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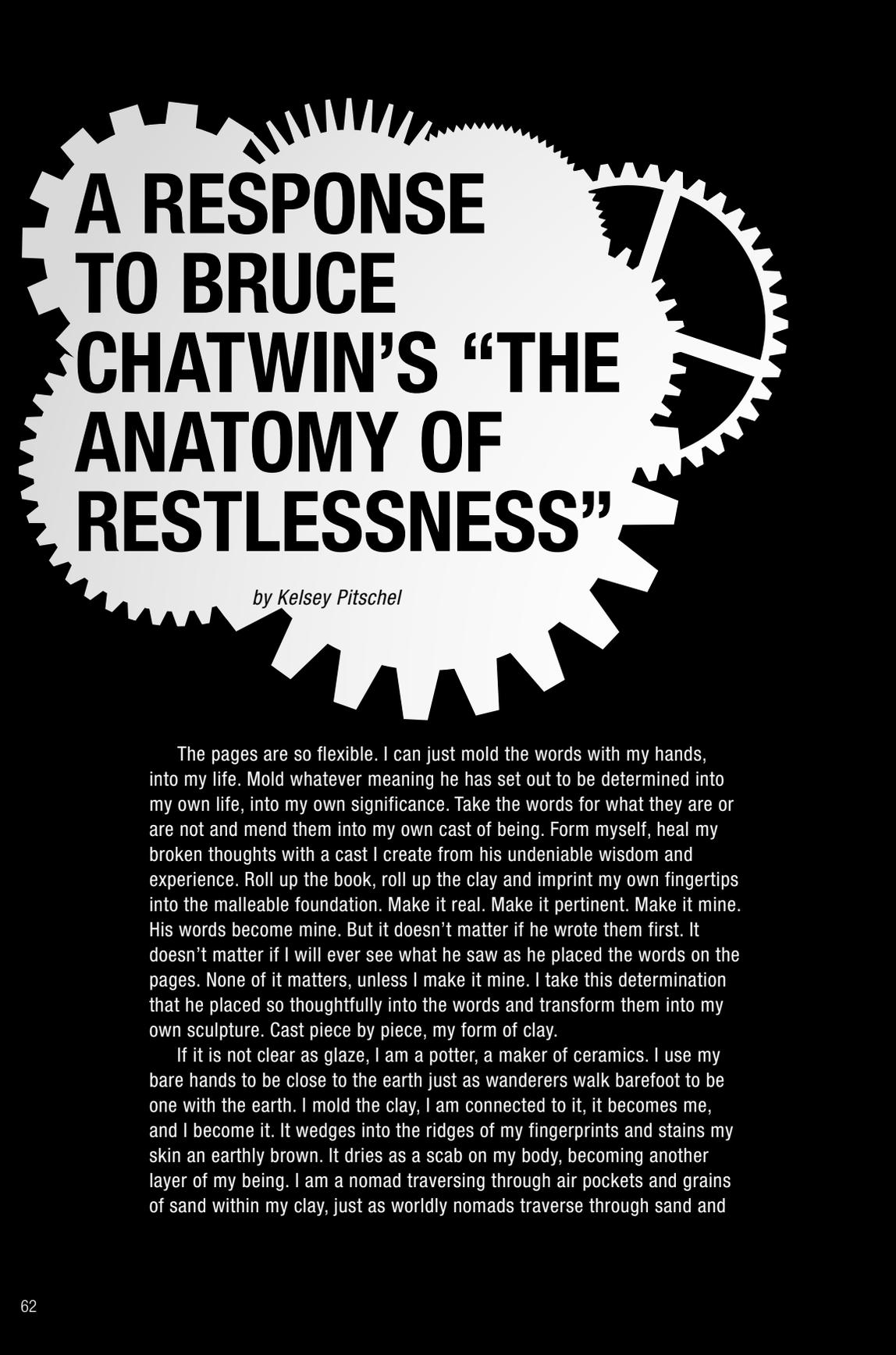
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A RESPONSE TO BRUCE CHATWIN'S "THE ANATOMY OF RESTLESSNESS"

by Kelsey Pitschel

The pages are so flexible. I can just mold the words with my hands, into my life. Mold whatever meaning he has set out to be determined into my own life, into my own significance. Take the words for what they are or are not and mend them into my own cast of being. Form myself, heal my broken thoughts with a cast I create from his undeniable wisdom and experience. Roll up the book, roll up the clay and imprint my own fingertips into the malleable foundation. Make it real. Make it pertinent. Make it mine. His words become mine. But it doesn't matter if he wrote them first. It doesn't matter if I will ever see what he saw as he placed the words on the pages. None of it matters, unless I make it mine. I take this determination that he placed so thoughtfully into the words and transform them into my own sculpture. Cast piece by piece, my form of clay.

If it is not clear as glaze, I am a potter, a maker of ceramics. I use my bare hands to be close to the earth just as wanderers walk barefoot to be one with the earth. I mold the clay, I am connected to it, it becomes me, and I become it. It wedges into the ridges of my fingerprints and stains my skin an earthly brown. It dries as a scab on my body, becoming another layer of my being. I am a nomad traversing through air pockets and grains of sand within my clay, just as worldly nomads traverse through sand and

storm to endure their pilgrimages. To travel the world is to gather the dirt and mud to create the clay I will then mold. The means of understanding a pilgrimage in relation to my self is the same as molding the clay into another form or, as Chatwin writes, "Travel does not merely broaden the mind. It makes the mind" (101). The Creation of earth is the same as the Creation of self.

