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POETRY & WRITING

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NOEL MONAHAN
CHALK DUST

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE

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- Extracts from "Chalk Dust"

which will be published by Salmon Poetry in May 2018.

TERRY MCDONAGH

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- taken from Terry's latest poetry manuscript.

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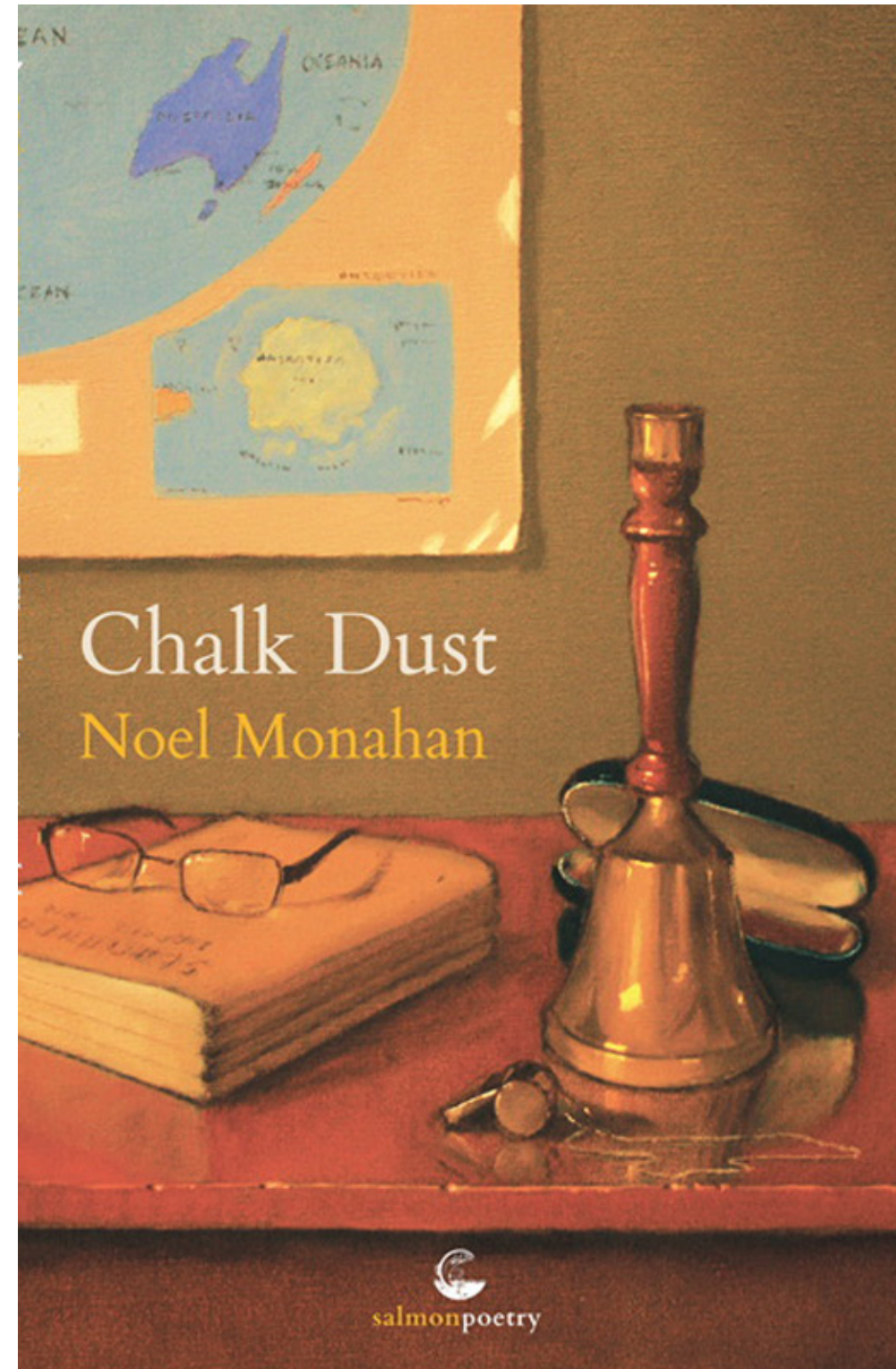
JAMES MARTYN JOYCE

Last Train to San Fernando

MARK ULYSEAS

Nothing is eternity - thoughts on Easter

Extracts from the long prose poem: *"Chalk Dust"* which will be published by Salmon Poetry in May 2018. The poem deals with the subject of a Boy's Catholic Boarding School in Ireland in the 1960s.



