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Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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MAY 2017

ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE

Emma Barone

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Live Encounters is a not-for-profit free online magazine that was founded in 2009 in Bali, Indonesia. It showcases some of the best writing from around the world. Civil and human rights activists, animal rights activists, poets, writers, journalists, social workers and more have contributed their time and knowledge for the benefit of the readers of the magazine.

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excerpt from The Conference of the Birds
translated by poet Sholeh Wolpé

Thomas McCarthy was born in Co. Waterford in 1954 and educated at University College Cork. He has published *The First Convention* (1978), *The Lost Province* (1996) and *Merchant Prince* (2005) as well as a number of other collections. He has won the Patrick Kavanagh Award, the Alice Hunt Bartlett Prize and the O'Shaughnessy Prize for Poetry. He worked for many years at Cork City Libraries, retiring in 2014 to write fulltime. He is a member of Aosdana. His collection, *Pandemonium*, will be published by Carcanet Press in November.



HER RETROSPECTIVE

In truth I have always want to ask her why she abandoned
Her life in art. To me it seems tragic, how a talent
That placed etchings before us, etchings as fine
As anything birdlike by Morris Graves or dog-like
In the manner of Lucian Freud; how such a woman
Could become indifferent to her great gifts: she is a mystery
To anyone for whom art is difficult. Her husband
Who is neither openly proud of her, nor discouraging,
Would nervously fix a complicated drink for me, or,
Worse still, fix me in his cold gaze, as if to ask:
Why are you so interested in my wife's unused talent,
What business is it of yours? Mister, you are too late

In the life of her work; and even if you'd come early
Into her studio you'd never have been chosen. His
Arrogance is as vain as her long silence, it says
She abandoned art not because something died within,
But because life has revealed itself. Their inner
Annoyance, a thing intimate and personal like a marriage,
Has created an atmosphere; keeping us out, keeping art in.

COUNTER-MANNERISM AND EARLY BAROQUE

If what I love is my true inheritance then I inherit this
Tremendous counter-point, our two lives running parallel
On a quiet Sunday before the year folds into Christmas,
Before we contemplate together Matteo Rosselli's *St. Paul*

In Damascus, or this truly divine canvas of the Archangel
Michael looking like a pampered youth of Florence
With his mysterious grin. There's half of Italy in this catalogue
Where Matteo rests, now, for ten thousand euro –

As if a door to love could be bought that cheaply. It is,
Quite simply, a cathedral, this love; it is entered on tiptoe
Like the cloister of the Basilica della Santissima Annunziata
Or an *Adoration of the Magi* at the church of Montevarchi.

On tiptoe I reject these distortions of High Mannerism,
And I refute, absolutely, any partial return to God
That art might promise in its chiaroscuro and charisms.
But something of Rosselli's simplicity, his grey mood

In plain tunic, his simple buttons, what looks like an unstarched
Collar – so strange in Florence – and a statement, perhaps,
Of the simple heart of an artisan; something of his rich
Clarity reaches us across the centuries. Love escapes

From its Roman mannerism to declare itself, so that as we sprint
Like exiles of the Waldense across the marbled endpaper
Of the year, we see the parallels between art and attachment –
How such an art declares love's clarity, and its formal order.

Dr Robyn Rowland AO is an Irish-Australian citizen living in Australia and Ireland. Her poetry appears in national and international journals and in over 40 anthologies, including seven *Best Australian Poems*. Of her 9 books, two were published in 2015: *Line of Drift*, Doire Press, Galway, Ireland, and her bilingual *This Intimate War Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915*, Turkish translations by Mehmet Ali Çelikel, Five Islands Press - www.fiveislandspress.com and Bilge Kultur Sanat, Turkey.



From the sequence *Family Catalogue*

JOSEPH LAMBERT

23 February 1886

There was a hush. Lace stilled at the window ajar.
His breath caught, finally. Night, and I swear
I heard the pain of a curlew's cry
piercing its way up from Cork harbour,
renting the curtain aside with its long beak.

