

FOUNDED 2010

Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
SEPTEMBER 2018

12 POETS & WRITERS
Share their wisdom

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



Street musician, Hoan Kiem Lake, Hanoi Old Quarter.

**SUPPORT LIVE ENCOUNTERS.
DONATE NOW AND KEEP THE MAGAZINE LIVE IN 2018!**

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

We are appealing for donations to pay for the administrative and technical aspects of the publication. Please help spread the free distribution of knowledge with any amount that you feel you want to give for this just cause.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om
markulyseas@liveencounters.net

[Donate](#)

All articles and photographs are the copyright of www.liveencounters.net and its contributors. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the explicit written permission of www.liveencounters.net. Offenders will be criminally prosecuted to the full extent of the law prevailing in their home country and/or elsewhere.

CONTRIBUTORS

COLETTE NIC AODHA
Being a Poet

BRIAN KIRK
Winter Songs

PETER O'NEILL
Merrion Square

MICHAEL J WHELAN
Small Copses on the Landscape

JOHN W SEXTON
Ocean of Souls: Six Minimalist Sequences

CATHY COLMAN
From an Imprint

RAY WHITAKER
Remembrance

RUAIRÍ DE BARRA
The Tower of Il-Gardjola

JAMES MARTYN JOYCE
Voyeur

NGUYEN VAN THO
The smell of Gun Powder
translated from Vietnamese and edited by Nguyen Thuy Hoa

DR HILARY PERKINS
Review of Suniti Namjoshi's book 'Aesop the Fox'

CHRISTINE MURRAY
Review by Peter O'Neill of her books - 'She' and 'Cycles'



Colette is an award winning poet who resides in Galway in the West of Ireland. She writes in both Irish and English. She has fourteen publications which include a volume of short stories, *Ádh Mór*, as well as an academic study of the blind poet Anthony Raftery, an 18th century bard whose songs and poems are still recited and sung today. She has one volume of English poetry, *Sundial*, which was published by Arlen House Press. She also has two dual language collections of poetry by the same publisher; *Between Curses: Baine Géar*, and *In Castlewood: An Ghaith Aduaidh*. Her work is on the syllabus in Primary, Secondary and Third Level colleges. Colette's latest collection (bilingual) is titled *Baine Géar: Sour Milk*, which is available in hardback and softback, published by Arlen House, 2016. : Colette is pursuing postgraduate studies in the English department of NUI Galway; she also has a master's degree in modern Irish. 'Magyar Dancer' is her forthcoming collection of English poetry.

NEW WORDS

for David Jones

After swimming towards this subterranean
gallery of bee hive huts, stone cloisters,
I circle around as you scuba dive off the coast,
bringing with you white sand, green waters,
sky of deepest azure.

Amongst the huts I unloosen stones
in my search for the truth I discover
heavy rocks delivered from hand to hand
like ancient family woes,
weighing us down on our journey.

Curating underwater is no picnic –
Bright coral and shells, translucent carpet
under which to brush your troubles,
kaleidoscopic rock bottom.

BEING A POET

'A necklace of wrens:' when he was young
Michael Hartnett lay down in a field, one day,
Lots of wrens settled on his chest:

*Dreoilín, dreoilín, rí na n-éan,
is mór and cuid, is beag tú féin,
éirí suas, a bhean an tí,
is tabhair dom pingin,
chun é a chur ina luí.*

His Granny said that he would be a poet.

I recall laying down on grass at the foot of a hill,
when I was young, out of the sight of my mother,
I was dodging work.
She told me I was going to be a poet,
but when she spoke
it sounded more like a threat.



© Colette Nic Aodha

PATTERNS

No urban landscape
only the crossed diagonals of trunk or grass
blurred shapes entrenched,
the silence of exile.

Beasts of battle all of a mind,
moving eye of the bird on high,
freckles of time or sun
but no names of place as a certainty.

Accoutrements of war all the same
a sentence or term of sorts,
his urn not yet on his mother's mantle,
no cushion or pillow for comfort,

lines of men form order from chaos,
keeping the conversation between countries,
between children and men,
embossing a new pattern,

moving from light to darkness
darkness to light.

SINISTER TWIST

Starting with the most recent advance,
An event to spoil this horse sleep,
bending towards perfume of rodent laced mud,
stretching time,

Barbed soil doesn't philosophise
the function of ritual or art
as you lie in a reinforced gully
donning new hats of tin.



© Colette Nic Aodha

Brian Kirk is an award winning poet and short story writer from Dublin. He was twice shortlisted for Hennessy Awards for fiction and his stories and poetry have been widely published in journals and anthologies. His novel for 9 – 12 year olds *The Rising Son* was published in December 2015. He was selected for the Poetry Ireland Introductions Series in 2013 and was commended in the Patrick Kavanagh Award in 2014 and 2015. His first poetry collection *After The Fall* was published by Salmon Poetry in November 2017. He blogs at www.briankirkwriter.com.



IN THE GARDEN

Once a place to sit, relax and wait for day
to fade to twilight after the work was done.
All summer there was warmth in the declining
sun until the year gave way to winter in November.

Now the days thin out, pressed between a delicate sky
and brittle ground. In the frozen pond the fish
play dead beneath wet leaves and mud. You stand
outside the back door in shirtsleeves and let your
shallow breath escape, a mist across the waste
of dying plants and naked branches.

Your years
sit roughly on your frame, the bones supporting
wasted muscle.

You shift, uneasy, yet unwilling
to return inside; recall the hours of labour under
a burning sun, body and mind at odds.

And yet,
despite the cold, the pain, the heart still beating.

WINTER SONG

Passionate friends: a book I read,
a song I learned to sing;
an acre of barren grass and I,
a curlew call, a cold lapwing.

A hat and scarf, waterproof boots
tread the frosted earth in silence;
red fingers burn, wind-salted eyes
watch cattle scratch against a fence.



FLOOD

After a long time Noah saw the sun
emerging through the grey, although the rain
still fell in squalls. The animals undone,
confined and restless in their stalls – the plain
a distant memory – bawled their pain across
the waters that unfolded to the end
of vision's range. After the raven's loss,
a dove was sent to try to find dry land,
returning at the last with olive leaf
that told of God's assurances to spare
the few who chose the path of just belief;
who built a boat when others would despair,
a haven for all creatures from God's wrath
until, rejoicing, they found Ararat.

POEM THIEF

The man you thought you loved must now take heed,
he left this morning while you were asleep.
He took a book of poems you never read

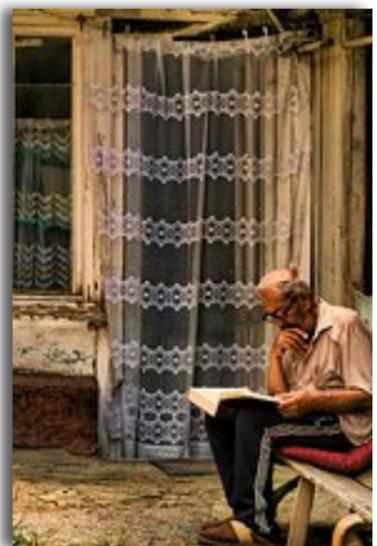
and stowed it in the dark of his old tweed
jacket, but left the rent – he wasn't cheap.
The man you thought you loved must now take heed

for out in the rain the ink began to bleed;
what each man sows, they say, so shall he reap.
He took a book of poems you never read

and in so doing thought he could be freed
from all the futile fights and lack of sleep.
The man you thought you loved must now take heed.

Imagine him as dead for his misdeed;
you would not even care, you would not weep
to lose that foolish book you never read.

That he is gone for good you must concede;
just like the poems, he was not yours to keep.
The man you thought you loved must now take heed.
He took a book of poems you never read.



© Brian Kirk

Peter O'Neill is the author of several books, most recently *More Micks Than Dicks*, a hybrid Beckettian novella in 3 genres currently out of print, and *The Dublin Trilogy: Poems & Transversions 1992-2017*, a singular engagement with a 19th century French Master; launched in Paris in November last year to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Baudelaire's death. He recently presented *je la dis comme elle vient* - The Appearance of the Homeric Muse in Beckett's *Comment c'est/How It Is* at the *How It Is Symposium* organised by Gare Saint Lazare Players Ireland at the Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris. He teaches EFL and resides in Dublin.

His writing (be it poetry, translation, critical reviews or academic presentation) has been published widely, being translated into French, Italian and German. O'Neill has also edited two anthologies of poetry; *And Agamemnon Dead* (mgv2>publishing, 2015) and *The Gladstone Readings* (Famous Seamus, 2017). He set up *Donkey Shots*, an avant-garde literary festival, in his hometown of Skerries, North County Dublin, and currently hosts *The Gladstone Readings*.



Oscar Wilde Memorial by Danny Osborne in Merrion Square. Photograph Peter O'Neill

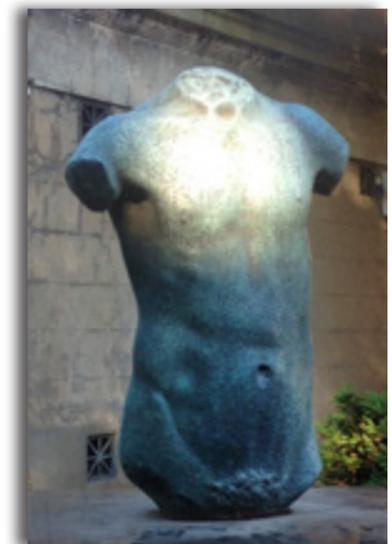
PEARSE STREET STATION

Standing before the Achaeans, spear in hand,
Athena charged so that the gathered assembly
No longer sees a mere boy, the son of a hero,
But a young man fashioned by a Goddess.

Standing before the assembled Achaeans,
The morning after her parting, his every limb
Noteworthy in their presence, sure in his way
Because her divinity passed through him.

So that his feet encased in the leather thongs
Feel nimble; where they his or hers? he wondered,
Sure only that she had passed through him.

Her divine words uttered into his ears alone
Entering his spirit stiffening his resolve,
Empowering him before the suitors.



THE FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION

After Courbet

Panties meaning freedom! That triangular
Tent covering the pubic mound.
Her subterranean trace the sign Φ
So, already a clue then to her mystery.

She then sphinx emboldened, the pungent
Aroma of musk, urine, even shit!
From out of the primordial caves
All fleshed out and primal, your slimy birth

Of origin unceremoniously unfurls.
The twin pillars of her thighs, smooth as
Any Portland Stone, their skyward

Movements supporting the colossus.
Under these skirts observe and learn;
From this orifice *youse'* are ALL coming from.