Noel Monahan has published seven collections of poetry. His most recent collection: *Where The Wind Sleeps, New & Selected Poems*, was published by Salmon in May 2014. He has won numerous awards for his poetry and drama. His work has been translated into Italian, French, Romanian and Russian. His most recent plays include: *"The Children of Lir"* performed by Livin' Dred Theatre. His seventh collection of poetry: *"Cellui Qui Porte Un Veau"* a French translation of his work was published by Allidades, France in October 2014. A new collection of poetry entitled: *"Chalk Dust"* is due for publication by Salmon Poetry in May 2018. This is Noel's eighth collection of poetry.



AND THERE WERE DAY BOYS.

Young men on bicycles, riding through the lanes and roads, at seven o'clock in the morning.

I see them cycling up the avenue with rain hats and coats,

Pilots on two wheels coming through the fog and rain, with wooden cases full of books

Copies strapped to the back of their bikes. Some come from far off Stravaignabo

Where the cows wander aimlessly in the fields and asses are skinny as greyhounds.

Or so some of the boarders say.

They have great Cavan names: Brady, Reilly, Lynch, McGovern ...

On reflection, Day Boys could be your friend. They were good for smuggling stuff into the College: brown sauce, sardines, sandwich spread, canned spam and cigarettes. Some stuck to strict black-market prices, others were happy just to oblige. At lunch time when we headed to the refectory, they ate their slices of loaf bread, drank milk or tea in the class rooms. When class ended they headed home again, past fields, country shops, townlands and parishes, some as far as nine miles away, cycling along the edge of light, climbing hills with a rising moon and arriving home in the dark.

THE COLLEGE REFECTORY

The hatch opened in the College refectory. Clatter from skillets and pans. Lids strayed away from pots. Cups and saucers sang from trolleys. Someone bent a spoon, there was great steam coming from a cauldron and John Joe, a young cook prodded something with a long fork. It was important to be well in with John Joe. He was in charge of pots in the kitchen: pots of spuds, pots of stew, pots of custard, pots of prunes... We dined underground at long tables, so hungry we could eat the timber. The refectory was a basement meant for a store room. A statue of St. Joseph stood on a wooden pedestal with nothing to say. Food in St. Norbert's College was a science of small measures, the minimum amount of everything: bread, margarine, porridge, potato mash ... We had cheese and a dollop of red jam on Friday to make the stale bread bearable and palatable. Sometimes we had two prunes and a ladleful of custard for desert. The Dean with an anorak over his white habit intoned:

Bless us O Lord and these thy gifts...

The noise was mighty: a sea of tea cups rattled, eighty chairs scraped the concrete floor, feet shuffled and a symphony of knives and forks commenced. We had porridge mornings, except on Sundays when you were treated to a sausage. Everything we ate came from the earth: carrots, potatoes, turnips, peas ... tiny peas hard as bullets. The stew was brown on Tuesdays, with meat, if you could find it. A line of mouths opened to thick slices of loaf bread with marmalade on Thursdays. Butter would be nice, but you accepted margarine. Every morning and evening the fat tea pot sat on the table, waiting to draw. Michael John grabbed an extra sausage and the Dean spotted him and he had to give it back. A fly Zee ...Zees ... in the jam jar. The flies would talk to you in May. They knew it was getting close to the long summer holidays and the refectory would be closed

Zee...Zee ...I am a fly, I am a food eater,

I will eat food long before

The other eaters of food

Can get their hands on it,

Zee ... Zee ... Zee ...

The lids returned to the pots. The hatch- door closed. The Dean Intoned:

We give thee thanks, O Almighty God,

For all thy benefits ...





LITURGICAL FESTIVAL

Come May, hymns triggered our concentration into serious rehearsals for the Liturgical Music Festival, held yearly in Cavan Cathedral. We intoned Gregorian chant. We prepared a special piece to be sung in two part harmony. The sacredness of Latin words lifted our souls:

Benedictus qui veni

In nomine Domini ...

We walked up the steps to the cathedral in full uniform, our blazers brushed down, our motto: *Veritas Vincit* / Truth Conquers, on our breast pockets. The spire soared above us. We felt important. Inside, organ music rang out. There was an air of nervous tension. Fr. McGrath showed us to our seats:

St. Norbert's College this way, Please

Don't be shy boys and sing out.

Secondary school students were crowding in. The convent girls arrived, at least seventy of them in their maroon uniform, complete with caps and pale faces.

Them's the Loreto ones, whispered Michael John.

It was a solemn Mass with the Bishop as chief celebrant and he wasn't much of a singer. The nun with the thick-framed glasses kept checking the girls. The Mass went on for two hours, no short cuts with Gregorian chant. After the Mass we all had to assemble at the Poor Clare School Yard and await our call to perform our individual pieces and have them adjudicated. A freak shower of hailstones in May had us stampede into the main building. We were never so close to convent girls before, so close you could smell the faint perfume from their uniforms, so close you could feel the warmth of their bodies. It was all:

oohs and aahs

Girls: Stop that unruly behaviour at once

It's only a hail-shower.

