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CHRISTOPHER MERRILL
Funeral Sentences

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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Christopher Merrill has published six collections of poetry, including *Watch Fire*, for which he received the Lavan Younger Poets Award from the Academy of American Poets, and *Boat*; many edited volumes and translations; and six books of nonfiction, among them, *Only the Nails Remain: Scenes from the Balkan Wars*, *Things of the Hidden God: Journey to the Holy Mountain*, and *Self-Portrait with Dogwood*. He directs the University of Iowa's International Writing Program.



CHRISTOPHER MERRILL

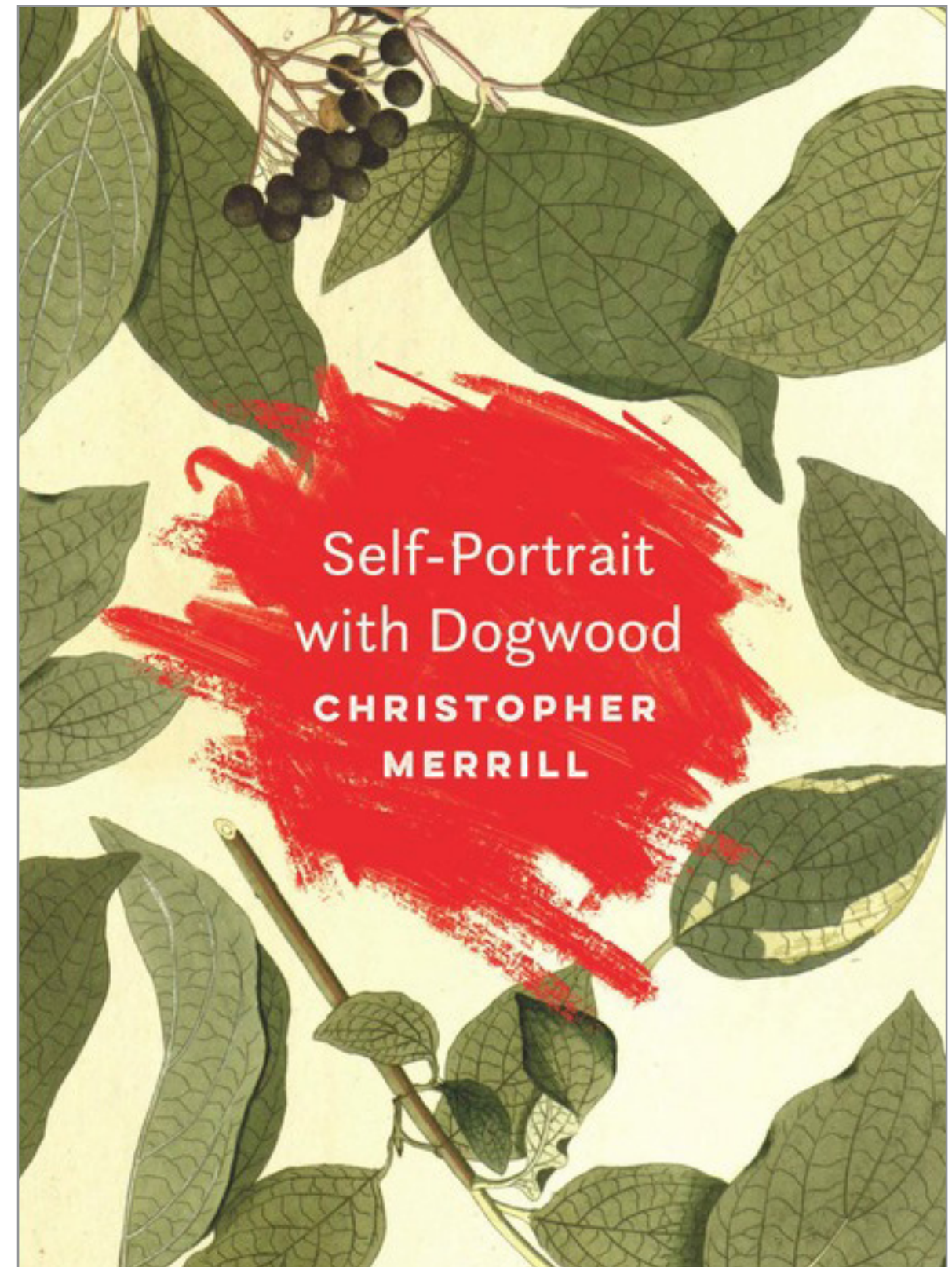
FUNERAL SENTENCES

The graffiti on the wall of an apartment building in Skopje pleased the poets on their way to the Struga Poetry Evenings in North Macedonia: **MORE POETRY IS NEEDED**. In the van were poets from India, Iran, Israel, Kosovo, Mongolia, Spain, and other countries, and on the drive through a wide valley between two mountain ranges I supposed the scrawled words had different meanings for each of us. Lake Ohrid was our destination, a place I had first visited as a journalist in the winter of 1992, during the wars of succession in the former Yugoslavia, and now on a hot August morning we passed vineyards and cornfields, houses with red-tiled roofs and a fire-scarred hill. In a summer marked by mass shootings, immigration raids, protests in Hong Kong, tensions rising in the Persian Gulf, a trade war with China, incontrovertible evidence of climate change, and increasingly unhinged tweets, pronouncements, and bald-faced lies from Donald Trump, I found some consolation in Geoffrey Hill's posthumous volume of poems, *The Book of Baruch by the Gnostic Justin*. The witness of poetry, Hill reminds us, can be redemptive, even or especially in difficult circumstances. For his determination to interrogate every aspect of his walk in the sun is by turns exhilarating and bracing: he stared into the abyss throughout his long career, and what he discovered there, translating into some of the most vital poetry of our time, may be useful for those of us who wonder how to make sense of the crises we now face.

Christopher Merrill

One night in Portland, Oregon, between reporting trips on the siege of Sarajevo, I had the good fortune to see Hill read with Donald Hall. This was near the beginning of what would be a remarkable run for a poet heretofore known for his scrupulous, if meager, output. Hill later credited “the taking up of serotonin” to treat chronic depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder for his newfound productivity; between 1996 and his death in 2016 he would publish nearly 800 pages of new poems, four times as many as had appeared in print during the first four decades of his writing life. On that evening in Portland, though, he still had the air of a convalescent, and I was struck by Donald Hall’s decision to make his friend the centerpiece of the event. He recalled his excitement upon discovering and then publishing Hill’s poetry when they were students at Oxford, and now I recalled his generosity on stage toward a man whose pain was so clearly etched in his face. It was, I decided, the best attitude to adopt at the outset of a poetry festival.

Hill’s poems, which are often judged to be difficult and allusive, sound every conceivable note and tone in a register whose contours seem to widen line by line. “If testimony is of a witness,” he asks toward the end of *The Book of Baruch by the Gnostic Justin*, “how should I summon or speak for myself?”—a question every poet must answer. Hill’s answers in this last poetic will and testament, the various selves he presents in a sequence of some 271 poems, take different forms—prophesy, curse, wisdom literature, joke, lyric—all marked by this stark recognition: “So short the time while the lime leaves have become darker and denser.” This may explain his interest in Henry Purcell’s “Funeral Sentences,” which helped to define the end of one political order and the advent of another: “Take heart, the Funeral Sentences are neither an act of homage nor a bill for damage.” I suspect *The Book of Baruch by the Gnostic Justin* will play a similar role in our time.



<http://www.christophermerrillbooks.com/>



Romanian poet Ana Blandiana

Hill died one week after his countrymen voted to leave the European Union. If he had once described the 1992 Maastricht Treaty as “an international corporate fraud,” the verdict he delivers in his short final poem reveals that he had revised that opinion, because he recognized the danger posed by the rise of populist anger to the civilizational values and ideals he had always cherished. He seemed to foresee how this would fuel anxiety everywhere:

*The numbness after the shock of exit, big-bummed Britannia in her tracksuit;
her phantom lap of honour; no other runner.
July the dark month; the lime leaves turned matt. The newly-bloomed mallow
will see us re-autumned before it falls fallow.
Even so, the power of stout roses has risen watt by watt against the afterglow of
each brief thunder-shower.*

Brexit was, of course, the most visible sign that something had gone awry in the western political order before Donald Trump was elected president later that fall. Coincidentally, the 2019 Struga Poetry Evenings coincided with the annual G7 summit in Biarritz, France, which the leaders of the world’s largest economies feared Trump would disrupt, and as I listened to the poets recite their poems in their different languages, reading along in English translation, I concluded that they were expressing “the power of stout roses [rising] watt by watt against the afterglow” of what was turning into a global thunderstorm, which had the potential to destroy everything. Which is to say: they were composing Funeral Sentences for an unsustainable way of being in the world.

