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AN LEABHAR MÒR / THE GREAT BOOK OF GAELIC
An Exhibiton : Twenty-two Irish and Scottish Gaelic Poems, Translations and Artworks, with Essays and Recitations

Fiction: PATRICIA SARRAFIAN WARD
"Alaine played soccer with the refugees, she traded bullets and shrapnel around the neighborhood . . ."
from THE BULLET COLLECTION

Poem: ELEANOR ROSS TAYLOR
Our Lives Are Rounded With A Sleep

Reflection: ANANT KUMAR
The Mosques on the Banks of the Ganges: Apart or Together?
tr. from the German by Rajendra Prasad Jain

Photojournalism: PETER TURNLEY
Seeing Another War in Iraq in 2003 *and*
The Unseen Gulf War : Photographs
Audio report on-line by Peter Turnley

Endnotes: KATHERINE McNAMARA
The Only God Is the God of War :
On BLOOD MERIDIAN, an American myth

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CONTENTS

AN LEABHAR MÒR / THE GREAT BOOK OF GAELIC *4*

Introduction : Malcolm Maclean *5*
On Contemporary Irish Poetry : Theo Dorgan *9*
Is Scith Mo Chrob Ón Scríbainn 'My hand is weary with writing' *13*
Claochló / Transfigured *15*
Bean Dubh a' Caoidh a Fir Chaidh a Mharbhadh / A Black Woman Mourns Her Husband Killed by the Police *17*
M'anam do sgar riomsa a-raoir / On the Death of His Wife *21*
Bean Torrach, fa Tuar Broide / A Child Born in Prison *25*
An Tuagh / The Axe *30*
Dan do Scátach / A Poem to Scátach *34*
Èistibh a Luchd An Tighe-Se / Listen People Of This House *38*
Maireann an t-Seanmhuintir / The Old Live On *40*
Na thàinig anns a' churach ud / All That Came In That One Coracle *43*
Pangur Bán / The Scholar and His Cat *48*
Coinneach Nèill (à Suathadh ri lomadh Rubha) / Coinneach Nèill ("a born half-wit") *51*
Oilithreacht / Pilgrimage *53*
Alasdair à Gleanna Garadh / Alasdair of Glengarry *55*
Hallaig / "Time, the deer is in the Wood of Hallaig." *60*
Sceil lem duib / Brief Account *63*
An Charraig / The Rock *67*
Aois Leodhais / The Age of Lewis *70*
Mairi Iain Mhurch' Chaluim / My grandmother who lost her father on the "Iolaire", New Year's night, 1919 *72*
Dubh / Black *75*
Bi i do Chrann / Be as a Tree *79*
An Lon Dubh / Blackbird at Belfast Lough *82*
Resources *84*

Patricia Sarrafian Ward
"Alaine played soccer with the refugees. . ." *86*

Eleanor Ross Taylor
Our Lives Are Rounded With A Sleep *107*

Anant Kumar
The Mosques on the Banks of the Ganges : Apart or Together? *108*

Peter Turnley
Seeing Another War in Iraq in 2003 *and* The Unseen Gulf War : Photos and Audio Report on-line by Peter Turnley *112*

Katherine McNamara
Endnotes : The Only God Is the God of War *113*

Masthead *3*
Contributors *130*

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AN LEABHAR MÒR

THE GREAT BOOK *of* GAELIC

… an fhéile
Nach do reub an cuan,
Nach do mhill mìle bliadhna;
Buaidh a' Ghàidheil buan.

… the humanity
That the sea did not tear,
That a thousand years did not spoil:
The quality of the Gael permanent.

Somhairle MacGill-Eain
Sorley MacLean
1911-96

edited by
Malcolm Maclean (Alba)
and
Theo Dorgan (Èirinn)

An Exhibition in *Archipelago*

An Leabhar Mòr : Introduction

Malcolm Maclean

'Good ideas don't mind who has them.' On the other hand, Cholm Cille or St Columba, was once part of a dispute that was adjudicated with the resolution, 'to every cow its calf'. The *Leabhar Mòr* is the 'calf' of the Great Book of Ireland which is itself one of the many calves of the Book of Kells. Its genesis dates to a crisp and sunny winter's day in January 1997.

I had come to the home of Poetry Ireland in Dublin Castle to view the Great Book of Ireland and to meet its architect, the poet Theo Dorgan. Our conversation was lively and ranged from the European *Schottenklöster* and rock 'n' roll, to the fragile ceasefire in the North and Sorley MacLean. Latterly we talked about the continuing power of Gaelic poetry, despite centuries of division, to inspire and delight and to connect our countries. By the time we parted it seemed obvious to both of us that the time was right for a Great Book of Gaelic, a 21st-century *Leabhar Mòr,* that would celebrate 1,500 years of shared Gaelic heritage and embrace the poetry of both Scotland and Ireland.

The idea grew and I returned some months later with a proposal which mapped out how, if all went well, we could create a new book that built on Theo's experience in new ways. We agreed to take the leap together and he gifted me a book of his poems inscribed 'For Malcolm, the day we decided to crucify ourselves with *Leabhar Mòr na Gaeilge/Gàidhlig. Ar aghaidh linn!*' The idea had continued to grow.

The first confirmation that the time was right came later that summer with President Mary Robinson's visit to Scotland and the announcement of the Columba Initiative, *Iomairt Chaluim Chille.* This important inter-governmental initiative, aiming to renew and redevelop the links between Gaelic Scotland and Ireland, became a key partner in progressing the *Leabhar Mòr.*

The time was also right in terms of Scottish and Irish constitutional change. By devolution in 1999, the Council of the Isles and the Northern Ireland peace process had created a new political context in which the idea of the *Leabhar Mòr* has flourished. In many ways the artists have anticipated or paralleled the best of the political process by working across old boundaries, seeking new perspectives, creating new relationships and reconciling history with the cutting edge of the here-and-now.

The key confirmation that the time was right, however, was the immediate enthusiasm of the great team of talents that collectively created this Great Book. The idea of the *Leabhar Mòr* has generated a remarkable degree of goodwill from the hundreds of artists,

poets and others who have contributed generously along the way. One American visitor heard a BBC radio programme about the *Leabhar Mòr* while caught up in London traffic, and was inspired to pop a £50 note into the post 'as a contribution to a wonderful project'.

Why the idea of the *Leabhar Mòr* has attracted such interest and support is beyond the scope of this brief introduction but three principle factors suggest themselves.

Firstly, ancient meets modern on a grand scale with 100 contemporary artists' perspective on 1,500 years of Gaelic history and identity. Secondly, it also transcends academic and creative disciplines in its collaborative exploration of poetry and language through contemporary arts practice. Finally, perhaps the most important factor, is that it transcends political boundaries to celebrate the unity and diversity of Gaelic culture as an integral part of contemporary life in both countries.

A language map of Europe reflects cultural realities that bear little resemblance to political boundaries. This is particularly true of Gaelic Scotland and Ireland.

There are no two countries in Europe with more in common. We share a mythology, three languages, a rich music tradition and some significant history. And yet a great deal of this enduring connection has been consistently glossed over or deliberately obscured.

It was the Irish Gaels, known as the Scoti, who migrated into Scotland from the 5th century and gave it its name. The most famous artefact from Ireland's golden age, the Book of Kells, originated on the Scottish Island of Iona. It was the Gaels who united Scotland in the 9th century and made Gaelic the language of the medieval court. The 'Irish' Gaelic culture in the Scottish Highlands survived that in Ireland by a century and a half. The Scots were 'planted' into Northern Ireland from the 17th century and hundreds of thousands of Irish people migrated to Scotland in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is less well known that the Hebrides were once mapped as the Irish Isles or that Michael Davitt was a leading figure in the Scottish Highland Land League.

The interwoven pattern of our separate histories continues and the Gaelic language remains our most potent living link. The models of modern Gaelic language development in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic have all been different and there is everything to be gained from sharing experience and collaborating on future development.

Scottish Gaelic, for example, has an unexpected resonance in Northern Ireland where Gaelic has become widely regarded as a badge of Catholic republicanism. The predominant Protestantism of the Scots Gaels, and their habit of voting for all parties and for none, provides a healthy antidote to such stereotyping and opens up fresh perspectives on old issues of language and identity for both the unionist and nationalist communities.

The Irish connection expands the horizons of the Scottish Gaidhealtachd following decades of contraction. It does so at a time when the Gaelic community looks hopefully to the new Scottish Parliament for a new recognition. Since the 1980s there have been important developments in Gaelic-medium education, broadcasting, the arts and the cultural economy, but Scotland's overall relationship with its Gaelic dimension remains ambivalent.

The language has been reclaimed from the museums but remains poised between eclipse and rejuvenation.

The issue is not local but international. One of our planet's 6,500 languages becomes extinct every two weeks and the total number of languages is likely to halve in the coming century. Language death is now of global significance and sustaining language diversity will be one of the paramount cultural challenges of the 21st century. If more artists recognise this acceleration in language death as an appropriate subject for literature, drama, music, visual art and as yet uncategorised artforms, then the issue will come alive in the minds of the general public. The *Leabhar Mòr* is a modest, but significant and optimistic, step in that direction.

…. At the first meeting of the full editorial team at the Glasgow home of MP Brian Wilson in June 1999, the selection process for both the poets and the artists was hammered out. The literary panel aimed to select 25 Scottish and 25 Irish poets, and to invite them to provide one poem of their own and to nominate one other, giving – in all – 100 poems. Following extensive discussion, however, it was finally decided that 15 Scots and 15 Irish poets would each provide one poem of their own and nominate two others, giving a total of 90 poems. The remaining ten poems were nominated by other writers with an intimate knowledge of Gaelic poetry. They were all asked to nominate their preferred translation.

Consequently, the *Leabhar Mòr* is not a conventional anthology, with all the gravitas that that implies, but a collection of favourite poems that inevitably omits some important poets. The *Leabhar Mòr* makes no pretence of being comprehensive or balanced, but offers a poet's and artist's insight into Gaelic poetry, and so may be more human, more inclusive and more unpredictable. Each poet is represented once and the 100 poems come from almost every century between the 6th and 21st. An impossible feat for most other European languages, including English.

The visual artists were selected on the basis of 50 per cent by nomination and 50 per cent by open submission. Key individuals with a knowledge of the visual arts and of the Gaelic communities were asked to propose artists on the understanding that at least two of their nominations would be invited to contribute. Advertisements placed in the arts and Gaelic press in both countries invited open-entry submissions from artists interested in the project. The difficult task of selecting the final 100 artists took place in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin and in a hotel ballroom in the Western Isles in early 2001. The consistently high quality of the finished artwork confirms the good judgment of our Scots and Irish visual arts panels.

Representatives from both the literary and visual arts panels met at Newman House in Dublin for the pairing of poets and artists. Each artist's work was shown and discussed as the panels sought five poems that might suit the artist's interests. Every artist was offered a poem by a living and a deceased Scottish poet, a poem by a living and a deceased Irish poet, plus one 'wild card' poem. The artists indicated their choice of poem in order of preference. The poems were finally allocated on a first-come first-served basis as an incentive for the artists to choose and respond promptly. Eventually 75 per cent of the artists were allocated

either their first or second choice of poem and the remaining 25 per cent were dealt with on a one-to-one basis until we matched all 100 poems to 100 artists.

The ten-strong calligraphy team was assembled and led by Frances Breen, and included typographer Don Addison. They first met in the Writers' Centre in Dublin at the time of the Irish press launch on *Latha Bríde*, February 2001, traditionally known as Poets' Day. Forty artists, calligraphers and a support team met in the Belfast College of Art later that month.

The Visual Research Centre in Dundee, led by Arthur Watson and supported by Paul Harrison, was commissioned to provide all technical, printmaking and other support for the artists and calligraphers throughout the artwork production period. They also supervised the production and distribution of the hand-made paper.

The process has been as important as the product throughout the making of the *Leabhar Mòr*. Simply bringing together substantial numbers of poets, artists, calligraphers, academics, arts workers, film makers, publishers, designers and others has had its own intrinsic value. Effecting introductions across new art forms, borders and languages has initiated new understandings and dialogues and some lasting relationships. The process of 'translation', characterised by one artist as 'letting go', has also been central. Not only the translation from the original Gaelic text into English, but the translation from text to artist's image, the calligraphers' squaring of the circle and the subsequent translation of the *Leabhar Mòr* into other media such as this book, the film, the BBC radio series and the website. These multiple translations enable the *Leabhar Mòr* to be experienced in several ways simultaneously and offer a rich compound value.

It has been my privilege to work with all of the remarkable team of talents that has created the *Leabhar Mòr* and given new shapes and forms to the Gaelic language. Every picture carries the story of its making, of those who made it and the innumerable creative interactions, decisions and discoveries that have brought it into being. Different readers will seek, and find different things within its pages. It is already something more than the sum of the parts. Maybe it represents a small punctuation mark in the Gaelic story. Time will tell if it marks an ending or a beginning – or simply a great, illuminated question mark.

Dhòmsa dheth, thàinig seo uile a-mach à gaol mòr eadar mi fhìn agus tè sonraichte bho Eilean Eireann.

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Twentieth-century Irish-Language Poetry

Theo Dorgan

At the dawn of the twentieth century, borne up on the rising tide of national feeling, nurtured by the Gaelic League's recuperative work on the poetry of the past, an Irish-speaking optimist might have predicted a flood of new poetry in the language as a feature of the coming times. He, or she, would have been both incautious and destined to be disappointed. The first Gaelic poet of serious achievement in the new century, Máirtín Ó Direáin, would not even begin to think of writing poetry in Irish until 1938, and would say at the outset "Níor chabhair mhór d'éinne againn san aois seo an aon uaill ná mac alla ó na filí a chuaigh romhain inár dteanga féin" — No cry or echo from the poets who went before us in our own tongue would be of help to any of us in this time.

Apart from Ó Direáin, no poetry of true value would appear in the Irish language until Seán Ó Ríordáin published *Eireaball Spideoige* in 1952. Consumptive, lonely and unillusioned, Ó Ríordáin was a kind of alienated pietist whose work strikes the first truly modern note in Gaelic poetry. Refusing the succour of sentimental loyalty to the forms and tropes of the high Gaelic tradition, his agonised soul-searching is a local version of the doubt and existential anguish which now seems so characteristic of the European mid-century. But Ó Direáin's reluctant, even angry abandoning of the Arcadian peasant dream does not quite make him modern, in the sense that Eoghan Ó Tuarisc, say, writing self-consciously under the shadow of the Bomb, is modern. Paradoxically, Máire Mhac an tSaoi, immersed as she is in the poet-scholar tradition, becomes modern precisely because of her ability to play off a distinctly independent and contemporary sensibility against the structures and strictures of inherited traditions. Seán Ó Tuama, with his Corkman's ancestral yearning for the Mediterranean, and Pearse Hutchinson, drawn to Galicia and Catalonia, find distinctive contemporary voices in Irish outside the sway of world-girdling English; one might say the same of Tomás Mac Síomóin, heavily and productively indebted to a Continental sensibility which owes more to Pasolini than to Pearse.

Caitlín Maude, who died tragically young, and Michael Hartnett, to whom we will return, both born in 1941, carry the mid-century: the fomer as a feminist *avant la lettre*, the latter as a gifted poet in both Irish and English, translator of Ó Bruadair , eidetic companion to the present generation even in death. Maude and Hartnett, as with the generation following swiftly on their heels, were more of the present moment than of Ireland, in the important sense that the Gaelic world was for them a repository of enormous resource for the living of a life, far more than it was a heavy and inescapable ancestral burden. They and their successors are of post-Catholic, post nationalist Ireland, the Ireland that was beginning to struggle to its feet at about the time they began publishing their youthful verses.

If the Gaelic League had, as it were, an afterlife following the establishment of the Irish Free State it was not vivifying, but the reverse. We can see it now as an admirable project of recovery and recuperation which carried within itself the metal fatigue of Victorian sentimentalism. The lost Gaelic order towards which it flung out a bridge was aristocratic, disdainful, Catholic and doomed. Apt in and for its time, the poetry of that order was spectacularly ill-suited to the grubby, dour, post-colonial truth of the infant Republic which would seize on it as the epitome of native high culture and, by force-feeding it in the schools, rob it of its political charge while unconsciously undermining its power as art. The insular, primitive nationalism of the new ruling class seized on the rich poetry of the 17th and 18th centuries as a shining string of baubles, the pathetic jewels of the poor who do not recognise their own poverty nor understand where their true wealth is to be found. By resolutely closing out the modern in favour of an idealised and unreal nexus of virtuous peasant and cultured Lord, the State, through its 'education' system, made the disjunction between a glorious poetry of the past and a possible poetry of the present both absolute and prescriptive. Seeking, for perhaps the best motives, to celebrate the high poetry of a comparatively recent past, it silenced the present.

There were, to be sure, disruptions. Frank O'Connor, no cherished treasure of the State, published a muscular translation of *Cúirt an Mheán-Oíche*, *The Midnight Court*, in 1945, followed by *Kings, Lords and Commons* and *A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry 600-1200* (with David Greene), both in 1959. These books, paradoxically, awakened his English language readers to the intrinsic riches of the Gaelic poetic tradition, and helped make it possible to see in a positive context work which, unfortunately, the State had helped stigmatise as backward and unworthy of serious attention.

There were disruptions, and there was also a nourishing silence. Away from the eyes of the State and the new professional class of Gaeilgeoirí, in "unforgiven places" as Tony Curtis puts it, Irish continued to be spoken as a living, adaptive and ambitious language. On building sites in Coventry as much as in the botháns of Kerry and the fire stations of Boston and Chicago, with neither fuss nor fanfare, the language endured and mutated, as all living languages do, out of sight and out of mind. There is nobody more secretively rebellious than a man or woman who is assured by the well-off that poverty is an admirable thing; nothing is better suited to the life of a language than the secrecy of the poor; and nothing more appeals to a rebel than a language in which to access simultaneously both a hidden past and an unborn future. The rebels, as it happens, were waiting in the wings.

When Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Michael Davitt, Gabriel Rosenstock and Liam ó Muirthile arrived in University College Cork, they were coming to themselves as poets in what Che Guevara, in a different context but at more or less the same time, described as "an objectively revolutionary situation". They would found, and be published in, a radical journal, INNTI.

The power of the State to contain reality had withered. The electronic age and the first world generation were upon us, rock and roll had thundered out across the world and the short-lived counter culture, for a dizzy moment, held the commanding heights. The first trans-national generation had arrived to claim its place in the sun, and considerably to the

surprise of the tweeds and Fáinne brigade this brash and exuberant generation of poets was as unremarkably at home in the Gaeltachts as in the hip, wide world.

Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, born in Lancashire, brought up in Nenagh and in the Gaeltacht of Corcha Dhuibhne, was a natural rebel with a profound sense of the riches of the folk tradition, as source both of story and syntax. Michael Davitt, son of a C.I.E worker, and Liam ó Muirthile from the heart of Cork City found themselves wildly at home in the Gaeltachts of Corcha Dhuibhne and Cúil Aodha, party and privy to a racy reality the pietists of the language had ignored or tried to forget. There was a true exuberance in the air, perhaps more soberly shared by Gréagóir ó Dúill and Micheal O' Siadhail (his own preferred spelling) in other places, a sense that, as John Montague put it, "old moulds are broken" and that a new world, a new language was both possible and necessary. An Irish language, to put it this way, that could contain LSD and Gabriel Rosenstock's abiding faith in the wisdom-literature of the East.

The wily and sceptical Seán ó Tuama offered a bracing counterpoint to their wilder enthusiasms, perhaps, as Seán ó Riada brought a demonic precision to the music he did so much to uncover and make new again, in the same place and at the same time, but for all that, the INNTI poets were essentially unruly and individual as much as they were ever a school. Their education helped shape but does not explain them.

They were excoriated as shallow barbarians, dabblers in the shallows of the language, polluters of the unsullied, sex-free, drug-free paradise of the Gael. Contemptuous of the carefully-nurtured and comfortable state-within-a-state which the professional Gaeilgeoirí had so profitably and quietly nurtured, they earned, in some quarters, genuine, spitting hatred. It is true that their focus was on the immediate, the lyric instant of the body present to itself, the street as theatre of the present moment, the exalted state of mind as both norm and normative. In that sense they were very much of their time, in fact so much of their time that, disconcertingly, they were of the avant-garde in a way that few of their English-language contemporaries were. Formally and thematically, they were ripping through received forms and received wisdom in unprecedented ways; perhaps only Paul Durcan, at that time, was doing in English what these poets were doing in Irish. This cleavage with the past, especially with the immediate past, was so shocking that, in effect, the shock anaesthetised itself. They were out and through into a new, unexpected re-appropriation of the past almost before they, themselves, realised what was going on.

It should be noted that the rising generation of poets were both heartened and inspired to a more capacious sense of their inheritance by the visits to Ireland of Scottish Gaelic poets, singers and musicians organised by Colonel Eoghan Ó Néill, and by the reciprocal visits to Scotland which would enter into the folklore as well as the poetry. The sense of a cognate tradition and of a comradeship in struggle became and remains an amplification and a quickening of commitment to the language, to a life in the language.

We live in a changed landscape now. Biddy Jenkinson can forge, as she has done, a lapidary and rigorous language of her own, steeped in the cold water of the language, and be and feel free to do so. Áine Ní Ghlinn can dare her poems to the edge of cold prose, write of the most painful things, and occasion no reproach that she lacks the classical frame of

reference. Cathal Ó Searcaigh, whose beginning was in Kerouac, whose delight is in an unabashed gay sensibility, can write of Nepal and Gort 'a Choirce and sex satisfactory and unsatisfactory and know he will be read and heard as a poet of the living moment. These things are true, and remarkable. Louis de Paor and Colm Breathnach are the first of the post INNTI generations, each a true and individual poet, both of them born into a new kind of liberty.

The cleavage is absolute between our now and our past, insofar as that past was constructed as an ideal reservation without whose walls there could be no salvation. The cleavage is, also, an illusion: language comes down to us as a living stream, defying all efforts to shape and contain its course. It is literally not possible to engage with the present of a language, to write in a language, without being informed by the past of that language. What is different is that the poet today can pick and choose where to immerse herself in the past, can come to the past as part of the project of making his own, unique existential self as a poet. There is an essential freedom in this relationship to the past, a freedom which is at base a kind of absolute humility and without which there can be no genuine respect for the life and work of those who have gone before us.

When Michael Hartnett, Mícheál Ó hAirtnéide, came "with meagre gifts to court the language of my people", when he turned from English to Irish, to his own immediate present as well as the living present of Ó Bruadair and Ó Rathaille, it was a gesture read in one of two ways: it was quixotic and arbitrary, or it was a choice made in the face of forces, a-historical powers, he was helpless to resist. With the passage of time, and following his uncriticised and civilly-received return to English, it is possible now to see that Hartnett's choice was made in response to a simple imperative: the words sought him out, and the words were in Irish.

And this, I think, is where we are now. When poets now living make their poems in Irish, they are making poems, not obeisances, not signs made in the name of a tradition but the elements themselves of a free, living tradition. Poems. In Irish. No more, and no less.

Theo Dorgan ithaca2@eircom.net is a poet, as well as a broadcaster, scriptwriter and editor. He is the author of THE ORDINARY HOUSE OF LOVE (1991), ROSA MUNDI (1995) and SAPPHO'S DAUGHTER (1998); editor of IRISH POETRY SINCE KAVANAGH (1997); co-editor of REVISING THE RISING (1991) and, with Gene Lambert, of LEABHAR MÓR na hÈIRANN / THE GREAT BOOK OF IRELAND. He was a former Director of Poetry Ireland/Éigse Éireann http://poetryireland.ie. His work has been widely translated and he is a member of Aosdána http://www.artscouncil.ie/aosdana/.

Ealaíontóir / Artist: Alasdair Gray
Peannaire / Calligrapher: Alasdair Gray
Aistritheoir / Translator: Kuno Meyer
Ainmníodh ag / Nominator: Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill

Is Scíth Mo Chrob ón Scríbainn

Ní fios cé a chum c.1200

Is scíth mo chrob ón scríbainn;
Ní dígainn mo glés géroll;
Sceithid penn – gulban caelda –
Dig ndaelda do dub glégorm.

Bruinnid srúaim n-ecna ndedairn
As mo láim degduinn desmais;
Doirtid a dig for duilinn
Do dub in chuilinn chnesglais.

Sínim mo phenn mbec mbraenach
Tar aenach lebar lígoll
Cen scor fri selba ségonn,
Dían scíth mo chrob ón scríbonn.

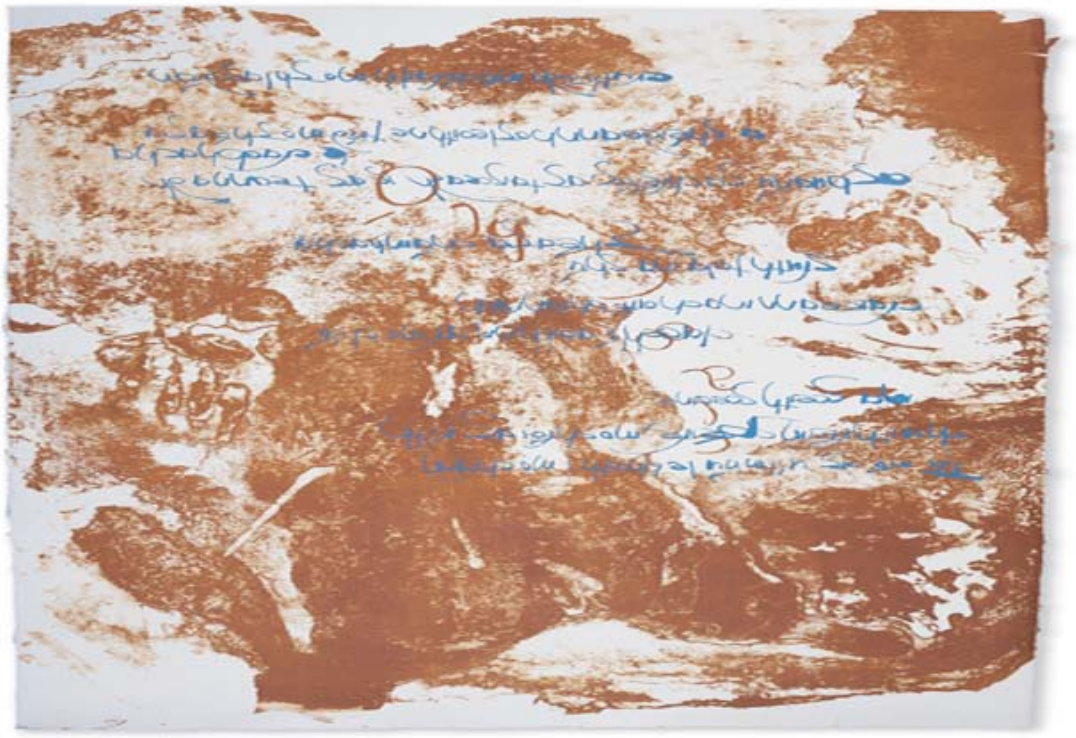
My Hand is Weary with Writing

Anon c.1200

My hand is weary with writing,
My sharp quill is not steady,
My slender-beaked pen jets forth
A black draught of shining dark-blue ink.