But I'm tired. Three months of his coughing blood,
crimson everywhere. And him, always telling me
we'd be all right. The pension fund.
I watched it rise from him – life – pass by me,
brush lightly my bare arm, a sigh of caress and it was gone.

John at twenty-two has to inform another death.
And William only fourteen. Robert seems unsteady but
then how could they be unscarred by all this loss. We'll send word
to his family. Good to see them but a long journey from Laois
if they make it. I can't bear the thought of all the planning.

'Police pensioner' they will write on the death form.
Not – a man who remade so much hardness into funny tales
we'd forget ourselves for moments, the empty places.
Not – a man who did his job not always believing it was right.
Not – a man to be missed, who never struck his wife.

All the man I ever wanted. A strength of will to match
my own, good company talking politics and change,
a way with him that made the children unafraid of
all kinds of darkness, those blue eyes that stirred me
these many years, and his body wool-warm along me at night.

Oh love, I'll take your cooling hand,
trail your fingers stiffening along my breasts
till they run up to the collar bone you loved to kiss
tonguing memory into my skin, the shine and sing of it.
Oh friend, husband, I feel the defeat of death in me.



© Robyn Rowland

SEVEN AND THE COOK

Retreat at Sangsurya

Mindful eating turns a simple meal into a spiritual experience ... food is a gift of the earth, the sky, numerous living beings, and much hard and loving work. - Thich Nhat Hanh

One creates percussion
chopping deep then high,
whipping the cream by hand
tapping the side of the bowl,
pounding spices.

Two relishes the splay of colour.
Beans, green as grass newly filled with rain,
capsicum, red as bougainvillea flowering
beside the meditation hall,
avocadoes creamy as custard, tinged lime.

Three peels back layers of onion,
rubs dirt off potatoes,
scrapes skin from sweet potato,
chops off the hide of pumpkin,
polishes aubergine purple as pomegranate.

Four sorts bitter greens –
sorrel, dandelion, endive –
leaves that leave no doubt
stinging on the tongue, but when mixed
with others, their nature improves.

Five enables sweetness,
squeezing oranges,
melting slabs of dark chocolate
to make a cake fit for the table
of the Four Divine Abodes.

Six finds complexity
in the silver labyrinth of red cabbage,
beetroot's white almost-invisible capillaries
tearing apart the contrast in
lettuce leaves both white and green.

Seven moves back and forth, assisting,
washing, her attention on shape –
the roundness of apples, the long fresh-seeded
thrust of cucumber, separated eggs floating
round as apricot moons in their translucent universe.

Each day the perfume of pears,
tantalising crushed rind of orange,
aromatic lemongrass, light-headed beside
erotic mint, is crushed into our skins,
carried away with us into our silence.

Everything is done in communion,
peace with attention. Outside, the ocean,
trees conversing in a light wind,
whip-birds making a call that takes two.
Joy is here, to be off our knees in kitchen work

worshipping in willing servitude
our great chef who with kind words,
puts the jigsaw into place, an ecstasy of taste.
Yes – it takes all this mindfulness, the Seven,
and Merdita, our cook, to feed us fully.



© Robyn Rowland

Maria Wallace was born in Catalonia, lived in Chile for ten years and later settled in Dublin. She has won many national and international poetry prizes, amongst them The Sunday Tribune Hennessy Literary Awards, 2006. Her work has been published in Ireland, England Italy, Australia and Catalonia. In 1996 she founded Virginia House Creative Writers and has edited four anthologies of their work. She has published two bilingual poetry collections (English - Catalan). She judges The Jonathan Swift Awards.



WHERE I WAS BORN

My family is spread out all over the world,
in different countries,
above, below,
under the soil,
in poems, in pictures.

The trees outside
are getting ready
for their summer display of figs,
almonds, walnuts and apples,
but they don't recognise me anymore
as all the echoes are too distant
to be heard or understood,
and my days here are heaped under
other peoples' days.

I am a stranger in the house
where I was born.

PARTICLES OF THOUGHT

His smile reminds me
of something
I no longer remember;
and I feel lost,
float in the infinite
skies of mind
trying to connect with
particles of thought
that might still carry
the code
of what I no longer remember.