The nun with the thick-framed glasses blamed the hailstones for drawing us together. After the competition we went down to McManus' Cafe in Bridge Street for fish and chips. A few of the Loreto Girls followed us in. We chewed gum, lit up our cigarettes and played the juke box. The Kinks were popular:

My makeup is dry and it cracks on my chin

I'm drowning my sorrow in whiskey and gin

We were longing for something to happen but as usual nothing really happened. A few of the girls promised to write to us and send us on photos. And the nun with the thick-framed glasses pushed open the cafe door.

The bus is waiting girls

The Loreto Girls made a fast exit and we were left to play one more record on the juke box.

The following are three Cantos taken from my latest poetry manuscript:

44 CANTOS IN A 4TH FLOOR FLAT

The protagonist in this collection is the Everyman in us who leaves *the yowl and yelp of his home crowd* to shape a future – to distance himself from the familiar, so-called tried and tested. He finds his place, space and voice in a 4th floor flat from where, in 44 Cantos, he grants us access to his hopes, dreams, expectations and thought patterns.



Terry McDonagh taught creative writing at Hamburg University. Was Drama Director at International School Hamburg. Published ten poetry collections, letters, drama, prose and poetry for young people. Translations into Indonesian and German. 2016 poetry collection, 'Lady Cassie Peregrina' – Arlen House; 2017, included in Fire and Ice 2 Gill Education; 2017, 'UCG by Degrees' included in Galway Poetry Trail; 2017, Director of WestWords, Germany's first Irish lit. festival in Hamburg.



1– SETTING OUT

Before broadband here, there
and everywhere,
a long-haired youth
slunk so far into foothills
that he lost sight of home
and home lost sight of him.

A glutton for pilgrim habits,
he traipsed and tracked
from land to land,
village, seashore and city
chasing star after elusive star
dreaming from inside out,
considering a bond with
the devil and alien recipes
when he chanced upon a room
just a stone's throw
from a voice in first person
yet far enough from the yowl
and yelp of his home crowd.

At first, he turned to his nag
wondering if it was best
not to have a now at all
but looking up at cloud pockets,
sunsets, life and half-life,
he knew he'd have to comment
on the underbelly of fortune,
if only to blame – when suddenly
out of the blue
like a whole shebang
of hammer and tongs
in a gutful of pig iron,
he blurted out from his high horse:
I will. Words are mine. Mine to speak.

2 – I'M HERE NOW

That past of mine was quirked,
discordant and full of black wind
but it's history, impetuosity
and so last year. I could shout
come back youth
but that's as futile as near kisses
and whinging – the heart asks joy.

I'm content on the fourth floor
but I think I could be happy
in a wilderness of rock pool,
gorse, hawthorn and hazel,
a place where plant touches plant,
songbirds focus the sun
leaving me free to go round in circles.

Up here I flick through day and dark
in the wriggling world of witchcraft,
homespun yoga and hymns of
jerky homage to a lost youth.

Night has lodged in my bloodstream
and road is spinning and shedding
all around me – I crave calm.
Silence.

In the mood for a snack, that's me
but I'm clean out – my last biscuit
a silhouette – my cupboard quiet
and mocking: *diet, diet*
it's your call
who's the skinniest of them all?

What's natural isn't wonderful
isn't much of an answer
but tell me
where is the magic pool
or dancer on sparkling donkey-back
that points to where mulling-over is located?

God doesn't reply so maybe
when sloes are ripening and
bees are out in summer finery
I'll get in touch with imps and elves
to learn more about brazen winds
that have so much say
in songs we sing or screams we scream
when lights crash into each other after dark.



© Terry McDonagh

4 – HOLY JESTING

In spite of the grace of God, Imams
and Prelates, I'm still only a *him*
aching to be a charmer and
fearless minder of word – might
even be a legate on a pedestal
with a host of holy pies at a window
exhorting eruptions to sprinkle
purple dust and folk karma
on the greedy. Let's hymn together.
Amen.

If sheep and lambs followed me
I'd have a flock to turn to.
I'm told I'm a ringer for a singer
strident among briers and berries
but I'm not just a singer – I'm a
scribbler under house arrest
in a sacristy of hard limestone
and sound bites without
a whisker of a vesper to my name.

As we speak there are rough drafts at large
but if needs be I'll roam
with jackdaw and gypsy
to snatch pure chant off the horizon.
Hang on, Mouse, there's more to come:
Bishop, Imam high up and tall,
who's the sexiest of them all?
I am whispered the woman on high
and all in *his* head. *Oh, Oh!*
Holy Joes in costume are a howl.
No blood left, hallow as bamboo
and just look at the get up of them:
bag ladies with no bags.