A stream of wisdom of blessèd God
Springs from my fair-brown shapely hand:
On the page it squirts its draught
Of ink of the green-skinned holly.

My little dripping pen travels
Across the plain of shining books,
Without ceasing for the wealth of the great–
Whence my hand is weary with writing.



Ealaíontóir / Artist: Ian Joyce
Peannaire / Calligrapher: Réiltín Murphy
Aistritheoir / Translator: Frank Sewell
Ainmníodh ag / Nominator: The Author

Claochló

Cathal Ó Searcaigh b.1956

Tá mé ag ullmhú le bheith i mo chrann
agus chan de bharr go bhfuil dia ar bith
mo sheilg gan trua, é sa tóir orm go teann,
mé ag ealú óna chaithréim spéire, mo chroí ag rith
ina sceith sceoine, roimh bhuaile a dhúile.

D' aonghnó tiocfaidh claochló aoibhinn ar mo chló.
As mo cholainn daonna dhéanfar stoc darach.
Tiontóidh craiceann ina choirt chranrach; gan stró,
athróidh an sruth fola ina shú, an gheir ina smúsach:
fásaidh duilleoga ar mo ghéaga cnámhacha.

Cheana féin tá mo chuid ladhra ag síneadh,
ag géagú amach ina bhfréamhacha feitheogacha,
ag buanú sa chréafóg, ag taisceadh is ag teannadh.
Mothaím mé féin ag imeacht le craobhacha
nuair a shéideann bogleoithne fríd mo ghéaga.

Inniu chan ag análú atá mé ach ag siosarnach
agus mé mo sheasamh caol díreach gan bogadh;
éanacha na spéire ag ceiliúr ionam go haerach.
As an tsolas diamhair seo atá mo spreagadh
go dil, cruthóidh mé clóraifil; mo ghlasdán…

Transfigured

Cathal Ó Searcaigh b.1956

I am getting ready to become a tree,
not because some god is after me,
bearing down with his aerial authority,
my heart bolting from the thrust of his need.

My figure will be transfigured, in one go;
my human shell turned to the trunk of an oak,
my skin twisted to gnarled bark, my blood-flow
to sap. Out of my branch-bones leaves will grow.

Already, my fingers and toes are stretching out,
elongating into sinewy roots,
tucking themselves tightly into the ground;
and when a breeze blows my branches round,
I feel as if I'm going nuts, or out

of my tree. Today I stand tall and straight,
not breathing but rustling; birds congregate
in me, warbling airs while I create
chlorophyll, inspired by unfathomable light
to fulfil my destiny, synthesise my fate.

Neach-ealain / Artist: Mick O Kelly
Snas-sgrìobhadair / Calligrapher: The Artist
Eadar-theangaichte aig / Translator: Ronald Black
Roghainn / Nominator: Myles Campbell

Bean Dubh a' Caoidh a Fir a Chaidh a Mharbhadh leis a' Phoileas

Donnchadh MacDhunlèibhe c.1877-1964

Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.*
Carson, a Dhè a tha sa chathair,
Carson an-diugh a rinn Thu 'n latha?
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Mo-nuar gum faca mi a shoillse
Ach a bhith gu bràth san oidhche.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Och, mo chràdh, mo chràdh 's mo lèireadh,
An latha thug iad uam mo cheud-ghràdh.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Do chorp donn an sin na laighe,
Toll air tholl a' sileadh fala.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Am fear bòidheach laigh rim thaobh-sa
An sin 's a mhionach às a' slaodadh.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Aichbheil, aichbheil, sgrios is lèireadh
Air an luchd a rinn mo cheusadh.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Eisd rim ghuidhean, Rìgh nan Dùilean,
Eisd rim athchuinge 's rim ùrnaigh.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Tha 'n luchd bàn an-diugh làn aigheir
'S tha mo phàistean-sa gun athair.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Is tha mo bheatha-sa nis falamh -
Ach ceadaich dhomh, mum fàg mi 'n talamh,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Air m' fhear-cèile 'n sin na shìneadh,
Nuair a thig mo mhic gu ìre,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

An èirig dhuinn airson ar dòrainn,
Latha rèidh a ghearradh sgòrnan;
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Ghearradh sgòrnan nam fear fuileach,
Fuil mum dhòrnaibh suas gu uilinn,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

A bhith gan reubadh is gam pianadh
Is deagh fhaobhar air mo sgian-sa.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Thoir latha dhuinn gu saor a' pàigheadh
Fhir is mhnathan agus phàistean
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

An luchd ghil a bhuail ar daoine;
Cuairt mun amhaichean den caolain.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Cuairt den caolain 'n àite chneapan,
Is siridh mi 'n sin taobh do leapach,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Na fiachan uile air an dìoladh,
Fhir 's a ghràidh, 's tu 'n sin ad shìneadh.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

* *Athair, a Thighearna, tèarainn sinn.*

A Black Woman Mourns her Husband Killed by the Police

Duncan Livingstone c.1877-1964

Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.*
Why, O God upon the throne,
Why did you make the day today?
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Alas that I ever saw its brightness,
I'd rather it were night forever.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Oh my pain, my pain, my torment's
The day they took my first love from me.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Your brown body lying before me,
Blood pouring out from wound on wound.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

The handsome man who lay beside me
There with his intestines trailing loose.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Vengeance, vengeance, grief, destruction
On the people who've had me crucified.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

King of the Elements, hear my oaths,
Listen to my petition and my prayer.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Today the whites are full of gladness
And my children have no father.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

And my life is empty now –
But grant me, while I'm still on earth,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

For my husband lying before me,
When my sons have come of age,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

In compensation for our grief,
Some perfect day for cutting throats,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

For cutting throats of bloody men,
Blood on my fists up to the elbow,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

For tearing them and torturing them
With a good blade upon my knife:
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Give us a day to pay back freely
The men, the women and the children
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Of the white folk who struck our people
With a turn of their guts around their necks—
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

A turn of their guts instead of beads,
And then I'll seek the side of your bed,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

All the debts having been paid,
Beloved husband, who's lying before me.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

* *Father, O Lord, save us*

Ealaíontóir / Artist: Deirdre O' Mahony
Peannaire / Calligrapher: Réiltín Murphy
Aistritheoir / Translator: Frank O Connor
Ainmníodh ag / Nominated by: Biddy Jenkinson

M'anam do Sgar Riomsa A-raoir

Muireadhach Albanach c.1300

M'anam do sgar riomsa a-raoir,
calann ghlan dob ionnsa i n-uaigh;
rugadh bruinne maordha mín
is aonbhla lín uime uainn.

Do tógbhadh sgath aobhdha fhionn
a-mach ar an bhfaongha bhfann:
laogh mo chridhise do chrom,
craobh throm an tighise thall.

M'aonar a-nocht damhsa, a Dhé,
olc an saoghal camsa ad-chí;
dob álainn trom an taoibh naoi
do bhaoi sonn a-raoir, a Rí.

Truagh leam an leabasa thiar,
mo pheall seadasa dhá snámh;
tárramair corp seada saor
is folt claon, a leaba, id lár.

Do bhí duine go ndreich moill
ina luighe ar leith mo phill;
gan bharamhail acht bláth cuill
don sgáth duinn bhanamhail bhinn.

Maol Mheadha na malach ndonn
mo dhabhach mheadha a-raon rom;
mo chridhe an sgáth do sgar riom,
bláth mhionn arna car do chrom.

Táinig an chlí as ar gcuing,
agus dí ráinig mar roinn:
corp idir dá aisil inn
ar dtocht don fhinn mhaisigh mhoill.

Leath mo throigheadh, leath mo thaobh,
a dreach mar an droighean bán,
níor dhísle neach dhí ná dhún,
leath mo shúl í, leath mo lámh.

Leath mo chuirp an choinneal naoi;
's guirt riom do roinneadh, a Rí;
agá labhra is meirtneach mé —
dob é ceirtleath m'anma í.

Mo chéadghrádh a dearc mhall mhór,
déadbhán agus cam a cliabh:
nochar bhean a colann caomh
ná a taobh ré fear romham riamh.

Fiche bliadhna inne ar-aon,
fá binne gach bliadhna ar nglór,
go rug éinleanabh déag dhún,
an ghéag úr mhéirleabhar mhór.

Gé tú, nocha n-oilim ann,
ó do thoirinn ar gcnú chorr;
ar sgaradh dár roghrádh rom,
falamh lom an domhnán donn.

Ón ló do sáidheadh cleath corr
im theach nochar ráidheadh rum —
ní thug aoighe d'ortha ann
dá barr naoidhe dhorcha dhunn.

A dhaoine, ná coisgidh damh;
faoidhe ré cloistin ní col;
táinig luinnchreach lom 'nar dteagh —
an bhruithneach gheal donn ar ndol.

Is é rug uan í 'na ghrúg,
Rí na sluagh is Rí na ród;
beag an cion do chúl na ngéag
a héag ó a fior go húr óg.

Ionmhain lámh bhog do bhí sonn,
a Rí na gclog is na gceall:
ach! an lámh nachar logh mionn,
crádh liom gan a cor fám cheann.

On the Death of his Wife

Muireadhach Albanach c.1300

I parted from my life last night,
A woman's body sunk in clay:
The tender bosom that I loved
Wrapped in a sheet they took away.

The heavy blossom that had lit
The ancient boughs is tossed and blown;
Hers was the burden of delight
That long had weighed the old tree down.

And I am left alone tonight
And desolate is the world I see,
For lovely was that woman's weight
That even last night had lain on me.

Weeping I look upon the place
Where she used to rest her head,
For yesterday her body's length
Reposed upon you too, my bed.

Yesterday that smiling face
Upon one side of you was laid
That could match the hazel bloom
In its dark delicate sweet shade.

Maelva of the shadowy brows
Was the mead-cask at my side;
Fairest of all flowers that grow
Was the beauty that has died.

My body's self deserts me now,
The half of me that was her own,
Since all I knew of brightness died
Half of me lingers, half is gone.

The face that was like hawthorn bloom
Was my right foot and my right side;
And my right hand and right eye
Were no more than hers who died.

Poor is the share of me that's left
Since half of me died with my wife;
I shudder at the words I speak;
Dear God, that girl was half my life.

And our first look was her first love;
No man had fondled ere I came
The little breasts so small and firm
And the long body like a flame.

For twenty years we shared a home,
Our converse milder with each year;
Eleven children in its time
Did that tall stately body bear.

It was the King of hosts and roads
Who snatched her from me in her prime:
Little she wished to leave alone
The man she loved before her time.

Now King of churches and of bells,
Though never raised to pledge a lie
That woman's hand - can it be true? -
No more beneath my head will lie.

Ealaíontóir / Artist: Moira Scott
Peannaire / Calligrapher: Réiltín Murphy
Aistritheoir / Translator: Thomas Kinsella
Ainmníodh ag / Nominator: Thomas Kinsella

Bean Torrach, fa Tuar Broide
Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh c.1400

Bean torrach, fa tuar broide,
do bhí i bpríosún pheannaide,
berar dho chead Dé na ndúl,
lé leanabh beag sa bhríosún.

Ar n-a bhreith do bhí an macámh
ag fás mar gach bhfochlocán,
dá fhiadhnaibh mar budh each dhún,
seal do bhliadhnaibh sa bhríosun.

An inghean d'fhagháil bhroise —
meanma an leinbh níor lughaide,
sí dhá réir gé dho bhaoi i mbroid,
mar mhnaoi gan phéin gan pheannaid.

Do shoillse an laoi níor léir dhóibh
acht a bhfaicdís – fáth dobróin! –
do dhruim iodhan an achaidh
tré ionadh thuill tarathair.

Mun n-orchra níorbh ionann dál
dá mháthair is don mhacámh;
do aithrigh dealbh dá dreich gil
is an leanbh ag breith bhisigh.

An leanbh dá oileamhain ann
dob fheirrde aige an fhulang,
níor léir don bharrthais óg úr
nárbh fhód Parrthais an príosún.

Seisean ag breith ruag reabhraidh,
sise ag dul i ndoimheanmain;
mairg, thrá, nach tiobhradh dá aoidh
ionnramh na mná 'sa macaoimh.

Ar bhfaicsin déar ré dreich ngil,
ráidhis an leanbh lá éigin:
ó tharla a fhuidheall ar mh'óidh,
cluineam damhna do dhobhróin.

Neimhiongnadh gé dho-neinn maoith,
ar sise, a leinibh lánbhaoith;
is rian cumhang nár dhleacht dún,
teacht d'fhulang pian i bpríosún.

An bhfuil, ar sé, ródh eile,
is aoibhne ná ar n-innmhine,
nó an bhfuil ní as soillse ná so,
ó dho-ní an toirse tromsa?

Dar linn, ar an leanabh óg,
gé taoi brónach, a bheanód,
is léir dhúin ar ndíol soillse,
ná bíodh ar th'uidh attuirse.

A n-abrae ní hiongnadh dheit,
ar an inghean, a óigmheic;
dáigh treibhe an teagh do thoghais –

treabh eile ní fhacadhais.

Dá bhfaictheá a bhfacaidh meise,
ré dteacht don treibh dhoircheisi,
do bhiadh doimheanma ort ann,
do phort oileamhna, a anam.

Os agadsa is fhearr a dhearbh,
a inghean, ar an t-óigleanbh,
ná ceil foirn fionnachtain de,
do mhoirn d'iomarcaidh oirne.

Loise an tsaoghail mhóir amuigh,
is eadh tháirreas ó thosaigh;
mé i dtigh dhorcha 'na dheaghaidh,
a fhir chomtha, is cinneamhain.

Le cleachtadh deacrachta dhe,
's nach fuair sé sódh is aoibhne,
níor cheis a ghruadh ghríosúr ghlan
ar an bpríosún bhfuar bhfolamh.

Baramhail do-bearthar dún —
an dream do bhí sa bhríosún:
lucht an bheatha cé an cúpla,
a ré is beatha bhríosúnta.

Ag féachain meadhrach Mheic Dé,
flaitheas aga bhfuil buainré,
cúis bhróin beatha gach dúnaidh,
slóigh an bheatha is bríosúnaigh.

A Child Born in Prison

Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh c.1400

A pregnant woman (sorrow's sign)
once there was, in painful prison.
The God of Elements let her bear
in prison there a little child.

The little boy, when he was born,
grew up like any other child
(plain as we could see him there)
for a space of years, in prison.

That the woman was a prisoner
did not lower the baby's spirits.
She minded him, though in prison,
like one without punishment or pain.

Nothing of the light of day
(O misery!) could they see
but the bright ridge of a field
through a hole someone had made.

Yet the loss was not the same
for the son as for the mother:
her fair face failed in form
while the baby gained in health.

The child, raised where he was,
grew better by his bondage,
not knowing in his fresh frail limbs
but prison was ground of Paradise.

He made little playful runs
while her spirits only deepened.
(Mark well, lest you regret,
these deeds of son and mother.)

He said one day, beholding
a tear on her lovely face:
'I see the signs of sadness;
now let me hear the cause.'

'No wonder that I mourn,
my foolish child,' said she.
'This cramped place is not our lot,
and suffering pain in prison.'

'Is there another place', he said,
'lovelier than ours?

Is there a brighter light than this
that your grief grows so heavy?'

'For I believe,' the young child said,
'mother, although you mourn,
we have our share of light.
Don't waste your thoughts in sorrow.'

'I do not wonder at what you say,
young son,' the girl replied.
'You think this is a hopeful place
because you have seen no other.

'If you knew what I have seen
before this dismal place
you would be downcast also
in your nursery here, my soul.'

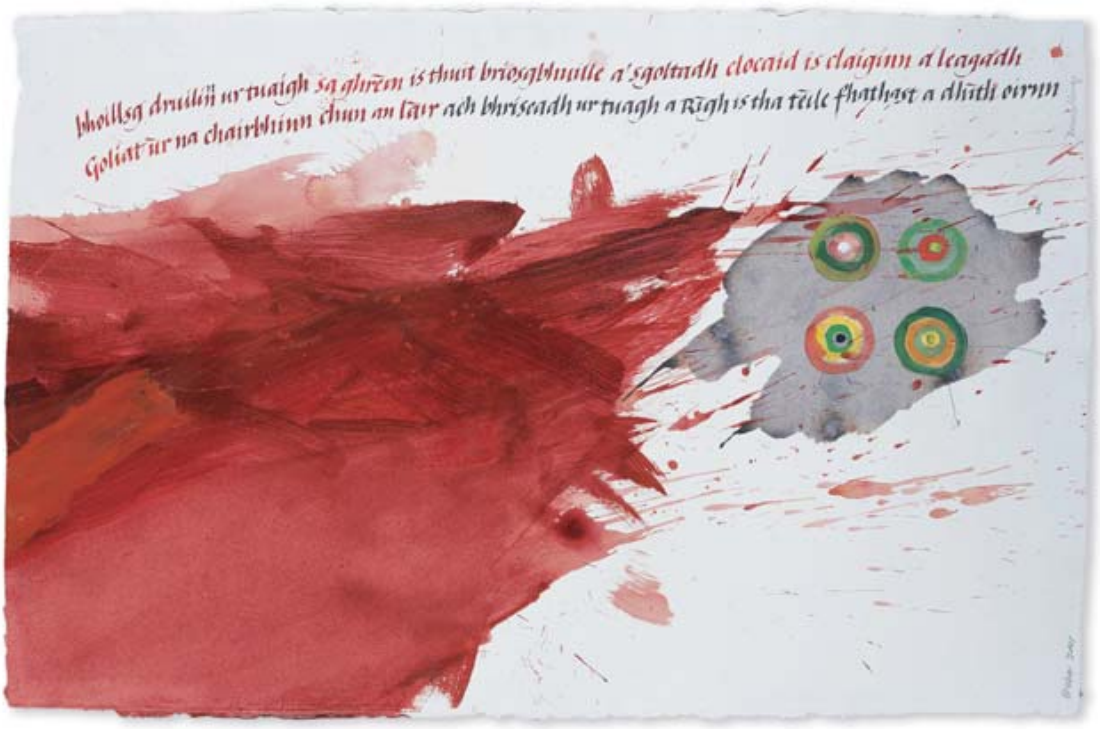
'Since it is you know best, lady,'
the little child replied,
'hide from me no longer
what more it was you had.'

'A great outer world in glory
formerly was mine.
After that, beloved boy,
my fate is a darkened house.'

At home in all his hardships,
not knowing a happier state,
fresh-cheeked and bright, he did not grudge
the cold and desolate prison.

And so is the moral given:
the couple there in prison
are the people of this world,
imprisoned life their span.

Compared with joy in the Son of God
in His everlasting realm
an earthly mansion is only grief,
prisoners all the living.



Neach-ealain / Artist: Katherine Boucher-Beug
Snas-sgrìobhadair / Calligrapher: Donald Murray
Eadar-theangaichte aig / Translator: The Author
Roghainn / Nominator: The Author

An Tuagh

Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh b.1948

thàinig e oirbh mar shròn-adharcach na dheann
is sibh a' feitheamh
mar Shùlu le sleagh

thàinig e oirbh mar tharbh
is sibh a' feitheamh
mar mhatador le claidheamh

thàinig e oirbh mar thanca
is sibh a' feitheamh
mar shaighdear le greinèid

thàinig e oirbh mar dhràgon
is sibh a' feitheamh (gu h-ìoranta, tha fhios)
mar an Naomh Seòras

thàinig e oirbh le ulfhartaich chon is Talai-hò
ach bu sionnach sibh
nach teicheadh

thàinig e oirbh mar dhìneosor
ach b'ainmhidh ùr sibh
le Einstein nur ceann

thàinig e oirbh mar locomòtaibh fo smùid
is sibh mar dhrochaid
an impis èirigh

thàinig e oirbh
le àrdan Napoleon,
le gaoir-chatha Genghis Khan
le tàir-chainnt Hiotlair fhèin
le ain-iochd Stailinn
le ìmpireachas Shasainn
le bodhaig de Bohuin

thàinig e oirbh
is sibh nur dìollaid
mar iolair air creig
mar leòmhainn na chrùban

thàinig e oirbh
le lanns is sgiath is clogaid is dos
is each is armachd is tàirneanach is fallas
is sitheadh is duslach is ràiteachas is bàs

thàinig e oirbh

ach a chlisge
le gluasad luath
le gradghluasad cruinn
le deasghluasad pongail
le snasghluasad brìoghmhor
san robh an sàs ar n-eachdraidh gu lèir

bhoillsg stàilinn
ur tuaigh sa ghrèin
is thuit briosgbhuille
a' sgoltadh clogaid
is claiginn

a' deargadh
Goliat earraidich
air raon uaine

ach bhriseadh ur làmhag, a Rìgh
is tha t'èile fhathast a dhìth oirnn

The Axe

Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh b.1948

he came at you like an angry rhino
and you waiting
like a Zulu with a spear

he came at you like a bull
and you waiting
like a matador with a sword

he came at you like a tank
and you waiting
like a soldier with a grenade

he came at you like a dragon
and you waiting (ironically of course)
like Saint George

he came at you with a baying of hounds and Tally-ho
but you were a fox
that would not run

he came at you like a dinosaur
but you were a subtle creature
with Einstein in your brain

he came at you like a locomotive under steam
and you like a bridge
about to rise

he came at you
with the hauteur of Napoleon
with the battle-cry of Genghis Khan
with the vituperation of Hitler himself
with the brutality of Stalin
with the imperialism of England
with the body of de Bohun

he came at you
poised in your saddle
like an eagle on a crag
like a crouching lion

he came at you
with lance and shield and helmet and plume
and horse and armour and thunder and sweat
and impetus and dust and invective and death

he came at you

but instantly
with an agile movement
with a neat sudden movement
with a precisely executed movement
with an elegant energetic movement
on which our entire history hinged

the steel of your axe
blazed in the sun
and like a blur the blow fell
splitting helmet
and skull

displaying
an errant Goliath
red on green field

but your axe was broken, O King
And another we have yet to find.

Ealaíontóir / Artist: Bridget Flannery
Peannaire / Calligrapher: Réiltín Murphy
Aistritheoir / Translator: The Author
Ainmníodh ag / Nominator: The Author

Dán do Scáthach

Colm Breathnach b.1961

an t-oileán glé úd gurb é tusa é
tá sé fairsing sléibhtiúil

ceilteach agus oscailte
is nuair a bhogann néalta
trasna na spéire os do chionn
léirítear ailteanna is machairí

seangacht agus méithe in éineacht
agus scáth ar scáth ag leanúint a chéile
timpeall ar do cholainn bhán go léir

tráth gur shínis amach
ar an dtocht lomnocht
sa tseomra dorcha
os cionn na mara
bhí caille ar d'éadan
a d'fholaigh do cheannaithe
do shúile fiú
nuair ba léir iad faoin bhfial
bhí mar a bheadh scim orthu

do bheanna mórtasacha
ag éirí is ag ísliú
gile fhíochmhar do chnis
ina hoileán i lár an dorchadais
shnámhas go dtí tú
m'fheargacht go léir ar crith
le tnúth agus le heagla

do lámha anall tharam is mé ag dul isteach ort

mar oilithreach chun do theampaill thánag
is mé ag foghlaim gaisce
san áit inar thit céad fear romham
níos fearr faoi chéad ná mé
níor chuala ach ceol na bpíob

nuair a léimeas thar do dhroichead
is nuair a réabas do bhaile poirt

ceol síoraí na bpíob
ag leagan urláir faoi mo chroí

an t-oileán glé gurb é tusa é
a chuir sciatháin le mo mhian

do bheanna mórtasacha ag éirí is ag ísliú
i gcónaí faoi gach gníomh a chuirim i gcrích

is cuma anois nó cuid díom tú
cé ná faca do shúile riamh
bhraitheasa do chroí ag bualadh

i siansán uafar na bpíob mór
is i nglórtha na ngaiscíoch a thit romham
faoi bhuillí fiochmhara ghile do chnis
sa tseomra dorcha os cionn na mara

oileán fairsing oscailte tú
a iompraím thart liom
im chroí ceilteach

A Poem to Scáthach

Colm Breathnach b.1961

you are a bright island
hilly and wide

reserved and open
as clouds drift over you
across the sky
plains and ravines are revealed

swelling and slender together
as shadow follows shadow
around about your white body

when you stretched
naked on the bed
in the dark chamber
above the sea
the veil on your face
concealing your features
even your eyes
when seen
seemed hazed

your proud peaks
rising and falling
the fierce splendour of your skin
an island in the midst of dark
toward you I swam
my manliness trembling
with longing and fear

your arms around me as I reached your land
a pilgrim come to your temple
to learn warrior feats
where a hundred fell before me
a hundred times bolder than me
all I heard was the pipes wailing
as I vaulted your bridge
and breached your haven
the pipes eternal chant
grounding my heart

you are a bright island
settings wings to my desire
your proud peaks rise and fall
beneath my every feat one and all
almost a part of me
though I never saw your eyes
I felt your heart beat

in the fearful whine of the war-pipes
in the calls of the warriors who fell before me
beneath the fierce bright strokes of your skin
in the dark chamber above the ocean

a wide open island
borne
in my reserved heart

Ealaíontóir / Artist: Catherine Harper
Peannaire / Calligrapher: Réiltín Murphy
Aistritheoir / Translator: Anne C. Frater
Ainmníodh ag / Nominator: Aonghas Dubh MacNeacail

Éistibh a Luchd an Tighe-se

Iseabail ní mheic Cailéin c.1500

Éistibh a luchd an tighe-se
re scél na mbod bríoghmhar
do shanntaich mo chridhe-sa
cuid dana scéalaibh do sgríobhadh.

Cé líonmhor bod bréagh-bhileach
do bhí san aimsir romhainn
tá aig fear an úird chrábhaidh seo
bod as cho mór righinn.

Bod mo shagairt thuarasdail
cé tá cho fada seasmhach
o tha céin ní chualabhair
an reabh atá ina mhacan.

Atá a riabh ro-reamhar
an sin 's ní h-é scéal bréagach
nocha [chuala] cho-reamhar
mhotha bhod arís. Éistibh.

