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JOHN W SEXTON

**Portrait of a Poet of the Ancient Mind**

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas  
Publisher/Editor  
[markulyseas@liveencounters.net](mailto:markulyseas@liveencounters.net)

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## CONTRIBUTORS

JOHN W SEXTON

CATHERINE ANN CULLEN

BRAD BUCHANAN

JANE LOVELL

ANTON FLOYD

DARAGH BRADISH

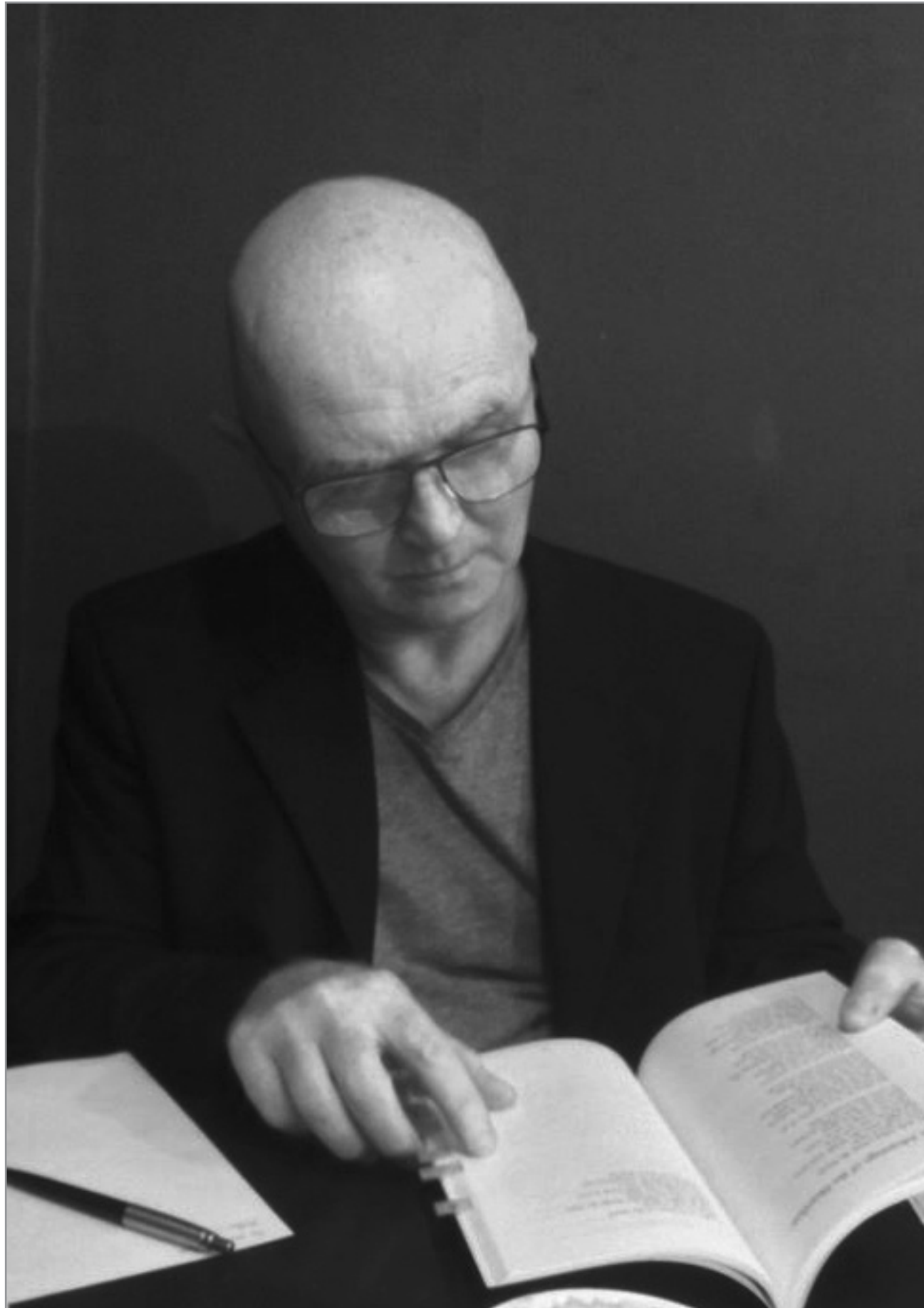
DR GRETA SYKES

RAEESA USMANI

BUI KIM ANH

ROZ MORRIS

HONGRI YUAN



John W Sexton

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. 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*.

## PORTRAIT OF A POET OF THE ANCIENT MIND

GUEST EDITORIAL  
JOHN W SEXTON

Our minds are born long before our bodies, although, when we are bodily born, our minds are swamped with sensation and are without language. Our bodies, now newly made, are well able to thrash about and perform some of their necessary functions, but the mind is dumb, except for the ability to bawl or coo. With that limited lexicon of grunting and crying and gurgling we flounder about until our tongues get the grasp of language; but once language comes it comes from both outside us and inside us. What comes from the inside comes from the mind that was forming at the beginning, inside our mothers, where the dead ancestors, dormant in our blood, then gave full belt to their chatter, keeping us company in our forming.

When I was born, nearly 61 years ago now, the place I came to was not my own. It wasn't the place of my ancestors or even the place of my parents, for they had travelled over from Ireland - my mother directly by boat, my father indirectly via Iraq, Singapore, Malaya and all the places that a brief sojourn in the British Marines had taken him to first. Anyway, there I was, born and brought up in London. But London was beyond the gate of the house. Inside the house was Ireland, the hilly pastures of north Kerry and Limerick, most of it furnished from the tongue of my mother. Iraq, Singapore, Malaya, London, even the radio and the black and white television, couldn't disrupt the Ireland of the house. Almost every year, during the full extent of the summer holidays, my mother would bring us back to the Ireland she had furnished the house with, while my father stayed in London working, joining us only for the final week. So when I stepped out into London, I stepped out as an Irish kid. And the mind, full of the chatter of the long dead, was Irish too.

Not all of the dead were as dead as the dead. One of the dead, a young baby, kept me company through a lot of my early years. She was a floating spirit, without a spoken language, and never aged beyond her babyhood. In that sense, even though she was dead, she managed to be immortal, accompanying me wherever I went. No one knew of her except me. I told no one of her existence until I was in my late thirties. I was in my fifties before I learned of her name. She was my sister, but a secret one, one that could not be talked of. Of course, I assumed, taking her existence for granted because she was with me everywhere, that I was a half-twin and that she had died in childbirth, and that's why I never mentioned her to my mother, for fear of upsetting her. How could I tell her that all was well and that my sister's ghost was with us always? I was over five decades alive before I learned that she was the child of a different father, someone in my mother's life before my father came along. Dad took mum and my sister into his life and the intention was to claim my sister as his daughter. I was born but a few weeks when she died. But she didn't leave me. She stayed with me for years, my invisible sister, gurgling and cooing and bawling in her ghostly way, and I minded her and soothed her and accompanied her and kept her from the darkness.

This is, I suppose, the mad talk of a poet. I had a poet's mind and a spirit guide from the very beginning, so it's little wonder that a poet I remain. My guide wasn't a Beatrice, like Dante had, but a baby sister. One, ironically, that was born before I was, but who never aged a moment. How could I fear the dead or death with such a guide by my side, such a guide to show me, from my earliest years, that death is not an ending or a disaster, but a companionship, a sister?

When I came back to live in Ireland in my early twenties I began to become aware that poetry was hidden in the background of both my parents' birthplaces. My mother was from Ahane Mountain in Brosna, Sliabh Luachra, and the old English name for Brosna Village was Rhymers' Town. Where my father was from in West Limerick, the Inchabaun townland of Templeglantine, there was a folk memory of a Poets' Court once held thereabouts. In fact, it was not far from Inchabaun that the poet Michael Hartnett lived in the 1970's. Whenever I visited these places I could hear the chatter of the long dead.