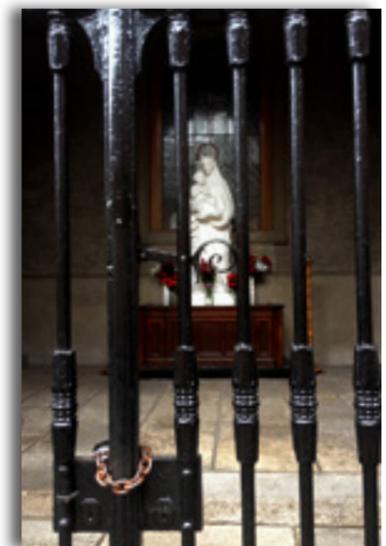
THE CLEARING

Early morning in Merrion Square,
Not far from Wilde and the Museum
Of Archaeology where Oldcroghan Man,
Arms flung abreast, his decapitation

And dismemberment a singular
Flourish in the grotesque, his bronZe
Torso leathery like some manbag
No worker of Hermes would design,

And which you will later bring your students
To admire, later in the day, after first
Getting them to read a poem by Heaney.

But first, you stroll under the young oaks
Whose skeletal leaves thrill to the
Gentle touch of dawn's golden fingers.



© Peter O'Neill

LINES WRITTEN WHILE SHELTERING FROM THE RAIN

Important events often happen in
The vicinity of pillars or columns,
Such is the influence of the Greeks;
Dorikos, Korinthos and Ionia.

You could say we are all still sitting
Under their influence, as I am
Writing this here in Dublin just
Outside the Museum of Archaeology

On Kildare Street, where nothing
Now of any consequence is happening,
Except for the rain falling and the people

Are sheltering under the great pillars
Which evoke those distant places,
And all of those other distant times.

SNAPSHOT OF THE 21ST CENTURY

We are on a Georgian Street in Dublin,
Mount Street Upper. Two women
Congregate outside the front door of an
Office to discuss, "What would be good

For *the* Business!" They are dressed
Very formally in business attire,
Somewhat masculine. Cut to the street,
And a young man passes in jogging tights

And vibrant red running shoes.
As he passes you are enveloped
In the aroma of his rather feminine

Perfume. The street is contemporaneous
With Jane Austen when women were seen
Rather than heard.



© Peter O'Neill

Michael J. Whelan lives in South Dublin. He served as a UN Peacekeeper in Lebanon and Kosovo with the Irish Army and is a historian and keeper of the Air Corps Military Museum. He was 2nd Place in the Patrick Kavanagh & 3rd in the Jonathan Swift Awards. He is widely published and read for the Poetry Ireland Introductions series and his debut collection 'Peacekeeper' was published in 2016 by Doire Press.



ROTATING

Irish UN Peacekeeping troops deployment from Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnel

Queuing up along the wall in the dining hall,
 an early breakfast before the long haul,
 their camouflaged uniforms separated hearts from bodies.
 For them the most difficult part was over, they had said their goodbyes,
 their families already returned to the car park, preparing for home.
 It's always the same, the wrenching away, the not knowing.

Later on I saw them in daylight, crowding by platoons and companies
 on the ramp between the hangars – waiting, the dark bunched up camouflage
 resembled small copses on the landscape, a long hedgerow here and there.
 There was a delay so they wandered round a bit before the orders came to form up,
 the pilot had signalled time to board, and the busses shuttled them out to the taxiway.

Old sweats and red arses, though even the well-seasoned soldier
 always has a slight churning in his gut before departure. I've been there,
 know the feeling well, the twisting anxiety, stomach rotating
 that only really leaves you after a couple of days in the AO. I nodded to a few
 faces I recognised, shook hands with others and wished them a safe return.

I knew some who never got one, their tours will last forever.
 In each of those uniforms was a life, a family, a story.
 They were going into the brutality of the world and every one of them was a poem
 that would never be written, giving their all when there was always more to give.
 I am glad of some things my country did.

AO = area of operations

ASKING THE DEAD FOR DIRECTIONS

It's 18 years later and I'm strolling down O'Connell Street.
 I notice a rough sleeper in a shop doorway. There is a queue
 for the bank machine contouring around his limbs
 as he lies face down on the hard ground talking loudly to himself.

I remember how the investigators worked flat out in Kosovo,
 almost captive to the corners of fields and the cruelty
 of the events they sought to prove, the soil they touched
 became a membrane surrounding remote scars.

They lay face down at times in abandoned crops,
 measuring tracks, listening for crowded spaces,
 recording the gossip of trees.
 They reminded me of Indian scouts from the movies,
 feeling for the signature of passing armies
 in the broken grass beneath their fingers.
 They were asking the dead for directions, the way somebody
 might search a cemetery, calling long deceased
 relatives to whisper if they are close or not.

Soon the world will discover another war crime and the skeletons
 of civilisation will once more bear witness to its own murder.
 As the Earth opens recent wounds I imagine the rough sleepers
 as skeletons of society communicating with scouts,
 investigators leaning over precipices,
 contemplating what goes into the filling of a trench.

THE AVIATORS

Sean Walsh Park, Tallaght

I was throwing bread and became surrounded at the water's edge,
engulfed by gaggles and screams, of birds of all kinds,
as if I had entered the wrong place at the wrong time
and my intrusion was being discussed.

A bawldy magpie digging a hole stopped every so often, stared me
up and down, paranoid, tilting its head, listening for bugs.
Its body seemed swollen, the wings raggedy and tired, feathers in tatters,
it seemed confused, limping, beaten upon and outcast by its peers.
Even the ducks and seagulls kept their distance.

I never throw bread into the water; it isn't good for pond life,
the magpie seemed afraid to approach where I had left a crust
on the ground, I felt sorry for it. A heron stood watching like something wise.
Some humans passed by, crossing the red bridge on their way
to the children's playground. The heron turned to study them.

When all the bread was gone some ducks waddled up to my feet, a little non-plussed
at my recent behaviour. I could see their beautiful colours, it felt like communication
having to prove my worthiness by showing empty hands, the aviators left then
and I was alone for a while with the wonder.

AUTUMN COMES

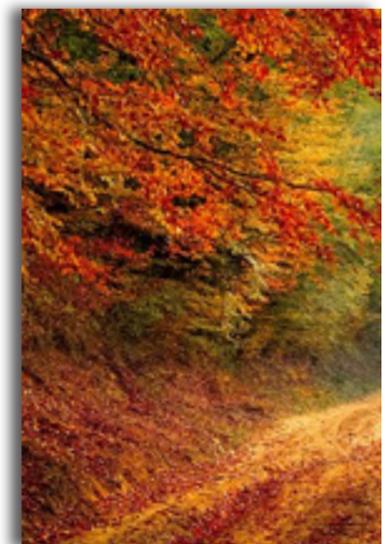
It happened so fast I almost missed it
the Mountain Ash turned to red,
a magpie stole berries from the Rowan,
each year two trees in the place of one.

*

My mother had blue woolly socks on her feet
when she waited in the coffin,
told us she didn't want to be cold
when they placed her in the ground.
Seven years later my father's socks were orange,
his funeral was in June, hers in November,
same plot.

*

The carnage of fuchsia flowers
fallen to the pavement
under weight of rain,
like the battlefield remains of the rearguard,
over-run, piled high at their last post,
a bed of blood near the greenest grass.



© Michael J Whelan

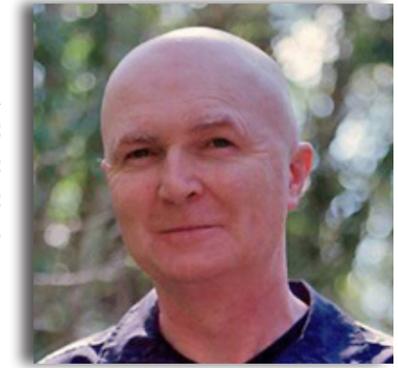
INSTRUMENT

I imagined
someone's last breath
caught with little
droplets of moisture
on the spider's web
in my garden,
a dream catcher
of what might
be carried on a final sigh,
words resembling
a gesture of love
to be heard
if the breeze
passed through
the glistening threads
in the right fashion,
when the web curves
like an instrument
returning the pulse
of someone lost,
who left something
unheard but gifted,

and so I steeled myself
each and every day
with a prayer
and the memory of faces
to protect what might
be there
until it came
to its natural end,
till the silver faded
even though sunlight
always told me
where it was
and then, in my head,
just before a hurricane,
the voice of reason
spoke a poet's verse
and said
*open your notebook
and listen
for words
falling from your pen.*



John W. Sexton was born in 1958 and is the author of five previous poetry collections: *The Prince's Brief Career*, Foreword by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, (Cairn Mountain Press, 1995), *Shadows Bloom / Scáthanna Faoi Bhláth*, a book of haiku with translations into Irish by Gabriel Rosenstock (Doghouse, 2004), *Vortex* (Doghouse, 2005), *Petit Mal* (Revival Press 2009), and *The Offspring of the Moon* (Salmon Poetry 2013). He also created and wrote *The Ivory Tower* for RTE radio, which ran to over one hundred half-hour episodes. His novels based on this series, *The Johnny Coffin Diaries* and *Johnny Coffin School-Dazed* are both published by The O'Brien Press and have been translated into Italian and Serbian. Under the ironic pseudonym of Sex W. Johnston he has recorded an album with legendary Stranglers frontman, Hugh Cornwell, entitled *Sons of Shiva*, which has been released on Track Records.



He is a past nominee for The Hennessy Literary Award and his poem *The Green Owl* won the *Listowel Poetry Prize 2007*. In 2007 he was awarded a *Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in Poetry*. His poem "In and Out of Their Heads", from *The Offspring of the Moon*, was selected for *The Forward Book of Poetry 2014*. He is also the changeling-other of the blog-poet Jack Brae Curtingstall.

FACE OF CHRIST

stitched from snakeskin Mr Dolly-Devilpatch
 red doors plot against the tyranny of threshold
 winding the unharm clock the old grow young
 after eating a flea infused with god he discovers fire
 in 1969 Luna is proved a stone I'm eleven
 moth at the oil lamp the face of Christ on its wings

PERFECT IFS

up ride a birch catkin to the moon's eye
 evaporated reigns the king made of steam
 negatives count backwards Einstime machine
 stuck in the 13th story Chef Zed's toffeemen
 towing Jerusalem by their hair swim midden east
 the glassblowers breathe bulbs of perfect ifs
 b mob ex plodes un does the car nage



A MOLECULE FREE

time travel takes real time on the turf escalator
his paper crown ablaze he illuminates the exit
build your own universe a molecule free with every issue
snow queen a morphine glacier expands his mind
for the Prince of Emgión sunlight opens the petal doors
Gabriel 8 ten devilled X 4 T got 6 6 6 a parrot

HOUSE OF LIGHT

cargo humans in jars dreaming until the moonmine
grazing stone my shadow's clothes never wear thin
then Mahoud held on to a cloud and escaped the city
before Yahweh, Onan claimed possession by glove puppets
Gallileo attaches the planets to the sun by his grey hair
Lilly pulled lilyturf until the ground screamed worms
under the Yangtze River Mr Chlang in his house of light



HIS NEPHRITE SUIT

take one primal egg poach in steaming cosmos serve cooled
fraction of theory more than the negative gold in fort nix
in his nephrite suit Emperor Shao enters the ocean of souls
soft tissue scars from wars with dandelion swords
armageddon ice-cream machine makes bloodberry Mondays
shadows the only tenants in the castle of dust

INSTRUCTION ON CENTRING

Jack Moonbeam your white sperm penetrates space
Jonah's unused whaleway return ticket
woodworm generate thoughts in the colonel's headboard
an instruction on centring from the stone angels
heron sections Siamese Buddhas from the salmon's heart
granny dark's brood all from the graves of the unbaptised
lord crow pecks the poisoned kumquat from her throat



Cathy Colman's first poetry collection, *Borrowed Dress*, won The Felix Pollak Award from the University of Wisconsin and was on *The Los Angeles Times* Bestseller list. Her second book *Beauty's Tattoo* was published by Tebot Bach. Her poems have appeared in *The Gettysburg Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Barrow Street*, *The Colorado Review*, *The Journal*, *The Huffington Post*, *Prairie Schooner* and elsewhere. Her poem entitled "The Last Time I Saw Virginia Woolf" was chosen by the Carnegie-Mellon curator of a traveling anti-gun visual art show to be included as the only poem.