Some clerics write psalms in secret
but hide sisters in grim grey to black
to knee and full length, who grin,
bear, manage the club, buy buns
for tea parties in Paradise or
the four-poster. *Give you a kick
in the privates, ye auld codger,*
said she after prayer and fasting.
Don't know how he responded but
I'd have outed, *oops* or *careful Lady*.

*

I'm at home in a foreign place
without a parrot to remind me
of far-off fantasies. Dressed to
kill in cowls of finery, I inhabit
these sacrificial streets – my
dreams worth baskets of blackbirds.
*Evening Sir, could I interest you
in a tasty bird?* What if a sprig
of family spirits were to tune in?
Ah, I'm giving myself the creeps.
I'm here and know so little.
Perhaps it's time to take a blind leap
into the corner of the next giggly breeze.



Angela Patten was born and raised in Dun Laoghaire, County Dublin. She now lives in Burlington, Vermont, where she teaches creative writing and literature at the University of Vermont. Her work has been published in a wide variety of literary journals and anthologies. She is author of three poetry collections, *In Praise of Usefulness* (Wind Ridge Books, Vermont), *Reliquaries* and *Still Listening*, both from Salmon Poetry, Ireland, and a prose memoir, *High Tea at a Low Table* (Wind Ridge Books, Vermont).



EVER SINCE BREAKING MY WRIST

I've noticed that the woodpecker,
hopping from deck rail to deck rail
to reach the suet-cage, looks somehow—
armless—and the raven picking
seeds up from the snow, bright eyes
darting this way and that, appears—
vulnerable—on two spindly legs
like a prisoner in handcuffs
or a card-sharp nailed for dealing
from the middle of the deck.

It is always disarming to see a bird in flight.
The great blue heron, perched on one leg
like a battered armature, takes off,
crying out his *cawchee* in disgust.

We look up from our fiberglass canoe
to see him suddenly become sprung
rhythm, great wings beating the wind
in a slow disdainful dance.

John James Audubon loved birds so much
he sometimes killed a dozen before finding
the perfect model, then pinned it down with wires
to create a lifelike image of a bird in flight.

And though my Kevlar-covered broken wing
will heal in time, I still rejoice that birds
can take their leave of us without regret
by pulling the ace of flying from their sleeves.

WHITHER THE OVENBIRD

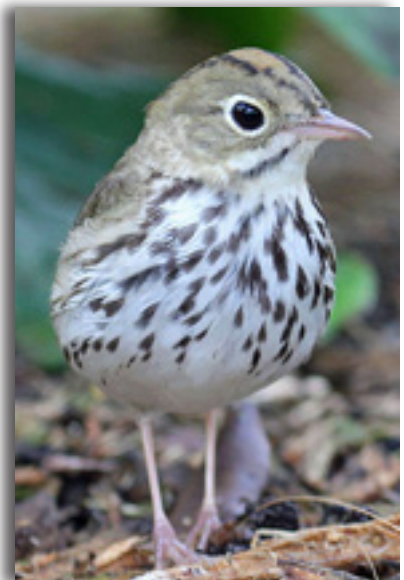
Because I too come from
a long line of nobodies
and he is a small warbler
with insistent voice
and inconspicuous plumage.

His song rings out in summer
hardwood forests—
teacher-teacher-teacher—
as if imploring academics
to lay down their dusty books,
their medieval regalia.

The ovenbird has no time
for such artifice.
His olive-brown feathers,
spotted breast and rufous crown
blend with the woodland palette—
tawny soil, peaty sod,
grey green of mosses,
autumnal camouflage.

Extravagantly creative yet practical
as bread, the ovenbird builds
a leafy dome like a Québécois clay oven,
part of his elaborate courtship ritual,
his industry an open invitation—

come join me in my humble labor
and help leaven it with song.



© Angela Patten

THE THING WITH FEATHERS

May morning outside my study window—
two warring bluejays shake a shower
of blossoms from the apple tree.

In high summer the scarlet cardinal
adds a new phrase to his song—
the metallic twang of a mouth-harp.

Three woodpeckers circumnavigate
the walnut tree outside our house.
Red-capped adult on the highest branch.
Young ones below halt their hammering
to grouse about their parent's blithe
refusal to continue feeding them.

At birding class I learn the early Colonists
killed and studied countless shorebirds,
then lovingly bestowed the familiar names
by which we know them today.

For instance, the Northern Harrier
used to be called a Marshhawk.
I wonder what name he might
assign for himself and his kind?

This morning blood and feathers in the snow—
remains of a hawk's midday meal
that we unwittingly catered with our menu
of sunflower seeds and suet.

A rapacious starling at our feeder
seizes all the seeds for himself.
Yet in a murmur of thousands
he will ascend almost to holiness.