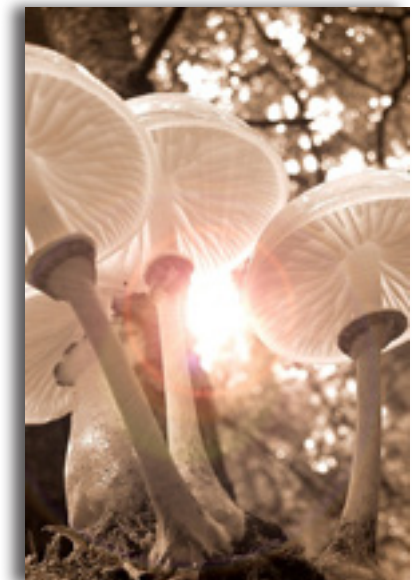
LIQUID BREATH

The youthful green of spring
was long gone.
She raked the leaves from the lawn
to the further corner of the garden,
piled them under the naked rowan tree.

In the cold, dimming light,
she heard a calling in the mist
creeping from the lake,
in the insistent swish
of wavelets on the shore.

She had heard it before, but today
understood the words,
and in her understanding
glimpsed a figure;

sure it was him risen from the water,
she walked into it.
Her steps never faltered
till her breath became
liquid like his breath.



M. L. Williams is author of *Other Medicines* and co-editor of *How Much Earth: The Fresno Poets*. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in many journals and anthologies, including most recently *Western Humanities Review*, *Miramar*, *The Journal of Florida Studies*, *The Cortland Review*, *Stone*, *River*, *Sky*, and *Clash by Night*. He teaches creative writing and contemporary literature at Valdosta State University.

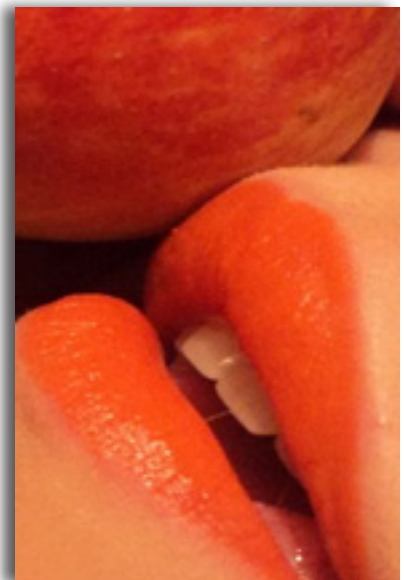


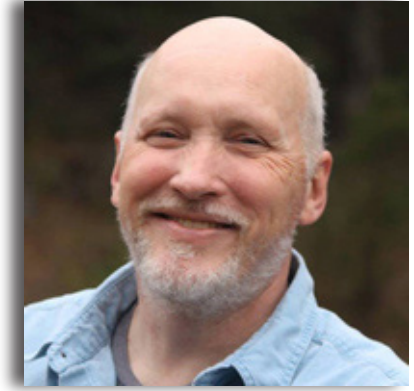
SIREN

That one kid in the neighborhood,
straight black hair, bangs, raspy
voice, wide-set eyes, the one who
everyone hated for no reason,
for old clothes, for lice, dead
lawn, wanting to fit in and not
fitting in, for having a boy's
name and dirty knees, for crying
loud when we called her ugly,
who had theories about why
we hated her, *because I'm poor*
was her theory when I talked to her
when she said she was moving,
when I didn't call her stupid okie
(we were all okies) and listened,
and I asked her if she had climbed
the ladder in her back yard
past the locks to the top
of the paste-yellow, cold-war
air-raid siren that I would stare at
in wonder from my back yard
and she smiled, "Yes," and that's
all she said about it, then said
where she was going
and after that I missed her.

KISSING KURT

On a dare, I kissed
another boy full
on the lips.
Ewww! said
a girl, twisting
her fake taffeta skirt.
And that was all.
The ball skipped
through the four-
square court.
Kids wound up,
threw fists
at the tether
ball winding
the tall pole.
They tossed marks
for hopscotch
on hot asphalt.
They leaped.