Listen, People of this House

Iseabail ní mheic Cailéin c.1500

Listen, people of this house,
to the tale of the powerful penis
which has made my heart greedy.
I will write some of the tale.

Although many beautiful tree-like penises
have been in the time before,
this man of the religious order
has a penis so big and rigid.

The penis of my household priest,
although it is so long and firm,
the thickness of his manhood
has not been heard of for a long time.

That thick drill of his,
and it is no word of a lie,
never has its thickness been heard of
or a larger penis. Listen.

Ealaíontóir / Artist: Patricia Looby
Peannaire / Calligrapher: Frances Breen
Aistritheoir / Translator: The Author
Ainmníodh ag / Nominator: The Author

Maireann an t-Seanmhuintir

Máire Mhac an tSaoi *b.1922*

Thaithin leo an t-éadan ard ar mhnaoi –
Faisean an ghlibe ar bhaineannach ní bhfuair cion –
Agus scaradh leathan na súl
Agus an séanas mealltach chun tosaigh sa chár gléigeal:
Canóin na háilleachta 'ceapadh roimh theacht do Chríost …
Agus shamhlaíos dom féin go mbreacfainn a dtuairisc,
Mar, nuair nach ann dár nglúin-ne,
Cé bhlaisfidh a séimhe siúd 'bhéascna?

Tharla mé ag múineadh scoile thiar ag an am san,
Agus ansan ar an mbinse leanbh mar lile:
Coimheascar na rós ar a leacain
Is a cúl dob' órbhuí,
Gorm a rosca agus mall,
Caoincheart a braoithe,
Agus a béilin úr mar shú na gcraobh insa Mheitheamh.
Aon bhliain déag do chláraigh
Is splanc ní raibh ina cloigeann,
Ná í in aon chor 'na thinneas,
Ba leor bheith ann is bheith amhlaidh.

Tháinig an focal 'bé' i dtreis le linn teagaisc;
'Sin focal ná beidh agaibh,' do ráidh an mháistreás leo.
Phreab an lámh bheag in airde:
'Thá sé agamsa'…
Íoróin throm an mhúinteora scaoileas den éill léi:
'Inis má sea don rang é, a Treas, a' stór do chuid eolais.'
Dána is teann as a gleoiteacht do raid sí an freagra:
'Bean gan aon éadach uirthi!'…
Do ghair Eoghan Rua.

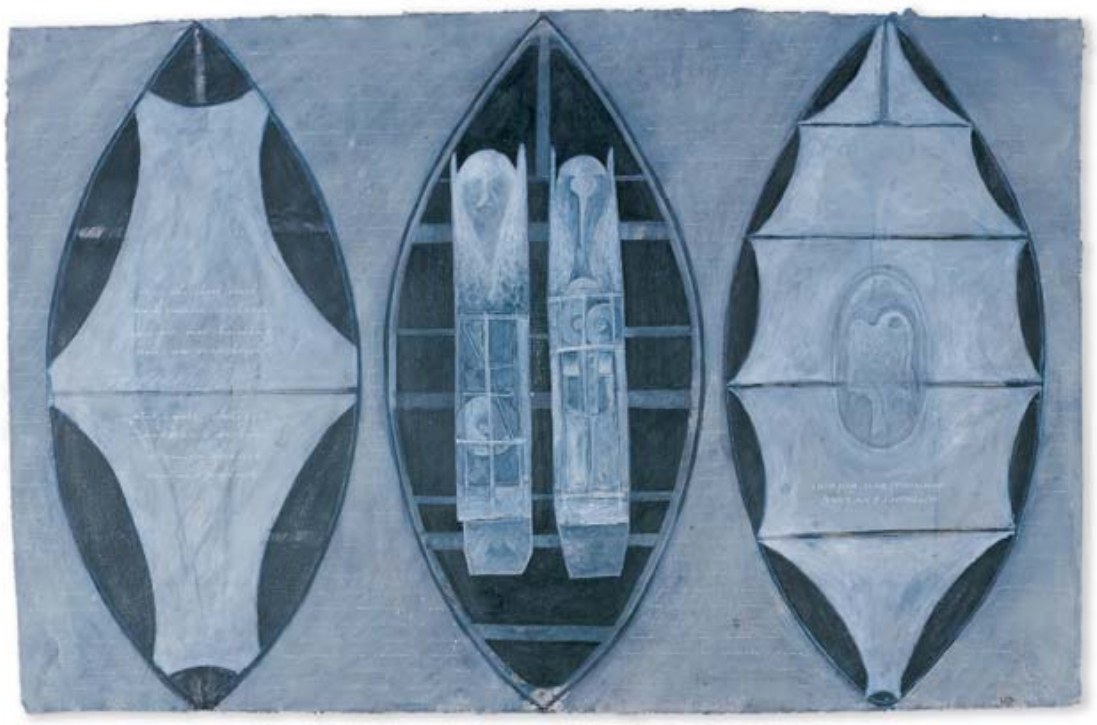
The Old Live On

Máire Mhac an tSaoi *b.1922*

They liked a high forehead on a woman –
The fashion for fringes on females was not prized –
And the broad separation of the eyes,
And the charming gap between the very white front teeth:
The canon of beauty laid down before the coming of Christ…
And I thought I would jot down their tidings,
For, when our generation is no more,
Who will taste the gentleness of their conventions?

I happened to be teaching school at that time in the West,
And there on the bench [sat] a child like a lily,
A conflict of roses on her cheeks
And her head of hair golden-yellow,
Her eyes blue and slow-moving,
Her brows precisely drawn,
And her small fresh mouth like raspberries in June.
She registered eleven years
And there wasn't a spark of sense in her head,
Nor was she at all worried by that,
It was enough to be there and be thus.

The word for 'muse' cropped up during teaching;
'That is a word you won't know,' the mistress declared to them.
The little hand shot up:
'I know it…'
I unleashed the teacher's heavy irony at her:
'Tell it then to the class, Teresa, from the store of your knowledge.'
Bold and confident in her loveliness, she shot back the answer:
'A woman with no clothes on!'…
Eoghan Rua laughed.



Neach-ealain / Artist: Will Maclean
Snas-sgrìobhadair / Calligrapher: Frances Breen
Eadar-theangaichte aig / Translator: The Author
Roghainn / Nominator: The Author

na thàinig anns a' churach ud

Aonghas Dubh MacNeacail *b.1942*

caith a h-uile clach gu làr,
leig leis an luibhe fàs -
tha anail fhathast san fhonn

mùch an teanga le smachd,
cùm an aigne fo dheachd -
srad dùbhlain fhathast sa chom

chan fhaighear sruth
nach giùlain soitheach

cuir pòr, mar chuimhne,
anns an t-soitheach

mar anail sluaighe
anns an t-soitheach

a' giùlain dachaigh
anns an t-soitheach

à doire àrd
    nan darach ruighinn
        thàinig coinneal sìl
            sa churach sheang

bu cholum soitheach
    dhan an t--sìol
        a thàinig thar
            na maoile nall

bhrùchd an sìol a-mach
    air leathad 's lios
        na dhuilleach gorm,
            mar dhannsair dàn

bu siud an sruth
a sgaoil tron tìr

chaidh cainnt na tuath
air feadh na tìr

chaidh cumhachd fios
air feadh na tìr

sgaoil duilleach fios
air feadh gach tìr

's ged a chaillte
bàrr nan leus,
anns a' cheathach liath
a dh'fhàg lasair dhubh
nan ìmpireachd,
bha luchd a' phòir
na shruth fo ghrunnd

chùm snàithleanan
de shileadh fann

siùbhlachd a' ghuth
tro uaimh a' chràidh,
sheinn an guth nach trèig
grian nan altramas
do bhlàth nan leus

an do chunntais thu,
a cholmain dàin,
na do long sheang sheice,
na làithean loma
a thigeadh oirnn
bhon a sheòl thu
thar na maoile,
le do leabhar mòr grèise
suaint nad chànan,
sgiath do-shàthte
an aghaidh lom-sgrìob

's ged a dh'fhalbh an cìobair,
ged a dh'fhalbh an treabhaiche,
dh'fhuirich an tobhta, na cochall
a' feitheamh an t-sìl

agus seall, ann an seo, eadar
coille beithe 's cuan a' bhradain,
a' chlach 's a' ghlainne
'g èirigh mar na blàthan ùra,
solas òrach na h-ath-bhliadhna,
dùn an dòchais, dùn a' gheallaidh

all that came in that one coracle

Aonghas Dubh MacNeacail b.1942

cast every stone to the ground,
let the weeds grow wild –
there's a breath remains in the earth

still the tongue with force,
keep the mind oppressed –
the body will not be a corpse

every current
will carry a vessel

put a seed, like memory,
into the vessel

like the breath of a people
in the vessel

carrying a home
in the vessel

from high derry
    of tenacious oaks
        a seed-candle came
            in the slender coracle

a dove was vessel
    for the seed
        that came across
            the bald-browed sea

that seed burst out
    on slope and lawn,
        its green green leaves
            like a dancer, bold

that was the stream
spread through the land

a people's words
went through the land

the power of knowledge
went through the land

the leaves of knowledge
through every land

and though the light
had lost its peak,
in the grey mist trail
of the black black flame

of empire states,
the seed's cargo
flowed underground

the smallest threads
of flowing veins
kept the fluid voice
through a cave of pain,
the unquenchable voice
sang a nursing sun
for the bloom of light

and did you count,
bold dove,
in your slender ship of skin,
the leanest days
that fell on us
since you sailed out
across the moil, with
your great embroidered book
wrapped in your language,
impenetrable shield
against devastation

and though the shepherd went,
though the ploughman left,
this ruin remained, like a husk
awaiting its seed

and see, over here, between
birch wood and salmon sea,
all the glass and stone
rising like new blossoms,
the golden light of next year,
fort of hopes, fort of promise

Ealaíontóir / Artist: Simon Fraser
Peannaire / Calligrapher: Frances Breen
Aistritheoir / Translator: Gerard Murphy
Ainmníodh ag / Nominator: Seamas Heaney

Pangur Bán

Ní fios cé a chum c.900

Messe ocus Pangur bán,
cechtar nathar fria shaindán:
bíth a menmasam fri seilgg,
mu menma céin im shaincheirdd.

Caraimse fos, ferr cach clú,
oc mu lebrán, léir ingnu;
ní foirmtech frimm Pangur bán:
caraid cesin a maccdán.

Ó ru biam, scél cen scís,
innar tegdais, ar n-óendís,
táithiunn, díchríchide clius,
ní fris tarddam ar n-áthius.

Gnáth, húaraib, ar gressaib gal
glenaid luch inna línsam;
os mé, du-fuit im lín chéin
dliged ndoraid cu ndronchéill.

Fúachaidsem fri frega fál
a rosc, a nglése comlán;
fúachimm chéin fri fégi fis
mu rosc réil, cesu imdis.

Fáelidsem cu ndéne dul
hi nglen luch inna gérchrub;
hi tucu cheist ndoraid ndil
os mé chene am fáelid.

Cia beimmi a-min nach ré
ní derban cách a chéle:
maith la cechtar nár a dán;
subaigthius a óenurán.

Hé fesin as choimsid dáu
in muid du-ngní cach óenláu;
du thabairt doraid du glé
for mu mud céin am messe.

The Scholar and his Cat

Anon c.900

I and white Pangur
practise each of us his special art:
his mind is set on hunting,
my mind on my special craft.

I love (it is better than all fame)
to be quiet beside my book, diligently pursuing
knowledge.
White Pangur does not envy me:
he loves his childish craft.

When the two of us (this tale never wearies us)
are alone together in our house,
we have something to which we may apply our skill,
an endless sport.

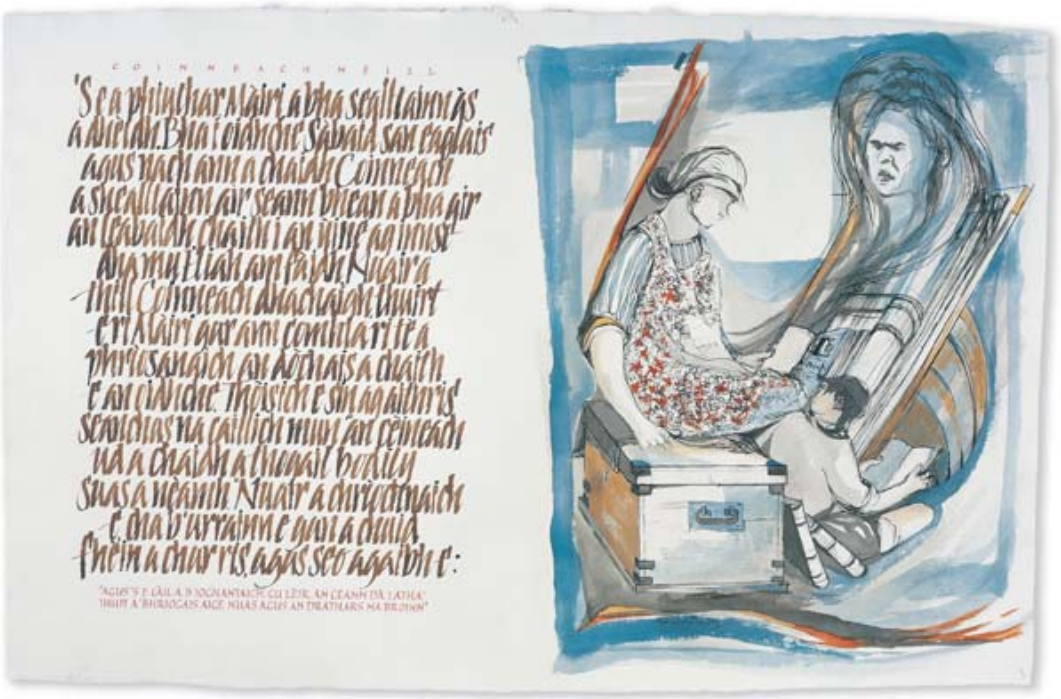
It is usual, at times, for a mouse to stick in his net,
as a result of warlike battlings.
For my part, into my net falls
some difficult rule of hard meaning.

He directs his bright perfect eye
against an enclosing wall.
Though my clear eye is very weak
I direct it against keenness of knowledge.

He is joyful with swift movement
when a mouse sticks in his sharp paw.
I too am joyful when I understand
a dearly loved difficult problem.

Though we be thus at any time,
neither of us hinders the other:
each of us likes his craft,
severally rejoicing in them.

He it is who is master for himself
of the work which he does every day.
I can perform my own work
directed at understanding clearly what is difficult.



Neach-ealain / Artist: Donald Smith
Snas-sgrìobhadair / Calligrapher: Louise Donaldson
Eadar-theangaichte aig / Translator: Norman Campbell
Roghainn / Nominator: The Literary Panel

Coinneach Nèill (earrann) à 'Suathadh ri Iomadh Rubha'

Aonghas Caimbeul c.1903-1982

'S e a phiuthar, Màiri, a bha sealltainn às a dhèidh. Bha i oidhche Sàbaid san eaglais agus nach ann a chaidh Coinneach a shealltainn air seann bhean a bha air an leabaidh. Chaith i an ùine ag innse dha mu Elijah, am fàidh. Nuair a thill Coinneach dhachaigh, thuirt e ri Màiri gur ann comhla ri tè a phrìosanaich an dòchais a chaith e an oidhche. Thòisich e sin ag aithris seanchas na caillich mun "an cèineach ud a chaidh a thogail *bodily* suas a nèamh". Nuair a chrìochnaich e, cha b' urrainn e gun a chuid fhèin a chur ris, agus seo agaibh e: "Agus 's e càil a b' ioghantaich gu lèir, an ceann dà latha, thuit a' bhriogais aige nuas agus an drathars na broinn."

Coinneach Nèill (excerpt) *from 'Suathadh ri Iomadh Rubha'*

Angus Campbell c.1903-1982

*His sister Mary looked after him. One Sunday evening she was in church and Coinneach went to visit an old woman, who was bed-ridden. She spent time telling him about the prophet Elijah.**

*When Coinneach returned home, he told Mary that he'd spent the evening with one of the 'prisoners of Hope.' ** And he began to recite the old woman's story about 'that character who was lifted bodily up to heaven.' When he'd finished, he couldn't resist adding his own bit to it. Here it is.*

'And the most amazing thing of all was that, two days later, his trousers – with his drawers in them – fell down to earth.'

**Kings II,* $_2$
***John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress*

Ealaíontóir / Artist: Daphne Wright
Peannaire / Calligrapher: Réiltín Murphy
Aistritheoir / Translator: Aodán Mac Póilín
Ainmníodh ag / Nominator: Tomás Mac Síomóin

Oilithreacht

Caitlín Maude c.1941-1982

Cleachtadh na ndeasgnáth
déan
an ceann crom
an croí trom

Saothraíodh an t-anam
an gaineamhlach tur

Cáilithe faoi dheoidh
don stuaim is don mheas
i dteach leathscoite deas

go n-éalaíonn peaca beag ciúin isteach
mar ghadaí san oích'

Ansin tagann clocha faoi bhláth
lasann an tír máguaird
siúlann an t-anam an téad mhín
idir 'sea' agus 'ní hea'.

Pilgrimage

Caitlín Maude c.1941-1982

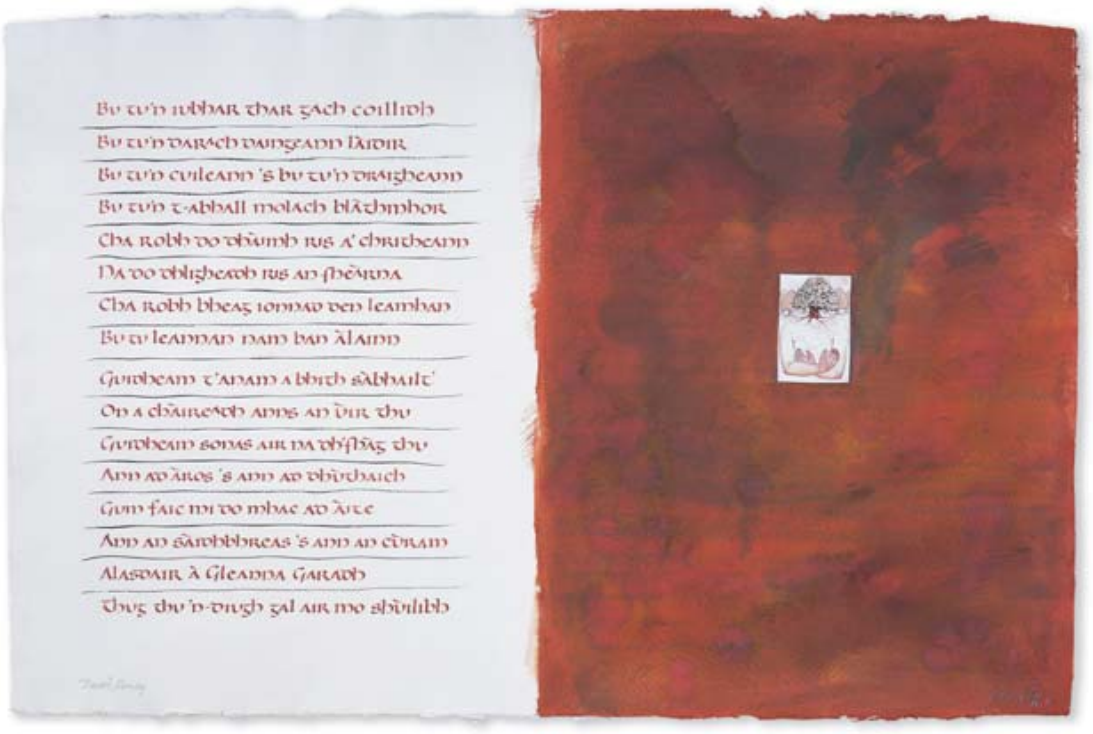
The ceremonial rites
perform
the bowed head
the heavy heart

Let the soul cultivate
the arid desert

Eligible at last
for a prudent respectably
nice little semi

till a furtive little sin steals in
like a thief in the night

Then stones blossom
the land about ignites
the soul treads a fine line
between 'yes' and 'no'.



Neach-ealain / Artist: Rita Duffy
Snas-sgrìobhadair / Calligrapher: Donald Murray
Eadar-theangaichte aig / Translator: Colm Ó Baoill
Roghainn / Nominator: Morag Montgomery

Alasdair à Gleanna Garadh
Sìleas na Ceapaich c.1660-1729

Alasdair à Gleanna Garadh,
Thug thu 'n-diugh gal air mo shùilibh;
'S beag ioghnadh mi bhith fo chreuchdaibh
'S gur tric gan reubadh às ùr iad;
'S beag ioghnadh mi bhith trom-osnach,
'S meud an dosgaidh th' air mo chàirdibh;
Gur tric an t-eug uainn a' gearradh
Rogha nan darag as àirde.

Chaill sinn ionann agus còmhla
Sir Dòmhnall 's a mhac 's a bhràthair;
Ciod e 'n stà dhuinn bhith gan gearan?
Thuit Mac Mhic Ailein sa bhlàr uainn;
Chaill sinn darag làidir liath-ghlas
A chumadh dìon air ar càirdean,

Capall-coille bhàrr na giùthsaich,
Seabhag sùil-ghorm lùthmhor làidir.

Bu tu ceann air cèill 's air comhairl'
Anns gach gnothach am biodh cùram,
Aghaidh shoilleir sholta thlachdmhor,
Cridhe fial farsaing mun chùinneadh;
Bu tu roghainn nan sàr-ghaisgeach,
Ar guala thaice, 's tu b' fhiùghail;
Leòmhann smiorail fearail feumail,
Ceann-feachda chaill Seumas Stiùbhart.

Nam b' ionann duitse 's do Dhòmhnall,
An uair a chuir e 'n long air muir,
Cha tigeadh tu dhachaigh gu bràth
Gun fhios dè 'm fàth às 'n do chuir;
Nuair a chunnacas air an tràigh sibh
A bhith gur fàgail air faondradh,
Thuit ar cridheachan fo mhulad:
'S lèir a bhuil - cha robh sibh saogh'lach.

Bu tu 'n lasair dhearg gan losgadh,
Bu tu sgoltadh iad gu 'n sàiltibh,
Bu tu curaidh cur a' chatha,
Bu tu 'n laoch gun athadh làimhe;
Bu tu 'm bradan anns an fhìor-uisg',
Fìreun air an eunlaith 's àirde,
Bu tu 'n leòmhann thar gach beathach,
Bu tu damh leathann na cràice.

Bu tu 'n loch nach fhaodte thaomadh,
Bu tu tobar faoilidh na slàinte,
Bu tu Beinn Nibheis thar gach aonach,
Bu tu chreag nach fhaodte theàrnadh;
Bu tu clach-uachdair a' chaisteil,
Bu tu leac leathann na sràide,
Bu tu leug lòghmhor nam buadhan,
Bu tu clach uasal an fhàinne.

Bu tu 'n t-iubhar thar gach coillidh,
Bu tu 'n darach daingeann làidir,
Bu tu 'n cuileann 's bu tu 'n draigheann,
Bu tu 'n t-abhall molach blàthmhor;

Cha robh do dhàimh ris a' chritheann
No do dhligheadh ris an fheàrna;
Cha robh bheag ionnad den leamhan;
Bu tu leannan nam ban àlainn.

Bu tu cèile na mnà prìseil,
'S oil leam fhèin da dìth an dràst thu;
Ged nach ionann domhsa 's dhise,
'S goirt a fhuair mise mo chàradh;
H-uile bean a bhios gun chèile,
Guidheadh i Mac Dè na àite,
O 's E 's urra bhith ga còmhnadh
Anns gach bròn a chuireas càs oirr'.

Guidheam t' anam a bhith sàbhailt
On a chàireadh anns an ùir thu;
Guidheam sonas air na dh'fhàg thu
Ann ad àros 's ann ad dhùthaich:
Gum faic mi do mhac ad àite
Ann an saidhbhreas 's ann an cùram:
Alasdair à Gleanna Garadh,
Thug thu 'n-diugh gal air mo shùilibh.

Alasdair of Glengarry
Sìleas na Ceapaich c.1660-1729

Alasdair of Glengarry, you have caused me to shed tears today. Small wonder that I am covered with wounds and that they are repeatedly being burst open; small wonder that I am filled with deep sighing, considering all the misfortune that has befallen my friends. Death is constantly cutting off from us the best of the tallest oaks.

We lost, almost at the same time, Sir Donald, his son and his brother. What use is it for us to complain over them? – Clanranald fell from us on the battle-field. We have lost a strong grey oak-tree which sheltered our friends, a wood-grouse from the pine-wood, a blue-eyed hawk, vigorous and strong.

You were the leader in wisdom and counsel in every activity where responsibility was concerned; bright, pleasant and handsome face, heart generous and liberal with money. You were the choice of excellent warriors, a shoulder to support us, as you were worthy to be; a courageous, manly and effective lion, a leader whom James Stuart has lost.

If you were in the same situation as Donald was when he put the boat to sea, you would never have come home without knowing why he launched it. When you were seen on the strand, left alone in the lurch our hearts fell into sorrow. The outcome is clear: you were not long-lived.