BOTH VISIBLE

If only I could have rested
 in a world of knowable equations
 before I was married upstream
 in a churn of warning.
 Our belongings, the anchors
 that sunk us deeper: your already crippled
 raincoat falling into the stairwell, Zig-Zag papers
 on the spool table, batteries waiting in their
 liminal lives for years, throngs of T-shirts and
 sweatshirts gnarled together in the hamper
 as if a killer instinct had suddenly gotten loose.
 When we were still at the threshold, particles
 must have lost their hold on each other, blown
 into the confetti of petals, spindles from branches
 unhinged from their limbs rained down
 on us like a finely-honed chaos. And by the end
 of that long night, I was married to someone
 enthralled by the cadence of his own footsteps pacing
 the halls in the small hours, bickering with himself
 in the bathroom mirror, drying his socks over the stove
 burners while he sat, studying naked and beautiful in the kitchen
 like a marble statue of Anteros, learning yet
 another doomed language.

FROM AN IMPRINT

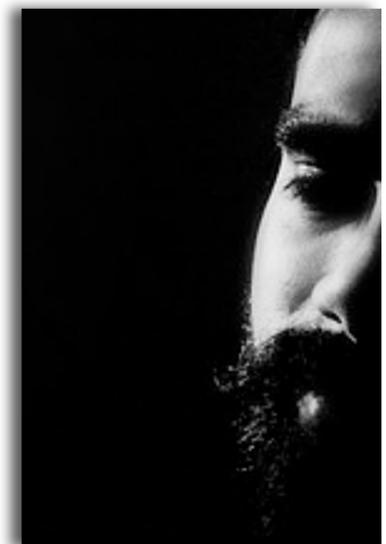
There's never enough sun in the tiny room
 where my almost weightless father
 has had gravity's forgetfulness fever the heft out of him.

Cobalt shadows on his face, fingernails like horn,
 water glass through which patches like trod-on leaves
 show crimson on his hands.

I am intoxicated by loss that courses on
 in its entrepreneurial fervor: his skin loosening, his
 left eye always closed.

When he looks at me suddenly, his right eye stops.
 It has found something-- it glitters hard,
 unfamiliar like newly formed quartz cracked

green by day. The eye is discerning, angry
 yet relieved that I am all it recognizes.



THE LAST TIME I HEARD THELONIUS SPHERE MONK

Water in the gutter sounds
 like bebop and the gravel like hard
 bop while I worry my
 worry beads waiting for you to come
 back, my echo-in-the-stairwell
 man. You're like

a record snowfall, once you're here
 we can't get out of the house. We
 feed the cats cottage cheese
 and pretend we're dieting in
 the bomb shelter because the cirrus

and cumulus from Washington D. C. are lowering, dark-
 ening and darkling, listen to the news and
 there may be a tinny voice that warns us bad
 acid is being sold on 7th Avenue and
 in Syria, while we are
 in the crosshairs of I lied and

fucking shut up, liminal like between
 seconds and sub-lingual like your tongue
 enmeshed with mine. I'm waiting for our early
 amphibious natures to drag us back into
 the feracious water so we can

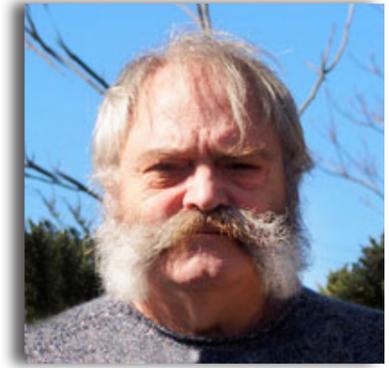
rebirth ourselves not like Christians
 but like fish with feet who walk
 on golf courses in Florida though darling
 we'll probably end up voting Republican
 because it's too bright to see or read

a book where a woman waits on a Greek
 island for a poem to come to her like
 a trained dog but without tiki torches and
 gun caps in the backyard, relics from our
 on-going civil wars. Not just the countries' but

ours because we tried couples counseling and
 it always boils down to either
 a seque-way or a boy's choir and sometimes
 a telegram that's taken so long to reach
 us it just says Stop. Stop. Stop.



Ray firmly believes that poems need to reach into the everyday person's pictures in their minds, and engage with those. This is where he aims to make a difference in his creative writing. Ray does readings around the state of North Carolina [USA], and is a member of the North Carolina Poetry Society, Winston-Salem Writers, and The North Carolina Writer's Network. He has thrice been a "Writer-in-Residence" at the North Carolina Center For The Arts and Humanities.



WOKE UP WONDERING

*Shifting in bed, not awake,
So completely asleep
Then suddenly sitting up in bed*

*It is still surreal
Reflective thinking.
Sleep vanished now, and
Yet, tangibly as if still dreaming:*

*Seeing self, after self
In among pre-dawn clouds,
Lined up, ready for....*

Becoming a waking pondering
While fingers rubbing the sleep out of one eye,
Smelling sweaty sheets from the night before

Lost feeling, barely aware, hardly stirred, having had
Rapt reflections startling enough, and powerful
To awaken from sound sleep.

Its dawn in the dream, a soft-colors real beauty of a dawn

*Seeing this while running with someone
Down this dawn's dim wooded path
Looking sideways, I see it's me.*

CAN'T REMEMBER

Woke up this mornin'
a Dave Mathews song rollicking thru my head.
Lively steppin', moving me along
steppin' into a new day.

Woke up this mornin'
thinking about the definition of liberal
about the definition of conservative
the lack of tolerance from either, for either.

Woke up this mornin'
mist was creeping up from the lake
towards puffy clouds above
blown about by the slightest breeze.

Woke up this mornin'
wanted to remember a unified country
and a world without hatred and war.
Was it ever like that? Can't remember.



REMEMBRANCE

The house is a melancholy place
while someone is dying inside

the push towards death belies
appearances, involved so in its own roll.

She sits up in her chair
out of bed for the first time in two days.

The touchdown she is going for
isn't in between goalposts

and that is a lie, too
because all waiting want to think she is going up

no touchdown, it is a flight, away
leaving hip replacements behind without a swish.

Sips of occasional cold, clear water
puts her tongue in perspective for a few raspy words

the water moves her eyes to make contact and
the reached savor it, mysteriously somehow it is more meaningful

the clear water is the soaking, warm rain
on the window to the outside, waiting patiently to be opened.

A LITTLE NUTS ALSO

fifth in the Scuppernong Books series

He wants to be free.
A comment overheard in the bookstore

it was another Immigrant story, too often
heard around the world.

Maybe its: She doesn't want to be raped.
A comment that needs to heard

in the midst of the biggest, largest
refugee crisis in recent history.

Those pictures of boat people
all looking more than a bit like nearly drowned

terse near-smiles on desperate faces
cold dripping windbreakers sodden with worry.

They just want to be free, people fleeing that
killing we can't stop

it is inherent, the understanding that
it's murder in or out of a uniform.

The Bulgarian cabin steward
is a pleasure to get to know

and even as he served us, all smiles
in a moment aside, said quietly: things are all fucked up.

The pain behind his friendly eyes hidden,
barely noticed.



MATH DREAM

When she is alone
with her thoughts

at 3 am, she is really alone,
and won't even share them later.

It is ground he does not walk on, he
only wants to know the direction

wants to know just what he can fix
like changing a light bulb or a tire
since that is what he does
so well.

In looking at the dream images
therein a problem asks for solving
yet there is no gradient towards solution
no formula, or otherwise a clue.

Yet a solution is demanded in the dream
even tho there arn't any odors to go by
seeing the images the photos of the mind
snapshots not found on instagram

Her sleeplessness is not for him to solve
while waiting for moments to be shared.

Waiting for words eagerly,
wishing for the dawn of breakthrough

what she has lain awake with
as much a mystery as if spoken in Norwegian.

Dreamlike, each picture has a math to it
a formula well beyond $E=Mc^2$
a solution begging like a starving dog on a winter's morn
to break open, the sun from behind clouds.



Ruairí de Barra hails from the wilds of Tawneyshane, Co. Mayo and now resides in Cobh, Co. Cork. With two decades of service with an tSeirbhís Chabhlaigh & Óglaigh na hÉireann, he is a regular contributor to 'An Cosantóir', the Irish Defence Forces magazine. His article "Rebuilding Somalia" was nominated for the European Military Press Association 'Best Article Awards 2017'. He writes creatively under the nom de plume Karol Barry at www.karolbarry.com. His creative work has featured with 'Tinteán' and in 'A New Ulster'.



RUINS OF HOUSES

In the shattered ruins of abandoned houses,
Lie secret notes on scraps of papers,
Tucked beneath the mossy stones,
Silent questions to be buried under falling needles,
Hopes and fears unanswered in the rough pine forest,
The cairn of broken plates and white clay pipes,
The thick round pots rims, orange and smooth,
Marking the commitment to the woodlice,
Of the lonely pain.

PETERS FISH

Red, golden, green, the scales of Peters fish,
stretched and nailed to the curve of the dome,
held up by pious prayers, feverish pleas and hope of the wounded,
the hospital arches of yellowed stone, barred with wrought iron,
twisted and anchored deep into faith,
by head and feet, anointed shells of men, bent battered forms.
Monuments of glory, extracted from pauper's pockets,
alms for the destitute and knives for the enemy,
brick and stone seated into the hillside,
suffer in your humanity, weep and be washed clean,
soldier return to maintain a homeland, soaked in blood.
Cassocked crucible redeemer, kneel and unto this ring press thy lips,
kiss, worship, bow, prostrate lie before fine marble,
whisper all into the grill,
bind thy limb, and mouth, choke off forbidden words,
in the darkness fear the retribution,
for untold sins at seven.
Cry out for the forgotten children,
wrapped in rags living in the doorway,
on the entrance to exalted palaces,
gleaming goods within, shining out from lust and greed,
stretching out across the broken pavement,
to illuminate the steps,
were the holy warriors bled and the drunk sleeps.



