

Vol 11, Issue 1

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Complete Poetry (Editor: Alison Flett)

Contents

Featured Poet

Andy Jackson

Andy Jackson: An Introduction

Dispersed

Out of Focus

The Hunchback in the Park Watching Dylan Thomas

Syrian Poetry Feature

Ghayath Almadhoun

An Introduction to Syrian Poetry

How I became ...

We

I Can't Attend

Ode to Sadness

Golan Haji

Cliffs

Spring Skies

Rasha Omran

The Woman Who Dwelt in the House Before

Raed Wahesh

Absence

Poetry General

Stuart Barnes

Petrarchan Sonnet

J V Birch

Ladybirds

Complete poetry.

Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, December 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Stuart Cooke	Components Buenos Aires Contemporary
Steve Evans	The Fast Train to Assen
Michael Farrell	In Bed with Metallica / En la Cama con Metallica (translation by Kurt Folch)
Rachael Guy	The Fall
Cary Hamlyn	The Train to Mandalay
Rose Hunter	Paris to Flamingo all this is blurred and much bluer than it was
Cath Kenneally	Trench Warfare split or stay?
Janet Lees	Practising Rogue Wave
Bella Li	Part Two: The Lady Hideko
Pooja Nansi	Poem for Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan ending in a beginning Tell me the Story
Nathanael O'Reilly	O My America
Juan Garrido Salgado	Ellas Madres y Esposas
Dominic Symes	T.E.O.T.W.A.W.K.I.

Volume 11, No. 1

December 2018

Letter from the Poetry Editor

Internet developments and our ever-expanding global community mean we have the opportunity, more than ever before, to learn about different cultures and, perhaps more importantly, understand the commonality of human existence. Poetry, with its ability to capture ideas and images in brief snapshots of language, is a great medium for sharing cultural experience.

In the general poetry section of this issue of *Transnational Literature* you'll find poems from or about Argentina, Australia, Britain, Chile, India, the Isle of Man, Korea, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Russia, Singapore and the US. We also have a guest-edited section dedicated to poets from the Syrian diaspora and curated by Ghayath Almadhoun, a Palestinian poet, born in Damascus, now living in exile in Sweden. The poets featured here speak eloquently and powerfully about their everyday lives, the bonds between women, the effects of war and the difficulties of living in exile in a country that views your culture with suspicion.

Of course, the borders between us are not just geographic or national. Our featured poet, Andy Jackson, writes about the bodily differences that separate us and attempts to break down the boundaries, creating a sense of connection rather than otherness.

While we're all essentially trapped inside 'the telephone box' of our 'own claustrophobic universe'¹ we each have the opportunity to lift the receiver and either speak out to the wider multiverse or listen to the voices coming in. The poets in *Transnational Literature* speak out but, as Lees puts it, 'the world's most powerful magnet ... is the listener.' We hope that you find, amongst the wide range of poetic voices in this issue, one or two that speak particularly to you.

Alison Flett, Poetry Editor

¹ Janet Lees, 'Practising', *Transnational Literature*, Vol. 11, no. 1, December 2018

Featured Poet: Andy Jackson



photo: Rachael Guy

Transnational Literature takes great pleasure in featuring Andy Jackson, a poet whose work sits comfortably between the twin poles of confrontation and charm. Andy has appeared at literary and arts festivals across the globe and his poems have been selected for five of the last six annual editions of *The Best Australian Poems*. His poetry collection *Among the regulars* (papertiger 2010) was shortlisted for the Kenneth Slessor Prize and he also won the 2013 Whitmore Press Manuscript Prize with the *thin bridge*. His latest collection *Music our bodies can't hold* (2017), consists of portrait poems of other people with Marfan Syndrome. It was featured on ABC's Radio National and the programme can be accessed [here](#).

Andy's poetic explorations of the ways we live within our bodies have had a significant impact on the Australian poetry scene. He is at the forefront of the recent explosion of writing and performance that examines bodily difference. In the poems presented here he questions our perception of 'otherness'; our ability to distance ourselves from difference and, by contrast, our insistence on an understanding that can never be fully achieved. Most significantly, his poems emphasise the importance of listening. In a world obsessed with shouting, this is a skill we desperately need to re-learn.

POROUS, RECOGNISABLE AND FOREIGN

For the last three years, I've been pursuing a PhD in poetry and bodily otherness, creating a suite of new poems and an exegesis. This kind of work, which requires you to research and create something original, might seem by definition isolated, tending towards the solipsistic. Will anyone apart from my

Andy Jackson. Introduction.

Transnational Literature Vol.11 no.1, November 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

supervisors and assessors read my thoughts on Emmanuel Levinas, disability theory, staring and caesurae?

Even alone, though, I am not alone. Writing the poems, in particular, has been an exercise in attending to other people, and to the spaces between us. In some way, each poem emerges out of some feeling of affinity or solidarity, a sense of bodily connection. And, at the same time, more often than I might realise, out of ignorance.

As I see it, poetry, though it is often composed in solitude, is the antithesis of solipsism. Paul Celan once wrote, 'poems are porous constructs: here life flows and seeps in and out, incalculably strong-headed, recognisable and in the most foreign shape.' The thing is, different poems handle this life in different ways.

These three poems enter unfamiliar places and attempt to speak from there. What is here that is 'recognisable'? What is this 'most foreign shape'?

'The Hunchback in the Park Watching Dylan Thomas' is a response to Thomas's poem 'The Hunchback in the Park'. As someone with severe scoliosis, that particular epithet has always stung. I wanted to turn the tables, for this person – who in Thomas's poem is not given a name or a depth of personality – to observe the poet. The tone, rhythms, sounds and narrative arc of my poem come directly from the original, its world, but (of course) translated, deformed, through my own fictional inhabiting.

'Out of Focus' responds to the experiences of people with albinism in south-east Africa – Mozambique and Malawi in particular. The poem is concerned with their persecution due to their appearance, and with their perseverance. Early drafts of the poem, though, made me realise my empathy was too quick, and the poem needed to be transparent about its failures, in the hope that 'mistakes / might be more beautiful and true.'

'Disperse' comes from personal experience on Dja Dja Wurung country, where I was born and where I now live. The central Victorian goldfields indeed feels like home, and yet its deep history is that of another nation. Certain places resonate strongly with a significance I can't put my finger on. Somewhere in the background of the poem is the hope that by listening to local Indigenous elders, and acknowledging the colonial histories of 'dispersal', we might somehow relearn these meanings.

Andy Jackson

2

Andy Jackson. Introduction.

Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, November 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Dispersed

Rock of Ages, Maldon

above the sharp lines of the paddocks

smoke in the blue distance

eagle-height and catching

my breath in the winter light

I rest on this hill of drought-stressed

trees, boulders and huddled stones

a meeting place? (wayaparri)

or somewhere no-one went? (ngalanya)

dry mosses and wind—the land

seems to have been broken

off from itself

only a shadow, there,

intangible, just over my shoulder—

dark pocket of air

or a murmur, unheard, stuck

between leaf rustle and crow call

as if waiting for a human

throat to inhabit

Andy Jackson. 'Dispersed'.

Transnational Literature Vol.11 no.1, November 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

the old name of the place

hidden under rubble

a car drones across the land

cows bellow to each other

their clouds of breath

disperse

Andy Jackson

Out of Focus

after a New York Times photo-essay, 'The Hunted', Daniel Rodrigues

'People with albinism are being attacked—usually with machetes and knives—for the purpose of obtaining their body parts (an arm can fetch as much as US\$2,000)' – Ikponwosa Ero, UN Independent Expert on Albinism

At a distance, my body leaps to think of him as kin—
both of us white in a Mozambique village.
But he is my subject, a victim, child.
I have my list of questions, my camera,

and these reckless mirror neurons.
He leans in, whispers into the microphone.

His father left them, thought the absence
of melanin a curse, proof his mother had slept
with a European. *I'm not a white animal*, he says,
looking away. I nod, make notes.

Some believe his white hair, thrown onto the lake,
will make fish leap into the net. Others think
a limb hacked off and held over the land
could lead them to seams of precious metal.

Money!, they call him, laughing when he walks past.
I finger the keys to my four-wheel drive.

The more he tells me, the quieter he gets,
until our only language is breath, and I become
acutely aware of every sound outside. Now
he wants to be left alone with his textbooks,

those maps to elsewhere. He wants to be known
for his intellect. I am thinking—as you are—

Andy Jackson. 'Out of Focus'.
Transnational Literature Vol.11 no.1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

of skin pigment and what can't be seen,
as I squint and shoot, and fail to capture him.

At play with his siblings, or alone against a crumbling wall—
however I frame him, it looks staged. Mistakes

might be more beautiful and true. Home,
in the safety of my own skin, there is one photo
I keep returning to. He is perfectly out of focus—
the sun is turning his face into a blur of light.

Andy Jackson

The Hunchback in the Park Watching Dylan Thomas

With his heavy brown coat,
a solitary thread
caught on the edge of the bench,
he drinks from a dark bottle
pulled from an inside pocket and sits
through the cold afternoon, watching me

(as if I wouldn't notice or mind).
How the pond takes the sky in,
the wonder and shuffle of ordinary
pigeons, even the way the keeper nods
a discreet tolerance my way—
our mister hasn't noticed.

With the elms, he plants himself down.
With the leaves, he sinks into the ground.
A solitary mister, he seems to mutter
into the wind, hunched over
his ragged notebook, alone in his watching,
looking away when I catch his eye.

