

Special Effects of the Mind

I am in Tijuana in the alternative clinic
pacing pale green corridors outside an open door
The gaunt body beckons by knocking on the headboard
Afraid the dream is ending, I ignore the desperate call

I tuck my legs beneath me on two cold rusty chairs
that won't come unstuck like my fingers at my ears
blocking the ringing, the tremor in my cells
the red phone imprinted like a poster in my head

I see nothing, I hear nothing
I know nothing anymore
I am only here to assist that man
behind the gaping door

Uncle! Have you forgotten already?
a voice reprimands me from within
First names only, otherwise you age the other
unnecessarily, when they're already at an early end

Would you prefer that I call him doctor, Doctor?
more annoyed than amused since he's a doctor, too
Director, he tells me, to use on himself
as the patients do in his care

Tijuana. I am in an low-budget Western
where the town is riddled with destruction and disease
Called to serve as one of few spectators
of the final scene in which my uncle stars

now scheduled to take place in a day or two
word sent that I was needed SOON!
Why? Since I could cry on command?
I hurry there. That same night I weep

They call it The House of Hope
Where some experimental filmmaker
tries his hand at a happy ending
The prospect is dismal in light of previous results

The crew in pastel dresses speaks no English
Instead they smile at the ever-changing, all-male cast
tired of their tragic roles
to which they're tied for life

Silence! SILENCE!! The scene must begin
I interrupt: Are you sure you wanted aqua walls
And can't you shoo the children and the chickens
from the windows as you shoot?

And most of all, the star looks sick enough to die
Makeup! I forget, I am no longer in standard Dreamland
but in its dirty sandbox where camouflage can come
in any shade of blue and count as reality's rites

Shallow breaths. My uncle pulls in musty, desert air
in raspy gasps. For the first time in the six months
that I've known him well, I see the wounds of warfare
scattered 'cross the bonedry leather wasteland

I see the halo form above the balding, shaven head
This is a film about angels!
The wings sprout forth from bruised blue buds
His skin as gray as the gathering clouds

The townspeople assemble, mainly women
since the other men are dead
Amongst them one who prompts, Let go!
so that only Richard will hear

The director-doctor whispers: Cut!
A non-English-speaking nurse approaches,
puts her arm around me gently, mutters softly
And oddly enough, I understand

Understand enough to know
he's gone, passed on, this gentle host of AIDS
whose sister and brother who carried him home, cremated
it was they who recounted the end