© Ruairí de Barra

TOWERING GIANTS

The rusty frames have faded into the background,
beyond the comprehension of the busy lives bustling underneath,
the silent gaze of the towering giants,
steadfast vigil beside the dark river,
strangers eyes see the flaking struts,
derelict complaints can't reach the pigeons nesting over Velrome,

These old familiar shapes once had motion,
the long lifeless chains once toiled,
hoisting plate steel upon the boom & jib,
dirt & sweat lowering bread upon the tables,
of those that climbed the ladders,
worn hands with black dirt engrained.

Tired forms slaked thirst inside the Smugglers,
read papers smudged by caulkers,
red eyed welders sat like monks,
in contemplation of the seam,
wreath in poison smoke,
attendant to the birthing bed,
of Irish Oak and Ash, of Aisling and of Emer.

Sickbed of a thousand weary hulls,
footings in the dock of industry,
outstretched arms into the air,
dismembered for the breakers yard,
to fade from memory of the passers-by,
rent a sunder in the final days.

Lest the crumbling lattice remove a life,
crashing into the cool shadow below,
or casting a hoist or sheave into the channel,
hooking the weary rumbling merchants,
like the swift runs of summer mackerel,
frozen now in the rarest of snows,
as the towering giants get pulled down.

THE TOWER OF IL-GARDJOLA

We hear it all,
the endless message,
carved high into the battlements,
conform and heed our call.

We see it all,
the lidless eye is never sleeping,
stays dry mid widows weeping,
for the husbands who lay bleeding.

We speak the truth,
if one can hear it,
stand on faith or simply fear it,
wearily silent, remain to bear it.

We are the day,
the endless power,
the bright sunlit gleaming tower,
careless now the hour,
brings no sunset.

We are the night,
deep everlasting,
pinned in stone,
the all enduring,
the world upon its mooring,
rotates on and on.

We are the Alpha and Omega,
the cross and holy sceptre,
the welcoming open harbour,
fruit laden timeless garden,
above trembling prison wall.



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*, was published in June 2018 by Doire Press.



VOYEUR

BY JAMES MARTYN JOYCE

When the autumn came I left a woman in Rome and drove north. Rob, a Dutch friend, had settled in The Hague and was doing well as a photographer, turning sandy cement-scapes into holiday destinations through his lens. He was criss-crossing the globe, business class, lapped and digital, capturing destinations with 'exclusive' pinned to them in the tour-shop windows and on the holiday websites. He'd told me I could share his flat while I sorted out one or two things, a job and a room to begin with. He was a good friend, I wouldn't wound him.

Rob had a two-roomed apartment on a quiet street just off Frederik Hendriklaan, the coolest street in The Hague. This was a not an Irish type flat: a square of cement, cheap wiring and a thin door. No, this was half a house, on two levels, Lego-style, stitched in and out of the other half, with a glass back wall to roof height, overlooking the tiny back garden. A house, but tasteful, like the person who'd designed it had actually cared.

At night I could hear the other tenant, a middle-aged woman crossing her floor above my head, vacuuming her carpets, cooking food, or her early step on the stairs in the morning. That was before I managed to pick up a job and took to leaving before her.

I collected the key from a friend of Rob's who ran a fruit stall on 'The Fred,' as Frederik Hendriklaan was called. I tapped him for work at the same time, and when he heard I spoke English and all, he told me to keep in touch, he had someone leaving in a week or so and I could use the time to settle in.

It's funny how cooking and travel go so well together. If I was still at home my mother would be doing everything, the cooking, the cleaning, and the dirty clothes. Yet here I was, three years gone, with a selection of passable dishes to my name, self-sufficient to a large degree, my clothes clean most of the time and the sky hadn't fallen in.

So I stocked up one of Rob's kitchen cupboards and spent a day or two walking here and there to learn the streets. In the evenings I'd toss a pasta dish together, or grill some fish, settle back, maybe watch the English news channel or read a little. I wasn't a great TV person anyway.

It was almost a week before I even noticed the family. They occupied the apartment across the back lawn, another house on another street but backing onto mine. It was the light I noticed first. Maybe it was the autumn closing in, but I noticed how the young mother would move from room to room every evening, turning all the lights up full, blazing the Edison glow across the little patch of grass, turning the bright walls brighter. She carried a baby across her arm, a little girl of two or so following her, trailing some toy or just clinging to her mother's dress. Sometimes the mother would sit and read to her, or feed the baby, or sit thumbing through her phone, just being there, living.

When her husband, or partner, or whatever, came home in the evenings the whole family would spring to life and he'd kiss the baby, change his clothes for a tracksuit, organise the cooking, the little girl now clinging to his trouser leg.

Sometimes I'd think of the woman in Rome, how quickly I'd left and why. A few times I slipped the Italian SIM card back into my phone and read through the texts, but after a week or so they stopped coming and after that I didn't bother.

One evening the little girl pressed her face to the cold glass of the window pane and filled it with her breath, the fog spreading out, and then she did squiggles and drew lines across it. I could see her lips moving and imagined her little-girl song.

Sometimes I'd stop on my way between rooms and watch. The father would move quickly through the scene, passing out plates of food or tossing the baby high above his head, the little girl a satellite in his wake.



Other times he'd return, the girl wrapped in a towel or dressed for bed and she'd run as fast as possible, her tiny legs almost too quick for her body and he'd pretend to chase her, the mother hurrying to hide her before they'd all collapse in a jumbled heap and he'd scoop the girl up and carry her away, book in hand.

After a while I found the family were better than television. I'd pull the big chair around, the lights dimmed, my full plate propped on my knee. I'd follow their little happenings, the baby stuffing its hand into its mouth, the mother talking, pulling the baby close to her face, the way the baby would shy from the contact, but smiling, catching its breath. At other times the little girl would paint a picture on the small easel with the cheap paper roll. The mother pulling a fresh strip into place and the little one would cover it in paint, no image, but a collision of colours erupting from the white page.

I grew to anticipate the burst of light in the evenings, the rooms flooding, the tableau settling itself, the father cooking, the mother folding baby clothes. After almost two weeks the fruit seller told me he had hours for me and I took to leaving in the dark, the stall opening early, shoppers on their way to work. The stall owner liked the fact that I was Irish; he had many English-speaking customers and was happy to let me deal with them, so I fitted in, weighing potatoes, sorting fruit, getting acquainted with the more exotic roots, enjoying the banter.

One evening towards the end of my first week there the father stopped to buy clementines, piling the golden fruits into a large paper bag. He selected them carefully, checking that the skins were slightly loose, rolling them in his grip, taking more care than many customers. I was wary of him, for no reason that I could explain beyond knowing in some small way how he lived. I felt like I'd looked into his life, an invasion almost.

'Just the clementines.' His accent was a surprise, further west than my own, but Irish all the same. We'd turned language into an apologetic art, the 'just' offering some apology for not buying more, like he owed the stall-holder and myself some level of support beyond the simple buy and sell. I nodded. Maybe I should have spoken, but for a second I felt some irrational dislike, a small hatred bubbling up in me, so I took his coins, tossed them in the till and offered him the change.

When I got home that evening it was dark, the rooms across the lawn already blessed with light. I pulled the chair closer to the tall glass until I could feel the cold coming off it, cracked one of the

cans I'd bought along the street, and sat watching.

The family were finishing dinner, the little one eating as she stood beside her mother, the baby feeding, cupping the mother's breast. The father cleared the dishes away, easing out of sight as he carried the plates to the kitchen area at the rear.

He returned and placed the full bowl of clementines in the centre of the table and sat and peeled the golden skins from the small fruits. He offered the first one to his wife then peeled a second one for the little girl, the fruit looking big in her tiny grip.

I no longer felt hungry, the beer filling me. I cracked the second can and sat, the darkness coming down over the garden and I thought again about Maria, the woman in Rome. I even took the Italian SIM card from my wallet and slipped it into my phone, but when I powered up my phone no text came through.

The father was back now, the little girl wrapped in a big towel. She played with his thinning hair as he dried her, and then she ran quickly to her mother on the couch, the over-sized pyjamas almost tripping her.

I jumped when my phone glowed, the delivery tone taking me by surprise. I thumbed quickly but the message was a generic one welcoming me to Holland, offering me the usual terms, telling me how much they cared. I couldn't be in the apartment after that, so I went along the street to a local bar and drank until midnight. The family was in darkness when I returned, the windows blackened and opaque.

'We did not get your name last night?' the barmaid asked when I stopped in for a beer again the following evening. 'I am Monique. Now that you are back you are a regular, so we must know your name.'

'Thomas, my name is Thomas.' And she called my name to the other patrons, who saluted through the smoke.

'You are visiting?' she asked, smiling. She was giving me at least ten years, but I'd learned that all games were fair once you left Ireland and passed through Calais.



'No, I live here, I work down the street.' Maybe it had been a mistake to come back for another beer, but I could feel Rob's house closing in around me. I took my drink and sat at the table near the door.

He was a surprise when he pushed through almost an hour later, the woolly hat pulled low and Monique waved, a chorus of 'Fergals' greeting him.

'And this is Thomas,' the barmaid said, giving my name a Germanic inflection. He nodded 'Thomas' and that was it, the conversation easing him in, the laughter coming, and the inclusive, insider jokes.

I had three beers that night; Monique brought each one to my table at my barest nod. She leant in, letting me see the offer, but I let it go. When I left, the father was not at the bar, toilets probably, and I stood outside, the Dutch cold biting me, and fixed my collar. He pushed through the door, woolly hat in place, still shuffling into his parka.

'Good night, Thomas.' His call was unexpected as he eased past, giving me his 'shit' smile, the one we keep for everyone. I mumbled a gruff reply and he was gone.

I cracked open another can when I got back to the apartment and eased into my usual chair. The lawn was almost white in the moonlight, the tall windows beyond it a curtain of black. Then the lights flickered and pulsed, the living room bursting with brightness and he entered carrying the little girl in his arms. She was crying hysterically and he stroked her hair and held her close. The mother followed, kissing the child's cheek and talking to her. I could see the tremors running through the tiny body. Maria's child had woken once in the night like this. Night terrors, Maria had called it, the child quivering with fear at some dream in her head, a horror untold.

Fergal sat on the broad sofa cuddling her. His wife kissed the top of the child's head again, bent and pecked his cheek before leaving the room and he settled down to comforting her.

I sat and watched, Maria and her daughter turning in my mind's eye. The little girl was playing with her toys now, putting plastic utensils on the play cooker near the window. The father stood and adjusted the lighting until the room was almost a dimmed stage, then he knelt, helping her to place the toys back in their storage box.

The girl moved towards the window and breathed on the cold pane, her breath a hot fog. Then she pressed her tiny fingers to the glass and cleared a circular smudge, drew a second eye close to the first. She brought her face closer to the pane until I felt she was looking straight at me across the pale lawn, her huge, round eyes fixing me like Maria's child had done when we'd first met in Rome.

