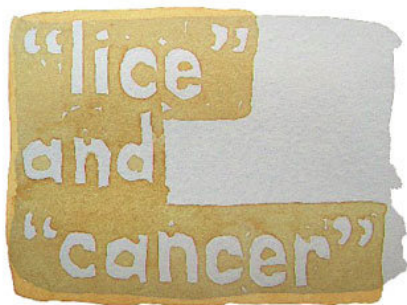


Story for performance #229  
webcast from Sydney at 07:58PM, 04 Feb 06



Source: Ed O'Loughlin, 'Under the gun in Gaza', *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 04/02/06.

Tags: [disease](#), [disenchantment](#), [home](#), [nostalgia](#)  
Writer/s: [Clare Grant](#)

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A man, very far away, calls his neighbours 'lice', calls his neighbours 'cancer'. Incongruous maybe, but equally 'bad'—attacking from without and within.

From one point of view, as he looks out at his world, he conjures walls against un-care, destitution, the edge of horror, of being 'eaten' from the outside, crawled on by the invisible, becoming a pariah, cast out from all he knows. As he feels the tell-tale itch of wrong association, he wonders: 'Where have I been? Who have I been with? Shit.' He starts to withdraw himself from people, go to any length to hide this thing he has got, these ideas he has had—at some point, he fears, he might be viciously thrust aside by other people, once they know, once the invisible begins to show up.

He must be very much afraid. He looks at his land and he must feel himself very tiny-tip-toed on the edge, about to fall off a tall white-anted plinth with surging, building flows of the new tide at its feet, that at any moment, inevitably, will snap his rotting, precarious perch.

And, from another point of view, that cancer he senses. Invisible. All the damage, contagion, spreading on the inside, allowing him a form of care perhaps, but leaving him still so deeply alone. He doesn't want to go there, taken over by an invisible death that has come upon him from right within his body, by stealth. The spreading on the inside. How can he defend himself and his world from that?

Over there, where he is, why shouldn't he be very afraid?

We sit at our oasis, over here, and I hear echoes of his voice. I hear a man here, a woman there say: They are coming, they say, for sure. The lice will get us, that cancer will take us by surprise. They invent monsters still, surrounded as we are, so to speak, by empty land and open sea.

I can't believe in this invasion myself. I can't imagine it. I can't imagine what he might feel that faraway man, his body so under siege from within and without, in the real world. I meet no real impediments in my journey to my job, there is a steady income coming in these days, even some very exciting days at my work from time to time, some world-opening moments with old friends, deepening histories with neighbour-acquaintances—in

spite of myself maybe, in some unexpected way I have inadvertently actually built a village around myself over the years. A gentle bulwark, its form traced from the template of the Brigadoon world my seven-year-old self longed for—the romantic village of wide-skirted women and woolley-capped young men all somehow dancing in a dance of the same steps, along their street and past all the houses, as if the words of their songs just popped out of their mouths in a spontaneous communal knowing, each new idea following the last in a silvery rush of joyful discovery, skipping along together.

That is not, to be sure, where I live. Though when a tv image sparks a memory of the dream, I notice with quickly concealed shame, that my eyes prickle with the pain of loss of this memory of a non-existent place. And I like the accumulating jokes with the fruiterer, the Chinese woman in the corner shop who gave me her own spring onions one day for my recipe, watching the strange boy who has walked the neighbourhood deep inside his own jerking conversations for coming on to a couple of decades now. Can it still be the same dog he walks?

Below my window I can sometimes hear the echo of the faraway man's voice. I hear people talk about it, all the time, this creeping attack that sits on our polished doorstep, and all the while they continue, going about their quiet days in our quiet world—albeit interrupted sometimes, by the edgy piercing barking of dogs supposedly at play, the roar of technology's engines filling the skies. And sometimes strange voices erupt in the silence of the night streets floating in through the summer's open window—an argument, a strange shrill voice. A woman? A man? Hard to tell through the high-pitched rhythms of unintelligible sounds.

Meanwhile, the wind moves all the trees softly and there's a soft/rich whirl of the ever-so-quiet modern car motor gliding a family, maybe, maybe on a little jaunt, perhaps on an errand to the shops or a longer journey, an adventure out of town perhaps, or a visit to the relatives far away.

Nothing to stop them from doing that here. Yet.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Clare Grant.*