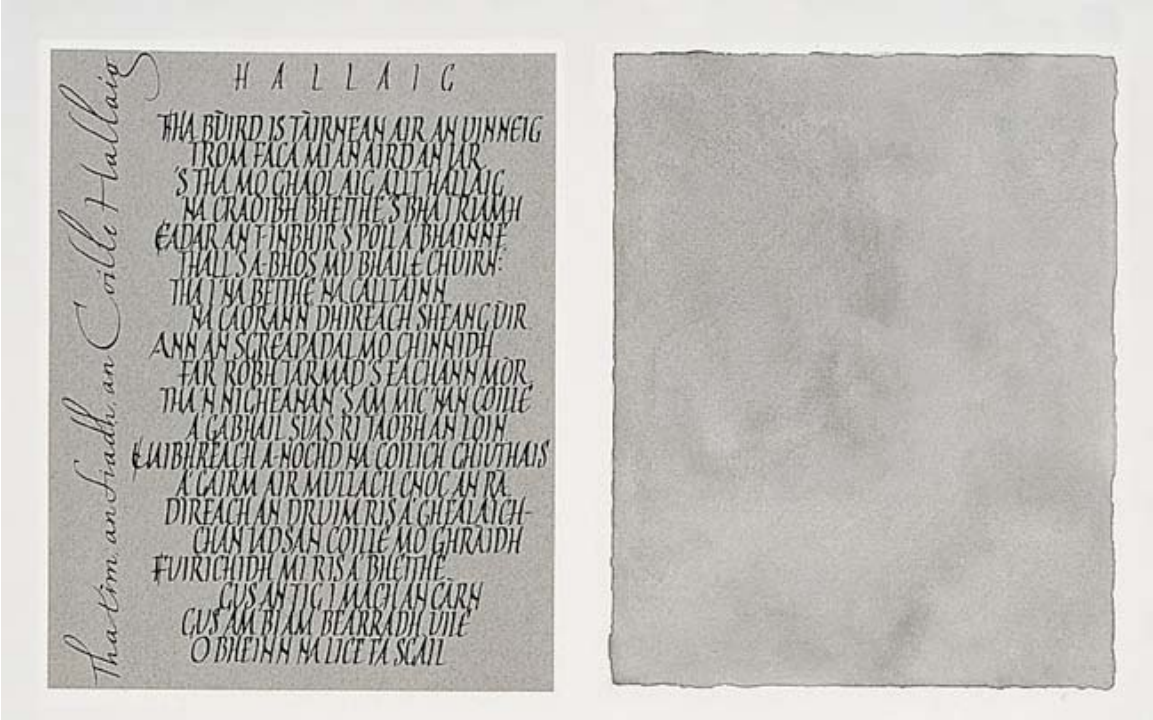
You were a red torch to burn them, you would cleave them to the heels, you were a hero for waging battle, you were a champion whose arm never flinched. You were the salmon in fresh water, the eagle in the highest flock, you were the lion above all beasts, you were the stout antlered stag.

You were an undrainable loch, you were the liberal fount of health; you were Ben Nevis above every moor, you were an unscalable crag. You were the top-stone of the castle, you were the broad flag of the street, you were a priceless gem, you were the jewel in the ring.

You were the yew above every forest, you were the strong steadfast oak, you were the holly and the black-thorn, you were the apple-tree, rough-barked and many-flowered. You had no kinship with the aspen, owed no bonds to the alder; there was none of the lime-tree in you; you were the darling of beautiful women.

You were the husband of an invaluable wife, and it grieves me that she is now without you: though it is not the same for me as for her, I have myself suffered a bitter fortune. Let every wife who is without a husband pray to have the Son of God in his place, for He it is who can aid her in every sorrow which afflicts her.

I pray that your soul may be saved, now that you have been buried in the clay. I pray for happiness for those you have left, in your home and in your lands. May I see your son in your place, in wealth and responsibility. Alasdair of Glengarry, you have caused me to shed tears today.



Donald Urquhart: detail

Neach-ealain / Artist: Donald Urquhart

Snas-sgrìobhadair / Calligrapher: Louise Donaldson

Eadar-theangaichte aig / Translator: The Author

Roghainn / Nominator: Hamish Henderson, Louis de Paor

Hallaig

Somhairle MacGill-Eain c.1911-1996

'Tha tìm, am fiadh, an Coille Hallaig'

Tha bùird is tàirnean air an uinneig
trom faca mi an Aird an Iar
's tha mo ghaol aig Allt Hallaig
'na craoibh bheithe, 's bha i riamh

eadar an t-Inbhir 's Poll a' Bhainne,
thall 's a-bhos mu Bhaile Chùirn:
tha i 'na beithe, 'na calltainn,
'na caorann dhìreach sheang ùr.

Ann an Sgreapadal mo chinnidh,
far robh Tarmad 's Eachann Mòr,
tha 'n nigheanan 's am mic 'nan coille
a' gabhail suas ri taobh an lòin.

Uaibhreach a-nochd na coilich ghiuthais
a' gairm air mullach Cnoc an Rà,
dìreach an druim ris a' ghealaich –
chan iadsan coille mo ghràidh.

Fuirichidh mi ris a' bheithe
gus an tig i mach an Càrn,
gus am bi am bearradh uile
o Bheinn na Lice fa sgàil.

Mura tig 's ann theàrnas mi a Hallaig,
a dh'ionnsaigh sàbaid nam marbh,
far a bheil an sluagh a' tathaich,
gach aon ghinealach a dh'fhalbh.

Tha iad fhathast ann a Hallaig,
Clann Ghill-Eain 's Clann MhicLeòid,
na bh' ann ri linn Mhic Ghille Chaluim:
chunnacas na mairbh beò –

na fir 'nan laighe air an lèanaig
aig ceann gach taighe a bh' ann,
na h-igheanan 'nan coille bheithe,
dìreach an druim, crom an ceann.

Eadar an Leac is na Feàrnaibh
tha 'n rathad mòr fo chòinnich chiùin,
's na h-igheanan 'nam badan sàmhach
a' dol a Chlachan mar o thus.

Agus a' tilleadh às a' Chlachan,
à Suidhisnis 's à tìr nam beò;
a chuile tè òg uallach,
gun bhristeadh cridhe an sgeòil.

O Allt na Feàrnaibh gus an fhaoilinn
tha soilleir an dìomhaireachd nam beann
chan eil ach coimhthional nan nighean
a' cumail na coiseachd gun cheann.

a' tilleadh a Hallaig anns an fheasgar,
anns a' chamhanaich bhalbh bheò,

a' lìonadh nan leathadan casa,
an gàireachdaich 'nam chluais 'na ceò,

's am bòidhche 'na sgleò air mo chridhe
mun tig an ciaradh air na caoil,
's nuair theàrnas grian air cùl Dhùn Cana
thig peileir dian à gunna Ghaoil;

's buailear am fiadh a tha 'na thuaineal
a' snòtach nan làraichean feòir;
thig reothadh air a shùl sa choille:
chan fhaighear lorg air fhuil rim bheò.

Hallaig

Sorley Maclean c.1911-1996

'Time, the deer, is in the Wood of Hallaig.'

The window is nailed and boarded
through which I saw the West
and my love is at the Burn of Hallaig,
a birch tree, and she has always been

between Inver and Milk Hollow,
here and there about Baile-chuirn:
she is a birch, a hazel,
a straight slender young rowan.

In Screapadal of my people,
where Norman and Big Hector were,
their daughters and their sons are a wood
going up beside the stream.

Proud tonight the pine cocks
crowing on the top of Cnoc an Ra,
straight their backs in the moonlight –
they are not the wood I love.

I will wait for the birch wood
until it comes up by the Cairn,
until the whole ridge from Beinn na Lice
will be under its shade.

If it does not, I will go down to Hallaig,
to the sabbath of the dead,
where the people are frequenting,
every single generation gone.

They are still in Hallaig,
Macleans and Macleods,
All who were there in the time of Mac Gille Chaluim:
the dead have been seen alive –

the men lying on the green
at the end of every house that was,
the girls a wood of birches,
straight their backs, bent their heads.

Between the Leac and Fearns
the road is under mild moss
and the girls in silent bands
go to Clachan as in the beginning.

And return from Clachan,
from Suisnish and the land of the living;
Each one young and light stepping,
without the heartbreak of the tale.

From the Burn of Fearns to the raised beach
that is clear in the mystery of the hills,
there is only the congregation of the girls
keeping up the endless walk,

coming back to Hallaig in the evening,
in the dumb living twilight,
filling the steep slopes,
their laughter in my ears a mist,

and their beauty a film on my heart
before the dimness comes on the kyles,
and when the sun goes down behind Dun Cana
a vehement bullet will come from the gun of Love;

and will strike the deer that goes dizzily,
sniffing at the grass-grown ruined homes;
his eye will freeze in the wood;
his blood will not be traced while I live.

Ealaíontóir / Artist: Alan Davie
Peannaire / Calligrapher: Louise Donaldson
Aistritheoir / Translator: Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh
Ainmníodh ag / Nominator: Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh

Scél Lem Dúib

Ní fios cé a chum. c.900/1000

Scél lem dúib:
dordaid dam;
snigid gaim;
ro-fáith sam;

Gáeth ard úar;
ísel grían;
gair a rrith;
ruirthech rían;

Rorúad rath;
ro cleth cruth;
ro gab gnáth
giugrann guth.

Ro gab úacht
    etti én;
aigre ré;
    é mo scél.

Brief Account

Anon c. 900/1000

Brief account:
    Stag's complaint.
Cold front.
    Summer's spent.

High cold blow.
    Sun holds low.
Short the day.
    Sea just spray.

Bracken brown,
    Broken down.
Geese all mouth,
    Heading south.

Chilled each quill.
    Feathers' flurry.
Weather's hoary.
    End of story!

Ealaíontóir / Artist: Steve Dilworth
Peannaire / Calligrapher: Susan Leiper
Aistritheoir / Translator: Frank Sewell
Ainmníodh ag / Nominator: Cathal Ó Searcaigh

An Charraig (sliocht)

Micheál Ó Conghaile b.1962

Déarfá gurbh ann ariamh di. Í ina carraig chomh storrúil damanta mór… Mór millteach. Agus téagarach. Charnódh a ceathrú fiú na céadta tonna meáchain ar aon scála ar domhan. Go dimhin, ní carraig ach oílcharraig. Fathach-charraig. Dia-charraig… Í sáilbháite go leisciúil i sméar mhullaigh an chnoic – go sócúil compordach cheapfá, mar a sciorrrfadh go ceanúil d'ainsiléad Dé. Í ina máistir. Ina máistir feiceálach.

Ina hardmháistír ceannasach, cumasach. Thar a bheith ceannasach cumasach ag breathnú – fiú más i ngan fhios agus dá hainneoin féin é. I ansiúd ag bearnú na mílte amharc i bhfáithim dhraíochtúil ildathach na spéartha. Níor ghéill an charraig ariamh d'aon tsúil ná sleasamharc dá ghéire, dá láidre, dá impíche. Rinne sclábhaithe feacúla adhrúla díobh dá mbuíochas ag urá a n-amharc. A cos i dtaca, sheas an fód go huasal dalba. Tostach. Marbhthostach. Tost críonna brionglóideach na haoise: na n-aoiseanna. A cruth sainiúil tostach féin aici ón uile mhíle uillinn sleasach. Síorathrú ar a síorchruth dá corp rocach carraigeach – na céadta leiceann uirthi: na céadta glúin: na céadta colpa: na céadta cluas: na

céadta boiric: na céadta clár éadain: na céadta faithne: na céadta goirín: na céadta at: na céadta súil: na céadta gearradh drúichtín: na mílte céadta…

D'aithneofá go bhfaca an charraig an uile mhíle ní ó chúil uile a cinn. Níor ghá di breathnú fiú. Chonaic i ngan fhios an dúiche uile máguaird. Amach os a comhair Machairí droimleathana. Cnocáin bheaga ghlasa. Bánta aerach bána aerach bána, claíocha bioracha is mantacha. Bearnaí. Ailltreachaí. Clochair. Sclaigeanna is scailpeanna. Leacrachaí loma. Leacrachaí fada fadálacha. Is cótaí de chaonach liath fáiscthe anuas ar chuid acu…

Agus garrantaí. An draoi acu. Iad cearnógach, ciorclach agus triantánach. Tuilleadh garrantaí éagruthacha. Cosáin aistreánacha. Portaigh bhoga riascacha. Srutháin chasta leath-éalaithe as amharc. Gleannta doimhne ag síneadh agus ag síneadh uathu níos faide i gcéin… Agus níos íochtaraí síos – cuanta leathana: crompáin chúnga: caltaí: céibheanna clochach lámhdhéanta, tránna geala fairsinge, sáinnithe cúngaithe scaití ag na taoillte tuile. Farraigí imirceacha…

Cheapfá gur sheanmháthair uasal chríonna í an charraig díobh go léir. Seanmháthair chiúin thostach, nár thug mórán airde ar a gairm, déarfá… ach a bhí ann i gcónaí, mar sin féin, ar nós aosach máchaileach i gcathaoir rothaí. Níor lig as amharc iad. Aingeal coimhdeachta cianradharcach. Í cúthail, b'fhéidir leathbhodhar fiú. Mar a bheadh ag míogarnach léi ansin….

Ba é saol é. A mhalairt eile níor chleacht a cnámh droma neamhaclaí stadaithe

The Rock

Micheal O Conghaile (20th Century)

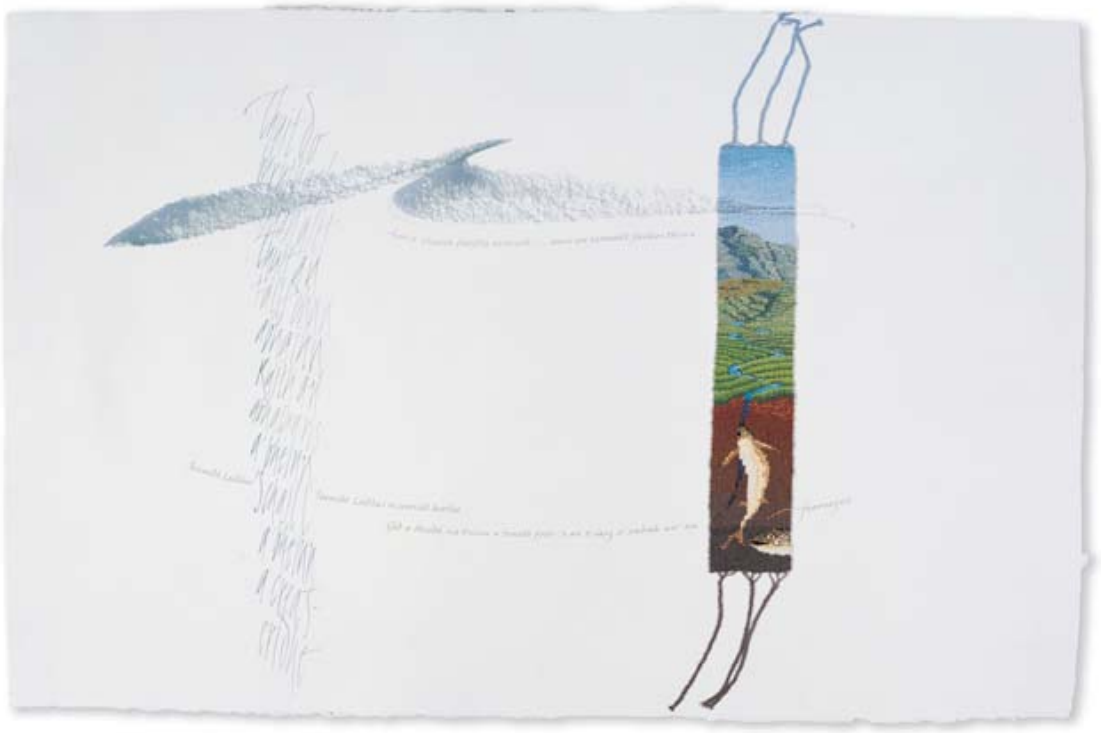
You could say it had always been there. An enormous rock. Damned strong. And bulky. Even a quarter of it would weigh hundreds of tonnes on any scale. I'm telling you, it wasn't a rock but the mother of all rocks. A giant of a rock. A god among rocks… Stationed, at ease, on the top part of the hill – all comfy and cosy, you'd think, like it was tipped lovingly into place by the hand of God. It was like a Lord. An eminent Lord. A powerful, commanding lord. Looking just the part, either despite itself or without knowing it. Interrupting thousands of glances at the magic, multi-coloured hem of the sky. The rock gave way to no-one's eye or side-glance, no matter how keen, strong or imploring. It made them submissive, bent-necked slaves for their trouble, eclipsing their view. Planted there, it stood its ground with daunting authority Silent. Deadly silent. An ancient, dreamy silence that was timeless. Its own silent shape from a thousand different angles. Forever changing the look of its wrinkled, rocky body's eternal shape – with hundreds of cheeky slopes, knee-

like steps, calf-shaped collops, ear-like edges, stick y but bits, brows, warts, pimples, lumps, hundreds of eye-shaped features, hard skin, split ends, trillions of things.

You sensed from the whole angry-looking precipice of its head that the rock had seen all things. It didn't have to look even. I just saw – unknown to the countryside around – all that lay ahead. Broad-backed fields. Small green hillocks. Good open grassland. Gapped, reedy boundaries. Openings. Cliffs. Strong ridges. Clefts and fissures. Bare slabs of rock. Long flat areas of stone. Some coated in mildew… And gardens. Loads of them. Shaped in squared, circles or triangles. Others irregular in shape. Rough –hewn paths. Soft damp bogs. Curving streams half-hidden from view. Deep glens stretching away out into the distance… And lower down, wide harbours, narrow creeks, straits, man-made quays, bright wide beaches, sometimes boxed in by the turning tide. The free, migrant ocean…

You'd think the rock was the wise old grandmother of them all. A quiet, taciturn grandmother who didn't pay much heed to her charge, you might say … but who was always there, all the same, like a seasoned old-timer in a rocking chair. It didn't let them out of its sight. Like a guardian angel watching from a distance. I eserved, and maybe even half-deaf. Looking like she was just dozing away there…

That was its life. That was all its locked ridged backbone had ever known.



Neach-ealain / Artist: Joanne Breen
Snas-sgrìobhadair / Calligrapher: Frances Breen
Eadar-theangaichte aig / Translator: The Author
Roghainn / Nominator: The Author

Aois Leòdhais

Màiri NicGumaraid b.1955

Anns an talamh luasgadh gaoithe
Anns a' ghaoith fasgadh iarmailt
Anns an iarmailt faileas thonn
Anns na tuinn toraidheachd

Thuit do bhruthach dhan allt
Thuit an t-allt dhan abhainn
Ruith an abhainn ris a' bheinn
'S chaill a' bheinn a creag-cridhe

Bha do shamhradh mar do ghlòir
'S bha do dhùthaich na grinneas
Bha do shluagh a' gabhail na grèine
Bu mhath nam maireadh, ma mhaireas idir

'S bu mhath nan seasadh, ma sheasas idir

Agus seasaidh
Seasaidh Leòdhas
Seasaidh Leòdhas ri cearcall beatha
Ged a bhiodh na tuinn a' toradh feòir
'S an t-iasg a' snàmh air na feannagan

The Age of Lewis

Mary Montgomery b.1955

In the ground the swelling wind
In the wind the sheltered sky
In the sky the shadowed waves
In the waves fertility

Your bank fell in the stream
The stream fell in the river
The river ran down the mountain
And the mountain lost its heartstone

Your summer was like your glory
And your countryside was green
Your people bathed in sunshine
It would do well to last, if well it lasts

And it would do well to stand, if well it stands

And it will stand
Lewis will
Lewis will stand its life cycle
Though the waves would yield up grass
And the fish swim through the ground

Neach-ealain / Artist: Alastair MacLennan
Snas-sgrìobhadair / Calligrapher: Frances Breen
Eadar-theangaichte aig / Translator: The Author
Roghainn / Nominator: The Author

Màiri Iain Mhurch' Chaluim

Mo sheanmhair, a chaill a h-athair air an Iolaire, oidhche na Bliadhn' Uir, 1919.

Anna C. Frater b.1967

Tha mi nam shuidhe ag èisdeachd ribh
agus tha mo chridh' a' tuigsinn
barrachd na mo chlaisneachd;
's mo shùilean a' toirt a-steach
barrachd na mo chluasan.

Ur guth sèimh, ur cainnt
ag èirigh 's a' tuiteam mar thonn
air aghaidh fhuar a' chuain

’s an dràst’ ’s a-rithist a’ briseadh
air creag bhiorach cuimhne;
’s an sàl a’ tighinn gu bàrr
ann an glas-chuan ur sùilean.

“Bha e air an ròp
an uair a bhris e ...”

Agus bhris ur cridhe cuideachd
le call an ròpa chalma
air an robh grèim gràidheil agaibh
fhad’ ’s a bha sibh a’ sreap suas
nur leanabh.

Agus, aig aois deich bliadhna,
cha robh agaibh ach cuimhne air a’ chreig
a bhiodh gur cumail còmhnard;
’s gach dòchas a bha nur sùilean
air a bhàthadh tron oidhch’ ud,
’s tro gach Bliadhn’ Ur a lean.

Chàirich iad a’ chreag
agus dh’fhàg sin toll.
Chruadhaich an sàl ur beatha
agus chùm e am pian ùr;
agus dh’fhuirich e nur sùilean
cho goirt ’s a bha e riamh;
agus tha pian na caillich
cho geur ri pian na nighinn,
agus tha ur cridhe
a’ briseadh às ùr
a’ cuimhneachadh ur h-athar.

“... oir bha athair agam ...”

Mairi Iain Mhurch’ Chaluim

My grandmother, who lost her father on the ‘Iolaire’, New Year's night, 1919.
Anne C. Frater b.1967

I sit listening to you
and my heart understands

more than my hearing;
and my eyes absorb
more than my ears.

Your soft voice, your speech
rising and falling like waves
on the cold surface of the sea,
and now and again breaking
on the sharp rock of memory;
and the brine rises up
in the grey seas of your eyes.

"He was on the rope
when it broke..."

And your heart also broke
with the loss of the sturdy rope
which you had clung to lovingly
while you were growing up
as a child

And, at ten years of age,
you had only a memory of the rock
that used to keep you straight;
and every hope that was in your eyes
was drowned on that night
and through each New Year that followed.

They buried the rock
and that left a hole;
the salt hardened your life
and kept the pain fresh;
and it stayed in your eyes
as stinging as it ever was;
and the old woman's pain is
as keen as the girls's,
and your heart breaks anew
remembering your father.

"...because I had a father..."

Ealaíontóir / Artist: Frances Hegarty
Peannaire / Calligrapher: Frances Breen
Aistritheoir / Translator: Paul Muldoon
Ainmníodh ag / Nominator: The Author

Dubh

ar thitim Shrebenice, 11ú Iúil, 1995

Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill b.1952

Is lá dubh é seo,
Tá an spéir dubh.
Tá an fharraige dubh.
Tá na gáirdíní dubh.

Tá na crainn dubh.
Tá na cnoic dubh.
Tá na busanna dubh.
Tá na carranna a thugann na páistí ar scoil ar maidin dubh.

Tá na siopaí dubh.
Tá a bhfuinneoga dubh.
Tá na sráideanna dubh (is ní le daoine é).

Tá na nuachtáin a dhíolann an cailín dubh
go bhfuil an folt láidir dubh uirthi
dubh dubh dubh.

Tá an damh dubh.
Tá na gadhair dubh.
Tá capall úd Uíbh Ráthaigh dubh.
Tá gach corr-éan a scinneann amach as an ealta dubh.
An chaoire dhubh a sheasann amach de ghnáth i lár an tréada
ní heisceacht í níos mó mar tá na caoirigh ar fad dubh.

Tá na prátaí dubh.
Tá na turnapaí dubh.
Tá gach bileog cabáiste a chuirfeá síos i dtóin corcáin dubh.

Tá na Caitlicigh dubh.
Tá na Protastúnaigh dubh.
Tá na Seirbigh is na Cróátaigh dubh.
Tá gach uile chine a shiúlann ar dhromchla na cruinne
an mhaidin dhubh seo samhraidh dubh.

Tá na poiliticeoirí ar sciobaidh
is iad ag baint an gcos is na n-eireaball dá chéile
ag iarraidh a chur ina luí orainn
nach fada go mbeidh gach dubh ina gheal.

Is an té a leomhfadh a mhisneach dó
nó a chredifeadh an méid a deireann siad
níor mhiste dó b'fhéidir an cheist a chur
ab ann ab amhlaidh a chiallaíonn sé seo anois
nach mbeidh ins gach dubhthréimhse ach seal?

Ach ní dhéanfadsa
Mar táimse dubh.
Tá mo chroí dubh
is m'intinn dubh.
Tá m'amharc ar feadh raon mo radhairce dubh.
Tá an dubh istigh is amuigh agam díbh.

Mar gach píosa guail nó sméar nó airne,
gach deamhan nó diabhal nó daradaol,
gach cleite fiaigh mhara nó íochtar bonn bróige

gach uaimh nó cabha nó poll tóine
gach duibheagán doimhin a shlogann ár ndóchas
táim dubh dubh dubh.

Mar tá Srebenice, cathair an airgid,
'Argentaría' na Laidine,
bán.

Black

on the fall of Srebenica, 11 July, 1995

Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill b.1952

A black day this,
The sky is black.
The sea is black.
The gardens are black.

The trees are black
The hills are black.
The buses are black.
The cars bringing the kids to school are black.

The shops are black.
Their windows are black.
The streets are black (and I don't mean with people).

The newspapers sold by the dark girl with the great head of dark hair
Are black, black, black.

The ox is black.
The hound is black.
The very horse from Iveragh is black.
The bird suddenly out of sync with the flock is black.
The black sheep that stood out from the ordinary run of sheep no longer stands out,
For all the sheep are black.

The spuds are black.
The turnips are black.
Every last leaf of cabbage in the pot is black.

The saucepan is black.
The kettle is black.
The bottom of every pot from here to the crack of doom is black.

The Catholics are black.
The Protestants are black.
The Serbs and the Croatians are black.
Every tribe on the face of the earth this blackest of black mornings
black.

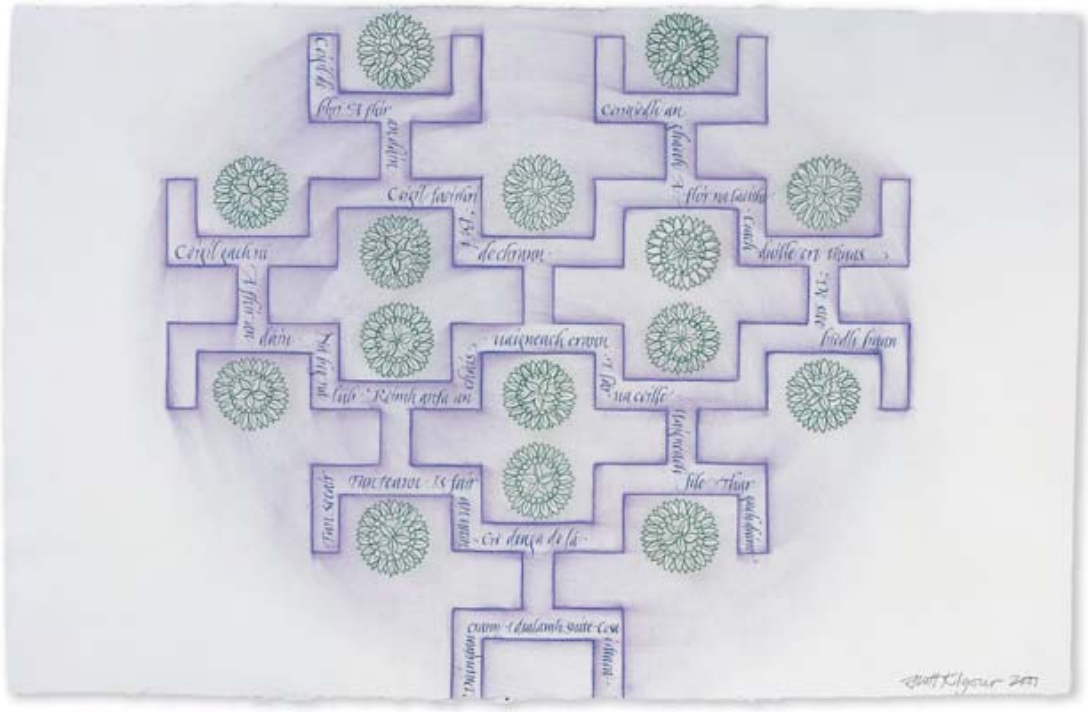
The politicians are scuffling about
biting the legs off each other
trying to persuade us
to look on the bright side.