Stephen Haven is the author of *The Last Sacred Place in North America* (2012), selected by T.R. Hummer as winner of the New American Press Poetry Prize. He has published two previous collections of poetry, *Dust and Bread* (Turning Point, 2008), for which he was named 2009 Ohio Poet of the Year, and *The Long Silence of the Mohawk Carpet Smokestacks* (University of New Mexico/West End Press, 2004). He is Director of the Lesley University MFA Program in Creative Writing, in Cambridge, MA.

WHEELBARROW

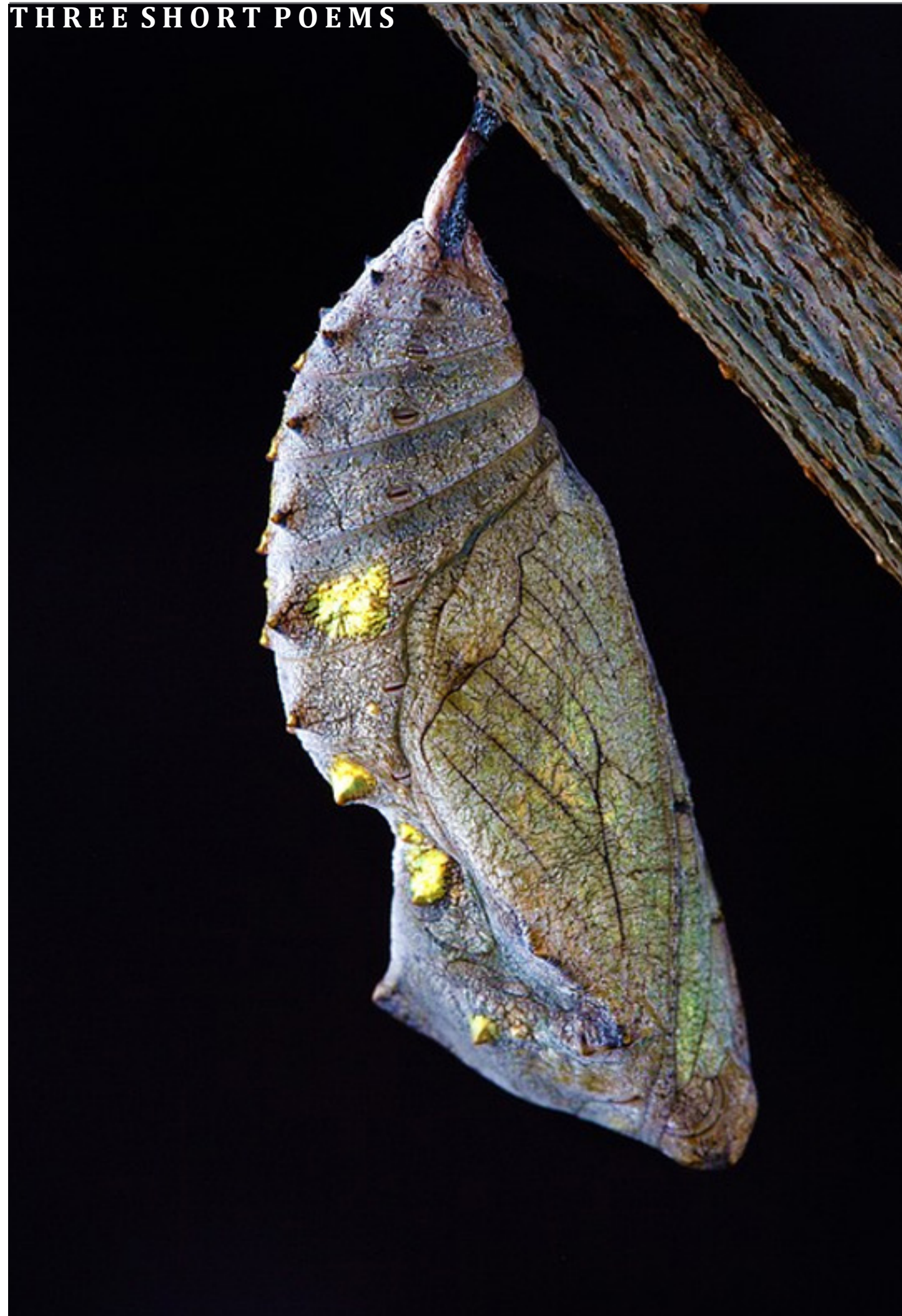
This parched pterodactyl
Tucked wings extended backward
Stoops at a drainage ditch
In Ashland, Ohio.

