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# Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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PAT BORAN  
*Plate*

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om  
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## CONTRIBUTORS

PAT BORAN  
*Plate*

ANTONIA ALEXANDRA KLIMENKO  
*Glass Onion*

TERRY MCDONAGH  
*Fourth Floor Flat*

RANDHIR KHARE  
*in an interview*

MICHAEL DURACK  
*Interrogations*

PHIL LYNCH  
*Beyond the Calm*

MARGARITA SERAFIMOVA  
*Magnolia*

ANTON FLOYD  
*Faultlines*

ANNE M CARSON  
*From The Detective's Chair*

HE ZHAOLUN  
*Mother*

SUSAN CONDON  
*Reunion*

NGUYEN VAN THO  
*A Live Encounter*

Pat Boran was born in Portlaoise, Ireland in 1963 and lives in Dublin. His most recent books *Waveforms: Bull Island Haiku* (2016), including photographs by the author, and *A Man Is Only As Good* (2017), a pocket-sized selected poems. Non-fiction includes the popular writers' handbook *The Portable Creative Writing Workshop* (updated 2013) and the prose memoir *The Invisible Prison: Scenes from an Irish Childhood* (2009). Awards include The Patrick Kavanagh Award in 1989 and the US-based Lawrence O'Shaughnessy Poetry Award in 2008. [www.patboran.com](http://www.patboran.com)



## PLATE

If you look closely, holding your breath,  
you can almost see him step  
from one green leaf to the next,  
this bird on the Ottoman era plate  
in the Leventis Museum, the gold  
and blue of his plumage  
echoed in the motion blur  
that marks its outer ring,  
as if, plucked out of time,  
he is but a single still  
from the short film of a life  
before film exists. The plate  
as globe and cosmic wheel. The plate  
as article of faith. *Please God,  
we will eat today, the sun  
will fall then rise, and, if we are blessed,  
that bird we glimpsed just yesterday  
will come again to sit  
and sing in our tree, the world  
turned upside-down in its ecstasy:  
the blue of the sea in its feathers,  
the tamed sun  
perched on its dazzling breast.*



## LUNG COLLAPSE

It was like the night the marquee tent,  
in a gale that came in off the sea,  
twisted so violently this way and that  
that it crumpled back into itself with a wheeze

and ended up flat, flat as the shape  
the TV detective traces with chalk  
round the corpse, until wear and tear  
wash it away. But if that's what it was,

his 'lung collapse' – or whatever they said,  
the older kids – I sat up all night  
unable to sleep, in my mind's eye  
the elephants, clowns and acrobats

left there with nothing over their heads  
but empty sky, endless dark,  
and, in the back field, still chugging away,  
the petrol generator of his heart.

## ARENA

*(Arènes de Lutèce, Roman Amphitheatre, Paris)*

The dozen or so young kids  
playing football in the gravel and dust  
of the Arènes de Lutèce  
frankly couldn't care less  
that gladiators once fought here,  
were taken off, dragging their heels,  
or propped themselves up on a sword  
while the mangled corpses of foes  
were fed to ravenous beasts.  
History is a long time ago.  
Now only the spectators are real;  
with each shot at their schoolbag goals  
watch all 15,000 souls  
rise howling to their feet.

## A DYING CRAFT

The little shop was one of those  
that sells new things made to look old:  
mildewed mirrors flecked with dust,  
metal picture-frames, whose rust

has carefully been faked with paint –  
perhaps by children far away  
in rooms where dust and rust and mould  
are worth, it would appear, their weight in gold.

Antonia Alexandra Klimenko was first introduced on the BBC and to the literary world by the legendary Tambimuttu of Poetry London--publisher of T.S. Eliot, Henry Miller and Bob Dylan, to name a few. After his death, it was his friend the late great Kathleen Raine who took an interest in her writing and encouraged her to publish. Although her manuscript was orphaned upon "Tambi"s "Tambi" s passing, her poems and correspondence have been included in his Special Collections at Northwestern University. A former San Francisco Poetry Slam Champion, Klimenko is widely published.

[www.spokenwordparis.org/about-us/antonia-alexandra-klimenko/](http://www.spokenwordparis.org/about-us/antonia-alexandra-klimenko/)



## GLASS ONION

*Looking through the bent backed tulip  
To see how the other half live  
Looking through a glass onion  
--John Lennon, The Beatles*

Please don't ask me  
what I do for a living  
*besides* breathe !  
It is all that I can do  
to get up every morning  
(well...ok...not every)  
to make it through the night  
to care  
for this human flesh  
that pays the barking bills  
launders that second skin  
drags the comb through thinning-hair-days  
(which will surely be gone tomorrow)  
though life goes on and on

Suffering IS  
my profession  
my preoccupation  
my greatest ambition  
I specialize in depression  
I'm fluent in Pain  
and I cry like nobody's business

This is what I live for

Oh what I'd give for  
just to peel back  
one more layer of skin  
to see how the other half lives!  
to offer up  
another tear another year  
of unadulterated sin  
to feel and be healed  
by the scent and touch of it  
the too little and too much of it

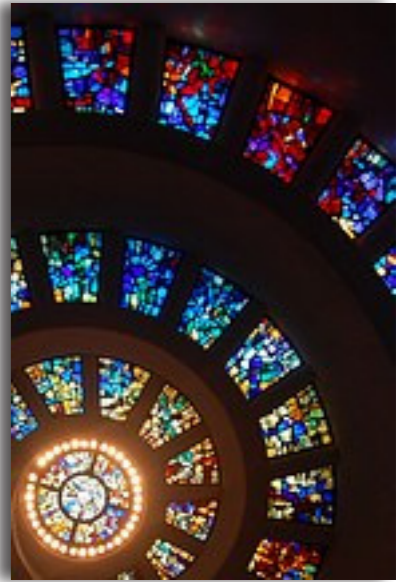
But even  
when there is nothing and no one  
to return to in the evening  
there is always *I must be dreaming !*  
as I catch my own reflection  
*Oh God is that really me?--*  
(I have to laugh)  
grey roots missing button  
yesterday's dribble down my undress  
Who else ? I sigh  
but my own work-in-progress  
ready to give Life new meaning

With every sigh with each small death  
I pass my hand through  
the All Nothing of me--  
the blessed dismembered All Humanity

Other mirrors other lives other layers of myself  
transparent transformed translucent  
are reborn  
with just one glimpse in the looking glass

*Hello*  
I say waving back  
*I remember you*





## WORSHIPING THE LORDSHIP

Every day I crawl to God  
 Every day on my knees I look for Him  
 Mostly I find Him Sometimes not  
 Others seem to know exactly where He is  
 and where He is not

Many pretend that He lives  
 somewhere *between*  
 heaven and earth That He takes  
 the elevator to the sky (linens on 3 absolution on 7)  
 That they have misplaced His address  
 and left His cell at the office

Most likely they say  
 He was born in the deep interior  
 of some mysterious country-- beyond the Beyond  
 There  
 swaddled in blankets of fog and ether  
 He weaned Himself on riddles  
 like  
 How many light bulbs does it take  
 to change one person's mind?  
 or  
 If a man cries alone in the Universe  
 is he said to have made a sound

But no one can solve the Mystery  
 of how He spent His time there  
 and how He spent His time here  
 all at the same time

Maybe  
 He had a Father and a Mother  
 Maybe they were going through a divorce  
 Maybe He was a mistake  
 Maybe He was unwanted  
 Your government your church your lover—  
 they don't like riddles  
 they like to keep things Ship-shape  
 They have all the answers they want

Besides  
 no one wants to hear  
 how God came from a broken home  
 how She was an orphan  
 how She was abandoned on our doorstep  
 how no one heard Her knocking  
 how She had to crawl to the altar  
 pour Herself a glass of wine  
 and toast Her own bread

No one wants to hear  
 that when She finally found Her place at the table  
 the table was too long with Jesus way down at the other end  
 No one wants to hear  
 that when She finally found Her place  
 they kept raising the rent-- so many mouths to feed  
 and the burden of carrying all those mattresses on Her back

*continued overleaf...*

WORSHIPING THE LORDSHIP *contd...*

Right about now  
I think She's thinking  
of trading in the table for a two by four  
I find She spends long hours  
tweezing splinters from her elbows  
and polishing her nails.  
Right about now I'm thinking She's thinking  
that soon very soon She may go for a pack of smokes  
and then...who knows?