There's a tradition that the last true poet of the Bardic School, Dáibhí Ó Bruadair (1623-1698), is buried out at Monagae, where all of my father's family are also buried. The two great poets of Kerry that followed him into Irish language poetry, Aodhagán Ó Rathaille (d. 1729) and Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin (d.1782), were associated with Sliabh Luachra, the mountainy land where my mother was from. These poets, all of the long dead, began to seem kindred to me, and I read as much of their poetry as I could. But not having the grasp of Irish I had to read it through cribs and distortions. In the finish I began to tackle making my own versions of it, and became infected with their concept of vision poetry. It was as if theirs were the voices that had been with me since the womb; that theirs was a company akin to that of my ghostly, invisible sister.

Aodhagán Ó Rathaille's great vision poem, Gile na Gile, describes an encounter with the sky woman, the Brightness of Brightness. Through all the voices of the dead, it is She, I now believe, who calls us to poetry. It is She who sends the dead to guide us. She is a manifestation of the creative energy that informs the universe. Ah, but here we go again, with that mad talk of a poet. But why not? Here are the first two verses of Gile na Gile (in my own version, first published some years ago):

*Glimmer of glimmer I saw on the path neglected;  
green glass of green glass the blue of her eyes inflected.  
Her language the notes of birdsong, of voices inhuman;  
her skin of fire, of snow; now white, now crimson.*

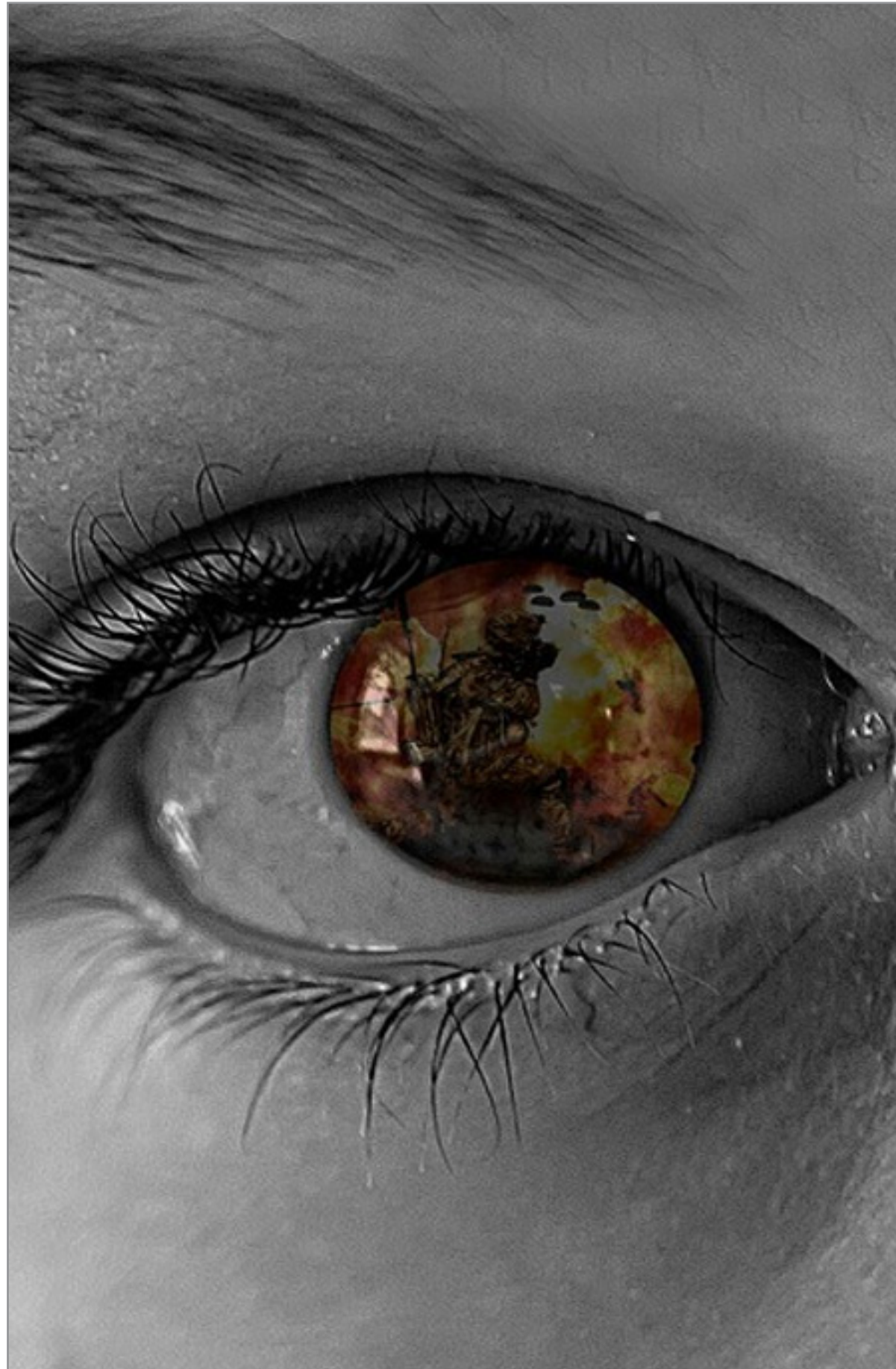
*Twisted and twisted the braids of her hair a sunset;  
the earth and the hills all one with their ferns pure russet.  
The brooch at her neck a star that had died in great brightness;  
a fragment of light, since she was creation's first instance.*

The other day, thinking over what I might write about for this brief essay, I suddenly recalled a memory from my childhood. I was nine, and standing at the threshold of a whitewashed shed in the yard at Brosna. My uncles Jack and Aney were deep inside the shed. They were talking to the bull. I could see nothing of him distinctly, except the soft glisten of his enormous nostrils. Not even the brightness of his eyes could I see, for everything in the shed was a hazing shadow. The bull was shadow and he took up the entire interior of the shed. Jack and Aney were a part of this shadow. It was as if they were inside the bull itself. Their voices went back and forth, in and out through the bull, soothing him like the voices of the long dead. The bull spoke back, but the voice came from his nostrils – a brutish snorting. Then someone was squeezing past me at the threshold, a man in a long beige workcoat. He walked into the shadow. I stepped back, out into the sunlight of the yard. Sometime later, the man emerged with uncle Jack and uncle Aney. And the bull. But now the bull had a brass ring through his enormous nostrils, and dangling from it was a rope, and he was being led by my uncle Aney. Not a hint of shadow was in him now; nothing was about him but the full dazzle of the sun. He was still the bull. He was still a creature who could absorb the shadows. He was still massive and powerful. But the brass ring had made him its servant.

Poetry is the brass ring that makes me its servant. But I am no less strong despite it. It leads me everywhere and will lead me, one day, right into death itself. But the dead never die.

My sister's name is Julia.





Catherine Ann Cullen is an award-winning poet, songwriter and children's author, and a recipient of the Kavanagh Fellowship 2018/19. She has published three collections, *The Other Now: New and Selected Poems*, (Dedalus 2016). *Strange Familiar* (Doghouse 2013) and *A Bone in My Throat*. (Doghouse 2007). Her reimagining into English of a Latvian collection of poetry for children, "[All Better!](#)" was published by Little Island in February 2019. She has published two other children's books, *Thirsty Baby* (2003) and *The Magical, Mystical, Marvellous Coat* (2001).



## THE MEASURE OF MY SONG

In Oxfam, an asylum seeker  
with a stack of albums  
and a gnarl of embroidery thread  
told the cashier, my name is Ovid.  
When I thread my pen  
a ribbon of song flows out  
stitching all the stories together  
from creation to Caesar rocking YouTube.  
I'm managing Apollo in the finals of the X Factor;  
remixing Virgil on a makeshift desk;  
bringing out a box-set called Shapeshifters;  
writing a book in Irish.  
The way the wind  
mouths the reeds on the canal into music  
reminds me of home.  
My friends here tell me  
I loved that place so much  
I should never have been exiled.

If I went back they'd have my head.  
It would float down the river singing.  
Even then I'd moan  
around my enemy's house  
until he died and the earth spat up his body.

