?'

Good question.



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GOLDFISH MEMOIRS & THE THINK TANK

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'Who are you?' said the doctor.

It was a good question but by now he was beginning to tire of these sessions which always ended the same way. 'Well these days, I suppose I would think of myself as a gardener.'

'Good – very good', said the doctor. 'We're making progress. A gardener. Yes. Agriculture is a very noble profession these days.'

'I used to be an artist but I'm over that now.'

'Good – very good. Same time next week? . . . And don't forget to keep writing that diary.'

WEDNESDAY JUNE 16

You know how it is when you're going through immigration after a long flight. The way the officials study your passport and then look into your face like you remind them of the country's most wanted. And they say, 'Just what exactly do you *do* as an *artist*?' Good question.

I forget precisely what was going on around that time but the thing is, everything started to get out of hand. So I took the first plane to a hot climate. It was a *foreign* country – I mean being English, I couldn't speak the language of course but that was OK by me.

I rented a cabin by the ocean and spent my days on the beach, reading the same book over and over. It was a short book but every time the ending seemed different. I remember that it was some kind of autobiographical novel but the title escapes me now. My memory is not what it used to be. I worry sometimes about Alzheimer's – especially because my mother used to cook everything in aluminium pans. They were very trendy in the 50s I believe, but now we know better – and cast iron is really the thing to use if you want to be up to the mark.

OPPOSITE: Goldfish Memoirs and the Think Tank, video installation and mixed media, colour, 1993 (camera, Ken Slater; music Nigel Collier), installed in the CWS Warehouse