Anyone who might be inclined
to take them at their word
would do well, maybe, to ask
why they think it goes without saying
that every cloud has a silver lining.

I myself won't be the one.
For I'm black.
My heart is black and my mind is black.
Everything that falls into my field of vision is black.
I'm full of black rage.
There's a black mark against all your names.

Like each and every lump of coal, every blackberry and sloe
Every grave and cave and arsehole,
Every bottomless pit in which we lose all hope,
I'm black as black can be.

Now that Srebenica, that silver city –
'Argentaria', as the Romans called it –
is blank.



Ealaíontóir / Artist: Scott Kilgour
Peannaire / Calligrapher: David McGrail
Aistritheoir / Translator: Colm Breathnach
Ainmníodh ag / Nominator: Colm Breathnach

Bí i do Chrann

Máirtín Ó Direáin c.1910-1988

Coigil do bhrí,
A fhir an dáin,
Coigil faoi thrí,
Bí i do chrann.

Coigil gach ní,
A fhir an dáin,
Ná bog ná lúb
Roimh anfa an cháis.

Fan socair,
Fan teann,
Is fair an uain
Go dtaga do lá.

Corraíodh an ghaoth,
A fhir na laoithe,
Gach duille ort thuas;
Do stoc bíodh buan.

Uaigneach crann
I lár na coille,
Uaigneach file
Thar gach duine.

Daingean crann
I dtalamh suite,
Cosa i dtaca
Cuir, a fhile!

Coigil do chlí,
Coigil d' aird,
Coigil gach slí
I gcomhair an dáin.

Tá do leath baineann,
A fhir an dáin,
Bí fireann, bí slán,
Bí i do chrann.

Be as a Tree

Máirtín Ó Direáin c.1910-1988

Man who makes poems,
Keep back their true import,
Conceal by three
Be as a tree,

Gather in all that's known,
Man who makes poems,
Don't stir, don't bend
Before this present tempest.

Stay steady,
Unswaying,
Watching the weather
Until the right day.

Let the wind disarray,
Maker of lays,
All your outer foliage;
Your trunk don't budge.

A tree is alone
In the wood's midst,
Among people a poet
Above all is loneliest.

A tree is steadfast
In its portion of land,
Poet, set yourself, man,
Take a stand!

Save your frame,
Gather your knowing,
Focus in every way
Prepared for the poem.

Maker of poems,
You are half womanly,
Be male, be whole,
Be as a tree.

Ealaíontóir / Artist: Jake Harvey
Peannaire / Calligrapher: Donald Murray
Aistritheoirí / Translators: David Greene & Frank O Connor
Ainmníodh ag / Nominator: Tomás MacSíomóin

An Lon Dubh

Ní fios cé a chum c.800

Int én bec
ro léic feit
do rind guip
glanbuidi;
fo-cheird faíd
os Loch Laíg
lon do chraíb
charnbuidi.

Blackbird at Belfast Lough

Anon c.800

The little bird has whistled from the tip of his bright yellow beak; the blackbird
from a bough laden with yellow blossom has tossed a cry over Belfast Lough.

Resources

An Leabhar Mòr / The Great Book of Gaelic is an international collaborative artwork bringing together the work of more than 200 visual artists, poets and calligraphers from Scotland and Ireland. It has generated an international touring exhibition of 100 artworks, a book publication, a television documentary, a series of BBC radio programmes, a music CD, a schools pack and an events programme. Following the exhibition tour (until 2008) the artworks will be bound into one volume to form a visual anthology and a permanent visitor attraction. The web site for the book is here http://www.leabharmor.net/.

An Leabhar Mòr / The Great Book of Gaelic was produced under the direction of **Proiseact nan Ealan / The Gaelic Arts Agency** http://www.gaelic-arts.com, the national development agency for the Gaelic arts, which designs, develops and pilots new arts and cultural initiatives. Their address is 10 Shell Street, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, HS1 2BS, Scotland. Tel: +44 1851 704493 Fax: +44 1851 704734 E-mail pne@gaelic-arts.com

Poetry Ireland / Éigse Éireann http://poetryireland.ie is the national organisation dedicated to developing, supporting and promoting poetry throughout Ireland. They are a resource and information point for any member of the public with an interest in poetry and they work towards creating opportunities for poets working or living in Ireland. Their address is: 120 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2. Tel: +353 1 671 4632 Fax:+353 1 671 4634

Aosdána http://www.artscouncil.ie/aosdana/ is an association of creative artists in Ireland established by the Arts Council http://www.artscouncil.ie in 1983. Membership, which is by peer nomination and election, is limited to 200 living artists who have produced a distinguished body of work. Members must have been born in Ireland or have been resident here for five years, and must have produced a body of work that is original and creative.

Iomairt Cholm Cille / the Columba Initiative http://www.colmcille.net/ was launched in 1997 to create greater contact and understanding between the Gaelic-speaking communities of Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It fosters the chance for these Gaelic-speaking communities to meet each other more often, and in so doing to learn more of the language, heritage and lifestyles of one another. Projects must be at least bipartite, linking Scotland with either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland. Priorities are given to projects linking all three regions. Contact information for each office is: ICC Scotland: Tel +44 (0) 1471 888590, e-mail sm00dam@groupwise.uhi.ac.uk. ICC Northern Ireland: Tel +44 (0)2890 238293, e-mail ccille.ultach@cinni.org. ICC Republic of Ireland: Tel +353 (0)91 503278, e-mail ccille@udaras.ie.

Re-Imagining Ireland http://www.re-imagining-ireland.org/ was held May 7-10, 2003, in Charlottesville, Virginia. The gathering, opened by President Mary McAleese of Ireland, met to explore the meaning of Ireland for the world as a modern and prosperous, yet traditional,

culture. Participants – more than 100 journalists, writers, politicians, artists, scholars, musicians, and citizen activists, most of them from Ireland – discussed how the Ireland of the future could emerge as a compassionate and vital society that created itself anew, while preserving the strengths of its heritage. Re-Imagining Ireland was produced by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities.

The Virginia Foundation for the Humanities http://www.virginia.edu/vfh/ is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to developing and supporting research, education, and public programs in the humanities. The people at the Foundation believe the humanities are active and public, not remote and academic. Their projects apply the various perspectives of history, literature, philosophy, cultural and religious studies, and other fields of the humanities to contemporary and abiding human questions. They contribute to the interpretation and understanding of cultural traditions, and to the understanding of current policy debates.

A bound version of An Leabhar Mòr containing all 100 poems in Gaelic and English and 100 artworks is published in hard and soft cover by Canongate www.canongate.net, 14 High Street, Edinburgh EH1 1TE, Scotland. The Great Book of Gaelic is here http://www.canongate.net/main.taf?_n=8.

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fiction

from
THE BULLET COLLECTION

Patricia Sarrafian Ward

The narrator Marianna, haunted by events her family is reluctant to discuss, recounts the fragmented, delicate story of her and her older sister growing up in wartime Beirut. Throughout their childhood, Marianna watches Alaine collect the detritus of war—bullets, grenades, shrapnel, a gas mask. These objects, some taken from corpses, line Alaine's bedroom shelves, a catalog of her retreat into a profound depression against which her family is powerless. For all their effort to endure the daily violence without, the war enters within, transforming their home into a place of danger and secrets. Marianna, ever watching, listening, becomes her older sister's keeper, desperate to solve the mystery of her sorrow….

Alaine played soccer with the refugees, she traded bullets and shrapnel around the neighborhood, she smashed her fists through the bathroom window and tried to climb out. Daddy shouted for help, and I was the one who got there first, hung onto her legs with all my weight while he pried her fists loose from the jaggedy window frame. The doctor said, She will always have trouble with this finger, and he held Alaine's hand aloft like evidence.

But Alaine's hands regained their strength. She stood in front of the mirror and cut off all her hair again so that Mummy had to take her to the barber to have it done right. She trained with the Civil Defense, though at sixteen she was too young to be more than an honorary member. Why don't you take your sister? our parents urged, and I hung my head, said I didn't want to go anyway. Her fellows caught sight of me on the balcony, however, and saw the potential. After that I played their victim, screaming hysterically in windows, clinging to my rescuer as he rappelled down the side of the building, but there were many days when I was not called upon, and I lounged on the balcony, peeking through the rails at Alaine coiling ropes, doing jumping jacks and running, administering CPR.

Then French peacekeeping forces occupied the building behind ours, forcing the Civil Defense to train elsewhere. Alaine kicked her ball around disconsolately for a few days, until the French soldiers joined in, three on three. She darted amongst them like a fly, her hair cropped like a boy's. They gazed at her in admiration, and I imagined my eyes could launch missiles to blow her right up. They paused in the game, wiped their necks and faces with T-shirts. *Mais pourquoi toi tu ne descends pas?* one of them yelled up, grinning. I shrugged

disinterest at his invitation, flounced back inside to listen to music. Maybe they would find her stash of food and weapons; they were bivouacked right on top of it, after all. Then she would get into so much trouble. I played the possible scenarios out in my mind, wicked vengeance.

Daddy found an unfamiliar grenade on Alaine's shelf, shaped like a tube. I seized this opportunity to ruin her life. She got it from them, I lied, nodding at the French barracks.

He went up to the two soldiers on duty. Did you give this to my daughter? he fumed in his terrible French.

—No, sir, the soldier said. They looked troubled. One of them held out his hand.

—Now *you* want it? Daddy said irrationally.

—It hasn't exploded.

For a moment they all just stood there. Then Daddy handed over the grenade. Sorry, he said, and I was embarrassed by the way they shook their heads when he turned around.

—Why do you keep interfering? Alaine screamed at Daddy. I hate you!

It was around that time that Alaine took a bottle of pills. I do not know what they were called, but they drove her mad with terror. She stayed awake for three days, because she thought if she slept, she would die, and she kept shouting that she didn't want to, she didn't mean to. The stench of her sweat filled the room, and whenever Alaine allowed it, Mummy cleaned her face and neck and armpits with a washcloth. I'm cold, she kept mumbling. I'm hot. The cat lay beside her, purring obliviously while she trembled and sweated and whispered. Go to sleep, Mummy begged her. It will be all right, the doctor said. But there was no convincing her. Mummy and Daddy divided the watch, and Uncle Bernie stayed over so he could help. There was no need for me. I retreated to my room.

The idea had lived inside me for so long, through nights of my ear pressed to Alaine's door, through nights of folding sodden bandages into the garbage. It was familiar as my own name. There was the dead soldier, whose gas mask sat on Alaine's shelf; there was Alaine's persistent misery; there was Mummy sobbing in the night and the clinking ice in Daddy's whiskey as he made his way from the kitchen to his chair; there was the question mark made by my fingernail digging into the soft, white place between veins on my wrist.

There was the day the American Embassy blew up. The top windowpane moved. In the heartbeat of time, I saw the glass bulge inward, an optical miracle only just filling me with surprise before the glass yielded to the pressure of sound, shattered into the room. Ba-boom, the bomb roared, and the building shuddered. Minutes passed. I picked up my magazine and held it so the glass slid off. I looked at my bare feet. Blood trickled down my

thigh and I touched it with my fingertip. I felt no pain. Perhaps this is how the bright idea beckoned me, that old friend, with the promise that there wouldn't be pain.

Mummy arrived in the doorway, and when she saw me, she collapsed against the doorjamb in relief, hands pressed to her belly. I thought, What is wrong with me, I should have screamed. I jumped up, to show fear, because now she was looking at me strangely but she cried out, No, don't walk in the glass! She left me there crinkling my toes, rushed away to find my shoes.

Hours passed. The ambulances came in and out of the hospital down the street, and then there was shooting. A jeep, the driver shooting in the air to make a car move out of the way. In the backseat, two men propped another in between, and his head rolled from side to side, making cries, Aah, aah. Hurry, someone shouted, the out-of-place word in English, so I realized they were American. The jeep reeled around the corner to the hospital entrance. I stood at the window a long time. It was as if everything I had always heard happening outside had just been confirmed, and there was a certain security in that.

Alaine came home several hours later. She had been there. She told me, The bomb was so strong, the bodies flew across the road into the sea.

She was ashamed that the Civil Defense workers had not allowed her to help. I imagined the bodies floating away as rescue workers waded after them, yelling back at Alaine to stay where she was; all this while I had been standing at the window so impotently. I couldn't help feeling glad she had been turned away, that she was in trouble for not having come straight home.

A heavy stillness lay around the ruins of the embassy, the same stillness that could be felt elsewhere in the city, of things meant to be hidden now laid bare. The back of the building stood intact, but in front, the floors drooped in layers down to the ground where the rubble had been partly cleared away. It was like looking through the window of a giant dollhouse, but a desk hung precariously off a shorn floor, a toilet tilted in the shadows, farther in, still attached to the wall, while the sink was lodged on a slab of loose tiles that slithered farther down every time it rained.

The great silver ships of the American soldiers lay offshore, moving imperceptibly through the sea, so that one day they were here, the next day there, and no one knew when they had moved. Smaller boats cut white frothy trails back and forth between the shore and the ships. Beirut waited in this lull, and the foreign soldiers threw flowers at girls, gave them photographs and presents, they marched confidently through the streets.

—They are only containing what is bound to come, Mrs. Awad proclaimed, and Mummy agreed in that way of hers, the wise, slow nodding. I understood from this that

Lebanon was like a stunned beast, netted and charmed temporarily by these handsome, pale soldiers, and it was only a matter of time before this beast would awaken. I felt a strange kinship to these men who had no idea what people were saying. I wanted to save them. But I was useless, a small, angry girl with curling blond hair and no courage, not like Alaine. The anger festered inside me, only increased by the long days spent indoors for the bombing and shooting once the Druze and the army started fighting. I sipped Daddy's whiskeys when he wasn't looking, then I made my own and sneaked them into my room. I wrote a serialized novel about myself in which I was a resistance fighter with an army of my own. *You must leave,* I told the foreign soldiers in clandestine meetings punctuated by the scratching of rats in the garbage, the occasional gunshot that made us all pause and concentrate on the sky. *You're only containing what's bound to come,* I informed them, hoisting my machine gun over my shoulder. *Help us,* they begged, and I led them through the myriad dangers of my territory, and they admired me. One of them became my lover, but it was around this time that Ziad came to our house with the news about Uncle Ara. The soldier was killed off in a firefight, and Ziad entered the story as a spy sent to infiltrate my army, but who turned double agent out of love for me.

—What are you writing? Mummy asked, flipping through one of my notebooks. I stared at her in dismay. She caught my mood, gave me the notebook with a smile. I know about being a writer, she said gently, and for the rest of the day she brooded over a small notebook of fairy tales her best friend Muna had written when they were young. I read the stories in secret, gazed at the photograph pasted in the front. She had been tragically killed, and I wanted to be just like her, remembered with sorrow and regret.

The novel twisted in a new direction. *I have to do it,* I shouted, wrenching myself away from Ziad. *No, no!* he cried, but I ran into the hail of bullets, sacrificing myself so that he might live.

Even though there was fighting all the time, school started again, and I skipped classes to write in my notebooks in the café next to the school. School's boring, I told Mummy and Daddy. They tried threats, but they had no ammunition; I had no hobbies to be banned from, and after school I stayed in my room anyway. They cajoled and begged, which worked for a time, because I disliked being the cause of their worries, and then they tried to enlist Alaine's help, but she refused, saying she had no influence over me, and this made me feel good. You hardly have to go anyway because of the fighting, Daddy attempted to reason, but the café lured me from the dreary routine of school and my fellow students. I wasn't the only one who skipped; I had an ally in the senior Marko, who was Greek and older than everyone else, almost twenty, because he had missed a year of school after a motorcycle accident. We did not

speak, but acknowledged one another in the café, in the halls, during the numerous detentions that had no effect on our behavior at all. He played pinball while I wrote, and we took cigarettes from each other without asking.

He had the highest scores ever recorded on the pinball machine; he even left free games that he had won for others to play, this was how much he won. He could play for hours without pause. I knew this because I stayed longer and longer, and Ghada, who ran the café, grudgingly let me know if a teacher was coming.

Marko's right hand was almost useless, I supposed because of the accident. The hand dangled against the side of the machine, and he used the heel of his thumb to push the flipper button. The hand was thin and white with a faint scar that began somewhere near the knuckles and traveled up under the cuff of his shirt. I could not understand how the doctors had managed to sew his hand back together and yet leave it so lifeless.

In addition to being older, Marko was taller than any of the other seniors, and he wore round shaded glasses like John Lennon. He did not seem to take care of himself and smelled sickly. He always wore long-sleeved shirts. I had read that people who are depressed wear a lot of clothes, because they are frozen with sadness, and certainly Alaine had hidden under her blankets for years. I suspected that the accident was the root of his sadness, the long-sleeved shirts and pallid skin, because he hadn't been the only one on the bike. His friend had been riding behind and was killed, and I could not see how someone could recover from that, from killing a friend by going too fast.

A commotion outside stirred my attention from Marko. Two French jeeps had parked across the street, and the soldiers were unloading. Ghada, smoking her argileh behind the counter (Have some, she always taunted the younger students, who thought it was hashish), noticed the trucks and hurried to stand in the doorway as enticement. Her fat arms waddled as she patted her dyed hair, then she placed one fist on her hip, and arranged herself into a stance I imagined a prostitute might use. I was ashamed that Ghada shouted so loudly, *Venez! Entrez!* but she was in acute competition with the store across the street.

One of the soldiers smiled at me as they filed in. They seemed a little awkward, and I supposed it would be the same for those American soldiers on duty by the Embassy, if they were trapped here without the protection of their barbed wire and tanks. No matter how friendly everyone appeared, these foreign soldiers could never know who might begin shooting. They bought Pepsis and Mirandas, then grouped around Marko, who nodded at them while he lit a cigarette. I could see his score from my seat, and it was in the hundred thousands. He drew back the exploder, as I called it, slowly, to its maximum tension, and froze, concentrating on the miniature world of lights and pathways and targets under the glass. He went over his plan, looking for trip wires, blinking challenges. The soldiers paused with

him, one with his drink halfway to his lips, the other holding a cigarette and lighter, waiting. The long pause grew longer, and it seemed that I was witnessing a pocket of time within the clanging and talking noises of the café, something separate, a sign. I did not breathe, I, all of us, were on the brink of something greater than Marko's free game, and his hesitation was an unwillingness to unleash it, as if he held in his hand the taut bowstring, the almost-there trigger, but it was inevitable, he had to let go, it was a matter of time. And beyond the happening of it, there were those of us who watched it, like me, and those who were a part of it, like the soldiers and Marko, and those who were innocent and continuing about their day, eating, drinking, chatting.

He let go. The ball jettisoned with such force that it cracked into the glass before speeding on into its violent world. The soldiers eased their way around Marko, chuckling, lighting cigarette, drinking, and leaned on the other machine, which was broken again. They stole respectful glances at Marko, and at first I thought it was because he was such a good player, never tilted though he banged that machine around like he could break it, but then I realized they were looking at his scars. They must have thought he had been wounded in the war.

—Why aren't you going to school? Astrig shouted. Do we need this now, at such a time?

—School's stupid, I said, secure that she wouldn't pursue this with the other important matters on her mind. She was furious because Uncle Ara was still in the mountains, and no one could make him come down. The whole world knew the fighting between the Druze and Christians would explode into a war once Israel pulled out, which could happen any day. But Uncle Ara said he wouldn't leave his house and garden unless he was in a coffin. Astrig adjusted the collar of her silk shirt; she had taken to wearing the clothes from her boutique because less and less people were buying things in this endless war. She looked at me with narrowed eyes.

—You can't force me, I cut her off.

—You see how she talks? Mrs. Awad moaned, as if I were her own daughter. She has turned into a *shitaneh*!

—If you fail, it will be your responsibility, said Daddy. This was his latest speech, repeated daily. He had been trying this with Alaine for years, and she was just scraping by, so maybe he thought it would work with me. I shrugged. I wanted to fail. I wanted to get my own apartment and write books and have French lovers.

—Alaine goes to school, said Mrs. Awad.

—She didn't always, I pointed out.

—But that wasn't good.

This was such a weak argument that I did not bother answering. Astrig had lost interest in my behavior, anyway, and the talk returned to Uncle Ara.

—He has an old Kalashnikov, Astrig told Mrs. Awad, who did not yet know all the stories coming to us from Shemlan. The Israelis came and he pointed it at them. What are you doing? the Israeli commander yelled. Are you crazy? Get out of here! We can't protect you! So what does Ara, my stupid father, say?

—What?

—He says, Please, Mr. Commander, don't worry about me. Would you like some tomatoes? No? Please, if *you* need anything, you know where I am. The Israelis, they're so stupid, they think he's a crazy old man so they leave him alone. They don't understand that he's mocking them!

—He should leave, though, said Mrs. Awad, dampening everyone's mood.

I did not care about the Druze and the Christians massacring each other, and what Jumblatt said and what Gemayel said. I supposed Uncle Ara would come down to us at the last minute, so I did not think about him, and I persisted in not caring even though my nonchalance tasted false, with a trace of something desperate. But there wasn't anyone to discuss this with. The grown-ups walked about with despair all over their faces, taking Alaine to the doctor, feeding her pills, begging her to speak. She controlled the daily motion of our household, whether Mummy went for her volunteer work or not, whether Daddy went to the library, whether the psychiatrist would come to us or they go to him, escorting her like a prisoner. The Israelis left, the mountain war began, but we still had to go to school. I played Marko's pinball machine when he wasn't there; the times he came in, I ceded my place without complaint, sat on a chair next to the window with my knees drawn up to my chin. At last the principal himself came to punish me. He forced me back to the office, lectured me on attendance and responsibility while I stared resolutely at the carpet.

—Why, Marianna? he asked despairingly. This is your freshman year. Do you want to start it like this?

—Obviously.

—Why are you imitating your sister?

It's not imitating, I snarled in my mind.

It was as if he heard me. He tilted his head, waiting for me to speak. I thought then I might say, *I want to die.* The words popped into my head like a bit of nothing. I did not know what they meant. I felt tiny and tremulous, verging on childhood. A rush of gentle memories assaulted me: Mummy dressing Alaine and me in front of the fireplace; Téta humming as she swept the cottage walkway; the mess of Jiddo's drawer, my hands groping

through Persian prints in search of sweets. The noise of bombs interrupted whatever punishment the principal was devising for me. The door opened and one of the teachers poked her head into the room.

—It's too close, in Khaldeh. I've told everyone to go home.

She ran off. Bombs thundered in the distance, mingled with the chatter of students filling the hallways. The principal sighed. He stared at me with his sagging brown eyes, hands folded on his desk. He resembled some hulking creature perched on the edge of extinction and no longer willing to put up a fight. The door rattled, a student evidently fallen against it. Laughter followed. A teacher shouted, There is no need to go home! The fighting won't come here! but the noise grew just the same. I wondered where the Israelis had reached, and who was bombing who. I thought of Uncle Ara in his house, Astrig yelling at him. She had gone up to join him the week before, saying she would not leave her father on his own.

—You had best find your sister, the principal said.

—She could find me, I countered.

He just smiled a little and shook his head. Find each other, he said.

I got up, the good younger sister, the strong one, the happy one. I left the school without my books. I walked through the university campus and made my way into a bit of wood. A wildness thrashed about inside me; with every step my head hurt more, my limbs ached from some kind of pain whose source lay just below my ribs, right in the center of me, and I walked with my fists jammed against the place like it could explode. I wanted to cry, but I did not. In the thick privacy of the foliage, while the Druze militias shelled the Lebanese army at Khaldeh, I pressed the razor blade to my wrist, gasping at the swift pain. I waited. The pain was followed by something deeper, a hurt deep inside the flesh seeping out in a thin stream of blood. It congealed almost at once, the cut superficial, nothing like the things Alaine did to herself; but it promised more, something craved. Now a calm draped over me, muting the wildness, pushing it farther inside until it was a mere pinpoint of light, and I sat still for a time. Then I made my way home, borne by this awful calm, and my body was weak and powerful at once, laden with guilt and transformed by awe.

At the door I paused to gather my sleeve into my fist, hiding the scratches, but no one looked my way. Hello, I said, and they answered, Good, you're home, and I slipped back into the household without any trouble.

—They're using the ships, Mummy cried out in anger. What right do they have?

—Typical, typical, Mrs. Awad bitterly shook her head. America always wants to crush the East! Look at Vietnam!

—This is hardly Vietnam, said Daddy, but he was embarrassed. The war, as the grown-ups took to saying dispiritedly, had changed its character, as if it were a person that others had grudgingly accepted but was now displaying ugly traits that couldn't be ignored. The Americans were to blame, because they chose to help the Christians, who were fighting the Muslim militias in the mountains, who were being supplied by the Russians. In the middle of it all, Uncle Ara and Astrig and Ziad were either dead or alive, no one knew. The war shifted, adapted, feeding on the new alliances.

I hated them. I hated the foreign soldiers, the Americans most of all, and I was ashamed of Daddy's American eyes and hair and skin, which had so sickeningly repeated themselves in me. I passed the days indoors, pale as a mouse, my hair long and stringy. Come out, Mummy cajoled, but when I walked on the street, I felt everyone staring at me, despising me for making the bombs falling on the mountains. I am from here, too, I wanted to say. An evil, helpless desire grew in me; maybe Uncle Ara and Astrig would die, to prove me on the Lebanese side once and for all. I could not believe I was thinking such a thing, but I did, and the thought did not go away but pestered me unceasingly with detailed images of hearing the terrible news, the weeping, the funeral, the pity of it all. I asked after them daily to counteract the malignant thoughts, but there was no news from the mountains, they were cut off from the world.