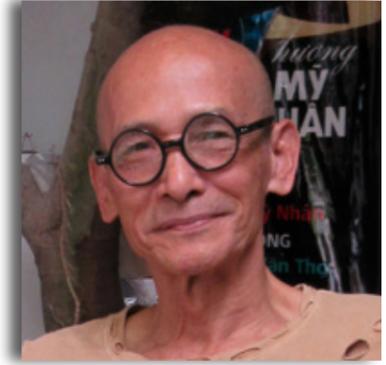
It's well after midnight now and I'm halfway down another beer. The local bar is empty except for the pool player asleep on the stained baize, his empty glass beside him. Monique had smiled when I pushed through the bar door, like something had been decided between us. I can still see the little girl's eyes, their cold certainty, almost like she could see me, and I can't get Maria out of my mind.

I could be south by mid-morning if I left now, I could drive through the night along the abandoned motorways, through the few tunnels, the hum of the engine lulling me. I can see myself easing through the doorway of the restaurant where she works, explaining how her child had been a surprise to me, appearing, as she did, after we'd been together for four months. How Maria had never mentioned that she had a child that lived with her grandparents, how wrong I had been to be angry at the time.

I can see all that as the pool player gives a drunken snort and settles again. I focus on my car keys resting on the table, and Monique places another full beer beside my half-finished one and smiles and laughs her tempting laugh. I know I need to take those car keys and leave. I need to do it now.

Nguyen Van Tho is an ex-Viet Cong soldier and author who has published a number of books. He was born on 6th October 1948 in the Thai Binh Province, Vietnam. In 1965 he graduated from Trung Vuong High School and joined the army the same year. He was assigned to a regiment defending Ha Noi. Three years later, in 1968, he was posted in the south of the country where he fought in a number of bloody battles, which included those in Laos. In 1976, one year after the country was reunited and peace came to the land, Tho was demobbed from the army. He got a job in the Aquiculture Company I. In 1977 he joined Commerce University and graduated in 1981. Later, Tho became vice chief of administration in a salt firm. Seven years on he left Vietnam for the German Democratic Republic to work as head of labour management in a company. Even after the unification of Germany, Tho continued to live and work there. He returned to Vietnam in 2014 and resides in Ha Noi.

As a writer, who has won many awards, he focuses on three main subjects: War and soldiers in post-war scenarios, Ha Noi, life of Vietnamese in Europe. Nguyen Van Tho is also a journalist who writes on current affairs. He is a member of the Vietnam Writers' Association. His books include poetry, novels and notes - *Mảnh vỡ* (1988), *Cửa sổ* (1999), *Bên kia trái đất* (2002), *Gió lạnh* (1999), *Vàng xưa* (2003), *Thất huyền cầm* (2006), *Vô danh trận mạc* (2013), *Hương mỹ nhân* (2016), *Vườn mộng* (2018), *Quyên* (2009), *Đào ở xứ người* (2005), *Mưa thành phố* (2010), *Vợ cũ* (2013), *Đầu ngọn sóng* (2016).



Memories of war and peace.

THE SMELL OF GUN POWDER BY NGUYEN VAN THO

From his anthology titled *Hương Mỹ Nhân*, published by Nhà Xuất Bản Thanh Niên. Translated from Vietnamese and edited by Nguyen Thuy Hoa.

The war had ended. He had refused incentives and promotion to remain in the army and insisted on returning home. For him the war was over. The country was united and at peace. It had been twelve years since he had left his village.

Throughout the train journey back to his village he could not sleep. For every time sleep came, the dreams came too. Sleep with its happy and sad dreams swayed back and forth like a ship at sea. In the delirium he saw his father and mother, the ruined garden, the straw roof of the house and bamboo platform on the pond. Just two hours before reporting for enlistment to the army, he had repaired the platform. He went down waist high into the water to attach two bamboos to reinforce and stabilise the structure. He didn't want his wife to be afraid of using it when she ventured to wash vegetables, rice or to do the laundry. And, in his dream, the aroma of her hair, her mouth, her lips and her breasts ensnared his senses. He saw his wife and daughter, a daughter whose face he had not seen, and woke up with a start. As he couldn't sleep he got up and went to the head of the compartment, looked out into the dark night and lit a cigarette.

Why did the train go so slowly?

After having smoked a few cigarettes he returned to his seat, opened his backpack and checked the contents...*this is for his daughter, this is for his father, this is for his mother, this is for his wife...* and these his war memorabilia – military poncho, part of a paraglider sheet, the American dagger with a wooden handle and ring, a bag containing a Claymore landmine and the last thing, TNT...the smell of gun powder. A smell that remained with him for many years, for every time he inhaled, he felt a strange mixture of passion and fright that shook him when he was in stupor to being wide awake.

© Nguyen Van Tho



Moon and woman

He had been a commando in the Special Forces. The commandos wore only briefs, covered their bodies with black ash to merge with the surroundings, the darkness, camouflaged so that they could approach the enemy base camp undetected... armed with explosives, daggers, AK 47 assault rifles, and backed by artillery.

Oh that gun powder emitted an unforgettable smell, an indescribable all pervasive smell. Whenever the AK 47 burst into life, red flames lit up the sky in the blink of an eye. The ensuing fire fight and the pungent smell of gun powder permeated the air around. And when the encounter was over the commandos moved on to another target. The smell of gun powder day in and day out became inescapable, it remained on his clothes and seeped into his bloodstream, his being.

He put the TNT back into the bag. As peace had come there was no need to use this explosive anymore. He had earlier removed the detonator and kept the TNT as a souvenir. When a person belongs to a class, a generation, more specifically to a military unit he must keep the memory alive to remind him of the time he had spent in the war, the smell of gunpowder, the smoke attached to it, and his brothers in arms – some alive, some dead, others missing. It reminded him of their faces, each memory as clear as yesterday, and etched for eternity in his mind. The smell that had shadowed him throughout the years, a tribute to the heroics of comrades of the Special Forces.

When the train arrived at the station, he alighted and decided to walk to his village, a good 30 kms or so away. He wanted to see everything again, from Hang Co Railway Station to Kinh Bac... his village across the river, which he had left twelve years before and had not returned since then.

He had arrived at his home! Nervously he removed the steel chain of the gate. Cúc tần* bushes grew around the house. The silk thread, tơ hồng**, which draped the bushes, and washed by the dew, glistened in the moonlight. He could still distinguish the yellow of the thread and the green leaves of the cúc tần even if they appeared lifeless in their firm embrace.

Moonlight shone on the front door. He noticed that the doorstep was still crooked. The clay front floor was cracking. His heart sank... he rushed into the house.

“Who’s that?” a faint hissing voice called out.

He was silent. Then gently replied “It is me”.

The sound of footsteps could be heard coming from the side room. He recognised the dark shape of the figure approaching him...his wife...how many years had passed...he reached out but stopped suddenly. His wife? Why is she carrying a child in her arms?

“Who’s that?” asked the trembling voice.

“It’s me” he replied and like the wind rushed to embrace his wife.

But his wife was lukewarm and suddenly appeared faint.

“Where are my parents?” he asked, looking around the cold room lit by the glow moonlight.

The woman seemed to recognize him. “Oh my God! Are you? Am I hallucinating or awake?” said the woman. “Are you real? Or is this your ghost?” the woman bowed and cried “Your spirit...please bless me...don’t scare me!” Then she fainted. He leaned forward and caught the woman and child from falling. They were like young birds shivering in his arms.

The whole village was talking about his return.

“Thánh is back. He will probably kill that slut Thom. What a wife! She sleeping with her husband’s father and driving him (the father) to suicide”.

The villagers sounded like frogs croaking in a pond. Whisperings carried the story of his family like the goings-on in the black market. But Thánh was not deaf. He had heard the gossip and it cut deep into his heart. And he hid. Hiding from the cruel reality didn’t bring any peace. It was futile. For days he lay there in the corner of the bed, unwillingly to leave home.



Baby

Visitors felt sorry for him. The gossip mongers who met him added to his misery. Thánh was a soldier back from the war... back from the dead...he didn't need pity. It seemed that it was easier to have crossed the line of fire in the war than to see, hear and feel the pain within...and being in his own village with nowhere to retreat. He decided to lock the gate, create a bamboo barrier higher than the cúc tần bushes festooned with tở hồng, and to close the holes all around the house, even the dog hole.

Each night Thánh lay restless between his 12 year old daughter and his brother who was no more than a year old. He couldn't sleep...he wanted to bury himself in his home, his father's garden where he had grown up. He held his brother in his arms as the boy stirred and began to cry for his mother. *Why does the boy look so much like him?* He got up and went to the adjoining room, which was once his parents' room to burn incense for his father at the family shrine. He recalled how he had hugged his mother before departing for the army. She cried, her tears had wet his shoulder. But he could not cry anymore. From the house shrine his father kept looking at him from a faded photograph... the eyes deep, half expecting, half surprised, in black and white...wild.

What should we do now, mom? Sometimes he wanted to ask but he could not open his mouth. It was painful to watch his wife genuflect before the shrine...he took her back to their room and went to bed and lay between the two children. His breath echoed in the night.

Heartbroken. He remembered the smell of gunpowder. He got up, went to his backpack and pulled out the TNT played with it between his hands. Finally looking at the two children he went to the front door and removed the American dagger, which he had kept behind it. He shaved a little off the TNT, then lit the shavings with a Zippo. A comforting fragrance filled the air, encompassed him, it steeled his nerves...the nerves of a man who had overcome many difficulties...bloody battles unto death...it soothed him. He had to live for his aged mother. Two children. His daughter and the other, his baby brother.

Had to live!

Had to live! But how to live? The nerve wracking moments when he had faced death in the war returned. There was so much loss of life, many people had died in his arms. He understood. Two children – his daughter and brother demanded that he live...and not forget to live.

Thánh could not come to terms with the situation... whether he still loved or hated the woman that he had loved so dearly in the past. A woman who waited patiently, for twelve years, for his return. And also the memory of his father whom he respected and loved.

No, all is over, no need to question, no need to regret. We should not live only in the past. We must live for the present and especially for the future!

He stared at the ceiling to avoid the look of his wife and the eyes of both children that were upon him. For a year no one had repaired the leak in the corner of the roof. It had turned black. The battle with raindrops went through the ceiling and left a visible stain. The hole in the roof could be repaired but what about his destiny, his mother's life, the lives of the children?

The next morning he went to his mother's house, hugged her and said, "Mom. I have accepted everything. From tomorrow, you move to my house!"

"No. I am not going to. Your house, you stay there..." she replied defiantly.

"Come on Mom. Forgive my wife."

"I do not blame her. All the people in this village thought you had died. She had waited for you for eleven years, waited for a man that the whole village has said was dead. Your death notice was also released. I do not blame your father, either. I felt sick every day after you had gone and could not fulfill my duties as a wife. He was lonely. I felt sorry for your wife. A woman cannot stay young for long ... But, but... if only your father had looked for joy in some other woman, not her ... then ... I would not have this regret."

"Please. Do not blame father! I had been gone so many years and there was no news from me! Stop crying, mom!"

"I also think so. So God made me live till today to welcome you back."

He understood, he wanted to forgive, wanted to forget all, to live once again. But he did not know how to live?



