

MAO

by Kyle Hemmings

I did not conceive the tilting trees or the people with white ashen lives, left to stand alone, crumble without a garage sale of useful parts. A girl who mimicked the inner glow of jackdaw babies said *Die with me*. I left her in the silence, a morning entwined with the arms of lovers about to swallow a poison made from Gerbera daisies. I kept seeing a girl from the roots of a dream about Peru. I felt Spanish moss in my bed. My nights were sticky--I so wanted to believe. I weaved the purling and shift of her voice. She was as distant as Mao, someone I never met, but whom everyone carried in their eyes, red with long-term memories, their fears of cramped space, swift invasions under the stars. Trying to fit China in a room. Someone once said emptiness is an illusion that leaves you "hanging" in space. Was I supposed to laugh? A waif from a traveling circus took my money and left me stranded with obsolete visions of the Far East. There were times, I swear, in the middle of the day, perhaps, or in the knot of a failed noose, when I believed there was someone other than me with mainland need.