Photograph by Alastair Rae from London, United Kingdom - Black Woodpecker,
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Geraldine Mills has published three collections of short stories and four collections of poetry. She has been awarded many prizes and bursaries including the Hennessy/Tribune New Irish Writer Award, two Arts Council Bursaries and a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship. Her first children's novel titled *Gold* has just been released and is available at www.littleisland.ie/shop/gold/ www.kennys.ie/gold-2179.html www.geraldinemills.com



WHERE YOU WENT

For Daniel

You told me that where you were going
was the farthest point on earth from home.

Rucksack packed, the final photograph
of mother and son.

Your body young and full of risk,
you stood looking beyond the lens before

you headed into earthquakes, tsunamis
that shifted land masses four centimetres.

Whether that was closer to home
or farther away from me I never learnt.

HEAD BURDEN AT THE MUSEUM OF COUNTRY LIFE

When honest-to-God hay was saved,
roped, plaited and whorled,
and in turn circled again
to coil the crown of her head
this was the load that wreath held:

potatoes she'd dug from the ridge,
water she'd drawn from the well,
shirts she had dried on bright gorse,
duck eggs in the nest of her hair.

The balancing to keep it all up:
the roof that needed new slates,
the child who needed a coat,
the wolf to be stopped at the door
so the man of the house might be saved.



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.*



SINCE 1917

The Russians are coming,
On email,
On Facebook,
On tanks, in TV,
When will they arrive?
The Russians are coming,
In spy novels, fake news,
In Vodka bottles,
On T shirts and underpants,
On twitter, when will they arrive?
The Russians are coming,
Reds under the beds,
Hiding in book shelves,
On tube trains,
In galleries:
Shall we invite them for tea?

THE IDES OF MARCH 2018: HOUSE OF COMMONS AND THEIR LEADER

Sharp-nosed and crooked-backed she bent over her loveless notes
Baying for punishment: Its him. Its Putin. Its Saddam Hussein, Its our lord.
Once more the House metaphorphosed into a howling rabble,
foaming at the mouth, bile exuding.
They are demanding the crucifixion of our Lord at Calgary.
Des-pi-sed.
Neighing and bellowing for blood,
the poison dripping from their fangs,
sulphurous fumes engulf the House
they spit out their collective venom
'Russia did it'.
I hear WMD. I hear Saddam Hussein.
Then 2003 they crucified an entire nation together with their leader.
WMD.
'Russia did it'. Its Putin. Its our Lord. The sacrificial lamb at Calgary.
Des-pi-sed.
But their sins of lies and mockery, lack of respect for other nations
Will never be forgiven.
Praise the Lord.



EULOGY TO LONDON BUS DRIVERS

Like a ship on ocean's green waves
The London bus sways gently along its route
From harbour, to another harbour,
people getting on and off with travel bags.
At night and during the day,
The captain bus driver kindly smiles,
Inviting us into her boat.
We take our seats on
Upper deck or lower deck.
We watch in comfort
While the sights of London drift by
Enchantingly and noiselessly.
The captain driver manages the waves,
The roads and other vehicles
With foresight, having learnt
And graduated from the lessons
For London bus drivers, making us feel safe.
We thank him as we exit
At the harbour of our
Destination.



Photograph <https://pixabay.com/en/london-bus-red-junction-downtown>

Bob shakeshaft is a regular reader on the Dublin open – mic scene since 2004. He has just recently appeared in the latest issue of the New Ulster Anu, the 40th. Issue. In this Anthology the following Poems appear: *Auld tripe*, *Ashen Sun*, *Toddles*, *A thin white line* and *After Philomena*. Also awarded 2nd.place in the New York Literary Magazine, in the category of Life/Death. Recently received 3 commendations from the Jonathan Swift Writers Awards.



ABERRATION

My mother told me that her mother
Never lost faith in human goodness.
If someone wronged my grandmother
Invariably they were excused
Reasoning that it was hum -buggery.

Her simple logic caused angst.
A neighbour who enjoyed gossip,
The better for telling
Even forsaking the truth or
Scraping the proverbial barrel.

No matter how startling
Or mythopoeic
Grandmother's ears were invaded
She remained indifferent
Remarking *never heard the likes*

With a tone in her voice
That said the truth was not aired.

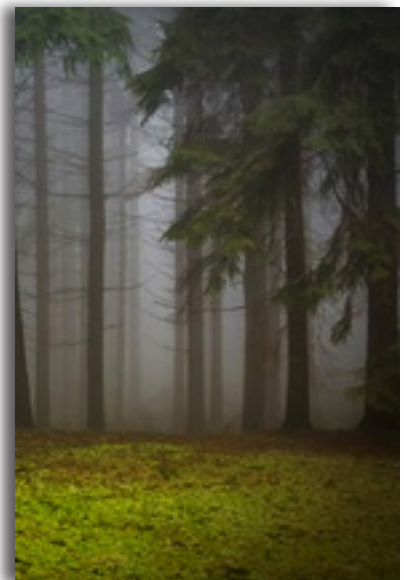
Years have moved on
Still her voice guides me
To live in a similar manner,
Alongside my own wisdom
I often remark

To my offenders
That story-telling
Is negated
When the victim
Refuses the intrusion.