Even then you won't have heard  
the measure of my song.

Photograph Pixababy.com

## TRACES

*for Wendy Doherty, found wandering after the bomb blast in Talbot Street, Dublin, that killed her mother Colette and unborn sibling on May 17th 1974.*

A toddler strays  
into the grey evening,  
confident that the familiar hand  
will float up again  
to anchor her fingers.

Those she passes  
shake off their own daze  
to retrieve her  
from the edge of vision  
lest she too vanish in the sudden night.

The stars explode in a new pattern.  
They map a pilgrimage  
where we trace and retrace  
the steps of the lost,  
feel for uncertain markers.

Where did their hands last touch?  
Maybe here, where Mammy stood—  
admiring a pastel swathe of baby clothes  
in Guiney's window,  
nine months gone  
but not buying yet, for luck.

We walk unsteadily,  
picking our way past a twisted bike.  
a skeleton car,  
staring through blown-out windows.

## FLOOD

*"And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. But the earth helped the woman, the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth." Revelation 12:15-17*

While the barman joked, have you no homes to go to?  
she went down to the Royal Canal  
and swaddled herself in a damp blanket  
under Binn's Bridge.

Through the fabric  
she felt the prick of the staple,  
found the pinned note,  
mouthed the words in the fractured light:

"You unlawfully entered onto these lands and set up an encampment.  
You are trespassing on the banks of the Canal which is a public amenity.  
We call on you to vacate with your tents and belongings.  
Unless you comply, we will ask the Gardai to take action."

By the Royal Canal  
without sovereignty  
she sank down and wept  
where she had pitched her tents and made her songs  
for she had no home to go to.

And they flooded the walkway under Binn's Bridge  
so she might float out of sight  
on the holed boat of her dreams.

Earth, are you there  
to open your mouth  
and drink the flood?

## PAPER BOATS

I fold my poems into boats  
to hazard your shore,  
an origami flotilla  
bobbing towards the occupation.

Between the creases  
some words are legible:  
'resistance' on the sail,  
'defiance' on the flag.

And when the gunships  
spot the word 'freedom'  
rushing the coast,  
their shells will rupture my fleet.

The boats will sink and then rise,  
or erupt skywards and then fall,  
scattering rags of verse  
across the water.

But I've folded some so artfully  
that their blind sides  
might float  
past security.

Perhaps one will beach  
where children have played  
and you will spread it  
like a map in your hands

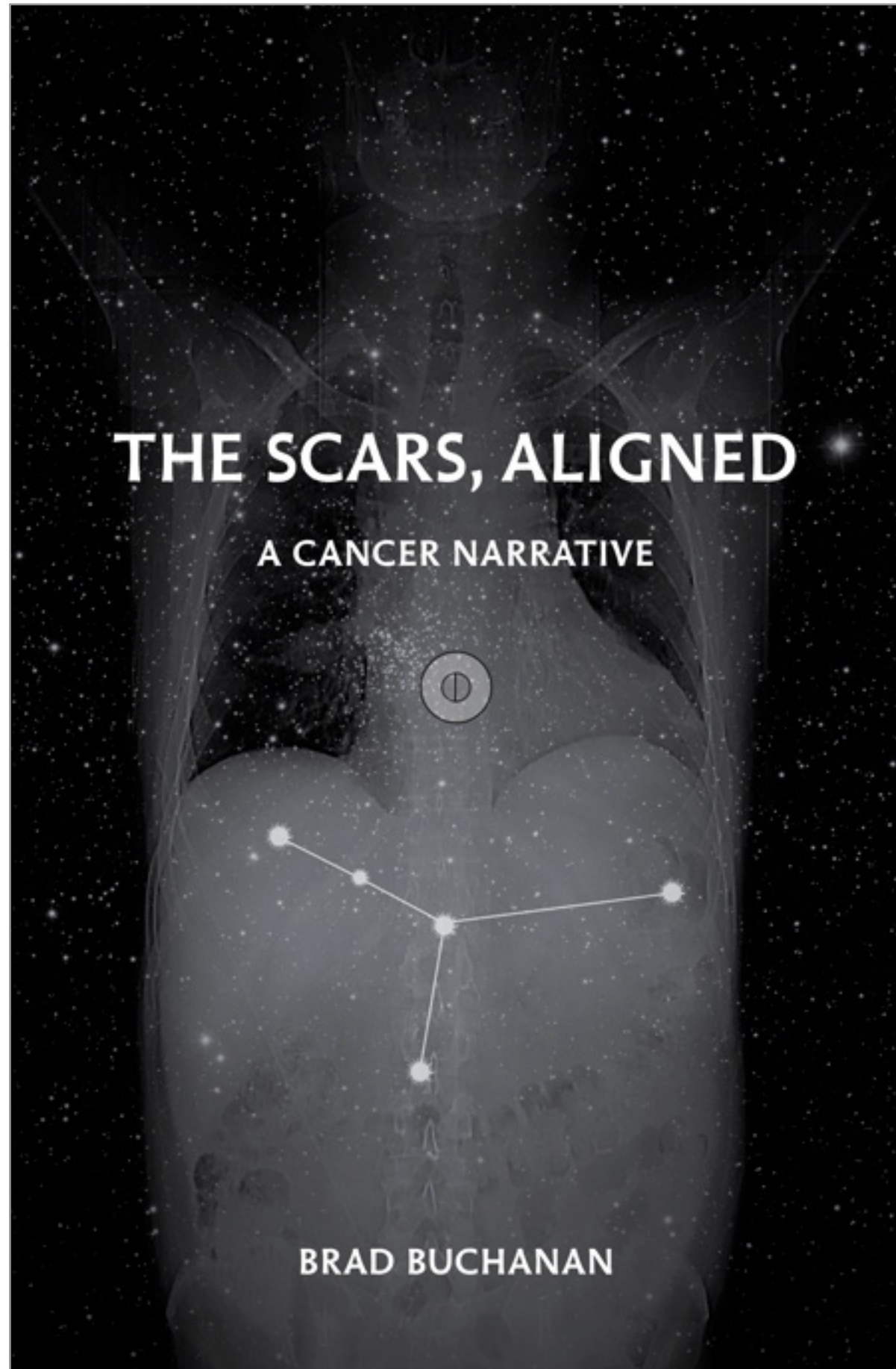
and know that someone  
whose rage is not brave  
will fold poems into boats  
to open on your sands

till on every shore  
are hands folding boats  
and your waters are white  
with fleets of our hopes.



Photograph Pixabay.com





Brad Buchanan's writings have appeared in nearly 200 journals, and he has also published two book-length collections of poetry: *The Miracle Shirker* (2005) and *Swimming the Mirror: Poems for My Daughter* (2008), as well as two academic books. His third book of poetry, *The Scars, Aligned (A Cancer Narrative)*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press. He was diagnosed with T-cell lymphoma in February 2015, and underwent a stem cell transplant in 2016, which involved temporary vision loss. He is currently in remission.



## RECURRENT DREAMS OF FLIGHT

I am somehow getting better  
if not in a general way  
at this particular discipline:  
I am improving my nighttime trajectories  
with a lucid awareness that bad dreams  
can be repurposed as superpowers  
in the tiniest sleepless hours  
yes, you can make yourself feel like you're flying  
if you know how to remember the airplanes  
you used to pretend that you were becoming  
on the playground, veering at girlfriends  
you only wanted to chase you down  
and pummel you lovingly  
you can discover wings  
hiding under pillowcases  
you can make your bed the whole sky  
as long you aren't afraid to plummet  
into the ocean at any moment  
utter a lifetime's prayer in an instant  
and wake to the death  
you dared  
defiant and weightless  
in that forgotten element

*The Scars, Aligned* (A Cancer Narrative), is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.

