Portrait of a Poet of the Ancient Mind

Cover Artwork by Irish Artist Emma Barone
SUPPORT LIVE ENCOUNTERS.
DONATE NOW AND KEEP THE MAGAZINE LIVE IN 2019!

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. Poets, writers, academics, civil & human/animal rights activists, academics, environmentalists, social workers, photographers 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 for this just cause.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor
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

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
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 Rhymer’s’ Town. Where my father was from in West Limerick the Inchabaun townland of Templeglantline, 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, Dáibhi Ó Bruidair (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, Aodhagáin Ó Rathaille (d. 1729) and Eoghan Ruad Ó Súilleabháin (d.1782), were associated with Ahane Mountain, 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 unde 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.
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.
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 harman 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
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 Lost Massages

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
an 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
massages 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
vaunted 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 becloms 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
SONG OF THE SALT BREEZE

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.

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; swifting 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.

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.
SONG OF THE SALT BREEZE

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.

**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.
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!

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.

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.
SUMMER PASSAGE

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.
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.

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.
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?
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 roadides, 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 un-aware 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!
FOR MY DEAR THIEN NHAN

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 her husband, well-known journalist Tran Mai Hanh, on Nguyen Dinh Chieu Street, Hanoi. She has two daughters and one son.

Published books of poems:

- *Writing for myself* (1995)
- *Sell nothing to the wind* (2005)
- *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](https://www.facebook.com/kimanh.bui.56)

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

1. vui và buồn là hai phần trái tim
một viên ngọc ánh trong đêm đen
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
sót 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 alway 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
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 đụng mảnh lời hư vô

2. một chút nhành xanh trồng trước cửa
sớm người đi qua nhổ mất rồi
khóa ô ngóng mỏi mà chưa thấy
thửa kiểu 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 thế phủ màu thiền chầm 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
dành thiện nhân

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

2. khờ dại và sợ hãi đã cắn xẻ trần truồng
dứa trẻ và người đàn ông khoảng cách ngăn vô tận
yêu thương ư? chuí 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? như 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

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

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