After the bombing of their embassy, the American soldiers onshore had constructed a barricade of sandbags and concertina wire that twisted and turned like a metallic snake along the Corniche from the destroyed building all the way to the British Embassy, which they now shared. They draped a thick sheet of wire from the roof to the street, at an angle, as a shield against any bombs, which would strike it first and explode harmlessly. In my novel they begged me for help, and I turned them away. *Leave,* I commanded. *There is nothing for you here. Please, Carinna* (my heroine name), *you must help us! Go or die,* I told them, which was so dramatic I could not bear to sleep until I had played out the scene over and over to exhaustion.

The Sunday morning of the two bombs, I rolled over and tried to go back to sleep, but Daddy came in and sat on the edge of my bed and told me exactly what had happened. I already knew, though, because the ambulances were starting to echo through the city. It angered me that Daddy seemed so moved. I thought, *No one knew what they were all doing here anyway,* but then I felt the weight of my own ignorance, because this wasn't really my opinion, I had overheard someone say it. I didn't know anything about them, or the war, or what any of it meant. I don't care, I told Daddy, and he looked sad and left me alone. I could not go back to sleep, and the ambulances wailed back and forth. I imagined the hospital lobby, the people running everywhere, how the beds would be filling up.

At school all anyone could speak about were the attacks and how awful they were. I sat in my corner, warding other students away from my table with my cigarettes and foul mood. Ghada smoked her *argileh*, listening to the news from a grimy radio on top of the refrigerator. The story was the only thing in the news, too. Ghada seemed impassive, her face bloated and sticky-looking in the heat. I wanted to know her opinion, but Ghada and I never spoke about anything other than the high cost of cigarettes and the quantity of garlic in her chicken sandwiches. A girl was going on about the hospital; her father was a doctor and she had stayed up late into the night, holding one Marine's hand. Her pity angered me. Thousands of people died all the time in the war, and only now was everyone talking about it like it mattered. I felt the knotted anger in my chest, but at the same time I imagined going to the hospital to help, as some of the students were contemplating. I could tell the nurses that I was half-Lebanese and that I was born here, just like them. Then I was jarred by the realization that almost all the nurses were Filipino; they came here to make money.

Marko was far away from these stories. He played today just as he did any other, and he was on his fifth free game; I had been counting through this jumble. He smiled now and then, a private, scornful smile. He was the only one in here acting normal, and I wanted to slide between the two machines, watch his game, but this was an intimate space, reserved for close friends of his. The floor between us stretched longer than anything, a place not to be crossed.

He played on, and he didn't care about the bombs and the dying soldiers. It had to be because he already knew about such mysteries, about people dying and how to feel about it and what one is meant to do. I examined his face to see what it must have been like before. There had to have been some change. His forehead and cheek had jaggedy red scars, and another one skewed his lips. He looked tired. Maybe he had nightmares. I had heard that the motorcycle slid right under the truck, came out the other side. I could imagine this, a movie screen in my head of slow-motion screech, roar of metal, the fragility of the human body become pathetically small, gangly, ripped up like paper. Then the quiet, tic-toc, tic-toc, of a place in the world that's transformed from day-to-day noises to crash and scream and stop.

I also could imagine afterwards, when Marko stood up. He got on his knees first, then his feet. He could not feel anything yet, only a heaviness, a numbing. The doctors told him later that it was shock. He saw his friend lying on the street. Now some people were running towards him, shouting. He asked, What happened? They told him the motorcycle hit the truck wheels, which was going too fast, though the bike had been, too, and skidded

right under and kept going. They tried to hold him back from going to his friend, but he persevered. Marko, supporting his friend under the shoulders, lifted off the helmet.

The story went that Marko saw the inside of his friend's head. The head, crushed in on the side, collapsed without the helmet to hold it together. Marko saw his friend's brain. Maybe it looked like the lamb brains Ghada displayed on beds of parsley. I knew it couldn't be like that, but it was the only image I had in my head of brains. Then the onlookers tried to pull him away but they had to fight him, because that was when he went crazy, when they pulled him and he lashed out, lost his balance so the body rolled limply off his arm and he heard his friend's ruined head strike the asphalt. That sound had to be what he heard in his dreams, every day, every night, and no wonder he didn't care about the foreign soldiers; but what was it that I had heard, to make me care so little? He knew what it meant to die: he had cradled death in his own hands. I did not have these secrets. Death had always occurred far away from me, in photographs or overheard conversations. I longed to be like Marko, to have a dead friend, despite the part of me that recoiled from my own strange feelings. I couldn't help it. My lack of caring was fraudulent; Marko, though, he had seen everything he needed to see in the broken bone and shimmering juices in his palms, and he did not have to care anymore, he did not have to try.

—*Akh, haram!* Mrs. Awad lamented, shaking her hands at the ceiling. All those poor young men!

Mummy agreed sadly. Their rancor about the foreign soldiers had dissipated, leaving only pity and worry for what would come next, especially with Ara and Astrig still in the mountains. Uncle Bernie and Daddy sat up late into the night, drinking whiskey, talking about America and the lives they used to have, about politics, about the future of the Middle East. Alaine became grimly obsessed by the bombings. She had always collected newspaper photos of the war, but these she decided to paste on her wall, painting abstract images around them. Mummy and Daddy protested this macabre collage, but Alaine retorted, It's art, which for some reason silenced them.

—Why are you upset? I demanded. They deserved it!

She was painting a skull next to the collage, and now she paused to glance at me, contemptuous of my ignorance. No, they didn't, she said. They didn't have anything to do with the war.

I stared at the collage, trying to feel remorse. All I felt was a tautness in my chest, a scream lodged there. I hated Alaine. She always knew everything, did everything. It was she who found a body and buried it, she who had a collection of unexploded bullets and shrapnel, she who knew nighttime streets, gunfire, bombs. And now this. I wanted to tear

every photograph of every corpse, every stunned and frightened face, every blast of concrete, arms and legs dangling out. I wanted to rip that collage to bits.

—Get out of here, Alaine said, and I did.

One day passed, two, and then the moment came when I just got up and walked out of class. The teacher followed, reprimanding me, threatening detention, but I continued down the hall. As soon as I reached the street, I started running in the light rain, and I ran all the way from the Corniche to the hospital. No one asked me questions, no one stopped me as I shouldered my way through the crowds swamping the hospital lobby. I rode the elevator with the grieving, the exhausted, a foul-tempered orderly rubbing a rash on his arm. I got out on a floor, I did not know which, and the first door that yielded, I slipped through.

The door sighed shut, muffling the hospital noises. An American soldier was standing next to an empty bed, speaking into a telephone. He glanced at me. What was I doing here? What had I been thinking? But I couldn't bring myself to move, because the soldier gave me a nod and a small smile, as if he accepted my presence. Then he went on talking. He was reading a list, pausing now and then to answer questions. It was a list of the dead, the mutilated, the nameless and the named. There were movie-sounding names like Red and Hammer, and also normal American names, like Roger or Willie. There were men whose dog tags were lost, men who were in comas. I drank the sweat from my lips. I became aware of the bed on the other side of the room, a man's bloodshot eyes peering at me out of bandages.

Then the soldier hung up the telephone. He said, You can be alone with him now, and walked out. I stared at the door closing, my whole body a wire connected to the door, pulled away from the dying man in the bed. *I'm not a relative,* I shouted in my head, but he did not come back. Quiet, only my breathing. I smelled the antiseptic air, the sweat and medicines, and the man in the bed shifted, still staring.

I approached the bed and started to speak about nothing that would be remembered, and then he whispered, *Français.* I seized his hand, saying in French that I was sorry, and he stilled me by closing his eyes. Minutes passed. When he finally spoke, his words crumbled in his mouth, they went only as far as his throat, a hushed talking, so I had to lean closer where the smell of him, antiseptic, sour at the same time, settled inside the cave of my mouth, a taste more than a smell. I listened until he fell asleep, and I held his hand even then, staring, reading the cracked, dry lips, the crusted blood in his nostrils, the measure and hover of lashes on cheekbone.

He is already on the balcony because he was roused by the first bomb, that first one that killed all the Americans, and he is a young French paratrooper looking across this still city that is hot and damp in the morning, and his eyes are blurry with sleep but his mind is

alert, watchful. The sergeant stands nearby rubbing his eyes and then lifting the binoculars, searching through the haze of heat already starting to lift through the city, and it is hot and numbing. The mountains form a purple line through the misty morning heat and Paul, looking at them in the moments of silence after the first bomb, is bothered again by dreamed images of village streets, of a father gone and a mother with amber lips and silk kaftans, of the day her hands stuffed his clothes into bags and suitcases to send him to France forever so she could vanish into Africa.

He stands and looks and a spiral of smoke is swelling into rolls like boiling water and he says to the sergeant, because suddenly he pinpoints the source of all this fire and smoke and he is fearful then; *Mais ce sont les Americains!* Then a split second of knowing, as if he feels it before it happens because it is already there in the smoke filling the sky, in the wails of sirens already starting, it will happen to all of them, too. His knees are failing before the roar comes, because his body here on the top floor, tiny on the edge of this building, has sensed the shudder in the walls and floors and windows, through all the sleeping soldiers inside, through the eyes of the soldier on duty downstairs who must have been the first to see the truck aiming like a rocket for the doors. Then he is falling, and behind him inside all his friends and the beds they are in and knapsacks and bags and cups and ashtrays are rolling inwards into each other as the building hollows itself out, a funnel of concrete and wires and tiles and plaster and soldiers slipping into it still stunned with sleep. He crumbles down with the outside of the building, falling with each floor that falls, one balcony onto another, one by one, riding down with the walls of the building, the sky revolving over his head.

The second day in hospital he tries to move his hands but cannot raise his arms with two broken shoulders and a gouged-out chest. The plaster on his nose itches hot then cold and his eyes burn incessantly. A man groans in the bed next to his and then two orderlies carry him out and the sheets are left there all day, rumpled and soiled, but the man is not brought back.

The door opens and closes, again and again. Through bewilderment of drugs and surprise at being here at all, he faintly recognizes, then loses, his general and captain and chaplain who are speaking kindly to him, patting his hand and telling him he is a strong soldier. But Paul keeps losing his place, the pages slip from his fingers, where he is, when: for a time he is in his room at home in France, napping on his blue bedspread, but then he finds himself speeding through wooded trails, his dirt bike jumping like a wild, living thing, and the autumn crush of leaves and mud and motor-oil smell wet and chilled, but afterwards he becomes who he really is again, a paratrooper stepping from the plane, taking pictures of the world as he falls, of the tilting line between sky and earth, the noise of his laughing lost in the roar of wind in his ears, and his skin lifts in slow motion and his mouth opens to

swallow the sky. The medics come and go, the nurses rub the crook of his arm with alcohol and pierce him with needles. Outside the tall windows, night inks the sky then recedes, and when his eyes open again to the present, he sees a girl standing on the other side of the room.

—You will never go back there again, Mummy warned me, but I was crying so much I could not answer. I could still taste the smell of him, and it hollowed me out, leaving an agony I had never before experienced. Marianna, Marianna, Mummy cradled me. You mustn't go back. There's no need for you to see such things.

But she was wrong. The next day I hurried home from school, I twisted about in front of the mirror, adjusting my wraparound jean skirt. I brushed my hair, anxious that it was too flat, and despaired of my big mouth that Astrig said was a movie star's mouth. What are you doing? Mummy said, and I said, I'm going to visit Paul, and she stood aside because my whole body threatened kick and scream should she try and stop me. What's going on? Daddy asked, and when he found out all he said was, Don't stay too long, I'm sure he's tired, and I was grateful for the way he held onto Mummy's arm, let me pass.

I had imagined an empty room, Paul gazing at me from his bed. To my horror, the room was full of soldiers who seemed to know about me already, because they winked and asked if I was a new nurse and where was my uniform? Paul told them to leave me alone and I sneaked behind a chair and stared at the floor, willing my cheeks not to be so red. Every so often the soldier who was the captain gave a stern glance, as if I were a child, and I wanted to flee but I could hardly do that, being behind the chair as I was and with all the soldiers blocking the way.

As soon as they left, Paul said, Where were you? I waited all day.

—I had to go to school.

It had not even crossed my mind to skip school altogether, stay at his side. He moved his hand slightly, gesturing me closer. I'm sorry, he said. Of course you need to go to school.

The whites of his eyes were spread through with red and his lips kept sticking together, chalky with dry spit. The smell of this room, of bandages moistened with medicine and blood and pus, of sour mouths slightly opened, of the food left on trays for hours, entered me then and for years, unbidden, far away from this room, they would come back.

The first time I fed him dinner the boiling soup spilled on his legs and he shouted in agony, throwing off the sheets. I was shocked by the sight of his thighs and what lay beyond. Towels! he cried, and I rushed to the bathroom. He could not move for hours

afterwards because of the renewed pain in his shoulders, and I was inconsolable until he began to tease me.

—What did you see under the sheets? he asked slyly again and again, until I begged him to stop tormenting me and the mistake of the soup was forgotten.

I fancied becoming a nurse, for I enjoyed spooning food into his mouth and adjusting his blankets, but then his bandages needed to be changed. I want to watch, I said, convinced of my own bravery. The nurse peeled off the outside bandage from his chest and began removing the gauze with tweezers. With every piece of gauze, my stomach turned woozily, for the layers did not end, and the wound went deeper and deeper. The nurse smiled wickedly at me, lifting out the gauze that was now sodden with blood, and Paul laughed.

— You don't have to look, he said.

It was too late; the wound was fresh and glistening as a steak, lined with white threads. I sank down to the floor. Paul gripped my hand. It will be over soon, he comforted, and he and the nurse laughed together at my weakness. After this, I went into the bathroom during this procedure. Is it over? I shouted; the first time, they lied for a joke.

I lied about Mummy and Daddy not caring where I was until one evening they entered the room still wrapped in their coats as if they had no intention of staying. You're coming home, they told me. Paul was beside himself with regret. He tried to sit up in his consternation and fell to the side; I caught him and propped him up, sending my parents death looks over his bent head. They relented, unbuttoning their coats but not taking them off, and sat on the visitors' chairs to talk with him. I loitered in the corner, mortified. But I could see they liked Paul, and then the nurse brought in dinner and greeted them effusively, praising my good nursing skills, and they watched how I fed him so carefully and knew just how much sugar he liked in his yogurt. They lengthened my curfew to ten o'clock at night provided I did my homework here, and Paul said I most certainly would and that he suspected I was a good student, better than he had ever been.

—How could you make your parents into such ogres? Paul asked in amazement.

I agonized that now he would dislike me and send me away, but he held my hand, counting my fingers as if this time there would be more, or less, than five. He told me, You should be grateful they love you so much. I knew then he was thinking about his own parents, for he had been adopted when he was very young and could barely recall his mother and father, who had left him alone like a forgotten piece of luggage.

—The one thing I know is that I'm Lebanese, he confessed, astonishing me, the nurses, everyone. He said, I never thought I would find myself here, in this country.

—Welcome home, the doctor joked.

I spent evenings next to his bed with my notebooks and pens and textbooks and did my homework, smiling shyly when he asked what I was learning. I showed him the math for help and laughed when he did not know the answers. He drew silly cartoons for me next to the equations, and I cupped my hand around them in class so that no one would see.

—Is he decent to you? Alaine asked.

I shrugged that of course he was. I was relieved that her interest did not seem to extend beyond this question, and put aside my worries that she would want to go with me.

The journalists began to arrive. They came in groups carrying stand-up lamps, cameras, tape recorders. Paul could not turn them away. For the families of those who died, he explained, but I was horrified with the questions, the hot lights and microphones pushed up close to his miserable face, and worst of all, the same question, over and over, the demand that he describe exactly what he had heard and seen on the day of the bomb.

It was only a matter of time before the journalists discovered he was actually Lebanese; the coincidence entranced them. To accompany the article on him, they needed a photograph. Hold this telephone to your ear, they said. Yes, just like that. The photograph came out the following day, with the caption saying he had been speaking with his French parents. The fabrication infuriated me.

I stood outside the door and refused to let the journalists in. Papers, I commanded.

—Listen to the little girl, the nurses said, and the journalists confessed they had not obtained permission for the interview from the French Embassy. The third time this happened, Paul shouted from inside the room for me to leave them alone, to let him answer the questions, because who else could comfort the families who had lost their sons? But when they departed, he groped for my hands as he cried because the nightmares had been stirred and the screaming kept echoing in his head. His eyes looked wild over the plaster encasing his nose. He turned his head, shifted his body as he wept, trapped in all his bandages, the blanket pulled to mid-chest and tucked tight so his wounded body was outlined in every detail, frail-seeming, all the way down to the feet pointing up and making little tents of the blanket. Daddy came to find me because it was past ten, and he did not argue when I refused to leave; he sat on a chair in the hallway and waited.

The other bed had been empty for several days but then the nurses wheeled in a gurney and told Paul, You have a roommate now. This soldier was older, a colonel, and he had miraculously survived being thrown from the seventh floor in the explosion. He groaned all day and all night for water, for his wife and children, for the pain to subside.

—I can't sleep, Paul cried. Oh God, make him shut up! but the man kept moaning, unaware of his surroundings.

The nurses taught me how to soak gauze swabs in water and insert them into the colonel's mouth so he could suck them dry. More, he mumbled. More, more. Not all at once, I told him, and his face twisted up in despair. Fix the IV, he cried weakly one afternoon, until a nurse finally arrived. She yanked the plastic curtain, noise of racing metal rings. There was a silence, then a moan, and blood splattered onto the tiles. Shit, said the nurse.

But in the following days the colonel became more alert, so I tried to entertain him with my problems at school and my plans for the future. Math is a difficult subject, he agreed. But you have to finish school if you want to have an apartment and a dog.

—Not necessarily, I argued.

—Finish your homework, Paul said, or your parents will kill me.

The nurse flung open the door. You have visitors! she announced.

A group of men and women filed in, awkward, laden with flowers and boxes of sweets. A journalist followed. They looked at the colonel, whose hand was in mine, then at Paul. He smiled uncertainly. They grouped around his bed. We will be your family in Lebanon, one of the women said in Arabic, since you do not remember yours.

Paul looked to me for translation, but the journalist stepped forward and spoke first. There was a silence as Paul digested this strange offer. *Send them out of here,* I thought, but instead he started to cry, not loudly, but in whispers, not violent, uncontrolled, but just tears that come when nothing can be said, and I ran out of the room because I could not bear the way Paul was just lying there, looking so frail.

After they left I climbed into bed with Paul even though the nurses could walk in at any time. Why did you like them? I asked, and he said, Because they are kind. But they aren't your real cousins, I pointed out, and he knuckled my chin. You're jealous, he told me, which shut me up.

After this, new relatives visited every day. Paul's lost family grew and grew. They brought chocolates and clothing and cards from others who could not come. The magic of Lebanon had brought him back, they exclaimed, which was a captivating idea, that the place where I was born was magical. Any person born here, I learned, and any visitor who stepped onto this land for even just one day was infected by this magic. No one could ever forget Lebanon, nor could one leave without longing to return.

Paul was not convinced. He said, I enlisted in the army. It was chance.

I shook my head, insisting on the truth of the spell that had him in its thrall.

More and more vases of flowers wilted on the room's balcony, left there so they would not suck away Paul's oxygen, and I counted them, delighted by the absurd numbers, by the bright new clothes, the chocolates that gave me stomachaches and that Paul could not

bring himself to eat. Paul smiled and laughed with me, and we whispered lying side by side, and the nights passed.

When he was well enough to be taken to a hospital in France, I stood near him on the sidewalk outside the glass wall of the hospital. Soldiers milled about, and jeeps waited in a line for the time everyone would have to leave, and he laughed in my ear, asking for a kiss in front of the captain who had always intimidated me. I finally gave in to his cajoling, and he smiled against my lips. The chaplain came close and whispered, I can marry you two now! Paul looked at me questioningly but I was in a state of alarm, and he pulled my face to his chest. The chaplain touched my hair with the tips of his fingers, saying he had not meant to frighten me.

Paul climbed into the ambulance, leaving me holding the half-empty boxes of sweets. The lights started spinning and he was carried slowly away, face framed by his palms against the window, and now I think about the other soldier in there with him, the colonel, and how everyone knew he was dying, even I knew, but still, it was a secret.

I closed myself away in my room at night with the vodka I had found in the kitchen, easier to steal than Daddy's whiskey. Mummy and Daddy did not notice me, and Alaine lived in her own world, headphones clamped to her ears all day, playing Pink Floyd. An empty space grew around me each night as I scribbled half-drunk letters to Paul, who wanted to marry me; he had promised that when I finished high school he would take me away to France. I sat in the darkness and smoked cigarettes I stole from Mummy. My love affair, unlike Alaine's, would be a success. I dreamed about wearing silk dresses and drinking Campari in France, I became someone else, someone older and quiet and mysterious who had nothing to do with me. If she were to meet me she would ignore me, a pathetic child. I sanitized a safety pin in my lighter's flame, pushed it through my lip. Mummy screamed when she saw me, and the emergency doctor shook his head, lecturing me about the absence of a punk movement in Lebanon and how I would be shunned. My lip ached for days. I settled for safety pins strung together as earrings, drew black around my eyes, dragged a knife through my jeans until they hung in rags around the knees. You look like a beggar, Mrs. Awad criticized in a weak attempt to jolt me back to normal.

At school I noticed I was alone. Like Alaine, I realized, and this seemed acceptable. I sat near her outside, not too close, but in her vicinity. We did not speak, except to ask for part of the other's lunch, or for a book. She took her medication without complaint, she didn't run away anymore, and she was trying hard to pass exams, but I walked right out of classes just as she once had and passed others like a satellite, untouchable. I was the older woman, walking down the street towards Ghada's café, *impenetrable, melancholic,* words from books. I looked out

the eyes of stupid Marianna, confident that no one could see this double life. I made up entire histories for myself and revised them as I watched the other students, who were oblivious to me and my complexity. *Before all this, when I was in Bordeaux, and the windy house crumbled around me, a knock at the door; it was the writer who was summering up the beach. He said, Are you all right? I was touched that he noticed something was wrong, but how could he know my terrible story, what brought me here ...?* At night, I lay wide awake while the whole house slept, alive in my made-up world, playing the same scenes over and over.

The Americans wanted revenge. The bombs from the battleship *New Jersey* were louder than anything we had ever heard; each one shook the entire country, and the silence after was so full, the air bloated and sagged with it and its weight held us in place and in silence. We heard tales of whole mountains being gutted. The size of a football field, I heard my father say, as if because the guns belonged to America their effect could not be measured in meters. Sixteen-inch guns, they were called, so I stood a ruler on end, measuring the remaining space with level palm, and it amazed me that something so small could be the source of the loudest bombs I had ever heard. Uncle Ara and Astrig came down from the mountains, thin, wild, full of stories, reporting that Ziad was alive as well. Christmas came and went, and when the Shi'a fought for West Beirut we retreated into the darkness of the basement. I chafed with boredom; I missed the long days at the café with Marko, and I wondered where he lived or if he was even still in the country. Late into the night, the streets alive with gunfire and bombs, I snuck to other parts of the building while everyone slept; I stood near windows, shivering, expecting death, and Paul sent telegrams, *Come to France, little flea. You must escape.*

But there was no escape. The months blended, drifting by, one battle erupting into another with only a few days or hours between to rest on a sunny balcony or stock up on food. The windows shivered and broke; I scraped my wrists along the edge to trace destruction, to say, *The window broke and I did, too,* and this fantasy of being a window giving onto another world occupied me. Why are you so quiet, Marianna? Because I'm thinking. What are you thinking? About life. She's thinking about life, so grown-up. This from Astrig. A great sigh. War eliminates childhood. This from Mrs. Awad, whose sharp eyes missed nothing but because I was a window they missed me and looked straight through to Alaine, whose junior year was doomed by the fighting so she tossed her books on the burning garbage pile up the street. How could you throw away books? Daddy cried, but then he found out they were only about calculus and economics, and the grown-ups laughed at his relief. By the time the peacekeepers finally evacuated, Alaine had managed to regain her footing in school, and our

parents invented what they thought would be a more virulent threat to make me work in school, that of not being as courageous and smart as my sister, but this had no effect.

The evacuation of the peacekeepers was played on TV, and we threw a party for it because, said Astrig, any excuse for a party was acceptable at this point. The peacekeepers retreated in jeeps and tanks, they filed onto boats, they looked back. The camera sought the most sorrowful ones to foretell Lebanon's dark future. We marveled once again at the plumage decorating Italian helmets. Mrs. Awad said she didn't know how huge feathers could serve as camouflage, especially in city warfare. She said those words, *city warfare,* as if she was a professor of some kind. They should be in the opera! Uncle Ara chortled, and the Italian banker he had brought as a guest took offense. This is an age-old tradition, he complained, but Uncle Ara said, *Tfih!* and brought up his issues with other idiotic but more sinister headgear, the fez, though it had no real bearing. They argued on. Daddy received word that America would help evacuate him and his family, if he wished. He wrote back, *This is my country,* and we all felt proud and Uncle Ara clapped his shoulder and called him brave as an Armenian.

There was merriment in this war; we laughed at it from the basement or the landing, and our laughter kept the little building safe, though a balcony was lost from the other side, and one night bullets shattered the windows behind Daddy's desk and strafed an arc through his books. Still, there was no escape. Daddy announced he wanted to usher in the Christmas season in style, to celebrate survival. Everyone came at the right time except for Uncle Bernie. We drank cups of hot spiced wine and we waited, but the doorbell did not ring and the streets went black and quiet. When Daddy and Uncle Ara came back from searching, they were alone. The party ended and everyone went home. Daddy sat at the kitchen table, the phone pressed to his ear, but there was only the khish-*khish-khish* of broken lines.

There is the awful day, soon after. I close my eyes, but the day remains. Daddy pushes the button for the elevator. I slouch next to him, all hairspray and cigarettes, my eyes drawn in thick black lines and safety pins dangling from my ears. We hear the elevator making its way down.

His sad blue eyes meet mine, and they seem to be asking something.

—I don't really care, I explain. I can't feel it.

I was speaking the truth. I couldn't feel anything about Uncle Bernie being kidnapped, and what was most important, to me, was to convey that coldness and its terribleness. Daddy just crumpled a little as if he had been slapped on the back, and he

lowered his head for a moment. The elevator bell rang its arrival, and Daddy stared at the light inside and he didn't open the door so the light went out and all was silent.

He said, I am going to pretend you didn't say that, and then I wanted to tell him I did care, I did, but it was too late. Daddy held the door open for me, and we rode up in silence, the floors gliding by under the straining clanks of the old elevator. The months went on, carrying us ever farther from the last time we had seen Uncle Bernie. The grown-ups said, He might be here, or, We heard he was there and he is in good health, and Uncle Bernie was moved from place to place, all around the country, and I did not tell Daddy I cared because parents always know, anyway, the truth inside their children. Rumors found our door, slipped through as rumors will, and the grown-ups, starved, fed on them: Did you hear, the kidnappers were kind at heart; did you hear, they brought him medicine when needed. The rumors offered a warm bed and no blindfold, kindly captors, a ransom about to be paid, and I did not listen, because it did not matter, because I knew with the easy certainty of a child that Uncle Bernie would be returned to us eventually.