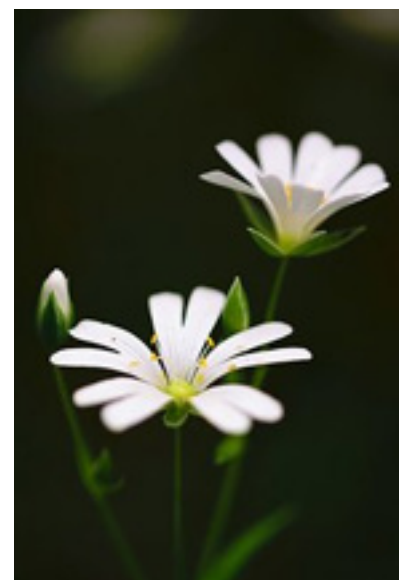
## THE LOST MESSAGES

I don't miss most of the things  
 my fingers just can't do anymore  
 but the simple act of rubbing your neck  
 until you made that little sound  
 whatever it was: a gasp, a murmur  
 a gentle exhalation  
 a not unsexy grunt of assent  
 an unforced moan of encouragement  
 I regret that I can't seem to manage that  
 perhaps I no longer trust my strength  
 of will and sinew to see it through  
 or maybe I don't dare to try your patience  
 when you look away  
 with an aching back  
 or heart  
 maybe this is the first form  
 of departure  
 death or divorce  
 and I wouldn't care which  
 but no  
 I will mourn that unreachable touch  
 with the rest of my life  
 I will scrub every dish with clumsy fervor  
 and hope you'll approve  
 of the awkward ways in which I move  
 towards a different comfort together  
 I will remain the weaker partner  
 if you will only forgive all the lost  
 messages my hands refuse  
 I may curse myself  
 and the wasting disease  
 that keeps me inert  
 but I will never leave

## ON "CHEATING DEATH"

I gave it the squarest deal I could  
 a lengthy opportunity  
 to cash in at the roulette wheel  
 or the slot machine  
 where the coins poured out  
 for countless others.  
 I nearly went bankrupt  
 feeding it chips  
 but somehow missed  
 the expected payout.  
 I even reserved  
 a special chair  
 at the blackjack table;  
 I wore my best casino suit  
 and daylong shades;  
 I doubled down  
 on my chamber pot,  
 came up with the same old  
 four-flushing farts  
 in my adult diapers;  
 I lost all shame  
 and bathroom manners  
 but somehow  
 every game was rigged.  
 I did not cheat death;

it cheated me  
 of my rightful  
 valedictory bucketful  
 of spoils from the place  
 with no clocks or natural light,  
 where the dutiful croupier  
 kept his thumb on the button  
 to ensure that the longest odds  
 were also the most agonizing ones;  
 inevitably, they favored the house  
 and made my bad beat  
 feel even worse.





## THE DAY I TOOK NO MEDICATION

On the day I took no medication  
 nothing terrible actually happened  
 that hadn't occurred a million times before:  
 the poor, imprisoned by endless war;  
 soiled their threadbare comforts with fear;  
 the great renewed their compulsive demands  
 for an obscure austerity in everyone else;  
 the sick were treated and mistreated  
 according to the latest accepted  
 well- or not well-intentioned malpractice;  
 the pills and liquids that held me hostage  
 let me out for a breath of fresh air  
 and even took off the blindfold for  
 a few blurry photogenic moments  
 later to be used in yet more ransom notes  
 from the underground;  
 the nonstop propaganda of pain  
 continued, of course, spreading lies around  
 my publicized, politicized body.  
 By the time all the opiates had worn off  
 there were no sensations left  
 except for the traces of self-contradiction  
 at the core of my organism,  
 the indivisible self that holds  
 despite the nakedness of its disease,  
 the self-evidence of its polarized  
 and warring factions, the rift it denies.

## A WAYS AWAY

Distance becomes a plural noun  
 as soon as our mind's eye lingers upon  
 the spatio-temporal continuum.

One estimate of proximity implies another  
 as though a sundial fragmented the sky  
 in moving its point like a snail over sand.

Duration beckons with a succession  
 of tiny gestures, perspectives that bend  
 and shuffle like feathers or sliding doors.

What we see approaching is measured in hours  
 and minutes to wait, or in seconds to impact.

The speed of light is too exact and impossible;  
 we can only relate each fearfully emergent event  
 in a fractured sequence, one stunted sentence  
 after another.

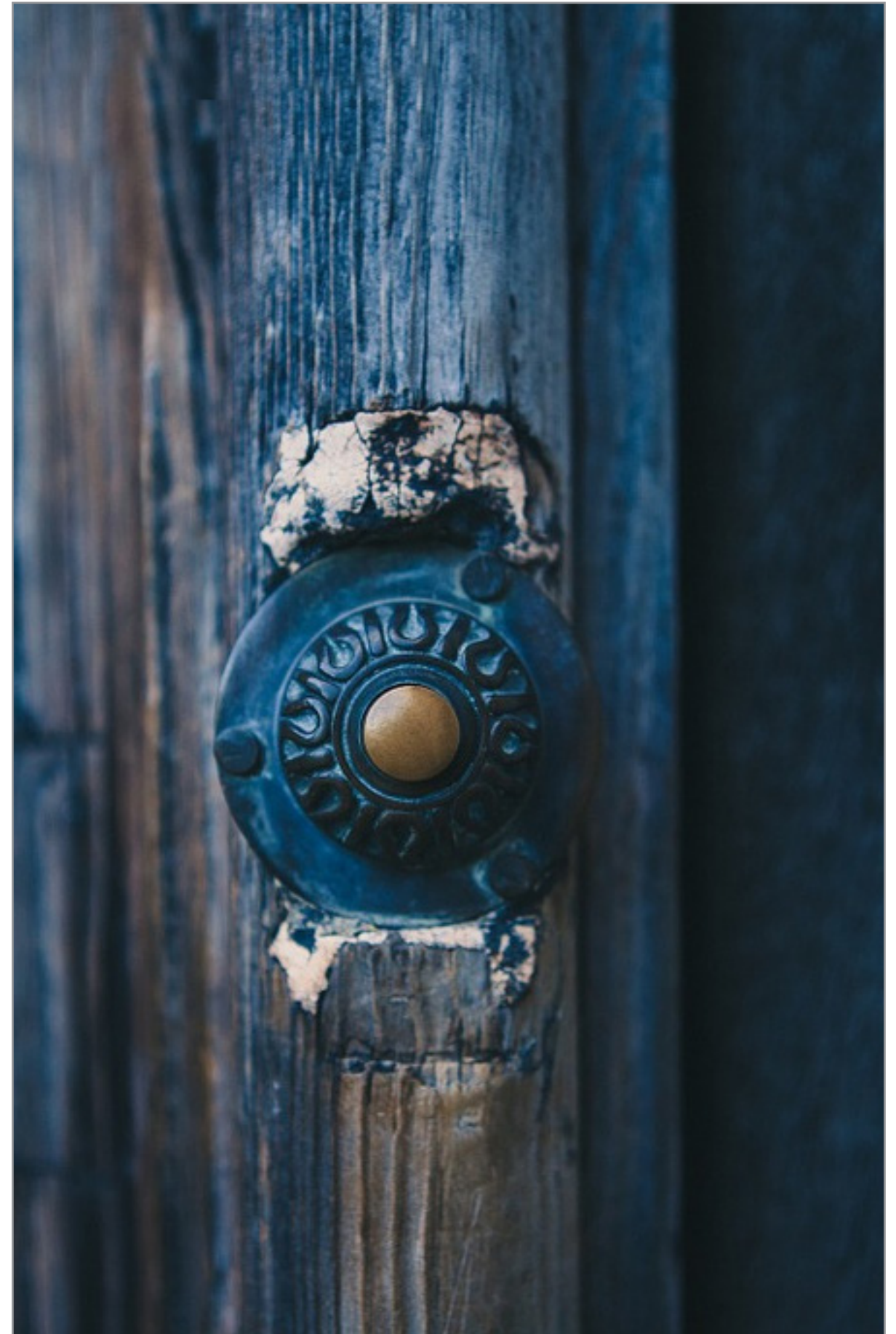
The long horizon might as well  
 be infinity as far as chronology is concerned;  
 we have to humanize its pace  
 in the faces of clocks that delimit our life.