SUSPIRATION

as the elms clung to one another
like giants whispering secrets
soon falling into a violent flurry
tossing wild arms aimlessly
about the cloudless sky
as if their earlier huddle
were too wicked
for peace of mind

ragged old rooks nests
burdening branches
swung sky -high
like strewn wrecks
upon a stormy sea
trapped like a wild beast
one with its shadow
cast bleak in blackness



SMITHEREENS

the morning lull
rudely startled
by the crash of the plate
once intact depicted beauty- born
recalled in the quiet talk
the first sign a shaky tremor
you not in control
I trying to show no alarm
so as not to seem so
after the doctor
the hospital
tests suspicions
early stage dementia
you would not remember
or even be aware
of the mind
strewn and scattered
its beguiling
how a lovely life
hits the floor

DESTINED

On cold seaside bench
dark mind
hung in pitch squalor.

Storm clouds bruised
whip – salt wound
my lonely despair.

I corner out images
bent shape squinting
fish watery dead stare

fathomless
candle flame pity
extinguished

inside bleak hell
gust punch
guts.

Brow furrows
harvest deep
soiled cold comfort.

Solitary isolation
will deceive
on cold seaside bench.



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.



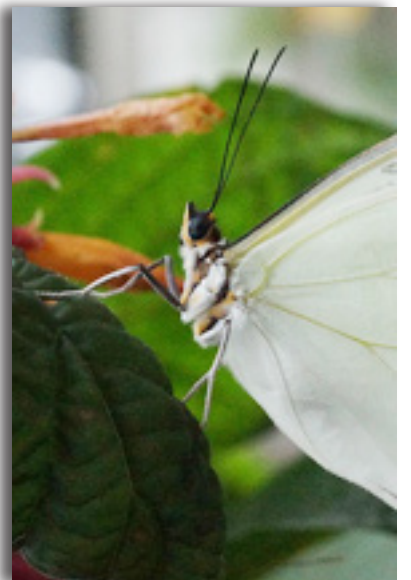
NATURE'S OATH

My spirit's high!
 In anticipation of your beauty
 ..of May fly
 Your giddy lambs
 And worker bee duty
 I celebrate your re-birth
 Your budding branches
 And green shoots breaking sodden earth
 Your natural oath
 A promise kept
 ..of seeded growth
 How deep you slept
 "I, will arise again", you said
 Your Autumn vow taken
 Spring's whispered words
 .."Winter Princess, awaken"

(written for my daughter Elle)

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 gentle breeze of change
 Marking this, your time and date of birth
 And you, one year older
 One day closer, to the bosom of my Earth



Joachim Matschoss was born in Germany and now lives in Melbourne/Australia. He is a playwright, poet and Theatre-maker. His Theatre Company, 'Backyard Theatre Ensemble (BYTE)' presents diverse pieces of theatre all across Melbourne/ Australia and internationally, both Youth Arts and for adults. Joachim has created theatre in Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, India, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, HongKong, Hungary, Taiwan, Switzerland and China. Joachim's poetry is published in Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom and the USA. Joachim's latest book, *Rain Overnight: Travels in Asia*, is available directly from him or from good bookshops in Melbourne and on www.amazon.com www.byteensemble.com



HAIKU *Singapore*

special in the irish pub (singapore, february 2018)

in muddy murphy's
one bacon and egg roll just
thirteen bucks today

evening (singapore, february 2018)

now darkness sets in
frogs start to fly and bats to sing
flowers still do smile

the girl with connections (singapore, february 2018)

left hand candy crush
right hand typing skyping lol
emoji phone three

airport (singapore, february 2018)

landed in changi
fake cherry blossoms ev'rywhere
it's chinese new year

supermarket checkout mantra (singapore, february 2018)

we do it this way!
two apples wrapped in plastic
into plastic bag

at the top of orchard road (singapore, february 2018)

girls on the sidewalk
are waiting for drunk old men
they should be at school

mortality or the butterfly in a cafe (singapore, february 2018)

piece of cake on plate
butterfly lands and gets stuck
waitress cleans table

afternoon (singapore, february 2018)

study at starbucks
wifi and frappochino
head down, headphones in



© Joachim Matschoss

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 Manu Mangattu



THE GOLDEN CANE OF YORE

Truth is beauty, true!
Though it belongs only to the eyes of the soul.
The world is but a stratified phantom city.
As me of yesterday smile at me of today
You reach instantly the garden beyond time
When your body is empty, as joyful as the diamonds,
And the universe is your biography, of past and future,
Sitting in the outer temple, that imperial king shall give you
A primeval cane of gold that makes rivers fragrant.

WINGS OF LIGHT

Each day is a dreamland;
Have you seen my golden palace in heaven?
Many an interstellar kingdom twinkle within that little room of stone.
The music of giant is honey for the soul, that gives you wings of light;
Yet you are surprised as if time had never passed,
When the one armored in diamond escort you out of the world.





James Martyn Joyce is from Galway. He has published three books, including editing *Noir by Noir West: Dark Fiction from the West of Ireland* (Arlen House). His work has appeared in *The Cúirt Journal*, *West 47*, *Books Ireland*, *Crannog*, *The Sunday Tribune*, *The Stinging Fly*, *The Shop*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Stony Thursday Book* and *Skylight47*. He was shortlisted for a Hennessy Award in 2006, the Francis McManus award in 2007 and 2008 and The William Trevor International Short Story Competition in 2007 and 2011. He has had work broadcast on RTE and BBC and has won the Listowel Writers Week Originals Short Story Competition. He won the Doolin Writers Prize in 2014. He was a winner of the Greenbean Novel Fair in 2016 with his novel, *A Long Day Dead*. His second poetry collection entitled *Furey* is forthcoming from Doire Press in March, 2018



LAST TRAIN TO SAN FERNANDO

Barely breaking his stride, he pulled the baseball cap low and snapped the junkie's wrist. Cheeky fucker, putting out his hand like that, trying for the delicate touch.

'Goodnight sur....' the junkie slurred, and he leant close enough to inhale the rotting ketones, grasped the outstretched claw, rotated the stick-thin limb, and bent the hand upwards. The junkie tried to fly, flapping his loose arm like a wing, Nureyev style, before the sudden push snapped the bone. He sank on to the wide footpath, people stepping around him, his 'Ah Jaysus' feeding back through the cinema crowds, everyone keen to make the Luas, the last bus home. Happy taxis for those with deeper pockets.

A girl came through the open doors of the late-night outlet. A random redhead with her headphones on, this was good. But it was the tune feeding around her from the shop speakers that really made him look: 'Jamaica Johnny, Last Train,' old-style, the happy wail. He felt the heat, the rolling tumble. It gripped the pit of his gut and tightened it.

He'd need more than a snapped wrist to fill him up tonight.

He slipped in behind her as the doors swished shut, following the curly cloud of red hair. He longed to touch it, moved close, his hand twitching in his jeans. The tune burbled in his head. He could hear the echoes. He hadn't heard it in so long.

Ellie loved that tune. Whore. She was the one who'd turned him on to that whole laidback Jamaican thing, slipping him the headphones at their lectures, smiling her promise, their lives moving 'slow-style'. How jealous the other students were, they were the happy couple.

Photograph <https://pixabay.com/en/>

‘Excuse me! Excuse me!’ Some weedy fucker in a duffel coat was coming towards him, pointing like an idiot. ‘Your T-shirt sir? It looks like the Eiffel Tower. I’m running a marathon there next month.’ What was the old fool on about? He had a banjo in a rucksack, the neck sticking skywards. A folk-singer? Marathon? Must be seventy at least, emaciated, but still an idiot.

‘It’s a guitar.’ He held the old guy’s stare. He’d lose her if he didn’t hurry.

‘But if you look at the line, how it points up like that? It looks like the Eiffel Tower?’ The old guy was really looking at him now. Just registering a flicker of regret? He’d try once more.

‘It’s. A. Guitar.’ The bothersome fool lowered his gaze, the beginnings of retreat. Old people? No purpose. He’d lost her now.

A Luas crossed at the GPO, slowing the hordes, a glimpse, and there she was, the red hair again, a flaring burn in the sodium glow. He wouldn’t run. Time was never tight.

Ellie was some bitch taking off like that to the university in Belfast. The tune burns in his ear, ‘Last Train, Last Train.’ He tried to hunt it from his mind.

They were almost at O’Connell Bridge. A few junkies mooched around the late-night pharmacy on the corner, eyeing the security man, not relishing their chances. She swung right, down the quays. In his mind he read the map, recalled the dark places on past the Four Courts. A good combination, blackness and the law. He closed the gap again. She was on her phone talking to someone called Joanie. Maybe it was just a ploy? So many women did that now, conjuring up friends to fend off the night.

Peripheral flash, he saw movement. All the shops were closed but, still... movement? Definitely. He slowed, his attention swinging to the under-glow from the cycle shop. He read the sign. A mother stood among the expensive bikes, light feeding from the office at the back. She leant against the counter, nonchalant, absorbed, her children playing in the slanting brightness. Identical twins, slapping the wheels, their infant fingers catching the black tyres and spinning them. The mother smiled as a tall man came from the office area and swept the twins high, an arm each, hugging them, his cheery shout barely audible through the glass.