The Romanian poet Ana Blandiana was awarded this year’s Golden Wreath at the Struga Poetry Evenings, celebrated for her powerful poetic voice and as “a symbol of rebellion... against Ceausescu’s totalitarianism.” In a press conference at the Hotel Drim she ascribed her dissent from the Communist order to her childhood in Transylvania, which had a tradition of rebelling against Hungarian invaders; her political poems, she explained, mirrored her countrymen’s state of mind and the dreariness of daily life in Romania: “We live in a wound,” she wrote; “the only certain thing is the pain that surrounds us.” No wonder she ran afoul of the authorities. “I was banned, even before I became a poet,” she said in another poem, which circulated in *samizdat* editions—a practice came to an end with the fall of the Ceausescu regime, when she found a new poetic destiny. She wrote: “The only that changed after 1989 is that I am no longer afraid.” Yet she feels more at home abroad than in Romania, where poetry had lost its central place in the culture.

“In Romania,” she explained, “we often discussed the subject of resistance through culture. We survived Ceausescu through this resistance. But resistance is more important now than before, because culture is being replaced by anti-culture. The fact that it is normal to talk about the end of Europe is proof that culture doesn’t represent anything anymore, even in Europe. Europe created two totalitarian societies, two world wars, and yet poets continued to write. We must create a movement of intellectual solidarity to counter the media’s destruction of culture.” In her poem “Biography” she wrote: “Every poem unsaid, every word not found,/ Threatens the atmosphere.” After the press conference I headed for the lake to find these words.

Scottish poet Magi Gibson has five collections published. She won the Scotland on Sunday/Women 2000 Poetry Prize, has held three Scottish Arts Council Writing Fellowships, has been a Royal Literary Fund Fellow, and Writer in Residence in Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art and Glasgow Women's Library. Poems in many anthologies, including *Modern Scottish Women Poets*, *Scottish Love Poems* (both Canongate) and *The Twentieth Century Book of Scottish Poetry* (Edinburgh University Press). Currently she edits The Poets' Republic. She runs Wild Women Writing workshops.
www.magigibson.co.uk



Pic from Pixabay.com

MENOPAUSAL THUNDERSTORM

rain hammers black fists
 at the midnight door
 the wind howls at the windows
 the dog cowers in the corner

Kate throws back a whisky, kicks
 off her shoes, strips off her
 cardie, skirt,
 her cotton underwear
 and fifty years
 of prim propriety

runs bare-foot
 bare-bum
 bare-naked
 in the garden
 whoops, leaps, dances
 glows and gleams
 white body
 moon-luminous
 under clouds
 that billow dark
 as witches' petticoats

her husband gawks,
 slack-jawed
 at the window,
 gormless prince
 turned glass-eyed toad
 dumbstruck by
 female power
 overload

a cataclysmic crack
 splits
 the skies apart

Kate's fingers spark
 forked lightning.



BERETS OF HUMANITY

At the bus stop where the wind's trying to kill us
slicing in like a scimitar from Siberia,
a tiny woman wears a colourful velvet beret.

She's so small, I see each segment of its circle sitting
on her head like the wheel of a stained glass window,
emerald, sapphire, saffron, indigo, amber, red.

She beams when I say it's beautiful, tells me its story;
a gift from her daughter years ago. She deemed it
too bright, too loud, stuffed it in a drawer. And now

her daughter's dead. Years later, the bus stop
in St Vincent Street, maybe it's the same wind, slicing
in from Siberia, snow and ice spitting through

its sharpened teeth. A young woman says,
'I love your hat!' It's a beret of sorts. Mulberry wool.
'Well cool,' she says. 'Unusual.'

'It's from a charity shop,' I reply. Then she admires
my scarf. Hand-woven in India. Peacock blue. Fair-trade.
And while the bus doesn't come, we talk carbon footprints,

pollution, climate change, and I see she's carrying
an art portfolio under one arm, while on her shoulders
she bears the worries and the future of the world,

and I swear her smile's so beautiful, this student girl
I've never met before, she's lighting up
the shelter like an angel in a holy grotto

while all around the drear November dusk descends
black as the wings of ravens. And the glow
from her face warms me more than my woollen

kind-of-beret or my hand-woven peacock blue
Fair Trade scarf or best thermal underwear
from Marks & Spencer, or my specially lined duvet

coat as worn by explorers to far frozen Antarctica
guaranteed to keep me warm at minus 50 in a hurricane,
and as we chat I recall the tiny lady's velvet beret,

its jewelled wheel of colours, and her sadness as she said
she wore it now to please her daughter, who is dead.
And all the while the darkness deepens as if the sky

is leaking sin, and the east wind with its icy breath
from Siberia does its best to kill us and cut like a scimitar
through the warmth of our common humanity.

MISSING

Her boots go with him everywhere
in a zipped Adidas shoulder bag.

A red leather ankle pair she loved to wear
even when the cancer was walking her away.

They travel now on trains and planes
to places she will never see. Once there, he

finds a spot, arranges them before the view,
and with the camera she loved, he documents

her ongoing presence, her aching absence
in his world. At Ground Zero they pose solemnly.

In Sydney, sunshine spotlights them like starlets
on the steps before the Opera House. See! At a magic

finger-click they look as if they might dance off, high-kicking
in their harlot-scarlet glory for the hell of it. But now,

at sunset on the darkening sand at Bantry Bay, they linger
by the lapping water's edge as he recounts the day

she begged he help her from her sterile clinic bed
so she could buy them – best Spanish leather

with Cuban heels that clicked and clacked to match
her gypsy soul, and how she wore them straight away,

even though with swollen legs and chemo cocktails coursing
through her veins and brain she could barely stand.

Ravaged and wrecked and beautiful, he says.
Do you think I'm strange, he asks as gently he slips

a hand inside each one, where faint prints
of her toes are stained, where traces of her cells remain.

If only the world were full of such strangeness, I reply.
If only the world were full of such love.



EPIPHANY

Underneath the No Waiting At Any Time sign
where a homeless man's been dossing
on cardboard in a doorway, someone

has scrawled in white chalk
I CAN SEE INTO YOUR SOUL
a phrase that snags on the ragged nail

of my consciousness as I walk onto
Great Western Road, past the kebab shop
and the graffiti-scratched bus stop

where a drunk is singing obscenities
into the cold ear of the east wind.
I can see into your soul

seven small syllables that susurrate
at the edges of my days
with the insouciance of the sinless

and flutter softly at the dark windows
of my dreams like the feathered wings
of the guardian angel I stopped

believing in when I was eight.
So when three Jehovah's Witnesses
in the fading winter light at the side door

of Oran Mor offer me a Watchtower
with added eschatological warnings,
I wonder if just to be rid of this message

messing with my brain, making me fret
about death and the afterlife and sin, I should
pass the Good News on, that up around the corner

in a dead end street where no waiting is permitted
for All Eternity there's a down-and-out dossing
in a doorway who can see into their Immortal Souls,

when from the frozen branches
of a black-boughed tree
at the red-amber-green lights where

four roads meet and the traffic roar
stops starts stops, and you can hardly hear
the pound of your own heartbeat, the song

of a blackbird rises into the city dusk,
scattering sparks of stardust
like a tiny resurrection.



Sandra Yannone's poems and book reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in numerous journals including *Ploughshares*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Women's Review of Books*, *The Gay and Lesbian Review (Worldwide)*. Her poem "Requiem for Orlando" appeared in a special issue of *Glass: A Poetry Journal*. She is a recipient of an Academy of American Poets' Poetry Prize and an AWP Intro Award. Salmon Poetry published her debut collection *Boats for Women* earlier this year. She currently resides in Olympia, Washington.



Pic from Pixabay.com

TULIPS IN FALL

We stopped along the street market to marvel
at the yellow tulips, and of course, the orange,

overflowing from the tops of glass vessels.
You dipped your head to peer inside

the cup of one. *Look*, you said, and I folded over
to bring my eyes to drink the orange tulip's inside

the way a horse bends to water. We knew
they were not native to this place and time,

yet we played along like lovers
who have nothing better to do

then stare into the eyes of flowers,
to find the real beauty the rest of the world

often unassumes -- so often, in fact, it manufactures
plastic tulips to simulate their smell and touch,

and even we are sometimes touched
into believing that they are real,

as we sometimes mistake two women
stopping to see yellow tulips, and even the orange,

in fall, as real, as somehow
being opened together.

FLIGHT PLANS FOR THE NEW HOME

For years I've travelled two-lane highways to find proof
in the dividing lines at night. Where does family
begin and end in the headlights' search for home?
Isn't the turn into the driveway just another form of chair?
What power compels the glove box to open, reveal its heart
as summer begins to launch into spontaneous flight?