## THE TALKING CURE

before the words  
 a desire to say  
 something profound  
 obtrudes, intrudes, I meant  
 but obscurely, obsessively  
 before the truth comes out  
 there is all holy hell  
 of abstractions  
 raging reasons  
 blame for those silences  
 nothing more  
 to be specified anyway  
 everything obvious  
 obsolete already  
 in our made-up minds  
 because there are too many  
 ghosts to name only the one  
 but that resignation too is wrong  
 and finally what you know  
 needs to be heard  
 that we could not save  
 somebody you loved  
 more than anyone knew  
 more than she deserved  
 more than you could stand

to admit out loud  
 but now speak of urgently  
 face in your hands  
 bursting with mourning  
 that we never dreamed  
 was possible since  
 she was lost long before  
 but now we know  
 that maybe we could have  
 that it was possible  
 if only in some  
 unbelievable way  
 with a method  
 she would never approve  
 to rescue her  
 somehow with our  
 helpless love



Photograph Pixabay.com



Jane Lovell won the Flambard Prize in 2015 and has been shortlisted for several awards including the Basil Bunting Prize, the Robert Graves Prize and Periplum Book Award. She has been published by Against the Grain Press, Night River Wood, and Coast to Coast to Coast. Her latest collection *This Tilting Earth* has just been published by Seren. Jane also writes for Elementum Journal.



## PASTORALE

In the dim kitchen  
your fingers knead and pull the dough,  
flour smudges the yellow light  
of your cheek and chin,  
poppy seeds escape across the table  
disappear onto the tiles.

Red-eyed herring sprawl on the drainer,  
flat and finless, silver.  
The knife slits, scrapes out the clotted  
strings of skin, viscera.

A worm-tangle of black vessels  
on quaggy newsprint,  
the bloody slip ferments  
and foams.

Liquor of fruit broods over must.  
Bruised pulp smears the neck plugged  
to protect from the crawl  
of vinegar flies  
fat and desperate with eggs.

The oven hums.  
Yeast creams in a jar.  
I measure sugar, boil the kettle, kneel  
to mash the blackberries.  
Juice stains my fingers, blackens my nails,  
the sweetness bewildering against  
hot bread.

## SONG OF THE SALT BREEZE

High above the windy town,  
its mudflats pinned by pier and promenade,  
shimmering in and out of dream  
they wait for me, Rosa, Elsie and Irene,

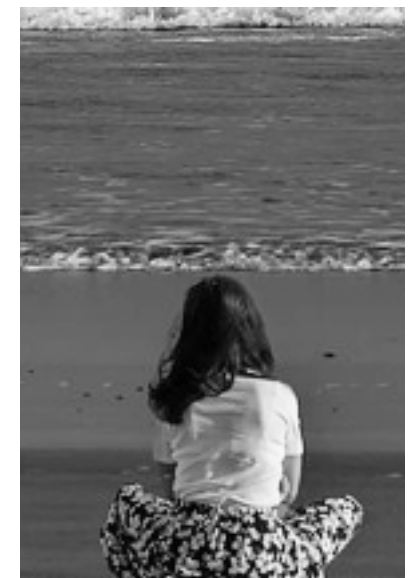
their hollow bones thin as reeds  
piped by the salt breeze, its mouth humming,  
humming over the curling and uncurling fingers,  
cuttled ribs, those proud cheekbones;

teasing their crimped hair; swift over  
the glass-green of their song:  
the song of ghosts, the song of their lives  
spun and woven from the changing light.

I skip about between rags of marigold  
and buffeted firs, chasing scraps of history  
along the path, the wind unwrapping  
long-gone milk-light, ash-light.

Way down on the beach, distant and patient,  
woolly heads dipped at the gusting sand:  
Sadie, Millie, Lady and Celeste.  
I long for them, for my thin legs against the saddle.

*Salt breeze, blow me like a leaf down the paths,  
over railings and gardens, all the way down,  
down, till my toes dig again into cold damp sand  
and I balance like an angel against you.*



## ECLIPSE

And there he is  
kneeling beside a bucket,  
fists clenched in fur until  
the useless claws, light as a bird's,  
trail away.

Water stills:  
an eclipse, a dark lens in a swift sky.

Alone in his lab sifting petri dishes,  
a haze of phenol in his clothes.  
A scimitar of light.  
'Streptococcus...'

He pushes the microscope  
towards me.  
Sperm-wiggle of nastiness stranded  
in bright grease; I hold my breath.

Those hands.  
The hand that held the kittens  
in cowardly collusion.

I never forgave them, those fingers  
now too weak to stir tea.

Night dissolves him.  
He crosses the garden, roots to find  
a foothold in a shifting landscape,  
a world that cannot wait.

I watch his puppet limbs  
describe the universe,  
with each step flinging away  
angels,

arcs of light  
across the billowing lawn,  
the titanic darkness.

I hear him breathe,  
breathe those words:

I want to go first.

## MARGARET

Your garden thrives in neglect.  
The peony has never looked so good, so vibrant;  
her blooms loll like woozy ladies on a lawn  
brilliant with lipstick and scandal.

Finches steal discarded cocktail sticks,  
appear upon the wire, beaks stumped with olives.  
Blackbirds stitch a path into the bushes  
clutching bright worms of pimento.

Dandelions secure the lawn,  
stop it flapping to reveal the wool  
of root fibre, scurrying ants.

You left this afternoon, wrapped in blankets.  
The rooms next door buzzed briefly then fell silent.

Within the hour, bedclothes appeared on the line,  
caught the May wind in a flurry of lemon and lace,  
waved you a final goodbye.







Anton Floyd from Ireland. Poems widely published and forthcoming in *Ireland and elsewhere*. He is a several times prize-winner of the Irish Haiku Society International Competition; runner-up in the Snapshot Press Haiku Calendar Competition. Haiku included in the anthology *Between the Leaves* (Arlen House). Included in the anthology *Teachers Who Write* (ed. Edward Denniston WTC 2018). He edited *Remembrance Suite*, a chapbook of sonnets by Shirin Sabri (Glór 2018) and an international anthology of poems, *Point by Point* (Glór 2018). His own debut collection of poems, *Falling into Place*, was published by Revival Press (2018).



## HALCYON DAYS

Oh, those halcyon days  
that uncomplicated time  
when you were young  
when once barefoot  
you careered the slope  
of a summer-green field  
your hair streaming  
behind you and you  
blithe in the balmy air  
your arms outspread  
ready for flight. Time  
then, made all things  
lovely, simple as honeysuckle  
climbing and catching light.

Anton Floyd's debut collection of poems, *Falling into Place*, published in 2018 by [Revival Press](#).

## RUSSET AFTERNOON

This wind would comb  
summer from the trees.  
Branches shed leaves  
into the air like spume.  
This russet afternoon  
they swirl about your feet.  
At once it comes to mind:  
there you stand, beautiful,  
complete, new baptised,  
Aphrodite of the Woodland!

## AFTER THE WINDFALL

The storm has left  
the flowering cherry  
riven and scant. Yet  
after the windfall  
along a wet branch,  
blackened with rain,  
a necklace of raindrops  
seeded with light  
is sun-struck again and again.





## ROBINS

I know they are around.  
 They appear at last  
 out of the fuchsia hedge -  
 birdsong made flesh.  
 Robins, a pair sleek  
 and blushed, real birds,  
 a valentine's couple.  
 They arrive at the first sight  
 or sound of my digging fork  
 or the smell perhaps  
 of the fresh earth turning.  
 Prompted by vernal hungers,  
 we stand our common ground.

They perch on a low branch  
 or flit close to my standing boot  
 alert to what my tines turn up.  
 Their eyes are beads of jet  
 sharp as any sniper's.  
 They pick off their targets,  
 share their spoils. Every now  
 and then I see one lift a leaf  
 or peel moss from a stone  
 and vanish, a hollow in the wall.  
 It plots its path, in hops  
 and pauses and furtive flights,  
 moves like a conductor's baton!