He has the eyes of a thinker
and a drinker—and I'd know
(though he doesn't know me).
I read the philosophies of the dead
leaves, slow snails, young ducks,
old water, and their insights I keep

to myself. Many figures come
here and go—the dark-suited
and stiff men, wet dogs snuffling
in their honesty, children with hand-me-down

Andy Jackson. 'The Hunchback in the Park Watching Dylan Thomas'.
Transnational Literature Vol.11 no.1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

cruelties and language games, nurses
on lunchbreaks with tender eyes—

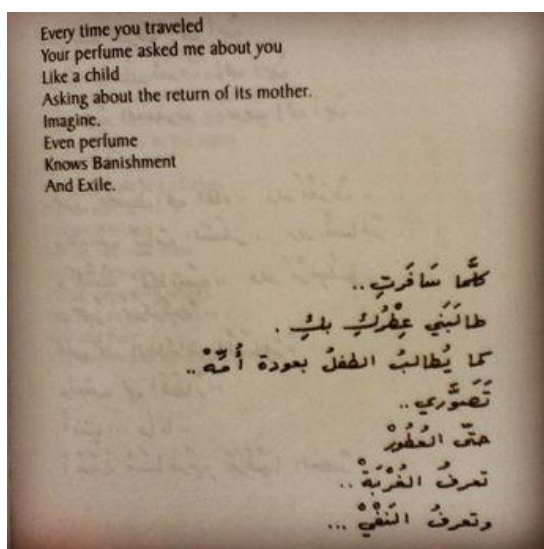
none of them without fault. I
hesitate to say how mister appears,
but I imagine his lines are straight
on the left-hand side, crooked on the right.
When the day begins to fade
and his bottle is as light

as the glass of it, he straightens up,
brushes some fragile, natural thing
from his coat, and I watch him shrink
back into the city. Towards a warm
and safe place he must walk,
followed by his own shadow.

Andy Jackson

With a view to increasing cross-cultural interaction and introducing readers to contemporary poetry from different parts of the world, Transnational Literature includes a small guest editor slot in its poetry section, curated by – and partly featuring the work of – an established poet from a country other than Australia. In this issue we're honoured to have a selection of Syrian poetry curated by renowned Palestinian poet, Ghayath Almadhoun, who has been living in exile in Sweden since 2008. Ghayath's vital, no-holds-barred poetry has many important things to say to the Western world. We're grateful for the opportunity to listen.

Syrian Poetry: An Introduction by Ghayath Almadhoun



Text from a poem by Nizar Qabbani

Modern Syrian poetry begins only in the 1930s. Prior to that, countries in the Middle East, including Syria, did not have the same political borders as today. The existing boundaries are the result of the Sykes-Picot agreement between the French and the English who occupied the Arab provinces at the beginning of the last century. Before that, poetry from the region of Syria was known as part of Arabic poetry, by virtue of language and history.

Damascus was the capital of the Arab-Islamic empire that extended from Spain to the borders of China for almost a hundred years. Syrian poetry is therefore an important part of the vast Arab poetic heritage that covers without interruption the period from the sixth century until today. There are twenty-two countries and more than four hundred million people whose mother tongue is Arabic. The main thing that distinguishes the Arab countries is that, although their mother tongue is common, they have very different cultures.

It is an unrivalled pleasure to be an Arabic poet because poetry is still the Arab's master art, old, important and with a great heritage. No one is denying the effect of prose writing – there are many recent changes in favour of the novel – but poetry is

Ghayath Almadhoun. 'Syrian Poetry: An Introduction'.
Transnational Literature Vol.11 no.1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

still dominant. The novel is ultimately a Western art; it's new in our culture and only appeared in the Arabic world a hundred years ago.

As an Arabic poet, your poetry reaches many different people from different cultural backgrounds and there are a great number of Arab book fairs, which go in a systematic way. When you finish signing your book at the book fair in Beirut, you can travel to the book fair in Casablanca, from there to Tunisia, Cairo and so on throughout the year. The most beautiful thing Arab culture offers us as poets is the great diversity in the reception of our books in the Arab countries: they love you in Iraq, they hate you in Libya, you become a star in Palestine, someone writes good words about you in Kuwait, you get negative criticism in Algeria, and so on.

Syrian poets have participated in Syrian political and social life since the beginning of the last century. The country's top intellectuals were poets, politicians and diplomats. Poets like Nizar Qabbani have played an important role in changing attitudes towards women since the 1940s. Qabbani addressed sensitive topics about love, women and the status of women in the Arab world, subjects that became taboo after the collapse of the Arab Empire, where a harsh censorship and self-censorship occurred in the whole society and worsened during four hundred years of Ottoman occupation.

The poetry in Syria before the Syrian Revolution in 2011 was mainly influenced by Riyadh Al-Saleh Al-Hussein, who died young in 1982 at the age of twenty-eight, and Mohammed Almagout 1934-2006. They were the poets – not Adunis – who influenced the Syrian taste for prose-poetry on the ground, among poets and readers. Adunis's influence on Arab poetry only exists among Western academic literature researchers, not in reality.

After the Syrian revolution, the Syrian poets find themselves in the diaspora: new life, new fact. Now we see the beginning of what we can call 'exile literature'. It's still early to figure what the full result of this dramatic change in Syrian literature will be but we will be able to judge it in the coming years. We do know that the Syrian revolution has created a rift between young poets and metaphor. No more hiding behind the symbols to stay safe under the dictatorship. There is no room for metaphors when death is so clear. Syrian poetry has also become more narrative, searching for an internal music in the text itself. Poets found that the prose-poetry form was able to say what the media could not. Poetry has in fact played a big part in the Syrian revolution because the poets themselves participated in it.

Ghayath Almadhoun



photo © Cato Lein

كيف أصبحت...

سقطتُ حزناً من الشرفية وانكسر، أصبحت تحتلج إلى حزن جديد، حين رافقتها إلى السوق، كانت أسعاً الأحزان خيالية فنصحتها أن تشتري حزناً مستعملاً، وجدنا حزناً في حالة جيدة، غير أنه واسع قليلاً، كان كما أخبرنا البائع لشاعر شاب انتحى في الصيف الماضي، أعجبها الحزن وقررنا أخذه، اختلفنا مع البائع على السعر، فقال إنه سيعطينا قلماً يعوده إلى الستينيات كهدية مجانية إن اشترينا الحزن، وافقنا وكنّا فرحاً بهذا القلق الذي لم يكن في الحسبان، أحسّت بفرحتي فقالت هو لك، أخذت القلق في حقيبتي ومضينا، مساءً تذكرت القلق، أخرجه من الحقيبة وقلّبته، لقد كان بجودة عالية وبحالة جيدة رغم نصف قرن من الاستعمال، لا بد أن البائع يجهل قيمته وإلا ما كان ليعطيناه مقابل شراء حزن رديء لشاعر شاب، أكثر ما أفرحني به هو أنه قلق وجودي، مشغول بحرفة عالية وفيه تفاصيل غاية في الدقة والجمال، لا بد أنه يعوده لموقف موسوعي أو سجين سابق، بدأت باستعماله فأصبح الأرق رفيق أيامي، وصيرت من مؤيدي مباحثات السلام، توقفت عن زيارة الأقارب وازدادت كتب المذكرات في مكتبتني ولم أعد أبدي رأياً إلا ما ندر، صار الإنسان عندي أعلى من الوطن وبدأت أشعر بملل عام، أما أكثر ما لفت انتباهي هو أنني أصبحت شاعراً.

How I became...

Her grief fell from the balcony and broke into pieces, so she needed a new grief. When I went with her to the market the prices were unreal, so I advised her to buy a used grief. We found one in excellent condition although it was a bit big. As the vendor told us, it belonged to a young poet who had killed himself the previous summer. She liked this grief so we decided to take it. We argued with the vendor over the price and he said he'd give us an angst dating from the sixties as a free gift if we bought the grief. We agreed, and I was happy with this unexpected angst. She sensed this and said 'It's yours'. I took it and put it in my bag and we went off. In the evening I remembered it and took it out of the bag and examined it closely. It was high quality and in excellent condition despite half a century of use. The vendor must have been unaware of its value otherwise he wouldn't have given it to us in exchange for buying a young poet's low quality grief. The thing that pleased me most about it was that it was existentialist angst, meticulously crafted and containing details of extraordinary subtlety and beauty. It must have belonged to an intellectual with encyclopedic knowledge or a former prisoner. I began to use it and insomnia became my constant companion. I became an enthusiastic supporter of peace negotiations and stopped visiting relatives. There were increasing numbers of memoirs in my bookshelves and I no longer voiced my opinion, except on rare occasions. Human beings became more precious to me than nations and I began to feel a general ennui, but what I noticed most was that I had become a poet.