UPSTATE NEW YORK HYMN

How could I ever, ever forget
The spring-drunk Chuctanunda
Bleeding, bleeding from the neck,
Its bright dye in that slow gravitas,
The Mohawk's resurrected dark.

HOLIDAY

"Now we welcome the New Year
Full of things that have never been..."
That's what Rilke says, the chrysalis
Where we live, everything new
Already old, waking to some new name
Or form, even in the shape it had before.



Poet, writer and artist Greta Sykes has published her work in many anthologies. She is a member of London Voices Poetry Group and also produces art work for them. Her new volume of poetry called 'The Shipping News and Other Poems' came out in August 2016. The German translation of her book 'Under charred skies' has now been published in Germany under the title 'Unter verbranntem Himmel' by Eulenspiegel Verlag. She is the chair of the Socialist History Society and has organised joint poetry events for them at the Poetry Café. She is a trained child psychologist and has taught at the Institute of Education, London University, where she is now an associate researcher. Her Particular focus is now on women's emancipation and antiquity. *Twitter: g4gaia. Facebook.com/greta.sykes. German Wikipedia: Greta Sykes.*



SAPPHO MOON

Fennel stems emerald green
 Glisten in her light,
 Tonight she is so near and urgent,
 Holds her rounded moon cheek
 Close to my garden
 a tender glow
 Like an embrace
 envelops
 the shapes of plants:
 pennisetum flowers golden brushes
 Tickle my arm,
 Silvery artemisia
 Brush my leg.
 the stone bench beckons,
 a soft breeze nods the heads of dried up sunflowers,
 orange Chinese lanterns
 the yukka towers graphically
 into the darkening sky.
 Men call her beaver moon,
 But I prefer her Sappho moon,
 A promise of love and poetry
 Perhaps of peace.

GOOD DEATHS AND BAD DEATHS

Aleppo – town of bad deaths
 Town of rebel fighters fighting for freedom
 Western version,
 Aleppo – Assad's town, an army using civilians
 As human shields, humanitarian crisis
 Town of bad deaths,
 Aleppo – town of barrel bombs
 That kill freedom fighting rebels, Aleppo
 Bad town, bad deaths.

Mosul – town of good deaths,
 Town of US freedom army who
 Kill civilians in defence of freedom,
 collateral damage of civilian deaths
 are not a humanitarian crisis,
 Mosul - town of good bombs,
 That tyrannise grateful women, children
 For they bring Western war plans
 And betrayal,
 Mosul, good town, good deaths.



Hongri Yuan, born in China in 1962, is a poet and philosopher interested particularly in creation. Representative works include *Platinum City*, *Gold City*, *Golden Paradise*, *Gold Sun* and *Golden Giant*. His poetry has been published in the UK, USA, India, New Zealand, Canada and Nigeria.

Translated by Yuanbing Zhang.



THE CHARMING FIGURE

The moon, please lend your silver light to me
 I am going to paint a city of light in the sky
 Let humans see the smile of heaven
 An ancient city on the earth
 It is the city of cities,
 The prehistoric giants are the city's master, they speak the holy words
 Do not know the night and the pain, thousands of years,
 and tens of thousands of years
 Have no senility either, do not know the love and hate of the world
 Have never seen war, their bodies are flames
 Are amaranthine flowers forever, amaranthine phoenix
 Only your soul can see the charming figure once in a while