Your government your church your lover  
they'll all weep openly of course  
they'll all tell you they never wanted Her to leave  
They never want anyone to leave.  
They want to be able to find you  
They want to be able to keep you

in your place  
on your knees

## CROSSWALK

In the end I always leave them  
whether it is at the corner the bus stop  
the threshold of my doormat  
or the threshold of our pleasure

This one was unfaithful this one unkind  
that one pushed the boundaries  
(the boundaries are a little fuzzy these days  
but he pushed them)!

Or...we just didn't fit  
He was the square peg in my round hole  
Said I invented things  
I told him he invented that  
Said I changed  
Told him he inspired me  
Said I talked too much  
Told him nothing  
before slipping out the door

Even an incoherent heart  
cannot ignore the signals that warn  
of oncoming disaster  
No matter  
that the light is turning green  
my own sentences  
run screaming off the page



## BECAUSE LOVEMAKING ISN'T MAPMAKING

You go away and come back  
 you go away and come back  
 you go away and cummmmm  
 but always you face the same direction  
 A weatherman with a pointer  
 might show more interest  
 might forecast drizzle  
 with a brighter mile

A lover  
 who is somewhere other than the bed  
 who makes and unmakes passion  
 who starts out  
 too certain of where he's headed  
 always comes back  
 never knowing where he's been

I am like the old road with scabs for markers  
 scars stretching beyond Wyoming  
 my arteries defying borders and boundary lines  
 my thinning cartilage rattling under  
 your speeding expressway with no exit

I am trying to remind you  
 trying to warn you  
 as eager as a wet billboard to get your attention  
 N for North E for East W for West S for South  
 spells news  
 spells change  
 not just on the hour  
 but every conscious fluid moment  
 pumping iron  
 into the rust the smoke the fumes  
 the burning rubber of forget

Our vehicle of welding flesh glows phosphorescent  
 under the deep-set neon glaze of your headlights  
 as you head for my magnetic North  
 And it's 7:45  
 and I am not the evening news  
 And it's still 7:45  
 and I have news for you

Never mind  
 that I spin before you—a singing globe  
 while you are laying me as flat as a map  
 (and you are holding me upside down)  
 Never mind  
 that I leave a trail of red ink before you---  
 my heart howling in my crushed hands—  
 broken fingers for flower-stems  
 in roadside memory

Enter me whole enter me now  
 but do not come back  
 Back may be there  
 but it isn't here

What you leave behind  
 is up the road at 7:46 at 7:47 7:48  
 is already ahead of you  
 is already at that place  
 where never now arriving  
 we have already departed





## TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH

To tell you the truth  
I am afraid of dying  
Oh  
perhaps not today  
or tomorrow  
but surely in the next  
ten...twenty years  
or twenty poems or  
who knows when or how  
Just imagine  
being done in  
by a Sonnet !

To tell you the truth  
I am afraid of everything--  
sickness poverty  
abandonment humiliation  
humiliation  
the pain of love  
the pain of no love  
the countless comings and goings  
of sun moon and stars  
of friends and other strangers  
the burden of darkness  
I drag around in this lie  
that separates me from you

*Forgive me Father for I have sinned*  
I have taken your name in vain  
or let us just say I have borrowed it  
and haven't yet returned it

Every day  
I peel away the labels  
the layers of dead skin  
encrusted with accusation  
with ancient history  
with names and words  
that do not really know me--  
filthy with shame and remorse  
for what I have and have not done

The struggle is immense  
and I am so small--  
a mere halo of light  
kneeling on the earth and this page  
bowing her head  
to the All-Knowing Unknown

*Forgive me Father for I know not*

But seriously  
must you force a signed confession  
from all my poems?--  
stick bamboo shoots  
under the nails of every sentence?!

Every morning  
I close my eyes  
and lather up  
a brand new prayer  
that sings  
its little heart out  
but only in the shower

To tell you the truth....  
I am afraid of living

## FALLEN

*That does not keep me from having a terrible need of—shall I  
say the word—religion. Then I go out at night to paint the stars*  
-- Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother

You've come and gone  
as Heaven and Hell  
fire and ice  
Memory's breath  
the throw of the dice

a weeping candle  
a burnt orange flame  
a suicide  
What was your name?

I think of you now  
spinning through space  
starry starry night  
your ashen face  
suspended

how meteors like angels  
fell from your mouth  
how you ended in passion  
how I—going south--sink with the sun

how you break *still* as light  
when you come  
into my head  
sliding in and out  
of my brain  
the pain  
the ink of emotion--  
the melting moon  
on my tongue

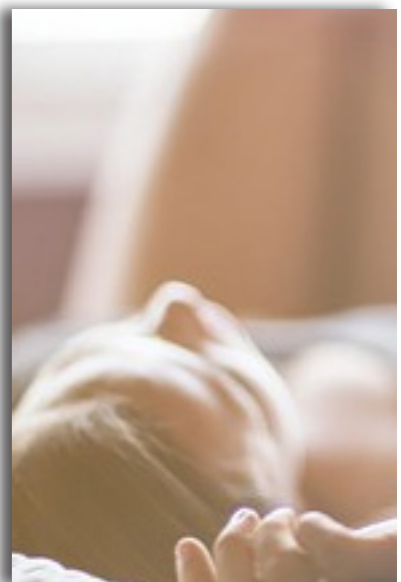
how we cross invisible boundary lines  
waxing and waning  
through magical portals  
the familiar the strange  
the brief the immortal  
the curse the blessing the lesson  
the lost the found

how I lie in my bed  
that black hole  
above ground

I do not like you as much as love you  
is what you said

Tears leave their trail as stardust  
their luster in thin air  
my body bears yours fingerprints  
the trace of you no longer there –

your brilliant streak swirling  
so far out of sight  
What's love without madness--  
that little sacrifice



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.



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

## FOURTH FLOOR FLAT 44 CANTOS

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.

As we progress through the collection, we begin to realize that the human being cannot avoid thinking unusual, strange, confused, happy, absurd and ridiculous thoughts – and these thoughts or images present themselves consciously and unconsciously in orderly, chaotic, mumbo-jumbo chunks from birth to death.



## SHENANIGANS

Thoughts can be disturbing,  
flimsy, tatty – as disjointed  
as wrack and ruin. You've  
got them lined up, pensive  
when out of the blue, words  
like financial haircut, crash,  
or a few rounds of wallops  
and dancing to corporate tunes  
interrupt the stillness of silence.

From time to time, as foil against  
the weary weight of gloom,  
I'd take part in pub shenanigans  
with youngish dreamers.  
Some, innocent as oysters,  
sparkled – others lamenting,  
swore minor poets were lesser,  
postmodern was passé  
and Paddy loved pints. We'd  
get ruddy, cheery and beveraged.

On one occasion a pale male,  
having taken time to ponder  
on a considered position  
adopted by a young woman  
in pink stilettos, plagiarized:  
*unthrifty loveliness  
why dost thou spend  
upon thyself thy beauties legacy?*  
...Shakespeare Sonnet 4.

Motto: don't look back – ever!  
Guinness, Guinness it's your call,  
who's the latest to cringe by the wall.

Needless to say  
we went our poetic ways.

## BUZZ AND BRAND

I'm afraid I don't have a buzz word,  
Mr Commerce, but sun, moon and  
rain don't either. If only you could  
see me up here, you'd say, ah ha,  
hold it right there – you'll need a  
decent set of golf-clubs and an  
up to date six-pack to set you right.  
You're a looney, a basket case,  
a header in a tower without any  
notion of noise. So let's dally in  
the real world of brand and label,  
even jazz up the Mother of God  
if needs be – give her top ratings.  
She'd not come cheap with her  
in-house contacts, but let's face it,  
it's all about fat loss, wink and  
tongue muscle training, isn't it.