Ghayath Almadhoun

translated by *Catherine Cobham*

نحن المتناثرون شظايا، الممطرون لحمًا، نتقدم بالاعتذار الشديد من هذا العالم المتحضر فردًا فردًا، رجالًا ونساءً وأطفالًا، لأننا وبدون قصد منا ظهرنا في منازلهم الأمانة بلا استئذان، نعتذر لانطباع أشلائنا في ذاكرتهم البيضاء كالثلج، ولأننا خدشنا صورة الإنسان الطبيعي الكامل في أعينهم، لأننا وبكل وقاحة، قفزنا فجأة على نشرات الأخبار وصفحات الانترنت والجرائد، عاربين إلا من دماننا وبقايا أجسادنا المتقحمة، نعتذر من كل العيون التي لم تجرؤ أن تنظر في جراحتنا مباشرة لكي لا تصاب بالقشعريرة، ونعتذر من كل من لم يستطع إكمال وجبة العشاء بعد أن فاجأته صورنا طازجة على التلفزيون، نعتذر عن الآلام التي سببناها لكل من رآنا هكذا بلا تجميل أو تقطيب أو إعادة جمع لبقائنا وقطعنا قبل أن نظهر في الشاشات، ونعتذر أيضًا من الجنود الإسرائيليين الذين تكلفوا عناء الضغط على الأزرار في طائراتهم ودباباتهم لتحويلنا إلى قطع، نعتذر منهم على الصور البشعة التي تحولنا إليها بعد أن صوبوا قنابلهم مباشرة إلى رؤوسنا الطرية، وعلى الساعات التي سيقضونها الآن في عيادات الأطباء النفسيين ليعودوا بشرًا كما كانوا قبل تحويلنا إلى أشلاء مقززة تلاحقهم كلما حاولوا النوم، نحن الأشياء التي رأيتموها على الشاشات والصحف، والتي إن اجتهدتم في جمع بقاياها كلعبة البازل، فإنكم ستفوزون بصورة واضحة لنا، واضحة لدرجة أنكم لن تستطيعوا أن تفعلوا شيئًا.

We

We, who are strewn about in fragments, whose flesh flies through the air like raindrops, offer our profound apologies to everyone in this civilised world, men, women and children, because we have unintentionally appeared in their peaceful homes without asking permission. We apologise for stamping our severed body parts into their snow-white memory, because we have violated the image of the normal, whole human being in their eyes, because we have had the impertinence to leap suddenly on to news bulletins and the pages of the internet and the press, naked except for our blood and charred remains. We apologise to all those who did not have the courage to look directly at our injuries for fear they would be too horrified, and to those unable to finish their evening meals after they had unexpectedly seen fresh images of us on television. We apologise for the suffering we caused to all who saw us like that, unembellished, with no attempt having been made to put us back together or reassemble our remains before we appeared on their screens. We also apologise to the Israeli soldiers who took the trouble to press the buttons in their aircraft and tanks to blow us to pieces, and we are sorry for how hideous we looked after they aimed their shells and bombs straight at our soft heads, and for the hours they are now going to spend in psychiatrists' clinics, trying to become human again, like they were before our transformation into repulsive body parts that pursue them whenever they try to sleep. We are the things you have seen on your screens and in the press, and if you made an effort to fit the pieces together, like a jigsaw, you would get a clear picture of us, so clear that you would be unable to do a thing.

Ghayath Almadhoun

translated by ***Catherine Cobham***

لا أستطيع الحضور

في الشمال، بالقرب من سياج الله، مستمتعاً بالتطور الحضاري وسحر التكنولوجيا، وبأخر ما توصلت إليه البشرية من أساليب التمدن، وتحث التأثير المخدر الذي يمنحه الأمان والتأمين الصحي والضمان الاجتماعي وحرية التعبير، أتمدّد تحت شمس الصيف كأني رجل أبيض، وأفكر بالجنوب، مختلفاً أعماراً تبرؤ غيابي، يمرّ بجانب مهاجرون ورحالة ولاجؤون، يمرّ سكان أصليون ومزيفون ومتهربون من الضرائب، كحوليون وأغنياء جدد وعصريون، كلهم يعبرون أمامي وأنا جالس في الشمال أفكر بالجنوب، وأولف قصصاً مزيفة كي أعطي على غيابي، وكيف أنني لا أستطيع الحضور.

نعم، لا أستطيع الحضور، فالطريق بين قصيدي ودمشق مقطوعة لأسباب ما بعد حداثة، منها أن أصدقائي يصعدون إلى الله بتسارع مضطرب أعلى من سرعة معالجة كمبيوتر، وبعضها يخص امرأة قابلتها في الشمال فأنستني حبيب أُمي، وبعضها متعلق بحوض السمك الذي لن يجد من يطعمه في غيابي.

لا أستطيع الحضور، فالمسافة بين واقعي وذاكرتي تؤكد أن أينشتاين على حق، وأن الطاقة المنبثقة من اشتياقي تساوي حاصل ضرب الكتلة في مربع سرعة الضوء.

لا أستطيع الحضور، لكنني قادر على الغياب، نعم، أستطيع الغياب بمهارة عالية، وقد أصبحت محترفاً في الأونة الأخيرة، وصار لي أجندة أرغب فيها مواعيد غيابي، وصار لي ذكريات لم تقع بعد.

أستطيع الغياب، كما لو أنني لم أكن، كما لو أنني قد، كما لو أن الهولاء لم يدخل رثتي من قبل ولم يك لي أعداء، كما لو أنني فداك ذاكرة هوكز، كما لو أنني غيبوبة تنقل بالعدوى.

لا أستطيع الحضور، فأنا الآن مشغول بالحرب الباردة التي أخوضها يومياً مع العزلة، بالقصص العشوائي للعظم، بالاكتناب الممنهج وغارات الوحدة التي تستهدف المطبخ، بحاجز التفتيش التي تقف بيني وبين الصيف، بالبيريوقراطية بسبب فصل السلطات التشريعية والتنفيذية، بالروتين في دائرة الضريبة، لقد حدثتني طويلاً عن الحرب، دعني أحتك قليلاً عن السلام الذي أنعم به هنا في الشمال، دعني أحتك عن درجات لون البشرة، عن معنى ألا يعرف الناس أن يلفظوا اسمك، عن الشعر الأسود، عن الديمقراطية التي تقف دائماً في صالح الأغنياء، عن التأمين الصحي الذي لا يشمل الأسنان لأنها ليست جزءاً من الجسد، دعني أحتك عن الخضار التي لا طعم لها، عن الورود التي لا رائحة لها، عن العنصرية المغلفة بانتسامة، دعني أخبرك عن الوجبات السريعة والقطارات السريعة والعلاقات السريعة، عن الإيقاع البطيء والحزن البطيء والموت البطيء.

هل ستصدقني إن قلت لك إن حذائي متعب، وإن في داخلي ذنباً لا أستطيع كبحه بعد أن اشتتم رائحة الدم، هل تصدقني إن رأيت على جسدي أثر الرصاصات التي أصابت أصدقائي هناك بينما أنا جالس هنا خلف شاشة الكمبيوتر، أتؤمن بالمصادفة، إن غيابي مصادفة مخطط لها بعناية بالغة، خط عشواء مدروسة، ولقد اكتشفت مصادفة أن ليس مصادفة أن تحدث المصادفة، إنما المصادفة ألا تحدث. المهم، هل ستصدقني إن حلفت لك بالموسيقى، أقسم بالموسيقى أن تصريح الإقامة في أوروبا قد يبعد ما بيننا وبين الموت بالرصاص، لكنه يقارب ما بيننا وبين الانتحار.

حسناً، سأخبرك الحقيقة، سأخبرك لم لا أستطيع الحضور، حدث ذلك في إحدى أمسيات الصيف، حين صادفت في الطريق إلى البيت امرأة حزينة، كانت تحمل في يدها غابة، وفي حقيبتها زجاجة نبيذ، قبلتها فأصبحت حاملاً في الشهر الحادي عشر...

ليس هذا ما يمنعني من الحضور، سأخبرك الحقيقة، لقد أمسكتي دمشق مع امرأة أخرى في الفراش، حاولت أن أصلح الموقف، وأن ما جرى نزوة ليس إلا، وأنها لن تتكرر، أقسمت بكل شيء، بالقمر، بالألعاب النارية، بأصابع النساء، لكن كل شيء كان قد انتهى، فهربت إلى الشمال...

ليس هذا ما يمنعني من الحضور، سأخبرك الحقيقة، حين كنت طفلاً، لم أكن أعرف أي شيء عن اقتصاد السوق، الآن وبعد أن أصبحت مواطناً في إحدى دول العالم الأول فأبني لا أعرف أي شيء عن اقتصاد السوق...

ليس هذا ما يمنعني من الحضور، سأخبرك الحقيقة، حين كنت أهم بالمجيء، اصطدمت حقيقتي بخير عاجل فانكسرت لغتي إلى قطع وتناهبها المارة، ولم يعد لدي لغة...

ليس هذا ما يمنعني من الحضور، سأخبرك الحقيقة، أنا ميت، نعم، لقد توفي منذ عدة سنوات...

ليس هذا ما يمنعني من الحضور، سأخبرك الحقيقة...

I Can't Attend

In the North, close to God's boundary wall, enjoying a developed culture, the magic of technology, the latest achievements of human civilization, and under the influence of the drug that grants safety, health insurance, social security and freedom of expression, I lie in the summer sun as if I am a white man and think of the South, contriving excuses to justify my absence. Emigrants, travellers, refugees go by me, genuine inhabitants, bogus inhabitants, tax-dodgers, alcoholics, the newly rich and racists, all of them crossing in front of me as I sit in the North thinking of the South, composing spurious stories in order to cover up my absence and explain how I can't attend.

Yes, I can't attend, for the road between my poem and Damascus is cut off for postmodern reasons: these include the fact that my friends are ascending to God at a rapidly increasing rate, faster than my computer processor, while other reasons relate to a woman I met in the North who made me forget the taste of my mother's milk, and some are connected to the fishes in the fish tank, who won't find anyone to feed them in my absence.