He was mesmerised, pressed his face close to the window glass, letting his eyes burn up the scene until the mother noticed him and said something to her husband. He breathed hard on the cold surface, widened his eyes, showed her the burn of hate, could imagine his face disappearing as he moved on. She’d remember the eyes, fear for her children in the night. Happy family. Like his own never was.... That was why Ellie had hurt so much, he had nourished a ‘maybe’ for their future. But she just checked out. A study colleague for fucksake. He’d missed the bloody signs for months until she told him.

‘A fucking cuckoo bird, Ellie? That’s the best you can do?’ That was all he said, never shouted, never hit her. Smiled through the lot. Her time? She’d never guess. There were things no one saw coming.

Waiting was an art.

He’d lost the girl now. Gone, either across the Halfpenny Bridge or into the darkness towards Stoneybatter. He wouldn’t run. Chance was everything. He found himself humming the tune, the wind watering his eyes as he crossed the black river. He hated this part of town, the gormless tourists, stags and hens, the perpetual circling of desire. Crowds milled around outside a busy pub, He’d bide his time. It would throw someone up.

His previous victims had been so simple. Late-nighters, wombling home alone. He loved that word. It summed up how people were now, disconnected, out of touch, assuming they were special. No one was untouchable, he’d seen to that. Amazing that last girl had survived.

He skipped around the ‘zombies’ outside the teen club. Another redhead caught his eye, bottle job, too young. He increased his pace as two Gardai ambled past. Midget and Juggernaut, the Guards were building them awful small now and pairing them off as well, Juggernaut thumping you while Midget nipped at your heels. He’d avoid that if he could, he smiled. They were so slow, never got the picture. Amateurs.

He scoped the bulk of the darkened bank, swallowed the traffic coming from Trinity, he’d have to wait. A homeless bagman shuffled past on his mobile phone asking some hostel if they had any spaces, telling them his name is Jack. She came from behind him out of nowhere and pressed a coin into the old man’s palm. He heard the tune again, ‘Last Train, Last Train.’ The lights clicked to green. It was game on.

Ulyseas has served time in advertising as copywriter and creative director selling people things they didn't need, a ghost writer for some years, columnist of a newspaper, a freelance journalist and photographer. In 2009 he created *Live Encounters Magazine*, in Bali, Indonesia. It is a not for profit (adfree) free online magazine featuring leading academics, writers, poets, activists of all hues etc. from around the world. March 2016 saw the launch of its sister publication *Live Encounters Poetry*, which was relaunched as *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* in March 2017. He has edited, designed and produced all of Live Encounters' 124 publications. Mark's philosophy is that knowledge must be free and shared freely (without charge) to empower all towards enlightenment. He is the author of three books: *RAINY – My friend & Philosopher*, *Seductive Avatars of Maya – Anthology of Dystopian Lives* and *In Gethsemane: Transcripts of a Journey*. www.amazon.com



NOTHING IS ETERNITY – THOUGHTS ON EASTER

Every maternity hospital should have a funeral parlour, to pray for new born babies who from the moment they take their first breath...begin dying. When we exist in 'nothing' we dwell in eternity. But the moment we cross the threshold of 'nothing' to life, we begin dying...one moment closer to death every minute as we age.

Life is a sentence. A sentence that presents a heaven and a hell designed to develop our sense of self-worth, or perhaps it is schooling for the soul.

Eternity is like a giant prism, refracting the light of the Maker and casting colourful streams across the firmament.

When we see a rainbow we are seeing the 'nothing' from whence we originated. But do we understand this? Are we happy that we grow old on our journey to 'nothing'? Should we be comforted by this thought?

'Nothing' offers us eternity to lay down our weary heads, not having to bother about waking up to run the gauntlet of everyday jobs and errands... To compete senselessly for money... To hate... To create and destroy all things bright and beautiful.

We talk of love, yet our actions are contradictory, which is akin to spitting in one's own face without knowing it. Real love, true love lies in the embrace of eternity where there is no beginning, no end but a continuous flow of consciousness in 'nothing'.

The oft repeated question is, "What is the purpose of life?"

The answer lies within; the heart feels without reason; the mind is too busy minding itself; the sub-conscious or creative mind, which is the soul unsullied by everyday events, acts only as a hard disk that stores all info from the heart and mind but never interferes with our actions or inactions. Often these three are not in alignment, so when one is faced with existential or other dilemmas one cannot draw on the soul for answers for it is not in sync with the mind and heart. Only when all three are in sync does one know oneself.

From this knowing oneself comes true understanding of Love.

For Love emanates from 'nothing'.

And 'nothing' is eternity.

And from eternity all things are born.



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