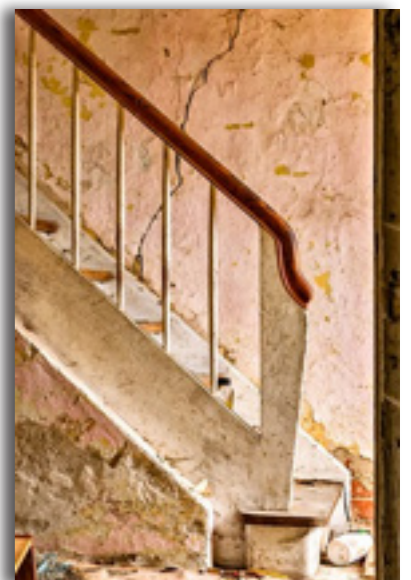
Mr Commerce, if you could  
see my corpulent neighbour  
scuttling the street below  
I'd imagine you labelling  
these unique features as  
reincarnated throwbacks to  
a previous life badly led  
without image or add – could  
even be extinct cherub or  
dodo parts – alien bits on a lost ledge.

It's true, my neighbour won't model.  
Could be a blow-in on a nightmare,  
a manipulated food outlet, a daydreamer  
trapped in caged, corporate air – but

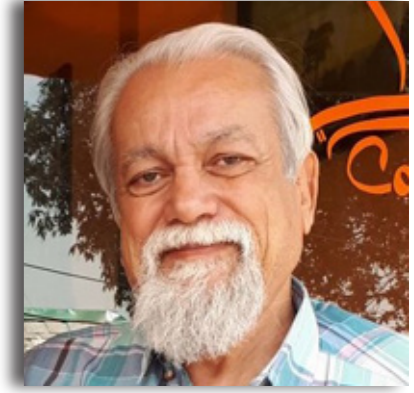
you don't own up to nightmares, Mr C.  
You trumpet, foghorn and flush  
to still the mocking jigsaw under grass.

If I were asked for a buzz word  
in noisy gym, rip and muscle time,  
I'd be inclined to lean towards silence:  
side-of-hill silence  
deep-valley silence  
prayer-at-grave silence.

Saint Mary Magdalene  
you know  
I've always wanted to  
be nothing other than  
a high-flying singer  
in a gush of notes  
by a humming river bank.



© Terry McDonagh



# MEMORY LAND

*Poems & Drawings*



RANDHIR KHARE

<https://www.amazon.in/Memory-Land-Drawings-Randhir-Khare>

<https://vishwakarmapublications.com/product/memory-land-poems-drawings/>

## RANDHIR KHARE

CELEBRATED INDIAN POET AND WRITER,  
on his latest book – *Memory Land, Poems & Drawings*,  
published by Vishwakarma publications, India  
in an interview with Mark Ulyseas

*Why have you called this latest book of poems **Memory Land**?*

The jungles of Dang in South Gujarat are alive with myths, legends, folklore and religious and community practices of traditional people. However, mainstream steamrolling of indigenous identities has started and survival of the old ways is under threat. In fact, as I speak, some precious part of these jungles is being altered and the fabric of inclusiveness is being frayed. This book of poems seeks to keep memory alive by celebrating the rich cultural ecology of these jungles. In times of irreversible change, memory is the only shield we have to help us hold on to what is valuable for the survival of cultural identities. Though I have not been born here I regard this my home as it epitomizes all that I believe to represent the traditional Indian ethos

*What is this traditional Indian ethos that you are talking about?*

Inclusive thinking, inclusive living and inclusive being. The harmony of inner and outer experiences. A relationship web that seamlessly knits together community life and the life of nature into a sacred tapestry. Human life and divinity sharing the same space.

When one alters the rhythms of human and divine harmony by building walls of difference between faiths, customs, social and community practices and manifestations of the divine, human beings are alienated from their traditional environment and become strangers in their own homelands. When the sacred spaces of nature are either cleared away or appropriated by the religious practices of politics, then they cease to have any relevance or meaning for those who dwell there.

Even though the jungles of the Dang have been pillaged, they nevertheless still contain the essential features and values of the Indian ethos.

© Mark Ulyseas

### Tell us about the jungles of the Dang and this relationship you share with it.

I first experienced the green world of Dang District in South Gujarat three decades ago when I visited the region to review the work of the National Literacy Mission. It triggered a passionate love affair which over the years (and numerous subsequent visits) has transformed into a meaningful relationship, taking me into the very heart of the forests and the culturally diverse communities of people settled here. Every visit has turned into an unexpected journey, revealing new realities – human, folkloric, ecological, social and spiritual.

Dang is a densely forested area which runs down the slopes of the Sahyadri mountains towards the plains of Gujarat in the west. From rugged mountains, the land dips towards low plateaus before it finally sinks to the plains, carrying river waters seawards. In the valleys and lowlands there's rich and fertile black cotton soil whilst in the uplands there's red soil which is dark and porous. Because of the undulating surface of the land, both red and black soil mix, creating the magic of varied foliage and ground cover. Here there are moist deciduous, dry deciduous and a sprinkling of evergreen forests which are home to a baffling range of trees, shrubs, climbers, grasses and countless species of wild life.

Across the centuries, people from traditional communities have settled here, driven by hostile armies, hunger and the need to be nourished and 'belong'. Early records seem a bit unclear about whether it was the Mahar Koli or the Bhil who first made these forests their home. However, they were soon followed by a host of communities including the Warli, Gamit, Kunbi, Dubla, Dhodia, Chaudhari and others. The Bhil, being the most adventurous and aggressive (as a result of the oppressive circumstances that had driven them here) successfully took on the role of resisting invasions by expansionist armies whilst the other communities settled down and established themselves. As a result of this, the Bhil are today perhaps the most economically unstable people in the region.

Despite varied cultural and social differences among the people of Dang, a pan-Dangi identity has evolved and physical spaces in the forests, vibrant with healing and empowering energies, are equally shared and revered. Ma Vali Para, for example, which is the sacred seat of the presiding Devi, is visited by people from various communities and faiths. So are innumerable other spaces. Nature has provided the Dangis with indigenous physical spaces that attract belief beyond differences.

This is what has drawn me to the region and encouraged me to be respectful of cultural diversity and the sacredness of forests, helping me to strengthen my faith in the all-pervasive power of the earth and the need to protect and preserve our natural world. I am not reluctant to admit that I have had meaningful spiritual experiences when among the pristine bamboo brakes of Mahal, under the mysterious star smeared dome of a Chinchali night, in desolate Gotiamal, green rich Vaghai, Wasurna

and Linga (seats of forgotten Bhil Rajas), Ahwa (which has been constantly on the crosshairs of Dangi history), Dhavalidod (where I have spent nights learning the language of darkness from the late Janu Kaka, a Kunbi Bhagat) and Chikar. From the rivers of the region I learnt patience, forgiveness and the will to go on – in life-altering ways.

### What is the message that you want to convey in *Memory Land*?

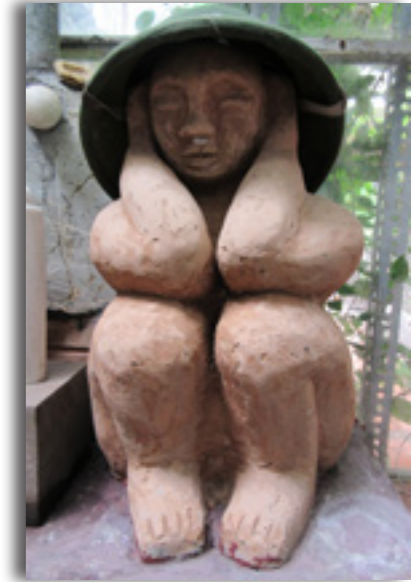
Respect and preserve diversity. Lay your life on the line if you have to, in order to do this. Nature is an animated university...a homogeneous energy that nurtures cultures and civilizations. In your deepest, darkest hour, nature heals and supports you.

### And is this the first time you have published poems with illustrations by you?

Being an artist and a poet, I prefer to give equal importance to the visual as well as written aspects of my books of poems. So, I call the visual elements of my books of poems 'drawings' and not 'illustrations'. I regard my drawings as entities in themselves. The movement of lines explore the themes that the words do, in their own unique way. Together – the poems and drawings create and present varied dimensions of the same theme. This is my fifth book of poems which also includes drawings. This book differs from the others in one way - every page of words (even if it is part of a longer poem) faces a line drawing. There are more than 50 poems and more than 80 drawings in the book.



With Shamans in the jungles of the Dang.  
Photograph courtesy Randhir Khare.



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### In 2000 you published a ground breaking book on the Dangs titled - *The Dangs - Journeys into the Heartland*. Is *Memory Land* a continuation of the exploration and narration of this journey?

Not exactly. Whilst the earlier book, which was a prose work, was written as a travelogue in a certain sense, this book is an intimate sharing of the experience of the human and natural aspects of the jungles. Whilst the earlier book was written by an 'outsider', this has been written by an 'insider'. The earlier book was written from an outer eye view, this has been written from the inner eye view of deep reflection and affinity. My experience of the jungles of Dang has evolved – inwards.

### Have you been a fine artist before writing poetry or did this come later?

Even though I started drawing much earlier than I started writing poetry, it was all in a closeted way. I never showed my work. Art was an intimately personal creative experience. The images were metaphors for my own experiences, thoughts, feelings. I began sharing my art with the outside world only about twenty five years ago. I have been writing poetry for more than fifty years now.

When I was little, my family lived in a community block with a series of outhouses which would be used as storehouses or kitchens by residents. I would sneak into the neighbour's storeroom and steal pieces of charcoal and go around to the back of the block and draw great whirls of lines from one end of the wall to the other. I called them 'wind lines'. Then I drew 'storm lines' and 'cloud lines' and 'rain lines' and 'tree lines'.

The lady of the house next door caught me, locked me up in her foul smelling bathroom and let me out after an hour with the gift of a small drawing book and some colour pencils. 'Here,' she said, 'since you anyway don't go to school, you might as well do some drawing at home, that is, if your parents don't put you to work.'

I grabbed the drawing book and ran to our apartment. 'Where did you steal that stuff from?' My father asked. I was scared to tell him the whole story so I said nothing. He took away the book and pencils. I never saw them again.

But I didn't give up and went down and stole some more charcoal then went around to the back of the block, climbed through the bars of the boundary into the slimy and disused service lane. The boundary wall was low and patched with moss and mud and other unmentionables. That was just what I wanted.

I circled the patches of moss and mud and turned them into islands. I created 'sea lines' to surround them. Drew 'boat lines' and 'ship lines'. It took me days to cover one section of the wall, then I'd walk up and down imagining that I had actually 'created' all of that like some divine creature. I felt that I could command the ship, the boats, the waves to move in whichever direction I chose. Other times I created stories around my lines.

In those dismal times, the lines on the wall were my ladder to the stars.

Much later when I took my lines out to people, they first didn't know what to do with the rawness of the work but have over the years found more affinities with them. Concurrently, my lines and textures have become more expressive.

### You mention the word 'rawness' here. Do you mean 'primitiveness'?

Yes, sometimes almost prehistoric. Early. Tribal. Folk. Of course, I am not influenced by any traditional form or style. But there are crossovers because in all cases Nature is the inspiration. Largely, I use lines, dots, whirls, spirals and other primal forms and shapes.

### But you appear most at ease with lines. Why is that?

When a line begins to move across blank space, it charts a pristine path – creating on its way a passage of certainty...like a stream of light spearing through thick foliage flows and curves and bounces and reveals, like a river draws its own story across the body of the earth, like time inexorably marking our lives, linking experiences, cutting through the living and the dying, like the light of a solitary star gently pouring on to the back of a passing mist that sails dawn-wards. A line gains life when you allow it to catch its own flow, which is in fact the artist's flow. I trust lines when I give myself to them.



Contemporary (Tiger God) Vaghdev in stone totem. Photograph by Randhir Khare.

### Has any of your work been translated into any other language?

Yes. My poetry has been translated into Persian, Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, French, Bulgarian and Czech then presented to various groups of people around the world. The work has been recited, performed to music and has inspired painters, artists and photographers.

### Has any of your work been adapted for the stage (theatre)?

Yes. My first play in 1971 was written in verse and performed in verse. The Ishara Puppet Theatre Company has also adapted my poems for stage performances.

Apart from my poetry, twelve of my prose plays have been staged. In fact, over the last two years I have written, produced and directed 5 new plays: *Breaking Free*, *Flowers*, *Waiting* and *The Clown Who Knew Too Much* for adults and *The Dream That Changed The World* for children. The premier of the last mentioned play is being premiered on June 30, 2018.

### What are you working on now?

My memoir *The Flood And After*, a fable - *Trees Live Forever* for children and my new novel *Talking In Tongues*.

### Could you give us a brief overview of your life as a poet, writer and artist?

I started drawing secretly at seven and went onto having seven solo shows of my drawings and paintings as well as two installations – one on the theme *Life In A Cage* and the other (in collaboration with the painter Manish Vedpathak) *I Am Not Me, I Am We*. My theatre work includes the adaptation of five plays for stage and voices, twelve original plays written, produced and directed by me.

As regards my published work – 37 books of poetry, short fiction, novels, translation from tribal dialects, travelogues, creative education and essays.

For the last decade I have been professionally mentoring writers of all ages (12 years to 83 years) in face to face settings and offer online master classes.

Michael Durack grew up on a farm near Birdhill in County Tipperary. He was a founder member of Killaloe Writers Group and his poetry has been published in a wide range of literary journals in Ireland and abroad, as well as airing on local and national radio. He is the author of a chapbook, *Nothing To Write Home About* (Derg House), a comic narrative in verse, *A Hairy Tale Of Clare* (East Clare Telecottage) and a memoir in prose and poems, *Saved To Memory: Lost To View* (Limerick Writers Centre.) He has collaborated with his brother, Austin on a programme of poetry and music, and together they have produced two albums, *The Secret Chord* (2013) and *Going Gone* (2015.)

<https://www.facebook.com/michael.durack>



## INTERROGATIONS

In English class we coaxed meanings from poems,  
confronted their authors, employed carrot and stick  
(minus the stick) for starters. When that failed  
we ate the carrot and resorted to the leather strap,  
the horse-whip, the bicycle chain, the thumb screw  
and sundry other instruments of torture.

But the pitch cap on Clarke's head failed to educe  
the whereabouts of the lost heifer;  
electrical charges to Keats's testiculars  
elicited only the same old "Beauty is truth,  
truth beauty" guff - not a syllable more;  
nor did Shakespeare's lips ope'  
in response to the tightening of the rack,  
to divulge the identity of The Dark Lady.

All the waterboarding in the world couldn't persuade  
Yeats to tell the dancer from the dance,  
so we bade him arise and go, fuck off back  
to Innisfree, and we sloped along  
to the Art Room to interrogate his brother.

## BIRDHILL STATION

Not Thomas's Adlestrop where no one left and no one came;  
nor Larkin's Hull, the three-quarters-empty train gliding  
to where sky and Lincolnshire and water meet.  
Not the windy, weedy platform of Betjeman's Pershore,  
nobody about but a conscript saying goodbye to his love;  
nor was it Montague's rain-washed Californian station,  
all legendary obstacles ranged beyond it.  
Not even Abse's Not Adlestrop, the wrong train,  
and a very pretty girl leaning out, refusing his gaze.

No, this was Birdhill (Cnocán an Éinfhinn), the right train,  
one-quarter full, eight-twenty, no obstacles, wending  
from Thornhill to where Pollagh and Eighty-Acres meet.  
And students grim as conscripts, heavy bags and hearts,  
equations to solve, Wordsworth to learn; downcast eyes deflected  
from willows, herbs and grass; the rocking rhythm muffling  
all the birds of Lackenavea and Coolnadornory.



© Michael Durack

## SPITTING IMAGES

In childhood I was a Moroney. *The spit of my mother*,  
as the elders put it. I couldn't see it, but I do now:  
1930s snap shot, school uniform, Leeds, St Mary's;  
front row, third from right, her face my face.

My brother was a Moroney too, so like his Uncle Christy,  
the handsome boy cut off in his prime 1942,  
thereafter Christ'-the-lord-ha'-mercy-on-him.

Posing on scaffolding by the roof of Cragg House,  
Grandfather Moroney, two workmen and a young Uncle Mick  
in tradesman's overalls. Looking at the photo for the first time,  
my brother was convinced he saw himself.