And tomorrow she will travel alone to the airport to catch a flight
in early morning. The chenille bedspread will try to hide the proof
that she turned her body toward me with her unruly heart,
just the length of a lyrical moment, an unspoken clutch for family
before the lights went out. And in the far corner, the empty red chair
blushes while everything shudders in my body, my new home

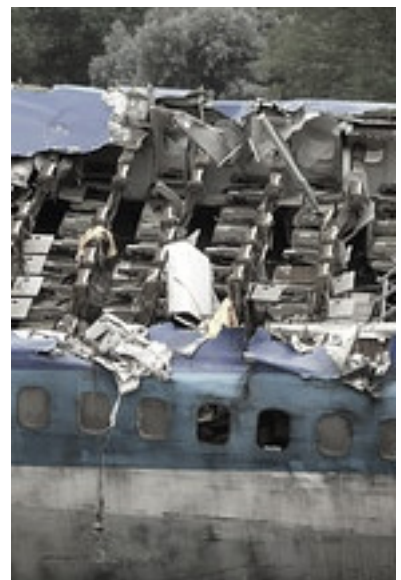
for the night. For years, I have run away from that home.
I have chartered planes and then missed the flights.
All these women couldn't win at my game of musical chairs,
couldn't calculate fast enough the geometric proofs,
the Pythagorean theorem that would unlock my family's
secrets, that would dismantle my ever-fragile heart.

Under that one night's cloudy moon, our two hearts
cling to the wisdom of dead poets, build a model home
for a few unsuspecting minutes, for one illusion of family
hoping to dream the night to breakfast, the flight
still on time, the pilots performing their final checks, proof
of her imminent take off in every seat, every empty chair

in the airport now waving its goodbye. What woman can chair
an investigation into a night crash where the flight
disappears off the radar screen? What indisputable proof
could ever make up for her loss? What homework
could bring her back more whole than the sum of all hearts
taking off and landing that day, then the sum of all families

waiting for some good news. The airline creates a makeshift family
room to simulate a comfortable den crowded with chairs.
And now our last night together lingers mid-flight
in my mind, every beat of my unchecked heart
ticking like an antique clock searching for a home.
Yes, I am in love again. You don't need any more proof

then this family photograph never taken, then this heart
seeking a chair to rest in, seeking its final home.
The delayed flight always harbors my fugitive proof.



GLASSWARE OF THE FINER POINTS

The first time it worked, she says about jumping
through the window to grasp his attention.

She is stirring the ice cubes
in her clear drink, trying to recast

the broken glass to its molten form,
to remember her body easing

through liquid rather than this hard,
jagged time of her life she's never really wanted

to escape. She imagines drama
as a way to reach him. After the emergency

room, the stitches in her hands, her forehead,
they drive to the hardware store

so he can buy another sheet of glass.
He uses the entire afternoon to cover

the finer points of how to replace
a broken window, caulk the frame, set

everything before it dries. On a high stool
eyeing his tender hold of the new

pane's edges, she feels
the business of his unflinching hands

at work, hands which did not
try to follow her

off the sill, and in her stitches,
the tight, thready pull of defeat.

THE NEXT OPEN SPACE

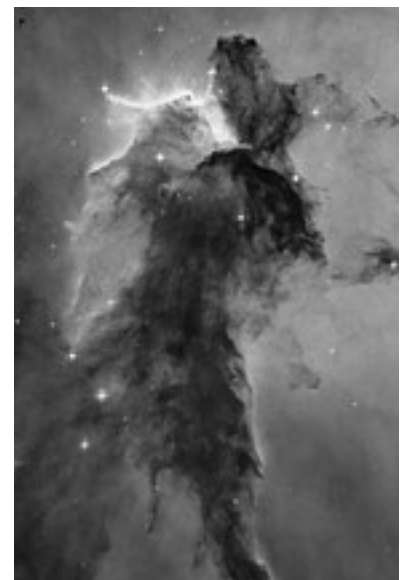
We think it's about
our footing, planting
the fleshy parts
solid to ground, taking it
one step at a time,
whatever it is.

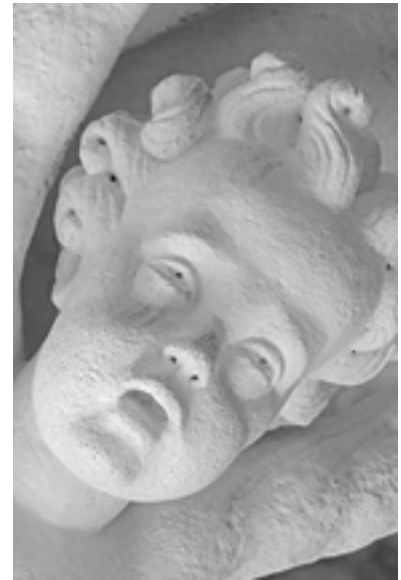
I try to remember this
as I comfort my sisters
as they migrate
to spaces that feel
closed before reached.
I have been there, outside
in that dark that redefines
dark, without words,
lifting my feet or voice
or eyes, impossible.

And, yes, it is
this dance that offers
to turn us toward
the next open space,
teaching us there is
so much more
than what we perceive
breathing under our feet,
the ground rising,
rising all around us
like immaculate glass cities.
Look up, look up, always
look up. Find the bird
inside you
and remember this
about the next
open space:

There is always
more than one.

There is always
more than one.





THE FINAL CROSSING OF CAPTAIN EDWARD J. SMITH

His voice had never fallen hoarse
his whole career until on board tonight. He regrets

for a water-logged moment hosting the five-course
meal, glasses toasting names the headlines will never forget,

his first-class guests now merely occupants
of the same fate as all the others. A monsoon

of panic overtakes the calm. Chants
of “women and children first” swoon

through the Atlantic chill. How to captain when riven
with everything unsinkable sinking? Between

not enough time and too few lifeboats? He cuts the ribbon
between himself and April fourteenth.

Now two hours into the fifteenth, death
hovers an instant away. He resigns to a final breath.

ONE

I want to write
the most exquisite
poem forever
for you, the one
I always dare
Myself to write.
The poem
coalminers recite
as they hoard air
in the dark, approaching
death. The one
mountain climbers
hallucinate
as they shiver
their last breaths.
The one that floods
the drowning one's throat
with drenched song.
The one that grants
every cut flower
eternal life. The one
that pushes fire
to stay alight.
The one that fuses
the *Titanic*
back together
and lifts her
from the Atlantic's floor
to voyage again.
The one my lips dream of
pen and inking down
the crossword puzzle
of your back.

The one that never
lets the hour
glass run dry of sand.
The one that keeps time
in our silk pockets
when we are together
like that.

And the one that is
the one that is
the one I can't write
because there is only
one exquisite blushing
bruised plum. And that
one beautiful one
resting in the green
ribbed bowl
ripening
is the one
that is exquisitely
only only you.



Terry McDonagh, poet and dramatist, taught creative writing at Hamburg University and was Drama Director at the International School Hamburg. He's published ten poetry collections as well as letters, drama, prose and poetry for young people. His work has been translated into German and Indonesian. 2016: poetry collection, *Lady Cassie Peregrina* – Arlen House. 2017: included in *Fire and Ice 2*, Gill Education for Junior Cycle. 2017: poem, *UCG by Degrees*, included in Galway Poetry Trail on Galway University Campus. 2017: *Director of WestWords*, Irish literature festival in Hamburg. 2018: latest poetry collection, *Fourth Floor Flat – 44 Cantos*, published autumn 2018 by Arlen House.



The Piper of Treenabontry by Terry McDonagh. Music on the Uilleann Pipes: by Jerry O'Sullivan.

This poem, *The Piper of Treenabontry*, came about after several encouraging conversations with musician, radio presenter and historian, Joe Byrne who had been researching Irish musical heritage in Chicago – the home of the legendary uilleann piper, Joe Shannon.

Joe Shannon, my mother's cousin, emigrated to Chicago with his family in 1929 and died there in 2004. In later years he was, frequently, invited to return to Ireland to share his talents and to be conferred with numerous accolades. His Taylor Pipes are unique and remain with his family in Chicago.

This poem attempts to outline the story of his life from his boyhood home – among fairies and music in rural Ireland – to his work, music and, in later years, his special relationship with nature and bird-life in his back garden.

Also, thanks to Joe Byrne, I met Jerry O'Sullivan, the well-known uilleann piper from New York – with relatives in County Mayo – who composed this piece of music in response to my poem.

Above photograph courtesy <http://www.uilleann.com/pipes.html>

THE PIPER OF TREENABONTRY

in memoriam: piper, Joe Shannon, Chicago.

They took their tunes with them
but the music refused to budge.
In Treenabontry I taste and smell
wind on the path the fairies crafted
when they chopped a corner off
Brennan's house – it had stood
on the track they'd worn to a frazzle
when transporting the music
and memory of the Shannon family
into posterity.

Before they'd left, melody tangled
about the house or hung carelessly
on hawthorn and briar – spirits danced
in moonlit splashes and stowed
treasured tunes in wistful wind,
dozing bog and landscape crannies.

Only those little people have
the language to tell us
where a musical note comes from,
how it lodges in the land,
in the heart of a departed family,
in a memory of a house.

Joe Shannon played the uilleann pipes
in Chicago. This was real – big
untainted sound – visible in loneliness,
choking fears, loss or in the smiles
it cloaked and covered up. It was
the stuff that held imagined fields,
fences, happiness and tears together.