Bananas

He also visualized everything through his wife's narration of past events...how her pregnancy began to show, how she couldn't hide it, how villagers created an uproar.

"Father sat in a dark corner of the house that night, next to an empty bottle of insecticide..." that, "he frothed from the mouth, his trembling hands reaching out and touching my six-month old pregnancy, my stomach". He told me, "You please keep the child, brother of Thánh. Thánh's dead. I have a problem with my wife. Who will keep the land? Who will keep the shrine? Forgive me! I go to another world to see Thánh. I will ask him to forgive you."

The old man coughed and then frothed from the mouth.

"You father said that, so even I hated him for a long time. I still kept the child, your brother, for the Nguyen family of this village. All the young men from our village departed for the battle field, never to return. Who expected that you would survive? Why did you survive? Why did you return to messed up mud ponds?"

His wife cried all night. He lay next to her and looked up at the ceiling. The pain he felt was like a hundred thousand knives stabbing his heart. How many days did his wife cry? How many days since he left? He had no faults, or did he?

The years of war when enemy planes bombed the village, temple and nearby small glass factory. From north to south of the country people hated the enemy that came from a far off land, and people wanted them to return to their country. Of course, they had to go!

Why did his father have to choose such a disastrous end? All his family had suffered so much...his father, his wife, his mother and himself. He also understood why several times his wife wanted to commit suicide, before and after his father's death. Once, when helping his mother clean the shrine he saw a rope in the cabinet hidden behind old clothes. So everyone wanted to leave but then stayed because of the two children. Was he more cowardly than them? He touched the American dagger, which he had sharpened, so sharp that it could be used to shave the hair off his legs. He could not stab himself in the abdomen even though he had sharpened the knife for just this. *No, he had to live...for the sake of the kids!*

People's wounds heal as time passes. He tried to be like a buffalo, pulling a plough in a field, a beast of burden. He earned enough money to buy tiles to replace the straw on the roof and purchase a bike.

The children too had grown up in the ensuing two years since his return. The image of his daughter with her school bag slung across the hips, hair over the shoulders as she returned from school was like a little bird, singing. Her singing wafting over the *cúc tần* in the embrace of the silken threads of the *Tơ hồng*, the bamboo ridge in the peaceful lane, and calmed the anguish he felt. He came out of the rain water tank beside the palm tree, scooped up and drank the clear water. The cuckoo's cry mingled with the smoke from the kitchen that gently rose into the air, and the smell of new rice created a peaceful atmosphere.

Yes, have to live. No more war. We had the peace now!

It was a hot summer day, two days prior to his father's second death anniversary, when people got easily irritated by the constant heat throughout the day and night, and before he left to work in the field his wife gave him two bunches of bananas. She said, "A boy named Ha would contact him to buy the bananas. He was to sell the bananas at the rate she mentioned. He was not to sell them at a lower price because it was just enough money to buy books for our daughter!"

He waited a long time but the guy named Ha never came. In the afternoon, when he was working in the pond, his mother arrived to pray at the family shrine. She said to him, "Son, the bananas are beautiful. Could you please give me two hands of bananas to offer your father when I light the incense?"

"Well, take it," he replied. He cut two hands of bananas and gave it to his mother. He also picked some green tea for her. "Cook green tea for the relatives, who will come to celebrate the death anniversary of my father."

Then late afternoon his wife returned. He heard her loudly exclaim from the house, "Oh! Who cut two hands of bananas?"

"Mother!" he replied loudly.

“Didn’t Ha come? Or, did he come but refused to buy the bunch without the two missing hands?”

“I cut for mother, she wanted to make an offering to father at the shrine. The day after tomorrow we celebrate the day father died,” he replied.

“Humm... Yes father!” Suddenly he heard the slashing sound of a knife and ran out.

In the yard his wife wielded the knife like a maniac, stabbing at the bunch of bananas in a frenzy. Hate rose within her as she continued decimating the bunch.

“Stop it! Stop! You’re crazy,” he shouted at her. But she hadn’t heard him. She was lost to the pathological hatred for the man who had ruined her life. Soon the bananas were cut into an unrecognisable heap. A mess! He could not control himself anymore as the small part of the man buried somewhere within him emerged. *Why forgive?* He pointed at the face of both stranger and loving woman and said, “I can’t stand it anymore. You betrayed me. Scorned my father.”

He left the house carrying the TNT and sat down by the river. The over-powering smell of gun powder rose and spread from the TNT shavings that had been burnt by him... beside the dark shadow of a man against the sky... smoldered as the sun began to sink in the west... and as it dipped below the horizon clouds like bloody hands stretched out, painting the sky in a bloody hue. That night he returned to write a petition for divorce, something that had never occurred to him during the past two years. His mother was supposed to keep vigil at the family shrine till his father’s death anniversary, but he had to go.

“I go first. I will return for you later!” he said to his mother.

“Go. It would be a relief to leave this place. I am used to enduring this alone,” replied his mother, sadly.

“Yes, then I go, I will send you money,” he replied.

At midnight a fisherman on the wharf saw two people secretly enter the river.

Thánh used his commando skills, and avoided taking a boat. Instead he swam across the river. His left hand pushed a floating plastic wrap forward. On it sat his daughter. He glanced back at the village. He knew there was an old woman, his mother, lonely, sitting under a *cúc tần* bush, who had been watching them leave home, escaping like fugitives.

He bumped into old friends in Da Nang city when he and his daughter returned to the place where he had fought. They received him with open arms. No one knew why he had returned to the old battlefield. His former unit commander, who had left the army and now worked for the management board of the city, enquired about his wife. Thánh replied that she had passed away. For him, she had died a long time ago.

The old commander was kind and offered him a job as a reporter for a newspaper in the city. As he could not arrange immediate accommodation for the father and daughter, the commander let them stay in the office, temporarily.

“No hard work,” he said calmly to Thánh.

When departing from his home he had left all his furniture and belongings to his ex-wife and brother – son of his wife and father. The traumatic moment was wishing his mother goodbye. She had refused to follow him. She told him that she would die where she was born. She didn’t mind being poor...she was poor all her life. But he could not accept his wife’s behavior that year. It pushed him to anger, to leave. Was this a hate that would last forever? This question remained in his head and often arose painfully like an old wound that reacts to the vagaries of nature. He attempted to busy himself at work so that he could forget that dreadful ache that had brought sleepless nights with it. Every time melancholy overtook him at night, especially when his child slept, he would remove the TNT from his backpack. He used the dagger to scrap bits off it and then he would burn the scrapings. The overwhelming smell of gun powder covered all that it touched, comforting him. He would lean back and shut his eyes, surrendering to this magic power.



Mother Au Co

Post war Da Nang grew fast from the ashes. Continuous reforms and development of the city brought a better standard of living, not only for the people but also for him and his daughter. He had a small house on the banks of the Han River. The house opened to the sea. So father and daughter often walked on the white sandy beach. Sometimes he gazed north.

But fate was about to make an appearance. On the day when the city inaugurated the statue of Mother Au Co*** situated on the way to the sea, an old woman made an appearance.

Sitting in the area reserved for war veteran delegates that day, he was intrigued by an old woman from People Deputies in the Hoa Vang district who stared at him. She announced quite firmly that he was the injured soldier who had stayed at her house in a secret cellar for a week during the war.

"You're Thánh. I heard people introduce you by name, so I recognized you. Do you remember, son, I saw you off when your comrades returned to take you with them?" The gray hair woman held his hands tightly and repeated that he was the soldier.

What she said was true. They had fought for several nights in that village before he came to Da Nang. But he had not been injured in the campaign. Perhaps the old woman had mistaken him for someone else. The former commander whispered in his ear, "You're weird. All the mothers in the South are *our Mother*. Like the mother that used to feed you. Do not disappoint her at this moment, under the statue of Mother Au Co that we have just erected".

He hugged the old woman. Under the benign gaze of Mother Au Co he had been given a mother, one who had helped a wounded warrior a long time ago. After this meeting, this woman cheerfully told everyone that she met, "I've always said that he would come back. If he's still alive, I would find him".

He and daughter were welcomed to Hoa Vang district to visit the family that had helped his unit. Coincidentally, the youngest daughter of that old woman, named Tham, who was very beautiful and still single, was a teacher of literature at his daughter's school.

The old woman strongly believed him to be the wounded soldier. During the meal, she appeared to have suddenly grown younger. She kept repeating, "I knew that I would find you anyhow".

Tham's family and his family grew closer in the following months. But he was honest. He could not lie. He told the teacher all about of his life and revealed that he was not the soldier her mother was referring to. Tham did not say anything. She wiped her tears and remained silent.

She told him to let her mother believe that he was the soldier. Maybe that soldier was dead. If he was alive, he would have visited her mother. He meekly agreed.

Perhaps destiny, unfathomable, was like an invisible cord that tied one to another, sometimes by accident. The teacher cared much for Thánh's daughter, whom she visited regularly. He in turn viewed her as someone indispensable to them. The bond was complete.

The wedding day was a cheerful event. His daughter was happy, too. But he couldn't comprehend why when the guests had left, he suddenly recalled the *cúc tần* festooned with *Tơ hồng* in his village. The moonlight shining into a part of the house... he trembled...like the silver glow of the silken threads of the *Tơ hồng* moistened with dew gently swaying in the breeze.

Ten years had passed. Although he had to support his daughter studying in Saigon, he sent money to his mother every month. The only time he went to north was for his mother's funeral. He permitted his daughter to visit her mother.

But ten years was a long time filled with many events. Time had erased many horrible memories. Erased the obsessive hate but brought back the sad memories. Memories that were not easy to forget, even if one wanted to.

He presumed correctly that his brother would have reached sixteen years of age. He had grown up so quickly! But how did he live? He was family, his blood, his younger brother. Unable to bear the thought of not seeing him, he discussed this with his wife, Tham, and then returned to the north.

The train journey was different now. The train was neither fast, nor slow. From Hang Co station he did not go on foot to the village but hired a bike taxi. When they reached the village he got off the bike and walked into the village.

His village had changed in many ways but the entrance to his house was the same. The cúc tần bush was still there, in the night, standing indifferently, tiredly.

He was shocked at the state of the house, which now belonged to his ex-wife. Old brick walls cracked and crooked. The tile roof was half broken. Before him stood an old woman who was dying and a sixteen year old thin boy, due to lack of food.

“Your brother had dropped out the school two years ago. I’m worried. In the village, the children become delinquents quite easily. I am too poor to care about all this,” his ex-wife whispered.

Then she opened her battered cabinet and withdrew some old clothes. From them she pulled out a paper packet and unwrapped it in front of him.

“This is all the money that you sent your mother. She did not spend a penny, though I begged her to. She ate whatever we could afford to eat, vegetables... porridge. When she lay dying she told me that all your money was left for me and my son. But after her death we dared not spend it for fear that as you were injured, you could not earn much, and hence you might want to borrow this money...” That night he could not sleep. Throughout the night he was restless in his cousin’s house. It was inconceivable how his ex-wife still obediently carried out her obligations as a daughter-in-law, even though she had been divorced by her husband. He got up, went to his backpack, removed the TNT and walked to the river.