Leningrad, the death throes of the Soviet Union,  
where a Nevsky Prospekt street artist sketched me;  
others joining in the exercise, scenting my dollars.  
I left, carrying three portraits - one just so-so, one a caricature,  
the third the spitting image of my brother's face.

## KILLING US SOFTLY

*(Don McLean at The Stadium)*

We knew he sang a good song,  
his records radiated style,  
so we went to see the living minstrel,  
made the N7 pilgrimage  
to the National Boxing Stadium,  
South Circular Road, Dublin 8.

On stage, alone, he gave us Winterwood,  
or maybe it was Magdalene Lane.  
Applause, another track from Tapestry  
or American Pie, applause, another.  
No word of greeting or acknowledgement,  
just those hypnotic songs and the trailing notes  
of the little Martin filling the smoky room,  
until we thought he had forgotten us,  
trapped in his private Castle in the Air.

And then, five songs in he paused, looked round,  
and uttered a single sentence, loud and clear:  
I bet many a man got a good lickin' here!



© Michael Durack

## B-SIDES

Saturday school half-day 1962,  
the Venetian Cafe, Pearse Street,  
(missiles in Cuba - a nuclear stand-off)  
killing time before the 4 o'clock bus  
with Austin and his fifth-year mates.  
A plate of chips, salt and vinegar,  
and the American elixir, cool Coca-Cola.

Watching the juke box's impassive claw  
sift through racks of black vinyl  
before the eruption of the first bassy notes  
of those B-sides that we longed to hear -  
Cliff and The King: *Since I Lost You*  
and *Just Tell Her Jim Said Hello*.

## AMERICAN BOY

Pressed to do my party piece  
at the staff Christmas social.

After the mandatory protests and demurrals -  
*touch of a cold, frog in the throat,*  
*out of practice, haven't sung in yonks* -  
I sidle up to the microphone,  
sling the guitar strap about my shoulder,  
and strike a swaggering Don McLean pose,  
while the genial master of ceremonies solicits  
the title of my chosen song.

A long, long time ago,  
but I can still remember  
how Máirtín's intro made me smile:  
*A cháirde, Michael Durack is going*  
*to give us "The American Boy."*



© Michael Durack

Phil Lynch lives in Dublin and has previously lived in Belgium. His poems have appeared in a range of literary journals and anthologies. His work has also been featured on RTE national radio in Ireland in programmes such as the Arena Arts Show, the Poetry Programme and Sunday Miscellany as well as on a number of local radio programmes. He was a runner-up in the iYeats Poetry Competition (2014) has been shortlisted and longlisted in a number of others in recent years, including the Doolin Writers' Weekend Poetry Competition, the Red Line Poetry Competition, the Dermot Healy International Poetry Competition and the Over The Edge New Writer of the Year Competition. He is a regular reader/performer at poetry and spoken word events and festivals in Ireland and has also performed at events in Belgium, France, the UK and USA. He was a co-founder of Lingo, Ireland's first spoken word festival and is a member of Dalkey Writers Workshop.

His collection, *In a Changing Light*, was published by Salmon Poetry in 2016: <http://salmonpoetry.com/details.php?ID=394&a=284>



## BEYOND THE CALM

These are wasted days,  
scary times we share as best we can,  
days when everyone wants to talk  
but no one cares to listen  
and so the tyrants are unleashed.

These are brittle days,  
so little chimes with what we know,  
time ticks towards an alien place  
that may hold no trace of anything  
we know or love.

Before sleep, I ponder  
questions that in future may be asked,  
like how so few could bring  
disaster to so many.

In sleep, I wander  
through a landscape of upturned trees,  
their budding leaves beneath the soil  
buried to protect the life inside,  
roots reaching to whatever heaven there may be  
tentacles outstretched in desperate dying pleas  
beseeching the tyrants to relent.

I wake to find the nightmare  
real in a fruitless day.  
Head-shakers declare that truthlessness surrounds.  
Great art may come of it some say  
but can we find beauty in all this death?

## STORM WARNING

When we were walking once amid a storm  
you told me that when trees begin to fall  
the safest place to run to is the trunk.  
I love that you're my safe place. When it's dark,  
your bark enfolds me in protective wrap.

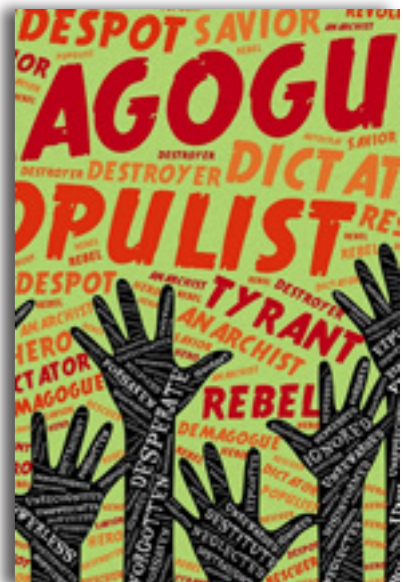
Sometimes you are my bite against attack,  
I love you for that too and when it's calm  
I love to play at being a weatherman,  
predicting dire storms, wild and angry winds  
that send me running to my safest spot  
to which I cling until the force subsides.  
In windless peace we settle down to sleep.

I love you when on unexpected days  
you, too, pretend a storm is on its way.

## UNDELIVERED

Flowers in a pretty bunch,  
left behind upon a bench.

A bouquet full of smiling scent.  
Forgotten or forsaken?



Serafimova was shortlisted for Montreal International Poetry Prize 2017 and Summer Literary Seminars 2018 Poetry Contest, and long-listed for Erbacce Poetry Prize 2018. She has three collections in Bulgarian. Her work appears in Agenda Poetry, London Grip, Trafika Europe, European Literature Network, Journal, A-Minor, Waxwing, Nixes Mate Review, StepAway, Ink, Sweat and Tears, HeadStuff, Minor Literatures, Writing Disorder, The Birds We Piled Loosely, Noble/ Gas Quarterly, Origins, miller’s pond, Obra/ Artifact, TAYO, Opiate, Poetic Diversity, Novelty, Pure Slush, Harbinger Asylum, Punch, Tuck, Ginosko, etc.



You are a magnolia in Marseille,  
all shine and glossy leaves from the times  
before death was born.

-----

Who are these,  
the stars?  
Whose lives are they burning?

Beautiful waves as Chinese lions with smoothed out curls  
are passing ahead in the light, and withdrawing.  
Life is god.

-----

8 January 2017  
  
It is alright, I was calming myself down,  
looking at the sunlight on the dirty surface,  
it is over.  
The amputation is over.



A fish leapt  
to capture its own low glint  
above the water.

-----

There was nothing in the unclear water  
but the lucent presence of chance –  
a big beautiful fish,  
fins spread out in delicious glory,  
might pass

It was present.  
I was surrounded by that  
which will not come again

-----

The beautiful heart found  
a new time.  
Nothing is like yesterday.



He was born in Egypt, a Levantine of Irish, Maltese, English and French Lebanese descent. Raised in Cyprus, he lived through the Cypriot struggle for independence and the island remains close to his heart. He studied English at Trinity College Dublin and continued his post graduate education at University College Cork. Poems have been published in The Stony Thursday Book, the Ghent Review, Live Encounters, The Shot Glass Journal, Crannóg, Visual Verse, Contemporary Haibun on Line and haiku in Shamrock. He won the IHS (Irish Haiku Society) International Competition (2014), prize winner (2016), honourable mention (2015) and was runner up in the Snapshot Press Haiku Calendar 2016 Competition.