I can't attend, for the distance between my reality and my memory confirms that Einstein was right and the energy produced by my longing equals mass multiplied by the speed of light squared.

I can't attend but I can be absent, yes, I can be absent with great skill. I've become an expert in recent times and I've acquired a diary where I make a note of the times I have to be absent and I have memories that haven't happened yet.

I can be absent as if I have never existed, as if I am nothing, as if air has never entered my lungs, as if I've never had enemies before, as if I'm concentrated memory loss, a coma transmitted like a contagious disease.

I can't attend as I'm currently busy with the cold war I fight daily with isolation, with indiscriminate shelling by darkness, with systematic depression, with the attacks of loneliness that target the kitchen, the checkpoints that stand between me and summer, the bureaucracy caused by the separation of the legislative and executive powers, the routine procedures of the tax department. You've talked to me at length about the war, now let me tell you a little about the peace that I enjoy here in the North. Let me tell you about gradations of skin colour, what it means when people don't know how to pronounce your name, about black hair, about the democracy that always favours the rich, the health insurance that doesn't cover your teeth because they aren't part of the body. Let me talk to you about the tasteless vegetables, the flowers with no smell, the racism masked by a smile. Let me tell you about the fast food, fast trains, fast relationships, slow rhythms, slow grief, slow death.

Will you believe me if I say to you that my shoes are tired, that inside me is a wolf I can't restrain once he's smelt blood? Will you believe me if you see on my body the marks of the bullets that have hit my friends there, while I'm sitting here in front of a computer screen? Do you believe in coincidence? My absence is a coincidence planned with extreme care, a well-considered random act. I've discovered by coincidence that it's no coincidence that coincidences happen, and in fact the coincidence is when they don't happen. The point is, will you believe me if I swear to you by music? I swear by music that a European residence permit prevents us from being shot but makes it more likely that we'll kill ourselves.

Fine, I'll tell you the truth. I'll tell you why I can't attend. It happened on a summer's evening when I met a sad woman on my way home. In her hand she carried a forest and in her bag a bottle of wine. I kissed her and she became eleven months pregnant...

That's not what's stopping me attending. I'll tell you the truth. Damascus caught me in bed with another woman. I tried to put things right, to say what happened was a spur of the moment thing, nothing more, and it wouldn't happen again. I swore by

everything, by the moon, fireworks, women's fingers, but it was all over, so I fled to the North.

That's not what's stopping me attending. I'll tell you the truth. When I was a child I didn't know anything about the market economy. Now, after I've become a citizen of a first world country, I don't know anything about the market economy.

This isn't what's stopping me attending. I'll tell you the truth. When I was intending to come, my suitcase collided with an item of breaking news and my language was smashed to bits, the passersby grabbed hold of the pieces and I no longer had a language...

That isn't what is stopping me attending. I'll tell you the truth, I'm dead, yes, I died several years ago.

That isn't what's stopping me attending. I'll tell you the truth...

Ghayath Almadhoun

translated by ***Catherine Cobham***

شيد الحزن

نحبك يا أوروبا، أيتها القارة العجوز، لا أعرف لماذا يسمونك العجوز، وأنت شابة بالمقارنة مع مصر وبلاد الرافدين.

نحبك يا أوروبا، وندفع لك الضرائب كالرجال البيض، ونحمل مزاياك المتقاع الذي يشبه طقسك، والنقص الحاد في فيتامين د بسبب ظلمة شتائك، نحبك وتحزننا حقيقة أننا لن نعتك هذا الظلام الدامس في شتاءاتك الطويلة، فها هم أصدقائنا الأوروبيون، أقصد سكانك الأصليين الذين ولدوا في شماليك البارد لآباء آريين، يعانون مثلنا أيضًا من الاكتئاب ونقص فيتامين د، فطبعًا لنظرية التطور، هم أيضًا هوموسيبيان قادمون من أفريقيا، أما سكانك الأصليون، أقصد النياندرتال الذين تطوروا خلال العصر الجليدي لكي يحملوا بردك، فقلد انقرضوا.

نحبك يا أوروبا، ولا ننكر أننا جئنا إليك من دول العالم الثالث المتخلفة كما تقولين، أنا تحديدًا جئت من دمشق، وتحملت الكثير من الكليشيهات والصور النمطية والانطباعات المسبقة من كتابك وشعرائك، ورغم أنني أعتبر نفسي نسويًا، فلقد مللت وتعبت وقرفت من الأسئلة السطحية المكرورة حول وضع المرأة في الشرق الأوسط، وها أنا أقر وأعترف، بأن المرأة في سوريا لم تتمتع بحق الانتخاب إلا عام ١٩٤٩. أما في سويسرا، عاصمة أموالك وأموال ديكتاتورياتنا وحساباتهم المصرفية السرية، فلم يسمح للمرأة بحق التصويت في الانتخابات إلا عام ١٩٧١، وطبعًا ليس في كل مقاطعات سويسرا، فمقاطعة أبنزل إينرهودن لم تسمح للمرأة بالتصويت في الانتخابات حتى عام ١٩٩١، يا إلهي!

نحبك يا أوروبا، ونحب الحرية التي منحتنا حين جئناك هاربين، وتغاضى عن العنصرية التي تحولين إخفاءها تحت السجادة حين تقومين بكس غرفة الاستقبال.

نحبك يا أوروبا، يا صاحبة الماضي الاستعماري، وقاتلة السكان الأصليين، يا ماصة دماء الشعوب من الهند إلى الكونغو، ومن البرازيل إلى نيوزيلندا.

يا صاحبة محاكم التفتيش وحارقة النساء بحجة أنهن ساحرات، يا سيدة تجارة العبيد التي نقلت السود إلى العالم الجديد، وصانعة التمييز العنصري في جنوب أفريقيا، يا مؤسسة الفاشية والنازية ومخترعة الحل النهائي لإبادة اليهود، الحل النهائي الذي جعلني أولد لاجئًا في مخيم اليرموك للاجئين الفلسطينيين في دمشق، لأنك بكل وقاحة دفعت بلدي فلسطين كضريبة وتعويض وحل للهولوكوست الذي قام به سكانك البيض المؤمنون ببقاء العرق الآري.

نحبك يا أوروبا، ونحمل جوازات سفرك التي تفتح أمامنا الأبواب بالسهولة التي فتحت بها رصاصاتك لحم مليون جزائري أراد أن يتمتع بالحرية الذي تنادي بها ثورتك الفرنسية.

نحبك يا أوروبا، نحب فنك ونكره تاريخك الاستعماري، نحب مسرحك ونكره معسكرات اعتقالك، نحب
موسيقاك ونكره أصوات قنابلك، نحب فلسفتك ونكره مارتن هايدغر، نحب أدبك ونكره الاستشراق، نحب
شعرك ونكره عزرا باوند، نحب حرية التعبير في أرجائك ونكره الإسلاموفوبيا، نحب تطورك
الحضاري وعلمانيتك وقوانينك العادلة وحقوق الإنسان على أرضك، ونكره عنصريتك ومعاييرك
المزدوجة ونظرتك الاستعلانية وتاريخك الدموي.

خذي النازية وأعطينا إيمانويل كانت
خذي القمصان السود وأعطينا نبيذ إيطاليا
خذي الإبادة الجماعية في الجزائر وأعطينا بودلير
خذي ليوبولد الثاني وأعطينا رينيه ماغريت
خذي أدولف هتلر وأعطينا حنه أرنت
خذي فرانكو وأعطينا سرفانتس
خذي أشياءك ودعينا نأخذ أشياءنا.

Ode to Sadness

"Ode to Sadness" was originally commissioned by Winternachten International Literature Festival 2018 in The Hague, Netherlands. The festival asked Ghayath Almadhoun to rewrite the European Anthem "Ode to Joy" by Schiller and Beethoven.

We love you, Europe, you old continent. I don't know why they call you old when you're young compared to Egypt and Mesopotamia.

We love you, Europe, and pay you taxes as white men do, and put up with your changeable mood that resembles your weather, and the serious lack of vitamin D caused by your dark winters. We love you and are saddened by the fact that we will never get used to this gloomy darkness in your long winters, for here are our European friends, I mean your original inhabitants who were born in your cold North to Aryan mothers and fathers, suffering like us from depression and a lack of vitamin D because, according to the theory of evolution, they too are homo sapiens, coming from Africa. Your real original inhabitants, I mean the Neanderthals who evolved during the ice age so they could bear your cold, are now extinct.

We love you, Europe, and we don't deny that we came to you from backward third world countries, as you call them. I myself came from Damascus and endured a lot of clichés, stereotypes and preconceptions from your writers and poets. Despite the fact that I consider myself a feminist, I've become bored and fed up with the constant superficial questions about the situation of women in the Middle East. I acknowledge completely that women in Syria only got the right to vote in 1949, but in Switzerland, capital of your money and the money of our dictatorships and their secret bank accounts, women only got the right to vote in 1971, and of course that wasn't in all the Swiss cantons: the canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden only granted full voting rights to women in 1991 for God's sake!

We love you, Europe. We love the freedom you gave us when we fled into your arms, and we pretend not to notice the racism that you try to brush under the carpet when you clean the living room.

We love you, Europe, mistress of the colonial past, killer of original inhabitants, bloodsucker of peoples from India to the Congo, from Brazil to New Zealand.