HE IS MY IMMORTAL SOUL

The eyes of the years are the maze of the stars
 In a huge hall
 I have seen the God of the gods
 He is smiling at me in heaven
 My thousand years in the world, is just his moment
 He is my immortal soul
 And the universe, transparent crystal ball, is in the palm of his hand



Azril is a Peruvian Agricultural Engineer and Sociologist. He has published extensively on issues of education (2013, 2015), Cultural Diversity, Anti-Racism, Cultures of Peace and Citizenship. Amongst his publications - 'Citizenship and National Identity in Latin America: The Persisting Salience of Race and Ethnicity' in Oommen (ed.), *Citizenship and National Identity: From Colonialism to Globalism*, 1997; *Ethnic Discrimination: Comparative Perspectives*, Uppsala Universitet: Research Report from the Department of Sociology, 1992; 2 ; *Ethnic Discrimination in Sweden: Basic Issues and Reflections*, Uppsala Universitet: Op. Cit. 1992: 53-69;

From Organism to Identity: The Road from Psychology to Social-Psychology. Towards an Epistemology of Self-Determination, University of Karlstad, Department of Social Sciences, Section of Communication, Working Paper 1994; 1. Ethnic Identity Responses of Mexican Americans to Ethnic Discrimination (Gothenburg, 1994), Quality of Working Life and Democratization in Latin America (EID, 1991). A poetry book "Refracciones Itinerantes" (Uppsala, 2010) - and currently in press with a second and enlarged edition, Fondo Editorial, UNALM, Perú (2017) In Press.



TANKAS

Stockholm Black Friday

Non-violence was
raped by violence in
Stockholm last Friday
An opera on Gandhi
turned into a requiem.

I watch birds, clouds and
dreams pass while sitting in
front of the kitchen
window someone sighs
and it goes through the window

HAIKU

Spring

You are the rain that
drops pearls and dreams
on my kitchen garden

Spring at last with us!
the cold wind blowing harshly
dancing leaves fly

Winter

As snows continues to fall
a dog joyfully jumps up
someone silently cries

To Sibelius' Vals Triste

So it happens that
grey days sadly intones
a mournful vals



Niall Cahir is a photographer, artist and writer. Based in Birr Co Offaly, born in Cork in 1966. His work is honest, deep and meaningful. Snap-shots of everyday life, thought provoking, with spiritual imagery, strong yet delicate in texture, just like life itself can be.



SURROUNDED

Sometimes ideas chase me hard
 They crowd me out
 I simply refuse to write them down
 For as long as I can stand
 And then
 ..I stand

And in that stillness, that quiet moment
 That embryonic, poetic note
 The one I just wrote down
 Stored away, to tease
 ..deep breath, and count to ten
 I am a poet, who writes with ease
 I am a writer once again

MOTHER MOON

Full Mother Moon, shine down on soon
 Dark corners of this Earth
 With liquid light, of silver might
 Drive all things to re-birth
 For tightened mind of all mankind
 Has bound her up in filth
 By sanctioned thought, a planet bought
 And riddled now with guilt
 How will you fare with trap and snare
 We've set for fellow man
 Show clear despair for shallow prayer
 Quench hungry flames we fan
 Bright lunar tint of mild green mint
 Shares universal goal
 Light of this kind leaves most men blind
 ..bar those of wisened soul

MIDNIGHT CALLER

By the time you will have read this
 I'll have come, and gone
 I will have touched you, upon
 Your left shoulder
 A breeze of gentle change
 Marking this, your time and date of birth
 And you, one year older
 One day closer, to the bosom of my Earth





Ian Watson was born in Belfast and lives in Bremen, Northern Germany. He writes and publishes in both German (mostly prose) and English (mostly poetry). His recent publications include two books of poetry and short prose - *Kurzpassspiel* (German) and *Riverbank City: A Bremen Canvas* – and his poetry collection *Granny's Interpreter* was published by Salmon Poetry in Ireland in 2016. A book of German prose, *Spielfelder – eine Fußballmigration*, also came out in 2016, with Edition Falkenberg. www.irishwriters-online.com/watson-ian