He's a member of Irish Haiku Society. A selection of his haiku is included in Between the Leaves, edited by Anatoly Kudryavitsky, an anthology of new haiku writing from Ireland (Arlen House). Poems have been selected by the Limerick Writers' Centre for the April Poster Poetry Trail 2017 and 2018 and a selection of his poems appeared in the poetry trail of the Kilkenny Arts Festival Fringe in 2017, the Inisheer Baldone Notebook. Drawing on Joyce Exhibition by Nickie Hayden at the Olivier Cornet Gallery, Dublin (June 2018). Forthcoming in 2018 a debut poetry collection, Falling into Place. (Revival Press)



## LAZARUS

*i.m. Hugh McKinley*

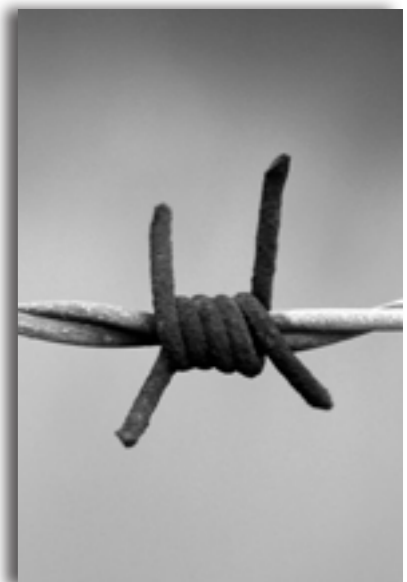
*If you could lick my heart, it would poison you  
a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto*

i  
At coastal Kition  
the sough of waves,  
the breezes in the palms  
underscore the night.  
And riding wavelengths  
of another sort  
are midnight sounds  
human noises confirming  
in houses in waterfront cafés  
apartments and hotels  
in the revel-rout of neon bars  
around the minarets and towers  
the complexities of love  
and sleaze around the port.

ii  
There's a stillness in that current's swirl  
where Byzantine domes harbour  
the icon of the relic saint.  
He who on these cathedral walls  
in the auric glow of awe and pity  
sets the perennial question of the dark.  
And to assuage their angel hunger  
they light a million candles  
the pilgrims from the streets  
flaming tongues to purge the vanities  
that poison their conceits  
and in his mythic presence  
make bonfires of their hearts.

iii  
Rough-hewn steps lead down  
to the second grave of the man  
from Bethany. He, the four days dead,  
in the stench of desiccated breath  
unwound his alien tales, scrolled  
on the linen of his winding sheet,  
tales that reset his world  
like a black star on a bobbin spinning.

Lazarus iconic or Lazarus the saint  
relived his life and wanted it darker,  
his laughter turned to mourning  
for the lost in the abyss. And the magic  
of these candles burning mirrored in this gold  
is the dancing of a firelight that's cold.



## BELLAPAIS, CYPRUS

*i.m. Lawrence Durrell  
for Alma Pietroni*

The sun has passed mid sky.  
Great lion pads of rock  
inching from the foothills  
have begun to throw  
their shadows forwards.

*This coarse brown loaf  
tastes so good. Nicolas says.  
Am I imagining it or  
does the air smell of lemons?  
On a day like this  
Shibboleths prove nothing.  
What do they matter  
those badges of division?*

*Go on, repeat them  
if you can, the names  
of the kings, the men  
who came to conquer  
that coastal plain below.*

## THE FAULTLINES

The cyclamens are in bloom.  
They wear crowns of blood red.  
I cannot guess at what is needed  
for you to find some equilibrium.  
Perhaps a form of healing words  
might serve, some potent spell  
and you will, like a startled bird  
tumbling in mid-flight, regain control.  
Even today as you playback time,  
rewinding the faultlines of your past,  
you revive episodes and names that chime  
with blame - we're all players in that cast.  
Yes, scars hurt, yet when love forgives love's wrongs,  
hurt dissolves like a wafer on the tongue.



© Anton Floyd

Anne M Carson is a writer and visual artist, whose poetry is published internationally and widely in Australia. *Writing on the Wall* was published by Mark Time Books 2017. She has won and been commended in numerous poetry prizes including being shortlisted in the New Shoots Poetry Prize 2016 and commended in the 2015 Melbourne Poets Union International Poetry Prize. As a Creative Writing Therapist she has edited and facilitated the group process which resulted in the publication of three books. She teaches Poetry Writing and Appreciation to adults and serves as Director Arts on the board of Ondru – a social-change-through-the-creative-arts organisation. Currently she is looking for a publisher for the story in verse of a little-known, Second World War humanitarian. The manuscript is called *Massaging Himmler: A poetic biography of Dr Felix Kersten*.



**From *The Detective's Chair*, a sequence of poems about fictional detectives.**

**(6) Anna Southwood, Licenced Private Enquiry Agent**  
Southward and Connelly Detective Agency, Sydney Australia

Anna turns to detecting after her shady, bastard husband dies. A baby sleuth, with enough Agatha Christie to know that trusting her guts is a real detective's best weapon; she is determined to learn the knack. Why was the deaf woman left bashed and bloody, close to death? She goes over her notes again and again, combing, looking for discrepancies, unusual occurrences, waiting for the tell-tale niggles that will alert her; there somewhere, buried beneath. Filled with broken images of death and betrayal, she's worried sordidness will become a way of life. It makes her antsy; she can't help needling the pompous or asking questions where she shouldn't. She loses patience with prevarication. Shopping forgotten again, it's a stale cheese sandwich with wilted lettuce for dinner. Her chair, her refuge, is the couch – an open bottle of Riesling before her, a second idling in the fridge.

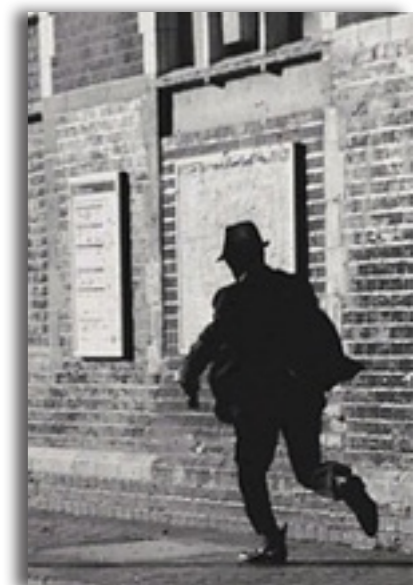


**(20) Detective Inspector (DI) Thomas (Tommy) Lynley  
Eighth Earl of Asherton**  
Metropolitan Police (New Scotland Yard), London UK

From constable to sergeant to Detective Inspector in his first five years, Thomas relishes police-work's rigour; its freedom after the claustrophobia of wealth, and the must of old boys' clubs. Hodge, the family butler, refuses to take it seriously, calls it *Lord Thomas's whimsy*. But Thomas has built a reputation as a passionate professional. Except this time – driven by romantic jealousy, he targets a suspect, completely loses objectivity. He comes through in the end but has it cost him a dear friend? Painful, necessary corrective for a lifetime of privilege. He does his thinking behind the Bentley wheel, ensconced in leather-upholstered luxury, listening to Beethoven's Pathétique. Its map of suffering helps him process the horror of the evil he has seen. Monumental outrage at wasted life; he says that every death diminishes him. Finally, on the right track, he registers the familiar tell-tale tingle of the chase.

**(21) Detective Sergeant (DS) Barbara Havers**  
Metropolitan Police (New Scotland Yard), London UK

Barbara has the makings of a good cop – fine probing mind, quicksilver intuitive leaps of understanding – but despair has been driven so deep inside her she is as brittle as glass. Something in her past so painful it must be buried, thorn-like, beneath scorn and a good dose of venom. She bristles at the slightest, spoils for fights, always thinks the worst. Forced back into uniform by spats with everyone of rank. Worse than prickles are the talons of self-hatred. She is close to wrecking her last chance to return to CID, when Lynley breaks the case open like a piece of rotting fruit, the innards spilt for all to see, spoilt, putrefying. It draws the poison out of Barbara's past, alchemically, and she vomits and vomits, purges herself. Not that she is totally reformed – she retains her hatred of class, of privilege and disdain gentry's hauteur. Her chair is close to an ashtray so she can inhale illicit courage along with her nicotine.



He Zhaolun, is an excellent poet in contemporary China. He is of Manchu nationality, and was born in 1970 in Jinzhou of Liaoning Province, China. Now he lives in Linghai City of Jinzhou. He is member of Chinese Writer's Association, Vice Dean of Poetry Creation Research Society of Jinzhou Writers' Association, vice chairman of Jinzhou Music Literature Society, the Dean of June Poetry Society. His works have been published in over one hundred domestic and overseas magazines and newspapers, and some have featured in numerous poetry anthologies. He has won many poetry prizes. His published poetry collections include *Indebted to Life*, *Days in Love with Sunshine*, and *Snow Falling in Liaoning*. He works in the Jinzhou Office of Liaoning Provincial Rural Credit Cooperatives.