Mistress of the Inquisition, burner of women on the grounds that they were witches, lady of the slave trade that transported blacks to the new world, creator of apartheid in South Africa, founder of fascism and Nazism, inventor of the final solution to exterminate Jews, the final solution that caused me to be born a refugee in Yarmouk camp in Damascus because you had the audacity to hand over my country Palestine as a payment, a compensation, and a solution for the Holocaust that was perpetrated by those of your white inhabitants who believe in the purity of the Aryan race.

We love you, Europe, and carry your passports that open doors for us as easily as your bullets ripped open the flesh of millions of Algerians who wanted to enjoy the freedom called for by your French Revolution.

We love you, Europe. We love your art and hate your colonialist history, love your theatre and hate your concentration camps, love your music and hate the sound of your bombs, love your philosophy and hate Martin Heidegger, love your literature and hate orientalism, love your poetry and hate Ezra Pound, love the freedom of expression within your own boundaries and hate the Islamophobia, love your advanced civilization, your secularism, your just laws and the human rights on your own territory, and hate your racism, double standards, your arrogant outlook and your bloody history.

Take Nazism and give us Immanuel Kant
Take the Blackshirts and give us Italian wine
Take the genocide in Algeria and give us Baudelaire
Take Leopold the Second and give us René Magritte
Take Adolf Hitler and give us Hannah Arendt
Take Franco and give us Cervantes
Take your things and let us take ours.

Ghayath Almadhoun

translated by ***Catherine Cobham***

Golan Haji



photo © Ammar Haj
Ahmad

سفوح

يُلقي الضوء ريشته الكبيرة
بين برج الكنيسة وحانوت التوابيت
حيث وقفت أمس
وانتظرت من قلني إلى الجبال
ولم أر عرابي اللحن
الذي ظل يؤمننا أعواماً وأعواماً.
النهار ينادي خطواتي
مثل صديق يصق تحت النافذة
لأصع تلك الأدراج البعيدة.

**

الريج الخفيفة أغرقت بياض أوراقنا.
حباً أزرق ذات في ورقة المسبح
ثم أخفى المساء الكحلي ما كتبناه
وفتحنا صدور قمصاننا
كأشعة خفيفة لا تحرك شيئاً.
مطلع الصبح، على بقايا قصيدة طافية
رأينا يعسوباً قرمزياً يحط
مثل كلمة وحيدة نجت.

Golan Haji. 'Cliffs' and 'Under Spring Skies'.
Transnational Literature Vol.11 no.1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Cliffs

Light is throwing its immense feather
between the church tower and the shop of coffins
where I stood yesterday
and waited for someone to take me to the mountains
and I didn't see the vehicles with their monotonous
pulse that lulled us to sleep for years on end.
Daylight is beckoning my footsteps
like a friend whistling under the window
to climb those distant stairways.

*

The light wind drowned our white papers.
Blue ink melted in the swimming pool
and kohl-coloured evening covered what we'd written
and we opened the top buttons of our shirts,
lightweight sails that make nothing move.
At daybreak, on the remains of a floating poem,
we saw a crimson dragonfly landing
like a sole surviving word.

Golan Haji

translated by the author and *Stephen Watts*

تحت سماء الربيع

بمقصيَّ الأسود ألمحُه
السنونو يخرقُ كرة البعوضِ العالية
فلا التلج من قومة الغيم
يستقيقُ على الصَّفيحِ الخفيف
ولا المياه تذكرُ سُيوفه الفضية.
غبارُ التريزفون جفَّت الطلع
على وَبرِ النحلِ القاعم.

مايطئ وَهَيْئُهُ السَّهْوُ الظليلة
دخلُ تغلغل في حافة ياقتي:

الربيعُ عربة فارغة
تتناقلُ السيارات وراءها
في الدُّروبِ الخالية
ويدي الداكنة
ممدودة بين الشمسِ الغارية وخدي
مرأة تتادي طفلها المفقود.

Under Spring Skies

I glimpse the black scissor of a swallow
veering through a high ball of mosquitoes,
but snow is not woken from its cloud slumber

by such slight shrilling
and water does not recall its silver swords.

The dust of lindens has dried
the pollen on the soft down of bees.

What was slowly offered by the shadows on the plain
is smoke that has suffused the edge of my collar:

Spring is an empty black carriage
behind which vehicles slow down
on deserted roads,
and my dark hand—
stretched between my cheek and the setting sun—
is a mirror calling out for the missing child.

Golan Haji

translated by the author and ***Stephen Watts***

Rasha Omran



photo © Dirk Skiba

لتي سكنت البيت قبلي

1

كلما حدثت قليلاً في البلاط الأبيض
رأيت آثار أقدامها الصغيرة
يخطر لي أن أضع قدمي اليسرى فوق أثر القدم اليسرى
واليمنى فوق اليمنى
وهكذا
أرى نفسي أمام الباب الخارجي
أفتحه وأغلقه
وأعود بنفس كآبة خطواتها العائدة من وداع الرجل الأخير
ثمة فارق وحيد فقط
لا بقايا لدموع جديدة
في طريق العودة

2

قلت للرجل الذي معي
نحن النساء نتوالد من أنفسنا
كأننا رحم وحيد
وكأن جدتي هي ابنتي
لنا كلنا نفس انسياب أفعى الحقول
ولنا برودة الرخام تحت إناء خارج لتوه من الفرن
الفارق فقط
هو القدرة على حياكة أطول مسافة من الفتق أسفل الثدي الأيسر
لم يصدقني
فتح الباب الخارجي ومضى
بينما المرأة الوحيدة التي سكنت في البيت قبلي
كانت ترمقنا بإشفاق وهي تتناول المناديل الورقية
وتمسح البقع الحمراء على البلاط البارد
البقع المتسربة من الجرح الطويل
تحت ثديها الأيسر

Rasha Omran 'The Woman who Dwelt in the House Before'.

Transnational Literature Vol.11 no.1, November 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

وهكذا أفتح باب بيتي على مصراعيه وأُحد حبات الرمل الداخلة حبة حبة، وحين أتعب م
العد، أتمدّد على كامل العتبة وأكوم الرمل فوق جسدي، بينما المرأة التي سكنت في البيت قبلي
تمسك مكنستها القديمة، وتزيل الرمل عن أرض الغرفة، كما يليق بسيدة منزل وحيدة، تعرف
جيدا أن العتبات التي تصنعها النساء ليسترحن عليها ليست سوى حبات رمل متراكمة ستنبعث
ما أن يفتح الباب قليلاً، تاركاً للحب وللوحشة أن يصطدما وهما يعبران من الباب

أريد أن أعرف
من هي تلك المرأة التي تتواجد حيث أتواجد
التي تستعير الفراغ المؤلم في أسناني
والتعب الدائم في عيني اليسرى
من هي تلك المرأة التي تفضل اللون الأسود مثلي
ومثلي ترتدي ثيابها دون أن تهتم بلمسة الأناقة الأخيرة
من هي تلك المرأة التي لها نفس جسمي
جسمي الذي يصبح بخفة الفراشة حينما أذهب للرقص
وفي البيت يتكور ويثقل كقوقعة تحجرت بفعل الزمن
من هي تلك المرأة التي تغازل الرجال الفتيين الذين أغزلهم في البار
الرجال الذين لا يلحظون السنين المتراكمة حول خصري
ولا خطوط النهايات القريبة في باطن كفي
المشغولون بألق النبيذ في عيني
وبالحمرة التي يعكسها الضوء الخافت على أرنبة أنفي
أريد أن أعرف
من هي تلك المرأة التي لا تتورع عن تقديم نفسها باسمي
ولا تخجل من تكرار أخطائي مرة إثر مرة
أريد أن أعرف من هي
تلك التي كلما تهشم قلبها
لملمته بهدوء وأعادته إلى صدري

الشاعرات مجنونات، يعرفن تماماً أنهن لسن أشجاراً، ومع ذلك كل ليلة يخلعن أسماهن ويعلقن
التعاويذ على صدورهن، ثم يقفن عاريات تحت ضوء القمر، هكذا، حين يلمحن خيالتهن
الطويلة ثابتة في الظلام يظنن أنهن أشجار، فيبدأن بالحفيف، الشاعرات مجنونات، لا يعرفن أن
حفيف الأشجار لا يجذب الطيور المطمئنة، وأن ظلالهن ستختفي ما أن تحجب غيمة عابرة
ضوء القمر، الشاعرات مجنونات، لن يتذكرن صباحاً ما فعلنه الليلة الماضية، غير أنهن حين

The Woman who Dwelt in the House Before

1

When I stare at the white floor
I see traces of her small feet
it occurs to me to put my left foot on the print of her left foot
and the right on her right
and so on
I see myself in front of the door
opening it, closing it
and returning with her melancholy steps
as she turned from the farewell of her last lover

there is only one difference
no fresh tears
on my way back

2

I said to the man with me
women give birth to themselves
we reproduce ourselves
as if from a single womb
as if my grandmother were my daughter
we are all sinuous as snakes in dry grasses
we are all cold as marble
under a pot hot from the oven
the only difference between us is
how we stitch closed the long gash under the left breast
he did not believe me
he opened the outside door and left

the lonely woman who dwelt in the house before
watched us with pity
as she picked up a rag
to wipe from the cold floor
red stains, leaked
from beneath her left breast

3

I open my front door wide and count the grains of sand that come inside, one by one. When I tire of counting, I lie across the threshold and bury my body in the sand while the woman who lived in the house before picks up her old broom and sweeps. She is a lonely housekeeper and knows that thresholds where women lie are nothing but piles of sand that blow away as soon as the door opens, leaving love and loneliness to bump into each other as they pass through the doorway.