THE PIPER OF TREENABONTRY *contd...*

The spirits of skinny streams
and tossing air knew this.
They held on to mossy paths,
untamed bushes, mists and forts
where they stashed away tunes
for home fires in strange places.

And when the new generation
learned a different way of talking,
old language lived on in melody.

I can see the thatched cottage,
wordless at first light. A mother
whispers to God at the cart-shed door.
The anxious dog whimpers. Mist
falls on a bucket of hot coals
handed to a neighbour to conserve
the hope-giving fire for their return.

I see the loaded cart getting smaller
with every step of the old horse, Doll.
My mother stands weeping as her
cousins disappear into myth and legend.

Threenabontry, Kiltimagh, train, Cobh,
America robbing a townland of a widow,
Ellen Shannon and her young sons.
Only music dug in its heels and
refused to budge. It cut holes in hedges,
buried itself in watery rocks, wakes,
dewy rose bushes and railway tracks.

Joe had *the gift*
in the rough and tumble suburbs of Chicago:
a piper, baseball player and fireman.
His uilleann pipes –
imitating rhythms
of blackberry clusters
of fire-department sirens
of domestic sounds
of birds in the back garden
of being finally alone –
came to him by fate
like a harmonious fragment
when Patrick Hennelly – piper
and pipe maker from Mayo
gave him his gift of pipes.
There were drones to be mastered,
children to be fed. His arms
would have been exhausted
from gathering food. Even
Odysseus in times of myth
must have cried out in frustration:
what are the kids up to, now, Penelope?
I can hear nothing in this light.

Francis O'Neill sang accolades
to his playing at The World Fair in 1934.
Joe tuned into the piping of
another left-handed piper, Patsy Touhy
and off he went like a poet
trying to find rhythm in a poem – like
a mother building hope into
a prayer for a special intention.



THE PIPER OF TREENABONTRY *contd...*

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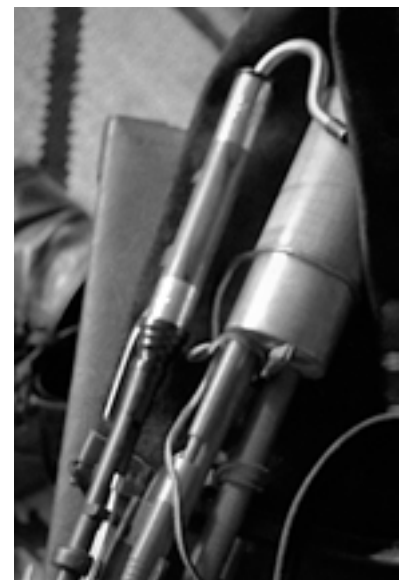
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a prayer for a special intention.



THE PIPER OF TREENABONTRY *contd...*

John McFadden, the fiddler from Newport
 composed The Pleasures of Hope
 before Joe's time. Eddy Mullaney
 handed him a set of Taylor Pipes
 in the sixties. They unlocked squeals
 of delight in Joe. He didn't ask who
 he could play with. He just did.
 Fiddler, Johnny McGreevy lifted
 his spirits. Defiant as robins in frost
 they battered aside new waves
 in their euphoria of reels and jigs.
 They heard the far-off cuckoo
 and the corncrake in the long meadow
 in their country of home-from-home.

Music had found its mark. Pilgrims
 descended on his kitchen. Joe
 and Johnny recorded Noonday Feast
 over cups of tea – word was out.
 The young came running.
 Piper, Jim McGuire, Box player, John Williams
 and Liz Carroll, the fiddler
 threw their hats into the ring – Joe
 gave them hope on nothing stronger than tea.

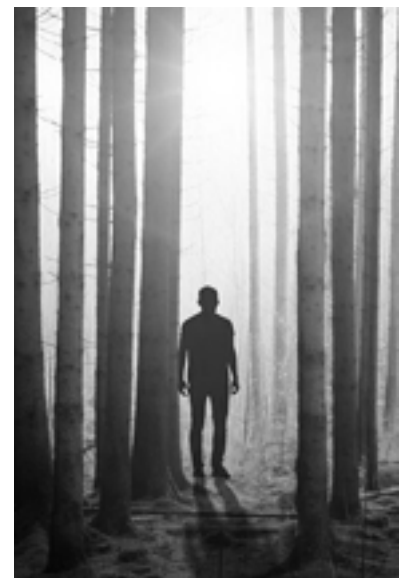
The Chieftains came and laid out a carpet,
 They played with the big man and
 acknowledged the **duine uasal* in him.
 Willie Clancy School and Cork University
 turned out like new brooches
 with awards and garlands – quiet as
 his mother Ellen, he took it in his stride.

In later years – alone, he'd whistle
 with birds in his back garden. They
 responded. He took a pair of
 Cardinal birds into his home and
 refused to bury them when they died.
 They came to light in his basement.

Joe Shannon
 left as a boy
 in 1929
 to answer
 the call to life
 in Chicago
 and he went
 to the homeland
 of the dead
 in 2004.

The ghost in his pipes says it all.