Translation / Zhangzaoyun  
Revision/Carole(English)



## MOTHER

I always used to touch,  
Mother's rough face over and over.  
Then, from her gray temples,  
Hand to be frozen.  
After hot her white hair as early winter snow,  
Wrinkles like a river, more exquisite than sewing needle point -  
Going through my close-fitting cotton-padded clothes.

Dew watching on grass without sleep,  
Cherishing memory of mother's village.  
Mother's great love,  
With fragrance of breast milk for a long time.

I must know,  
Mother's withered breasts,  
Must have been storing golden grain.  
The rolling barns,  
One hundred times more than obesity in our happiness,  
One thousand times more than vanity of our happiness.

Land can speak out,  
Those words with tears.  
The most worthy of love,  
Allows me to embrace mother's silence again.

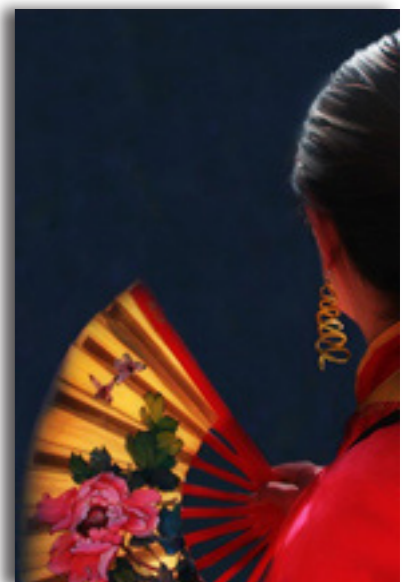
## THE SOIL

A leave doesn't know,  
It belongs to earth,  
Until it falls.

A tree turns old,  
It doesn't fall  
It belongs to root  
Until it's exhausted.

In my heart,  
There is a pure soil,  
Spring never fades  
A plant flourishing in it.

Leaves are like childhood of migratory birds,  
And the roots are our family indeed.



## MOTHER TOLD ME ABOUT GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

Great-grandmother alive more than eighty years old,  
Her life is much longer than grandmother,  
Great-grandmother lives religiously,  
Poor with Buddha beads in hand.

Grandmother died early, father loses his mother when six,  
Great-grandmother had to bring him up,  
The life always like a dervish,  
Almost see through the world thoroughly,  
As to wooden fish itself,  
Found her belief transparent.

Water to swallow tolerance,  
A bowl for food, a bowl for detachment ,a bowl for Buddha.  
It's a pity that I was late to the world,  
She passed away on another road.  
Her feet like three-inch-flowers,  
She walked with body swaying,  
And tried hard to take it easy.  
Great-grandmother disappeared among flowers,  
Only wind to support her.

Mother told me about great-grandmother,  
A lamp in hand,"Amitabh" is all her life.

No resentment of the dust,  
A good-natured old Buddhist,  
So many years, guided us.

## OLD TIME, OLD PHOTOS

From a pile of old photos yellowed,  
I went back to mother's old time so beautiful—  
Her youth like wheat swaying,  
Wheat fragrance swaying in front of eyes,  
Wheat smell scattering around me.

Good sweet inched into old time,  
Mildly pushing me to move forward,  
I grasp mother's skirt and hand,  
Feel warm to preserve fingerprints,  
Instead of happiness bloom,  
So beautiful to fulfill the future.

A pile of yellow old photos, old time so beautiful—  
Mother's wheat no longer green,  
Weeds grow fast year after year,  
She kept cattle and sheep in mind,  
Thinking of bitterness for a lifetime,  
Don't need me to say any words.

So I keep the old time,  
Keep the beauty of the old days,  
Turn over a few times, warmer in sunlight

An ear of wheat, tender in field,  
Just like mother still constantly swaying,  
Scattering wheat fragrance from yellow old photos.



© He Zhaolun

Susan Condon, a native of Dublin, Ireland was awarded a Certificate in Creative Writing from the National University of Ireland Maynooth. Her short stories have won numerous awards including first prize in the Jonathan Swift Creative Writing Award. Publications include Ireland's Own Anthology, My Weekly, Boyne Berries 22, Live Encounters, Flash Flood Journal, Spelk, Flash Fiction Magazine and The Flash Fiction Press. Follow her writing on @SusanCondon or susancondon.wordpress.com



## REUNION

by Susan Condon

Around her, commuters beam in the after-glow of a sunny weekend, while the train swishes along the rails bringing her closer.

Soon, after all this time, they'll be reunited.

The train groans to a stop. Her stomach lurches: only two more stations.

"Breathe," she mutters.

"Sorry?"

She shakes her head at the woman beside her.

In through the nose, out through the mouth, her internal voice commands. Obeying, she feels a slow calm creep through her body. She watches the canal ripple gently. Two swans grace the water while a blackbird soars overhead. Only days before she too was flying through the air, from Boston to Dublin, on a one way ticket. Today would determine her return.

She delves inside her purse, retrieving a mirror. Stealing a glance, she appraises her newly high-lighted hair.

One more station.

Darkness envelops the carriage as it speeds into a tunnel, then out the other side. Bright pink flowers drape white walls, the sight of them bringing back a flash of memory so vivid that it takes her breath away.

Age seven, holding her mother's hand, they waited for him to return from the city. He never saw them. When he did, it was too late. Nothing could ever erase that image of her father as he stepped onto the platform. His smile as he turned to take the manicured hand of the woman with the cerise pink lipstick. Their embrace. The meeting of their lips ...

Pulling her hand from her mother's tightening grip, she ran.

Not long after, Boston had beckoned to them. Now, fourteen years later, she had decided to return.

The train stops.

Commuters depart.

But she remains seated.

A grey haired man stands alone. His eyes, the same chestnut brown as her own, scan the crowd.

She turns away.

The 20th century was perhaps the bloodiest in the history of Vietnam.

This interview was conducted with the help of a translator.  
I hope nothing has been lost in translation.



## NGUYEN VAN THO

VIETNAMESE AUTHOR AND EX-VIET CONG SOLDIER

in a candid interview with Mark Ulyseas, over a cup of rice wine and a bowl of litches at his home in Hanoi.



Nguyen Van Tho in his studio, Hanoi, Vietnam. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

I was born in Thai Binh Province, in 1948. I studied at The University of Commerce and Economy in Hanoi. In 1965, at the age of 17, I joined the army and fought in the war.

I learned to use many types of guns, including anti-aircraft while on duty protecting the city of Hanoi and surrounding areas.

Three of my older brothers died of disease during the war. I, being the fourth child who survived sickness, was named 'Tho', which means 'to live forever' in Vietnamese.

Most of my friends died in the conflict.

*(Breaks down and cries)*

When I got married, and when I became the father of a beautiful baby girl...every night whenever I slept I dreamt of the war...the blood, my dead friends, and I became scared...I could not sleep with my wife.

Now I am married for the third time.  
I live with my third wife here in Hanoi.

My daughter, from my first marriage, is called Trang.  
She is now 40 years old.

### Why do you write?

The first reason is that I want to talk about the life of Vietnamese people. And I want to show that war was hell for those of my generation...my generation that wants to live in peace...my generation that wants to give our children...to show them...that peace is all important...that war serves no one.

### When did you begin writing?

In 1985 I watched a drama on television. It was a story about a man who returns from active service in the army and how he faced hurdles attempting to adapt to a normal life. But this was not *real*. There was no reality... it was missing, the drama was not real. And this was the reason why I began writing because I wanted to convey the 'reality' I lived through.

My first short story was about a young soldier who is wounded. He manages to get to the hospital but the only doctor there had been killed by the enemy. He witnesses the desperation of the situation...bloody bodies lying unattended...breathing and crying in great pain. The young soldier writes to his mother telling her that he cannot return to Hanoi because he can't take the killing. And later, he died of his wounds in hospital. He never told his mother that he had been wounded.