My movements are as cyclical as the potter's wheel itself: one revolution to fettle the form and another to solidify the symmetry, just as revolution in man is a form of cyclical identity adaptation, the fight to belong to one's own name and cause. "When a revolutionary hijacker says, 'I'm married to the Revolution,' he means it. For Revolution is a liberating god, the Dionysus of our age. It is a cure for melancholy. Revolution is the Way to Freedom, even if the end result is greater servitude" (104). And so man serves for his new nation, nomad serves his seasonal land he follows, and I serve the project I am wholeheartedly pursuing.

I am often asked where my inspiration comes from. It is as elusive and footloose as the wanderer himself. It ambles across the landscape, tumbles over the rolling hills in search of an artist. Ideas live in the most natural of places, giving themselves to be materialized when they find an artist to be as wayfaring as the idea itself. And so when asked about my creative life and the way it is guided, I answer in the same manner Li Po did in response to cathartic journeys: "You asked me what is my reason for lodging in the grey hills: I smiled but made no reply for my thoughts were idling on their own; like the flowers of the peach tree, they had sauntered off to other climes, to other lands that are not of the world of men'" (106).

Others who nurture this creative process as much as I do are Axel Munthe, Baron Jaques Adelsward-Fersen and Curzio Malaparte, writers who, as Chatwin states, "were writers of the self-dramatizing variety. All had a strong dose of Nordic sensibility. And all sought to expand their personalities in architecture" (151). More simply, these men were creative men. They created and understood the fundamentals of art; Munthe explains it well when he claims his acuity of man in respect to expression: "It was built by me on the principle that the soul needs more room than the body" (158). The human being needs more than his physical self to define his self. And in forms of creativity, like my own, artists seek expression in every possible way. It is the quest to see myself outside myself, to recognize all that I am in ways that may not be entirely my own, but external reminders that I am alive in the world around me. As opposed to placing myself in the domain of another, because "people are never reliable. Instead one should surround oneself with things, for they never let you down" (172). This judgment is a simple rebuttal to those who question my admiration and ardor of art.

Of the need for external inspiration, Chatwin writes:

In one of his gloomier moments Pascal said that all man's unhappiness stemmed from a single cause, his inability to remain quietly in a room... Diversion. Distraction. Fantasy. Change of fashion, food, love and landscape. We need them as the air we breathe. Without change our brains and bodies rot. The man who sits quietly in a shuttered room is likely to be mad, tortured by hallucinations and introspection... We spend far too much time in shuttered rooms. (100)

So we should avert our gaze, we should look out onto the world of endless inspiration, for if we spend too much time in our closed room, we only look upon ourselves. Only so many things can be created solely from the self, if any. And whilst we peer into the cavernous hollows of our fragile beings, we notice the cracks and stains left by the carvings of our continuously coiling restlessness. Our eyes adjust to the dark and our ears collect the vibrations of our thoughts we wouldn't otherwise hear. And so it becomes obvious, that we were never meant to know this side of us. Even in search of inspiration the depths of one's self are precarious. I, too, fear what I do not know about myself.

If I were to be enclosed in a room without my clay or means of artistic expression, I would default back to unhealthy ways of introspection. I would sink into the darkness of my undefined self, and wait for the glorious moment when my palms would feel the clay adhering to my skin. I would long for the freedom of exploring, in my case, the world of pottery—in any case, the world itself. My toe would tap the floor and my gaze would narrow to nearsightedness. A nomad's feet would have nowhere to tread as my hands would have nothing to mold.

And with all this time filled with creating, I have filled space to match. Other intellectuals deem this disastrous, with possession clouding our potential, including Chatwin: "And do we not all long to throw down our altars and rid ourselves of our possessions? Do we not gaze coldly at our clutter and say, 'If these objects express my personality, then I hate my personality'" (114). But this seems unsettling to me, considering I've spent my whole life creating these "things." The creations though, my creations, are pieces now breathing worldly air that were previously made stale within my mind. And even if the Ancient Israelites deem this form of possession unworthy of the simplistic lifestyle they favor, then so be it. I have the power to find myself in all places, even other than myself. I am often faced with the question, "Why are man's real treasures useless?" (171). But I gaze at my "treasures" of arduous art and say, if life is based on utility, than why do we fill our days with frivolities like we fill our shelves with things? If our reverent works of art are so useless and detrimental to our wandersome beings, how can we so easily waste time? Are not the patterns of our

footfalls and etchings of our walking sticks a trace of our artistic expression? Isn't everything about us a form of ultimate utterance?

I want to become a great potter, to create things as beautiful as Meissen porcelain. But I have yet to commit myself more fully. I am aware of my closeness to my creations, and the focus of my efforts to devote myself to beauty. But I am beginning to turn off the spotlight and live within the floodlights, the infinite horizon. I am becoming increasingly nomadic in my metaphysical world view. The focus is not the object I insert myself into, but the absence of focus. It is proven that to walk a pilgrimage, with no boundaries, and with no spotlight there is less a chance of error to hinder farsighted epiphanies. Catharsis is not limited to the textbook definition of Nomadicism. It can reach and stretch and coat the entire life of a being. Drip paint above a ball of clay, and soon the entire sphere will be swallowed with pigment. And just like the ever-extending horizons of the wanderer, I realize that I am everything about me. My self lies under my being, around it, above it, and within it. The shadows inside the vase I'm shaping shape me. I melt into the rhythm of the whirring and buzzing potter's wheel. The grains of sand and dust collect under my fingernails and in the crevices of my mind.

And this gathering of self is not in the possessor's sense of selfishness; this is an awareness of dimensionally inward and outward effects. I touch the loop tool and the whole act, the whole surrounding environment, the tool itself, my hand, the space between the two, all become my being. And when I think of it this way, all parts becoming me, I am no longer scared, no longer cautious of the final project or end result. My entire life, and all that I have created, is the end result.

Work Cited

Chatwin, Bruce. *The Anatomy of Restlessness*. New York, New York: Penguin Books, 1996. Print.