Light and heat turn the page,  
 the mother book inside her head,  
 sets her to weaving sheep's-wool,  
 moss and dead leaves  
 into a secret cup.  
 I see this robin is a feisty bird.  
 His beak contests any rival.  
 He pitches a piccolo song  
 protective and territorial.  
 I lean to my work, watch  
 these rites of spring take hold:  
 how nesting and courtship feeding  
 revolve around the axis of my fork.

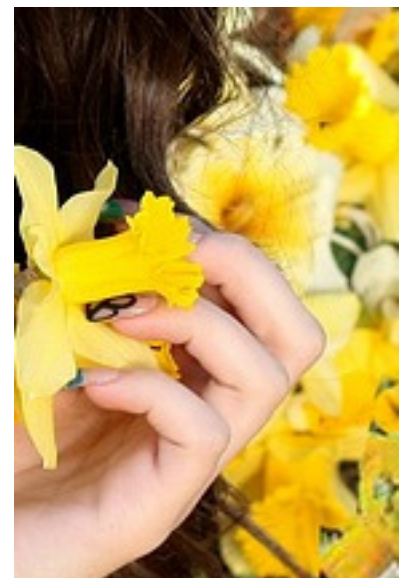
## THE DAFFODILS

The daffodils you picked  
 as a child filled the house.  
 You called them *yellow suns*.

But the day you left home  
 I felt you as far from earth  
 and roots as cut flowers.

Time since can tell of love  
 and love's ambition,  
 its healings and its hurts.

Today daffodils in the field  
 spark thoughts of you.  
 They spread everywhere.



Dublin born writer Daragh Bradish's poems have appeared in literary journals such as Cránnog, the Moth, Poetry Salzburg Review, Orbis, The North, and Acumen, in Ireland, the UK, and Europe. He was the winner of the Poetry Ireland Trócaire Prize, published poet category, in 2018. His first collection 'Easter in March' was published by Liberties Press in 2016



## TOWARDS MORNING LIGHT

Answer the question,  
or begin to write it down.  
I have put off my ghost-search long enough.  
Where was I going through this sleepless night?

At dawn I dreamt I had gone  
back to school, not knowing much,  
but carrying a sack of ripened pears, apples,  
and plums, that showed the indents of their pickers.

Around me, classrooms vibrated chaos,  
lined up possibilities before me,  
unmarked doors which I could slip through,  
Autumn-gifted, yet still curious.

I ask my woken self;  
what do you reach for, Old Testament or New?

This day, believing in surprise,  
my thumb and index finger  
grip the dial, the radio projecting sounds to latch on:  
waves of a world- in-waiting;  
confusions of the marvellous, responsive to our touch.

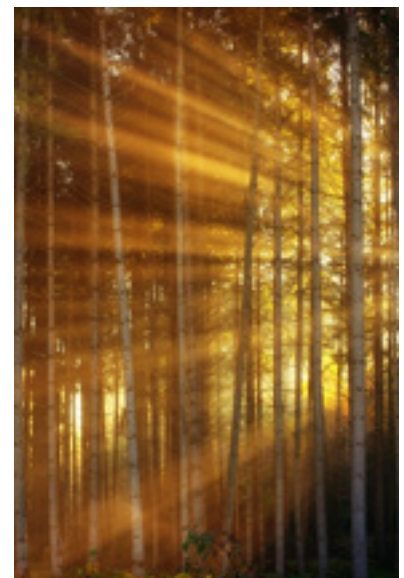
## SUMMER PASSAGE

Five nights ago we heard the cuckoo's call  
as we sat in a garden in Kilshanny, County Clare,  
where we left trees for pleasure's sake  
clad in their ivy shrouds which will  
in time some cold day choke them.

For now, it is the hearing  
and the gaze that settles us.  
At this moth hour a last light  
fingers on the bottom bower,  
all else withdrawing into dark.

Cuckoo, thrush, black bird  
and posted lark, bear witness  
to our summer's passing ease,  
which seems an open paradise for these  
slight pilots with their hurried lives,

whose flights from one side of a haven to the next  
alert us to some hidden cleft. Should we too enter  
and with purpose name our cause?  
The heart's flight; with fanfares rushing by us  
listeners, to the final call.







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

## HOMAGE TO LONDON BUS DRIVERS

Like a ship,  
softly swaying on the ocean,  
from harbour to harbour,  
The London bus  
Rocks us gently  
Along the path.  
At night as much as during day.  
The captain driver manages the waves  
Of roads we pass and cross,  
As other vehicles appear and  
Storm of signs and signals  
Come and go.

Invited into his/her boat  
We embark taking our seats,  
And looking outwards to the sights beyond,  
While travelling safely, until we reach  
The harbour of our destination,  
When we disembark,  
Saying 'thank you driver'.

## FATHOMLESS SKY

Fathomless sky,  
Perhaps heaven,  
Below tiny humans and other creatures  
With a will to live, some caught in storms,  
While the fishes watch.

Fathomless sky,  
With a lust for disturbance,  
Turbulence,  
Circulation of winds and rain  
From overheating oceans,  
Perhaps hell.

Fathomless sky,  
If you believe nature's geometry,  
Harmony,  
Its logic and reasoning,  
It could be heaven.



## THE SHARP TRUTH

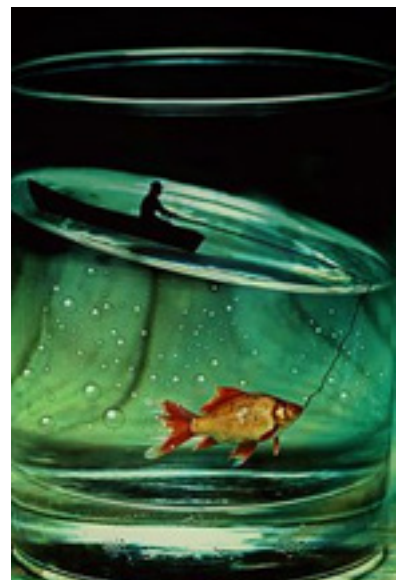
On the eastern sky the moon  
And a smudge,  
A smudge of a moon,  
Sickle shaped smudge on a vast sky  
Of gold, blue and yellow,  
A blotch covered by cloud.  
Like the truth,  
It is there, but as a smudge.  
It is there like the moon,  
Sharp and unforgiving,  
But smudged,  
It will hold those for the deaths in Syria  
Responsible,  
Unforgiving to those who pursue the lies,  
The blotches,  
The smudge over the truth  
About Syria,  
Like the smudge over the moon,  
Just a small cloud, but a blotch  
All the same,  
On the eastern sky,  
In gold, blue and yellow:  
A smudge of a cloud  
Puts a blotch on the crescent moon,  
Its sharp edge, like the truth  
And it grows every day.

Since 1917

The Russians are coming,  
On email,  
On Facebook,  
On tanks, on TV,  
When will they arrive?

The Russians are coming,  
In spy novels, fake news,  
In Vodka bottles,  
On T shirts and underpants,  
On twitter, when will they arrive?

The Russians are coming,  
Reds under the beds,  
Hiding in book shelves,  
On tube trains,  
in galleries:  
Shall we invite them in for tea?





Ms. Raeesa Usmani is a Lecturer in English at The Department of Biotechnology, Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat, Gujarat, India. A Gold Medalist in M.A. in English Literature and Language, she received her M. Phil. Degree on Travel Writing. She is currently working for a doctorate. She has published poems in journals and magazines, i.e. Setu, Spillwords Press, Tuck Magazine, The Pangolin Review, Café Dissensus, an Anthology, "Muffled Moans: An Anthology on Abuse/Gender Violence", GNOSIS: An International Journal of English Language and Literature, JMS: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal.



## INDELIBLE IMPRINT

The indelible imprint  
Captured in my memory  
Of those sublime days  
And cozy nights  
Makes me wonder till the date  
What it was like!

Those smiley faces  
On sunny, crowded days  
Caught my attention on roadsides, markets, and eateries  
Worrisome yet joyous spirits  
Of those fresh, unhealthy souls  
Left an indelible imprint!