His mother still keeps his letter and often she opens to re-read it, hoping and praying that her son will return one day.

*(Breaks down and cries)*

Many of us joined the army because we wanted to protect our land from invaders – the Americans. I fought the US marines in many towns and today I still recall where my friends died, where their blood was spilled in the rice fields and little villages. This is *my living* memory.

At present, there are many American expats living in my neighbourhood, yes white Americans. I talk to them. I have no hate, just sorrow.

### And when the war was over in 1975, what did you do?

I worked in Hanoi for a number of years and after that migrated to Germany in 1988.

Vietnam and Germany, then it was (East Germany), had an agreement that Vietnamese could seek employment in Germany. *(Reunification of Germany was in 1990.)*

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Here I published my first anthology of short stories titled *Old Gold*. The stories are about Vietnamese living in Berlin and about the Vietnam War.

I shall outline one story about how a former US marine (Vietnam Vet) meets a former Viet Cong soldier in Germany:

One day an American entered the Vietnamese place of work and arrogantly placed an American flag on his counter. On another visit the American comes to know that he is Vietnamese.

The Vietnamese after much exchange of information realises that the American was a soldier he had fought in Da Nang during the war. The marine shows his scar of a bullet wound received when the Vietnamese had shot him. And the Vietnamese showed the scar on his hand from a bullet which the marine had fired.

The marine told him that after the war he had come to Germany and married a lovely German girl and settled own.

From then on the American and his German wife helped his former enemy and his family. Often they would drink wine – a special wine – German wine with Indian spices – and talk about food and exchange stories of each other's lives and country.

The short story is titled 'The Scar'.



Nguyen Van Tho when he joined the army in 1965.  
Photograph courtesy Nguyen Van Tho.



### So are these short stories fact or fiction?

Fact. I am the Vietnamese in *The Scar*.

*(He shows me the scar of a bullet wound on his hand)*

### How did the Germans treat the Vietnamese?

There were two types of Germans. One type treated us very well, helped us in many ways. The other type didn't like us. They set fire to our homes, beat us and abused us in the streets.

### What happened when you first arrived in Germany?

My first six months in Germany, I didn't go to the market. I had very little money. I wrote. I wrote many short stories even though I was very poor. I wrote fifty short stories and two novels.

The first novel – *Quyen* – is about Vietnamese in Germany. This was made into a film.

The second novel, I am writing. Not finished...I have been writing for five years...nearly 700 pages.

### What is the role of the writer?

To show people the way to peace. That war is not the solution.

We cannot use guns, weapons to solve violence. Unfortunately, this is why war happens in small countries because we are constantly under threat from forces wanting to control us.

Presently, much depends on the Pacific situation. The South China Sea.  
Each country must protect itself.  
This is the reality.

But we can talk. And talk doesn't need weapons.

### What is your view of contemporary Vietnamese writing?

The tendency is to write on the political. But I think this direction is not good. A writer must remain outside the political sphere. Outside, above, beyond politics...to be able to see humanity.

### What does Hanoi mean to you?

I grew up in Hanoi.

I studied in Hanoi.

I fought the enemy to protect Hanoi.

This is my home.

When I go far away from Hanoi I miss the simple things...like the sound of fallen leaves being blown by the wind...the rustling of leaves in the trees...the small rain drops falling on my shoulders during the Tet festival...and how people exchange presents on this occasion.

*(He reaches for two books, signs them, and then hands the books to me in all humbleness).*

I want to give you these two books written by me:

*Quyen* – a novel

This novel is the story of a Hanoi girl named *Quyen* who is well-educated, beautiful and has a pleasant personality. She leaves Vietnam and migrates to Germany hoping for a better life. She faces challenges, and suffers many indignities. Through the painful life of *Quyen*, the writer presents the dismal life of Vietnamese expats in Germany.

*Huong My nhan - Fragrance of beautiful a woman* – anthology of short stories  
The anthology features fifty stories of life in Germany, Hanoi, the war and post-war.

### What do you think about the young generation of Vietnamese?

In my childhood I remember that whenever I returned from school I would go straight to the kitchen but the only food available was corn. My mother was very strict and though I didn't like corn I had to eat it.

Youngsters today have all the resources and opportunities for development. My generation gave this to them. My friends died to give them this land, free from invaders. They must look to our generation for guidance.

Freedom doesn't come without responsibilities.

I want to ask you, Mark, do Indians still love Mahatma Gandhi?

Yes, millions do, I answer, but many of us are moving away from his teachings especially that of non-violence. Tho, you look like the Mahatma.

*(Tho laughs)*

**So how do you spend your time?**

I wake up every morning at 3 and read books. Before I became a writer I read books for ten years. Today I like reading books on history of Vietnam, India, USA, and Germany etc.

**Do you have hate in your heart for the enemy considering the number of bombs dropped on your country and the after effects of the chemical, Agent Orange?**

No. I do not have hate. In fact as a writer I feel hate destroys bridges between people. As a writer my job is to bring people together. The poet and writer is more important than politicians and bankers. And perhaps more important than religion. We are the conscience of society, in a manner of speaking.

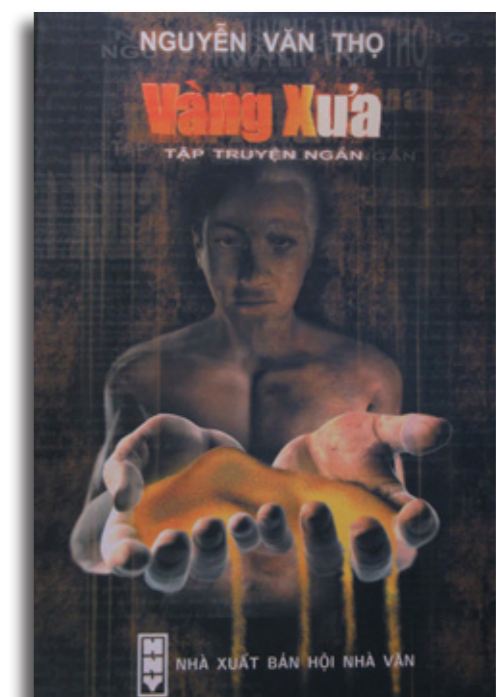
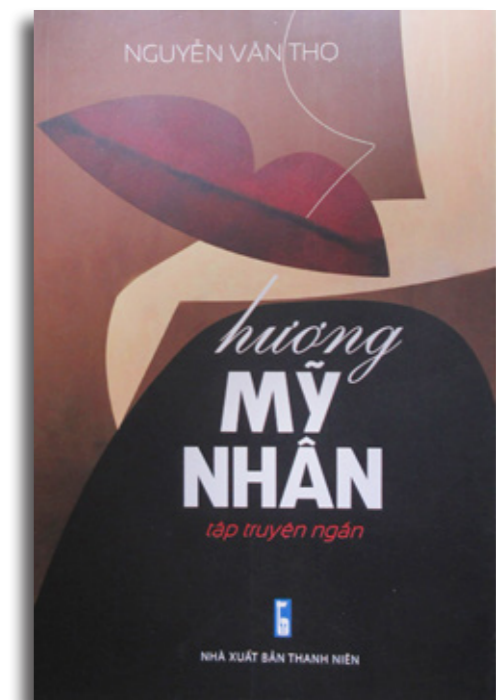
**What is your message to the world?**

All my life I realized that the destiny of every human being always depends on the destiny of a nation, a country; especially a small country. Therefore, I feel that each person can be a grain of sand to build the *fortress* that is the country. Many politicians in big countries always work for the interests of their own people, regardless of the fate of people in small countries. So small countries like Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and those in the Middle East, etc., must be linked together along with countries like India, to form a power block against these powerful forces to prevent them from trampling the small nations for their own selfish interests.

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Tho climbed onto the roof and broke some star fruit from a tree and handed it to me saying, 'You are lucky, these are the first fruit of the season'. I thanked him and departed.

As I walked back to my B & B through the narrow streets clutching his books in my hands, I couldn't help thinking about the futility of war and the resilience of Vietnamese like Tho who have kept the faith that peace is the only way forward.

Nguyen Van Tho hopes that an international publisher would have his books translated into English and published so that the world may get to read his works.



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