JUST A MINUTE

My word is fox and the quick brown one jumps over the lazy dog. His name is Qwerty and his German cousin - *der Fuchs* - is called Qwertz. I have seen them dead so often, splashed across the country roads. Once, coming home from Hamburg in the car, it was the red eye I saw first in the headlights. One time, on the bicycle with its faulty lamp, I was so close I couldn't stop, and thumped and skidded towards Sir Reynard as he skedaddled away. Two yards beside him was a hedgehog, playing dead. I lifted it and laid it in the hedge. A lout from a passing van sprayed me with beer and the empty can clattered somewhere a few seconds later. The bastards nearly ran over my bike. And now this graceful country gentleman is the new city rat.





Jim Meirose's work has appeared in numerous magazines and journals, including Calliope, [Offbeat/Quirky \(Journal of Exp. Fiction pub.\)](#), Permafrost, North Atlantic Review, Blueline, Witness, and Xavier Review, and has been nominated for several awards. His E-book "[Inferno](#)" is available from Amazon. Underground Voices. His novels, "[Mount Everest](#)" and "[Eli the Rat](#)", are available from Amazon. "Mount Everest" has been adapted to a play by a leading west coast playwright. www.jimmeirose.com

FRAGMENT I, OF SUNDAY DINNER WITH FATHER DWYER

So, the third rule seaman Skip forgot, was; always keep your belly full, to absorb the queasiness that creeps inside, grows like a ball of slimy worms, and drags you by the face to the side of the ship, to puke, puke, puke some more—Skip remembered the rule and dug into the hard barely edible expired prison food loaf they'd been gifted with, and he quietly relaxed. Under the gaps between jaw crushes and swallows, he again thanked God, in Father Dwyer's name that he was always on the sea. As he reduced the brown matter on his plate smaller the smaller with each and every bite, he felt his cares melt, and sink away, except for a deep grasping undertow in the black dark under his lowest reptile brain that he never ever heard, but that continuously kept telling him, I am in you and you no longer know who or what you are and I am deeply disturbed I don't like to be deeply disturbed something is different now there's something you know in the upper levels I can't see into that has changed everything; something large is different. Somehow you are confused, and no one has told me; what is different? See, somehow I sense you don't know if you are about to be born or if you are about to die, or somehow magically have split into being in both states at once. It's something like that, like—like remember that computer monitor they had in the office down Florida, years ago when you had not yet decided to give up life on land, you had that new job in that computer consulting office, using that fat wide 80's vintage IBM monitor, and it suddenly looked as though you or it or both had suddenly snapped crack into double vision; you were confused as I am confused, and all at once a hand came and slammed into the side of the monitor, and everything slapped clear again, and you looked to the left, and up, behind, and there stood one of the masters of the place, whose job it was to train you, Kent Dazey. He smiled, and he spoke quickly, saying, Hey, Skip my man, this monitor's on the blink; we called IBM and they sent out a suit and he came and looked and couldn't find why it goes all nutty looking like that, but said to just give it a good hard slap on the side when that happens, and that would always make it right. We said, well, that's kind of cheesy—how about we replace it with a new one?

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<https://pixabay.com/en/silver-gull-black-headed-gull-sea-631225/>

