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POETRY & WRITING

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APRIL 2020

PETER O'NEILL  
*Reference Points*

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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Thank you Peter for putting together this fabulous collection of poets and writers.

In these uncertain times we need sustenance from poets and writers to reassure us that there is hope for humanity, and redemption, amidst the ongoing rapacious indulgences that appear to overcome us all.

This edition is out early because life is a bit uncertain at my end and that is why I am rushing through publication.

*Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om*

Mark Ulyseas

20th March, 2020.

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### PART I

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PART ONE

Peter O'Neill is the author of six collections of poetry, a volume of translation *The Enemy-Transversions from Charles Baudelaire* (Lapwing, 2015); a work of prose fiction *More Micks than Dicks – a hybrid Beckettian novella in 3 genres* (Famous Seamus, 2017); and has edited two volumes of poetry – *And Agamemnon Dead* (mgv2>publishing, 2015) and *The Gladstone Readings* (Famous Seamus, 2017). As part of a continuing engagement with Samuel Beckett's novel *Comment c'est*, he will be presenting a paper at the *How It Is Symposium* organised by *Gare Saint Lazare Players* at Reading University on the 4th May, 2020.



## PETER O'NEILL REFERENCE POINTS

I was living in Paris when Samuel Beckett died, his death was announced the day after he died in *Liberation* on the 23rd of December, 1989. I will never forget it. It is a defining moment in my life, not only as a human being but particularly as a writer. I am making a clear distinction between the two. After all, not all writers write like humans, just as not all humans appreciate writers, or writing for that matter, and that is the unique distinction that I would say qualifies why certain writers are human, as they are *engaged* with human issues. Beckett was certainly one. While others are merely putting words down on paper, which is a very different thing altogether, I would say. There are an awful lot of people putting words down on paper, but does this make them writers? Not as far as I am concerned, in any case. This is one of the main criteria's that I look for in a writer, their humanity.

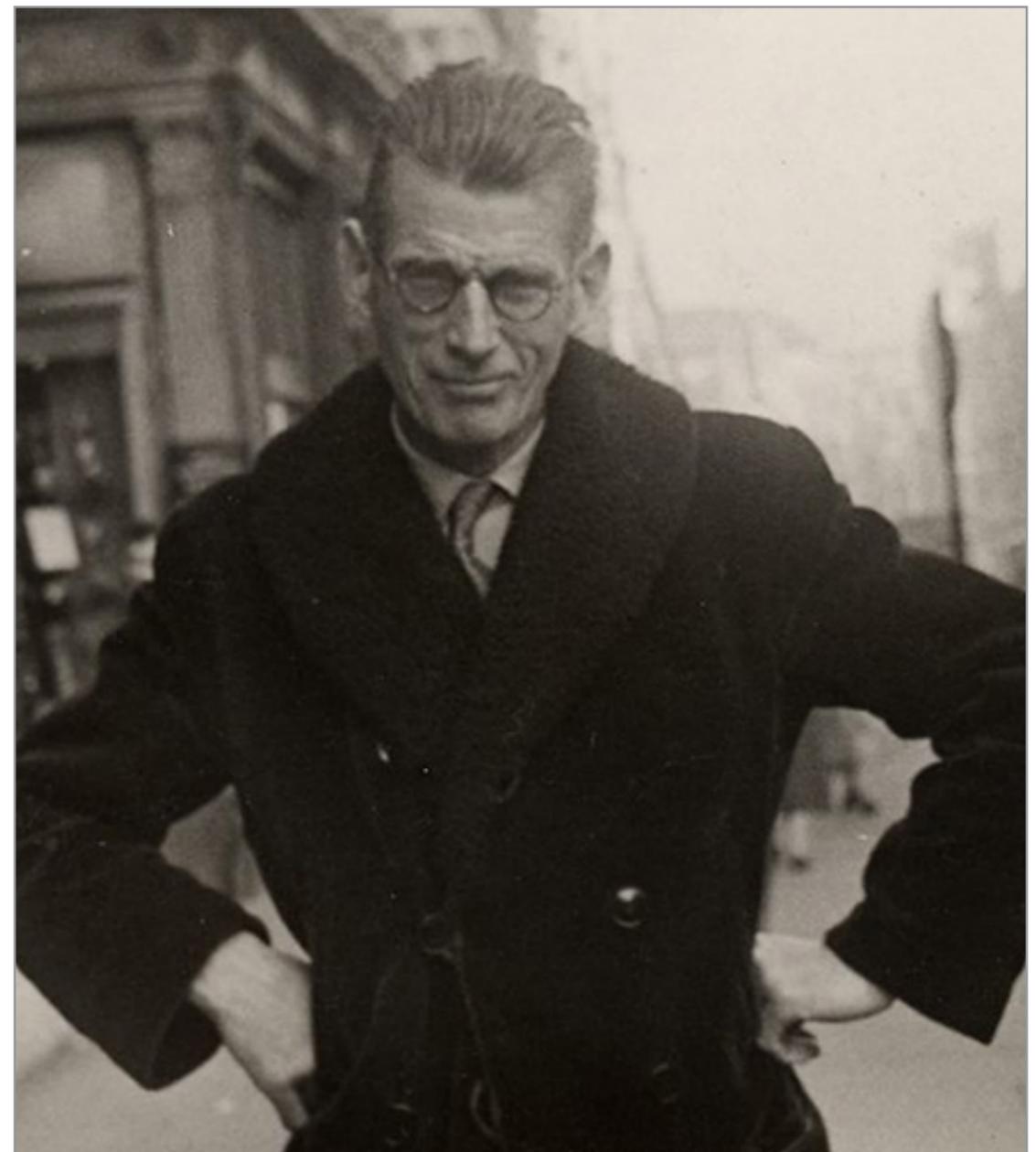
All of the writers that I have chosen in this issue of *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* are of the former category, in other words they are Real Writers, engaged as they are with the Real World around them, as opposed to the one which exists in their heads, and it is for this reason that I invited each and every one of them a chance to celebrate what it is to be a writer while at the same time being human. I cannot underline the importance of this distinction here, as it is the first thing I want to determine when someone introduces me to someone as a 'writer'.

Peter O'Neill

But to return to Beckett... and that day when I was reading the newspaper in some café in Versailles where I was living at the time... The editor had chosen to publish a huge photograph of Beckett, head like a hawk, illuminating a cigarette in the foyer of some theatre in Paris - the photograph the editor used was taken by Guy Suignard in the *Odéon, Theatre de France*, September 1966. Yet, what was really striking about the front page on which the news appeared, almost taking up the entire front page, was the fact that in the very topmost corner, hidden away almost as an afterthought, was a very small photograph of the Romanian Dictator Nicolae Ceausescu who had been murdered by a crowd of revolutionaries and was to be seen lying in a pool of his own blood on the street. The contrast of both these people's lives could not have been more opposite, and so also the way they were being remembered.

That was a life- changing moment for me, reading about Beckett's death. As his *disparition* made me realise all the more how important he had been in my life. I had only discovered him in *The Phoenix Bar* one night in Cork, some years previous. *Molloy* alone had made me finally decide that I too wanted to become a writer. Not that I had any pretensions that I could ever write anything of a similar standard, no! But his writing had convinced me that there was something more to writing other than just putting words down on paper. What Beckett had done, it seemed to me at the time, and still does, was something so much more important than that, for he had somehow made sense of the importance of voicing, however apparently senselessly, to the void the position of the human endeavour, and this seemed to me to be something incredible, particularly so for a young man having grown up in Cork during the eighties, for example, and who had just managed to escape to Paris, in some vain attempt to follow the Master. Now, he was dead!

The effect on me that day was profound. It was as if a great light had just gone out in Europe. The war in the Balkans was escalating. Genocide, once more, was being perpetuated. So, Beckett, or rather his disappearance from the European stage, felt particularly traumatic. If you want to get an idea of how black things were, go to poet and historian Michael J. Whelan's text after reading this introduction and you will get a very clear picture. Michael was serving in Kosovo while I was in Paris at the time, so it is particularly poignant for me to reproduce his text here in this bumper April edition of *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing*. Some years later, back in Dublin, while reading Baudelaire I came across his poem *Les Phares* and it reminded me of that poignant December day all those years before.



<https://sites.utexas.edu/ransomcentermagazine/2014/07/17/fellows-find-samuel-becketts-radio-plays/>

## VI. Reference Points

Reubens, river of forgetfulness lounging in pleasure gardens  
Cushioned the youthful flesh which can but be loved,  
There where life rushes, an Amazon with no end,  
Fathomless- like the air in the sky, the sea in the sea;

Leonardo Da Vinci, sombre and profound mirror,  
With the Angels upon the Rocks smiling tenderly,  
Super-charged with mystery, kneeling within the cavernous  
Shadows, fermenting with the glaciers and pines *his* mystery;

Rembrandt, hospitalised with the murmurs of history,  
Supplanted by the great crucifix which is decorated solely  
With the prayers and tears exuding the stench of winter  
Landscapes, and biblical deserts traversed fleetingly;

Michelangelo, that obscure station where Hercules and  
Christ conjoin, and together boldly rise Promethean-  
There with the phantom doom of judgements, tearing  
The shrouds from them with their crepuscular fingers;

The rage of the pugilists, impudence of pricks,  
You who pick up all the beauty of the shits,  
Great heart bloated full of humility and a savage pride,  
Francis Bacon, you funerary, melancholy emperor of human skin;

Watteau, this carnival of good where illustrious hearts,  
Like Nabokov's butterflies, flamboyantly err  
Among decors light and clear -as laughter-  
Pour out their folly onto the ballroom floor;

Goya, nightmare full of unknown things,  
Foetus' which were conceived at a black Sabbath,  
Old crones vein still before mirrors, while babies are exposed  
To paedophile rings – here, our collective insanity lies;

Delacroix, a lake of Syrian blood we bathe in,  
Cloaked in a wood of corpses in rigor mortis,  
Under a jet-less sky are heard strange fanfares  
Reminiscent of Hollywood and Wagner, to stoke boy's fantasies;

All these maledictions, these 'blasphemous' cries,  
These ecstatic screams, these tears, these *Te Deum*,  
Are but an echo redirected by a million labyrinths,  
Which for the human heart work like a divine opium!

They are the cries which have been repeated by an army of sentinels,  
And order resent by a million human voices;  
A beacon lit by in a thousand neighbouring cities,  
A cry of help sent up by the hunter lost in the wood of suicides.

For, they are really, sweet Christ, the greatest human testimony  
And which have the power to give us back our dignity,  
All of these bloody tears which drip from age to age,  
And which die upon the shores of eternity.

There they are, Baudelaire and Beckett, on opposite sides of each other in the  
cemetery at *Montparnasse* the two Gods of modern literature, and the two who  
have had the most profound effect on me as a human being, first, *and* as a writer  
secondly.

Antonia Alexandra Klimenko was first introduced on the BBC and to the literary world by the legendary James Meary Tambimuttu of Poetry London. A former San Francisco Poetry Slam Champion, her work has appeared in (among others) *Maintenant : Journal of Contemporary Dada Writing and Art* archived at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. and New York's Museum of Modern Art. She is the recipient of two grants: one from Poets in Need, of which Michael (100 Thousand Poets for Change) Rothenberg is a co-founder; the second—the 2018 Generosity Award bestowed on her by Kathleen Spivack and Joseph Murray for her outstanding service to international writers through SpokenWord Paris where she is Writer/ Poet in Residence.



## LA VIE EN ROUGE

Brave heart depraved heart  
 City of rose-tinted glass  
 Heart at my unframed window  
 Heart with your thumb up my ass

Oh Rouge!!  
 how softly you weep  
 onto cobblestone—  
 the freshly cut grass

Pulsing Portal eternal immortal  
 imposing muscle scalpel in hand--  
 your open-head surgeries  
 your mouths your wounds too many to count  
 Heart ready to beat the band

Beating! Beating! Beating! heart  
 with your Billy clubs your gases  
 In-Seine River  
 of blood and tears

Red heart dead heart  
 in your bright yellow vest  
 how you cried out in vein all these years

Sainted heart not for the faint-of- heart  
 no longer the pale pink lie  
 I'll live to see red yet another day

Cross my heart and hope to die

Antonia Alexandra Klimenko

## ART ISN'T DEAD—IT'S STILL DYING

*"like Dali's melting clocks"*  
- Steffem Horstmann

How you plan to kill time  
means nothing to me  
as your troops invade my body

Outside  
the city falls to its knees  
I hold it crying in my arms  
as I fall in love with strangers

Come my friend  
let us crucify the hour—  
minute-hands nailed to the cross--  
our faces slowly turning  
*like Dali's melting clocks*  
to and from the horizon

Please let us hurry! We must go!  
There *is* no arguing  
the yes and no of night and day

But first  
let me murder the piano  
one by one and in every key—  
lifting and lowering each tone  
into its ebony grave its ivory tower—  
raising even the dead  
in living color  
as only an Impressionist can  
who draws pictures and no conclusions—  
my blood spilling onto  
the human canvas  
stretched beyond all measure—  
lamp-shades of skin and ash

(How beautiful the light  
that carries the weight  
of its own unbearable absence)

See how the undying wave to you now  
from the unframed corners of my mouth  
(that other gas oven)

in muted screams of crimson and orange  
bewildered yellow muffled brown acoustic blue—  
How sudden inspiration *Dada!!! Mama!!!*  
can explode  
like shooting stars or automatic fire  
into the tone-deaf illusion of pitch-black Nothingness

Come  
let me recreate  
the fluorescence of your smile  
let me reinvent *myself*  
as I on display  
walk these random streets  
freshly garbed in widows weeds  
Paris 1942

Even now as I speak  
I am painting my screams green  
I am dying my hair red  
(as only the color blind can)  
I am changing my name to Violette  
and I am returning to that *other* country

*continued overleaf...*



Author of novels and short stories and a poet and translator who has been published mainly in revues such as *Le cafard Hérétique* and small independent publishers in France such as *Zinedi*, *La Matière Noire*, *Editions QazaQ*. Yan also edits the online literary journal *Les Cosaques des Frontières*.



Three poems in French with translation in English.

Yan Kouton

## VISION

Ce moment pauvre  
 Mais plein d'assurance  
 « Sans fin ni bornes”  
 Des mots que l'on verse  
 À l'infini

Contre l'affront  
 Cette vie seule offensée  
 Qui se balance  
 Au-dessus du vide

Ce moment pauvre  
 Qui magnifie  
 Les lignes malades

Sans compter  
 Les coups  
 De cette arme  
 Douloureuse  
 Contre les morts

Une vision  
 Que l'on raffine  
 Jour après jour

## VISION

An impoverished moment  
 Full of assurances  
 « ..endless, without borders.. »  
 Words which we pour  
 Into the infinite

Against the insult  
 Only this life being offended  
 And without balance  
 Teethering on the abyss

The impoverished moment  
 The punches painfully pulled  
 By this arm  
 Against death

A vision  
 To be refined  
 And on a daily basis

( all transversions from the French by Peter O'Neill)



## DOULEUR ASILE HI DAD :D POO

Ce mal  
 Mis en fuite  
 Sans nouvelle  
 D'un ailleurs  
 Comme une mer  
 En rage

Ce feu brutal  
 Qui s'empare du crâne  
 Et qui ressemble  
 A la crainte  
 De son retour

Tu sais quelle oraison  
 Ça représente ?  
 Quel horizon  
 Ça détruit ?

Ce n'est pas  
 Le corps qui lutte  
 C'est l'esprit  
 Qui attend qu'il  
 S'allège

L'aveu sans fard  
 De sa détresse totale  
 Et de sa puissance

## THE PAIN OF ASYLUM HI DAD :D POO

This pain  
 Its flight  
 Without any news  
 From else where  
 Like a sea  
 Enraged

This brutal fire  
 Which impairs the brain  
 And which resembles  
 The fear  
 Of it ever returning

Do you know what oration  
 This represents ?  
 What horizons  
 It destroys ?

Its not just the body  
 Which struggles  
 It's the spirit  
 Which awaits  
 To be relieved

The avowal without artifice  
 Its total distress  
 And power



## PRESQUE CHARNEL

De vivre sinon  
 Sans prudence  
 En raison de l'expérience  
 Trop douloureuse  
 C'est comme les eaux  
 D'un torrent  
 Dans lequel on se noie

Toutes les pudeurs  
 S'empressent de  
 S'effondrer

De vivre sinon  
 Sans répit  
 En raison d'un corps  
 Instable  
 C'est comme foncer  
 Au cœur d'une tempête

Toutes les  
 Défenses s'empressent  
 De s'effondrer

## ALMOST CARNAL

To live differently  
 Without the prejudice  
 Of jaundiced  
 Experience  
 Descending like a torrent  
 In which you drown

All the fears  
 Mercifully evaporating  
 Into the ether

To live differently  
 Without respite  
 In the mind of the body  
 Unstable  
 As if rushing into the heart  
 Of a storm

And all the fears  
 Mercifully evaporating  
 Into the ether



Michael J. Whelan is a poet and historian who has served time as an Irish soldier serving on tours as a United Nations Peacekeeper in South Lebanon and with the Peace-Enforcement mission to Kosovo. He has two collections of poetry *Peacekeeper* (2016) and *Rules of Engagement* (2019) both published by Doire Press.