With the Zippo he burnt a few pieces shaved off from the TNT. He inhaled the smoky aroma of gun powder and decided the next cause of action. He pulled out his phone, it was almost 2 a.m., and called Tham. He told his wife clearly, without crying, the horrid situation.

“Yes I hear you clearly. Bring your ex-wife and brother to Da Nang immediately.”

The sixty year old veteran burst into tears. He wept. Tears rolled down his face as he walked to the home of a mother and son through the bushes of cúc tần* on the moonless night. Though it was dark he could see everything. His hand brushed against the yellow silk threads of the Tơ hồng** that draped the cúc tần, a common sight in the village.

Early one morning, a week later, some villagers saw him depart with his ex-wife and her son who followed him quietly. On the edge of the village he stopped and looked back at the old house for a few minutes, then, holding his brother’s hand pulled him away.

It was not easy to provide for his ex-wife and brother in Da Nang. He and Tham sold both their motorcycles. “We will walk for a while. First have to settle them down,” said Tham. The money raised with the sale of his ex-wife’s house and the two motorcycles plus a few savings, Thánh could buy a small house for his ex-wife and her son. Fortunately, a former comrade hired the boy to work in his car repair shop. His friend told him that the boy was honest and smart.

But life had its ups and downs. The day of his father’s death anniversary had arrived once more. He prepared dinner for the whole family, and invited his mother-in-law. Later he took the TNT cake, shaved a few bits off it and burnt the shavings. Flames suddenly rose followed by the smell of gun powder as it wafted across to where his mother-in-law was sitting.

She stood up and exclaimed, “What is that smell?”

But it was not strange to Tham. When her husband was sad or faced some difficulties, she witnessed him doing this. It was all too familiar to her.

“He lit some explosive, mother!” replied Tham.

“Where, what explosives?” said a distraught mother-in-law.

The old woman ran outside and grabbed the TNT from Thánh.

“Oh...this killer thing. Your father was also surrounded by explosives when the enemy burnt him. Why did you keep this? Why? Do not frighten me,” she cried out bitterly.

The truth of what he had been doing dawned upon him. It was like an awakening of his soul. He embraced his mother in law.

“Sorry, I’m sorry, mother.”

“You throw that thing into the sea! Throw it away, now!” She said as her shoulders trembled.

He took the TNT from her, an explosive which had been an inherent part of his youth, his heroic battles, his miserable life, and the lives of many who had fallen in the war, and ran to the shore. Under the benign gaze of Mother Au Co, he threw it into the sea.

Then he stood silently. He did not know why he suddenly remembered his village, far away, the image of *cúc tần* bushes around the house...the *Tơ hồng*, yellow silk threads draped over the bushes, under the moonlight, the yellow thread and green leaves...forever and ever tied together... like the smoke from the kitchen rising up and floating in ethereal clouds over the rooftops of houses...

Foot Notes

**Cúc tần* - *Pluchea indica* is known as the tree of compassion. It has medicinal value, is used to spice food and also grown as a hedge around homes.

** *Tơ hồng* – *Dodder*, which is a symbol of *Tơ hồng*, the match-maker fairy.

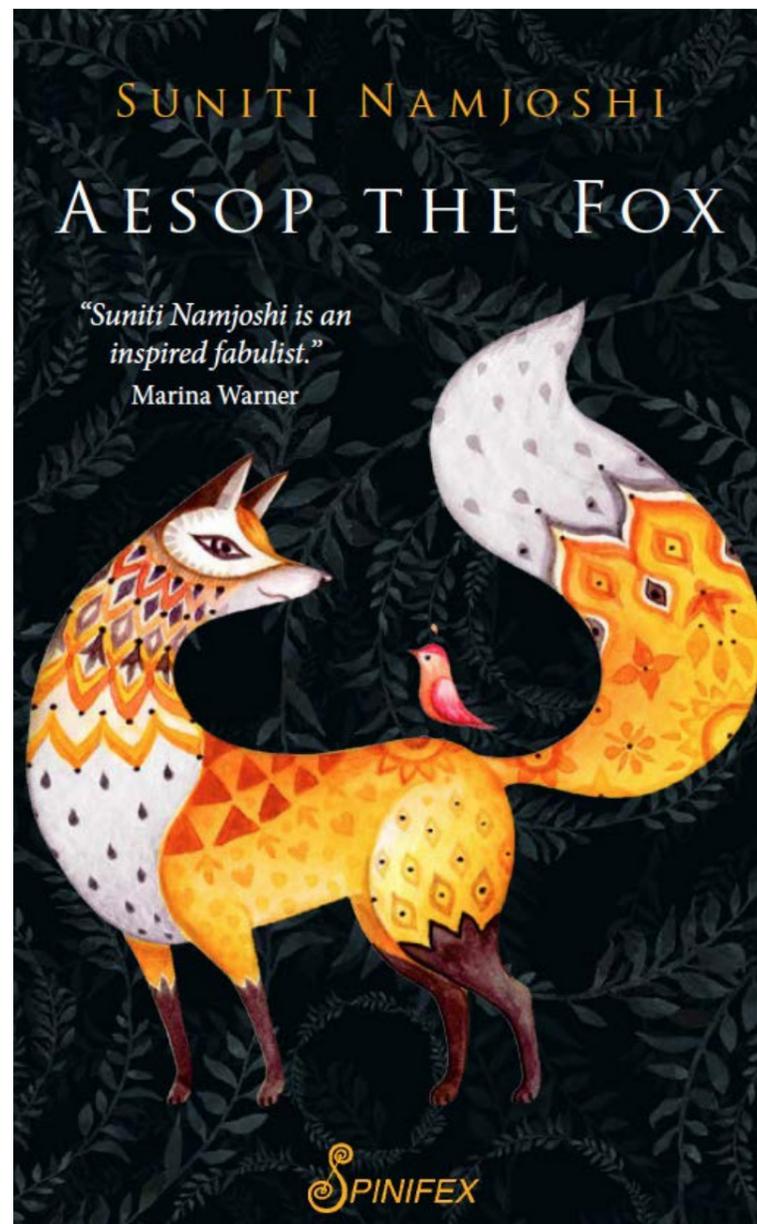
Pluchea indica and *dodder* are in a way dependent on each other...just like a married couple that has tied the knot...the knot of destiny.

*** Au Co is the first mother of our nation, Vietnam. She bore 100 eggs and from them were born 100 brothers and sisters.



TNT, photography by Daniel Grohmann [LINK](#)

Dr Hilary Perkins is an academic from the UK whose PhD explored ecocritical perspectives of Magic Real Metamorphoses in South Asian women's writing. She taught for several years at Southampton University, delivering seminars on Modernism, Critical Theory and Romanticism as well as lectures on Shakespeare. She has given papers on the writing of Suniti Namjoshi and Githa Hariharan, notably at conferences of the British Association of South Asian Studies and the Postgraduate Contemporary Women's Writing Network at Goldsmith's University.



<http://www.spinifexpress.com.au/Bookstore/book/id=305/>

Review of Suniti Namjoshi's *AESOP THE FOX* Spinifex Press, 2018 by Dr Hilary Perkins

"Who are you?" he asks me. Aesop tells him that I'm a figment from the future.

"She thinks she can rewrite my fables," he adds scornfully.

"No, not rewrite," I explain patiently. "Just write new ones, some of which might be based on yours."

Namjoshi's latest work, *Aesop the Fox* is a fascinating elaboration on her previous revisions of fable. Whilst still containing her insightful and radically satirical interpretations of traditional fable, she further develops this novel into a profound commentary on authorship and the relevance of fiction to survival in the modern world.

"I don't re-write them really. I just use them to make new ones. Your fables are like the Bible or Shakespeare or even Homer. Everyone knows them."

Aesop's tales are ubiquitous, but other than he was a slave very little is known about him. Some have claimed that his slavery influenced his fables, indicating ways to survive in an essentially hostile world: "This is not an easy world to survive in. Which world is? Was." Namjoshi describes the significance of Aesop's 'exploding stories,' and their revisions over time, as central to understanding human existence, not only from an individual perspective but from a global perspective across time and location: "We live in time, Sprite. Don't you understand? The dream mutates and shifts."

At the beginning of the narrative, Aesop physically 'yanks' Namjoshi - as the character Sprite - into the past. They discuss and swap stories until they are seemingly indistinguishable: "If that's Aesop, then who am I?" Both are engaged in crafting and revising fables that are 'repeated, mutated, fizzing with energy,' not merely old-fashioned stories with a simple moral message, but collective tales that 'hold up a mirror so that we're forced to see that the way we carry on really won't do.' Indeed, in an interview with Kausalya Santhanam in *The Hindu*, February 20th 2000, Namjoshi states that fable is an essentially didactic genre, 'able to answer questions' concerning issues such as 'racism, gender stereotyping and attitudes towards exploitation of the planet.' The narrator/character of Namjoshi/Sprite in *Aesop the Fox*, similarly asserts this responsibility:

Isn't it our job to do something? Say something? Tell the whole damn species to get a grip and grow up somehow?"

Although this is clearly a huge responsibility to place on authors and fiction, it has been argued that fables are well placed to convey such anxieties. Despite some scornful accusations of juvenility, fables have long engaged human sympathies and imagination. They have been universally popular, amusing, and oddly credible over hundreds of years. Thus, it may be that they have the powerful potential to address what Namjoshi identifies as the 'mess' we are in. Namjoshi/Sprite emphasises this potential when telling Aesop about Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, noting the way both Swift's satirical commentary on society was initially misconstrued and underestimated; similarly derided on the basis of fantasy and childishness.

"There was a man called Swift. He lived a little more than two thousand years after you."

"What happened to him?"

"After his death for about two hundred years they said he was mad."

"And after that?"

"They turned his most ferocious satire into a children's book."

Perhaps, it is only such 'ferocious satire' that has this powerful potential. Indeed, Namjoshi's use of satirical humour, related to the Hindu concept of Leela, the serious but playful nature of the divine consciousness, is also deceptively powerful. Whilst simultaneously recognizing the enormity and unreasonableness of her appeal, Namjoshi/Sprite urges Aesop to 'save' the world and is furious when Aesop claims he writes merely for fun.

"Then why do you write your fables?" I'm practically yelling at Aesop. I didn't mean to sound so passionate, but I want some answers.

"For fun."

This makes me angry. Then I see that he's smiling. He's teasing me. So I say soberly, "Yes, it's true it's fun. It's done for pleasure. But if you had hit harder, if you had somehow managed to change things, I wouldn't be living in a world that's in the same sort of mess as this one."

"Look, it's a pleasant morning...Surely all this doesn't make you feel that the world is a mess, does it?"

"No, that's why it has to be saved."

"And you want me to save it?" Aesop asks.

There! That's it. It has been said explicitly. What I want is out of the bag now.

"Yes," I reply defiantly. "You're not really socking it to them. People either think that the fables are just cautionary or that the fables are not about them."