4

I want to know
who are you
you live in the painful spaces between my teeth
and in the fatigue in my left eye
who are you
you like black (as I do)
you wear your clothes (as I do)
neglect a final touch of elegance
who are you
you have my body
it is light as a butterfly when you go out dancing
but when you are at home, it curls into itself
like a shell petrified by time
who are you

you flirt in the bars
with the same men as I do
men do not notice
my waist thick with years
or the broken lines in my palms
they see the shine of wine in my eyes
the soft light of the bar on the red tip of my nose
I want to know
who are you
why do you use my name
why are you not ashamed, time after time, to repeat
my faults
I want to know
who you are
and why
each time your heart breaks
you
deliberately pick up the pieces
and put them back
inside
me

5

Women poets are mad
they know they are not trees
but every night they take off their tattered clothes
and hang amulets on their breasts
and stand naked in the moonlight
when they see their long still shadows
they see trees, and begin to rustle
Women poets are mad

they do not know that the rustle of trees
does not attract birds
and their shadows will disappear
clouds over the moon
Women poets are mad
in the morning they do not remember
what they did the night before
but when they stand in front of mirrors
they see deep scars on their breasts
where their lost amulets hung

Rasha Omran

translated by ***Kim Echlin and Abdelrehim Youssef***

Raed Wahesh



photo © Ahmad Alrifae

غياب

1

منذ غابوا،
لا مكان للقاء
إلا المنام..

ينتظروننا كل يوم
بثياب نظيفة
ودفون حليقة
كما يليق بالمواعيد العاطفية..

يعاتبون عيوننا
إن تأخرت في الإغماض،
ويحزنهم أن يلمسوا فيها
أول الإصباح..

يريدوننا أن نبقى هناك
لشدة ما يقضون وقتنا مملاً..
بينما نتدّرع بأشياء ضرورية
كي نغادرهم إلى حياة
لا نفعل فيها شيئاً
سوى انتظارهم..

هل نحن من نصحو لنتحقق بهم؟
أم أنهم من ينامون لينضموا إلينا؟

كلنا غائبون
عنهم
وعنا
وينقصنا موتٌ يجمع شمل العائلة.

Raed Wahesh. 'Absence'.
Transnational Literature Vol.11 no.1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

2

ألا تزال لك تلك العينان الطيبتان كبيتٍ في الريف؟
ألا تزال بذلك الشَّعر الجاف،
إذ يبدو مليئاً بالغبار بمجرد أن يمرَّ عليه ضوءُ الشمس؟
ألا تزال مؤمناً كما لو أن الله وعدك بالنبوة؟
ماذا فعلوا بك؟
ما الناقص من صورتك؟
قل لنا
ساعدُ خيالنا لنراك؟

3

يريدونك أن تبقى حياً
أن تصمد تحت التعذيب لسنواتٍ
لكيلا يموتوا يأساً في انتظارك..
ألم أقل لك:
الأمل مدرسة الأنانيين؟

Absence

1

Since they've left
the only place we can meet
is in the dream.

They wait for us every day
with clothes cleaned
and beards shaven
as is fitting for dates.

They reproach our eyes
if they don't shut quickly
and it grieves them if they touch daybreak in those eyes.

They want us to stay here
because they are bored
While we use important things as an excuse

2

Raed Wahesh. 'Absence'.
Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

to leave them so we can return to our lives
where all we can do is wait for them again.

Is it us who wakes to catch them up?
Or is it them who falls asleep to join us?
We all are absent
from them
and from ourselves.
We're just lacking a death to reunite the family.

2

Do you still have those kind eyes like a house in the countryside?
Do you still have that dry hair,
Which seems like it is full with dust when sunlight passes through it?
Do you still believe, as if god had promised you prophesy?
What did they do to you?
What is missing in your photo?
Tell us
Help our imagination so we can see you.

3

They want you to stay alive
To endure torture for years
So they will not die despairing of waiting for you.
Didn't I tell you that
Hope is a school for egoists?

Raed Wahesh

translated by ***Henry Holland & Hazem Shekho***

Petrarchan Sonnet*

In Roma—*'Hannibal ad portas! Aie!'*—

I flared between blinded cats, through cobblestoned
streets, Chianti-red dragon, classically stoned,
tripped until dawn, bearing purple tie-dye
pants, shirt, black beret. 'Cry
-baby, Mama's Boy,' my untuned
body scolded; black coffee intoned
Latin prayer in the hotel restaurant. I

didn't want to advance on Russia, see
The Motherland Calls' horror, the Kremlin,
care for the Soviet controllers' reign.
The Cure's 'From The Edge Of The Deep Green Sea'
was devoured by my Walkman's gremlin,
Aeroflot's winged hammer and sickle scoured black rain.

Stuart Barnes

* this poem is a companion piece to 'Ghazal for The Sisters of Mercy' published in *Transnational Literature* Vol.10, no.1, November 2017
https://dspace.flinders.edu.au/xmlui/bitstream/handle/2328/37575/Barnes_Ghazal_for_The_Sisters_of_Mercy.pdf?sequence=1

Ladybirds

I try to call you every three weeks to conjure you again.
Today's a good day, with your morning and my evening,

we span the in-between. You ask about me—
how I've been, my husband, my work—and I share,

like this is routine. I reciprocate, mention your heatwave
blazing across our wintered news. You say it's been hot,

but not a patch on the summer after I was born,
the hottest on record and when the ladybirds came.

You tell me again how you didn't know what to do
with me, tried to keep me cool by putting my pram

in the shade veiled in white cotton. I try to picture you
cooing and fanning to keep me appeased, and can't.

Instead, I see a rippling swathe of ladybirds, a delicate
sea of red, lifting their skirts for any promise of breeze.

J V Birch

J V Birch. 'Ladybirds'.
Transnational Literature Vol.11 no.1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Components

after Roger McDonald

Here are
jade notebook,
milky distance.

A yellow desk,
straws of sun,
coppery wooden knots.

A plunging forest,
light flung
and falling into chords.

And the thought of a river
creeping through the ravine.

Here are the clearest
sounds, all three.

An old man
clumps things into a case
for the last time.

Birds trill,
sketching plans
for the afternoon.

The mind
sweeps it away
with the stems of dried phrases.

Stuart Cooke

Stuart Cooke. 'Components' and 'Buenos Aires Contemporary'.
Transnational Literature Vol.11 no.1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Buenos Aires Contemporary

The sturdy painter hikes through the swirl
of his grey, Scotland hawk

the stacks build and drill against purple
and pink, horses stop to think

who chopped off his ear? and
left it in the other room

with a small desk by a window
a blanket tucked tight, striped

like my umwelt, the lonely chair staring
it's all so woody, zero connectivity

my lonely breast, my long, white alien
behind my elbow I'm despair.

The brainy old coral of the landscape
the bubbling stone at dusk—

shrubs grow there, along the ridges
beside the dry riverbed

and the dead, grey woman, plastic doll
sucking her tit.

Eyes half-closed, she looks
below your waist

her ready hand—will she
take life back, take you

by the throat?
Tears of green glass bottles

strident candle maroon.

No one's lashed with city's

fiery spools through night brick
but her head splits

then a burning horse onslaught
halo of laser and blossom

cooled into weedy arc
with a crust of skeletal baroque.

Paris was a party; Buenos Aires is Aussie
the storm's bluest knot

cracks a tiny mule into white
hides it beneath a torn sheet of itself

grows testicles of abstraction
while Eleanor Rigby's cello reverberates in circles

of white, black, orange and yellow.
Frames splinter in the insatiable pampas mouth

prey dripping with eyeliner and cherry
things get cleaner years earlier:

blurbs get written, vibrant brides
sucked into clowned accordion

world renovated into gleaming
guttled mouse.

Stuart Cooke

The Fast Train to Assen

Deer almost as common as cattle,
foals lying flat in the afternoon sun,
a hare lolloping alongside a ditch,
hundreds of waterbirds probing mud,
all passed at astonishing speed.

Towns flicker by,
brief settlements with coloured doors,
clusters of prison-like shops and factories
celebrating the right-angle.
Street trees at regulation height.

The passenger beside me is still busy
watching porn on his mobile.
I return my gaze to the window.
Three traditional windmills;
here, gone.

Steve Evans

In Bed With Metallica

She moves out of the painting like a metal
 Band . . . She's carrying the frog of darkness
 The crowds, the Parisian crowds are forming
 And it makes me weep. I buy a jigsaw puzzle
 To support the industry. I don't need something
 To do in my hotel room: I just need fame
 And a frame and someone under glass to visit
 At 3am. It's got to be Leonardo da Vinci
 Sketching naked rehearsing members of
 Metallica. He doesn't know photography's
 Invented – and no one wants to break his heart.
 Or tear him apart to find the secret of his genius.
 We read him Berrigan's sonnets: he thinks it's
 Standard English – and that T. Rex is a fragrance.

Michael Farrell

Michael Farrell. 'In Bed With Metallica'.
Transnational Literature Vol.11 no.1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

En la Cama con Metallica

Ella sale de la pintura como una banda
Metalera . . . Ella trae el sapo de la oscuridad
Las multitudes, la multitudes parisinas se forman
Y me hacen llorar. Compro un rompecabezas
Para mantener la industria. No necesito algo
Que hacer en mi pieza de hotel: lo que necesito es fama
Y un marco y alguien bajo el vidrio para visitar
A las 3am. Tiene que ser Leonardo da Vinci
Bosquejando a los miembros desnudos de
Metallica. Él no sabe que la fotografía ya se
Inventó – y nadie quiere romperle el corazón.
O partirlo en dos para descubrir el secreto de su genio.
Le leemos los sonetos de Berrigan: él cree que es
Inglés estándar – y que T. Rex es un perfume.