**Duine Uasal* = Unique person

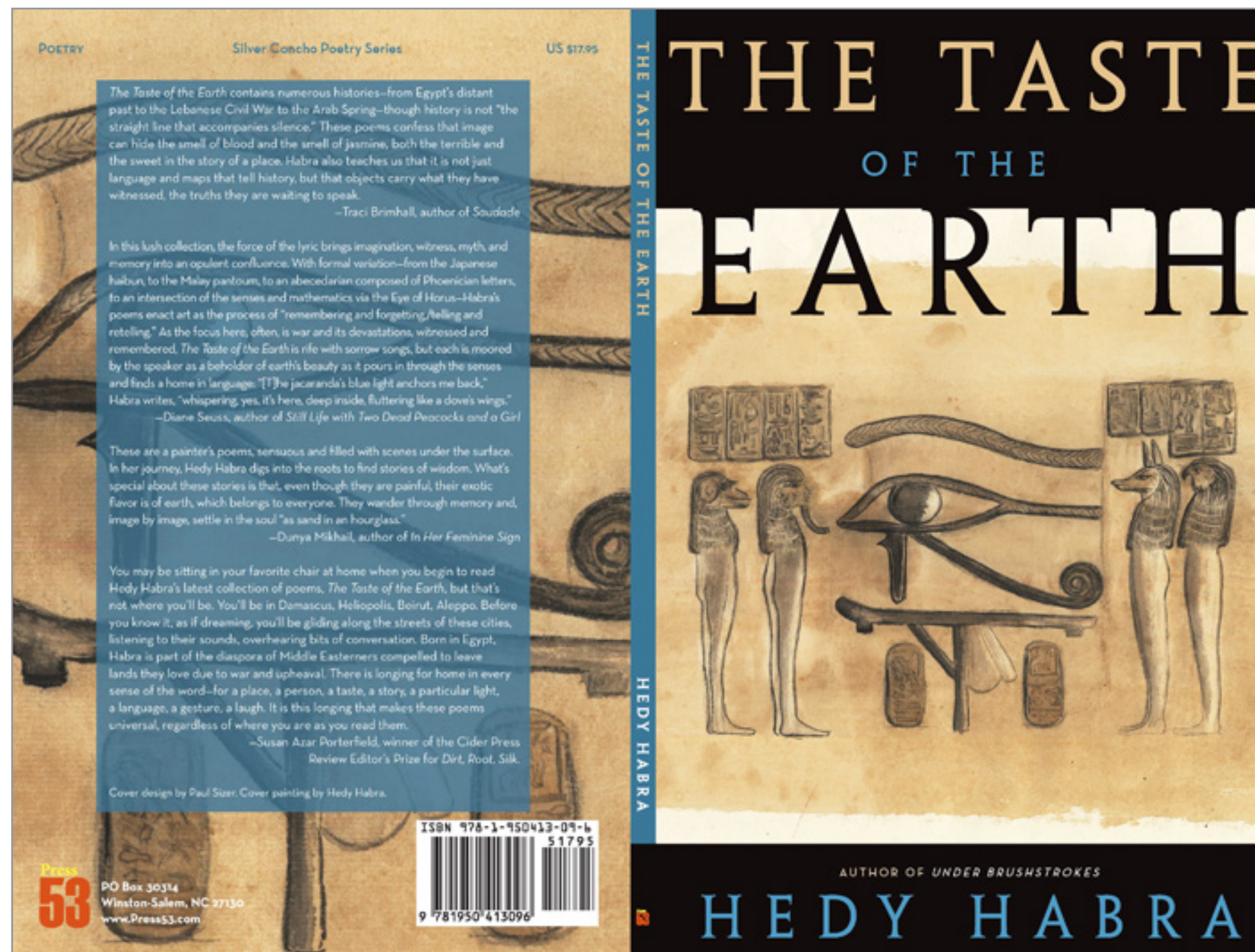




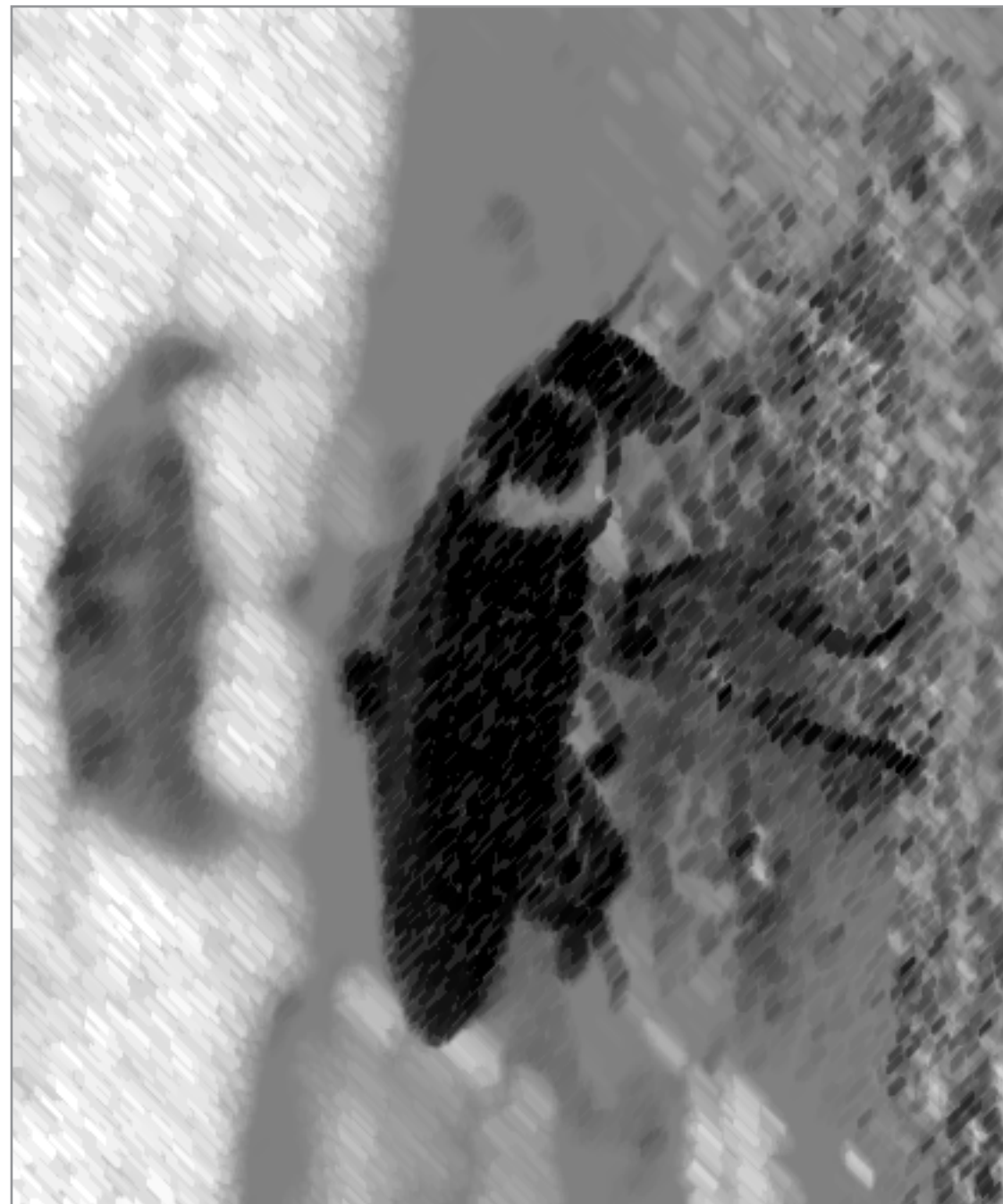
SUSAN AZAR PORTERFIELD
ON HEDY HABRA'S LATEST
COLLECTION OF POEMS

Born in Egypt, Habra is part of the diaspora of Middle Easterners compelled to leave lands they love due to war and upheaval. There is longing for home in every sense of the word—for a place, a person, a taste, a story, a particular light, a language, a gesture, a laugh. It is this longing that makes these poems universal, regardless of where you are as you read them. — Susan Azar Porterfield, winner of the Cider Press Review Editor's Prize for *Dirt, Root, Silk*.

The Taste of the Earth,
is available at www.amazon.com
and <http://www.press53.com>



James Walton is published in many anthologies, magazines, and newspapers. He was a librarian, a farm labourer, and mostly a public sector union official. He resigned from an elected position in 2014 to write. His books include 'The Leviathan's Apprentice' 2015, 'Walking Through Fences' 2018, and 'Unstill Mosaics' 2019. He has been shortlisted for a number of awards, and is a winner of the Raw Art Review Chapbook Prize for "Abandoned Soliloquies" to be published shortly. He lives in Wonthaggi.



COCKROACH MEDITATION

Two spindly things
you once ran
always to the sun

We watch the smaller dot
a circumference of all imaginings

You scratched the iris of rain forest
beat against the tinnitus
of your making

Saw tumbleweeds become the norm

Here in the damp
termites sing to their cousins of silk

Your memories arc in fragments
ours leapt the largest footprints

now hold fast before the hurricane

Steel into river red gum
you cannot learn to be
we remain still in a micro wave

Your generations talk of humanity
We remember Cain

SUNDAY 2009, ANY DAY A SUNDAY

By the time the town hall meeting
is called, they have stopped the fire
at the third green. The wind change
waved in presence back to the lake.

The new town is a suburb returned
to earth, a clay pot of dry river bed
in the gully. Ravens and magpies
compete for air to sing in prolapse.

Seb the Sri Lankan counsellor sits
beside me, his gum boots covered
in cold ash. Back at his property
only some steel veranda posts stand.

He's sobbing as he takes my half
used tatty handkerchief, not from
any sorrow this time. Because his
house cow trotted out of the cinders.

Squirting her demands there as he
sat between geography. His family
is safe and there are no casualties,
this time we are boats for salvage.

COOTAMUNDRA WATTLE

You're too daggy now
once so ubiquitous
along with hydrangeas
the pairing almost a haiku

every second child fell out
of that shivering font of annunciation
all Alice through hay fever
the broken skin your other variety

Jason's crew cleaned their bodies
with oil from a familiar orchard
your head tossed its fleece
over the weight of so many plantings.

You're confined these days
to grandparents' gardens
in forgotten suburbs of lustrous hubris
gummy excretions from pruning

not fitting the clean lines of Rubik cube domesticity

shepherded back to the great plains
an origin where like the elephants
wandering in grand eloquent possessives
as seedling shields howl out resistance

mimosa florets precious as saffron
lay over the trails to graveyards
the leaves finely cut venetian blinds
all frayed by the incisions of golden offspring.



© James Walton

Martina Evans is an Irish poet, novelist and teacher. She grew up in County Cork in a country pub, shop and petrol station and is the youngest of ten children, and the author of eleven books of prose and poetry. Her latest collection *Now We Can Talk Openly About Men* was published by Carcanet in May 2018, and shortlisted for the 2019 Irish Times Poetry Now Award as well as the Pigott Poetry Award.



MARTINA EVANS ON TIM CUMMING'S LATEST COLLECTION OF POEMS

Knuckle from Pitt Street Poetry is Tim Cumming's eighth collection. The book begins with a stunning sequence on the planets, each one different, each suffused with humour, eroticism and Cumming's trademark scientific focus.