Those shouts, bargaining and customer's support  
Everywhere you passed by or come across  
For shopping, eating or commuting  
Wandering or crossing or walking  
There, on every novel road you walked by  
In this unattractive city  
Has left an indelible imprint!

The polluted air, fill lungs with dark phlegm  
The faces doesn't seem cooperating body  
And shall leave you devastated or broken  
Millions times a day  
And you still smile  
Thanks god and complaint at a time  
For all those indelible imprints these shall leave behind!

## BEAUTY

Her graceful smile  
Full of life and zest  
Never let leave the glance  
From those long dark curls  
Keep irritating her every now and then  
Yet unaware of the Beauty her irritation adds  
To the viewer, who forgets even his self.

Her graceful walk and brainy talks  
Her innocent humor and sharp wit  
All seem so pious and filled  
With the original nature  
Of that Lady's thrill.

For the first time in life  
He did not see the Beauty  
But felt its gracious presence  
That touched both – his heart and brain  
As the rain would touch  
Those dry sand of the thirsty land!





Special thanks to Nguyen Thuy Hoa (Ms) for making this happen.

A former and much-loved high school literature teacher in Hanoi, poet **Bui Kim Anh** is a member of the Vietnam Writers' Association. Born on February 25, 1948 in Thai Binh Province, Vietnam, she has spent most of her life in Vietnam's capital, Hanoi.

Bui Kim Anh writes many types of literature, and is constantly innovating her style and poetic expression. Her poetry is both sad and beautiful, conveying deep feelings about life's joys and sorrows.

Bui Kim Anh lives with his husband, well-known journalist Tran Mai Hanh, on Nguyen Dinh Chieu Street, Hanoi. She has two daughters and one son.

Published books of poems:

*Wild weeds of ignorance* (1996)

*Writing for myself* (1995)

*Sell nothing to the wind* (2005)

*Rainy ways* (1999)

*Afternoon poems "Lục bát"* (2008)

*Sad words on stone* (2007)

*Time locked up* (2010)

*Put on the wind and weigh it* (2010)

*Finding the dream* (2012)

*Collect words for the shadow of leaves* (2015)

*Seems the season was missed* (2016)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/kimanh.bui.56>

Vietnamese Poet Bui Kim Anh



These poems are translated by her daughter, Tran Mai Anh.

## lời chiều hôm

1. vui và buồn là hai phần trái tim  
một viên ngọc ánh trong đêm đen  
một đám mây chì phủ lên tất cả  
giây phút hiếm hoi cũng phải nhoẻn cười

2. tôi không biết giờ sinh của mình  
không thể dựa dẫm vào bói toán  
và tôi có được tự do  
tự do lo toan chịu đựng với tháng ngày

3. người nhắc tôi về sứ mệnh của thơ  
phải vượt qua nỗi đau riêng hướng về cảnh khổ  
tôi dành cho đời những câu thơ vô nghĩa  
những câu thơ chẳng mang nổi mình qua nhịp cầu khổ đau

## FEELING AT TWILIGHT

1. Sad and happy – two parts of a heart  
A sparkling gem in the dark  
A grey cloud covered everything  
A smile appeared on some rare moments

2. I didn't know when I was born  
And couldn't count on the astrology  
Then I could be free  
Free to bear and get along with the months and days

3. I was told about the mission of poetry  
To overcome my own pain toward the other miserable  
I spent the nonsense verse for life  
The verse couldn't cross the painful bridge.

These poems are translated by her daughter, Tran Mai Anh.

## lời bóng đêm

1. tôi không biết mất ngủ từ lúc nào  
đã nhiều đêm không trọn giấc  
hạnh phúc ư những ý nghĩ tự do mở mắt  
ngoài kia ánh đèn đường rọi vệt sáng như trăng

2. Tôi đã sống nhiều năm chịu nhiều đau khổ  
tôi cho tôi là người đau khổ nhất trên đời  
và tôi biết là tôi luôn ngộ nhận  
có bất hạnh nào sánh với bất hạnh nào được đâu

3. trời đã định bước ta đi  
còn chặng cuối ngắn dài không biết nữa  
sốt lại vui của những gì vui nhất  
ru ta nửa giấc chạm rạng ngày

## FEELING AT LATE NIGHT

1. I don't know when I couldn't sleep  
Passing through the night  
With the thought in my mind on happiness  
While the lamp street like a moon outside

2. I have spent so many years in miserable  
Supposed I am the most miserable man in the world  
And I know I always make mistake  
And no one can compare the pain

3. Fate has showed us the way  
The final destination who know it is long or short  
The most happy thing will left  
Bring us into dream then the new day come



These poems are translated by her daughter, Tran Mai Anh.

## lời sớm mai

1. dò dẫm tôi đi tìm con chữ  
xếp lối men vào ý thơ  
nắm phải tay mình vỡ giấc mộng  
nhặt đụn mảnh lời hư vô

2. một chút nhành xanh trồng trước cửa  
sớm người đi qua nhổ mất rồi  
khóa ơ ngóng mới mà chưa thấy  
thừa kiếu riêng mình khóa lá cây

3. xin đừng ngồi khoanh chân và chắp tay như vậy  
lần tràng hạt bao lâu biết rành rẽ mọi điều  
rũ bụi thể phủ màu thiền chậm chậm  
cho tôi một lời tĩnh lại ý thơ

## FEELING AT THE DAWN

1. I grope around to find the words  
Make the way by the poetic inspiration  
I hold my hand the dream end  
Pick up the nihilistic words

A little tree in front of the door  
Be pulled up in the early morning  
It is tired to find the lock  
I made my own lock, lock leaves

Don't cross the legs and clasp hands like that  
Strings of beads, know everything  
Cast off the dust of life, deep into Zen meditation  
Give me one word to peace the verse

These poems are translated by her daughter, Tran Mai Anh.

## dành thiện nhân

1. lo toan trắng trên mái tóc bà  
không biết cơn đau nào khiến lưng bà còng xuống  
là cháu hay nỗi đau là cháu  
gọi bà trở dậy những vần thơ

2. khờ dại và sợ hãi đã cắn xé trần trường  
đứa trẻ và người đàn ông khoảng cách ngăn vô tận  
yêu thương ư chùi sao khô nước mắt  
xót xa dành hai chữ Thiện Nhân

3. giả thật hai phần đời che dấu và bày biện  
cháu đứng trên đôi chân giả thật để làm người  
rạch ròi ư tìm đâu lẽ giản đơn như vậy  
chẳng vật vã thơ bà chẳng trở gió cháu đau

