

Kevin Irie

IN A FOREIGN TONGUE (OLD WORLD VISIT)

English is sugar;
it rots the teeth
of all these children
hungry for more,
who sweeten their lives
on Hollywood films
and know each star at night on TV.

You see it each time
you return for a visit;
these children schooled
to recite movie titles
in the proper order
of every sequel
like some foreign alphabet
learned by heart,

these children fluent
in Billboard pop
who think those sugar
concoctions of music
hold substance enough
for a wage and a living
to give them their daily bread overseas.

They've already seen the photos and letters
sent back home
in their native tongue
that speak of cars and houses and cities,
all giving voice
to the dream of the good life
broadcast to them
from American shores.

And even the grown-ups
stuff these young
with choice imported English phrases
crammed in the mouth
to keep their offspring
bred for a market
beyond these borders.

Already they mention the dwindling jobs,
the limited prospects,
as if the future
is a dying language,
as if no words
existed in English
to translate the same frustration,
despair,

as if discontent
is a worm in the stomach
to be lured up
and finally expelled for good
by English
laid on the tongue
like candy.