I was a window, and people looked through me and did not see, and so I moved through the days and nights. I sought the parts of my body that I could hide, dragged open the skin with knives. The pain slid out, trailed by that calm I craved, but then it always returned. I made a path out of the cuts, leading to the place under my ribs, the seat of my soul. One day, a lover would find me. That is what I dreamed, and in all this time, Uncle Bernie waited in one dark room or another, his feet in his shoes and his soft hands folded in his lap, and now and then I did think to miss him, I did.

Our Lives Are Rounded With A Sleep
(Katherine Taylor, 1948-2001)

Eleanor Ross Taylor

Where are they sleeping,
the babies to be born
a hundred years from now?

Where did she sleep, my daughter,
when I was a child?

Has she gone back?
    And will she know the place?
        Who's there?
Or does it matter who is there,
in that blank space?

In fluid form?
Force without form?
    Her tiny nails, her lustrous hair,
    her laughing face.

Survivor on a sofa, I
re-voyage to window's trees,
likes ones where I was new—
    their swing, their girls, their words—
        and watch night fall.

Return from there—
    A There that was a place?
        Where is it now?

Her nails, her heavy hair,
(her pillowed face)

The Mosques on the Banks of the Ganges: Apart or Together?[1] (in the era of the West and Islam)

Anant Kumar

tr. from the German by
Prof. Dr. Rajendra Prasad Jain

These days, like most Europeans, I too think very often about the Muslims. This, despite the fact that, in contrast to the adherents of Mohammed, neither my ancestors nor the numerous gods of my country ever had anything to do with the Occident. On the other hand, however, thousands of mosques are situated on the banks of the Ganges together with millions of Hindu temples. From Benares to Calcutta. And it is not uncommon on that thickly populated Indo-Gangetic Plain that one brother starts to hate the other only because he wears different clothes. Or one worships another God, or eats a different kind of meat. It often happens that siblings fight one another. Even unto death.

After the deaths on September 11 I thought less – if at all, then only marginally – about Muslims, but a great deal more about the unscrupulous terrorists who could recruit at will from various groups of people, minorities, nations… And as a human being I felt blind hatred against the organizations, groups of people, countries … whose pictures were repeatedly flashed in the aftermath. And gradually the common denominator became more and more evident to me, i.e., that all of them were Muslims.

I became more confused and uncertain and tried to find solace in the writings of my western ideals, who are poets and thinkers. With great care I read an interview with the philosopher Gadamer, who himself had had to live through the most devastating wars of mankind, entitled "I am very frightened." His answer to the question of the 'Acceptable Future of all Religions' was a help to me, *viz.*, that it is possible to come to terms with everything, except for the religion of the Arabs.[2] I read the paragraph again.

As far as I can remember I had had a similar discussion with my elder brother in Delhi (during my studies in New Delhi). At that time we had reacted to a report in *India*

[1] Almost 140 million Muslims live in India (as many as in Pakistan).
[2] *Die Welt*, 25/09/2001

Today, India's *Der Spiegel*, which read: "Throughout the world the nations and cultures have had conflicts with the Muslims, irrespective of whether they were in a minority, as in India, or a majority, as in Indonesia." Then, the report appeared to us, two students of the Indian middle class, like a scientific observation and simultaneously as a logical explanation of certain evil situations. And we believed it.

In my small hometown, Motihari, in Eastern India, where George Orwell saw the light of day, and where, in 1917, Gandhi started his *Satyagraha* movement,[3] the Muslims are in a minority. And in my childhood and youth I, a Hindu, had an interesting relationship with them. We went to school together and they were my playmates.

Every now and then, however, conflicts did take place between adherents of the two major religions of India, between Muslims and Hindus. Special security measures were adopted during those tense days and weeks. Parents forbade their children to go into areas where mosques were situated.

There was a small Muslim ghetto, about as large as the northern part of Kassel, called the *agarwa*.[4] In this area lived a large Muslim joint family. My father, a Hindu, was related to this family. Yes, 'related' is the correct expression, as my father, a strict disciplinarian in his own family, was looked upon in that Muslim family as the most beloved and generous of uncles. The children of that family told me that only as young men did they get to know that my father was neither a Muslim nor a blood relative. He spoke excellent Urdu[5] and in his wardrobe one could find several well-cut *sherwanis*.[6]

But we children belonged, on the one hand, to a Western-oriented era, and simultaneously to modern, progressive India, in which Pakistan and its Muslims were considered arch-enemies.

My brother and I were particularly fond of Muslim festivals, especially on account of the delicious sweets prepared on these occasions. My mother comes from a strictly vegetarian Hindu family, and at home even today no meat is cooked. But we brothers had early on discovered the joys of eating meat. At such functions the Muslims prepared for their Hindu guests and neighbours dishes made from goat's meat. Just thinking about them even now my mouth starts watering. I can well remember the day when we visited the family late in the evening on Eid-ul-Azha[7] and the meat had all been consumed. I was upset and both my brother and I wore downcast expressions. My aunt realised why and

[3] *Satyagraha*: civil disobedience for the sake of truth.
[4] *Agarwa*: a foreign, Urdu-Persian term for the Hindus who account for 81% of the population.
[5] Urdu: official language of Pakistan, also spoken in large parts of India. It is related to the Indian national language, Hindi, but contains more.
[6] *Sherwani*: a long coat for men with the collar buttoned at the neck in Mughal fashion.
[7] Eid-ul-Azha: The second most important festival of the Muslims

immediately asked her daughters, or her daughter-in-law, to prepare a fresh meat dish just for us. I was overjoyed!

Even as a child I was a revolutionary and, as a result, quite early on I moved away from my family. I spent the last years of school in cities thousands of miles away. The visits to my family were few and far between in those days, partly due to strained relations within the family, and partly due to the extreme competition at school, which entailed much work. It was the same with my elder brother. We did our best to get the best grades and results in order to be able to rise in the hierarchy of the Indian bourgeoisie.

In New Delhi my brother met his school friend, a Muslim by the name of Aquil Ahmad, once again. Both became bosom pals after this meeting. One of the important reasons for this was that Aquil was a student of Urdu literature, and Urdu poetry was my brother's favourite reading in his leisure hours, although he was a student of Mathematics. He now lives and works successfully in the United States. I experienced the intensity of this relationship only incidentally, as I was a diligent student in the Foreign Languages Department at a different university. In due course I learnt that Aquil had lost his father as a child. He thus referred to my father as Uncle or sometimes even *Baba*,[8] as we children did. Especially during the last few years, after we had emigrated to two different countries for higher studies, he took to calling my father *Baba*.

In 1993 I was working as a trainee in the Volkswagen factory in Kassel when I unexpectedly received news that my father was on his deathbed. I took the next plane out and when I landed in Delhi, in a state of shock, Aquil, the Muslim friend, arranged for my speedy travel to Patna in Eastern India. I did not arrive in time to see my father alive, but as a Hindu son I carried out his last rites according to Hindu tradition on the banks of the Ganges. At all the long complicated funeral ceremonies Aquil was the one who coordinated everything, working tirelessly, like a well-oiled machine.

My colleague Dirk Schümer wrote the following in the *FAZ*: 'What is Islam actually? I must admit that till now this question has only marginally interested me and I cannot for the life of me remember when the Mohammedan era began. 620? 628?'[9] At first I thought his lines partly ironical, partly complaining. Then I imagined how it would look if in a public discussion, say on a television talk show, I suggested my understanding of his lines. I saw my colleague become irritated. He started refuting my interpretation: *No! No! ... You have completely misunderstood me. I want neither to complain, nor to ignore Islam… But it is my right (and also possible) not to understand everything in this world.*

[8] *Baba*: Persian for father; an affectionate term for father in India.
[9] *FAZ*, 30/09/2001

Those same questions go through my head. But my case is more justified, surely, as I come from a country in which religion is seldom taught in schools. Furthermore, although a deeply religious and educated man, I have read only a fraction of the numerous Hindu sacred texts – the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Epics.

I saw on CNN a Muslim woman academic bemoaning the fact that Muslims, a third of the world's population, remain misunderstood; that the rest of the world had to understand the Muslims, or else peaceful coexistence between nations would remain a utopian idea.

Hindus do not constitute even a third of the world's population, and Buddhists are even fewer in number. I try in vain to imagine an international constellation in which temple bells would peal in Europe for millions of cow-worshippers and their billions of gods.

For me, as a writer educated in Europe, it is even more difficult to end this article with the opinion of the European philosopher Gadamer: 'I don't know, but I believe in our world as we know it, and I do not need any written explanation for that. It is really very difficult for a European to understand that it is not always so for others.'[10] Yes, very difficult, even if my colleagues like Mr. Schümer were to find Buddha, Krishna, Rama … and the cows very interesting and fascinating.

To comfort myself I let my thoughts drift to the mosques on the banks of the Ganges, especially since I – living in the country of my choice, like some of my western colleagues – am not concerned either with mosques or with Islam.

[10] *Die Welt*, 25/09/2000

Seeing Another War in Iraq in 2003
and
The Unseen Gulf War

Peter Turnley

At Al Asskan Hospital in Baghdad, a pediatric hospital, two doctors perform cardiac massage on 10-year-old Worood Nasiaf, who died a few minutes later. She suffered from pulmonary pneumonia, and she was unable to be brought to the hospital for treatment by her father, because of traveling conditions during the war, and because many hospitals stopped functioning during the fighting. In the bed next to hers lay patient, 2-year-old Mortalha Hameed, and her mother Eman Ali, 23. After the doctors declared Worood Nasiaf dead, they put her hands together on her chest, and covered her face, and her father entered the room and wept.

An audio talk by Peter Turnly about his experience as a unilateral photo-journalist during the American and British invasion of Iraq, March 2003, and a show of his photos and texts from that war, as well as from the Gulf War (1991), are on *Archipelago* http://www.archipelago.org/vol7-3/turnley.htm.

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Service in the armed forces of the United States has not been a universal male obligation of citizenship since 1973. Our military today is a professional corps of men and women who join up for their own reasons, commonly to advance themselves in the face of one or another cul de sac of American society. They normally do not expect to be shot at, but they do expect all the benefits of state employment – steady pay, good housing, free medical benefits, relief from racial discrimination, world travel, and gratitude from the rest of society for their military "service." They are well aware that the alternatives civilian life in America offers today include difficult job searches, no job security, regular pilfering of retirement funds by company executives and their accountants, "privatized" medical care, bad public elementary education systems, and insanely expensive higher education. They are ripe, it seems to me, not for the political rhetoric of patrician politicians who have followed the Andover, Yale, Harvard Business School route to riches and power but for a Julius Caesar, Napoleon Bonaparte, or Juan Perón – a revolutionary, military populist with no interest in republican niceties so long as he is made emperor.

Given the course of the postwar situations in Afghanistan and Iraq, it may not be too hard to defeat George Bush in the election of 2004. But whoever replaces him will have to deal with the Pentagon, the military-industrial complex, our empire of bases, and a fifty-year-old tradition of not telling the public what our military establishment costs and the devastation it can inflict. History teaches us that the capacity for things to get worse is limitless. Roman history suggests that the short, happy life of the American republic is in serious trouble – and that conversion to a military empire is, to say the least, not the best answer.

Chalmers Johnson, "The Scourge of Militarism - Rome and America"
Tuesday, September 9, 2003 *TomDispatch.com*
http://www.nationinstitute.org/tomdispatch/index.mhtml?pid=938

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The Only God Is the God of War
On BLOOD MERIDIAN, an American Myth

Katherine McNamara

Your ideas are terrifying and your hearts are faint. Your acts of pity and cruelty are absurd, committed with no calm, as if they were irresistible. Finally, you fear blood more and more. Blood and time. –*Paul Valéry*

> It is not to be thought that the life of darkness is sunk in misery and lost as if in sorrowing. There is no sorrowing. For sorrow is a thing that is swallowed up in death, and death and dying are the very life of the darkness. –*Jacob Böhme*
>
> *Epigraphs to* BLOOD MERIDIAN

A dozen years ago, the American West was on my mind. I had finished writing a book about Alaska, where I had gone to live when younger, and now wanted a wider, literary perspective on our westward expansion. The novelist Thomas Pynchon suggested I ought to read a remarkable work of fiction, BLOOD MERIDIAN OR THE EVENING REDNESS IN THE WEST, by Cormac McCarthy. His advice was sound. The prose enthralled, even as the archaic subject of the novel infused the reader I was then with awe-filled terror.

On the North American continent, so long inhabited by immigrants and their descendents, I thought that our (children of immigrants') literature seldom had attained the imaginative truth of myth. By myth I meant a kind of story rooted in belief so profound it animates the very way one sees the world and which in the fineness and accuracy of its detail, explains that world by its description. It need not (surely, cannot) explain causality; it is not science; it does not support rational knowledge. It is another way of knowing seldom available to us modern, educated people. In the Alaskan Interior, occasionally, I was permitted a glimpse of such knowledge.

Occasionally, true artists are so permitted; one cannot envy them. Melville was permitted; Faulkner, too, likely; and in this book at least, Cormac McCarthy stood with them. His was a chthonic vision. Some vermillion impulse had risen from the very ground of the West and touched his imagination, and he gave it form. The book he made was not for the squeamish. I began it three times before succeeding and thought my hair would turn white as I read. To regain a necessary distance I wrote a series of notes, then put them away. This war-filled summer I opened BLOOD MERIDIAN again, and re-read the notes. I believe they stand.

Best Not To Look In There

> See the child. He is pale and thin, he wears a thin and ragged linen shirt. . . . He can neither read nor write and in him broods already a taste for mindless violence. All history present in that visage, the child the father of the man.

The kid, Cormac McCarthy's protagonist, was the child who would lead me further West in literature, into the mythical American wilderness. He was a child of "history

present," the eternal return, impersonal and without a self. He has no name and no stake in property: "His folk are known for hewers of wood and drawers of water but in truth his father has been a schoolmaster. He lies in drink, he quotes poets whose names are now lost. The boy crouches by the fire and watches him." The kid is a character of no ambiguity. He never learns to read or write. The land teaches him some things: how to eat, how to take his bearings. The unalterably violent, erotically described gangs of men he drifts into teach him something else. He looks for this thing, and expects it; he rides to it as a pilgrim. Is he a creature of belief, of free will and consent? He has had no formation but that his father "lies in drink," and has no moral center but his taste for violence.

In Faulkner's great novella "The Bear" a reader finds what could have been one line of the kid's patrimony, born in an instant of possibility. Here is Isaac McCaslin, arguing with his cousin McCaslin Edmonds. He is twenty-one, trying to come to terms with the land he has inherited and how he cannot "relinquish" because his forebears have not truly "owned" it; because it was established by God that man should oversee and "hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood." He cries out about the nature of his God:

> 'He didn't have His book written to be read by what must elect and choose, but by the heart, not by the wise of the earth because maybe they dont need it or maybe the wise no longer have any heart, but by the doomed and lowly of the earth who have nothing else to read with but the heart.'

I imagined the kid born in the shadow of that cry; I saw him as the negative possibility of Ike McCaslin's desire for "the communal anonymity of brotherhood." The kid was as doomed and lowly as a child of God could be.

What is the nature of his heart?

Now the kid is fourteen; the year is 1847. (It interested me to trace the years in McCarthy's fiction, to see if, as decades passed, there had been moral development in the citizenry; another way of measuring Progress, I thought, as an ethic of the American civil religion.[11]) He has run away from home, gone to New Orleans, fought and been shot,

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[11] [11] Bernard DeVoto wrote ACROSS THE WIDE MISSOURI about the Rocky Mountain fur trade (the early decades of the kid's life):

> By the time we deal with in this book, several hundred men were crossing the Great American Desert every year and its commerce had been incorporated in world trade. No matter: it was still uninhabitable, the soul would no grow crops, there was no grass domestic cattle could eat…. [I]n 1844 the editor of the *Christian Advocate*, whose church had had a mission in Oregon for ten years, thought that Botany Bay would be more favorable for emigration. In that same year Daniel Webster

recovered; he has traveled in mud and rain and seen brutal death; he asks no man for anything, and can defend himself. He has turned west, toward Texas; or toward the land McCarthy calls Texas, where "not again in all the world's turning will there be terrains so wild and barbarous to try whether the stuff of creation may be shaped to man's will or whether his own heart is not another kind of clay."

This "Texas" is not only an historical evocation. The word also calls up a sacred land; but no gentle meaning for sacred there. In archaic and biblical cadences delineating the moral landscape through which the kid journeys, a theogony is traced. The kid rides west on a pilgrimage to mindless violence. The word McCarthy assigns again and again for this place is *darkness*. It is a metaphysical darkness.

On the dark trail the kid meets a hermit.

> Lost ye way in the dark, said the old man. He stirred the fire, standing slender tusks of bone up out of the ashes.
>
> The kid didnt answer.
>
> The old man swung his head back and forth. The way of the transgressor is hard. God made this world, but he didnt make it to suit everbody, did he?
>
> I dont believe he much had me in mind.
>
> Aye, said the old man. But where does a man come by his notions. What world's he seen that he liked better?
>
> I can think of better places and better ways.
>
> Can ye make it be?
>
> No.
>
> No. It's a mystery. A man's at odds to know his mind cause his mind is aught he has to know it with. He can know his heart, but he dont want to. Best not to look in there. It aint the heart of a creature that is bound in the way that God has set for it.

"Best not look in there": there the kid looks. What he sees is darkness. He has no mind to comprehend it; he has no family or community, no law or religion; he is without

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most certainly did not make a speech that has been attributed to him ever since: 'What do we want with the vast, worthless area, this region of savages and wild beasts, of deserts, of shifting sands, and whirlwinds of dust, of cactus and prairie dogs? To what use could we ever hope to put these great deserts or these endless mountain ranges, impenetrable and covered to their base with eternal snow?…I will never vote one cent from the public treasury to place the Pacific coast one inch nearer to Boston than it now is.' Mr. Webster has been libeled, he never made that speech – but the point is that the speech was so common in and out of Congress that any expansionist could believe he had. And John Charles Frémont, who crossed the wasteland in 1842, came back to say that maybe a grazing society could inhabit parts of it, but not many nor large parts, and the rest was steppes. Next year he changed his mind and began to render his principal service to American history by shrinking the great desert toward its center. (p. 3)

distinguishing qualities and exists for himself alone. He is an individual. (He is the negative type of Ike McCaslin's romantic yearning that the meek shall inherit the earth.) Therefore, he sees war, fought across the demonic land into which he rides. BLOOD MERIDIAN is a book about war, and about a human possibility no one in his right mind would choose; yet, without cease, humans choose it. They *choose* war, or so I have believed. Therefore, if we were men, that is, humans, endowed by our Creator with free will and conscience, if we followed His way, would we not therefore renounce the choice of war?

If that was my naive question, McCarthy's answer was as hard as Calvin's, and as Hegel's: in his theogony, history is indeed a slaughter bench; his theology is implacable, more determinist than Calvin's. With gaze held steady he envisions no redemption outside slaughter. In such a world, what choice does one such as the kid have? "In him broods already a taste for mindless violence." Thus predestined the kid will enter the field of war; and, empty-minded, he will be crazed and destroyed by it.

The scalphunters

Dry, stony, Spanish landscapes, snake-eyed stubble-beard grotesques killing everything that moves. . . Spaghetti westerns are *fantasías* on the American western, a genre that is itself a voluptuously violent visual fantasy about our history. The movies flicker through the pages of BLOOD MERIDIAN. A brassy undertone of Morricone-music mocks its pure vernacular. This book is grandiose, it's an epic, it's movie melodrama. The kid's trail compañeros are killers, truly, but stylized, in their ghastly antics almost comical. The story advances cinematically, one scene succeeding another, the transitions purely formal. A passage, one among the many, evokes the scene. It is the appearance of a band of scalphunters riding into the capital of the state of Chihuahua. They are led by a veteran soldier named Glanton, an American hard man. The kid and a man called Toadvine, and another Kentuckian, "a veteran of the war," are incarcerated in the filthy *calabozo*. They are about to be delivered.

> They saw patched argonauts from the states driving mules through the streets on their way through the mountains to the coast. Goldseekers. Itinerant degenerates bleeding westward like some heliotropic plague. They nodded or spoke to the prisoners and dropped tobacco and coins in the street beside them.
>
> They saw blackeyed young girls with painted faces smoking little cigars, going arm in arm and eyeing them brazenly. They saw the governor himself erect and formal within his silkmullioned sulky clatter forth from the double doors of the palace courtyard and they saw one day a pack of visciouslooking humans mounted

> on unshod indian ponies riding half drunk through the streets, bearded, barbarous, clad in the skins of animals stitched up with thews and armed with weapons of every description, revolvers of enormous weight and bowieknives the size of claymores and short twobarreled rifles with bores you could stick your thumbs in and the trappings of their horses fashioned out of human skin and their bridles woven up from human hair and decorated with human teeth and the riders wearing scapulars or necklaces of dried and blackened human ears and the horses rawlooking and wild in the eye and their teeth bared like feral dogs and riding also in the company a number of halfnaked savages reeling in the saddle, dangerous, filthy, brutal, the whole like a visitation from some heathen land where they and others like them fed on human flesh.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> That night Toadvine called them together and they crouched by the wall and spoke in whispers.
>
> His name is Glanton, said Toadvine. He's got a contract with Trias. They're to pay him a hundred dollars a head for scalps and a thousand for Gomez's head. I told him there was three of us. Gentlemens, we're gettin out of this shithole.

The scalphunters, filthy and decrepit as spaghetti banditos or Alaskan end-of-the-roaders, are, equally, pre-Homeric ("patched argonauts"). Their purpose ("Goldseekers"), too, is eternal. McCarthy's theogony allows no history, and there is no progress; its very movement is repetition, it is eternal return.[12] BLOOD MERIDIAN is not an historical fiction; it does not purport to retell what happened to these people in this place as family or nation. Though his faceless individuals are the characters of chronicles, legends, movies, they also are only types, and they enact something larger than themselves, of which they are wholly ignorant, as they are wholly ignorant of themselves. They are mythical. But this is an American myth and it subsumes all forms into itself; and it is McCarthy's telling of a cosmic principle clothed in a configuration his reader can recognize. The scalphunters are a bloody eternal band. They also, recognizably, are part of us, the U.S.

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[12] McCarthy's third epigraph, one leg of his thesis tripod, is this:

> Clark, who led last year's expedition to the Afar region of northern Ethiopia, and UC Berkeley colleague Tim D. White, also said that a re-examination of a 300,000-year-old fossil skull found in the same region earlier shows evidence of having been scalped.
>
> —*The Yuma Daily Sun*, June 13, 1982

The judge

Riding with the scalphunters is a character called the judge, who is, ought to be, an alarming presence in American literature. He is a comic-grotesque, an incarnation of an eternal force, the trickster whose milieu is blood-letting, whose society is men whose anti-community is the roving gang, whose hearth the night's campfire. After the convention of frontier penny-dreadfuls, or the legend of Faust, amid those many who can neither read nor write he is a man of learning and books. He is the one who will, as Faulkner's Ike McCaslin despaired, "elect and choose."

The kid is sixteen, the year 1849, when he washes up in the mud and rain and the jakes of Nacogdoches. The judge appears first as a monstrous imp at a sodden tent revival. He invokes panic and incites the crowd to become a mob, then to kill a preacher, and fades from the kid's view into the darkness. He will reappear in new guises. He has set the pattern. Some time later, the kid sees him amid that "pack of visciouslooking humans," the scalphunters, riding into the capital of Chihuahua.

> Foremost among them, outsized and childlike with his naked face, rode the judge. His cheeks were ruddy and he was smiling and bowing to the ladies and doffing his filthy hat. The enormous dome of his head when he bared it was blinding white and perfectly circumscribed about so that it looked to have been painted. He and the reeking horde of babble with him passed on through the stunned streets and hove up before the governor's palace where their leader, a small blackhaired man, clapped for entrance by kicking at the oaken doors with his boot. The doors were opened forthwith and they rode in, rode in all, and the doors were closed again.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The following day the judge in the company of others stood in the street smoking a cigar and rocking back on his heels. He wore a pair of good kidskin boots and he was studying the prisoners where they knelt in the gutter clutching up the filth with their bare hands. The kid was watching the judge. When the judge's eyes fell upon him he took the cigar from between his teeth and smiled. Or he seemed to smile. Then he put the cigar between his teeth again.

The judge is Glanton's – the scalphunters' leader's – advisor, and he is the story's evil daemon. He has long since *chosen* the kid. In an inverted way he will act as his father, willing to teach him how to live in the enormous darkness that "is like a land of some other order out there whose true geology was not stone but fear."

The kid, always watchful, comes to ride with the filthy band. His heart is empty and is never faint, and he has no ideas at all. He has no fear. The scalphunters are witless men. At the evening campfire, their imitation hearth, they call upon the judge to instruct them, and the judge, with delicate contempt, does so.

One such night his subject is war. Deftly he instructs them that they are men at war; and that war endures and is no human invention. Here opens a fantastical scene, no aspect of it without metaphysical weight. Near the campfire the judge "stood half naked and sweating." "All listened as he spoke, those who had turned to watch him and those who would not."

> It makes no difference what men think of war, said the judge. War endures. As well ask men what they think of stone. War was always here. Before man was, war waited for him. The ultimate trade waiting its ultimate practitioner. That is the way it was and will be. That way and not some other way.
>
> He turned to Brown, from whom he'd heard some whispered slur or demurrer. Ah Davy, he said. It's your own trade we honor here. Why not rather take a small bow. Let each acknowledge each.
>
> My trade?
>
> Certainly.
>
> What is my trade?
>
> War. War is your trade. Is it not?
>
> And it aint yours?
>
> Mine too. Very much so.
>
> What about all them notebooks and bones and stuff?
>
> All other trades are contained in that of war.
>
> Is that why war endures?
>
> No. It endures because young men love it and old men love it in them. Those that fought, those that did not.

How then, in McCarthy's theogony, are men creatures of God, who are endowed with free will? If war endures, what choice is theirs; and what God has made them? If the judge is the fearsome *one who reads,* what book is his text; and what is its nature?