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The IBM suit, hearing this, smelled money in his eyes and told us how much that would cost. We scratched our ears, looked down, stepped back, and decided, to the deflation of the IBM guy who smelled this sale coming, to keep this one, thinking that a slap in the side was free, and no problem, as outside of that, the gigantic thing worked perfectly. The sale smelling IBM suit left abruptly, eager to get to the next client location where he could root in the leaves and the mulch and the dirt for the next sale attempt, taking his mysterious extremely heavy pitch black fat briefcase with him. So, you see, we're cheap here, we watch every penny. And he was right, you know Skip. Cheaper is always better—that was true, Skip, years ago, when you could still bear to live ashore. And it's still true after all these years, here out at sea. And it's been smooth sailing for you since, you got a job at sea finally, yes, but now, here today, I have to speak and say there is something different in you, way above me, that is quite unsettling—so since you are no more than a machine of flesh bone blood and general muck, atop which I just sit and man the controls, how 'bout we do what Kent Dazey recommended and slap ourselves silly on the side of our fat rocky head—go on! And Skip's partner Norman, sitting across, jumped his chair halfway back to the bulkhead and almost spat out his fully chewed sandwich, as Skip's hand came up like a gunshot, and slapped him as hard as it could on the side of Skip's head. The strike sounded awful, strange, damaging, yes; Norman feared an eardrum burst, or worse; Skip looked dazed, so dazed—Norman began to rise, speechless—and stepped around toward Skip to see what was wrong what had happened what was he thinking to cause this, but; Skip's eyes cleared, his face lost its stricken pallor, and he said, You know, Norman, I read a paper on the internet last night, that confirmed once more, my core belief, that we have a global crisis that calls for international cooperation to reduce emissions as rapidly as practical. Otherwise, the warming will continue, and it will be just Waterworld, just like that shitty movie, Waterworld, and you know what, fucker? I can't shitcan wait for that dream to some true. Now—

Norman was so relieved, so relieved, a tiny spot of liquid seeped into his underpants without his knowledge, as he said, Skip! You sound like the old Skip! Skip, why the hell have you been acting so weird?

Huh? What?

Weird!

Weird? How? What the hell are you talking about, Norman? You always ask such odd questions—you should talk about weird, you actually spent a long time thinking you were married and you had a pregnant wife, you even had me feeling sorry for you, but today—you tell me that's not true and was just in your head, and you are calling me weird? You're the weird one! Listen, hey—and what's more, I been—

Skip it, man! waved out Norman. Enough! Enough! Let's just be!

Skip? You said Skip? Hey—that's my name, laughed Skip; thou shalt not take my name in vain! How dare you, landsman, insult this future Godlike merman of the deep!

They exchanged shocked glances, that suddenly melted to smiles, and they sat and laughed for a while deep up from their smelly slimy bellies right out from their mouths, about what an odd day it had been so far. It has to be caused by being at sea so long. It had to be because every minute of every day was exactly the same aboard the Dakota Maru, with Sunday Dinner With Father Dwyer playing full blast on the flat screen TV hung from the back wall of the bridge, twenty four seven three hundred sixty five of episode after episode, and impossible to turn off, switch the channel, or lower the volume, because the actual TV on the wall had no controls, and the remote had been was thrown overboard years ago by a seaman who'd been at sea one minute too long on the very maiden voyage; but the company, when advised, decided a new remote was not important enough to their corporate mission to spend a few dollars on; just like Skip's ancient, bottom level, reptilian brain deeply, and truly, also firmly believed.



www.sholehwolpe.com
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PARABLE OF THE CRACK IN THE PALACE WALL

AN EXCERPT FROM THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS

by 12th Century Sufi Mystic Poet, ATTAR translated by SHOLEH WOLPÉ

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A prince built himself a golden palace, spending money on it in a hundred ways. When the magnificent palace was finally finished, he decorated it with fine carpets and other luxuries. Many came from far and wide to see the splendid abode. Servants bearing trays of food greeted the guests.

The prince then summoned his sages and close friends, seated them around himself and asked: "Is there any beauty or luxury missing from this palace of mine? Is it not absolutely perfect?" They all agreed they had not seen such a place on earth. But a pious fellow amongst them sprang up and said: "Fortunate one, there is a crack in one of the walls, and that makes the palace imperfect. Indeed, if it weren't for this fatal flaw, this heavenly residence would be like a gift from the Invisible."

The king replied: "Ignorant man, what an inflammatory remark! I have not seen a crack anywhere."

The man replied: "Proud king, there is a crack, and it opens to Azrael, the Archangel of Death. If only you could mend that crack! Otherwise, what good is this palace, crown, or throne? This palace may be as delightful as a paradise now, but soon enough death will make it foul in your eyes. Nothing is immortal. You have a life here now, but beware, it's ephemeral. Don't take such pride in your home or mansion; don't ride so haughtily on the steed of arrogance. I pity you, king, when a man like me has to explain to a man like you this fatal flaw."

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