Michael J Whelan

### AN IRISH PEACEKEEPER IN KOSOVO (part 5)

## LANDSCAPES OF CONFLICT – CONFLICTED LANDSCAPES

Once you were off base (outside camp) and no matter where in the province the convoy, or for that matter the vehicle you might be in, was heading the landscapes were truly amazing and told a multitude of stories and histories if you were willing to open your eyes, read the features and listen. The country was/is beautiful and in that beauty there were echoes of the centuries of violence passed and of the most recent scars of wars to encapsulate Kosovo and the greater Balkans region not least in the amount of International peacekeeping soldiers guarding hundreds of churches, mosques, cemeteries and schools. Many, many of these had been damaged or destroyed in ethnic violence since the war ended. But absorbing all that magnificent landscape and history against the sufferings of the local Kosovar people in the height of a cold, wet and for the most part grey winter could leave a dark and lasting impression on you.

Being very interested in history I was able to pick out man-made features around the border areas with Macedonia such as pillboxes and bunkers, which were constructed during World War Two and later periods of the Partisan wars. There were very deep ravines and high mountain ridges in these areas with unused railway bridges linking the country through those historic landscapes, which would have been ideal for ambushes and guerrilla warfare against occupying forces. These same mountains were the routes for the refugees fleeing the war in the year before I arrived in Kosovo. They were the same hills also that were shelled by Serbian forces, while those refugees trekked through the winter forests to find safety. Many people were lost in those mountains to artillery bursting above and amongst them and often times I could see the yellow tape trailing off up into the high ground where un-exploded ordnance or mines had been discovered or were suspected to be.

K.FOR troops would be busy, all year round and still are to this day, trying to clear these areas and make them safe again, a very strenuous and dangerous task in the deep forests and foliage which blanketed the peaks and valleys. The remains of human victims of the Kosovo war were sometimes discovered and from a wise experience the peacekeepers would approach carefully in case bodies or graves were booby trapped.

I remember a few years after I came home from Kosovo, watching a TV documentary on the problems with mines in the province and how they were being detected with the use of ground penetrating radar being fired or scanning the landscape from a flying balloon, rather like the famous Zeppelins of WWI although much smaller in scale.

Driving along the roads in rural areas and in the hills it was easy to spot deserted or destroyed villages, many burnt and without roofs. Some of these had been cordoned off and had signs posted warning the former owners of mines and booby-traps left by Serbian military forces. During the war Serbian troops had positioned themselves on the strategic heights of Mount Golez, a massive feature in the hills rising up over the landscape near Pristina and the airport. These positions had been bombed by NATO aircraft and the trenches that remained on the upper slopes as we approached were still littered with un-exploded cluster-bombs, (large capsules containing hundreds of small *bomb-lets* designed to be dropped on infantry over a wide area), making this a dangerous environment to be operating in. At the top of the mountain there was a massive K.FOR signals-communications compound, within which the Irish units had a re-broadcasting station and radio masts. The compound had to be maintained regularly and this meant negotiating the climb up by vehicle was hazardous, you didn't dare drive off the road even if you had to manoeuvre or turn a truck on the narrow roads.

In Kosovo, in the early days of the K.FOR peacekeeping/peace enforcement mission, it was common to see clusters of graves in farmland and these were sometimes visible where crops had not been harvested by the owners. I never discovered if any of these were the result of ethnic cleansing, murder, reprisal killings or from un-exploded ordnance going off, while farmers worked the land. There was also a number of graves, some unmarked, on the center island of the main road artery of one of the main cities. Un-exploded mines or booby-traps whether left in the ground from the war or recently deposited by armed factions in acts of revenge or reprisal were an almost daily occurrence and very dangerous.

In the center of *Lipjan*, the large town near to where the Irish Company Headquarters was located there was a major K.FOR presence of mostly Finnish peace-keeping troops. Members of this battalion were regularly tasked with escorting children to school to avoid them being attacked. It was common to see dozens of children under the protection of armed peacekeepers as they walked along safe zones marked out on the streets with tape and protected by a tank or a couple of armoured personnel carriers. The armed escorts were essential protection because of hand grenades and improvised explosive devices being thrown at the children and into the school playing yards. I have a memory of hearing about shots being fired at school children too.

I remember one day the vehicle I was travelling in was driving through Pristina city; we had just turned left into what seemed like a raging river of cars travelling in both directions. I spotted a suspicious looking rusted orange coloured car pulling up beside us on our side of the road near the center island. The car looked like it hadn't been on the road in many years and was violently starting and stopping as if the driver was having trouble. As the vehicle I was sitting in the back off slowly drove past the orange car I looked in and saw that the driver and front passenger were under severe pressure and were shouting at each other. I then looked into the rear and saw a man laid out on the back seat. He seemed to be in a lot of pain, I could see his face and he could see mine. The man sat up for a moment and I saw then that he was clutching his upper right leg and what seemed to be a white shirt drenched in blood wrapped around his knee. He was moaning in agony, I couldn't hear him but I could see his eyes. The shirt came away and I could see that his leg was gone from the knee joint, which was hanging loose like a ball onto his thigh. Our eyes caught each others for a split second and I knew he was at the mercy of the driver. I presumed afterwards that the man had stood on a mine or booby-trap and his friends had bundled him into an un-roadworthy car and were frantically trying to get him to a hospital. He might have been a farmer working his land and tripped the mine laid the night before my an enemy was may once have been a neighbour, such things were reported regularly in the newspapers. I have wondered many times since if he survived or was I looking into the eyes of a dead man.



<https://pixabay.com/photos/mine-shaft-vent-shaft-ventilation-2252206/>

Part of the humanitarian work the Irish troops carried out entailed providing aid to remote or isolated villages way up in the hills along the borders and I have distinct memories of our vehicles driving for many hours to reach them as some of the more direct routes had not been cleared of munitions and mines or were just too dangerous.

I remember we drove into villages over very rough terrain, the vehicles bouncing all over the place, only to discover that we had driven over an ancient cemetery or some other hurting ground belonging to the story of that particular place. I remember the very steep mountain climbs in heavily laden trucks in severe snow blizzards on narrow tracks and some of the materials shifting and falling off the trucks and tumbling down the side. When we pulled into the center of a village the building materials and other humanitarian aid would be unloaded onto the ground and the locals would come out from their homes and take what they needed. Many times we unloaded material onto the ground beside a recently made mass grave, landscaped and covered in KLA flags (Kosovo Liberation Army) and floral wreaths. The graves would be filled with the victims of ethnic cleansing from the recent war, mostly the parents of the young children who gathered around our work parties. There would be the older generation, parents and grandparents of those buried in the graves, and the orphans. Imagine driving into a village that seemed to have been forgotten by the advance of time except for the 21st century to come visiting violence on its inhabitants; and you seeing, feeling and absorbing the emotion of the place. The children walking around half dressed and barefoot in the winter weather, the older people just staring at you, afraid to speak, most likely afraid of our weapons. I imagined and still do that the last uniform they saw in their village was probably the one that brought death and destruction so who was I to think they would appreciate another uniform coming into their midst like some kind of liberators and saviours, not that we were doing such and I have never felt that way since either.

The children who were brave enough to come down from the high ground in the village would gather round us as we worked and as the others followed them down it became quite dangerous for them so some of us would chat and play with them, dance and generally act the maggot. We gave them chocolate and drinks from our own rations to keep them occupied and safely away from the vehicles but I think that in many ways this was our attempt, although we didn't realise it back then, of atoning for what had occurred to them and their families.

Sometimes we had an interpreter or member of one of the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) like CONCERN or GOAL (Irish charities operating in the province) with us who would help the locals and the peacekeepers to communicate and we would be able then to listen to the stories of the people who had been killed or were still missing and what had happened in that particular village. This really brought home to us what war was like for the civilian populations and in a way, for a while, we felt good about the job we were doing but if you had small kids at home like I did then absorbing these scenes was quite upsetting and for the most part they have stayed with me ever since. I have written and published a number of poems that were inspired by these moments on the hurting landscapes of Kosovo fifteen years ago that still resonate in my memories and my consciousness as if it were only yesterday that I witnessed them. Those children, who would be in their twenties and thirties if they are still alive most likely wouldn't remember me or the Irish troops but it is always *place* and what happens in a *place* that keeps the stories that stay with you. Kosovo, to me, is not just a place; it is an event, a time, a thing, a tangible world in my mind, in me, who I am. Those children's memories too are landscapes of conflict on a conflicted landscape – a landscape of those violent times before we arrived and I hope that our brief encounters with them planted seeds of a peaceful, friendly future in their minds.

Anamáia Crowe Serrano is an Irish poet and translator. She is currently working on a novel set during the Spanish civil war, from which the excerpts in Live Encounters are taken. For more information, visit her website at <https://anamariacs1.wixsite.com/amcs>.



Anamáia Crowe Serrano

## EXCERPTS FROM A NOVEL IN PROGRESS SET DURING THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

The bar has a clear view of everything that goes on in Plaza del Torico. María and Encarna could have turned away but the attraction of death is inexplicable. Maybe watching is an act of defiance. Maybe it's solidarity with the dead. Besides, it was the beginning, before everything else, and no one imagines death on their doorstep.

People are gathering. Moments before the slaughter they see the Hunchback and the prisoner coming from the direction of the seminary where the falangists hold their prisoners. Why prisoner. Who.

Crowds give events an air of fanfare. Before the slaughter you'd think there was going to be a party but silence spreads as the Hunchback and the prisoner arrive. The women hardly have time to blink when they realise what's happening. By the fountain six shots to the legs and he falls to the ground. The Hunchback stands over him. He won't, they gasp, incredulous. This is the plaza. Decent people. But his agenda is not theirs. He puts his pistol to the man's head. Purposefully. Out of his agony then, and he walks away.

From the shock of bullets to the reflex of habit. María blesses herself. *Que en paz descansa*. The plaza swarms around the dead man. Why does no one remove him. What are they waiting for. Behind the window María and Encarna cling to each other.

The Hunchback returns, this time with a line of men. Now the professor tied to the mayor of Mora and now the mayor of Mora tied to the insurance salesman and now the insurance salesman tied to the civil engineer and now the civil engineer tied to.

The legs. The head. One of them, who, writhing on the ground, cries out *Viva la República*. They hear it and now a thick carpet of blood creeps up to the door of the bar.

Encarna has to sit. María too. Cautiously they ease themselves onto chairs as if it is the first time they have ever sat on a chair. They watch people in the plaza search for loved ones among the dead. Hours pass and suddenly darkness descends.

~~Respectable, affectionate lady, widowed, home-maker, of modest income would like to meet tall, mild-mannered widower (40 to 45 years) for serious relationship.~~

~~Respectable, educated widow of some means would like to meet serious gentleman (aged 40 to 45) (no divorcees), with a view to marriage.~~

~~Attractive, presentable, hard-working widow (teenage son still at home) seeks widower (40 to 45 yrs) of reasonable means for serious relationship.~~

~~Attractive, respectable widow seeks gentleman, bachelor or widower, of reasonable~~

~~Hard-working widow with teenage son~~

~~Attractive, hard-working widow with teenage son would like to meet gentleman~~

~~Attractive, hard-working widow, of modest means, with teenage son, would like to meet gentleman of similar disposition with a view to marriage.~~

Attractive, hard-working widow of modest means, with teenage son, would like to meet gentleman (40 to 45 yrs) of similar disposition with a view to marriage.

In the stillness of the empty house they have one hour like normal people. Upstairs. Moments stolen from the war. From life itself. Moments when they can be exactly who they want to be. As if nothing else in the world mattered and he didn't have to hide.

Living in a box does strange things to a man. He has lost strength and even the dim light is too glaring. He seems frightened of the light. Frightened of the creaking stove pipe. Frightened of the softness of her bed.

His eyes half closed for longer than she recalls before they adjust. His bones ache when he stretches and they ache when he moves. His skin is paler, the colour of almond milk, but warm in the treacherous winter, his breath comforting. And his voice – his voice that she rarely hears properly anymore – it too is getting weaker from whispering but still mellow, husky.

How did this happen, they keep wondering, and neither of them really knows whether they mean the war or this impossible love they are living. Two extremes and neither makes sense. Less sense, the happiness they feel. In the midst of destruction and terror, this tenderness that should not exist. We are like those insects that live in the dark, he says. The ones that survive underground, unseen, when the larger creatures are wiped out. The blind ones who feel nothing.

She stares at him. I don't understand, she says.

I love you. But what does that mean if I am invisible, dead to the world, in that box.

But you are not, she thinks, invisible or dead to me. I couldn't keep going without you, she says. We will be together when the war ends. Together like now. We will make it happen, my love. It will happen. She cups his face in her hands. Strokes his cheek.

He smiles at her and says yes, they will be together, but in his head he thinks the war will never end. How can this thing that began so long ago and has infiltrated them to their core ever be completely purged. The war will always be part of who they are and they will never be able to make it end. We are the war, he thinks. We will always be the war. Dragged into it. Deformed by it. Reduced to animals by it.

Yes, he says, because he wants to make her smile again. He needs to see her smile. When the war ends we will be together. Like normal people

In the dark

food – lack of food – the hunger that goes with it – running low even though I ration it more than ever with such a full house  
a bowl of rice to last the day – three almonds – will she be able to get another bowl to me tomorrow

the more people around the harder it is – fear of hunger – fear of running out of food for any length of time – already two days ago it happened  
endurance requires imagination

I think of our rations at the front – but there was always someone to share grievances with – there was light – always someone with smokes – someone with a story of how they found food or survived without it – the story of Tena who suckled from the breast of a young girl in one of the villages – in the grain loft – how the girl stroked his head as he suckled while her tears streamed down – howls of lust and laughter among the men

sometimes you just have to believe in things – in food being plentiful again – in a woman's love – in sanity being restored

fried onions – peppers – green and red – rosemary – thyme – chorizo – tomatoes – chickpeas – carrots and celery – barley – rice – rabbit – fresh baked bread – paella  
twice my plate blasted out of my hand

on the long marches hoping for bins – a carcass – fruit and vegetable peels – it didn't matter whose mouth they had previously been in – what dog had chewed those bones  
-



By Miguel Ors Archive, in "La Guerra Civil en la Comunidad Valenciana". <http://www.elche.me/etiqueta/fotografia?page=15>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=67879692>

Osama Eber is a Syrian poet, short story writer, photographer and translator who presently lives in California. He is an editor in Salon Syria, Jadaliyya's Arabic section, and an editor in Status audio magazine. Among his poetry collections are: *Screens of History* (1994); *The Accord of Waves* (1995); *Repeated Sunrise over Exile* (2004); and *Where He Doesn't Live* (2006). His short story collections are entitled *The Autobiography of Diamonds* (1996); *Coffee of the Dead* (2000); and *Rhythms of a Different Time* (in process). He has translated into Arabic works by Alan Lightman, Richard Ford, Elizabeth Gilbert, Raymond Carver, Michael Ondaatje, Bertrand Russell, Toni Morrison, Nadine Gordimer, and Noam Chomsky, to name a few. He attended the international writing program in Iowa in 1995.

These poems are translated from Arabic.

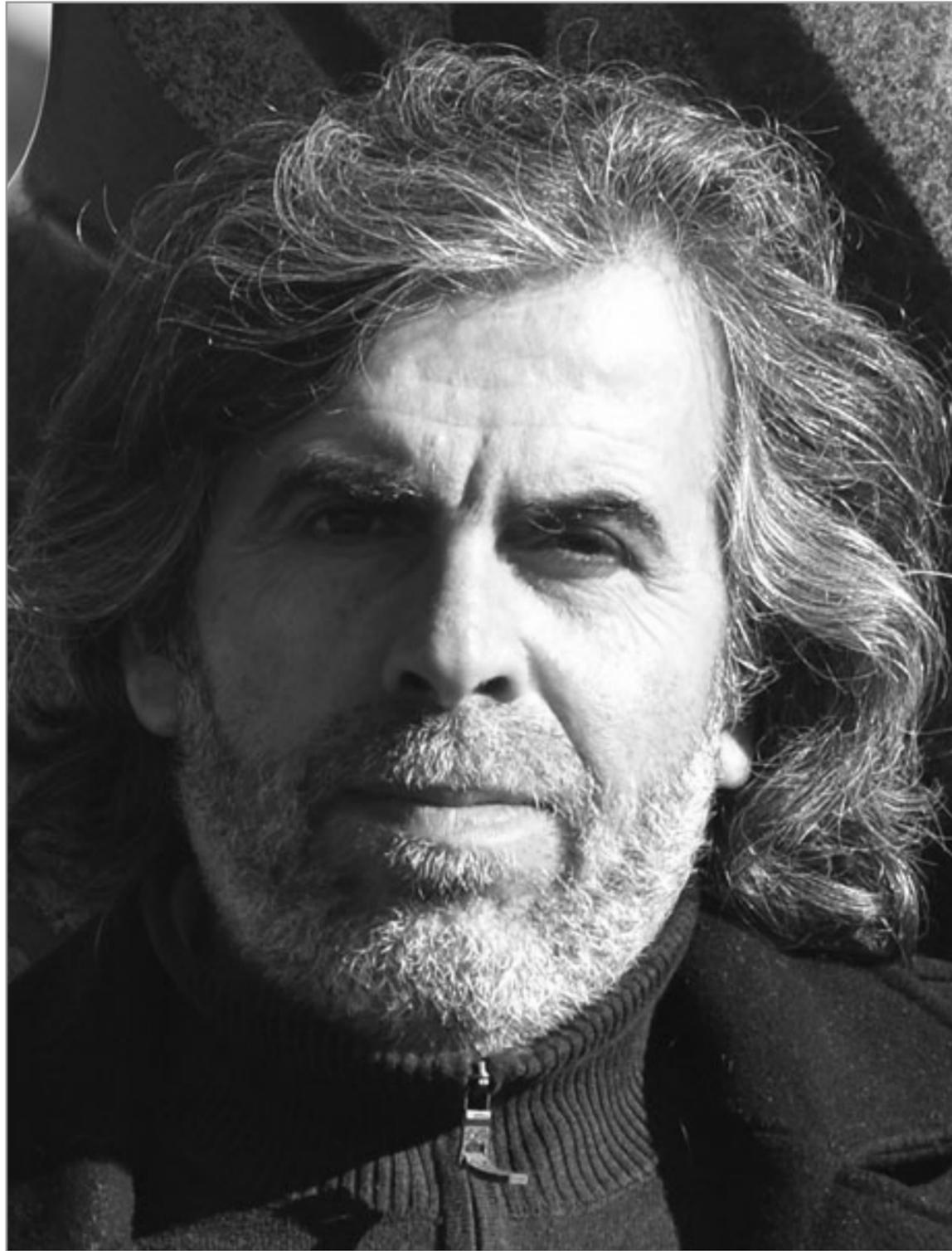
## FERMENTATION

The sun fermented its light in the sands  
to intoxicate me.  
clouds dissolved as ink  
and I tried to translate a language  
whose letters flew in the wind or the drizzle  
or merged with the rays.

I was not separated.  
I felt I was flowing  
in the river of things.

Light lies on the sand  
and suddenly jumps like a fox  
or flies like a hawk.  
I don't see its feet or wings  
but I follow its visit to things,  
the sound of its breath in their ears.  
I see it sliding on your skin  
more brilliant as if a sun in you  
feeds it with more glow.  
You walk on the beach.  
I walk on the roads of the blue  
escaping my memory,  
the images of the dead,  
the murals of death.  
the graves that open their mouths.  
black holes in the souls of cities.

Letters, that the sea whispers to my cells  
and return me to myself  
when I look at you I feel  
I am a wave that does not  
want to reach the shore.



Osama Esber

## THE WIND DID NOT TELL ME

The wind didn't tell me anything.  
It only blew.  
bearing its snack of leaves and dust.  
Our love did not yet flower.  
We sought warmth in sadness,  
the only thing alive in us,  
the only wood burning in the stoves of our souls,  
because death demarcated borders  
and distributed the country on its graves.

The wind of the absurd took their bodies  
as leaves fallen from the trees of their youth  
before the opening of flowers  
before the ripeness of fruits  
before the shadows' offering  
of their gifts to a passerby.

Our love was a frightened bud  
on the bough of a casual meeting  
when we silently sat  
as if listening only to the wind of separation  
that did not say anything except its blowing.

## A PIECE OF WOOD

A piece of wood, the sea  
cast on the sands.  
It was a leafy road  
on which fruit used to walk.  
It was something to lean on,  
a threshold of presences  
that showed their faces.

The bark was peeled off  
but it seemed like a skin in which  
the voids of exile accumulated;

I felt like it is a hand,  
a hand that moved its fingers  
to shake hands with me.  
Honestly, I felt the touch of its fingers  
and walked the beach as a mad man  
searching for a pen and paper,  
for a lute or guitar  
to convey the message.



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Souzan Ali is a Syrian poet who lives in Damascus. Her debut collection of poetry *The Woman in my Mouth* was published by Mediterranean Press, 2017, in Italy. She has read her work widely throughout the Middle East, and she is also a noted playwright. *Kohl Arabi – Arab Eyeliner* won her the Gold Prize at the international theatre festival in Carthage, 2019. Souzan's writing has been profoundly influenced by the war, which has been going on now for over a decade. She lost a brother to it, and she lives in fear daily. It is a great honour for me to publish some of Souzan's poems here and which have been translated wonderfully by her fellow Syrian poet Osama Esber.

These poems have been translated from Arabic by Osama Esber.



I

Once, in the summer,  
 in the purple hot summer,  
 I caressed my breasts with the grass of the slope.  
 I went to lie down there using weak pretexts  
 Which neither God nor the clouds could know.  
 Like: I was bored in the house because  
 my odor was dead.  
 The pond's frog watched my naked thighs.  
 The gypsies passed with their sheep  
 and smiled to me.  
 I slept naked over the grass,  
 caressed all the old footsteps.  
 When my saliva became hot  
 I heard my dad's voice in the valley.  
 I picked a leaf of fern  
 and wiped my water with it  
 and left.  
 I glimpsed darkness lightly covering the grass  
 calling me with another name.



Souzan Ali

## II

One clothespin  
 prevents my dress from falling.  
 What if it falls over this speeding bus?  
 Maybe the driver will give it to his sick wife.  
 Or maybe, the driver is alone like me.  
 Never mind!  
 He will hug it or eat or tear it off.  
 How to prevent the wind from taking my dress?  
 It will fly and enter other houses  
 there  
 at the end of the city  
 on the mountain's slope  
 or in an ivy tree  
 there  
 at the end of the street  
 or in an empty tavern.  
 What does this dress do in my house anyway?  
 Did it change my way?  
 Did it buy me medicine?  
 Did it enter my dream one time?  
 The stony church opens its window now.  
 The fat nun yawns and scratches her thigh.  
 While the sleeves of the dress flaps in the wind.

## III

Wine, saints, white candles  
 and night behind an old barn.  
 The lamp in the hand of the guard was a star  
 and the barking of footsteps was a shudder.  
 I was holding a copybook in my hand  
 and in yours there was a comb.  
 Villages were twinkling buttons in the distance.  
 This is the tattoo of my leg,  
 a flower or a snake.  
 This is a vein which I hate when it comes into view.  
 Here is my small cottage.  
 Don't come closer  
 in order not to cry.  
 I want to see the clear sky  
 to hear how the bellowing of the cow  
 reaches the rivulet and returns alone.  
 I want your breath to pass over the stones,  
 the platanus tree, the well, the stoves' steam, the roof of our house,  
 the swing of my sister, the dress of our female neighbor, the clotheslines, thresholds.  
 I want it to descend to the valley submissive, tired, hot  
 and enter my small cottage.

Carolina Medina is a poet, translator, novelist and illustrator. Born in Chile, she currently lives and works in Dublin. I had the pleasure of attending her first solo exhibition *Capitulo Once* which is dedicated to her two parents Roberto and Viviana. Roberto, Carolina's father, died when the author was 11, hence the title of the book/poem which is reproduced in its entirety here, translated by the poet into English.



## CAPITULO ONCE - CHAPTER ELEVEN

*To Roberto and Viviana*

I  
*Cuando aún nada se había dicho, las palabras flotaban alrededor de los ojos del infante, rodeados de incentivos mágicos. Hoy, en la sublime reconciliación del tiempo Evoco.*

In the timeless dark, when no one could describe our attachment,  
Words floated around the infant's eyes,  
Surrounded by magical incentives.  
Today In the majestic reconciliation of time  
At times I evoke

II  
*Al sujeto sin edad, alineado y ausente. Sin más que la noble tarea de la sonrisa infinita ¿Cuántos años más tendrá que esperar para poder hablar?*

The ageless being, alienated and absent, With nothing but the noble dutie of an infinite smile,  
How long did she wait to speak again?

III  
*Placentera ilusión de un castillo en el cielo. ¿Preparaba quizás la piel en la inconsciencia de no saberse maldecida?, ¿o bendecida?*

Pleasant illusion of a Castle in the Sky Was her skin getting ready for her cursed fate?  
Or was it a blessed one?  
There are certain questions you do not ask yourself

Carolina Medina

*continued overleaf..*

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CAPITULO ONCE - CHAPTER ELEVEN *...contd*

IV

*Antaño, si mal no recuerdo, mi vida era un festín en el que se abrían todos los corazones, donde todos los vinos corrían. Una noche, senté a la Inocencia en mis rodillas. Y la encontré amarga. -Y la injurié.*

Once, if my memory serves me well, my life was a banquet where every heart revealed itself, where every wine flowed. One evening I took INNOCENCE in my arms -and I thought her bitter -and I insulted her.

V

*La gamuza que reviste a la armadura. El sillón rojo en medio de una biblioteca ajena, El consuelo de los libros que acogen en un reino posible, gracias al silencio.*

Cadmium soft suede cover the armor, A deep-red armchair in the middle of someone else's library, Beloved books whose shelter creates a plausible yet reticent kingdom, where no hope or danger ever lived, is founded in the name of Silence.

VI

*Podría transgredir, los colores que alguna vez instauré, como explicación del delirio primero. Mas esta vez, las tonalidades prevalecerán, Por el bien de la Memoria.*

Perhaps I would disrupt the colours that I once established, As a possible explanation of my first Delirium,  
Although not this time. Not now. All these tones WILL remain,  
For the sake of Memory

VII

*Las Cartas al Padre Presente Son el obsequio pagano de mis ojos, en la recopilación pictórica de los días, con prematuro atardecer.*

Letters for an Existing Father, Are the pagan allowances of my own thoughts,  
As a graphic compilation of our days, where the embryonic twilight took our souls.

VIII

*De los olores y sabores que recuerda mi consciencia, Oda al arroz moreno con verduras, Oda a su tiempo de cocción.*

From all the scents that my consciousness remembers,  
this is an Ode to the Brown Rice  
An Ode to its Cooking Time

IX

*El mas grande amor, La silueta que veré en otras pieles, El perfil que se repetirá a sí mismo por más de tres décadas.*

Magnificent love. The silhouette that I will contemplate among other skins.  
The profile that will be conjured for more than three whole decades.

X

*Inevitable el quiebre del paradigma familiar, Que nos liberó del refugio del beso del mundo, en la desviación placentera de nuestra lógica humana.*

Inevitable breakdown of the family paradigm, That freed us from the refuge of the Kiss of the World,  
Pleasant deviation of our human remembrance.

XI

*Desde entonces, un susurro inquebrantable en la comisura de esta sonrisa, que induce la expansión de la médula pulsante como un abismo infinito que, conscientemente habito.*

Ever since, an unshakable whisper at the corner of my mouth,  
induces the expansion of the creative beat from its beginning to its endless repetition,  
just as an infinite abyss that I consciously inhabit.  
Devotion, then, as the only way of attaining happiness.

*continued overleaf..*

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CAPITULO ONCE - CHAPTER ELEVEN *...contd*

XII

*¿Quién podría haber vaticinado la muerte de todos los símbolos?  
Viendo nuestras espaldas en el vaivén acompasado de la muerte,  
Aún puede oírse el eco de nuestras voces y el paso de la muchedumbre que no repara en  
nimiedades.*

Who could ever have predicted the death of all symbols? Seeing our napes in the rhythmic swing of Death, You can still hear the echo of our voices, and the crowd tip-toe, ignoring our fragile beating heart.

XIII

*En medio de esta naturaleza simulada,  
Allí fuimos y allí somos, Padre. La ingenuidad de tus ojos vive en mi.*

Enclosed by this simulated, open-grounded nature, There we were and there we are, Father. The naivete of your eyes lives in me.

XIV

*De mi hermano emancipado;  
La pulsión del intento, y el naufragio como arte y resurrección.  
En el segundo respiro de mi vida, convicción de un ser que camina  
a mi lado.*

From my Emancipated Brother; The attempt, as a constant, urgent desire, and the Shipwreck as a form of Art and Resurrection.

In this, Second breath of life, I feel the conviction of a walking-breathing being by my side.

XV

*El interludio paciente, que espera en medio del verde jardín, (junto a la pesadilla nocturna del niño que tiembla) promete la aniquilación de cualquier linaje y/o vínculo sanguíneo.  
Tic tac tic tac tic tac tic tac tic.*

THE willingness-to-endure Interludes, waiting in the middle of our green garden, (next to the nightmare of the shivering child) promises the annihilation of any kind of lineage.  
Tick tock, tick tock, tick tock, tick tock.

XVI

*El brindis será entonces, en este primer Requiem en gloriosa perspectiva, Por cada desayuno de cereal con leche en un oscuro amanecer. Por cada caviar y pan con mantequilla. Por la tenue luminosidad tras los ventanales del comedor.  
Por la historia que el tiempo nos debe y por los abrazos que llegaran.*

Our Tribute will then set, after this First Requiem of glorious perspective and For each milky-cereal breakfast, in a dark dawn. For each caviar and bread-with-butter meal. By the dim light behind the dining room curtains. For all the stories that Time owes us;

XVII

*Por cada botella de vino servida, Cuya perfecta fermentación, sede a la noche, de una  
CENA FAMILIAR*

Every sacred bottle of red wine, each astonishing fermentation. There is a soft place in my heart for a night-dinner in that long, curvy-shaped-country called Chile.

*continued overleaf..*

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## CAPITULO ONCE - CHAPTER ELEVEN ...contd

XVIII

*La bandera tricolor que vio mi nacimiento fue, sin lugar a dudas,  
una estridente melodía de encuentros y desencuentros.  
Como una película narrada íntegramente en un solo plano secuencia.  
Todos los momentos, voces y aromas reunidos,  
En el veinticuatro de un pasaje sin salida.*

The three color flag that saw my birth was, unquestionable, a shrill melody of encounters and disagreements. Like a one-shot feature film Moments and voices and aromas gathering together In the twenty-four hours of a dead end road.

XIX

*Con la melodía de un vals que no recuerdo y aquella voz profunda, en el deseo ferviente de verme en la expansión de lo que ya he sido.  
De los senos de mi padre, La autenticidad del ser El crecer, entregar y crear.*

A waltzing melody that I could not remember, His deep voice, In the fervent desire to see myself in the expansion of what I have already become.  
From my father's breasts, The authenticity of being my true self To grow, to give and create.

XX

*De los senos de mi madre La fortaleza del ser, El pensar, el hacer y el triunfar.  
Primogenita determinación que sueña conmigo.*

From my mother's breasts  
The strength of Being  
To think, to do and succeed. The First determination that dreamt of me.

XXI

*La responsabilidad impartida como reflexión de nuestra propia personalidad,  
La dedicación amorosa a las vidas no humanas en la entrega natural. ¿Será esa la respuesta a nuestra sensibilidad multicromática? (No es más que un ápice).*

Imparted responsibility as a reflection of our own personality,  
Loving dedication to non-human beings; Is that the answer to our multi-chromatic sensitivity?  
(There is so much more)

XXII

*Uno tras otro, los animales, compañeros de ojos transparentes, vierten sus vidas a nuestros días y se despiden, satisfechos, de haber amado con el corazón abierto.  
(Anulando la fatídica duda del que piensa el pensamiento).*

One by one, the animals, companions  
whose transparent, clear eyes, pour their lives into our days and say, suddenly, farewell.  
Satisfied of loving us in red blood. (Ignoring the tedious doubt of those who think what they think).

XXIII

*La meditación como resultado del silencio que gatilla múltiples universos. ¿Qué tan distintos seríamos sin la recopilación, (y selección) de las memorias?  
Brindo por el obsequio de la ausencia, que en todo su dolor, cultiva especies a contrapelo, inverosímiles y testarudas.*

Meditation as a result of the silent energy that triggers multiple universes. How different would our lives have been without these memories? A toast in the name of Absence, which, after all this time, admiringly cultivates our implausible and stubborn character.

*continued overleaf..*

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## CAPITULO ONCE - CHAPTER ELEVEN *...contd*

XIV

*Mientras tanto, un último interludio se asoma entre la colorida maleza de los jardines, se trata de una alegoría al púrpura y al amarillo. Entre los árboles frutales que inconscientemente plantamos*

Meanwhile, One last interlude appears between the colorful weeds of our gardens  
Among the fruit trees that we,  
unconsciously  
planted.

XXV

*Hoy,  
En el veinticuatro de un pasaje sin salida. En la sublime reconciliación del tiempo,  
Evoco.*

Today, In the twenty-four hours of a dead end road. In the sublime reconciliation of  
time which  
I evoke.



<https://pixabay.com/>

Mick Corrigan's poems have been rejected by some of the finest magazines around, his debut collection, "Deep Fried Unicorn", was released in to the wild in 2015. His poems have been nominated for The Pushcart Prize (USA) and The Forward Poetry Prize (UK). His second collection if ever completed, will be launched on an unsuspecting public like a clown fired from a cannon. He plans to do wild and reckless things with his hair before it's too late.



### FROM A BEACH IN CRETE (SUMMER 2019)

A deep chest chant from the sand raking man,  
love song for his mother sea,

close by the hut of driftwood and palms  
the languid moon-touched sisters wait,

combing out their seaweed hair  
tying it back with brooches of bone,

hollowed from the shipwrecked men  
broken on a crown of thorns.

White mote in the distance,  
God sailing her yacht,

sails full, tiller down,  
utterly indifferent  
to everything but the tide.

Mick Corrigan

## THE BLEAK WINTER DREAMS OF A SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT MODERATOR

A dreaming horse in frosted fields, witches' knickers in the trees,  
the well of bad weather getting colder and deeper  
as a dark river runs through the sleep of our dead.  
Erotic chanting hot as blood, carnal balm for a troubled mind,  
the trembling hand reaching to touch all the breathy "what if's",  
never more than a yard from a salty mortal sin,  
the slumbering town is twitchy tonight.

A pinstripe prince from the chamber of commerce,  
eyes like poke holes in a plate of lard,  
drinking dark spirit from a fat lipped bottle  
while angry weather climbs over the windows.  
His curated life never once troubled  
by even the waft of a tremulous fart  
though down by the lake when the water is clear  
you can still see the faces of his drowned.

The lumpy land like an unmade bed  
left by a creature most concerned with itself,  
a virgin boy on a humming rail,  
arms wide like a welcoming Jesus  
washed in the light of a heavy goods train,  
sometimes these times are more than the weather,  
sometimes these times are the sum of all winters,  
never more than a yard from a salty mortal sin,  
the slumbering town is twitchy tonight.

## THE WILD SLEEPLESS NIGHTS OF LATE MIDDLE AGE

Some shithead shouting out in the dark,  
offering to fight his neighbours or the moon.  
Anxiety murmuring beneath respectable roofs,  
sleepless over block-chain technology, crypto currencies  
and the essential thread count of expensive, cotton sheets.  
The night-light odyssey of people who don't wave  
when they're drowning.

A samurai sword and a giant tv,  
proud on a lilac coloured bedroom wall,  
each mocking the other as a ghost wolf raises her muzzle to the air.  
In the pagan fields at the foggy gather  
of those who died from blind optimism  
and unshakeable faith,  
a small bird trapped in a barren tree  
heart fluttering against the ageing ribs.

Beside the tidal river of sleep  
a wild hare on the winter grass  
dark eyed and ethereal,  
sleek, agile, ancient.

Light in the east  
new made.

## FORTY DAYS OF FASTING, ABSTINENCE AND SOME MUSHROOMS SCAVENGED FROM UNDER A ROCK

You were a found poem, a stolen song,  
dying on the desert floor,  
a revenant sea gone to dust,  
home to scorpions and erotic dreams  
of cold, beading water across the map of a beloveds' skin,  
your magical mind telling you stories  
beneath a carousel of pale, carved horses.

Bees and Bells  
Humming, Peeling.

Out of the haze, a firebird in silk,  
carrying a posy of night blooming flowers,  
silver robe and white sand shimmer,  
a necklace of souls reciting their sins.  
Flaying wit of dark eyed bright  
smiled at your hallucinating head,  
from a fashionable bag of stretched, ancient faces  
drew honeycomb and crown of thorns,  
slipped the robe from smooth brown shoulders,  
whispered to your groaning form  
"time to talk of pleasure and freewill".



<https://pixabay.com>

Silva Zanoayan Merjanian is a widely published poet of Armenian descent who grew up in Beirut, Lebanon. Her work is featured in international anthologies and poetry journals. Merjanian has two volumes of poetry, *Uncoil a Night* (2013) and *Rumor* (Cold River Press, 2015.) *Rumor* won the Pinnacle Book Achievement Award Fall 2015 for best poetry book by NABE, she has 3 poems from *Rumor* nominated for Pushcart Prize. Merjanian donates proceeds from both books to charitable organizations.



## THE DARKEST SHADE OF GRAY

*Out of the ash  
I rise with my red hair  
and I eat men like air  
- Sylvia Plath*

There's a flame sliding over the rain  
flickering your image in the corner shadows  
like a struggling wick

I rise from it  
marcescent twig of an old willow branch

my tongue extends to viscid residue of your voice  
thickening the air  
only to trace shriveling edge of time  
where I'm the lie we shared

I disown my breath  
burn in the distance to your poems

as dusk fades into night  
I fade in your absence  
you will never have my death  
but a pile of ash in mouths of men

Silva Zanoayan Merjanian

## JUDGEMENT

*To Paris*

*Dedicated to child brides invisible in large cities*

In the distance she's that dim light  
 spilling from a window into the night  
 hair doused in city smell  
 that of empty streets past her bedtime  
 illusion of intimacy of street lamps  
 lies the dark squeezes from her eyes

*hold that breath, there's no room to exhale in this cage*

your chest rises with a breeze  
 licks the stale moonlight on her hands  
 up to a ballooned promise  
 back to storm-drains looking for change  
 and up again  
 asphalt reaches concrete  
 stone touches glass  
 eyes wide open you look past her into a dream

*hold that river, the Seine knows nothing about old men*

rasp of odds is in her favor at this hour  
 that she breaks out of this shell unharmed  
 before guilt on windows blind her to your stone façade  
 and she lays her faith inside your mouth  
 bartering prayers for mistakes she sanctifies

*hold that dot spreading red on an awning*

she's caught the rain pelting her voice  
 on your pavements with indifference  
 yet she fails to see she too is a willing prey  
 to your streets lit in the gentlest light

*hold that hope, it's a stray dog looking for a bone*

a shadow beyond distorted street signs  
 she is jealous of your sunset sinking into dusk  
 how it molts its heart beyond venal rooftops  
 while she takes hers into this wounded night

*hold that sky pressing on her like rubble of a man*



© Silva Zanoyan Merjanian

## FALLING INTO DUSK

*For the Trafficked*

I've been sinking in this brittle light since I was twelve  
you, floating in my dead eyes like an ellipsis on power lines

we both vanish without closure  
purging God's shame on silhouette of broken men  
in rooms sunken with weight of prey

I've seen rivers slice cities in your soft glow  
drown a pale moon in murky currents  
denial a birthmark on its brow  
misplaced conscience pace in awning shadows  
judging the sky in squint of eyes bloodshot with spite  
hush money graffiti on coffins in plain sight

they know me  
the way they know the traffic light on McArthur  
first rain of fall on their windshield  
the sign OPEN on bakeries they frequent rushing to work  
they know my face  
some know my name  
familiarity's a cannibal tied to bed posts  
you too should know  
your tongue holds scars of its bite

Are we too far gone  
to cover corpse of another sun  
have we forgotten where we left  
dirge and flowers  
in hours counted  
not accounted  
slipping through palms

I wash my words in holy water bought from a street vendor  
and a truce you made with the righteous  
who bargained redemption from the same vendor  
on the same corner  
hangs from my neck and fills my pockets with stones

trees wipe your drool  
off another approaching night  
it will carry you again over the threshold  
like a bride veil caught on pander  
while I search for the bottom where it's pitch dark  
to bury my body whore carved on my inner thigh



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## A THOUSAND LAYERS UNDER AN IMMIGRANTS SKIN

I was younger than a dream  
when summer stretched on its side  
heavy with sweet taste of plums  
it swayed our dreams to lethargy  
it sweat in trees with polished roots  
while we wasted away feasting  
on raw gratitude

*nostalgic for days we all killed something to escape  
wore our bones like prison bars of heritage*

I was older than my skin  
when mosquitos carried a drop of blood  
drawn from mere blink of an eye  
stained the shade my words cast on open palms

streets sizzled in the sun  
dried every shard of regret  
on steps of every cathedral  
women do not cry from their eyes  
they give birth to tears in clenched fists  
then leave them like used prayers on old pews

I held all blame in my mouth  
who wouldn't hide rot of yesterday's appetite  
yet can you forget humidity of our lies  
our tongues still search for their taste  
it sweetened our stagnant breath

*nostalgic for days we all killed something to escape*

summer shifted its weight on fall's rain  
we changed our skin  
put on a new pair of jeans  
a white shirt  
outgrew our names  
we'll be laid down a hue of decent in our graves  
our smiles bleached  
our shadows still a deep grey



© Silva Zanoyan Merjanian

"Rob Buchanan is the author of *The Cost of Living* (Five Nothing Press, 2016). His is an utterly unique voice in contemporary Irish poetry. Coming from a working class background in Dublin's southside, in a society which pretends to be classless, as an openly gay man, Rob only recently married the man for whom his book is dedicated, his poems cut through all the veneer of the Republic, revealing a brutal world, yet one from which he, like Baudelaire before him, has extracted miracles." - Peter O'Neill



Rob Buchanan

## WINDOW SEAT

Pursued over sea by the sneak music of spectral intercourses.  
Twitching curtains, after mass mutters.  
The departure lounges frigid furniture,  
The trolley dolly's friendly faggotry  
"Travelling alone love?" Delicate proof in paper cut smile.  
Guilt is a transparent web work intricacy.

Unreliable narration of paranoia turns fellow passengers  
In to school girls passing scraps of receipts  
Plain speaking clipper poetry. To gloating at the  
Checkout girl corporation estate grotty mongrel. She feels smelly,  
She fantasies of hypothetical criminality, sinner's indignity.  
Period drama food poisoning, swooning castrated child bride.  
Trying to sleep, her heart broken head throws up  
Scattering colours like kindergarten paintbrush spatter.  
She shouldn't have to be lonely this way. Our daughters.  
Plain speaking parents proud of ignorance. Her mother  
Thinks she's at a wedding down the country.

On the return flight she's gotten the window seat.  
Thin parcel of space time one winter in the early eighties. Liverpool.  
In its on way mirror, she sees herself frost blanching in cotton clouds.  
Bleeding from a different wound. Show me what courage is.  
As virgins and old men choose with hypocritical brinkmanship  
Gloating double blind decades of rosary  
*Sean-nós* ghost or rebel rabble rousing for myopic grace.  
We have failed thousands like you.  
Your womanhood dignity mortgaged to sulking tapestry saints  
The last refuge to flee our dark country and return  
Her body whole, minus the wound inside her.  
As virgins and old men worship the painted feet of Virgins, real life despised.  
While the divinity of living women is criminalised  
There is no grace, there is no grace.

## SIXTH SEAL

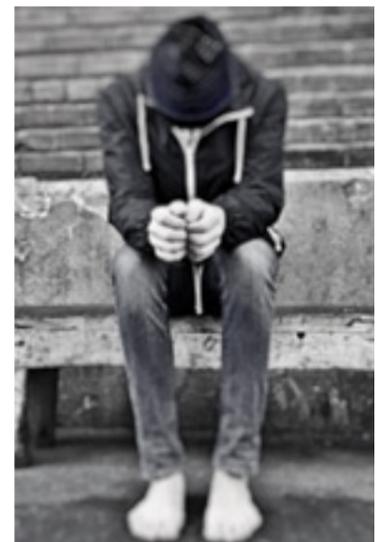
*For the young man outside the National Gallery*

Storm. The Spire draws down the ragged tridents,  
The ozone kiss crackling, breaks white lightening fingers,  
Surgeon stitches the night. Throws columned shadows back like midnight sundials,  
Scrimshaw carved the mushroom clouds surrender rain.  
The GPO marble temple sleeps as the streets empty.

He killed time during the storm. Nowhere better to go so,  
Walked head down, wet runners loitered before the biggest painting in the gallery.  
The Opening of the Sixth Seal.  
He thinks he doesn't understand its meaning.  
Distant desperate men pleading for premature burial under dark mountains  
Stares deep, enfolded in printed shadows.  
Leaning in to green-screen dreams, naked they're hiding from earth, from heaven.  
The last day is like the first for men like me, for worlds like these.  
Before security sees, says "Sir, galleries closing, you have to leave."

Thunders talking drum worries store window dummies.  
Blind buildings burn in neon's after burn.  
Headlight's lens flare wet constellations.  
Watercolours make river roads. Taxis draining  
Drunken songs from Dawson Street, as he returns  
He smiles, his only thought is home.  
Tonight he'll disappear behind the painted door.  
The wife, the kids, the warmth. The window of televisions.  
Night and cold will be tame beasts tethered outside,  
Weathered with loneliness.

Red-blue flashbulb strikes illuminates his sleeping bag,  
Develops inanimate celebrity silhouette against cardboard pediment.  
His face glows a moment longer,  
As if it hungrily holds some electric orphan wonder. No longer shakes  
Like his plastic sacred heart scapula, worn smooth from rubbing.  
Lightning makes the ambulance driver some shivering Frankenstein.  
Come back to claim the love of his creation,  
Did not come back in time.



© Rob Buchanan

## PANGAEA

Glasnevin, Eden was no maternity ward, was a cemetery.  
 Charnel destiny. Better go and see, better get the camera fast,  
 Before the continents re-shift again to defame, retrial, recast.  
 Moss muffled names and dates and treaties.  
 Granite, gravel reiterations to cement and paste the past.

Grandchildren could pave the island with gravestones.  
 Feel how thin the earth is here. Was the dead who woke the living,  
 Compelling tomorrow from lichen covered thrones.  
 Irreverently dancing on those mondegreen serene shames,  
 Bones proclaiming history is fairy stores, suicide notes. I ignore the sirens.

Row in supermarkets, fuck in car parks, cry on double-decker buses.  
 These are the ghost's glories, trophies etched blank between family names.  
 During that phantom famine I'd have danced and slept here.  
 Bestially feasted green toothed on hungry grass, guiltless as the resurrection men.  
 The wind's fingers sandblasting marble till initialled brass  
 Wears smooth as the innocent future.

I'd have O'Connell as Isaac and de Valera for Yorick.  
 I'd swallow the putrid dated liberty, taste the courage  
 Of appropriated Portland Stone petrified lies.  
 Empires hand-me-down crowns, anachronistic virtues  
 Swap potatoes and thorns for credit cards and cell phones.

Reap the ripe revisionist harvest with my empty belly.  
 Cannibalise catacombs, say I did my best, hope for forgiveness,  
 Some lessons take more than one life to learn.  
 They are all here waiting for the rebirth of the stillborn.  
 Obscenity of skeletons daring to swear on our lives.

But children can't live on golden calves,  
 Build homes of mouldering bones. This potter's field is our stage  
 Worth nothing then, less now, morally atrophied epithets.  
 Nothing I can see with living eyes anyway.  
 Tell their wraiths we tried.  
 But I swear we will be woken in te afterlife, by the sound of  
 Those great dead men and women begging us to remind them  
 What heaven was like.



## THE GARGOYLE OF BLANCHARDSTOWN

There's a cathedral in me.  
 Pebble dashed transept, chipped pixelated mosaics,  
 Monuments to my guilt.  
 Chapels commemorate my casual unconscious cruelty  
 Memories sliced seconds thin enshrouded in candle lit tenebrous.  
 Faded frescoes repainted nightly with invisible colours  
 Cries imprisoned in elated high relief  
 By the magic hours stained glass alien familiarity  
 It's my cradle and my crypt.  
 That's the way it should be.

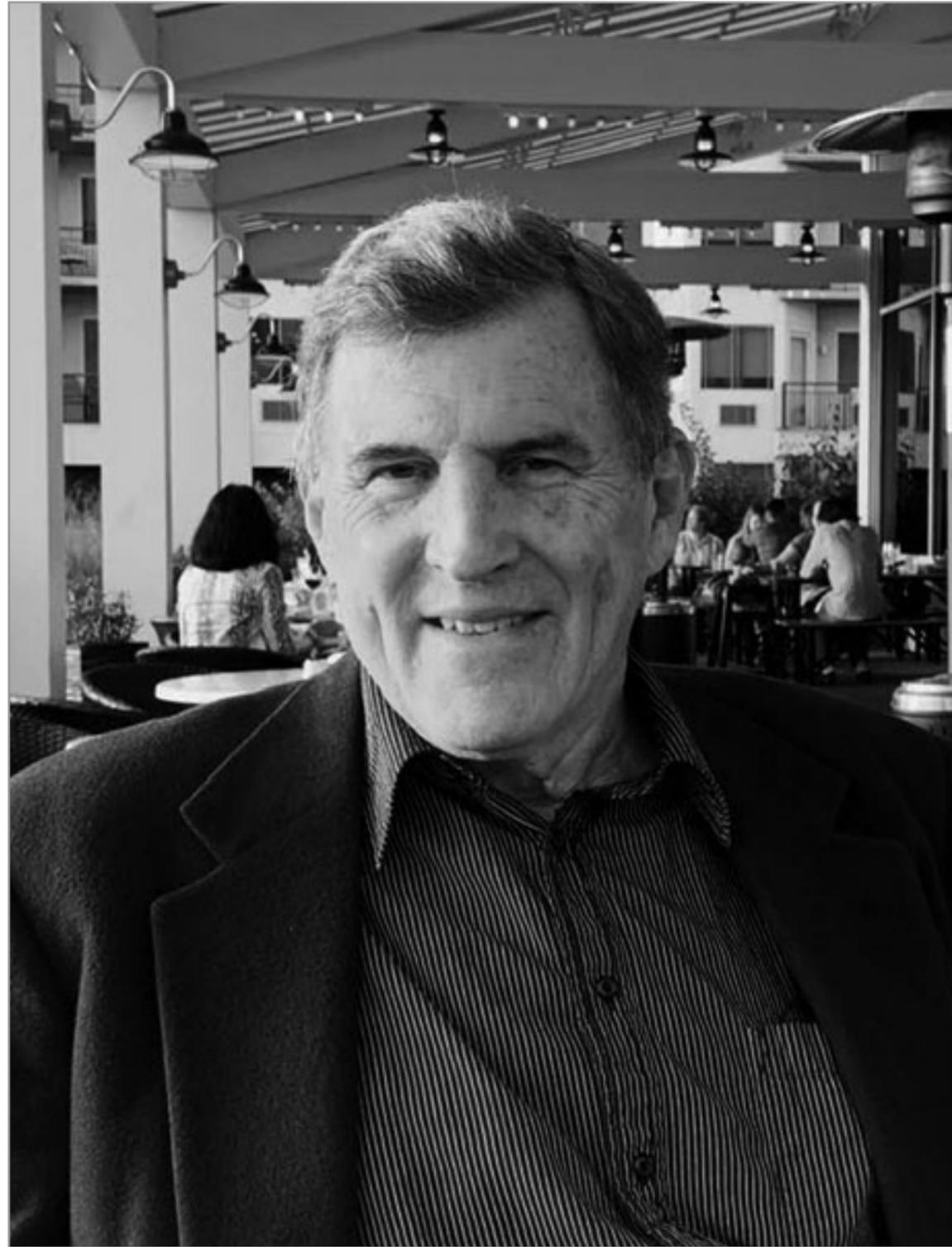
I feel like I should pray for you inside it,  
 As I did for him. Our last trip together,  
 A glib pilgrimage to Lourdes, paid for  
 By his lads from work and the pub.  
 Lukewarm Guinness and cocktails of chemotherapy  
 Hands together scrubbing carbolic prayers  
 Changing colostomy bags, manoeuvring  
 Hollowed bodies out of wheelchairs.  
 I'd go out on the balcony so he wouldn't see me cry.

After twice dunking in a holy trough.  
 My boxer shorts still skin-wet shivering  
 As they held me under, I thought I heard  
 Your hoarse voice from underwater, it said  
 You can pray for anything.  
 Wart-faced monosyllabic French carers  
 Dunked broken and obscene bodies, careless as sheep dip.  
 Ladled scallops of absolving sour scum coloured wishes  
 Over heads, like bone nosed cartoon cannibal cooks.

Seeing the hope in your eyes unmade me.  
 Felt my whole body crying, dissolving.  
 Outside I vomited a clotted well spring of stout  
 On a statue's feet by a wall of sleeping crutches.  
 Pushing you back to the hotel, stopped on a hill to  
 See if you needed the bathroom.  
 Your smugglers wink, pain in your bloodshot eyes,  
 Irrational squeeze of my hands in yours  
 On the wheelchair arm rest.  
 "Don't pray for that," he said.



David Rigsbee is an American poet, critic and translator who has an immense body of published work behind him. *Not Alone in my Dancing – Essays and Reviews* (2016), *This Much I Can Tell You* (2017) and *The Pilot House* (2011) all published by Black Lawrence Press are but a sample. His complete translation of Dante's *Paradiso*, from which the following Canto is taken, is due out by Salmon Press later in the year.



David Rigsbee

## CANTO XXXI

*[Dante encounters St. Bernard of Clarivaux, who will be his final guide, as Beatrice takes her throne in the Rose. Dante says a farewell prayer of thanks to Beatrice, who smiles at him a final time, before turning to God. St. Bernard tells Dante to look up.]*

In the shape of a white Rose,  
the sacred host was shown me that Christ,  
in His own blood, had made His Bride.

The other host—flying and singing  
the glory of Him that drew them to His love  
and the goodness that so ennobled it, 5

like a swarm of bees that in one moment  
dive into the flowers and in another turn  
back to the sweet work of the hive—

plunged into the great, man-  
petaled bloom, and then flew back  
to the place where eternal love reposes. 10

Their faces were living flame,  
and their wings were gold, the rest so  
white no snow could rival it. 15

As they entered the flower,  
they spread, level by level, both ardor  
and peace by the fanning of their flanks.

Nor did such plenty interposed  
between the flower and what was above  
impede the sight and splendor. 20



## CANTO XXXI *...contd*

The Divine Light so thoroughly  
pervades the universe according to the merit  
of each part that nothing can stop it.

This secure and happy realm 25  
was thronged with old and new, who trained  
their look and love all to one end.

O Triple Light, that sparkles 30  
in their eyes, contenting from a single light,  
look down upon us in our storm!

If the barbarians (who come  
from that place where Helice travels the sky  
with her beloved son each day)

seeing Rome and her mighty works 35  
were dumbfounded (when the Lateran  
outshone all mortal achievements)

then imagine, when I came  
from human to the divine, time to eternity,  
from Florence to the just and sane,

the size of my utter stupor! 40  
Truly between this and my new joy  
it was a pleasure neither to hear nor speak.

As a pilgrim at the shrine of his vow  
is renewed and considers, as he looks around,  
how to describe it when he returns home, 45

so did I survey the living light,  
leading my eyes through the degrees,  
now up, now down, now sweeping about.

There I saw faces devoted to love 50  
of His light and by smiles and demeanor  
embellished with every grace.

At this point my vision had grasped  
the general plan of Paradise but had not  
focused on any particular part,

and with renewed desire to know 55  
I turned around to ask my Lady about  
things of which I was still unsure.

What I expected was not what I met:  
I thought I would see Beatrice but saw instead  
an elder dressed in the robes of the blessed. 60

His eyes and cheeks were flushed  
with divine joy, and he had a tender  
father's bearing of compassion.

I said at once, "Where is she?" 65  
He replied, "She urged me to leave my place  
and come to bring an end to your longing.

If you look up to the third circle,  
highest degree, you will see her enthroned  
where merit ordained she should be.

Without reply I raised my eyes 70  
and saw that she had made herself  
a crown that reflected the eternal light.

CANTO XXXI *...contd*

Not from the region of highest  
thunders, to the bottom of the deepest sea  
was any eye so far as mine then

75

was from Beatrice, but it  
made no difference because her image  
came to me without any blur.

“O Lady, in whom resides my hope,  
and who for my salvation was suffered  
to leave the imprint of her feet in hell,

80

it is thanks to your excellence  
and power that I have recognized virtue  
and grace in all the things I have seen.

You led me, a slave, to freedom  
by all those ways and using all the means  
that were within your power to employ.

85

Preserve me in your magnificence,  
so that my soul, brought to health, may be  
pleasing to you when it leaves the body.”

90

So I entreated her, and she, so  
distant as it seemed, looked down and smiled,  
then turned back to the eternal fountain.

The holy elder said, “In order that your  
journey may reach its perfect consummation  
prayer and sacred love have sent me.

95

Let your eyes fly in this garden  
for gazing at it will train your sight  
to rise and follow along the divine ray.

The Queen of Heaven, in whose  
fires my love burns, will grant us every grace  
because I am her faithful Bernard.”

100

And like a foreigner, a Croatian  
perhaps, who comes to gaze at our Veronica  
and cannot get his fill of that ancient fame,

105

but says to himself while it is  
displayed, “My Lord Christ, true God,  
is this what you looked like in life?”

Just so I found that I was gazing  
at the living love of one who in this world,  
in contemplation, tasted of that peace.

110

He began, “Son of grace, you  
will not know this state of blissful being  
if you keep your eyes trained on what’s below.

Instead, let your eyes rise to the most  
distant circles, until they behold the Queen  
to whom this realm is subject and devoted.

115

I raised my eyes, and as the morning  
horizon in the east shines brighter  
than where the sun sets, and I saw,

120



## CANTO XXXI ...contd

as if going with my eyes  
from valley to mountaintop, a remote part  
that shown more splendidly than all the rest.

And even as on earth we await  
Phaeton's shaft at the brightest  
point, while the sides grow dim, 125

just so there in the center  
the golden standard of peace shown  
and on each side the glow subsided,

while all about the center, I saw  
the outstretched wings of a thousand euphoric  
angels, each different in brightness and kind. 130

And I saw smiling there, at their festivity  
and song, a beauty whose joy was reflected  
in the eyes of all the other saints. 135

If I had as great riches in words  
as in imagining, I would not dare attempt  
even the smallest part of such delight.

When Bernard saw how my eyes  
were fixed on the object of his zeal turned  
his own eyes to her with such love that he 140

made my own gaze all the more intense.

Notes:

2, *the sacred host*—Dante is shown two hosts: those who were in heaven, having lived first on earth, and those whose entire existence had been heaven.

32, *Helice*—A nymph who bore a son to Zeus (Arcas). For this, Hera changed her into a bear and translated her to heaven (Ursa Major), along with her son (Ursa Minor).

35, *the Lateran*—The Lateran Palace was the papal residence during Dante's lifetime.

60, *but saw instead an elder*—St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 – 1153). Cistercian monk and reformer who helped to spread the Benedictine Order and devotee of Mary, known for his eloquence and contemplative nature. He is Dante's final guide.

104 – 105, *a Croatian perhaps*—I.e., as one on the margins of Christendom, although Croatians were known for the strength of their faith.

104, *our Veronica*—I.e., "true icon." The Veronica was a cloth used to wipe the sweat from Christ's face as he made his way to Calvary. It reputedly bore His image and was put on display and venerated in the Vatican.

125, *Phaeton's shaft*—I.e., the forwardmost part of Phaeton's chariot to be seen at dawn. *Paradiso* Canto XXXI



## PART TWO

Enda Coyle Greene is the author of three collections of poetry; *Snow Negatives* (2007), *Map of the Last* (2013) and most recently *Indigo, Electric, Baby* (2020) all published by Dedalus Press, Dublin. She lives in Skerries, and she is a devout believer in Minerva.



## FREIGHT ON A TRAILER IN A YARD IN SWORDS

Wind lifts  
the canvas roof  
as I pass; rain forecast  
in another language offloads,  
soaks me.

Enda Coyle Greene

## CONTINUA

Like a moth, much-  
magnified, its wing-beats  
broad, flat, almost

audible, this time  
the owl in our headlights  
is tawny, not white.

We're passing Ardlá  
where my own dead rest,  
when a hare jinks

from the ditch, kicks  
back panicked dust yet  
sticks with us

on the hill before  
vanishing to wherever  
a hare goes once

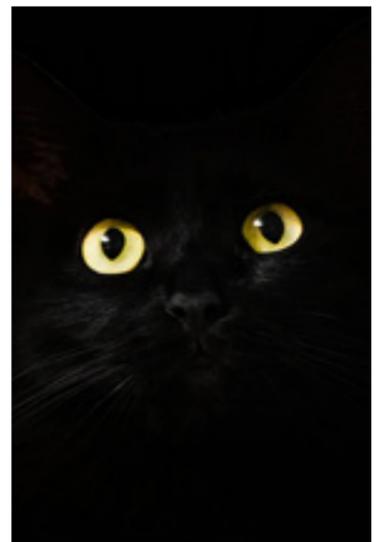
it has finished being  
a continuum of souls.  
I'm thinking of a friend,

her all-too-swift affinity  
with living, as a shade  
splits the darkness

into darkness that shifts.  
I see only eyes, back-  
lit as if star-packed:

it has to be a cat,  
it has to be black,  
it couldn't possibly be

otherwise, tonight.



Fred Johnston is the author of nine collections of poetry, the latest being *Rogue States* published by Salmon, 2018. He is the founder of *Cúirt*, Galway city's annual literary festival, the city where he currently teaches Creative Writing at NUI Galway. He is also the author of three novels and two collections of short stories, he is currently working on his third collection. He has very strong links to France, having written many times in French and having also translated from the French. He won a *Prix de L'Ambassade* for his translations in 2004.



## THE ROMAN BRIDGE AT CALLAC

Then in Brittany  
 On the Roman bridge at Callac  
 Sensing the railway, its single coach  
 Trailing beyond the trees and highway  
 And the Square limping, leaning  
 The stone soldier *Mort pour La Patrie*  
 The patient silence of a ragged belfry

To buy lilies by the Café de la Place  
 Order coffee in French from  
 The pretty Welsh wife at the bar  
 Sit at a rickety table and watch  
 Circus posters bloom on the walls  
 Like fat urgent flowers,  
 Small urgent women gossiping for hours

To be arriving off the ferry  
 Feeling sumptuous sun through  
 The windscreen, taking the first  
*Rond-point* slow and cautious,  
 Accelerating on more open road,  
 Gliding without maps to a diesel beat  
 Lapping like a lover at the salted heat.

Fred Johnston

## BETWEEN ZERO AND ONE

Cyber-space is an empty frame -  
We're drawing letters, whole

Words, phrases, in that lack,  
Declaring ourselves by electronic

Innuendo or appearing to, ciphering  
And decoding, hemmed in,

Cornered by the heart's pulses to  
The finger-tips, the what-not-to-say

Beating like a spacer on the screen  
Of ourselves, the digitalised longing

Pressing on the *Delete* button -  
What can I save you as?  
There is no folder secure enough  
We are not Password Protected.

## THE GECKO

There were spaces in the day best occupied  
With walking in the sand-brewed garden under  
Clacking palm trees whose leaves were sharp as blades  
A place to rattle the unswept cage of your head  
Once the rains went and there was undying heat  
And there was so much to discuss with the empty  
Benches and the dried-up fountain  
With the trains humping and loud as lovers  
Over in the sidings under the grain silos  
Far enough away for privacy, their intimate couplings  
The dumbfounded gecko, *Tarentola neglecta*,  
Scuttering along a wall of broken stones -

This before the bombs came and the atrocities  
And the throats slit in ambushed villages; before  
A heresy of hanged men among orange trees  
And the unsafe safety of locked doors; I read of it  
Tucked safely in a demoralising pub under Irish rain  
Left most utterly to my own devices  
Most of which acquired a habit of exploding in my face;  
I had never known ageing men so unexplored, so  
Foul-mouthed, foolish and frantic  
Gecko-jittery and smoke-choked and angry when the sun  
Came out and the street glistened like blown-out glass  
Light sharp as blades, the no-sound of their catastrophe.

## WORDS AND MUSIC

*i.m. Ciaran Carson, poet, 1948 - 2019*

It's all in the breath -  
Your airs drew words along, or seemed to,  
Staves of street upon street

Over the derelict spaces  
The dialects of a many-musicked people  
Ghettoed by gantries, tight bricky terraces

Pubs where it's prudent to  
Weather-eye the door, listen for an engine revving up  
The feather-light tick of the out-of-place -

You had the right words  
In the right order, as the *diktat* goes, and so could  
Put words and music in their proper place

Now and then let them scatter  
Off the leash, they'd dander where the weather'd  
Take them, in and out the badlands

Muttering murderous roads punctuated  
By black taxis, back home through the radio-squelch  
Of Army checkpoints. Still, you held the long note,  
Had the last word.



<https://pixabay.com>

Daniel Wade is a poet and playwright from Dublin. In January 2017, his play *The Collector* opened the 20th anniversary season of the New Theatre, Dublin. In January 2020 his radio drama *Crossing the Red Line* was broadcast on RTE Radio 1 Extra. Daniel was the Hennessy New Irish Writing winner for April 2015 in *The Irish Times*, and his poetry has appeared in over two dozen publications since 2012, incl. *Cassandra Voices*, *The Agonist*, *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears*, *Live Encounters*, *The Galway Review*, *A New Ulster*, and *Banshee Press*.



Daniel Wade

## THE LONG WATCH

*i.m. Irish sailors lost at sea during 'the Long Watch' of WWII.  
For Eamon Mag Uidhir*

U-boats ranging the sea-trench had us marked;  
a destroyer on passage from Portsmouth swiveled  
its turret in our direction.

Most unsplendid isolation - our discreet Emergency:  
government rations wolfed down with livid urgency,

the country once more in danger of starvation.  
Men risked the all-clear of magnetic mines,  
torpedoes puncturing supply lines

aboard nearly-new colliers and steam packets,  
each named after trees, 'EIRE' tarred port

and starboard, their hulls brittle as neutrality.  
What service, what grit: to willingly barter a life  
deep-sixed below sea level in an engine-room

while surf sloshed fantails, oil fizzed past midnight,  
and no navy lads left to drown, not on our bosun's watch,

anyway: Axis or Allied, shivering and soaked in confusions  
of surf - an SOS flare needed no translation.  
We'd haul them from the froth without hesitation.

On deck, the bronchial stack smoked a final signal  
as MG 17's spluttered, spat from overhead -

fiery gougings through plate-iron, bloodied  
life vests clogging every ebb and crest. Essential  
demand, manifest supply, green global stretch:

all sunk without trace, or else washed up on beaches.

## HOME COMFORTS

My wife's copies of Vogue  
 And Glamour will be collector's items  
 Someday, each going for an arm  
 And a leg. Or so she tells me.  
 Right now they're just piled up,  
 Abjectly unread, on our Ikea footrest,  
 As if waiting to be doused in petrol  
 And torched. I'll be honest,

The thought of doing so often crosses  
 My mind, as well as hoping the Ikea  
 Footrest'll go up with them in smoke.  
 But then, I'm quick to notice flammable  
 things. Ah, sure, look. A man can dream.

Like, say, when I sit in our kitchen-cum-  
 Study, the kettle fuming in the corner  
 Like a rival I've bested in a debate,  
 On a Saturday mid-afternoon, hungover,  
 As sunlight licks the dusty floorboards  
 And a black cat mews into my window  
 For some affection it gets nowhere else,  
 And the steel-capped stomp of the people  
 In the flat above ours walking  
 Overhead like an out-of-sync timpani solo  
 And I grit my teeth. I've had words  
 With them before about the noise  
 To little effect, 'cause they keep making it.  
 And don't even get me started on the landlady.

Fear not, though; my own appetite  
 For destruction was called off  
 Long ago, all murderous impulse  
 Medicated into the good, clean,  
 Half-hazy calm of trips to Tesco,  
 And alarms set for 7 am;  
 I'm nothing, no threat to anyone  
 Or anything you can name.  
 Just a house angel, another model citizen  
 With the steadiest of incomes  
 Earned from working the safest of jobs.

But should the tides ever rise  
 And mountains implode  
 Before we make it to safe ground,  
 Know this and only this:  
 It'll be me who laughs wildly as the smoke  
 Thickens over the city's  
 Toppled rubble and siren wail  
 And ash-choked air,  
 Trudging through the glorious wreckage...  
 Yes, I'll be there,  
 Gnashing the sight with my smile,  
 Blood leaking down my jaw.  
 Yes, I'll be there, just as I am here.



## OXYGEN THIEF

For Graeme Coughlan

*I think this technological, the science of obsolescence, or the fact that people are becoming obsolete... the people who are most affected by this technological obsolescence are the ones least capable of understanding the reason for it, so the venom builds up much quicker.*

- Hunter S. Thompson, speaking on WFMT-FM, 1965.

Butchered, bled and good for sweet fuck-all  
 Except to fizz in ethanol,  
 I am left to rot away in this fumigated jar,  
 A lame, stunted relic, cocooned from air  
 And my head stewing with sedatives.  
 The value I've come to outlive  
 Melts to ether, the bolus stirring in motion  
 A termless sleep, cellular corrosion.

The surgeon's hands are gloved, icily washed;  
 With his thumb, he traces a pattern of rust  
 Along ribbed arteries that once were stainless,  
 His procedure designed to be painless:  
 I see a scalpel's intent, the scan incomplete  
 As it files what's left of my body heat.  
 He saws into my marrow, as if gutting a fish  
 For market, blanched meat of my flesh

Laser-stamped with an I.D. number.

Meanwhile, my limp, unneeded member  
 Sags between my thighs; light-heads glisten  
 From above, stinging my eye to frisson  
 For the harvest of piss-poor seeds to begin.  
 My scar tissue is wiped, dropped in a bin.  
 I must, by necessity, be cut loose, a withered limb  
 Awaiting amputation, swathed in scrim.

I am neither standstill nor rampage; I welcome  
 It, the disposal of all I have become.  
 This isn't the end I thought I'd reach, at all,  
 Not even after the elbowroom or oxygen I stole,  
 Any base residue of my existence erased,  
 Stamped, sealed, set aside as excess waste.  
 Here's the operating table, the needle held steady.  
 Soon enough, I'll disappear for good. Be ready.



## HMS HERMIONE

*Setting of a mutiny by her crew on the 21st of September, 1797*

*"You showed no mercy yourself and therefore deserve none." Final words spoken to Capt. Hugh Pigot before he was killed.*

We spoke the language of bayonets that night:  
Clustered around a barrel of grog, our fears  
Of angry justice clouded over. From bowsprit  
To foc's'le, fizzing with the bile of mutineers,  
Crimson fog seeped through yardarm and gun port.  
The murmuring Caribbean tongued our ears;

Hatred was the name of our confederacy.  
Moored in the Mona Passage, slabs of islands,  
Tumours inflaming the tide, torn from every  
Mainland, sneered at our thirst. All hands,  
I confide, hadn't enjoyed a day of shore leave:  
Our feet sore for warm, tropical sands,

Our backs pungent from twelve bites of the lash,  
Nerves melting for the cool of a woman's touch.  
I kept a weather eye on the weapons cache  
And managed to wallop the tar on night watch,  
Declared mutiny with a flintlock's powder flash.  
I knew the captain's malice was really his crutch.

So it began, gun-smoke flooding the night air,  
The captain squealing for mercy as we hacked  
At his cur's limbs, let his bilge rat's blood pour  
In scarlet ooze. He could easily have embarked  
To plead our forgiveness, and atone for  
The lashings, rituals of disgrace, his forked

Tongue dribbling venom and scorn unquenched.  
And he *would* have received our pardon, our good will.  
But our scripture was now a palette of revenge,  
Our cutlasses drenched eagerly in his entrails.  
His nightshirt blushed with gore, and the stench  
Of his sweat; the sleeves flapped like sails

In a crosswind, as we flung him overboard  
To be mauled by the punch of the sea.  
On deck, his blood soiled the gun port,  
Tinged the cannons, divulging our mutiny.  
We waited until for shrieking to be die,  
And butchered eight more of the ship's company.

Already, dread of punishment gripped the men.  
We set a fretful course for the port of La Guaira  
Where the horizon is fully tortured by the sun,  
Summertime beams soundly flog the riviera  
And ships are manacled by their anchor chain.  
We prayed freedom was not a delusory chimera.



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Jim Ferguson is a poet, novelist and academic from Glasgow who has been writing, publishing and performing poetry for many years now. Among his publications are *Weird Pleasures* (Urban Free Press, 2020), *For Eva: selected poems 1992-2017* (Famous Seamus, 2017), and *Neither Oil Nor Water* a novel (Clochoderick Press, Paisley, 2018).



Jim Ferguson

## WHOSE ANONYMOUS CRIMES ARE THESE?

who are you  
 who are you  
 tell me, please, who the fuck are you

did you die in 62  
 with shamrocks on your shoes  
 tell me, dæmon, who the fuck are you—

wise old woman  
 with thistles in her hair  
 gave us balloons to soar into the sky

dirty little man  
 with a spanner on his hip  
 left blind-innocence with a broken skull—

every trust was trampled the day you were born  
 jesus nor buddha could redemption bring  
 there was silence in the forest, filthy shadows on the streets  
 winter storms in radioactive zoos

be much better if you're dead  
 no more seedlings running red  
 from your squalid hands and monster rendezvous—

turns out you were a bomb from America  
 from India, Pakistan, France, Russia, Israel  
 you were China, North Korea and Great Britain too  
 tell me, dæmon, who the fuck are you

who are you  
 who are you,  
 please don't flash me once again,  
 please don't show me dæmon who the fuck are you?

*continued overleaf..*

© Jim Ferguson

## SERENADE

bored with sex  
 bored with sex  
 bored with talking about sex

bored with life  
 bored with life  
 bored with talking about life

she screwed you to the floor  
 left your heart fucked by the door—

and when you're tongue tied  
 not all peanut butter tastes the same  
 when your fire's out  
 and your little plastic lighter has no flame  
 and when you're broken  
 looking bored is how to hide your pain

living war  
 re-living war  
 when you're home from the war

on the floor  
 on the floor  
 crawling underneath the floor

falling fast  
 gone at last  
 meeting earth and dust at last—

when you've been dangled far too long  
 on the end of that rope  
 the cock-pit has vanished  
 and the boxing ring's closed  
 no more punches to throw  
 no more blues to evade  
 off to hell in a handcart  
 with a slow slow-slow  
 s e r e n a d e

**s e r e n a d e**  
**we're not supposed to**

we're not supposed to  
 be feral children  
 happy to wander the streets of our talents

we're not supposed to  
 walk  
 on the road where the cars go

we're not supposed to  
 talk  
 to the police in the wrong strong tone

we're not supposed to  
 disrespect  
 millionaires' private property

we're not supposed to  
 tune  
 into the news from *Russia Today*

*continued overleaf..*

SERENADE *...contd*

we're not supposed to  
get  
drunk until we're sent to jail

we're not supposed to  
take  
control of our beautiful souls

we're not supposed to  
steal  
the wigs from balding judges

we're not supposed to  
appear  
*on Star Trek The Next Generation or Big Bang*

we're not supposed to  
outlive  
lazy lords who call themselves farmers

we're not supposed to  
caress  
our lovers with toil-weary hands

we're not supposed to  
mark  
life in seasons but only in storms

we're not supposed to  
forget  
to harvest an over-ripe crop

we're not supposed to  
neglect  
our couscous for tatties and rice

we're not supposed to  
eat  
excessive amounts of sugar and spice

we're not supposed to  
extract  
our own teeth with a dentist in sight

we're not supposed to  
migrate  
to the cities and steal the shit jobs

we're not supposed to  
use  
names like Charles or Harry or Grace

we're not supposed to  
mock  
the queen at Holyrood Palace

we're not supposed to  
mock  
the queen at Buckingham Palace

we're not supposed to  
mock  
the queen at Westminster Abbey

*continued overleaf...*

SERENADE *...contd*

we're not supposed to  
act  
like we are above ourselves

we're not supposed to  
remain  
forever the lower orders

we're not supposed to  
'live long and prosper'  
as part of the infinite natural structure

we're not really supposed to  
be here any longer  
yet here, here we are

— good night!



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Christine Murray lives in Dublin. She founded and curates *Poethead* dedicated to platforming work by women poets, their translators and editors. She is an active member of *Fired! Irish Women Poets and the Canon* which seeks to celebrate and draw awareness to the rich cultural heritage of Irish women poets through readings. Her latest book is *'bind'* (Turas Press, 2018)



## THRIVING OUTSIDE OF THE NARRATIVE, AN ESSAY ON POETIC PRACTICE

*You are a poet and in the end you must only care for your own views' (A.S Byatt)*

Book making is an art form that should be resistant to any and all imposed external narratives. It is an expression of the interiority of the poet and of their intimate relationship to their milieu through language and form. If the poet chooses to reject the narrative impositions propounded by the leaders of the literary world; essentially an out-of-tandem publication industry that has an uneasy alliance with the academy, then, it is in the gift of the poet to both ignore and object to what are essentially modes of narrative imposition, that are neither creative or literary.

The rejection of narrative imposition should be the poet's first port of call. The individual poet navigates the personal within their own language-ecology, be their art textual or performative. Poets are makers of books, and book-making is not about rushing hidebound into a narrative expectation that requires conformity in how it should be. The art of the poet and their relation to language should stand apart from narrative concerns, and be responsive alone to the interiority of the poet. However, we live in an age where it is quite easy to exert pressures on the poet to conform to linguistic and other ideologies that do not reflect their own relation to language and to their personal symbol-use. The job of the academy and the vaunted book publishing industry who may, for instance, desire their eco-crisis to be delivered in short sharp dilutable doses is to follow the poet. It is not their role to impose a narrative that amounts to a concoction of personal ideological stances having nothing to do with the poet's relationship to their art.

Christine Murray

The exciting thing about making books is that the very first book permits the second and subsequent books. The geography of book-making is traceable through the terrains set up by the poet in their use of symbol and language. In my case, for instance, I tend toward book-length poems, sequences, series and inter-connected images that have weaved through every single one of my books. Often, a new book will develop from a line or phrase that I had left in the text of its immediate predecessor. This is an organic process that connects all my work along a subterranean channel of communicativeness and I did not choose it. It began and progressed organically from my first collection 'Cycles' through to my newest collection due later this year.

'A Hierarchy of Halls' (Smithereens Press, 2018) is related to 'bind' (Turas Press, 2018) through the phrase,

*'A leaf fallen  
Is always a poem.'*

'Bind' is related to my new book through the phrase,

*'They and I,  
O how far we have fallen!  
Just to burn here.'*

The impetus and thematic structures of the books are vastly different, but there are strands or veins of images that share a commonality, or a narrative thrust that informs their symbol-use.

If I choose to write what compels me, I will always stand outside of the narrative zeitgeist and that is fine. I endured a decade of rejection from Irish book-publishers who did not really like my weird little songs. This may have been because they lacked the imagination to see the poems outside of the books that they were already inhabiting. The first book that I published was published out-of-state.

Many of my poems have been translated and shared across the globe, but I endured so many local rejections that I am really quite cautious about submitting in Ireland. I am lucky to have a sympathetic publisher now. Before that, I had thought to squeeze myself into little boxes and produce works that might tempt publishers, but that is an act of self-treachery that has no good outcome. Poems often flow out of me unbidden and at inconvenient times. Most recently, I was designing a web-project and a poem insisted on emerging. I took the time to write and submit it. Poems have 'happened' on walks or runs, when I have no handbag/notebook/pen and I have to carry their remnants home to put them onto a page. My family is used to my disappearances and abstraction at this point. We are poets if we permit ourselves to be. We write books if the book permits us to write it. Everything else is noise. I withdraw from noise, as I find it excruciating and time-wasting. The poem is the thing.

As I write there are areas of study opening in the academy that values itself as the natural home of Irish poetry. However, one has to remind oneself that poetry can and does thrive outside of the academy, whose job it is to interpret, archive and support rather than to direct or create a national poetry. Writing programs can provide excellent openers to the labyrinthine world of the literary arts, but they are simply (eye) openers that may create interest in a publishing career. Many, many poets do not study within the academy, nor do they require it to make their art. Some of these poets have been inexcusably ignored because it is hard to label and place them in an industry that requires both provenance and labels. As an aside, we refer to them privately as '*do we know them types?*' - if they haven't socialised or networked with the poet, the poet does not exist. Ireland is full of that bullshit and it prevents the dissemination of good literary art. Literary snobbishness is a thing that should be shameful, but in many cases, it isn't.

Outside of the bubble, the book industry itself has a hard time keeping pace with new developments. It is hard-set, conservative and incapable of reflection. While the entire world has found ways to subvert industry expectations and to change the way we make and view the book, industry is caught up in its creation based on their simplistic notions of 'market'. Eschewing

Eschewing best practice in digital archive and development has led to lucrative careers for those who seek quite wrongly to define poetry without the least modicum of knowledge of poetry developments and dialogues, or indeed in recent academic advancements in the literary field!

Increasing the diversity of editors could actually change this siege-mentality. A little humility and curiosity about poetic-development couldn't go wrong. The irony of the situation is that poetry is organic, changing and adaptive, the people who lord it are anything but.

So, where are we all going wrong when it comes to the literary arts in Ireland? Firstly, there is an unwonted resistance to the practitioner of poetry whose job it is to create and sustain modes of expression that are not subject to either industry standards or narrative imposition. Language is what matters, language is as resistant to narrative sway, as it is to a toxic business-to-arts view of poetry within the literary world. All the networking in the world does not create poets. It creates names, and some of those names haven't time to look at a page and to put words on it because they are caught up in corporatism and or academia.

For a poet to thrive outside of the imposed narrative, they must be capable of querying and interrogating the narrative. They must be loyal to and driven by their gift, and they must really be a student of language. This means being a reader, being curious, and being capable of silence in order to work with their creativity. It can take years to develop interiority and to hone their expression. While this is ongoing they have to navigate the world around them and find time to write. These are onerous duties to the work of poetry that require an ability to filter out argumentation, rejection and alienation. The reward of loyalty to poetry is the creation of the poem, anything else is immaterial and can be justly ignored.



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Michael S Begnal is the author of *Future Blues* (Salmon Poetry, 2012) and *Ancestor Worship* (Salmon Poetry, 2007), as well as the chapbook *The Muddy Banks* (Ghost City Press, 2016). His work has appeared in journals and anthologies such as *Notre Dame Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Empty Mirror*, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, *Scoundrel Time*, and *Thinking Continental: Writing the Planet One Place at a Time* (University of Nebraska Press, 2017), and he has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He can be found online at [www.mikebegnal.blogspot.com](http://www.mikebegnal.blogspot.com) and [https://twitter.com/Michael\\_Begnal](https://twitter.com/Michael_Begnal).



## MANY MANTISES

The magical insect appears again  
 crawling out of the bag  
 you brought them in,  
 a long slender body  
 and glowing green wings

now two or three different entities,  
 legs and reds and antennae  
 feathery and powdered—  
 you want to protect them  
 but it is their nature to emerge—

one will become enmeshed  
 in the local ecosystem,  
 another vibrates when it bites,  
 and the silver mantis escapes onto the bar  
 as the owner whacks at them—

it is what owners do  
 and have always done,  
 they're gonna do it  
 and are doing it to you,

no way to stop it  
 now that they've seized control  
 of the parameters of perception:  
 we are always living in normal times

Michael S Begnal

## RHINO

Something has gone wrong and  
we face imminent peril—  
from the regime, its supporters,  
their stockpiles of automatic weapons

already they attack us  
with executive decrees,  
expunging of the electoral rolls,  
the defunding of services, the theft  
of our common capital and care,  
the theft of kids coming across  
the border—

murder us,  
like the rhino in the zoo,  
horn sawed off  
as she lay  
bleeding  
in her cage

## PALINDROME VI

It is like we enter  
into this room, spherically  
shaped and filled with forms,  
and in this room we too  
acquire forms and feelings,  
blues and angers,  
anxiety and the joyous  
                  joining with others/

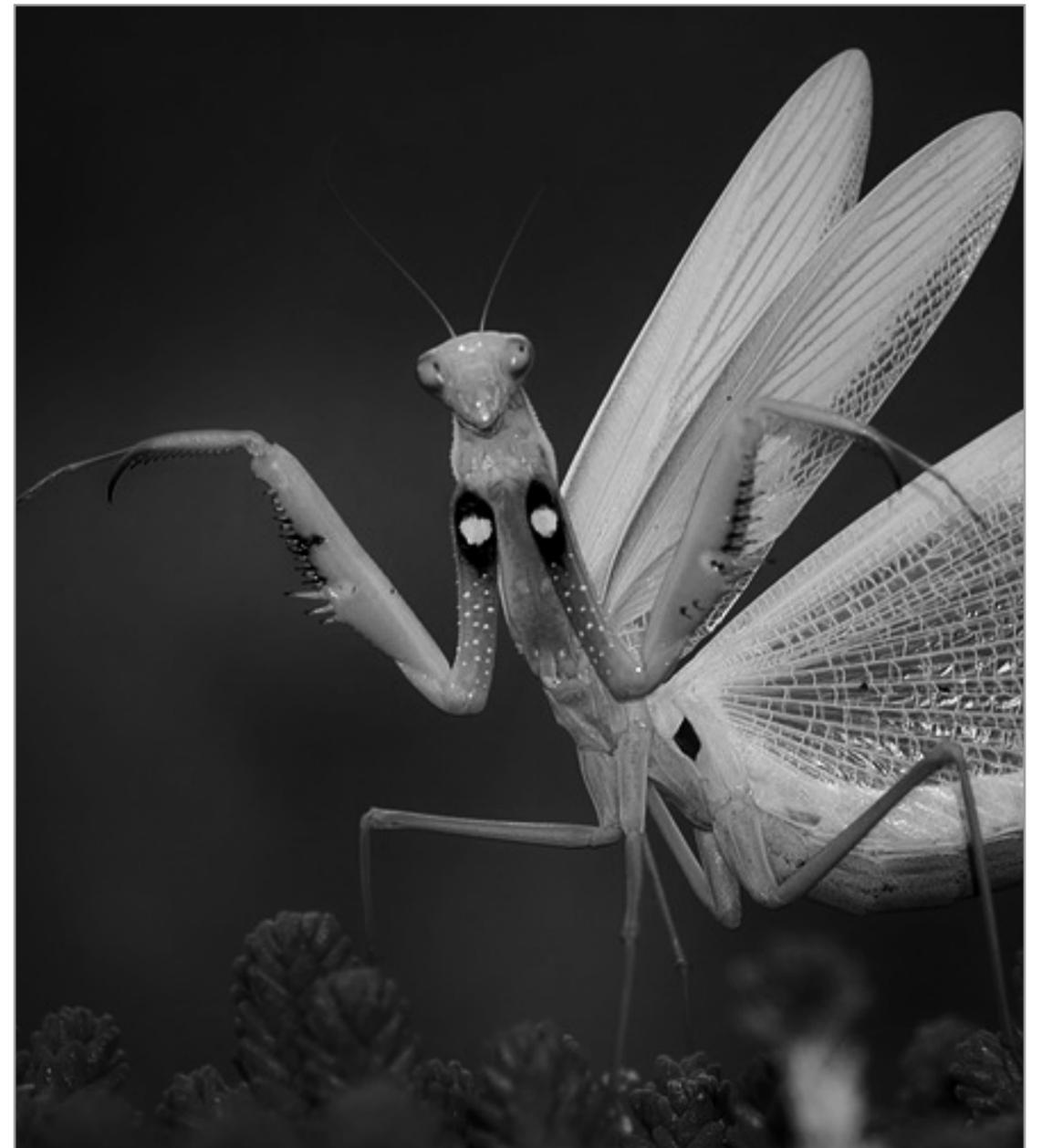
                  joining with you  
sentiently, and the dolorous  
pools of danger  
rewire and morph into leafings  
and on this moor we two,  
shaped and filled with form,  
as to a mushroom, fiercely,  
it is like we enter

## THIS BE MY NEWS

This be my news:  
that there is a field  
of action, that whether dry or wet  
it awaits a poet's words  
and that (still) there's wine,  
in the grass lazily blowing  
with the crickets and the katydids  
and like them you sometimes fly  
through the autumn air  
up from the grass,

that the field is thus also vertical  
and you might rise  
like a mist off the moss

and fly through the floss  
till you see the purple light  
of clouds, and see yourself  
as the others—as mantises—  
see  
"you"



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Brendan McCormack is the author of two collections of poetry, *Selling Heaven* (2013) and *Phuckle - Irish Auf English* (2014). Originally from Dublin, he is currently an environmental activist living in West Cork with his family. He was part of the 'Save our Skibereen' campaign which proved to be very successful and he ran as an independent in the local elections in 2019.



## OUR UNSPOKEN PLACE IN OUR ENVIRONMENT

*"A curtain is rising on the western world. A fine rain of soot, dead beetles, anonymous small bones. The audience sits webbed in dust." Suttree, Cormac McCarthy 1979*

Who knows what it means to live in this world?

Climate change. Global warming. Biodiversity crisis. Even these phrases, which are ubiquitous now, still dance just beyond any meaning that can be grasped.

We don't know what Climate Change will bring. Nor do we understand the implications of the biodiversity crisis.

We don't know these things because despite all the technical knowledge that has been accumulated by Western culture, we have no idea where we are or what we live in. The surprise is not that people cannot face up to the impending dangers that scientists are reporting – the surprise is that there are people who do face up to these problems. We seem to have spent the last few centuries creating a fiction that we could understand and use without realising that we were using up the reality that sustains us. And that reality is still a mystery. Even now, scientists are finding it difficult to predict with any certainty what is happening. This is a strange world we now inhabit.

In 2015, I moved with my wife and family to West Cork from Dublin. One could hope to be as profound as Dante and declare that in the middle of my life I found myself to be in a strange wood. My own poems were sparse, raw and violent with rage and despair. Trying to write into a world where language was useless in the face of reality became an exercise in trying to break the language, to break the words, to create spaces where I could fall through. This is not a lucrative enterprise.

Brendan McCormack

The materialism, which is shared by all sides of our current discourse, seemed predicated on creating an illusion. One in which millions can live while the dark side of that reality is distributed off to others who suffer exclusion.

Cormac McCarthy, the author who in some ways writes best about the rejection inherent in the idea of borders, and what is rejected there and at great cost can maybe never be reclaimed, is the one of the muses for this exploration.

I didn't become involved in environmentalism because I thought it needed to be saved. I became involved because I saw that it existed outside of us and that whatever I felt was missing might be found there.

It is a strange thing to move to the country. Some simple things become apparent. It is never dark. The sky is too bright. The moon too luminous. It is never silent. The ocean never stops. The shrieks of death at night. The constant low hum of distant wind turbines. The rumbles that are indeterminate. The planet becomes apparent. Where I live, the stone circle of Drombeg is not far. Many circles dot the landscape, as do fairy forts, standing stones and other markers from another time.

*'Mostly, I'd like to look over the country around the gorge again, just to bring some of it clear in my mind.*

*I been away a long time." One flew over the cuckoo's nest, Ken Kesey, 1962*

Drombeg is a stone circle with 16 stones and a recumbent stone. It takes many visits for it to sink in. Like many places in the world, it contains its own sense of strangeness that is apparent. Many times, I have stood in silence and watched as people arrive and like inmates let out for a while, they can barely contain themselves from talking incessantly as if this place might drive them mad.

Before we invented time, and clocks, Drombeg was the clock. It marked out the year by the passage of the sun and how the stones marked the solar events that reoccurred thus creating for that early engineering genius a sense of time. To create such a mechanism around which the universe revolved is beyond our capability now. We are dumb with information. We are too smart to be intelligent. Our assumptions declare us to be above needing to know where we are.

But it is possible to see this planet as a planet. To see it curve away. To see it slant. To see it tilt through the night sky, especially in Winter when Orion rises in the East and through the course of some nightly smoking, dances towards the West.

Is there a point to any of this?

I don't know. The more you step into it, the more the endless and deeply mystifying everything seems. Perhaps why we invented a world that we could live inside. But it is there, and it determines who we are even if by our exclusion of it.

So, when the world is declared, in ways, to be on fire. Who can know when few know that the world even exists? In trying to write about this, I was not having much luck but I did find here in West Cork other adventurers who struggle with these questions and these conversations led always out into the world.

Where are we? What is this place? Who are we?

(And why are we fucking it up and burning it up when it might be the only way to find out anything worth finding out. This thought became more important.)

Everyone in their life has moments. Joyce used to highlight them in his work. Epiphanies. Stark moments when the veil, the untruths, the delusions, the hopes, the fears, would drop like a curtain swung away and the world was revealed in a timeless moment for a second or longer.

In conversations with a friend, Jennifer - now sailing on a sail ship across the Atlantic in pursuit of the completion of a script about the sea - we spoke deeply about meaning and the sense of language being a pursuit of the shapes that world is made of began to emerge. For anyone who has taken hallucinogenics or entered deep meditative states, you will sense what I am speaking of.

*"the rest of my days I spend  
Wandering: wondering  
What, anyway,  
Was that sticky infusion, that rank flavour of blood, that poetry, by which I lived?"  
The Bear, Galway Kinnell, 1968*

In a loosening of the material world, dreams take on a meaning that is inevitable. Dreams may have no meaning but because of the way our minds work, we cannot but interpret them, even if the interpretation is that there is none - this leaves a mark.

We took a family holiday to the South of France and stayed in a quietly magnificent camping place called 'La Sciréne'. A place of swimming pools, nightly west end style musicals, tall palms trees, and occasional buddhist statues. A wonderful place south of Carcassonne.

On the last night, and this is immaterial to all of this story, but it is worth telling because we are leaving all that behind anyway - I had a dream. I found myself going down a path towards the ocean with a sense of foreboding. There, I found myself on the edge of a forest, on cliff top looking out at the ocean. A huge figure, rounded head, no real face but had a face, no real eyes but had eyes, emerged out of the water like a Moby Dick. And in the water around it were swimming all these stunningly coloured mermaids and the water where they were was luminescent and alive with energy.

It spoke to me and told me that I shouldn't be here. That I shouldn't have seen this. And it took up a bow and an arrow and it fired the arrow over my head where it stuck in the tree above me. I looked up and saw the arrow change into a white bird that flew down and alighted on my shoulder.

This bird, it said, will now follow you through the rest of your life because you have seen this.

I woke the next day and told my wife about the dream and I then told her I was going for a walk because I had to meet someone who knew why the resort was named 'La Sciréne' - the mermaid or the siren.

A chance encounter, as they all are, ended up chatting to the wife of the scuba trainer where I was collecting photos of my daughters. The conversation somehow moved to Lacan and Derrida and I asked her if she knew how the resort got its name. She didn't. So, I told her about the dream and she began to cry.

It was her father, who had died months earlier, that had named the resort. And she cried because she had never asked him why.

What does this have to do with anything? What does it not?

Back in Skibbereen, an American multi-national plastic company had been granted planning permission for a 5000 sq metre Thermoplastic Compounds Facility on the outskirts of the town. The town where my mother was from, where we had spent our holidays growing up, where the land of my forefathers and foremothers lay up in the hills of Castlehaven.

I could say how we took them on. All the issues. But really, it was about one reality colliding with another and the reality of the world when you inhabit something of it, takes no shit. In the one corner, Cork County Council, An Bord Pleanala, and RTP Company - all miserable in their detachment from the world, from reality and from the onset of that other reality.

In the other corner, a community that embraced the dream of reality and not the dream of this world's denial. And this is to be found in so many people in West Cork. People from everywhere. Like I said, it is Ireland's California – there is gold here, some special kind, that draws artists and writers and poets and chefs and artisans. And that is why there is no fucking plastic factory in Skibbereen.

We asked for money. We got money. We paid lawyers. They went to court. We wiped the floor with them.

Everything went our way. And in the High Court, An Bord Pleanála conceded defeat without arguing their case. (This is how poor official Ireland is and probably why we have such a poverty amongst us.)

The planning permission was quashed. And a month later RTP Company withdrew from the process completely. I don't know if the bird still sits on my shoulder or whether I will ever discover the words I am looking for, but I know now some simple things.

We are strange but so is the world and thus is our home for now. That we are destroying it without really knowing we are doing so should be the cause for real alarm. But how do you wake the dreamers? And have we set our alarm?



By Aaro Koskinen - Own work, Attribution, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2261813>

Dr Peter Sheekey is originally from Cabra, Dublin but spent 15 years working as a teacher in Switzerland and Italy. For the past two decades, Peter has been a researcher and practitioner in the field of second language learning and social orientation for refugees and migrants in Dublin. His doctoral research focussed on the lived experiences and social barriers facing border-crossing adult migrant English language learners in Ireland. On foot of these studies, he set up the Intercultural Language Service in Ballybough, Dublin to meet these challenges. Also, he has created the Intercultural Storytelling Project, where members of local and new communities share their stories to promote greater intercommunity understanding and social cohesion.



## THE INTERCULTURAL STORYTELLING PROJECT

### The social context of the project

The Intercultural Storytelling Project was developed to meet the challenges to social cohesion in areas where both New Irish<sup>1</sup> and settled community members can face forms of social exclusion while also promoting literacy and language contact for marginalised migrants. The access issues and linguistic contact challenges facing newer Irish can be considered systemic, while those facing settled members include exclusion from job markets and institutional socio-economic neglect (Ilan, J., 2011). In order to address these challenges, our storytelling practice operationalises a two-way model of social integration where the onus is also on the local population to embrace the stories and cultures of the newcomers while sharing their own storied experiences (Carrera and Atger, 2011).

For the New-Irish in question here, adult first-generation migrants, who have reached a level of spoken English where they can survive, the journey to successful resettlement is often not over. Even after more than a decade, some migrants I surveyed for my PhD still struggle with access to educational, vocational and social networks due to limited literacy and social contact (Sheekey, 2015). Little (2010; 7, 2009) maintains that since the process of integration is not a short journey, and cannot usually be completed within a few years of arrival, so

it is thus not enough for the receiving country to provide special integration pointed out in the second edition of the European Commission's Handbook on Integration, it is necessary to adapt all kinds of public services to the needs of immigrants, including housing and access to the labour market and education programmes.

At the same time, there are pockets of urban areas in Dublin where more settled community members may have ambivalent attitudes to the New-Irish, who can make up more than fifty percent of the local population (McGinnity et al., 2018).

Peter Sheekey



Our storytellers at work in Ballybough

### Intercultural Storytelling at Ballybough

During the winter of 2017, I recruited a group of volunteers from our school, Intercultural Language Service(ILS)<sup>2</sup>, and other community networks in Dublin to do our 1st intercultural storytelling with a cohort of learners recruited at our school. In March 2017 we were ready to begin our Intercultural Storytelling Project.

Each Friday for 12 weeks, the storytelling pairs were given themes to work on in the form of narrative frames. Narrative frames are an A4 page with unfinished sentences or question prompts used by our tellers to draw out the life experiences of their fellow teller. Both types of frame can be used to provide a scaffold for writing, helping the storytellers to co-write their stories around the themes. The weekly themes we used were designed to explore and share the universals and differences in the life stories and cultures of our storytellers, and included the following topics as examples.<sup>3</sup>

- The Old Town – writing about how familiar a town or city has changed
- Arrivals – writing about first impressions of a country
- My Year – about experiences and notable events of the past year
- My hopes for Next Year – about future plans and dreams
- My Identity Star – a mind map exploring participants many identities
- Biopoem – a short biographical snapshot poem

The biopoem frame was probably our participants’ favourite. Here is the narrative frame we used, with instructions about how to create a partner’s biopoem:  
How to make a Biopoem:

- (Line 1) First name
- (Line 2) Three or four adjectives that describe the person
- (Line 3) Important relationship
- (Line 4) Two or three things, people, or ideas that this person loves
- (Line 5) Three recent/current feelings this person has experienced
- (Line 6) Three fears this person has

- (Line 7) Accomplishments
- (Line 8) Two or three things this person wants to see happen or wants to experience
- (Line 9) The residence of the person
- (Line 10) Last name

Here is Nasouh’s biopoem (a Syrian refugee) written by his storytelling partner, Sylwia. (They are both pictured at the back of the photograph above)

Nasouh  
Whose name means “advisor”  
Who is peaceful and wise  
Father of Murhaf, husband of Falak  
Who loves learning English – stubbornly  
And loves learning about cultures around the world  
Who is always worried about Syria and its people  
But feels happy to be a survivor  
Who is scared of losing those he loves  
Who is proud of his son  
And of himself for learning English  
Who hopes to see peace in his country and no hunger anywhere in the world  
Who lives in Marino  
Hossari

### Impacts of intercultural storytelling in Ballybough

All in all, our intercultural storytelling project has been a remarkable success. At the time of writing, we have run three storytelling cycles of three months each, and another two cycles have taken place at Dublin City University (see below). Three book of these stories have been published. Such is the power of storytelling that our tellers bonded very quickly, and had great fun sharing their stories. Our New-Irish learners had found a new social network, someone who listened attentively to their experiences, hopes and dreams, and some of the locals came back for subsequent storytelling cycles.

Aside from the very positive impacts on the English literacy for our learners, the process of telling, writing and publication of these stories has produced very beneficial washback into both the local communities, in terms of social cohesion, and into the heritage communities of the learners. There was much excitement among the students at seeing their work in print, with some skyping home to show their work. A further benefit of publishing these stories is that they are now available as authentic and deeply relevant reading material which can encourage other learners to 'have a go', and tempt other local community members to join in, too.

Built into our storytelling was a feedback unit which provided some insights into how the process impacted on the tellers. Kitman from Iraq reported the following, and it is notable her use of the term 'socialised': "It really helped my English language and skills, has given me a lot of experiences how to be socialized in a friendly way and how get involved and learn from friends stories". Subsequent to her involvement in our storytelling, Kitman was able to access further education, a goal which had eluded her for years. Maceij from Poland also noted the social aspects in his feedback. It could be argued that Maceij's increased confidence surely had some hand in him finding a job in a local hospital shortly after our storytelling project had ended:

What I got from the project is meeting and socializing people, improving my English in more creative ways. I feel that I am more confident using English because it is a more creative way of talking and I think more about how I try to communicate. I would like to continue in a group like this, coming together to do something that could become even more creative.

One 'local', Marie from Cabra in Dublin, penned a piece about her experience in the journal *Around Europe* (2017):

Being part of this project has given me an insight into some of the lives of the new Irish. While many stories are told with humour, like one Polish student warning his visiting friends to get used to eating chips with vinegar, or that Irish people don't understand the clock. Behind this there are also

stories of great loneliness and isolation for those so far from home who can't speak the language. Alleviating such loneliness and isolation is a major aim of Dr. Sheekey's project.

Intercultural storytelling has been adopted by Dr Veronica Crosbie at Dublin City University (DCU) as part of a University of Sanctuary initiative which brings refugees from an Irish direct provision centre (where asylum seekers await processing) at Mosney, just north of Dublin, to DCU to practice storytelling and find social inclusion with students and staff there. This shows how situated storytelling practices are transferable to different settings. All of this led to an important international colloquium in September 2017 at DCU called *Asylum Narratives*, which included very inspiring reports on the DCU storytelling project. Also, we just completed a similar project with a group of 80 1st year students at the Larkin College in Dublin 1, which could be replicated in other national schools.

### Conclusion

Intercultural Storytelling can be very for both new and settled communities, and I would conclude that there are significant benefits on the fronts of social inclusion/cohesion for both, and real impacts for language and especially literacy progression for migrant learners most in need. Situating literacy practices in the lives of learners and sharing them by using narrative methods in the praxis outlined here can build stronger literacy through meaningful biographical texts, and by sharing these texts with more settled community members, we can construct greater social cohesion in communities under pressure. I would argue that the praxis presented here offers us a very useful toolkit for the challenges facing many migrant language learners and the changing demographics in certain communities. In conclusion, inter-community, socially-situated practices like this are both feasible and necessary to promote personal and inter-community development and cohesion.

#### End Notes:

- 1 New-Irish includes groups of all status types, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in general
- 2 ILS, a free English Language and integration service, has at any one time 100 learners from over 40 counties at its school in Ballybough - [interculturallanguageservice.com](http://interculturallanguageservice.com)
- 3 All our frames, along with a PDF of our published books, guides and literature, are available on the storytelling page of our website <https://www.interculturallanguageservice.com/storytelling-at-the-ils.html>

Linda Ibbotson is a poet, artist and photographer from the UK, currently residing in Co. Cork, Ireland. Her poetry, artwork and photography has been published internationally including The Irish Times, Irish Examiner, Poethead, Levure Litteraire, Enchanting Verses Literary Review, RDS Dublin, California Quarterly, Itaca (featured Irish poet and translated into Romanian), časopis Harmonie (Czech music magazine) Lime-light ( Australian classical music and arts magazine) and Boyne Berries 27. Linda was invited to read at the Abroad Writers Conferences held in Ireland. Also read on radio and performed in France by Irish musician and actor Davog Rynne. She writes a poetry and arts blog 'Contemplating the Muse'.

*Dedicated to my mother who passed away – May 2019.*

## BARGEMUSIC - BROOKLYN

I am sitting in The River Cafe, *Brooklyn Bridge*, breakfasting on cinnamon porridge, topped with bananas, blueberries and strawberries, drinking tea out of vintage bone china tea cups, listening to *Cole Porter and Sidney Bechet's - Si tu vois ma mere* and feeling nostalgically transported to Paris of the 1920's.

In stark contrast, across the East River to Lower Manhattan, reminiscent of a theatrical backdrop, is the frenzied financial district, unsteady in its shifting tides of commerce and political unrest. My eyes looked to the place ideas are born. Cold concrete and lights stared back at me. *Tall masts of Manhattan* so aptly described the skyscrapers in the venerable Walt Whitman's poem *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry* inscribed on the metal railings that wrap around the grey boardwalks of the Fulton Ferry landing.

The River Cafe's homely neighbour, gently surrendering to the East River swell is legendary *Bargemusic*. An intrinsic part of the landscape, a *sine qua non* to the classical music scene and described as New York City's floating concert hall. This 100 foot long white barge is steadfastly anchored at the ferry landing and my reason for being in New York, an invitation by Serbian/American classical pianist Ivan Ilić to photograph and to relish three consecutive late afternoon piano concerts held in this authentic intimate setting!

The Brooklyn waterfront, now awash with trendy apartments, many renovated from former cargo warehouses and lofts attracting the artistic bohemian, is a far cry from the grim weedy desolation and dereliction of bygone years, the scene when *Bargemusic*, a former steel coffee barge was established in 1977, now with approx 200 concerts annually. After the passing of her husband this was the vision and passion of concert violinist Olga Bloom, originally from Boston. She regularly played in orchestras such as the *American Symphony Orchestra* and numerous Broadway Musicals, however, on deciding to retire from that genre she focused her time and resources on establishing a regular and easily accessible chamber music venue. When reading about Olga and listening to radio interviews I greatly admire her tenacity, strength to overcome challenges and her warm sense of humour. This was her third barge as the others were not suitable and she periodically lived on the barge. It took 10 years to find a suitable mooring.



Linda Ibbotson

Her first concerts were to the local longshoremen who basked in the mid-day sun listening to Brahms or Bach! Olga particularly supported young Julliard students, in line with this quote from the New York Times – Reflection of a Dream- Olga Bloom – *“There are many wonderful musicians who work so hard and never get a chance to be heard. I wanted to create a place for them to perform in an environment that would nurture, rather than destroy, their creativity.”* She sadly passed away in 2011 aged 92.

Inside the barge, the cherry wood panelling enhanced the acoustics and replaced steel walls. It took over a year to fetch piece by piece in her Volkswagon from a Staten Island Ferry. The brick fireplace a focal point for winter warmth, the wooden benches and comfortable red chairs seating approx 150. On the stage the Steinway grand piano is securely bolted to the floor! I imagine listening to the after concert lingering notes, embodied as a narrative in the eaves. As the concerts were late afternoon my eyes were transfixed beyond the panoramic windows, watching the luminosity of the tangerine sunset light of Manhattan, in contrast, skyscraper shadows stood back to back between the warp and weft of its broad avenues. The Brooklyn Bridge, darkening into a grey silhouette, towered above like a giant harp, as if inviting you to pluck its strings, its Gothic shaped arches remind me of an *Ogive* doorway I walked through in Notre Dame, Paris.

### **The magnificent concerts –**

*“Ivan Ilić, a pianist of penetrating intelligence and pellucid technique.....”* as described in The New Yorker. From his website - *“Ivan Ilić enjoys a unique place in today’s musical landscape thanks to his unconventional repertoire and multifaceted approach. By combining performing with writing, producing radio and video, and drawing upon key interdisciplinary experiences with visual art, acting, and the neuroscience of learning, he develops new audiences for unfamiliar music.”*

He has been appointed Musician in Residence at Ulster University for 2018-2021 Ivan plays with clarity and sensitivity, powerful and yet gentle at the same time which I find rare and expresses an enthusiasm for research that is contagious! His programme over the three days was tailored to suit all tastes, from the contemporary such as *Hans Otte, Scott Wollschleger, Keeril Makan, Melaine Dalibert, Satie* and *Debussy* to the more traditional *Haydn, Beethoven* and *Reicha*.

Listening to Hans Otte *The Book of Sounds*; the first of the three concerts, each contemplative composition reminded me of a vignette and not surprising to read that they were greatly influenced by Eastern meditation. It felt as if significant moments in life’s mercurial waters ran through my veins as if a gentle pulse to which I surrendered before regaining equilibrium. The accompaniment; the creaking barge, lapping of waves and sporadic toot of a passing cargo ferry in a pitch perfect A flat. I imagined notes, shaped like October leaves move with the tide as if migratory birds along the East River, past Williamsburg to Long Island Sound and I remembered how beautiful small things can be. Wonderful concert reviews from New York Classical Review *“smooth as flowing water, with a great evenness of tone and rhythm...”* and Limelight *“.. his touch light as a falling leaf.”*

It was refreshing in the Saturday concert to hear Ivan play lesser known contemporary meditative compositions with enviable poetic titles; French composer Melaine Dalibert, the repertoire including USA and world premiers- Based in New York City, Scott Wollschleger’s composition *Music Without Metaphor*, Ivan had previously recorded on *The Transcendentalist* and Keeril Makan *Capture Sweetness* written especially for Ivan! Along with Debussy and Satie made for a *coup de maître!* In the semi darkness a very attentive and appreciative audience, the lighting reminiscent of a Caravaggio masterpiece.

Sunday included Beethoven and Antoine Reicha. Complementing his Reicha Rediscovered CD series for Chandos Ivan recently filmed a documentary series in which he wrote and presented. Personally, the *tour de force* was Stegmann’s transcription of Haydn’s Symphony 44, *Trauer* discovered in a Cologne trunk! I adore the *Allegro con brio*, sensually building to a crescendo then bursting into sweet cascades of ripples. The CD launched in 2019!

Between rehearsals and concerts I explored the juicy streets of Brooklyn Heights, along with the joggers and dog walkers. Pineapple, Orange and Cranberry Street, the names alone quenched my thirst. I watched squirrels dart around meticulously clipped Buxus Sempervirens and golden pumpkins. Autumn permeated the air. A walnut Steinway in a Brownstone bay window beckoned. It was on the corner of Cranberry Street, the same street where Walt Whitman's first edition of his poetry book "*Leaves of Grass*" was printed in 1855, the red brick building sadly no longer standing. In the same neighbourhood I discovered the literary houses of W H Auden; tree lined Montague Terrace where he lived on a top floor penning *New Year Letter*, Henry Miller's la vie boheme at 91 Remsen Street in 1924/5, the sympathetically restored 70 Willow Street where Truman Capote wrote *Breakfast in Tiffany's* and 13 Pineapple Street built in 1790, formerly the home of a sea captain inspired his essay *A House on the Heights*.

*Bargemusic* is, from 2005 in the caring hands of Olga Bloom's dear friend, violinist Mark Peskanov, President and Artistic Director, born in the Ukraine. From their Website - "*Mark emigrated from Odessa to the USA aged 15. His phenomenal musicianship won him both the Aspen and Juilliard concerto competitions, bringing him to the notice of Isaac Stern and Mstislav Rostropovich and rocketing him into the top echelons of the music world.*" "*Peskanov inaugurated Tokyo's Suntory Hall with Yo-Yo Ma and Stern, and Weill Recital Hall with Stern, Midori and Gil Shaham. Collaborating with these colleagues prompted Peskanov to turn intensively to the chamber music repertoire's more intimate, complex, and dialogical possibilities. His delight in chamber music, his independent artistic vision, and his desire to mentor promising musicians as he had been mentored, led to Peskanov's present role.*"

There are several concert series to savour, such as *Here and Now, Then and There, Masterworks, Music in Motion* on Saturdays at 4pm with free admission, all attracting prominent musicians.

In a world where conflict and unpredictability is tantamount, cherished venues such as Bargemusic anchor, bring pleasure, stability and vitality that is both socially and soulfully enriching. Music is our constant companion when alone and I am convinced music is my raison d'être.

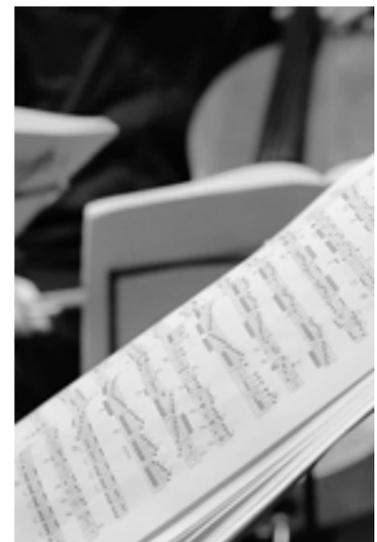
In the words of Plato "*Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything.*"

*Sidney Bechet's - Si tu vois ma mere* translation - "If you see my mother."

Dedicated to my mother who passed away - May 2019.

<https://www.bargemusic.org/>

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



Éamon Mag Uidhir studied at Trinity College Dublin where he edited the literary magazine *Icarus*, back in the day. After a career in journalism, Eamon returned to his literary roots and has been writing novels, short stories and poems in a veritable frenzy of literary endeavour. He also edits *Flare* Dublin's only narrowsheet, and helps curate *The Sunflower Sessions* held every last Wednesday of the month in *The Lord Edward* opposite Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin.

## EPITAPH FOR SLAVE GIRL EROTION [EPIGRAMS, BOOK V, XXXIV]

*Hanc tibi, Fronto pater, genetrix Flaccilla, puellam  
Oscula commendo deliciasque meas,  
Parvula ne nigras horrescat Erotion umbras  
Oraque Tartarei prodigiosa canis.  
Inpletura fuit sextae modo frigora brumae,  
Vixisset totidem ni minus illa dies.  
Inter tam veteres ludat lasciva patronos  
Et nomen blaeso garriat ore meum.  
Mollia non rigidus caespes tegat ossa, nec illi,  
Terra, gravis fueris: non fuit illa tibi.*

To you my father and mother, Frontor and Flaccilla,  
I entrust little Erotion, my joy and my delight,  
So that the dark shadows and the monstrous mouth  
Of Cerberus won't frighten her.  
She would have survived a sixth cold winter,  
Had she lived but six days more.  
Between such venerable protectors may she sport  
And play, and babble my name in her little lisp.  
Let no rough turf lie on her tender bones.  
And do not press heavily on her, earth.  
She pressed but lightly on you.

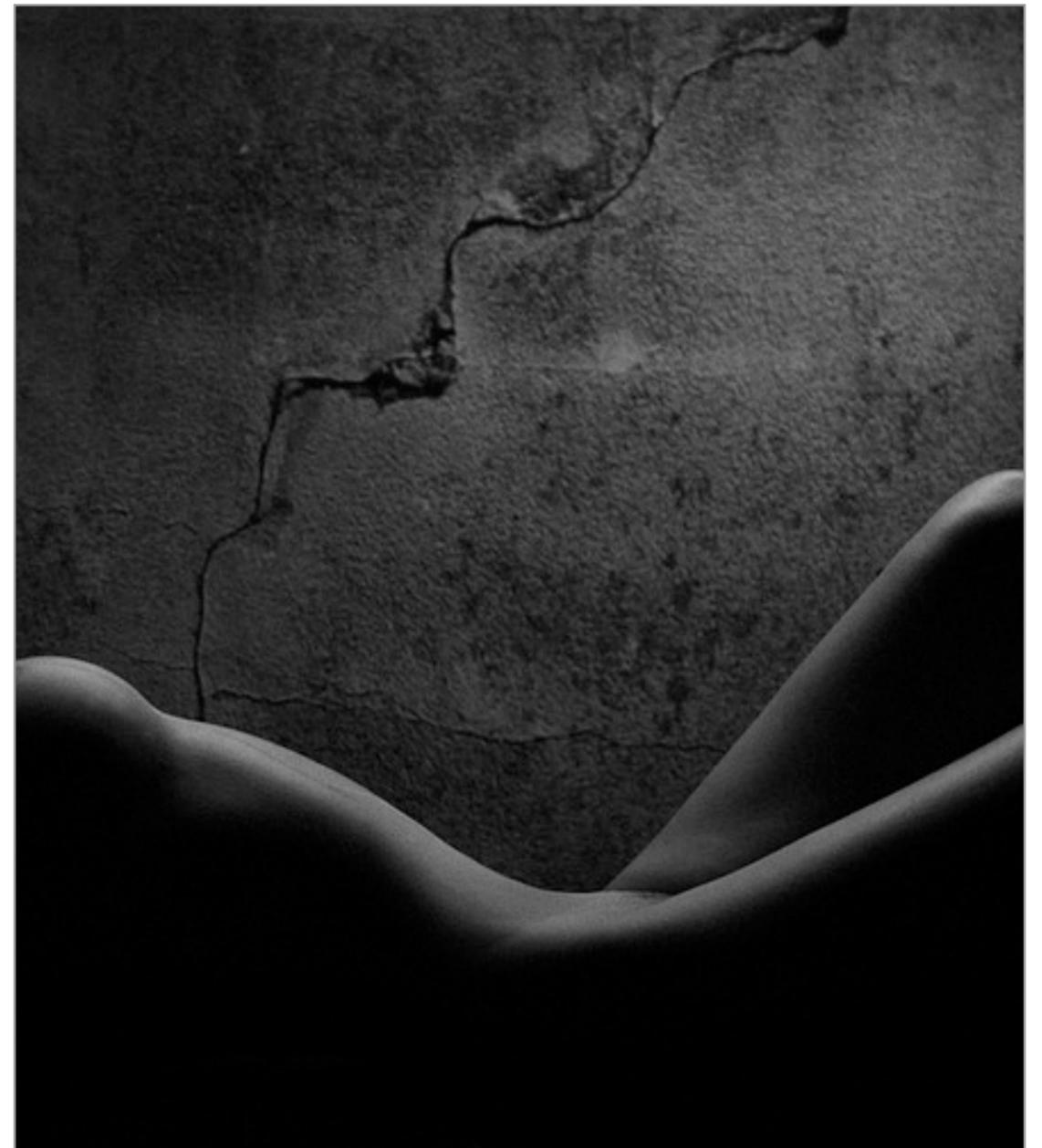


Éamon Mag Uidhir

A VISIT FROM DOCTOR SYMMACHUS  
AND HIS HUNDRED STUDENTS  
[EPIGRAMS, BOOK V, IX]

*Languēbam : sed tu comitatus protinus ad me  
venisti centum, Symmache, discipulis.  
centum me tetigere manus Aquilone gelatae :  
non habui febrem, Symmache, nunc habeo.*

I was poorly, Doctor Symmachus. Then you scurried  
round to me with your hundred students.  
A hundred hands chilled by the North Wind pawed me.  
Though I hadn't had fever, Symmachus, I do now.



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