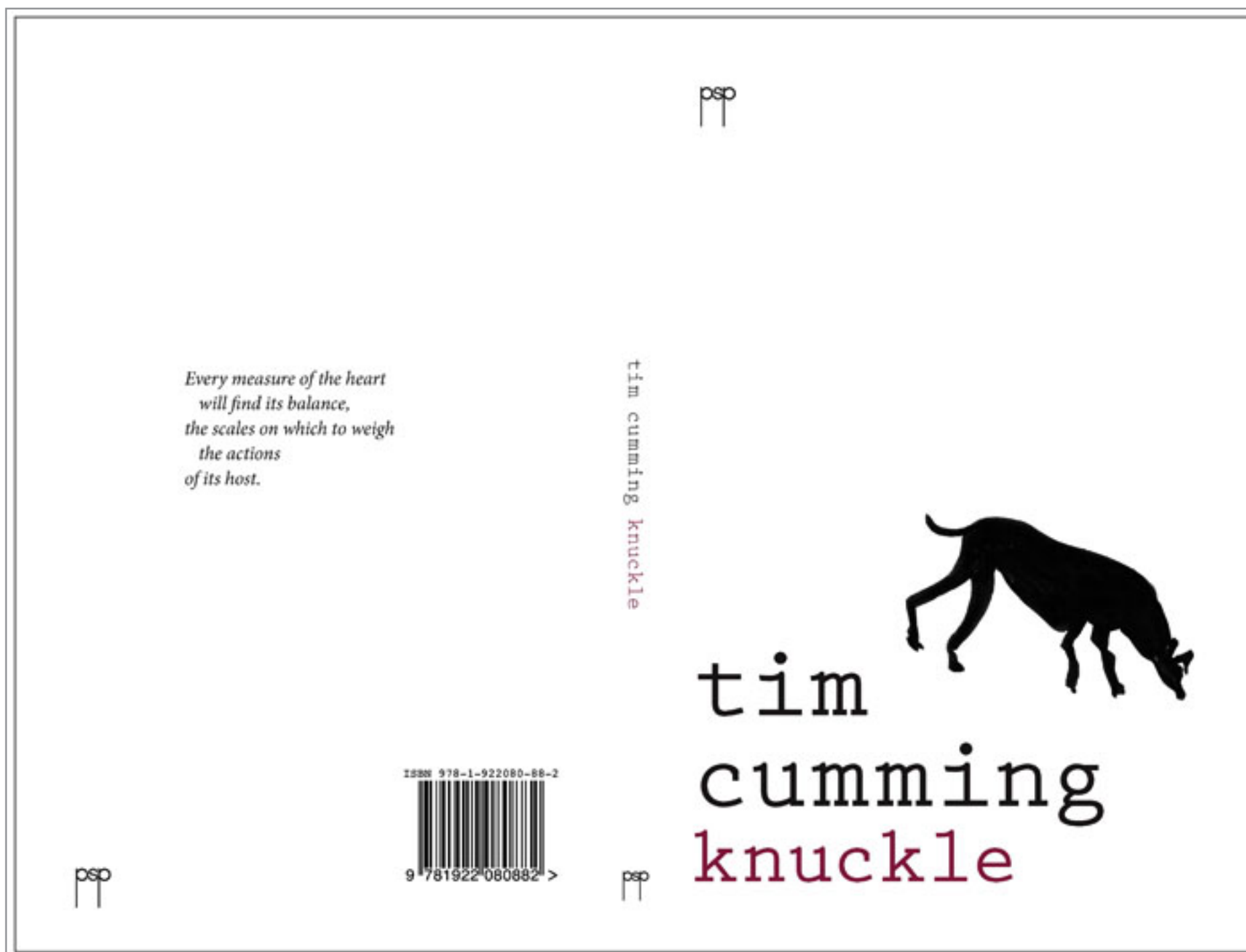
The title poem 'The Knuckle End' comes from the sweetest meat on a leg of lamb and it is equally sweet in the way that great music is sweet. There are no wrong notes, no sentimentality, "I am struck by how little/ food waste there is in Mum's/slops bucket...". A wider sense of waste returns with great force in his fine poem, 'Bag', "Nothing says forever like plastic." All of Cummings' preoccupations are here — music, destiny, love, travel and history enhanced by his terrific 'End Note' which reads like a manifesto, an essay or a lesson for poetry.

Cumming's clear, cerebral poetry has never been finer while his short poem 'Stylus' operates like a coda, 'The only diamond I ever owned/was set in the stylus of a turntable,/its arm falling into the groove/of one great album after/another. I held them close/as I would a lover.'

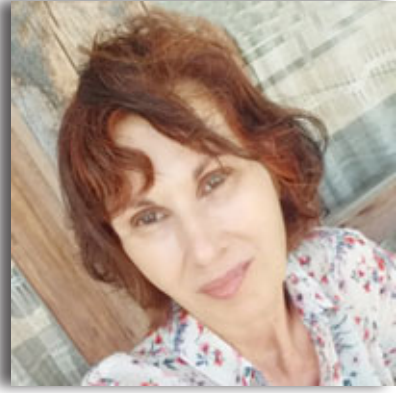
The book is available at:

<https://pittstreetpoetry.com/poet/tim-cummings/>

<https://timcumming.wordpress.com/2019/06/18/knuckle-a-new-collection-launching-from-pitt-street-poetry/>



Maria Castro Dominguez is the author of 'A Face in The Crowd' which is her 2016 Erbacce press prize winning collection. Winner of the third prize in Brittle Star's Poetry Competition 2018 and finalist in the 2019 Stephen A DiBiase Poetry contest NY and Mslexia Max Poetry Competition. Joint winner of the Orbis 185 Readers' Award 2019. Her poems have appeared in *Obsessed With Pipework*, *Sarvasti*, *Apogee*, *The Long-Islander Huntington Journal* and *Popshot Magazine*. She holds a Bachelor's degree in English philology.



INSOMNIA

Mama uses a rosary to sleep,
her fingers weaving between
rosewood beads buoyed
up by her bed sheets.

I use the radio,
listen to long haul drivers
relieved to speak over
the monotony of wheels

at 3am, when photos of new-borns,
a faux rabbit's foot, and other charms
that make their cab a home
fail them.

I am complicit in their travel;
prayers like voices
strung together in the dark.

SOLITUDE IS A CACTUS

White spines pricking leather skin.
An old man's stubble antennae-like
hearing children run out of school,
and parents picking them out
from a spill of high-pitched shrills.

Like a thirty year old dress
sequins missing, drooping threads
buried in the back of a shelf.
Like an eight year olds' present
buried in scraps of party paper.

Solitude is forgetting you could
remember who I was.



© Maria Castro Dominguez

TRUE OR NOT, I'M READY TO BELIEVE IT

After Wisława Szymborsk

I was told after Darwin it was true
the toughest species won or
survived, not
the weak of heart, but I'm
most gullible always ready
to reach out to
anything beautiful to believe
retrieving a truth (or not) from it

A GLOBE AS A PRESENT FOR A NINETY YEAR OLD

You wanted a globe
for your birthday
with hand painted ships
engraving around its meridian
a spin irresistible

your man had been a sailor
and I'd followed him
although you missed me
fussed each time I left
making me fear I'd lose you
if I dared to leave you bereft

on your birthday
you placed the gift between
your bed and the oxygen
showing me how
you would follow me
around the world
with nothing but your fingers.



© Maria Castro Dominguez



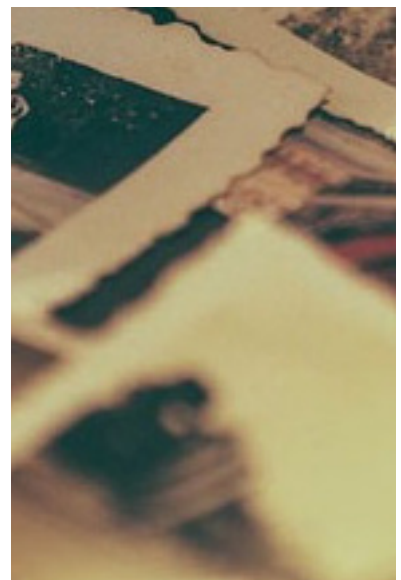
American-born Jack Grady is a founder member of the Ox Mountain Poets, based in Ballina, County Mayo, Ireland. His poetry has been widely published and has appeared either online or in print in *Live Encounters Poetry and Writing*; *Crannóg*; *Poet Lore*; *A New Ulster*; *The Worcester Review*; *North West Words*; *Mauvaise Graine*; *Outburst Magazine*; *The Runt*; *The Galway Review*; *Algebra of Owls*; *The Irish Literary Times* and others. His poetry collection, *Resurrection*, was published by Lapwing Publications in October 2017 and was nominated for the T.S. Eliot Prize, and it can be ordered from their list of poets on the Lapwing Publications website or via their direct link to the collection, which is [Jack Grady – Lapwing Store](#).

BLOODLINE

Someday, a grandson will find in a cigar box
a picture of you with photos unfiled
in the flat of his deceased grandfather.
He'll take it to his mother and ask who you were.
Chances are she won't know
nor any person alive who might tell her.
So, she'll deem it no keepsake
and toss it on the junk pile.
The image of your face may end in cremation
with waste in a public incinerator,
or it may take years to decay
under the ooze of rubbish in a landfill.

But it may be luckier than that. She may not
know who you were but would like to think she does;
so, she puts your image in the 'save' pile,
has it framed and mounts it on a wall
for visitors to admire and to inquire after.
She will relate what she knows of events
in another person's life, embellish a fiction
with vaguely remembered details from a family legend,
or invent an entirely new story, if only to conceal
the fact she has no idea who in God's name you were
and then have to explain why she retains
the photo of a complete stranger.

The true story of you may thus have been lost
with the passing of the boy's grandfather,
or perhaps that grandfather discovered your photo
in his own grandfather's cigar box
and never knew who you were himself.
But, for centuries, your image may continue to exist,
even achieve a sort of immortality
as a mask for another life and then another
dimly if at all recalled
and then another not recalled at all,
though, unbeknownst to you, you've been crowned
founder of a bloodline not even your own.



SAIGON CRAB, 1975

I can still see it in Hong's kitchen,
where she allowed it to roam,
nanoscopic in its progress of shell
and claws, as rigid as arthritic bone.
Yet somehow it inched
its way to a drain, but the cover
was cruel and refused to give.

It drove the crab mad with the scent
of escape. It taunted and baited with damp,
as if it knew the pincers of its victim
were pinioned with string.
I didn't wait for a meal
I would not have eaten if I had.
I went to a restaurant and ordered pho instead.