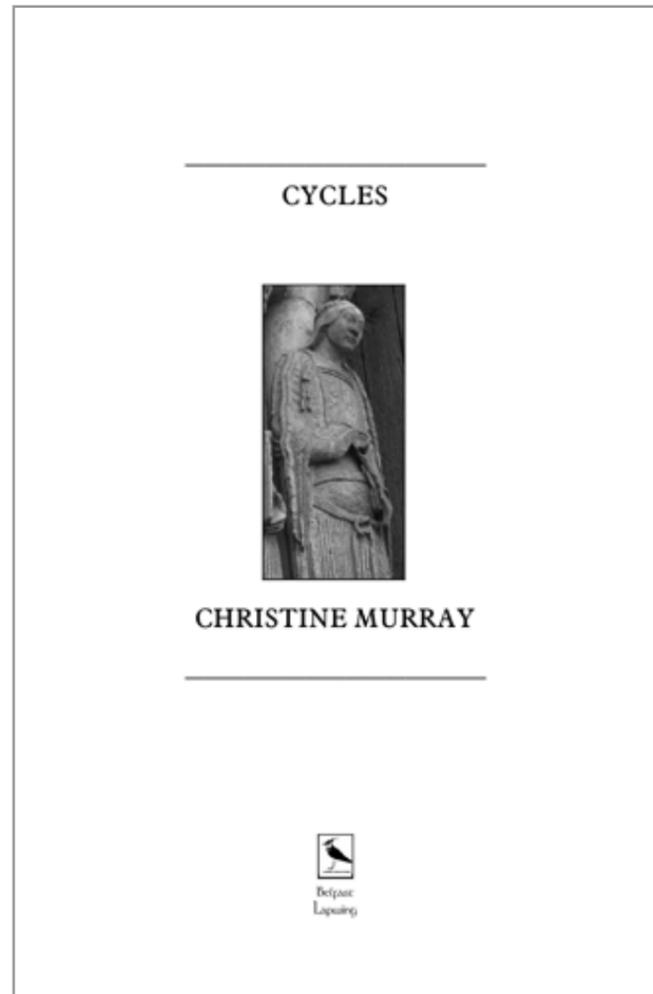
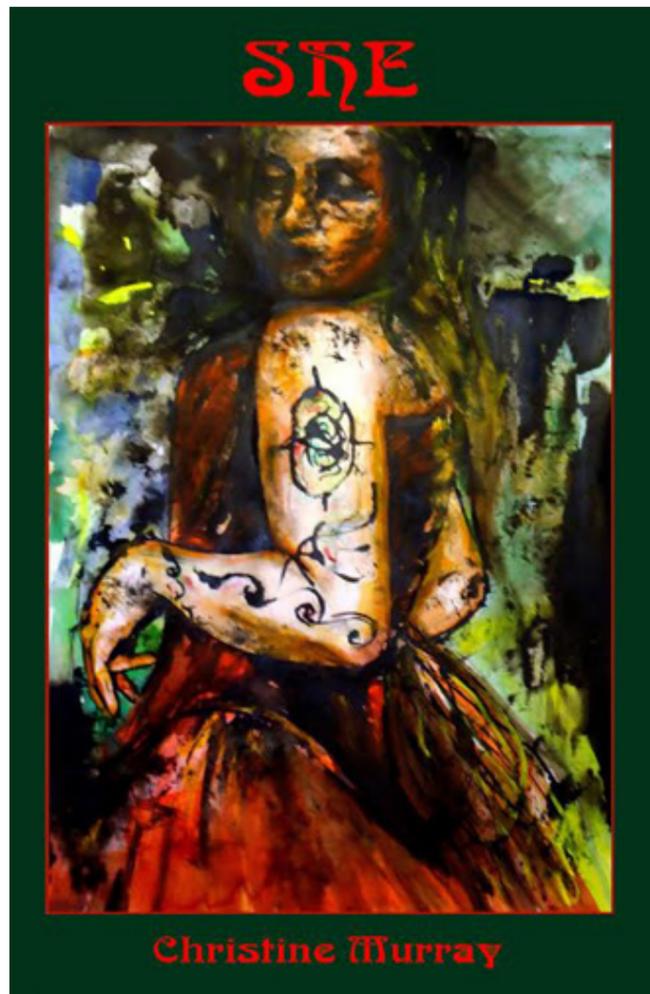
Aesop shrugs. "My fables are as good as the people who read them. I can't even control what happens."

This novel is more than a 'cautionary tale' - it is an important and insightful commentary on collective accountability and the power of fiction to navigate and confront the modern world: 'dearth, death and famine, horrible inequalities, and strutting four-year-olds ruling the nations!' Something only too recognisable in the present political climate.



Christine Murray is known internationally for her work as creator and curator of the website *Poethead*, a free, open access database of women’s poetry which is dedicated to the written expression of women poets from Ireland and throughout the world. She is a passionate advocate for the voices of Irish women poets and an active member of the group *Fired! Irish Women Poets and the Canon*, who campaign for parity of esteem and inclusion of Irish women poets in the literary canon. Her work is a resource and inspiration for poets and readers, women and men, everywhere. Christine’s own poetry has been widely published, both in print and online, in chapbooks, anthologies and journals. Her books include: “Three Red Things,” (Smithereens Press, 2013), “Cycles,” (Lapwing Press, 2013), “The Blind” (Oneiros Books, 2013), “Signature,” (Bone Orchard Press, 2014), “A Hierarchy of Halls,” (Smithereens Press).

Anthologies representing her work include “And Agamemnon Dead: An Anthology of Early 21 st Century Irish Poetry,” (eds Peter O’Neill and Walter Ruhlmann, “All The Worlds Between,” (Eds Srilata Krishnan and Fióna Bolger, Yoda Publishing, 2017), “The Gladstone Readings,”(Ed. Peter O’Neill, Famous Seamus Publishing, 2017), She was a contributor to “Eavan Boland: Inside History,” (Eds Siobhán Campbell and Nessa O’Mahoney, Arlen House, 2016). Christine Murray’s latest collection ‘Bind’ (Turas Press) will be launched by Peter O’Neill in the Irish Writers Centre in Dublin on the 8th of October 2018.



Review of Christine Murray’s *SHE* and *CYCLES* *Oneiros Books* and lapwingpublications.com by Peter O’Neill

With the news that a new collection *Bind*, is to be published by Turas Press in Ireland this coming autumn, making it her first book to be published in her native land, fellow poet Peter O’Neill thought it timely to write a kind of homage to his fellow Dublin based poet.

In *She* Christine Murray takes a figure from ancient Irish mythology the *Sí*, as in the *shee* in Banshee for example, who are powerful feminine forces in pre-Christian Irish folklore, taking on the many guises. In Murray’s *She* they are represented by the Crow Woman, symbolised by a black feather. And it is with this singular image, of a black crow’s feather, that Murray enters the text.

A black feather
 From her
 Black feather tree

Sways down

She has spread
 Her blacks out
 For carrion lovers

Lace their moons with trawling nets

Bird-pecked crabbed and sweet apple
 Windfalls

Roll them into grass
 Bamboo worms a curve into flared ground

Black feather sways down

Through dream
 To this waking place/
 Of stones

www.paraphiliamagazine.com/oneirosbooks/she/

<https://sites.google.com/a/lapwingpublications.com/lapwing-store/christine-murray>

She tells the tale, in two parts, of 'Miss Constance Byrne who died on the 21st of January 1883 at the St. Lucy Hospice, after 25 years in a comatose condition'¹. What happened to her? Did she encounter a *Sí*? Apparently in Irish myth, if one did encounter one by malevolence they might reach down and touch your foot and you would disappear from mortal sight! We don't know, as readers. But, after reading a short letter, signed Constance, we are informed by her that she has entered a kind of dream world which is as real as our own. So Murray, by invoking this myth of the *Sí*, or *She*, is allowed access into the comatose world of Miss Constance Byrne, a figure from the mid- nineteenth century when the gothic novel was still very much in vogue. It is a very clever conceit, allowing Murray the possibility to explore multiple worlds drawing on such parallel universes as: chess, ancient Irish mythology and stone cutting; Murray is a stone-cutter by trade.

However, the poems which make up *She* have their origins in another book, *Cycles* published the year previous and by Lapwing in Belfast. The *Eamon Ceannt Park: A Cycle* is the beginnings of this extraordinary world which Murray conjures. I would love to quote the cycle in its entirety, as it merits it, but will have to be content with giving snippets. The first poem in the cycle, there are 7 in total, is called *Ingress*. Murray is about to enter the park which is situated in Dublin 12, and is named after one of the executed leaders of the 1916 rising.

Her boots are wet, grass-greened.

Things have gone aground at the grove,
only the fairy-ring stands in her circle
of spectral gowns,

So, already within the very first poem Murray invokes fairy rings and the idea of haunting or the otherworldly is suggested in the 'spectral gowns'. In the second poem of the cycle *Inscription* Murray introduces her two other themes stone- cutting, in the title, and chess.

The park is scattered as after a storm,
The destruction is knave wrought.

In the third poem of the cycle, all three themes are further developed. I shall quote it in its entirety as it is very short.

(iii)

There is a man in the stone.

The dew is playing at her feet,
wetting her legs.

A legion of rooks guard his stone.

Now, let us return to *She*. Here is an extract from the second poem in the collection, which follows immediately the first poem *A black feather from her black feather tree*, which I quoted in full at the start of this overview.

I have awakened in a place of stone
In the midst of man-bearing stones

There is a sense of tree
There is of no-light
There is some debris

That includes the carrion feather
From where did it fall?

As we follow Constance Byrne on her journey through this ever- widening dreamscape the lexicon and syntax that Murray employs conjoin in unaccustomed ways. She will use an all too familiar noun, for example, in its verb form throwing the reader. Language is physical embodiment for Murray, which for the reader makes a refreshingly novel experience. And, when you think about it, isn't this just exactly what we require of our poets and writers, to take us out of the ordinary realm, even when describing the ordinary? Was not this Pound's famous modernist dictum.- Make it New? Murray has been making it new for years, its high time we all caught up with her.

Indeed, as I found myself going further and further into the text, I was reminded of many writers from the past; Lewis Carroll because of the fantastic references to rooks and queens and other chess pieces. But, also the Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca, through the way in which Murray, like Lorca, is obsessed with ancient figures from mythologies which are now merely creatures of folklore. Both poets bring them into their work, reinvigorating them. Also, both poets use modernist imagistic techniques. There is but one difference. Christine Murray is alive and writing among us, and I for one am very glad that she is. One has the feeling that you are reading the work of someone who will be remembered, long after you and she are gone from this world. The fact that she is only now getting a book published in her own country speaks volumes about the state of poetics in contemporary Ireland. The gate-keepers have such incestuous claims on one another that they are sleeping the sleep of entropy. Good luck to them!

¹ Murray, Christine: *She*, Oneiros Books, 2014, p.3.

FOUNDED 2010

Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
SEPTEMBER 2018

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE