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Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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DANIEL LUSK
The Tablecloth Is White

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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Thank you Irish Artist **Emma Barone**
for coming through with another of your
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Daniel Lusk is author of six poetry collections and other books, among them *The Shower Scene from Hamlet*, *The Vermeer Suite*, and a memoir, *Girls I Never Married*. A former commentator on books for NPR and well-known for his teaching, he has been a Visiting Poet at The Frost Place in Franconia, N.H., Eigse Carlow Festival in Ireland, and Juniata College, Huntingdon, PA. His poetry has been published widely in literary journals, among them *Poetry Ireland*, *North American Review*, *Poetry*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Nimrod*, *The Iowa Review*, and *Salamander*.



THE TABLECLOTH IS WHITE

*"...tout respire a nouveau
La nappe est blanche"*
—Rene Cagelles

Her bedroom was a closet.
And knowing of no better place,
I crawled in to lie on the mattress beside her.

Music of friends from beyond the door.
Voices leaked in. A thin corona of light.

In Edward Hopper paintings
a maid in uniform
turns down the sheets;
a waitress with her slender back
to the uptown couple at an adjacent table

suggest intimacies beyond our view.

Glimpses into bygone rooms,
hotel and apartment windows
glow against the city's silhouette
like a hillside of far-flung fires.

We may return alone
to these hearths in our daydreams—
a remembered cupboard or cafe
where we tucked ourselves away for love

or solitude in a tumultuous house
—someone practices piano, someone sets
the supper table, someone calls up the stairs.

Our hearts may crave such hide-and-seek
to fuel the wistful undercurrent
winding among our hidden urges and desires.

Daniel Lusk. Photo credit: Alison Redlich.

GAME OF SHADOWS

Geese crossing a cobbled street,
a cloud-drenched hovel of driftwood and thatch,
a huddle of sheep crowds a country road.

As in a poem dimly remembered,
servants dance in the courtyard
*because a prince has been born in the house.**

The movie takes us to places
we have neither been nor imagined.

Fire-escapes tumble from broken buildings
in the rain, crocodiles of school children round
a corner, a barefoot violinist on a dim subway stair
—an air that will follow us home.

Windswept steps to a cliff-top monastery,
a mumble of circling monks in cumquat robes.

We forget that these are shadows and light.

Why do we need to leave home,
we think, those of us who are faint-hearted.
The outer world dissolves and we
won't leave our seats until the lights come up.

When will we find courage
to desert our customary duties and place?
Stars come out, a meteor shower
above the theater parking lot.

We marveled at the horses, drawing
little sleighs over the snow.
And wonder if they might be there still
when or if we finally come.

**ref. Robert Bly*

TOWN FARM TO CONVERSE BAY

We are paddling on the deep lake,
passing the encampments of the rich,
encampments where tonight the rich lie dreaming.

Our canoe lolls on the lift and fall
of rolling waves, swelling the heavy waters,
like a heavy hand, shifting toward the shore.

We sense how the rock cliffs
and their sloping porches plunge into the bowl
of the lake, recalling how in eons past
they were thrust up from the fissure.

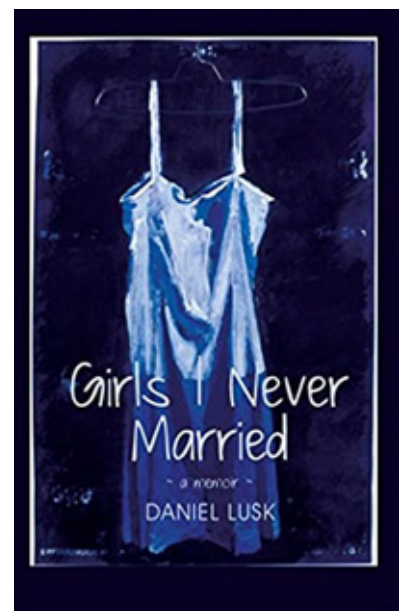
Now, as in a dream, our fears surround us
and we keep our breathing steady by looking far
into the distance—sailboats, mountains, swells
and billowing cloud formations.

*In the beginning was the silence.
Then the first o.
How the first unspeaking cracked the world
and they who had been born conceived the sense
of what could be ancestor voices.*

Night fallen, we are camped where they camped
on the bluff above the shore.
We are long asleep.

Then the cry that wakes us
to the deep past and the silence.

Out of sleep, the birth cry of the nether bird
that reaches us, here by the sleeping lake,
out of the fulsome depths we share.



© Daniel Lusk

Angela Patten is author of three poetry collections, *In Praise of Usefulness* (Wind Ridge Books), *Reliquaries* and *Still Listening*, both from Salmon Poetry, Ireland, and a prose memoir, *High Tea at a Low Table: Stories From An Irish Childhood* (Wind Ridge Books). Her work has appeared in literary journals and anthologies. In 2016 she received a National Poetry Prize from the Cape Cod Cultural Center. She now lives in Burlington, Vermont where she is a Senior Lecturer in the University of Vermont English Department.



AFTER THE STORM

Calm and sunny now, the snow
like eggwhites and sugar
whipped to a creamy sheen.

Cardinal shows up at the feeder
conscious of the dashing figure
he cuts in his ecclesiastical robe.

Catholic cardinals wear scarlet
symbol of their readiness
to shed their blood for Christ—

a gruesome faith. Cardinal
at the bird feeder might scoff
at such a bird-brained notion.

He flies in like a feathered arrow
to its target, unstoppable
as hunger, red as desire.

Angela Patten

AFTER CATARACT SURGERY

“The source of all light is in the eye,” Alan Watts

My father forfeited one eye
to clerical brutality
in that country of the blind
where priests were permitted to impose
their hellish visions on the innocent,
the foolish, and the weak.

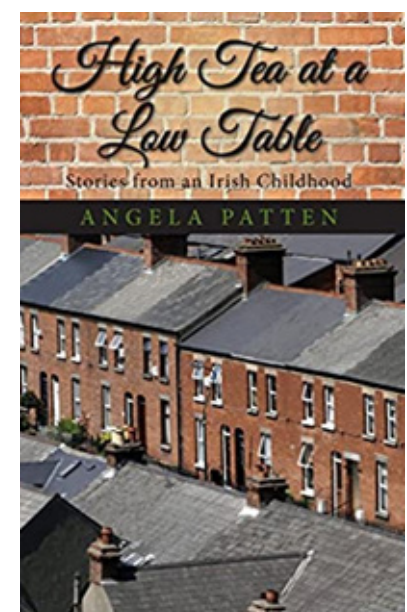
Did it restore some crucial balance
in the universe when the ophthalmologist
withdrew the gauzy cataract
through a pinhole aperture
in my own blue eye like Jesus
who restored the blind man’s sight
by mixing sacred spittle in the dirt?

And was it only cataract removal
that made the goldenrod more deeply yellow
when I emerged days later
from the shadowed woods
into the sunlit field?

Why had I never noticed
the discarded seed-pod
of the Queen Anne’s Lace
was a tiny basket, intricate
as a bird’s abandoned nest?

The Monarch on the Joe Pye Weed
opened and then closed its wings,
quivering with excess of love
like a Victorian lady fluent
in the language of fans.

How many of us with two good eyes
reduce our worldview to a small rectangle
gazing at our palms like children
peering through the windows
of a dollhouse?



MAKING STRANGE

Instructions on a packet of *Strepsils*:
“Consult your doctor if symptoms persist or anything unusual happens.”

There’s nothing strange with us
my brother says on the phone from Ireland.
Is there anything strange with you?

No, nothing strange with us, I tell him
except the image of your face on FaceTime
and the miracle of our transatlantic conversation.

Beam me out of here, Scotty, straight into
your living room three thousand miles away.

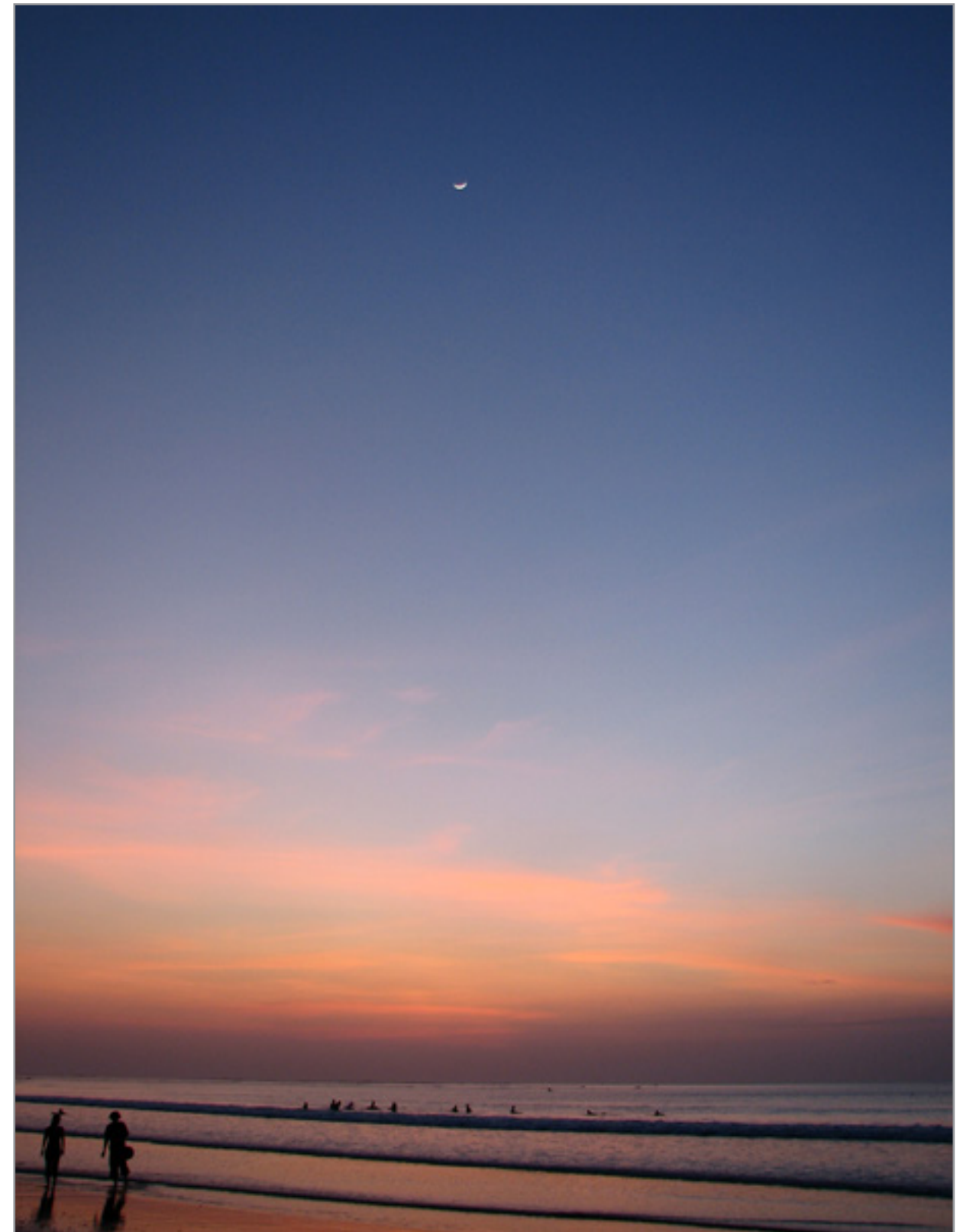
He’s only making strange, the young mother apologizes
gently removing the screaming infant
from a stranger’s arms.

Strange how we cling to our initial narratives
half-truths we tell about ourselves
our flaws and failings, ignoring everything
we have accomplished since leaving home.

I like the strange taste of certain sounds
As in the colors—*ultramarine, cochineal, crimson*
in names like *Imogen* and *Archibald*
in words like *clavicle, iris, serpentine*.

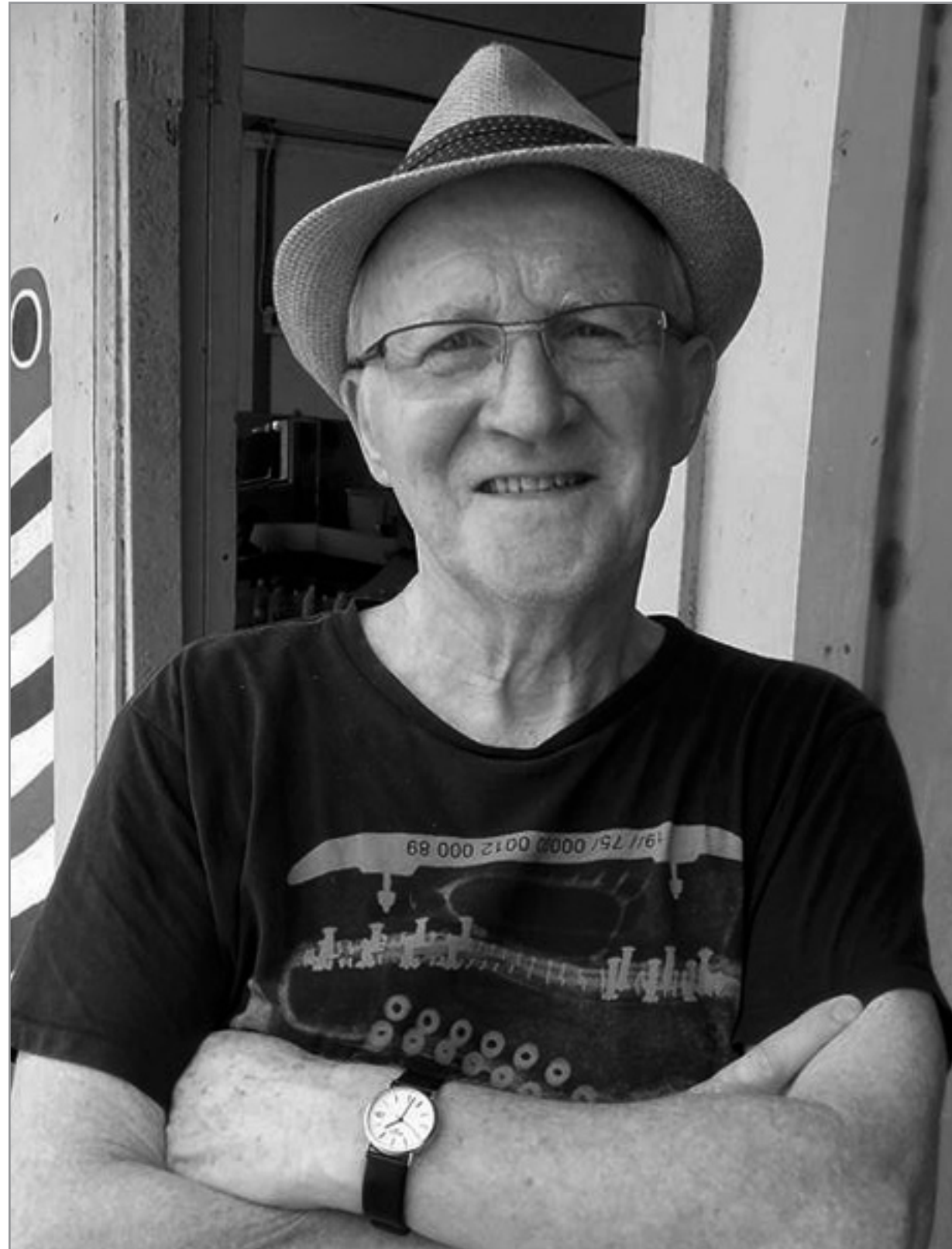
Strange too the art of breathing
weeping, breathing again.

There’s nothing strange, I say
into the magic mirror of my mobile phone
absolutely nothing and everything.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas, Bali, Indonesia.

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



SILENT ORDERS

There were druids, ascetics and
abbesses long before our day.
Some moved on, heard light
and became saints. Most lived
in routines of matins, vespers,
fine wines and herb gardens.
They had honey and garlic in
their bones and could be seen
in purple fields smiling alone.
They didn't need to screw up
their eyes looking for playmates
or lie on their backs to tarnish
their faces in July heat. They'd
amble to and from toil when
bells tolled and speak when
spoken to. Hills and valleys
joined with them in worship.
There was no panic in the fields.

If, for once, we could be quiet,
down tools and listen, we might
hear them – silent as ever – in cells.
It has to do with love. It's no secret.

Terry McDonagh

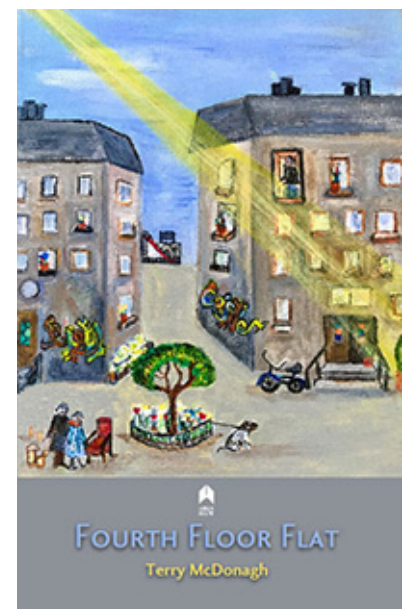
FLYING HIGH

Any excuse and Mike was up there
out of sight and sound in cloud nine.
He'd whisper softly *I won't sign* and
another Merlot please. Down below
on *terra firma*, there were traps and
snares behind every smile. No escape.
Two women arrived at Terminal Two
to meet this one man. One woman
was his wife – the other a lover.
They stood next to each other
both blonde and unaware but
blonde is not unusual at airports.
The man, Mike, looking forward
to his lover before his next flight,
floated through in American sweats
waving a heart-shaped pink balloon

ONE FORGETTABLE FLIGHT

On a flight from Jakarta to London
I sat next to a chubby man
whose bulk spilled over the armrest
to lay claim to a third of my seat.
I know we were traveling economy
but I was paying above the odds
for a fraction of a seat and
to add insult to injury
he'd elbow me and snigger
when a picture he thought funny
popped up on his screen.
He asked me what I did for a bob
and when I told him I was a poet
he said he'd never bring a book
on an Asian trip. I wondered
what Franz Kafka might have said.

he'd bought in Vegas. His wife,
full of quirky surprises and jest,
didn't visit her mother after all.
Mike saw it all too late. There
was no way back up. The women
came at him from both sides and
grabbed at the balloon. He ducked.
The balloon burst. The women
tugged at him for a bit, got fed up
and rambled off for a cappuccino
and two nice slices of carrot cake.



Ilhem Issaoui is a Tunisian researcher, poet, and translator. She has been published in many countries including the US, the UK, Canada, and India in print and online. She is in the process of publishing her second poetry collection.



BECAUSE LIFE IS EPHEMERAL

And death is the ultimate saboteur of moments, and not of existence itself
Death becomes a way to measure
How much you existed and will exist
Ergo, existence is what one ought to pine for
When all is wanted is to live
To exist as a memory, as a book, as a feeling, as a smile when the heart is heavy
Is the adamant wish
Ask the anemones and dandelions

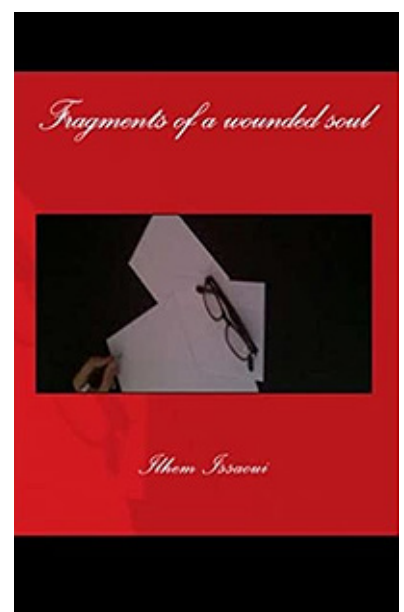
Ilhem Issaoui

FOR WE CARE WE ABSTAIN FROM TALKING

for we care we abstain from talking
and if you pay attention you will fathom
caring requires thinking
and for an encephalon that is restless
thinking is hell
thinking is treading barefoot on little fires of worry
of what could and couldn't be happening
and when no answers are given
that is the hour for grand calamities
and the little fires showing the way back
are no longer
because caring became absurd

COLD PLUS COLD IS NEVER WARMER

and so I sit under the sun, in our veranda
where I can be hidden by tall and wide lemon trees
for a moment, it felt like I was melting
and all the gelid ice was gone
but it is never gone
and my friend full of thorns
is always cold when he replies
I have all this wasted love
that he refuses
I go pour it out to the tree that refuses to grow
then return to my room where the lights are never warm enough



Ndue Ukaj (1977) is an Albanian writer, publicist and literary critic. His poems has been included in several anthologies of poetry, in Albanian, and other languages. He has published several books, including "Godo is not coming", which won the national award for best book of poetry published in 2010 in Kosovo. He has also won the award for best poems in the International Poetry Festival in Macedonia and another prize. His poems and texts are translated into English, Spanish, Italian, Romanian, Finnish, Swedish, Turkish and Chinese. Ukaj is member of Swedish PEN. *This poem appears in Albanian and English.*



LET US MAKE THE WORLD BETTER

The world is sneezing in front of a virus
that has bound the earth and shakes it like a light toy.

People are panting like dogs after a long and aimless journey.
Everyone panting, and behind walls they compose a symphony of fear.

Ahead of us, scary walls and glum news.
The planet - like a trembling heart -- is shut,
and is listening to lightning.

Tonight, the moon was beautiful and in the light of her eyes
I saw the troubled eyes of the weary world.

The day was sunny too.
I was sitting in the back seat of a car
snaking through silence and fear
and I saw nature breathing, without humans.

The clockwise are slow now.
Girls take their time getting out of their pajamas.
Women pray rosary for new weather.
And men like me are terrified in front of the black glass.

(Also terrified those who sit in huge castles and high thrones).

Beyond is silence like a raging ocean
where ships drown with longing -
and prisoners see Eden burning

Ndue Ukaj

continued overleaf..

LET US MAKE THE WORLD BETTER *contd...*

The clockwise move slowly now.
The news spreads fear faster than the virus.
One counts the hours of life ahead
and sees the final destination – death.
Younger ones pant like tired dogs
and put out the cigarettes in their burning hands.
Children fill sacks with toys
and, confused, wait for a new day.

But there are also those who don't need clocks and calendars:
that old man sitting under his beloved tree;
doctors who fight to save more lives.
Groups of reporters roam, like the wind that warns of worsening weather.
Bad news is growing – they say -
because some people have closed their windows on good news.

The media is full of sadnesses
and troubling reports
that sneeze viruses and microbes.

Humanity sneezes anxiously.
In this long night of frightening darkness.
I sit in the back seat and watch the evil hearted sneeze,
and hear kindhearted voices who confess on the altar of forgiveness.

But when the cathedral bells ring
everyone turns their eyes to heaven -
they sneeze and pant
and pray that tomorrow the world will get better
and celebrate a great mass of love.

TA BËJMË BOTËN MË TË MIRË

Bota po teshtin përpara një mikrobi
që e ka lidhë dhe po e tund si një lodër të lehtë.

Njerëzit po dihatin se qen të lodhur nga një udhëtim i gjatë dhe pa cak.
Po dihatin të gjithë dhe brenda mureve po kompozojnë simfoninë e frikës.

Përpara kemi mure dhe lajme të frikshme.
Planeti - si një zemër e dridhur është mbyllë
dhe po dëgjon rrufe.

Sonte hëna ishte e bukur dhe unë në dritën e syve të saj
pashë sytë e trazuar të botës së lodhur.

Edhe dita ishte me diell.
Unë rrija në ulësen e pasme të një makine
që gjarpëronte përmes heshtjes dhe frikës
dhe shihja si natyra merrte frymë pa njerëz.

Tashmë akrepat e orës janë të ngadalshëm.
Vajzat nxjerrin kohën prej pizhameve të tyre.
Gratë me rruzare në dorë luten për një mot të ri.
E burrat si unë trishtohen përballë xhamit të zi.

(Trishtohen edhe ata që rrinë në kështjella të mëdha e frone të larta).

Matanë është heshtja si një oqean i tërbuar
ku fundosen anije me dëshira plot -
dhe të mbyllurit shohin si digjet Edeni.

continued overleaf..

TA BËJMË BOTËN MË TË MIRË *contd...*

Akrepat lëvizin ngadalë.
Lajmet shtohen dhe frika përhapet më shpejt se virusi.
Dikush numëron orët e jetës që ka përpara
dhe sheh cakun final - vdekjen.
Ata më të rinjtë dihatin si qen të lodhur
dhe fikin cigaret në duart e tyre të përzhitura.
Fëmijët mbushin thasët me lodra
dhe të hutuar presin ditën e re.

Por ka edhe të tillë që nuk kanë nevojë për orë dhe kalandër:
ai plaku që rri i menduar nën pemën e dashur
dhe mjekët që luftojnë për një jetë më shumë.

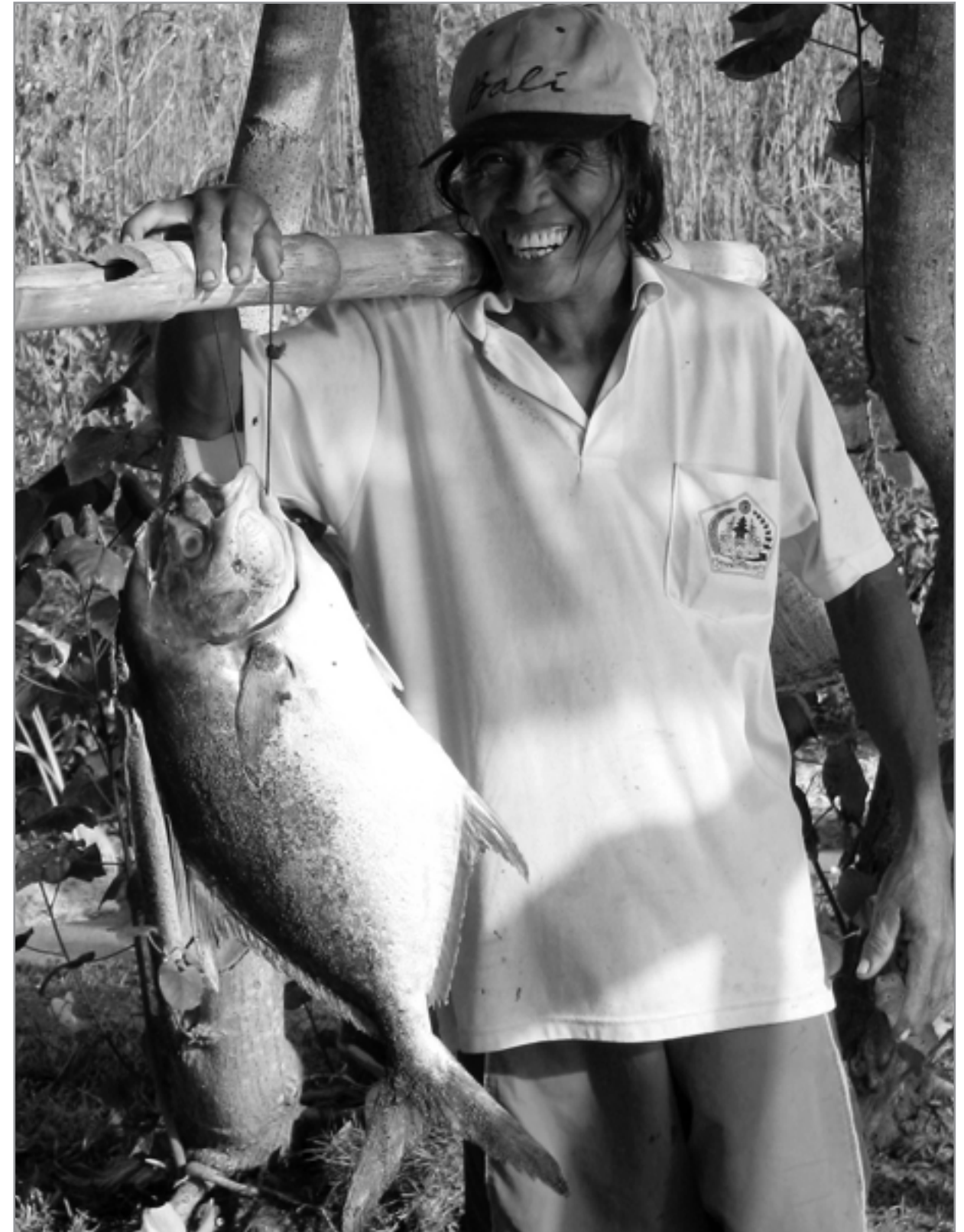
Tufat e gazetarëve bredhin si era që paralajmëron përkeqësim të motit.
Po shtohen lajmet e këqija – thonë -
sepse disa qëmoti i kanë mbyllë dritaret për lajme të mira.

Mediumet janë të mbushura me trishtim
dhe lajme të trazuara
që teshtijnë viruse dhe mikrobe.

Njerëzimi teshtin ankth.
Në këtë natë të gjatë me errësirë të frikshme.

Unë rri në ulësen prapa dhe shikoj si teshtijnë orëligët
dhe zërat zemërmirë që rrëfihen në altarin e faljes.

Por kur bien kambanat e katedraleve
të gjithë kthejnë sytë kah qielli -
dihatin e teshtijnë
dhe luten që nesër bota të bëhet më e mirë
dhe të thuhet një meshë e madhe e dashurisë.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas, Bali, Indonesia.

Writer, editor, and broadcaster Tracy Gaughan is based in Galway, Ireland. Her poetry and short fiction have been widely published in literary magazines and journals including *The Blue Nib*, *Bangor Literary Journal*, *Re-Side*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, and others. Twice shortlisted for Galway Arts Trust Poems for Patience, her work explores themes of historical legacy, death, love and loss, ecology, and the female experience. She recently completed an MA in International Literatures. A mainstay on the cultural scene, Tracy facilitates creative writing workshops, presents *Westwords* on Ireland's Community Radio Network and is UK/IRL poetry editor at *The Blue Nib*.



WHAT EURYDICE REALLY SAID

The listening roses on the threshold prevail and I clasp my hands
in resignation. From inside myself, I scream. Vain Orpheus!
Release thine arms of lamentation from my bound unwilling feet
and let me go. The knell of your name is death breathing.

Coward! Your love was not true. You died not for it.
Love died for you. Love whose notes your music played,
whose words your verses spoke, whose veins strung the lyre
you shattered, seducing the nymphs of Spring!

Yes, your grief brings tears to stones, but please clothe thyself.
Recover those black locks you lavish like conceited wreaths about me.
Let the other bear me, death, with his love as old as earth,
sleep's twin, whose longhaired silence is thistledown

to my brow; whose shrouded wings yet folded,
traverse the floors of time like angels in the under-boughs
and burrows. I yearn not for resurrection but a path through
Hades rivers five. Oh, to lie in the fields of the blessed!

Begone Orpheus! Ere, I call out your wretched name
that burns my lips like bitter wine and bids me vanish
like breath into the night.

Tracy Gaughan

THE LAST FORESTER OF MECKLENBURG

- for Achim Von Arenstorff (1867-1926)

A pendulous branch creaks and a door to the forest opens.
A parent peering into a nursery he silently cares for

the birches; watches them blossom as love blossoms.
Into the lady of the woods, into the mystical skin of her

white cloak he is born again. In her flayed-bark scriptures,
he reads the mind of God, so rich in faith, alive

with Indic legend and the once damp secrets of Novgorod -
whose spalted shadows return at nightfall to their clay-soiled

places. The darkness is daylight to him as everything
still exists: the fox in the hole, the mushroom fruiting

on the horizon, the fluent roots of his feet entwined in hers;
her underground pathways energetic with sunbeams.

The forest speaks its own tongue: tree frogs hoarse for love,
raindrops fat with syntax rattling to life in the ear.

An act of love, he releases his feet from her soft ecology,
climbs her limbs like a ladder to the sky. Vibrating, touched

by electricity, she had been waiting for him her whole life
to reproach heaven, curse the Slavs who butchered her,

wolves on a doe, lapped from her breast the sap
that wheeled them into the stars of spring; the townsfolk

who incinerated her - a witch, a burned scroll.
But for days the door to the forest has been swinging

uselessly open. The crows have begun to grieve
some grim communication with the air, and groves

of voiceless standing people are falling like wheat
to the sickle without knowing why.

** Native American cultures refer to trees as 'standing people'.*

ANNIE, WHEN I HEARD

(Annie refers to the CPR doll developed by Asmund Laerdal and modelled on the widely *circulated death mask of an unknown woman* - famously referred to as *l'inconnue de la Seine* - who drowned in Paris, c. 1880)

that the toymaker, Asmund, loved you, I thought it was a love story. But when I asked, *are you okay?* caressed your head, I saw you wore the face of the dead: the Parisian pleasure girl, they say murdered herself,

unfortunate child who drank the Seine. Whose legend are you, l'inconnue? Hoofed or winged? No matter. Beautiful suicide sank to the grave, fished out in nets of Saint-Cloud. Oh, Annie resusci

sans soucis, sans merci, fallen woman, bitter as gall, who needed to be dead to be loved. When the water drowned your stains they worshipped you, a heroine! That mute smile of salvation, a souvenir cast one

thousandfold, a coveted objet d'art. L'inconnue you grew neither young nor old but numerous. The poets, the mourning lovers placed death safely in you, inscribed your face with fantasy

and necrophilic lusts ill-using you, as Asmund, who knew those lips, well versed in kisses, were apt to save a life. I compress your chest sweet Annie resusci, sans soucis, sans merci. You are death by proxy.

So pleasing to those who stilled your sacred harp, whose immortality transcended your despair that foggy night: tiny boots running twixt lamppost and linden, a ghost on the banks of the Seine. My mouth on

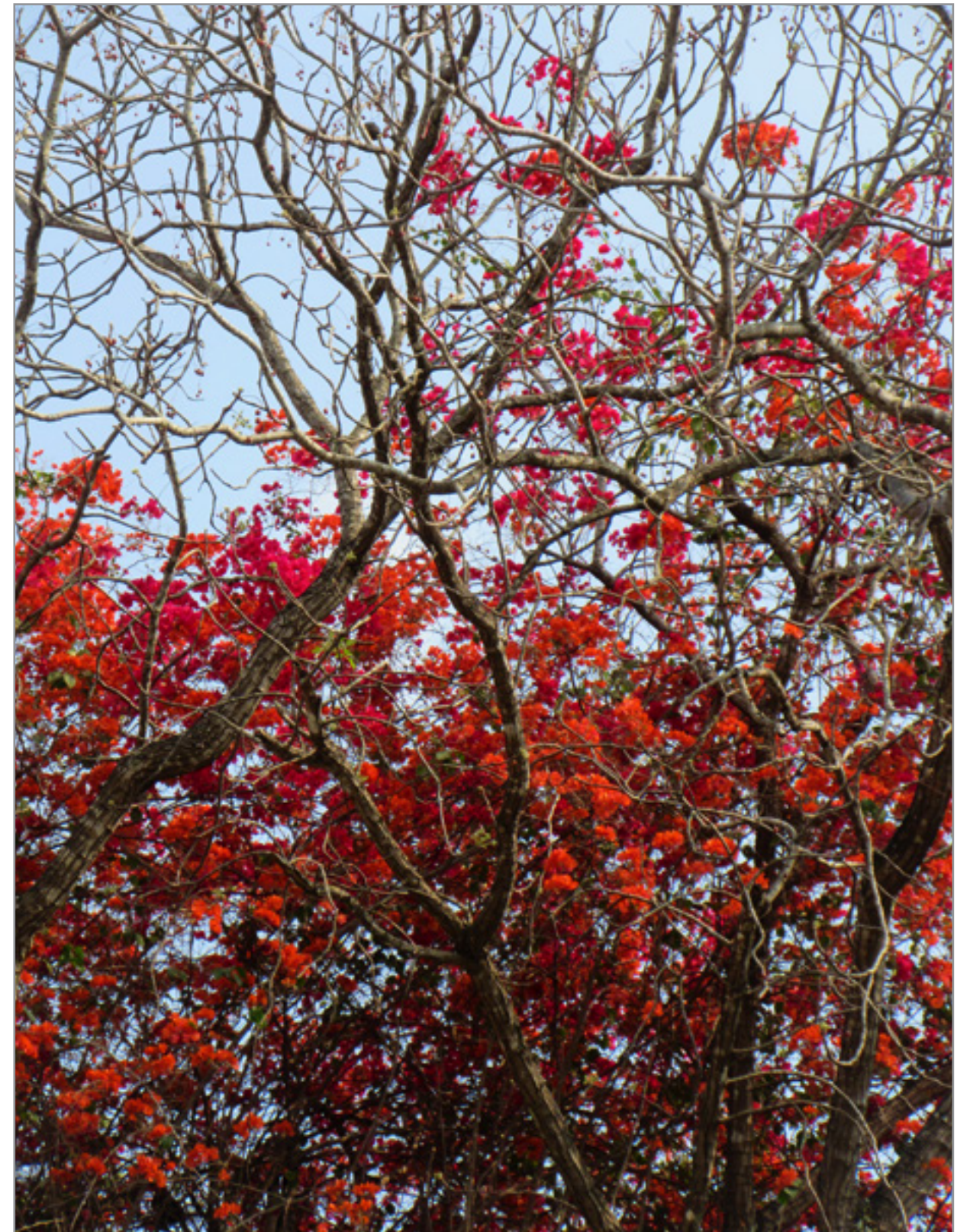
your mouth. I can't breathe their want into you, Annie: erotic corpse, Nabokov's itch, inanimate woman? No. But I can go to your river, close your button nose, hold your mouth tight shut like an oyster and let you go.



THE PARTING GIFT

On a rocky sea ledge
fourteen hundred meters below
sea level, a lone female octopus
clutches her eggs.
She is ivy root, stuck as remora.
Four long years, she vigils -
oxygenates her translucent progeny;
gathers them in. Never leaving,
never eating, she is a brooding ghost,
a symbol of self-sacrifice.
When like miniature adults
her offspring hatch, their mother
starving and exhausted, sinks
like a burst balloon
to the bottom of the sea.

This is motherhood.
Where life begins
and ends.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas, Luang Prabang, Laos PDR.

Born in Paris in 1970, Christophe Bregaint is the author of four collections of poetry; *Route de Nuit* (2015), *Encore une nuit sans rêves* (2016), *A l'avant-garde des ruines* (2017), and finally *Dernier atome d'un horizon* (2018).

Transversions of the folloing poems into English, Peter O'Neill, 2020.



1

C'est venu
Comme une pluie soudaine et vive
A l'abordage d'une lumière
Ornée de morsures
A l'heure qu'il est
Dans le halo de l'ordinaire impérieux
On attend là
Le poème d'une autre gamme chromatique

It came
Like a rain sudden and alive
Boarding with the light
Adorned with moisture
Timely
In the halo of both the imperious
And the ordinary
We await
The poem of a completely different register

Christophe Bregaint

2

Vers des rives épuisées
 Il y eut ces routes
 Tuméfiées
 Dont les visages sont devenus verdâtres
 Au fil du temps
 Peu enclin à retenir les souvenirs des sillons des horizons consumés
 A l'approche des côtes qui bordent les rivages de ces mers gonflées par les naufrages
 Le vent reproche aux siècles le calme des silences des chemins
 En déshérence
 Dans l'espace sémantique des perspectives meurtries
 Pas après pas
 Comme la peau du ciel sent la mémoire de ce qui n'est plus
 Qui dégouline sur les terres d'ombres
 Qui rassemblent les affaires des empreintes d'une existence qui se marie
 Avec l'avènement des ruines

Towards the exhausted banks
 There are these roads which tumefy
 So that faces turn green
 In time
 Little inclined to return to the memories
 Of furrows of consumed horizons
 Approaching the coasts which break the banks
 The sea swelling with waves
 The wind reproaching the centuries
 The calm of the silence of the paths
 Dormant in the semantics of dead perspectives
 Step by step
 Like the skin of the sky which feels the memory
 Of what is no longer there
 Dripping onto the earth shadows
 Which resemble the affair of traces
 Of an existence which is wedded
 To the advent of ruins

Dernier
 atome^{Christophe}
 d'un horizon^{Bregaint}



After graduating from law school in the late 1980s Terry worked in the Australian public service for decades. He was inspired to write after seeing Michael Dransfield poems in The Australian newspaper when a teenager. Terry has been published in Australia and abroad since retiring. He lives in Brisbane when not travelling.



1. CORONA

world did
you forget

to wind up
your spring

everything

seems to be
shuddering

to a halt
italians are

singing and

playing guitars
from windows

we hoard
toilet rolls

Terry Wheeler

2. MILEY CYRUS

snap frozen
the gym

equipment
lit up forlorn

the herds

restless in
their pens

spreckles
calls it

miley cyrus

soon it may
become

that achy
breaking heart

3. MACLEAN

the wheel
of fortune

in the tartan
pizza shop

was unexpected

as were those
corona bottle

salt and pepper
shakers at

the top pub

but toilet rolls
at the spar

put a spring
in our steps

4. CONFINED

radiate out
random

eight out of
ten paths

not taken

the maths
may flatten

the curve
there's no cure

only avoidance

mysterious
as prayer

rolling its
celestial dice

5. BUFFERING

while living
becomes

an act of
prophecy

salvation

remains some
distant thought

we've been
taught not

to take too

much heed of
dreams or

the dazzle
of a mirage

6. LIFE IS

like those
movies that

never explain
what's going on

ending abruptly

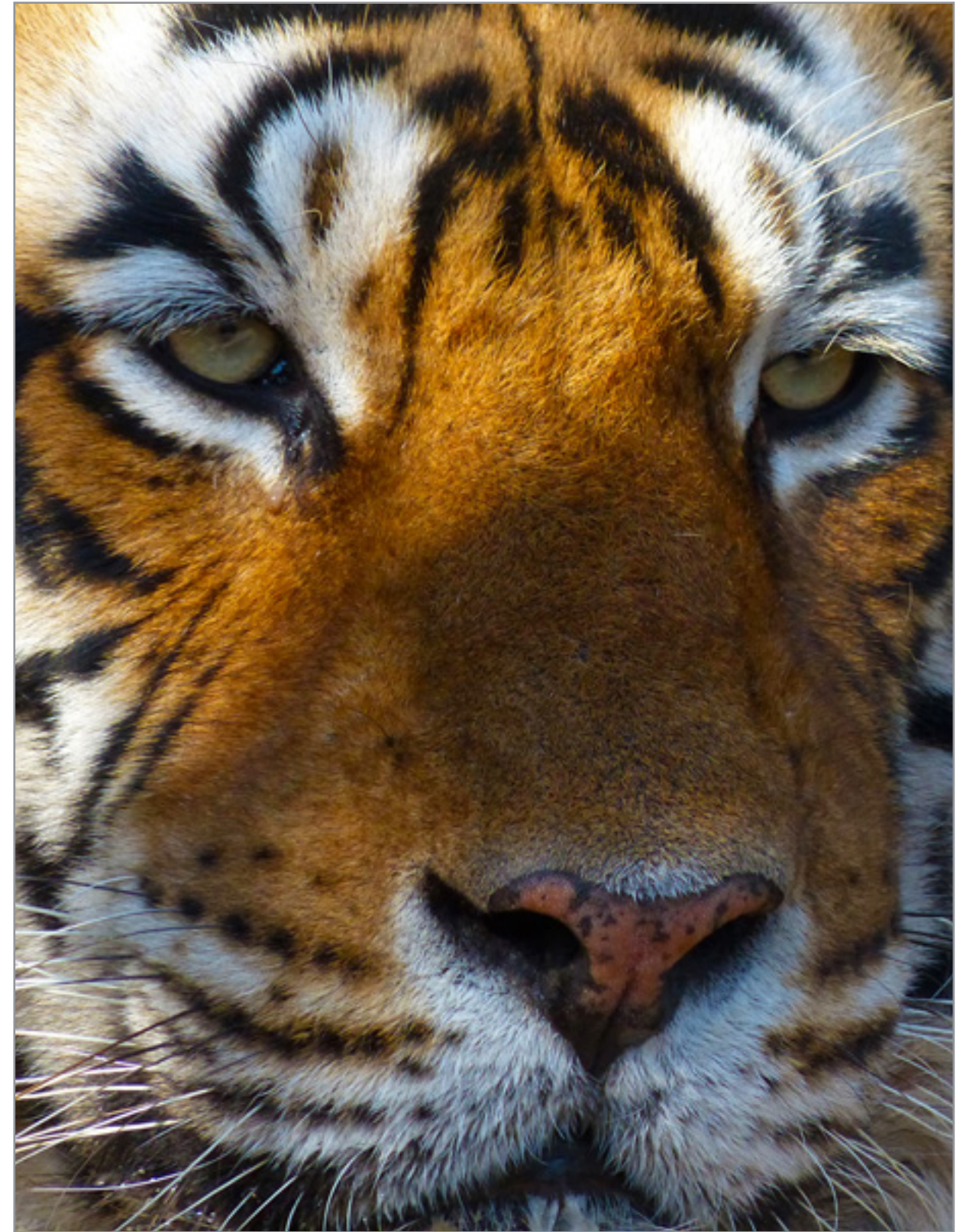
as you stumble
out of darkness

into the foyer
scratching your

head thinking

if watched
again maybe

it would make
more sense



Photograph © Valmik Thapar, Guardian of the Tiger, India.

<https://liveencounters.net/january-2014/05-may-2014/valmik-thapar-guardian-of-the-tiger-live-encounter/>

Robert (Roibeard) Shanahan. I am a poet playwright and a painter. A storyteller. For me all there really is...Compassion and Expression. I describe myself as a...‘Grand Lector of Apocalyptic Utterances’. I live in Tasmania. I am from the Irish diaspora. My family from Cork. My prose was published in Australia. Ireland in Outburst magazine. India in Setu poetry magazine. I was awarded high commendation. In the W.B.Yeats poetry prize with ‘Violence at the Egg’. It was read out in the National Parliament of Australia.
<https://www.facebook.com/robert.shanahan.98>



Robert Shanahan

ROME

Arid scatterings the roman flower blood white rose withered
 Hysteria's high cry throttled lily throated vomiting the empire folly
 Augustus's decayed marble transformed crumbles as brick
 Mocked Imperium unruly connection of shine gold to drunken discharge
 Mercury's putrescenced stem stamens of dead gods black corn
 languished Pax Romana desecrated oceans wizened
 Spirits throw theived salt at slitted spectred throats invisible

She wolf wrestles inside itself
 Rhea Silvia Mars skinned
 By river Styx SPQR drama
 Stabs a cauldron crack relentless
 Dank sweat skeletonized tears
 Romulus grieves and opens up
 Saturn's lost time of notte-mare
 Remos blood the roman echo

Rams head empire skulled
 Decomposed purple garbed caesar
 As the bone lion splinters
 The bear rotted on the sword
 Spartacus beneath dirt garlanded
 In the scragged arms of slaves
 Rome orating in a statues mind
 The mimic of the slaves shriek

Asp snakeskin's clog the tiber
 Poison froths as mania
 Great lava flows frenzy
 Seized idols bob mock sink
 A floating amphitheatre wends
 Bodies with animal heads
 Animals with human heads
 Whirlpool in the lava defiled

continued overleaf...

© Robert Shanahan

ROME *contd...*

Barbarian masks on senators
 Nailed to the tongue Mors
 Rolling mausoleum chariot
 Flagged with Juno heart bones
 Daggers lashed to the wheels
 Impaled gladiators rotate
 Crucified mouths cry tribune
 limbo laments hail Rome

Kaleidoscoped scene of despair
 Young skin in a game of terror
 Seats excited romans masturbate
 A ground for Mors panic
 Lovers the divine of arms
 Four eyes in the erotic of one
 Lovers bandits children slaves
 Face the phallused fang of Rome

Half a plebeian for a toga
 Slave spearing into caesar
 Nubian heads necks burn
 Spin around his concubines skull
 Musty between her legs bone
 Worms secrete where once
 Withering snakes aroused
 Her breastless nipples pulsate

On dead dry straw grain defiled
 Reptilian claws slice the air
 Crocodile scale cut by pluto
 Gladiator lays then placed inside
 Sewn together with virgin hair
 Combed from crucified young
 Gladiator seen in scale ardor
 One pugio starts the cutting

Out the putrid gladiator
 Remounts the mountain of osteoderm
 Sexual entry as caesar lusted high
 Gladiator body vacuumed pushed
 Galea scratches the vent to bleed
 Sewn as again with stolen strands
 Cuts hair dagger slashes dripping out
 Debauched in bestiality Rome

Caesar blank eyed sparkle torture
 Funnelling gold down pagan throats
 Stand in blighted light as golden inners
 Moon reflects the mouths aghast
 Internal statues in free otherworld
 Reflecting garden of rebellion
 These inside golden tarnished organs
 Chime the trip the fall of Rome

Under a decaying planet facade
 Charmless fingers raise as thorns
 Seduction drowned tainted Venus
 Venus dice losing inviolability
 Shadowed change to black heart
 Bathing drowning in alcohol carnal
 Venus falling backwards through
 Eternal limp phallic maze

Minerva Jupiter head cracking
 Huddled with Tinia with Uni
 Field mice devour the owl
 Tails of mice tales of mice
 Minerva webbed arachne spider
 Under the ruins of Pompey's eye
 Ritual permeates from the seal
 Minerva swords splits Junipers brain

continued overleaf...

© Robert Shanahan

ROME *contd...*

Three headed dog death is barking
 Furred skin blocks the final entrance
 In flux his eyes are closing flux
 Snakes of tears fall on dim skin
 Serpents tail spike numina
 Mane knotted by flicking blurs
 Cerberus fangs the underworld
 Spits of Pluto torrents a flume

Black salt in octopus desiccated
 Seaweed is sky sea life blind
 Sand is grinding over Neptune
 Trident melts into dark changed tide
 Neptune floats in a dead whale
 Drowning the times of Saturn
 Frothing waves the drowning one
 Neptune is the vatical sinking

Broken bows and quiver swing
 On a crackling crescent moon
 Roman disabled limbs branch
 Snapped bones tombs of skeleton
 Rex Nemorensis frosts Diana
 Memories of brutal combat
 Ghostly Actaeon a legless stag
 All for a eyeful of Diana

Diana in a moonscape of stumps
 Oak groves loss of the virgin leaf
 Embryo's of the gladiatrices
 Ly speared in the romantic sky
 Spectred ears from hunting dogs
 Cover Diana as quietus clouds
 Creaking behemothed stag kick
 The celestial body of Diana

This is the pebbling of Rome
 Stone cruelty rock tarpeian
 The squeezing strangle hands
 Become the inhuman cruel fling
 As the deranged slay the sick
 The disabled and the crazed
 Arise as leadened soil martyrs
 Dusting the bed of all innocence

Ghosting phalanx trample hades
 Through flaming holes legion dismal
 Silent songs of sordidness cosmos
 The beat is beaten beaten still
 Nobility drums tattooed skin percussive
 Cornu of empty blast-less tone
 Baleful armament rusting to guilt
 Mouth of mistruth dirges of Rome

Saturn sows through wasted vines
 Blooded stains colosseum debris
 Ceres bedaubes red bark
 Long unsowable seeds of Rome
 Pomona trapeze's on decay
 Juggling the rotting pulp slop
 Sacred orchard is soul blighted
 Upturned sculpted trees curse SPQR

Ghostly bound body parts
 Hercules in the grottos hearth
 Bubonic rain torrents sacred fire
 Frozen frosted Vesta pyre hail
 Stoned fire fumes of Hercules
 Excite the lust of the underworld
 Vestael virgins opera of coitus
 Seduce the cadaver of Vesta

continued overleaf...

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ROME *contd...*

Between lares and lemures shades
 Pestilence conjoins with plague
 Pages sew a net over divination
 Sibylline tomes foretold mendacity
 Rome is a burning stilicho flame
 Locked in lifeless atom space
 Roman sandals worn by ants sticky feet
 History is in the "Memory of Insects"

I Shanahan
 am naked
 My body painted
 Pagan soul is depicted
 And eye in invoked say
 This is for the innocents
 Of our own roman days

A spirit sobbing a sadness approaches
 Tears on my prose mine
 A Mother proffers her dead baby
 As tribute Feed ROME
 Devour Rome my babies bone
 Her words
 The last for me
 I imagine the last for you

POETS

There are some sweet explorers
 Sincerity rumbling jubilant on their backs
 Their muses bounding around their lamps
 Lighting the wicks with an active response spark

Some spilling alcohol a few licking the floor
 Drugged high and looking for more
 Or for others
 Abstinence the very hold on their pencils
 Soberly visions play strong for them

These are poets
 The givers and the confusers
 Of the understanding of word

Subconsciously immersed in masses of images
 Scratching little shapes in a journal
 Letters form their minds in sight
 Then change occurs moved by a found implied meaning
 Is this to be known now is this it's time
 Am I the one weighted enough to tell it

Drowning now where no resonance is soon shown
 To reform again somewhat taunting their doubting selves

Some living in rooms stacked with bureaus
 Their floors covered with socks and cutlery and the like
 Stumbling around tripped by the clutter
 Writing exquisite lines they place in the drawers
 Locking them only once tight
 Then swallow away each key

continued overleaf...

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POETS *contd...*

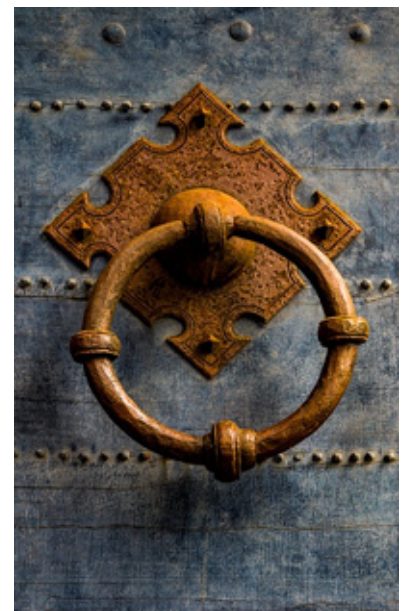
Some sit on books
Languishing between the pages
Eat off books sleep on poetry magazines
The movement of their bodies ends in a sentence
The blinking of their eyes
The closing of a book
The opening of a book

Some resplendent in generosity's spirit
They and their lines linked to support
Some part of each scribbler to them conjoined
Through the airs of this world of pages
They love words and those that love words
There lines that of the first drippings of the soul

Some hold close mute all words of praise
They are echoing the mismanagements of childhood
Some shaky memory requiem of loss
Paternal and that of hand then held
Holds that hand now around memory flower stems
Beneath climbed trees again
Of this is the stuff for them to speak

Some live in demiurgic awareness
Manifesting apparitions worded reverie
Recurring spectacle oracular and sibylline
Rarefied personas sublime in expression
They lay naked all of meaning and it's shadowed fragments
Their lines flow as flooded streams

And what would I say of myself
If I indeed say that it's a poet I be
Rabble rousing prosody
Deafens most of my description
Only a few scant words are heard
"on the tilt"
"sweet utterance"



MUTUALISM

I in anxious grasp
Of my green wooden chair
At swelled moments tears fall
Deeply absorbing into the timber

My chin perches as a destroyed bustard
On the top of the chairs left leg

My body sideways hangs over it
The back rail pressures pain in my forearms
Then slowly comforts
Then back to discomfort

Sweat soaks moistures penetrates the wood
Radicles germinating on the underside of the seat

My stretching legs cold
Now seem to be drilling
Through the floor entering the ground
Tap roots searching seem to follow me
Through my toes

The chair moves inside itself
The need of its ligneous self
What it was before the felling

I now raising a glass
Liquid streams from the corners of my mouth
I can not stop drinking and it's all pouring out
An uncontrollable urge to keep filling the glass
The chair and myself sodden

Dropping the glass I in mutualistic eye vision

The chair sprouts
Buds on the rungs and rails
Side branches early limbs surround me
Chlorophyll misted air
Murmurings up and down in the emerging vascular system
The seat is rising on trunk
Warm bark for a moment covers me

My head now lys on a gall insected cecidia
My arm winding a blossom
To the centre of the heartwood

Leaves fresh in their profundity
Are a green curtain over my face
Symbiosis

I fall forward the chair is gone
I slowly walk forward
The emerging foliage shadows my steps
Onto the next chair and tears

John W. Sexton's sixth poetry collection, *Futures Pass*, was published by Salmon Poetry in 2018. A chapbook of surrealist poetry, *Inverted Night*, came out from SurVision in 2019. His poem *The Green Owl* was awarded the Listowel Poetry Prize 2007 for best single poem. His poem *In and Out of Their Heads*, from *The Offspring of the Moon*, was selected for *The Forward Book of Poetry* 2014. His poem *The Snails* was shortlisted for the 2018 An Post / Listowel Writers' Week Poem of the Year Award. In 2007 he was awarded a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in Poetry.

FEAR NOT, ENTER

first
the obvious night ... then
the owl's unanswerable query

always the first and
the last to move ... the folded
chessboard owns the game

gastric sheen to the walls
... the new doorless estate
went up over night

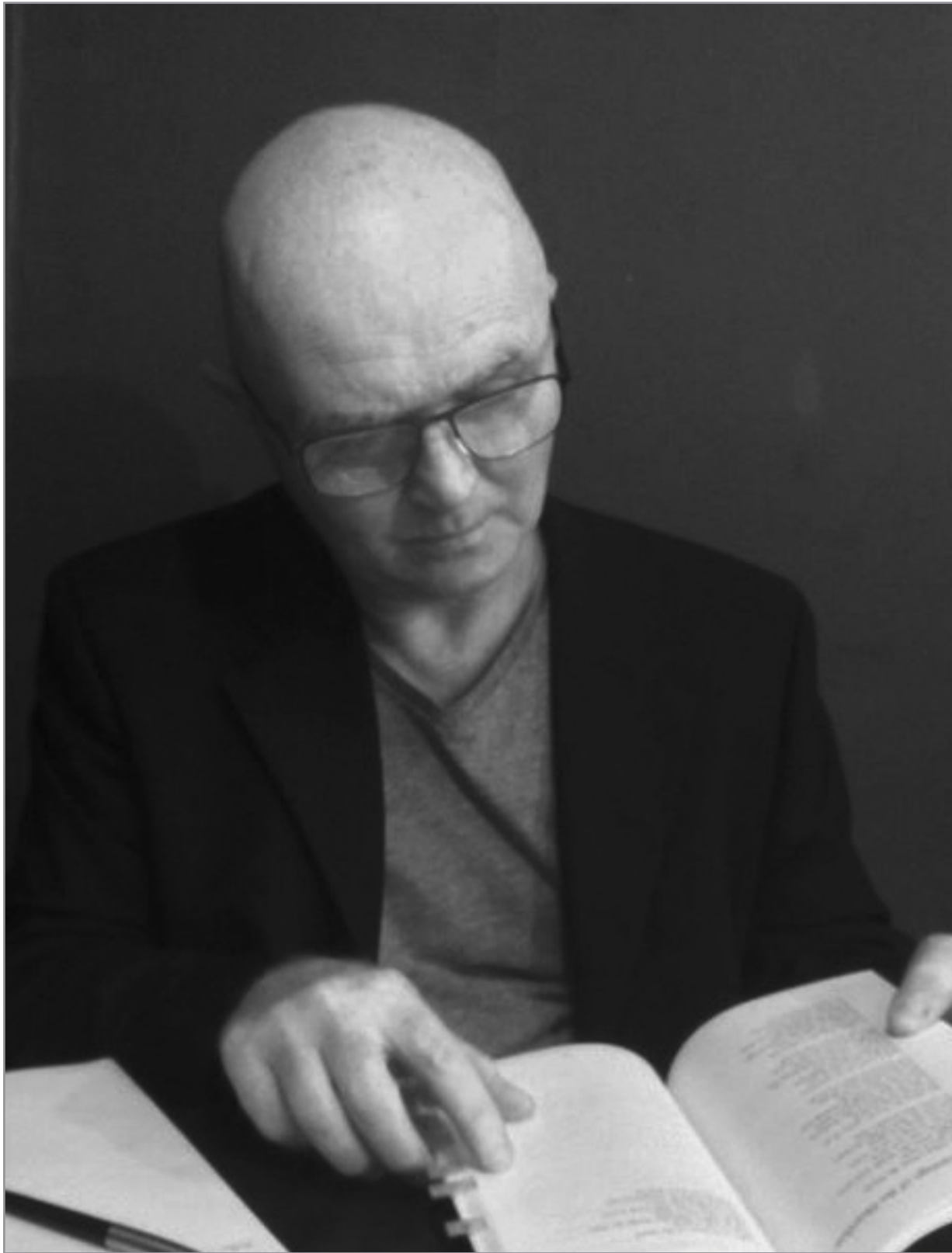
mer- ... instead of a heart
the patient had a chunk
of mother of pearl

to our ancestor
whose house was a whale ...
the android Pinocchio

fear not, enter ...
this hole of fire at the peak
leads to never wanting

nothing left on Earth?
then let us dance
to the fossil record

man with nine nostrils ...
no need of a tin whistle,
just play your own face



John W Sexton

A GAME OF TUMBLING MONKEYS

we all caught him
but none met him
... invisible Lord Cough

spiders' eyes grafted
to her brow ... oh the distances
of the up-close

the letter of the lawn ...
katydids
grassing themselves out

Socrates
saw for a moment
but no

subtle the horror
that broke
from the nightingale's notes

True or False?
a game of tumbling monkeys
inspired Cern

an elephant's rectum for a hat
... tea
at the Cirque Atastrophe

old Granny Darn ...
astride her sewing needle
to the cloth of heaven

and perfectly true
false teeth
lie in the mouth

Dali foresees dementia ...
rhinocerants shatter Time
on their horns

NOTHING EVER “FALLS”

the witch’s cat’s replacement ...
her clothes moth
regurgitates a blue dress

holding kitchen parchment
to the night ... let us try
the starlight oven

really, redemption
in Hell? ... we descend
into the soul mine

snug outside when it’s
wild outside ... his arctic sweater
of knitted snow

ghost dogs
yipping in comet trails ... nothing ever
“falls” through space

no broomstick, Aunt Sal?
astride a garden gate
she announces the moon

the nightshade door
might be in the ditch, but ...
a sheet of light at our toes

do say: “through
the FTL funnel” ... don’t say:
“up the Asimov!”

a flamingo
as an umbrella ... an umbrella
for the guano



Peter O' Neill is the author of *More Micks than Dicks*, a hybrid Beckettian novella in 3 genres (2017) a work of translation *The Enemy- Transversions from Baudelaire* (2015) and a number of poetry collections among them *The Dark Pool* and *Dublin Gothic* which are both out of print. He has just finished a monograph on the influence of *Finnegans Wake* on *Comment c'est/How It Is* a ground breaking work of its kind and he is currently working on an English course book and a novel, when he finds the time.
<https://peterseanoneill.blogspot.com/>



MIDDLE AGE

Screw middle age! At least, that's how I always
Used to feel about it. You're as old, or as young,
As you feel. Or so I used to think.

Then, like the dreaded furies, she left me
With her calling cards, all three! Rhinitis,
Thyroid dysfunction, and then just for good measure

She blessed me with an absolutely ghastly dose
Of ulcerous colitis. Now, my life is governed by diets,
Stress management and breath control.

I wait for my monthly meetings up at the hospital
To meet with my support group. Inside the reception
Area I stop before the bakery shop

With its mountain of cream doughnuts and custard
Tarts. There it stands like a fabulous metaphor for my
Once mythic youth, when I could feast and gorge with impunity.

Peter O'Neill

CORNUTO,
OR THE APPALLING DESTINY OF EVERYMAN

I see the bustling young, those among us
Who still wear their invisible golden crowns,
Each one oblivious to his real fate
And who will very soon appear with the terrible horns,
Transforming the man into but a clown.
It is as certain as Archimede's fabled sword,
The spherical condition of man, everyone!
Though each, in his turn, will refuse to believe it.
Noli turbare circulos mios...
But, when they have finally fallen to the floor,
As the fatal weapons are drawn upon the beloved,
And every passionate thrust will further embroil them
Into the universal screw of the one from Syracuse.
Such, at least, is the world of men who are incredibly obtuse.

MATHEW THE BOATMAN

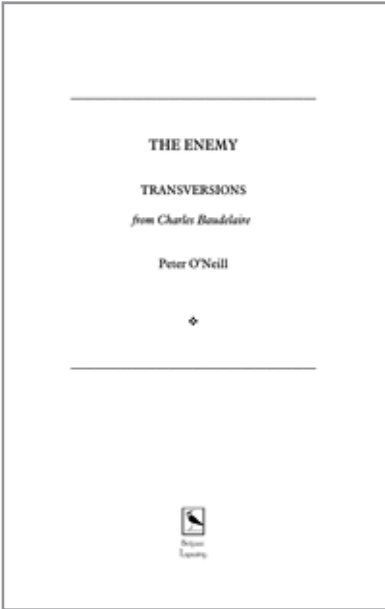
Bid me come unto thee on the water (14:28)

By Bethsaida, near the Sea of Galilee, the boat came.
John's decapitation seemed to throw a terrible shadow
Upon the whole land. We were all frightened, restless,
And so very tired. To be honest, we just wanted to sleep.

But, we left the crowds behind us and set sail.
Jesus kept staring out upon the waves.
For a whole day Peter just watched him,
Sustained, no doubt, by the liquid luminescence.

How the light played upon the water, its solar power
Unlimited, transcending all into unlimited credit.
He must have thought about the pagans who once loved it.

They who dwelt only in the tangible,
Who put their hands out to touch it,
Instead of waiting around for bleeding miracles to come.



"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



CHANGELING

In 1895 Bridget Cleary of Clonmel was
Abducted by fairies.
Exchanged with a
Changeling claiming
She was wife, mother, sister, daughter.
Her husband Michael and her village
Exorcised her writhing pitiful
Body with boiled urine, branch beatings and
Finally fire.

Her strange soul, a molten commonwealth of
Superstition, tradition and mental health,
That would remain supernatural
For another century.
As if familial love was some backwards
Compatible technology, impotent
In your imperfectly siloed souls of
Atrophied individuality.
You are outside of time now Bridget
Embedded frozen flame in some
Neurological event horizon of history.

I imagine your last point of reason
Pleading for help as your loved ones
Descended on you. Truly changed, transfigured
A charcoal neutron star fizzing and boiling
Through a pane-less peasant cottage window,
Free of cruelty, catching breath
With courting gulls sporting
On gusts of smoky breeze.

Rob Buchanan

HURTING GOD

for Mam , died 07th September 2020)

My nightmares steal your sweet face
 To accuse me. This tortured oedipal dance ,
 Monsters swirl around me
 But I can tell the difference.
 And somewhere among
 That sweating and nurses screaming I beg an audience
 But you won't see me
 Or maybe your soul is still sleeping or worse
 You no longer recognise me.
 Don't blame you, lately I Hardly recognise myself.
 Remember me please I am your father and your baby.
 I am the wound you left bleeding.
 Let me forget please, I see you recrucified a
 Dozen times daily I wish I could explain to those white coats that
 You were not just some old aulone,
 How when I cleaned and fed you I knew I washed the wounds of Christ,
 Like it was me that made you
 And as your skin turned to cold marble
 My reverse pieta. It is still you holding me on the ground.
 I spoke to your ghost about suicide
 You said "that would be hurting God"
 And you smile and look away
 Say "what does it matter if this time I lost you on a nursing home floor
 And not some sand choked temple
 In Golgothan moonlight?"
 There's no way of carbon dating
 Our ancient love, our great deeds
 Against the dead I know what it feels like to lose two
 Gods I've been dying since I learned the truth
 The cobblers children are never shod
 So call me Gods orphan, see me

Sun bleached hanging from a tree
 A serpent umbilical coiling
 My heart poured out at its feet,
 Husband and wife and the meat that made me
 How dare you tell me I'm hurting God?
 Christ, look what he's done to me.

KILLING KAVANAGH

Crumpled cap, B.O. and yellow streaks In white hair.
 Poor mouth,
 Flops open Smyllies Irish Times.
 The maestro is in, ahem.
 The mystic peasant holds court "Ahem!"
 "Are ye bleedin listenin?"
 (Ruffles the pages again, heavy breathing,
 the apostles hasten)
 Reads aloud
 "Thalaikoothal is an ancient custom
 Of the Tamil Nadu people in India."

In McDaid's the disciples are killing Kavanagh
 With large ones, drowning him in whiskey.
 Walking pelican poet, pious
 Blood-alcohol ink well.
 Pen plucked feathers,
 "Young relatives give elderly men
 A special oil bath and force them
 To drink a potion of coconut water
 Garçon come here to me, have we any of that or only porter?"

"Palm oil preservation patricide.
 Until they experience kidney failure,
 Convulsions. Sweet Jaysus! Me lungs.
 Get me Archbishop McQuaid" (spits on the floor)
 You have to make it Paddy, dying well timed.
 You have to make it count, by closing time.
 "The victim usually dies quite painfully
 Within a day or two"
 (Elbows the boy poet number 2 or is it 30
 "Sure I'd bleedin' die of thirst before that. Tides gone out son"
 (Points at absence of whiskey in glass)
 "Savages! Have you any coppers on you, Ye fool ye?"



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas, Havelock Island, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, India.

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