His book is men and the cosmos; their nature is chance and possibility, and their will exists to be tested. No moral law mitigates this, and thus is all men's choice and election subsumed to a larger will: the world is a dice game, a gamble, and men are players. His logic is as rigorous as the Grand Inquisitor's, or the Jesuit, Naphta's; it is the dark side of Manichaeism; it is exuberantly nihilist. I could not dismiss it: the judge carries an inviolable authority. He had to be studied and his terms considered. It was folly to shy away from him because he is horrible, because he also is fascinating, and because he, his like, endures.

> The judge smiled. Men are born for games. Nothing else. Every child knows that play is nobler than work. He knows too that the worth or merit of a game is not inherent in the game itself but rather in the worth of that which is put at hazard. Games of sport involve the skill and strength of the opponents and the humiliation of defeat and the pride of victory are in themselves sufficient stake because they inhere in the worth of the principals and define them. But trial of chance or trial of worth all games aspire to the condition of war for here that which is wagered swallows up the game, player and all.
>
> Suppose two men at cards with nothing to wager save their lives. Who has not heard such a tale? A turn of the card. The whole universe for such a player has labored clanking to this moment which will tell if he is to die at that man's hand or that man at his. What more certain validation of a man's worth could there be? This enhancement of the game to its ultimate state admits no argument concerning the notion of fate. The selection of one man over another is a preference absolute and irrevocable and it is a dull man indeed who could reckon so profound a decision without agency or significance either one. In such games as have for their stake the annihilation of the defeated the decisions are quite clear. This man holding this particular arrangement of cards in his hand is thereby removed from existence. This is the nature of war, whose stake is at once the game and the authority and the justification. Seen so, war is the truest form of divination. It is the testing of one's will and the will of another within that larger will which because it binds them is therefore forced to select. War is the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is god.

"War is god." The judge shocks even the scalphunters. These are creatures who have abandoned home, family, land, so that all they came from was behind them and dead to them, and who prey on all that lives; and yet, who carry in themselves some rudiment of biblical teachings left over from their childhoods. In some dim way they know they are among *the doomed and lowly*. For a moment they retrieve a shred of moral principle:

> Might does not make right, said Irving. The man that wins in some combat is not vindicated morally.

But Irving's protest, and Brown's more reflexive reaction ("You're crazy Holden. Crazy at last.") carry no weight and are lost in the judge's smile. He tells them:

> Moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak. Historical law subverts it at every turn. A moral view can never be proven right or wrong by any ultimate test. A man falling dead in a

> duel is not thought thereby to be proven in error as to his views. His very involvement in such a trial gives evidence of a new and broader view. The willingness of the principals to forego further argument as the triviality which it in fact is and to petition directly the chambers of the historical absolute clearly indicates of how little moment are the opinions and of what great moment the divergences thereof. For the argument is indeed trivial, but not so the separate wills thereby made manifest.

His logic is unmovable, his argument pitiless. He is shameless and arrogant; he is merely observant. He foresees all opposition.

> Man's vanity may well approach the infinite in capacity but his knowledge remains imperfect and howevermuch he comes to value his judgements ultimately he must submit them before a higher court. Here there can be no special pleading. Here are considerations of equity and rectitude and moral right rendered void and without warrant and here are the views of the litigants despised. Decisions of life and death, of what shall be and what shall not, beggar all questions of right. In elections of these magnitudes are all lesser ones subsumed, moral, spiritual, natural.

Gaily he invites scholastic disputation; but not even the ex-priest in the company will dare answer him. The judge is satisfied.

> Ah Priest, said the judge. What could I ask of you that you've not already given?

No disputation possible: the logic of war is not open to rebuttal; how could it be? War endures. A gun silences a protester.

However, I was a reader; no gun was turned on me. As my dismay rose it was met by McCarthy's refusal to turn aside. I could not turn aside, but read to the end; only then did I begin to recover myself, as is necessary. BLOOD MERIDIAN is a book containing such violence and the poetic description of violence that this word, *violence,* pales as I write it to mere reference. Wishing to disarm it, I traced its linguistic origins. The dictionary (*Amer. Her.*) noted its Indo-European root, *wei-*, meaning *vital force.* Related words are *vim*, *violate*, *violent*, from the Latin *vis*, force. Related meanings are, "to treat with violence," and "vehemence."

About "vital force" the dictionary told me that Indo-European metaphysics appears in its root word *aiw-*: "'vital force,' whence 'long life, the eternal recreation of life, eternity'";

also, "'endowed with the acme of vital force, young'." Its derivatives are *ever*, *every*, *never*, *medieval*, *age*, *eternal*, and *eon*.

This was some awful, cosmic kind of pun. The vital force of life and the vital force of war conflated, long life and youth conflated, and one becomes the other!

That etymology hardly laid the ground for disputation. The judge found an answer for it in his book of the world.

> The truth about the world, he said, is that anything is possible. Had you not seen it all from birth and thereby bled it of its strangeness it would appear to you for what it is, a hat trick in a medicine show, a fevered dream, a trance bepopulate with chimaeras having neither analogue nor precedent, an itinerant carnival, a migratory tentshow whose ultimate destination after many a pitch in many a mudded field is unspeakable and calamitous beyond reckoning.
>
> The universe is no narrow thing and the order within it is not constrained by any latitude in its conception to repeat what exists in one part in any other part. Even in this world more things exist without our knowledge than with it and the order in creation which you see is that which you have put there, like a string in a maze, so that you shall not lose your way. For existence has its own order and that no man's mind can compass, that mind itself being but a fact among others.

Still I looked for my own ground to stand. I turned back to the dictionary, to *war*, and, chillingly, the dictionary offered a "word history" that was like a funhouse-mirror image of the judge's order of creation:

> A piece of liverwurst may perhaps help us gain some insight into the nature of war, at least into the semantic history of the word *war*. *War* and the *-wurst* part of *liverwurst* can be traced back to the same Indo-European root, *wers-*, "to confuse, mix up." In the Germanic family of the Indo-European languages, this root gave rise to several words having to do with confusion or mixture of various kinds. In the case of the ancestry of *war*, the hypothetical Germanic stem *werza-*, "confusion,' became *werra-*, which passed into Old French.... Both forms meant "war," a very confused condition indeed. Meanwhile another Indo-European form derived from the same Indo-European root had developed into Old High German *wurst*, meaning "sausage," from an underlying sense of "mixture," which is, of course, related to the sense of the root "to confuse, mix up." …. *(American Heritage Dictionary)*

Your only protection was to stay out of its way

In the Interior of Alaska I saw a man shot, lying in a field of snow, the snow around him red, the blue sky as hard as enamel. The man swore at the nurse and cursed her as she

inserted an IV-needle in his arm. Four paramedics had to hold him down. He was a drug-taker and one of those men they call an end-of-the-roader. I saw a woman come out of her cabin at sunset, the right side of her face bruised where her husband's aimed rifle butt had hit her. The bruise was the color of the sunset, which was beautiful; but her face was not beautiful.

Two of the woundings I saw, among many hundreds I did not see. Two intense moments as life went on. Moral law had not intervened. Something remained to trip off small explosions in my memory. Reading the fictional, or mythical, violence of BLOOD MERIDIAN was another kind of experience than watching it happen. The violence of the book was an astringent. Once I could stomach the reading, I felt cleansed by it. The prose was immaculate. A friend of mine, a translator of languages and woman of moral acuity, lifted an eyebrow at my surprise, and suggested: "Of course: there is no ambiguity. That may be why violence – at least, reading about it – can almost invigorate us."

It invigorated me, because its art had not "bled it of its strangeness." The *frisson* was erotic, but not merely sexual, if it was at all sexual. Yet, when I saw what I saw, it too was strange; I had not grown up with it and it was new to me. What images of violence I carried in imagination came from movies and television, counterfeit images as I knew; and came from news videos of the Vietnam War, and all the wars since that have appeared on television. Of those I was a disembodied spectator, watching but in fact removed in time and space.

In Alaska I was present, and felt direct emotion: surprise, compassion, a deep calm, awareness of beauty. Recalling the moment, however, I was aghast; only after repetition, when I began to imagine possibilities, did fear touch me. This is to say that the experience was made of more than one quality; and – this is equally important – it took place in three physical dimensions. At the same time, before my eyes it occurred as though for the first time. The act seemed unreal ("Is this a movie?"), but its effect, the wound in the living flesh, was palpable. Those women and men were people I knew, and they tried to keep going; as for me, in the end I got away. Since then, that part of the world has seen an increase in the violence; even worse, in its randomness.

Cormac McCarthy's uncompromising fiction, or, his telling of the myth, placed the violence in long perspective. The formality of the narrative; the almost comic, because nearly unbelievable, quality of its imagery (finally, though, not unbelievable, because I have seen and heard enough of it, and know it will not end); its distancing in time and distortion of space; its incantatory prose, biblical cadences, metaphysical arguments, archetypal characters – none of this is banal; but none is at odds, either, with the chronicles and tales of the mountain men, pioneers, warring tribes, the hermits, crazies, desperadoes, socio- and

psychopaths who exist in the history of the West and the North. In the kid and the scalphunters is displayed a quality whose like I first saw in the eyes of certain men in the remoter parts of the North. It was a fury, *a vital force, violence* in their spirit, that they tamped down and held under iron control. There were men of this kind, though, for whom self-control was not tight enough and could never be so; who were bound to go on until something, a mere nudge, provoked them and the force broke through. Then it worked its own course. Your only protection then, the people advised, was to stay out of its way. Nothing human but equal or greater force could stop it.

"All listened as he spoke, even those who had turned to watch him and those who would not."

The kid belongs to the judge

The kid is an American type. He has no knowledge, particularly not of himself. (He is innocent!) He seeks no attention and has no inclination to speak. He is wary and defensive; when he must act, he acts instantly, his nerves all reflex. He is an individual because, willfully, he belongs to no one or thing. But he belongs to the judge; for only in relation to the judge can he begin to know himself.

If war is not holy man is nothing but antic clay

After a terrible journey the kid makes it to California, where he knows no one and has no standing or name; he is wounded, and has stopped drifting. "He seemed to be waiting for someone to come for him and after a while four soldiers entered and arrested him."

> In his cell he began to speak with a strange urgency of things few men have seen in a lifetime and his jailers said that his mind had come uncottered by the acts of blood in which he had participated.

His mind unhinged, he has, just barely, begun to understand what the *wei-* darkness means. He has learned fear.

One morning he wakes and sees a terrifying visitor: the judge, who like himself has survived the frightful ordeal in the wilderness. With feral intuition he knows the judge is crazy. The judge, irresistible, is about to test him again. It will be the penultimate test. He

begins with a monumental, sophist's joke: he suggests the kid is a creature of free will and choice, and the agent of his own fate.

> I believe it is their intention to hang you.
>
> What did you tell them?
>
> Told them the truth. That you were the person responsible. Not that we have all the details. But they understand that it was you and none other who shaped events along such a calamitous course. Eventuating in the massacre at the ford by the savages with whom you conspired. Means and ends are of little moment here. Idle speculations. But even though you carry the draft of your murderous plan with you to the grave it will nonetheless be known in all its infamy to your Maker and as that is so shall it be made known to the least of men. All in the fullness of time.
>
> You're the one that's crazy, said the kid.
>
> The judge smiled. No, he said. It was never me. But why lurk there in the shadows? Come here where we can talk, you and me.
>
> The kid stood against the far wall. Hardly more than a shadow himself.
>
> Come up, said the judge. Come up, for I've yet more to tell you.
>
> He looked down the hallway. Dont be afraid, he said. I'll speak softly. It's not for the world's ears but for yours only. Let me see you. Dont you know that I'd have loved you like a son?
>
> The judge smiled. He spoke softly into the dim mud cubicle. You came forward, he said, to take part in a work. But you were a witness against yourself. You sat in judgement on your own deeds. You put your own allowances before the judgements of history and you broke with the body of which you were pledge apart and poisoned it in all its enterprise. Hear me, man. I spoke in the desert for you and you only and you turned a deaf ear to me. If war is not holy man is nothing but antic clay.... Only each was called upon to empty out his heart into the common and one did not. Can you tell me which one that was?
>
> It was you, whispered the kid. You were the one.

It is an uncanny, blasphemous moment. The judge is the Tempter of the desert, he is the Antichrist: he is a casuist, and master of the dialectic: he is a moral shape-changer and wears every face that evil has worn in literature. The kid is nothing, not St. John, but lost and doomed, and there is no society and no redemption for him. But, inexplicably, the kid is released; the Spanish doctor decides to think he is a young Easterner from a good family; his wound is operated on. He falls into delirium.

At last he sees the judge in his own mind, truly, fantastically. The judge appears in all his incarnations. He has no origins. He is the principle of the world of false coinage, and of the Hephaestean weapons-fire that smelts metals ripped from the earth.

> A great shambling mutant, silent and serene. Whatever his antecedents he was something wholly other than their sum, nor was there system by which to divide him back into his origins for he would not go. Whoever would seek out his history through whatever unraveling of loins and ledgerbooks must stand at last darkened and dumb at the shore of a void without terminus or origin and whatever science he might bring to bear upon the dusty primal matter blowing down out of the millennia will discover no trace of any ultimate atavistic egg by which to reckon his commencing. In the white and empty room he stood in his bespoken suit with his hat in his hand and he peered down with his small and lashless pig's eyes wherein this child just sixteen years on earth could read whole bodies of decisions not accountable to the courts of men and he saw his own name which nowhere else could he have ciphered out at all logged into the records as a thing already accomplished. . . .
>
> In his delirium he ransacked the linens of his pallet for arms but there were none. The judge smiled. The fool was no longer there, but another man and this other man he could never see in his entirety but he seemed an artisan and a worker in metal. The judge enshadowed him where he crouched at his trade but he was a coldforger who worked with hammer and die, perhaps under some indictment and an exile from men's fires, hammering out like his own conjectural destiny all through the night of becoming some coinage for a dawn that would not be. It is this false moneyer with his gravers and burins who seeks favor with the judge and he is at contriving from cold slag brute in crucible a face that will pass, an image that will render this residual specie current in the markets where men barter. Of this is the judge judge and the night does not end.

The kid's attachment to the judge was his only purpose: for, the judge incarnated his bent to mindless violence and revealed to him its dimensions; but he would not recognize this. But now he saw that the violence has a mind: it is the willful order of disorder and counterfeit, the logic of war. But the story had not ended. The logic of the myth would not permit the judge to be a figment of delirium, he is not eradicated by knowledge; he and the kid would meet only one time more.

The night does not end

The myth spares the kid nothing as he nears his end. The year is 1878; he is forty-five years old, no longer the kid but the man. Inevitably, he is riding toward Texas. He passes through the West as the frontier is closing; he sees the new faces of violence. He meets an old buffalo hunter who tells him about the last great slaughters, the trains of emigrants going west, the ravages of the mines.

He meets four bonepickers, kids from Kentucky and kills one, a violent and mouthy boy, a version of himself at fifteen. "This country was filled with violent children orphaned by war." He crosses the Brazos into Texas and, closing his great circle in a raw and garish saloon, comes to his final meeting with the judge.

> Do you believe it's all over, son?
>
> He turned. The judge was standing at the bar looking down at him. He smiled, he removed his hat. The great pale dome of his skull shone like an enormous phosphorescent egg in the lamplight. . . .
>
> Was it always your idea, he said, that if you did not speak you would not be recognized?

No matter how he dodges, he is caught up in the judge's final casuistry; the more indifferent, the more taciturn, the more evasive he is, the less it matters. The judge will not be stopped. The writing spares no one. The man ends in somber, stereotypical sordidness in this garish, noisy saloon filled with whores, whisky, cheap music, lost children, slaves and indians, the carcass of a wantonly-slain bear; out back in the mud is the jakes. He has come back to where he started, and, in the jakes, he is annihilated by the judge.

"But I will tell you," says the judge, last words before consigning him to *Sheol*:

> Only that man who has offered up himself entire to the blood of war, who has been to the floor of the pit and seen horror in the round and learned at last that it speaks to his inmost heart, only that man can dance.
>
> Even a dumb animal can dance.
>
> The judge set the bottle on the bar. Hear me, man, he said. There is room on the stage for one beast and one beast alone. All others are destined for a night that is eternal and without name. One by one they will step down into the darkness before the footlamps. Bears that dance, bears that don't.

On the Texan ground, in American history, simultaneously, more than one kind of story unfolds itself. Story depends on belief; and there we are tested. What line of story do we know how, do we dare, to refuse? But how can we live in the uncertainty it brings? We live with it because these stories we read are art. They are human makings.

In this American myth there is no redemption. Most horribly – because it is left to the reader's imagination – no image is given of the man's death, only the grubby circumstances of the doomed and lowly; his end is, classically, off stage. But it is no tragedy, because he was nothing. But his end is unspeakable.

The judge remains, fantastic creature, comic, fool, dialectician, slaughterer, preternatural spirit, the messenger of the god War. His last scene is cheap and cinematic and it is occult and somber; it is a Germanic music-drama and a mining-camp ghost tale; it is unstoppable and stately and very frightening. The judge is the *Totentanz*. "He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die."

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William Faulkner, "The Bear," GO DOWN, MOSES. (New York: Vintage International, 1942/1970)

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Previous Endnotes:

"Where Are the Weapons?" http://www.archipelago.org/vol7-2/endnotes.htm
Patriotism and the Right of Free Speech in Wartime http://www.archipelago.org/vol7-1/endnotes.htm
A Year in Washington, Vol. 6, Nos. 3/4 http://www.archipelago.org/vol6-3/endnotes.htm
Lies, Damned Lies, Vol. 6, No. 2 http://www.archipelago.org/vol6-2/endnotes.htm
The Colossus, Vol. 6, No. 1 http://www.archipelago.org/vol6-1/endnotes.htm
The Bear, Vol. 5, No. 4 http://www.archipelago.org/vol5-4/endnotes.htm
Sasha Choi Goes Home, Vol. 5, No. 3 http://www.archipelago.org/vol5-3/endnotes.htm
Sasha Choi in America,Vol. 5, No. 2 http://www.archipelago.org/vol5-2/endnotes.htm
A Local Habitation and A Name, Vol. 5, No. 1 http://www.archipelago.org/vol5-1/endnotes.htm
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On the Marionette Theater, Vol. 4, Nos. 1/2 http://www.archipelago.org/vol4-2/endnotes.htm
The Double, Vol. 3, No. 4 http://www.archipelago.org/vol3-4/endnotes.htm
Folly, Love, St. Augustine, Vol. 3, No. 3 http://www.archipelago.org/vol3-3/endnotes.htm
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Contributors

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Anant Kumar http://www.anant-kumar.de.vu, a writer in the German language, was born in the North Eastern Indian State of Bihar. He learnt German as a Foreign Language in New Delhi, before he came to Germany in 1991. Between 1991 and 1997, he studied German Literature and Linguistics. He wrote his Masters Thesis on the epic MANAS of Alfred Döblin at the University of Kassel, Germany. Besides regular contributions to literary magazines and periodicals, he is the author of five books of poetry and prose: FREMDE FRAU -- FREMDER MANN (Schweinfurt 1997/ 2000), KASSELER TEXTE (Schweinfurt 1998/ 2000), DIE INDERIN (Schweinfurt 1999/ 2000), ...UND EIN STÜCK FÜR DICH (Ahlhorn 2000), and DIE GALOPPIERENDE KUHHERDE (Schweinfurt 2001/2002). He has received several awards in contemporary German literature and is a member of German Writers Association. The original essay was first published in the trilingual German cultural and political magazine *Gazette*, Munich http://www.gazette.de/Archiv/Gazette-Oktober2001/Kumar-Indien.html. The essay is contending presently for the Heinrich Heine Literary Award, Düsseldorf.

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Malcolm Maclean pne@gaelic-arts.com, co-editor of AN LEABHAR MÒR / THE GREAT BOOK OF GAELIC, is a Glasgow Gael who has lived since 1975 in the Western Isles, where he helped raise two lovely daughters. A graduate of Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen and the Open University, his previous incarnations include fisherman, water-diviner, art therapist, painter, cartoonist, book designer and teacher. He helped form Peacock Printmakers (Aberdeen 1974) and An Lanntair art gallery (Stornoway, 1985). He was curator/editor of the touring exhibition/book, AN FHEARANN (From the Land) (1986-1990), co-curator of 'Calanais' (1995-97) and various other touring exhibitions. He has been the director of Proiseact nan Eilan / The Gaelic Arts Agency http://www.gaelic-arts.com since 1987.

Eleanor Ross Taylor was born in 1920 in North Carolina and was married to the fiction writer Peter Taylor. She is the author of five volumes of poems: WILDERNESS OF LADIES (1960); WELCOME EUMENIDES (1972); NEW AND SELECTED POEMS (1983); DAYS GOING / DAYS COMING BACK (1992); and LATE LEISURE (1999). A selection from the latter appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 3, No. 1 http://www.archipelago.org/vol3-1/taylor.htm. In 1998 she received the Shelley Award from the Poetry Society of America and, earlier, was awarded a fellowship by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She is the subject of THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER, Essays on the Poetry of Eleanor Ross Taylor, edited by Jean Valentine (Hobart and William Smith College Press http://www.hws.edu/senecareview/). Writers contributing to this festschrift of "bright *hommage*" include Betty Adcock, Fred Chappell, Ben

Cleary, Alfredo Franco, Lorrie Goldensohn, Eric Gudas, James Harms, Richard Howard, Randall Jarrell, Heather Ross Miller, Gregory Orr, Adrienne Rich, Deborah Tall, Henry Taylor, Jean Valentine, Ellen Bryant Voigt, Rosanna Warren, and Alan Williamson.

Peter Turnley <pturnley@attglobal.net> has published his photographs in such magazines as *Newsweek* (contract photographer, 1984-2001), *Stern*, *Paris Match*, *Geo*, *LIFE*, *National Geographic*, *The London Sunday Times*, *VSD*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, and *DoubleTake*. *The Digital Journalist* http://wwwdigitaljournalist.org has published his portfolios of Kosovo http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue9904/fields01.htm; the Gulf War, 1991 http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0212/pt_intro.html; and Iraq 2003 http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0305/pt_intro.html. He has documented most of the world's refugee populations; witnessed Nelson Mandela walk out of prison and the end of apartheid in South Africa; chronicled Tiananmen Square, 1989; and was present in New York at "Ground Zero" on Sept, 11, 2001 http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0111/pturnley_intro.htm. He has received the Overseas Press Club Award for Best Photographic Reporting from Abroad, and awards and citations from World Press Photo and Pictures of the Year (University of Missouri). He has published four books: MOMENTS OF REVOLUTION, BEIJING SPRING, IN TIMES OF WAR AND PEACE, and PARISIANS http://www.abbeville.com/parisians/index.asp. Peter Turnley is a graduate of the University of Michigan, the Sorbonne and the Institut d'Études Politiques. He was a Neiman Fellow in 2000-2001, has taught at the Santa Fe, Maine, and Eddie Adams Workshops and was a Teaching Fellow for Robert Coles at Harvard. He was assistant to the French photographer Robert Doisneau in the late 1970s. He continues to work as a documentary photojournalist and is a special contributor to the Denver *Post*. His photographic archive is more than 25,000 images (some are here http://home1.nikonnet.com/nikoncentre/photojournalism/photoj_turnley.html and here http://www.apple.com/pro/photo/pturnley/). At present, he lives in New York and Paris http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0009/frame_cover.html. His most recent work is represented by Corbis http://pro.corbis.com/search/searchFrame.asp.

Patricia Sarrafian Ward pishatamer@yahoo.com was born and raised in Beirut, Lebanon, and came to the United States when she was eighteen. She holds a B.A. from Sarah Lawrence College and an M.F.A. from the University of Michigan, where she received Hopwood Awards in Novel and Short Fiction. She was the 2002 winner of the RAWI (Radius of Arab-American Writers) writing contest, and has received a Henfield Award, a Bread Loaf Scholarship, and Fellowships at Vermont Studio Center and Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Her writing has appeared in several journals including *The Literary Review, Epoch Magazine, Ms. Magazine,* and the *Post-Gibran Anthology of Arab-American Writers.* THE BULLET COLLECTION is her first novel. She currently lives on Sandy Hook Bay in New Jersey.

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News of Our Contributors

UNFINISHED IRELAND: ESSAYS ON **HUBERT BUTLER**, edited by Chris Agee, has been published by Irish Pages in association with the Butler Society. **Hubert Butler**, the Anglo-Irish author whose centenary was observed in October 2000, in Kilkenny, Ireland, his family home, was the author of four late-published volumes of noteworthy essays on subjects as close as his own neighborhood, as far-ranging as Russia and the Balkans, about which he wrote essays of international importance. His "The Artukovitch File" also appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 1, No. 2 http://www.archipelago.org/vol1-2/butler.htm, with an appreciation by Richard Jones http://www.archipelago.org/vol1-2/appreciation.htm. In Vol. 5, No. 1 we offered his remarkable "The Sub-Prefect Should Have Held His Tongue" http://www.archipelago.org/vol5-1/butler.htm, followed by two essays by **Chris Agee**: "The Balkan Butler" http://www.archipelago.org/vol5-1/agee.htm, and "The Stepinac File" http://www.archipelago.org/vol5-1/agee2.htm. Inquiries concerning UNFINISHED IRELAND and the excellent quarterly journal *Irish Pages* may be sent to Chris Agee, Editor cagee2@visteon.com, Irish Pages, The Linen Hall Library, 17 Donegall Square, Belfast BT1 5GB, Northern Ireland.

Edith Grossman is the translator of DON QUIXOTE, by Miguel Cervantes, to be released in October by Ecco, an imprint of HarperCollins. The First Chapter (in an earlier version) appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 6, No. 2 http://www.archipelago.org/vol6-2/cervantes.htm. Also this autumn, her translation of LIVING TO TELL THE TALE, by Gabriel García Marquez, the first of a projected three volumes of memoirs, will be published by Knopf. Edith Grossman is a contributing editor of this journal. Her translation from the Spanish of "Music to Forget an Island By," by Victoria Slavuski, appeared in Vol. 2, No. 1 http://www.archipelago.org/vol2-1/slavuski.htm.

David Cooper has recently published two e-books, GLUED TO THE SKY and JFK: LINES OF FIRE http://www.pulpbits.com/previews/cooperd.html (Burlington, VT: PulpBits.com http://www.pulpbits.com) One of the poems in GLUED TO THE SKY first appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 3, No. 3 http://www.archipelago.org/vol3-3/cooper.htm. David Cooper's poems and translations have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Literary Review, The Massachusetts Review, Passages North, Painted Bride Quarterly, Chelsea, Tampa Review, Confrontation, The Spoon River Poetry Review , Rashi: The New Zealand Jewish Chronicle Literary Supplement, Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, and a number of other publications.