But, as soon as the soup was served,
an amputee Americans dubbed 'The Crab'
crabbed to my feet and presented for inspection
his only finger and thumb.
I guessed it a sign for begging
when he connected their tips like pincers,
though the expression on his face made me envision
a saint and those digits as hands in prayer.

I offered this saint a piece of chicken,
and finger and thumb deposited the meat
like the Eucharist on his tongue.
As penance, I surrendered another piece,
then lowered the entire bowl, dropped
on the table the cost of my meal
and, on the supplicant's lap, half
the gratuity in brass-plated dong.

Later, I wondered if my gifts were no better
than a covered drain to a crab
and if the embassy's gates would be no better
than a covered drain to Hong
when America abandoned Saigon
easier than I had abandoned Hong's kitchen,
easier than I had left a war victim
a dying nation's worthless change
and some chicken.



END OF AN IDYLL

*...nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass....*
– William Wordsworth, *Intimations of Immortality*

Did her mind, as I read
from my juvenile attempt
at writing an historical novel,
march with centurions mustered by my pen?

Or did she see herself as another Cleopatra,
and did she imagine the flash of her eyes
more alluring when shadowed with kohl?
And, behind those eyes, was I my story's tribune –

Maxentius Verus – riding his white steed?
Or was I merely one of my invented generals,
and what was my name?
Was I Lucius, Lycus, or Laurentius?

It should have been Lascivious or Licentious,
for some variation of lustful
is indeed how she made me feel.
But she never surrendered her chastity

to the serenade of my loins or the salivations of my zeal,
though her smile would toss me a rose
for an amorous chapter in my tune.
But in our minds what did we do?

She was a conqueror's treasure on that summer day.
She was my cherished African jewel.
We savoured as we sat on canvas-backed chairs
the scent of splendour in the grass

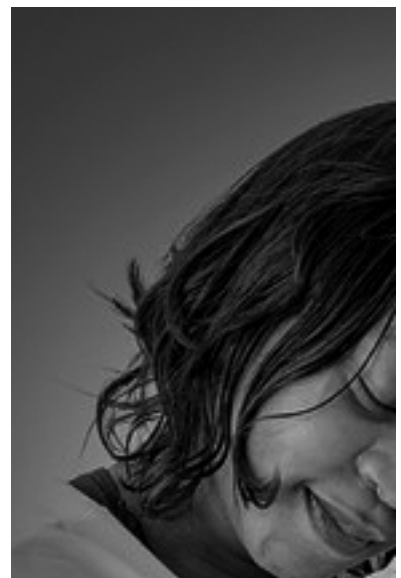
while lilacs bloomed in my parents' backyard
and honeysuckle seduced the bees,
but we were still too innocent and cautious
for actions more venturesome than a dream

as we sailed on a barge of reeds, drifted
past Luxor, and kissed outside Thebes,
and attendants fanned us with ostrich
plumes and date palm leaves.

We didn't know that storm clouds in the west
were roiling our way,
that they would drive us inside,
that they would spoil our day's idyll with rain,

nor did we notice that the thunder of real war
was drumming a dirge to America's door,
that real generals like crocodiles were awaiting their feast,
that relentless, hidden currents

would snag us in sediment, would ensnare us in deceit,
that our generation would founder,
its innocence devoured, our idylls abandoned,
'In God We Trust' run aground.



THE CAREER SOLDIER SALUTES

Somewhere, the flag is lowered
to the sound of a bugle
blowing *To the Colours*.
But, even though you can't see the flag

as it slides down the cable of its pole,
nor can you watch it
while it is folded lengthwise in half;
then doubled again before wrapped

from one end to the other
in a reverent roll of thirteen triangular folds,
precise and as neat as the starched fatigues
of the MP folding it,*

and even though you can't see
a bugler playing or that loudspeaker blaring
the pre-recorded call from a wall
of Saigon's Pentagon East,

you are outside and in uniform
and therefore must stop.
The bugle call is the metronome
for your Pavlovian psychic secretion.

So, you turn to the mecca of the sound,
plant, if not snap, your heels together;
and, while holding yourself firm and stiff-backed,
snap your right elbow up,

make your arm as straight as the wings of *Enola Gay*
as you align it with your brow,
the fingers of your right hand as still at that squad
in the body count you last made of the enemy's dead

and you hold them as tight as beheaded sardines
crammed into a coffinlike tin. Your thumb,
dutifully denying its independence,
reinforces the proximal phalanx of your first finger

and will remain steadfast in place, a sentinel
as attentive to its duty as the holding end's MP,
who waits to tuck the end of the flag
into the final fold's sleeve.

You are the soldier who will obey
a pre-recorded call
and give homage to a flag,
indelible in your mind,

even if unseen,
and you will follow
its command,
to hell, if need be.

*MP refers to an American Military Policeman.





The Stinging Fly magazine has described Kevin Higgins as “likely the most read living poet in Ireland. His poems have been quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times* (UK), *The Independent*, *The Daily Mirror*, *Hot Press* magazine, on *Tonight With Vincent Browne* and read aloud by film director *Ken Loach* at a political meeting in London. Kevin’s eighth poetry collection, *Sex and Death at Merlin Park Hospital*, will be published by Salmon Poetry in June.

Anne Walsh Donnelly was shortlisted for the 2019 'Emerging Poet' Hennessy Literary Award

This life-affirming poetry collection reflects on the author's growth since the ending of her marriage and what it means to unearth one's true sexual orientation, in mid-life. Anne Walsh Donnelly's intimate exploration of sexuality and identity is both brave and touching, marking this debut collection as a triumph.

"Anne Walsh Donnelly is by far the most daring poet to emerge in Ireland of late. The starkly honest and overt sexuality which pervades Anne's poetry make the work of pretty much all her contemporaries appear repressed and backward-looking in comparison. This publication would certainly have been banned in the Ireland of the past. Indeed, she is one of the few poets around whose work has the glorious ability to get moralistic, supposedly liberal eyebrows twitching."

- Kevin Higgins: Author of *Song of Songs 2.0: New & Selected Poems* (Salmon Poetry, 2017).

"Anne Walsh Donnelly is a brave poet who writes with integrity. To my mind she is among the strongest of the new voices to emerge in Irish poetry in the past decade. On first reading her work, you are left with the impression that ideas come to the poet fully formed. Her style is simple, often writing in the colloquial, but when examined closely, the true craft of the work emerges. In this volume Anne documents her own journey of self discovery in a frank, open and glorious fashion"

- Dave Kavanagh: Editor. *The Blue Nib*.



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KEVIN HIGGINS ON ANNE WALSH DONNELLY'S POETRY CHAPBOOK

Anne Walsh Donnelly is by far the most daring poet to emerge in Ireland of late. The starkly honest and overt sexuality which pervades Anne's poetry make the work of pretty much all her contemporaries appear repressed and backward-looking in comparison.

This publication would certainly have been banned in the Ireland of the past. Indeed, she is one of the few poets around whose work has the glorious ability to get moralistic, supposedly liberal eyebrows twitching.

Anne's poems are pretty perfectly formed hand grenades which she tosses about the place with abandon while maintaining a deadpan face. I think this publication is the beginning of something great. — Kevin Higgins, author of *Song of Songs 2.0: New & Selected Poems* (Salmon Poetry, 2017).

The Woman With An Owl Tattoo
by Anne Walsh Donnelly
Published by Fly on the Wall Press May 2019
Copies can be ordered from
Flyonthewallpoetry.co.uk
AnneWalshDonnelly.com

Gareth Writer-Davies is from Brecon, Wales. Shortlisted Bridport Prize (2014 and 2017) Erbacce Prize (2014). Commended in the Prole Laureate Competition (2015) Prole Laureate for 2017. Commended in the Welsh Poetry Competition (2015) Highly Commended in 2017. His pamphlet "Bodies", was published in 2015 and the pamphlet "Cry Baby" came out 2017. Both via Indigo Dreams. His first collection "The Lover's Pinch" (Arenig Press) was published June, 2018. He is a Hawthornden Fellow (2019) and his pamphlet "The End" is due out later this year.



ARTIFICIAL FLOWERS

the bees come through the open window
and fly straight past the flowers

not fooled by their gaudy come hither blooms
or their bend 'n' snap stems

that someone in a plastics design studio
took to the boss and thence to the guys on the production line

who bundled them in a box
and delivered to a store which is where I came in

I pack groceries in the boot of the car
pick up my laundry

and not forgetting the bouquet
drive home through the drowsy fields of summer

NARROW BOAT

it's rather like camping
everything must be put back in its place after use

mugs washed at once after the last sip
clothes hung up

that's how all is kept ship shape and shiny
a place for everything and everything in its place

though as you roll out of the narrow bed
mind your head

and don't step on the wine glass
or trip on trousers discarded in haste

in this narrow space
love is a folded blanket and a tidy shelf

an aphorism yet to find its way into romantic literature
though worth a footnote

today
I say nothing and let you be

like a vow I made
to not be alone

we lie together spooned and unspeaking
in the bed we are making

there is scarce time now
to be unkempt



ANTHROPOMORPHIC TEST DEVICE

knowledge is trial and error
and along the way
there are always fatalities

the shock of a punch to the torso
a careless spear
traumatic amputation

cracking like a tree upon a fault-line
the trunk
making sudden kindling of unmastered limbs

as the humanoid crashes to the ground
suddenly to live or die
a dummy flies through a wired windshield

whilst an improved model waits out the back
failing better
rubbing two sticks together

LIGHT VERSE IS THE ANTIDOTE TO SORROW

Cacti are survivors
Robust, prickly, they are not like people in a book

Who get distracted
Make decisions with tragic consequences

The cactus takes one sip of water
And just gets on with it.

