

# LETTER TO A DESIRABLE ALIEN



*Tom French*

*for Anne Kennedy*

Days before you're due to go away  
Friday's mail brings news—firstly, from the USA,  
Ventura Boulevard, CA., of a Green Card Lottery,  
filled with tips to skip the pitfalls that disqualify;  
and good news from your household in the west—  
the rub of the relic in St Michan's must have worked—  
the cat-scan showed up clear, so you are burst-  
ing with health, hoping to live to a great age like  
an ox, enclosing a xerox from *The Irish Times*

on the arrival, 60 years ago today, of Antonin Artaud  
starting a dander through the fledgling state at Cobh,  
intent on saving souls "*avec son Canne de St Patrick*"  
(The Bachall Isu, for all the world, the knotty stick  
the Saviour laid about him like a cudgel with to stunt  
Satan), and winding up on Aran in the heel of the hunt,  
a *duine le Dia* of the avant-garde, without a visa,  
holed up in an outhouse at Dún Aengus, hope *in absentia*,  
the fort all his, a mythomaniac Jesus in a beret—

And out around the borders of the sheet I see  
your photocopied hands, creased from keeping creases  
from the page, the heart line and the life line  
in your palm so clear I hear your big rings clink  
against the plate of xerox glass in the Buddhist hush  
of your stronghold on Augustine Street, unfussed,  
where I met you last, resting between readings,  
drunk on books and friends who love regal-  
ing you in cafés over coffee with their *scéalts*.

You thought you'd been immune to the charms  
of the uncrowned queen of hearts who came to harm  
in an underpass in France last week, unsuccumbing  
to "her smile stretching from London to Ballymun",  
the day of her wedding, when even in the hospital  
you couldn't hear yourself think for "*The bells, the bells!*";

And then last Sunday, in your kitchen at 6 a.m.,  
the irony and the waste, too numb to take it in—  
the young girls burned to death in Dublin, a hit-

and-run, the family ripped to bits in Moycullen,  
a neighbour praying for a transplant for her son,  
how, looking down from above, the good God  
sees us all as equal, but Death sits on his tod  
on a hard chair in a pink jumper in the day-  
room, chain-smoking, sizing us all up, the ultimate  
cure in poetry for the *faux naïf*. But good news too  
of a new arrival—Henry Lewis Greenblatt, 9lbs 30zs,  
blessed with long musician's fingers, lungs like Caruso's;

You end, post scriptum, writing Miles last week  
rescued a kitten from a litter bin, and is weaning  
it back to gambolling health, implying it is these piddling  
acts of kindness we perpetrate that stand in the end,  
that are, in fact, the outright point of the whole charade.  
I am grateful for the time you take to write to me today  
and think of you tonight in Ballinfoyle, the range  
well stocked and the coffee on, composed on your settee  
for a late date with the BBC, or reading poetry,

aware that fate deals far worse hands than these  
nights spent in solitary with Bartley. But the weeks  
you are away there is no knowing what the weather  
has in store, so I hope this small reminder  
comes in time, to bring with you to the great United States  
the umbrella that I glimpsed you with in Kirwan's Lane,  
like one of those ghost soldiers in Kurosawa's *Dreams*,  
ambling between the rebuilt medieval walls, wearing  
sunflower yellow in defiance of the weather, a far cry

from standard issue, swapping stories in the aftermath  
of battle—Eurydice in the tunnel, Aeneas in Seattle—  
too full of your own singing to be following the leader,  
bearing it like a staff to deliver “a few taps of the persuader”  
to your devils massing, or a branch ripped from an orange tree  
in passing, to test the ground with and establish footing, or just  
have

handy, a relic no less blessed for being snapped up for a song,  
a knock-down in the early morning market, a *canne*  
to put your hand to in your time away, because even  
in your Sunshine State, dear friend, it sometimes rains.