Michael Farrell

(transl: Kurt Folch)

The Fall

I remember my mother
fallen there in the darkest
reaches of the corridor.

Her plangent crying, so like a wounded animal,
tousled mass of curled hair spilling
across the floor boards in a slit of light.

She was sobbing into the crook of her arm,
clutching an ankle, writhing with a pain
I could not decipher.

I tried to pat her, to tidy the damp strands
of hair stuck to her face, but she wailed
and growled and shrank from my touch.

I could not comfort her, so I just stood there—
clutching the bunched hem of my dress
like an unlaid wreath.

Rachael Wenona Guy

The Train to Mandalay

Boys swing between carriages on the train to Mandalay,
arms and legs thrust out into an uncertain future,
their bodies hang suspended
in a mid-air trapeze
before plunging into the connecting carriage.

Some carry baskets of soft-boiled eggs, others
have ducks for sale, plucked and dangling from strings,
their bulging eyes surprised
as if death had come too soon.

I take a photo of three young boys, a smiling triad as they climb over each other in the carriage door.

One carries a large tin kettle full of luke-warm chai...

The boy with the kettle only has one cup, tin and tiny which he fills for each traveller, then wipes the rim on his grimy sleeve, grins, takes our meagre coins.

Through windows devoid of glass, dust and dirt blows in;
rain is a stranger to this land—
everywhere trees hunch
like neglected veterans, clothed in brown dirt,
begging for water.

At brief stops along the way, women sell oranges from baskets on their heads, their arms thrust through barbed wire, waving their fruit as if drowning.

On board rats are foraging under straight-backed pews
while we sit sore-boned, hour after hour of tedium
broken only by the swill of the squat toilet.

Don decides to try the mid-air swing,
disappears, but later returns to describe
an Indian wedding party in the next carriage.

He makes his way back and I follow after him...

Cary Hamlyn. 'The Train to Mandalay'.
Transnational Literature Vol.11 no.1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Paris to Flamingo

– “So let me confess at the outset to my preference for the real
fakery of Las Vegas ...”*

framed like this we inch ahead creaking
cupboards & selves. you wear sunglasses
& i stare deep into the eyes of whipped cream
 Abercrombie & Fitch & stuffed
vitamin display the child stars
the convenience stores, Walgreens, CVS’s
the folded arms & tunnel-vision gaze of strongmen
the contorted beckoning of child-women
 (the trucks of girls girls girls)

the Montgolfier Balloon: a lone castanet
or snazzy pyjama-striped doorknob teetering
 over the Arc de Triomphe
& La Fontaine de Mers (girls girls girls
holding fish) the Eiffel corporate duck
the background ph, an angel trumpeting
the black beehives of traffic lights
& bare asses of Bally’s, yeah girls girls

(& we’ve only just started) remembering
the man who lost his feet, his Bally’s dream
in that end of the world hotel the point
which was not to win of course but to keep going

the eye struggle of a Vasarely[†] the overwhelm
that brings underwhelm (as strategic, as reaction
as put-on as nonchalance) the objects
clear from here not there phantasmagorias
of FOMO & the boredom inherent in quote exciting
things present/past/future demolition

* Epigraph from Dave Hickey. “Dialectical Utopias: On Las Vegas and Santa Fe.” *Harvard Design Magazine*, Winter/Spring 1998, Number 4, pp. 1-5. p. 1.

† “the eye struggle of a Vasarely:” Robert Venturi, Steven Izenour, and Denise Scott Brown. *Learning From Las Vegas*. Revised Edition. The MIT Press, 1977. p. 53.

derbies, planned obsolescence
& dust pollution hiding
in the collisions of indigo yellow & harlequin
green through which our autescape edges
a contest of tides, reencountering

the who's pretending to be who's/whose
with each nudge, watching the watchers watching
(Jimbo abandoned for your friend's convertible
leather seats! & backseat driving) an auto-

mobile promenade: flooded
with churning & burnt out with afloat
on the sidewalk people standing on people
on fences on attention, to watch water
take shapes of cypress trees & stalagmites
& smoking wedding cakes
under the pocket gables of Caesar's; the Cromwell
upscale-ordinary against pink & flaming
feathered eggshell cracking crown

under which bare-chested boys juggle for change
over a couple verging on ten different types
of selfie (the backdrop Margaritaville girls girls
girls posters & the others
slipper walk, drinking from hookahs)
woman with cardboard sign *anything helps*

Rose Hunter

Rose Hunter. 'Paris to Flamingo' and 'all this is blurred and much bluer than it was'.
Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

all this is blurred and much bluer than it was

and where is the one who says to hell
with this anyway *i'm gonna go with the flow*
(plummets the rapids the ease of its return
an insult to the struggling way it came
but other than that pretty chill) (i'm

not going to dump all that turned up
in my body in some backwater then
hang around waiting to die; why go back

to where i was born after all, it wasn't that
great and i've travelled so many miles
since then, i'm a fish of the world

and far as i see plenty of you all
doing what you're doing i won't be missed
this leaping also is overrated, to get
from here to there, sometimes lice
not an epiphany and not individual

since we're all doing it, not a work of art
either or a feat of anything. i'm gonna do
something *completely different* drift back

where i came from live out my days
eating shrimp you suckers)

ii.

oh when may we sleep?
when we reach the river.

oh when may we sleep
when may we eat?

iii.

Chinook (king)
chum (dog)

Rose Hunter. 'Paris to Flamingo' and 'all this is blurred and much bluer than it was'.
Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

coho (silver)
sockeye (red)
humpy (pink)

iv.

in a blue night from a Red Rock desert we came
and how does this sort of thing even happen?

(oh right, *yes yes yes!*) three am, past inlets
and outlets mudflats and sandflats, one snow

capped fantastic after another, already i can't take
any more yet they keep appearing, stuffed full
of the wows (hungry cold tired, fed up) where

the hell even are we? through the grey light
night, creases in the grey mud soft wet paper
reaching out past windscreen tears, mist sleet

or snow, really, in summer? 61 degrees north
holy north, look from a Red Rock desert
(your steering wheel shedding snake skins
and dashboard stew) next thing on a plane

with bear hunting talk. her hair river honey
under a mesh cap advertising a firing range
in Waco. she gave us cookies (as usual
we had no food), it was freezing and you

were all the way across the aisle. i kept reaching
for your hand and sure none of this was really

happening (look, from a Red Rock desert still
jangling slots, the silvering tinker tinker)

(we came) and now, pissed! where are we going
and for how much longer, your answers are vague
and you ignore all demands to stop. ready to leap
out the window hitch back where i didn't

Rose Hunter. 'Paris to Flamingo' and 'all this is blurred and much bluer than it was'.
Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

come from, preventing it, the distance we've
travelled (the way the already ventured

serves to cement the presently occurring whatever
it is) and curiosity.... you seem to have no need
for sleep or food. we have no water
and the fuel guage is low (you and your
cutting it fine). our stakes are not like theirs.

yet you are single-minded, hell-bent
(i am watching your colours take over).

Rose Hunter

Trench warfare

Kenwood House:

an autumn Wednesday,
woods tame and endless, mild grey sky
where I wandered, hopeful, one November
in the belted trenchcoat that felt matronly
(from a dive in unfamiliar downtown Sydney)
but of course wasn't on a twenty-something

First time in London
where I'd lived in my head since I could read

This time, more dogs than I recall, otherwise the same

the barrel-vaulted Stewards' Room rendering glamorous
cheese and pickle, a pot of tea,
my heart bursting from my chest

Still happy when we all meet at the Lion
a drink then The IT Crowd on TV
the others under the weather

Cath Kenneally. 'Trench Warfare' and 'split or stay'.
Transnational Literature Vol.11 no.1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

(under it, for good or ill, every day

today, held under, as by a mean kid at the beach)

Another time, we stride it out to Swiss Cottage, where Swiss Tony

doesn't live, find the gym and pool in the community centre

The day is brighter, Anna home sick. We stop at the new Camden Arts gallery

check, then forget work email

Euroboy Gabe claims now to prefer Spain to his native land. He shows us

his climbing wall. He'll be at our reading at Australia House,

common territory for now

In Russell Square Garden cafe

select poems to read

Warm again.

Drifting back to Karin Mamma Anderssen's lovely Camden paintings

spiky pines barricading or guarding a wintering house

pumpkin and beetroot tones in warm, cluttered interiors

We bought a gift for Tom in the bookshop:

YoshitomoNara: 'AngryGirl:NothingEver

Happens'

Cath Kenneally. 'Trench Warfare' and 'split or stay'.
Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

threatening faux-naif big faces he will like

angry boy arming himself with art

Angry sister ponders the decades:

waves of nostalgia swamping the Heath, inundating Camden

percolating up in noxious bubbles from my ill-sealed Underground

ride it, all you can do

hold on to your sou'wester

belt your raincoat tight

the underrated art of straphanging

Cath Kenneally

split or stay?