Two saplings grafted onto a common stock
Light verse and modern poetry

Behave as if each is a distant cousin, vaguely related
But fluidity rather than thought

Is what keeps the cactus going
A deep rooted flower that blooms amongst thorns

Light verse is the true antidote to sorrow
And something way beyond intellect





MONKEY TAILORS

after an 18th century painting at Hawthornden Castle

are busy
cutting, measuring & sewing

the many skills of tailoring, divided between them
like any workplace
monkey see then monkey do

there is a market for paintings
where animals take on human work, play cards
& even marry

detailed scenes of the domestic
a dog reads a newspaper by the fire whilst his cat-wife prepares supper

animals have their own ways
of going about
intricate and marvellous

& we can't stand it
as if hens are dying to lay our morning egg (though many are)
& make themselves useful; that's nature as we see it

Beatrix Potter has a lot to answer for
we don't believe her bunnies in breeches are human for one minute
they're so lazy

APOLLO 13

Five-Four-Three-Two-One
Action!

and like a Western in space
the cool nylon heroes
blast
off
riding seven and a half million pounds of thrust

later
the rocket bucked and gravity fading

the lonesome voyage around the moon when all contact lost the audience
held its breath

it ends with a big splash
grizzled astronauts waving from the bobbing hatch

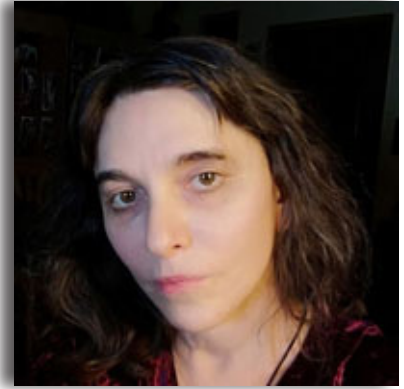
there isn't a dry throat in the house
-Moon Cola ®-
as the credits roll and the crew leave the seen unsaid

again
in soundless darkness

we breathe (respire)

the trailer for the next show
dissolves to white

Moscow born, Nina Kossman is a painter, sculptor, bilingual writer, poet, translator of Russian poetry, and playwright. She is the author of two books of poems in Russian and English as well as the translator of two volumes of Marina Tsvetaeva's poems. Her other books include *Behind the Border* (a collection of stories about her Moscow childhood), *Gods and Mortals: Modern Poems on Classical Myths* (Oxford University Press, 2001), and a novel. She lives in New York. Her website is www.ninakossman.com.



LAMENT FOR ODYSSEUS

Beauty that you take so lightly,
 because it is not yours,
 because it is foreign,
 because it is not the beauty of Ithaca,
 because it belongs to that other land,
 Troy,
 the enemy,
 the vanquished land,
 whose soldiers it was your job to kill,
 whose mothers lament in a different tongue
 (although the tongue is the same,
 yes, it is,
 really, it's the same tongue as yours!)

and although you so despise
 that foreign beauty

- of the land
- of buildings
- of women,

it is still beauty, Odysseus,
 and you know it
 in the depths of your clever heart.

MEMORY IS SILENCE

Awake in me, you sleep
 the sleep of knowing -
 memory is silence
 hungry for music,
 self is the world
 hungry for a face,
 seed is a stone
 hungry for living,
 and every paradox in the world
 ends in death.

Awake in me, you know
 the knowledge of sleep_-
 words are a trap
 set by the mouth,
 body is memory
 disfigured by light,

poems are bird language
 calling
 - like every paradox in the world -
 for silence.



LINES

Lines shouldering clipped words,
careful not to awake the sea
of pride in uniform sounds,
impatience brewing in them like wine
in tight-lidded kegs:
an army scattered in emptied ruins
beyond the sky's drifting sight,
versed in swift rising -
now or never. So words defy truce:
carved shafts aiming upward
grammarians can't grasp.

UNTITLED 1

The lesser magic,
the greater unknown,
a shadowy host,
the immortal dust,
what's this life about
but letting go,
enough time for the mouth
to unlearn the word "mine",
enough time for the bone
to grow old and weak,
enough time for the mind
to forget the names
of all who are gone;
what's immortality,
but the lesser magic,
the greater unknown,
mold on the host,
dust on a gravestone.



UNTITLED 2

Light,
light of my life,
exempt from thinking,
let me go out
neither with a bang nor a whimper,
but with a poem
whispering its way
from my heart to my lips,
and from my lips to a pencil,
and from the pencil - to paper,
and from paper - to the hearts of my friends!

UNTITLED 3

What can death do to me
that it hasn't done yet?
What can it take
that hasn't been taken?
it can only lift
what hasn't been lifted,
it can only unfold
what has been folded
by what calls itself life
yet is not alive;
it folded itself onto me,
until every breath became war.
I do not lie
when I say
there's death
in every breath,
(and a common rhyme it is, too!).
Think "дух" and "дыхание",
"anima" and "animal",
then turn them upside down:
now you get it.
So hello there, silly old Mr. Death,
and how do you do?



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 from Mandarin by Yuanbing Zhang.

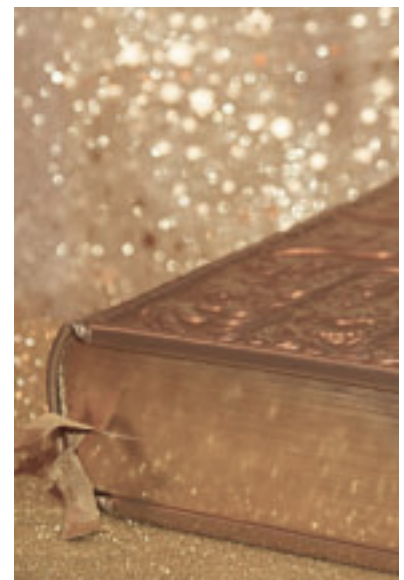


INTERSTELLAR KINGDOM

My snowflakes are white flames
and death is the singing of the golden car from the kingdom of heaven.
I walked through the black forests for many years and slept soundly on the rocks
forgot images of the world, until the wings of gold were like clouds
when I heard a call from the outer world,
which was as sweet as the sun rays
I opened the doors of the ninety-ninth floor of heaven
the interstellar kingdom, with fragrant words of honey.

GODS' SOLEMN KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

I dreamed that the giant ships of the earth were flying in space
into the center of the Milky Way.
The vast kingdom of stars were suddenly like the great never-withering flowers
of the universe
and their flames were fragrant and burning.
I heard the nameless fairy music,
which revived my prehistoric memory
ten thousand volumes of gold books, layer upon layer
huge wings like the rocs in the clouds,
piggybacked a city of giants from outer word——
that gods' solemn Kingdom of Heaven.

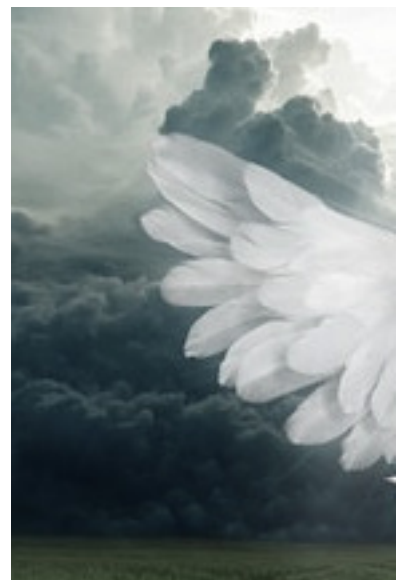


WINE OF SOUL

I picked a bunch of fairy flowers from the garden outside,
to make you instantly recall the prehistoric days of immortals
that travel leisurely by the light.
The golden car of the Dragon and Phoenix stayed on the island of fairyland,
and the layering of mountains of towers soared straight up into the purple sky;
a chant of a jade flute attracted the angels,
as if a bevy of birds hovered in succession
which made time sweet, like top-quality wine of soul.

ANGEL'S BEAUTIFUL IMAGE OF WHITE FEATHERS

The birds in my head sang the music of the Kingdom of Heaven,
sprinkled the rain of sweet dew and honeyed the dusty world
made the bones like jade and the king of soul to smile.
A golden axe cut off the body of a black python for thousands of years,
and the light of dawn bloomed in the giant's prehistoric garden,
made the angel's beautiful image of white feathers
intoxicate a giant city beyond the sky.



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