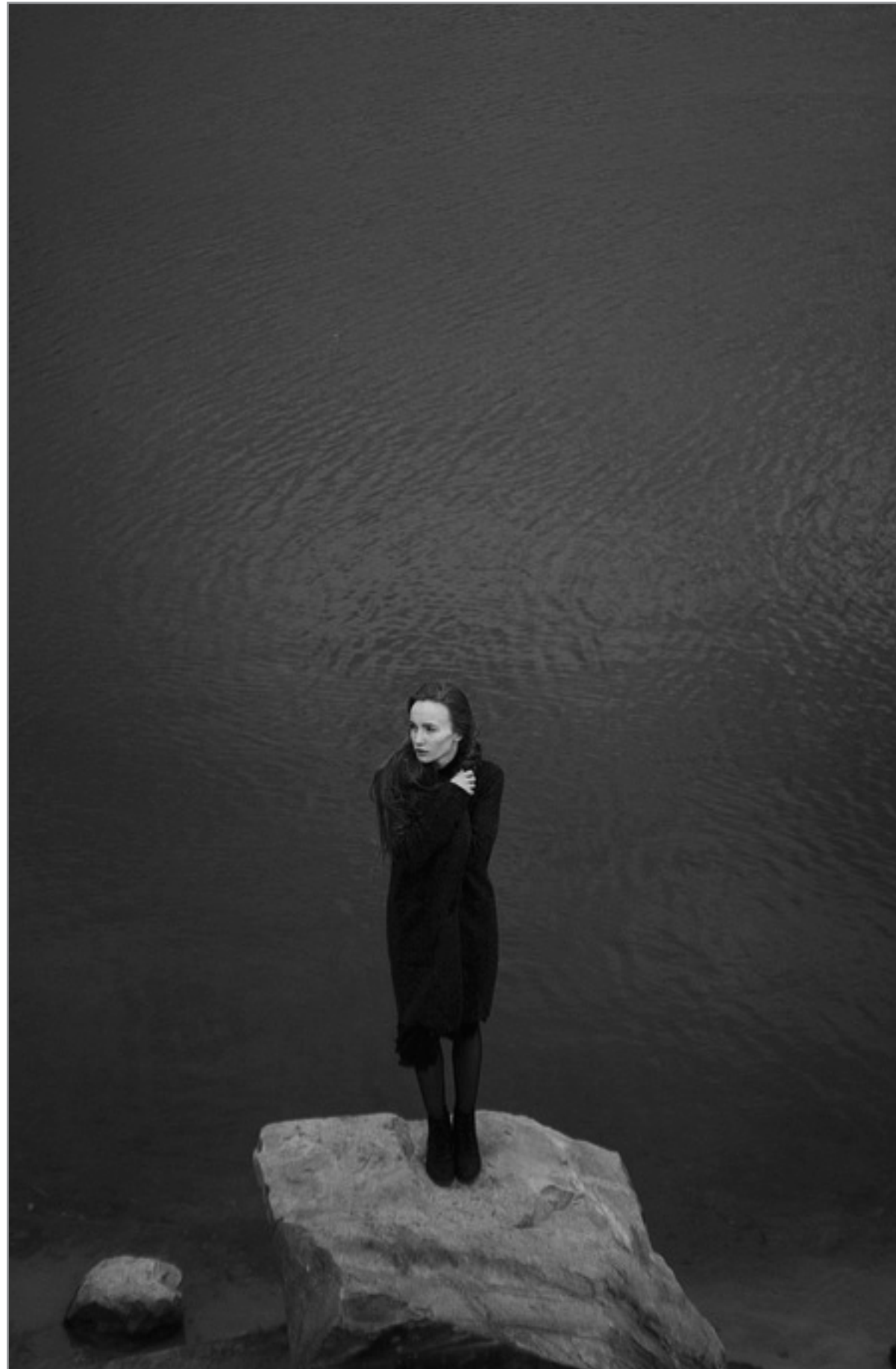
## FOR MY DEAR THIEN NHAN

1. The worried white hair all over her head  
What kind of pain makes her back curved  
It is you or the pain is you  
Wake me up and write poem

2. Fool and fear, take a naked bite  
Endless distance separate the man and the child  
Love, how can dry the tears  
Compassion for my dear Thien Nhan

3. Real or fake, two parts of life that show and hide  
You stand on the real and fake legs to be man  
To be fair? How can find such a simple thing?  
No longer writh my verse and hurt my grandson once the wind of change





Roz Morris is a bestselling ghostwriter turned contemporary novelist and author mentor. She has two published novels (*My Memories of a Future Life* and *Lifeform Three*, which was longlisted for the World Fantasy Award) and a collection of travel diaries *Not Quite Lost: Travels Without A Sense of Direction*. Her latest release is a workbook version of her successful writing manual *Nail Your Novel*. Find out about Roz here <http://rozmorris.wordpress.com> Catch her on [Facebook](#) and tweet her as [@Roz\\_Morris](#)



## NOT A PHONE PERSON

I don't have a phone.

Actually I do, but it's old-fashioned, so friends don't agree that it's a phone.

Their kind of phone is a smart slab of glass with internet, photos, and apps with everything. My kind of phone is a handset that does texts and calls and ... that's it. I call it the dimphone. It's the kind of phone you see in crime dramas, where they're known disdainfully as 'burners'.

My choice of phone annoys certain of my friends. But not for practical reasons. They can contact me if necessary. No, my dimphone seems to rankle for other reasons. For instance, my friend Caroline seems to think it a denial of something, a refusal of progress.

'For goodness sake,' she'll say over coffee, 'get a phone. You can use Twitter from it.'

But I am on Twitter, I tell her. I use Twitter from my PC, many times a day.

Indeed, I got her started on Twitter in the first place, showed her the sweetest tweeters and the best twetiquette. But right now, sitting in a cafe talking to her, I don't need to be on Twitter. It will still be there later.

But, she says, scrolling and swiping, you're missing this and this...

She fears I'm resisting the era of connection, but I'm not. Au contraire, I am extremely in favour of connection. I'm on Facebook and Linked In as well as Twitter. I blog. I use online tools and services. They are the oxygen and blood of my professional life. I upload my work to platforms that reside on servers in far-off continents and time zones. I create files at my desk in my home, and they become real books that people can hold in their hands (or on their phones), anywhere in the world. I certainly appreciate the blessings of connection.

But I don't have a phone.

Photograph Pixababy.com

If you had a phone, says Caroline, you could carry all this with you.

And there's the rub. I don't want to.

Today, walking from the Tube station to begin a freelance shift at a magazine, my head was pleasantly full of the book I'd been reading on my Tube journey. I found I was experiencing the walk as if the author was still with me, describing it. I saw a woman in a navy padded coat. I thought how a coat stays with you a long time. It is a defining garment for a span of months or years. In a photo, you will always know the date by the point in that coat's life cycle. Perhaps it was in its new smart phase, worn only for trips in the city. Perhaps it was later on, when you didn't care if it got scuffed by backpacks or snagged by thorns.

The coat observation is trivial, but the moment was not; it was a new way to notice an everyday thing. That's one of the pleasures of a book, the after-reading period when the writer's sensibility still colours your mind. If I had a whizzy phone, I'd have started to check in on everything and everybody because I am a person with no self-control. I'd never have had that quiet, idling walk.

I don't dislike our connectedness; not at all. The internet is my world. I owe it my career as an author. Previously, I'd been a ghostwriter, a secret person who wrote blockbusters and was never named. Online, in blogs and other social media, I was able to set forth as myself, to speak without a go-between and in my own words. Online, I have found a wondrous world-wide environment of creative people, a place of energetic makers that never sleeps.

Speaking of perpetual motion, that makes me think of a passage from Iain Sinclair's *London Orbital*, where he wonders about our attachment to our cars. Why we are so keen on them if they burn money, guzzle petrol, emit fumes? Even madder, he finds people who, given a choice of routes for driving home, opt to take the longer one. They tell him it's because it allows more time to think, in the quiet, in motion.

And I think this is it. I need the protected quiet time, the time for drifting reverie, the way we all need sleep and dreaming in order to stay sane. If the internet city never slumbers, I'll make my own night.

I love you all, my online friends, my online worlds where you are all so instantly available, so vibrant, so human, so impulsive, so irreverent, so mischievous, so campaigning, so passionate, so pioneering. I love the serious knowledge I get from you as well. But I also need quiet time, to listen, to hear myself think. Which is why I don't have that kind of phone.





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

Translated by Yuanbing Zhang



## OUR SOULS ARE FREE AND MAGICAL

Our souls are free and magical  
Which can reach many heavens without wings  
Every Kingdom of Heaven has sweet memories  
Oh, where there's no the word of death  
To protect your childhood sun  
The teenager's starry sky is light from the Kingdom of Heaven  
And in the deep of your bones  
old gods are smiling at you  
Their words are music from the Kingdom of Heaven

## GIVE YOU A BOTTLE OF NECTAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

I

Give you a bottle of nectar from the kingdom of heaven  
Let your flowers of soul blossom  
Let your bones be white and transparent  
Let you bathe in music of the kingdom of heaven  
There will be no more earthly night  
Let you forget that fragrance of soul  
That's in your home of soul  
That giant's yourself that are sweet and free.

II

The strings of heavenly gems  
Embedded on your golden crown  
You are the giant's king from the of the Kingdom of Gold  
Your land is vaster than billions of seas.



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