Split, an ordinary afternoon,

observed from a bollard, a place to stay being

sought and found at one esplanade agency

after another

We can have

the Mihanovic apartment,

but I have a bad head by now

suave Maria lets us in, I

lie down, the others go out for a meal

Diocletian's city leaves me cold, though that could be the headache

a certain kind of migraine - the 'white' variety –

that chills the extremities

douses enthusiasm, certainly

maybe tomorrow

(ah, Chrissie, always ready to drop a line)

Yuri and Bianca remain in Hvar,

already I miss those crazy chimneys

I look out across the courtyard, waiting for the diners-out with takeaway

I see this block houses a Gynaecologist and a Friseur
would a *friseur* do massage or hair?

The wanderers return
with food and the story of the surly waiter

who denies the existence of all the drinks on the menu
No Negroni - '*whatever that is!*' - and brings
cappuccino instead of Campari

in this house of a dozen beds
we each choose one to lie in

the pillows of sparkling Dalmatia beneath our heads
the citizens still bent beneath the yoke of Empire

descendants of Roman legionaries serving Cokes
adding a spit of poison where they can

Cath Kenneally

Practising

She is in her bedroom practising piano. On the wall above the piano is the picture that gets put up every year – the manger scene with Mary in a cloak of the most beautiful blue. The blue is still beautiful even though the picture has faded. In her head she is in the telephone box. It is its own claustrophobic universe. Fogged-up glass, vicious little paint flakes, a hollow metal smell mixed with piss and dead cigarettes. The clammy black receiver, mouthpiece peppered with tiny holes. She imagines her voice going into the holes, splitting into bright streamers of sound in the darkness behind them, her message exactly as she wishes it to be for a shining moment, then sucked thin into the curly cord and pulled blindly through the telegraph wires by the world's most powerful magnet that is the listener, into whose ear she tumbles muddy and squashed, the colour of plasticine all mixed together. She hits the cracked B flat above middle C. Then she is back in the box, fingers tangled in the empty cord, the pips in her ear like a lack of stars.

Janet Lees

Rogue wave

There is no clock

on this exposed stone wall

but I feel its silent

movement in me.

The pure white trick

of the hitch

in the chest, like missing

a train you didn't know you'd booked: an abrupt itch for something

someone you had no thought of wanting

until this moment.

I picture home. A postcard, bleached;

the image blurred, its edges curled.

I need to move. I need to get up now,

step away with my hands in the air

from the bird without feathers

pecking at my breastbone,

get back to the cold house

by the sea; the clock of

the tide that scours me.

Janet Lees

Part Two: The Lady Hideko

Once, when still a child, I climbed a tree in the garden in order to see the ground from a different height. That part of the garden where the sky looks black, but is not. It was spring, there had been blossoms, I had been a child. Not long in the great house. And the hiss of the wind. And the clouds. The bend of the sky where it looked. Seeing, from that height, the gentlemen file past on their way to the library, with its acres of books. From there the perimeter of the grounds, its acres and acres, was obscured by a perpetual mist. I was an orphan, but resembled in some way, in some angles, from certain eyes, a lost aunt—once hanged, becoming a length of rope inside a hat box.

As a child I studied history, remembering that

I remember the greenness of the trees, and also the lamps.
Flickering on and off in the midst of storms.

When the girl arrives, she calls herself Tamako. She calls herself a great many things, though not aloud. When the gentlemen arrive, they file quietly past. The fiction of their names. I would watch from the stage while reading and painting, while learning my history. I would study my length of rope. A past does not become and goes. My father said this to me once, but it was long ago. It was in another country.

When a child sees itself at the end of a long drive; when the clocks are stopped at twenty to nine; when in the library the books are arranged precisely—by period, by weight, by significance. There are blackouts in the night; they come without warning.

Bella Li

Poem for Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan ending in a beginning

Yours is the music of quiet 4am, of solitary afternoons that seem unending. Yours the music of desire, the exhale of the Urdu word for 'need', like the sound of a lung first learning breath. Yours the shape of my father's mouth turning into song. Yours the voice of sandpaper and husk, like the call for God coming out of a garbage truck throat. Yours the voice of surrender, surrender, surrender to the longing of the living, to all bottomless need to be filled, to find another, to be whole. Yours the poet's knowledge of how to moan a word, yours the low humming of all the world's restless stirring. Yours the yearning, the always and forever yearning, yours the trembling lips of a muted string waiting to burst into passion. Yours the hunger of a fakir who has forsaken begging to shout from the rooftops. Yours the sweet wine of grief, the unbridled intoxication which you deliver like a lover's return. Yours the lust. Yours the notes that land like a hand tapping on the tight drumskin of my heart, then the strum of the harmonica which struggles to keep up with your voice soaring into the sky. Yours the utterance of devotion, yours the prophet's chant, yours the treacherous winding road harmony, yours the fevered ecstasy. Yours a wild animal wail from before words, the sound of the soul freed of the ribcage, from some ancient deep forgotten history, yours every exuberant end yours every troubled beginning.

Pooja Nansi

Tell me the Story

There's so many Bombays I do not know will not know would die to know but could never know even if I time travelled, whiskey marveled, mused unsettled, left untitled, even if I puzzled over, battled with every punctuation pause in every family story and said no no wait no hold on what happened before that and then where did they walk to how fast did they walk and what year was this how high in the sky was the sun beating down or did moonson soak their conversation and who heard them and how did you find out are there any photos any telegrams and could we call Raman Masi and find out if she remembers her name alright fine what colour was her dress and what did she have for breakfast and I know they fell in love that day but was it on a stomach filled with toast and eggs and no I do not know the Cathedral of the Holy Name oh was it the church we passed in Colaba but did it look the same when they stood in front of it in what year did you say it was in that record store in Kala Ghoda where we went childhoods ago to buy cassette tapes playing those Mohd Rafi songs those sad longing songs so much sad longing I thought it would flood the streets that you walked when you were eighteen and you are now sixty three and the record store is closed but we can still go to the Cathedral of the Holy Name I don't know the bends on the streets and where is this Bombay of my father's young man dreams how many right turns before I get there , no no wait no hold on what happened next?

Pooja Nansi

O My America!

An overweight, bearded middle-aged
black man wearing a baseball cap,
t-shirt and cargo shorts spreads
his stocky legs wide, leans forward
over the trunk of his Ford sedan
parked in the driveway of his suburban
middle-class four-bedroom brick home,
hands behind his head, fingers locked,
as an overweight, bearded middle-aged
white cop wearing a handgun and Taser
moves his open hands over the suspect's
body, maintains a spoken commentary:
license my roving hands and let them go
before, behind, between, above, below.
O my America, my newfoundland!*

Nathanael O'Reilly

* Note: The last three lines of the poem are adapted from John Donne's "Elegy XX: To His Mistress Going to Bed."

Ellas, Madres y Esposas de los Detenidos Desaparecidos

—Dedicado a nuestra amiga Hilda Zaldivar, madre
de Gerardo Silva detenido desaparecido 1976

Allí están
bailando
pañuelos al viento
como una cueca de la soledad clamando justicia.
En sus pechos
espina clavada
foto de los que no están
bailan el ritmo del terror
danzan con los pañuelos de la tristeza
blanco como la ausencia
flameando como el nombre amado
dando la vuelta de la cueca como dos sombras
zapateando el pavimento del tirano
cantan para que se haga justicia
cantan por la libertad
bailan por el dolor
cueca sola por la vida de los caídos
cueca sola ritmo de cuerpos que bailan el dolor
¿Dónde Están?

Juan Garrido Salgado

Those women; mothers and wives of the Disappeared, Chile 1973

Why are these women here dancing on their own?
Why is there this sadness in their eyes?
Why are the soldiers here
Their faces fixed like stone?
—They Dance Alone (Cueca Sola) by Peter Sting

There they are
dancing
handkerchiefs in the wind
a dance of solitude calling for justice.
On their breasts
a thorn
a photo
who are they?

Dance the rhythm of terror
dance with handkerchiefs of sadness
white as their absence
waving as the beloved name
turns the dance into two shadows
drumming the pavement of the tyrant
singing for justice
singing for freedom
dancing through pain
cueca sola for the life of the fallen
cueca sola with the rhythm of the pain of bodies dancing
where are they?

Juan Garrido Salgado

T.E.O.T.W.A.W.K.I
or The End Of The World As We Know It

america

I want to bite you in the ass
 the way all your abbreviations
 are assumed
 & all your acronyms are true
 I chase the word "HUGE"
 like a balloon around
 the early afternoon
 having gone a whole morning
 without checking the news
 I wear the glasses
because my eyes get exhausted
 in these frames
 schadenfreude
 is not an endurance test
 your symptoms
 & anyway ha ha

america

acting as your analyst
 if I'm being honest
 eventually I stop taking notes
 it's like a game of hide & seek
 you tire of & fall asleep

america

you big bear
 you sexy fuck
 I want to whisper things in your ear
 like a podcast you set a sleep timer to
 I put a sticker on your shoulder
 that says Wake Me Up For Food

Dominic Symes. 'T.E.O.T.W.A.W.K.I.'
Transnational Literature Vol.11 no.1, November 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

america
I sing the body eclectic

america
I sing the body acclimatising
these new pants are troublingly comfortable
you essay

america
I'm listening
I'm listening
I've got these
noise cancelling headphones

america
my america
my newfoundland
the hope that when this all blows over
we'll have something good to eat
like popcorn
G.O.O.D while you can
get it?

america
bless the machinery of war
keep it quiet
I like this film
I hope it wins the oscar
it has no plot
no heroes
but you feel
everything

Dominic Symes