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**On the cover *The Scents of Childhood* by fitured artist Ljubomir Popadić**

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## **MANON GODET**

### **1. I only believe in you.**

You the words.

You the images, the stars.

You are the threads we weave with our fingers so that the blood flows from vein to vein.

Opening the canvas.

Make the skin speak.

Make my skin speak.

### **2. They must be in the sea. Maybe in the water.**

No, I think they're down in the dunes.

They must have run fast.

My theatre is empty.

I'll be able to run my race too.

I slip into the empty bath.

Before it was full of milk. Love milk. Of my love, her love.

I can hear her heart in my ear. I feel her skin on my cheek.

The skin of you, of my roof.

She wraps me in warm water.

I know she's waiting for me. She was patient, my Aline, she was patient.

Two dreams needed me here.

*I'm coming, don't go, my Aimée. I'm on my way.*

I'm leaving them poems. Songs and new hills to climb. To descend.

I can almost see you under my eyelids.

You are beautiful, my Aimée. Naked. Like an angel.

You used to come to us at night. I know you did.

An invisible bridge connected my bed to you. Connecting us.

I come to see you with a new star.

3. Aurore watched the blood clots fall.

Aurore couldn't feel anything.

The electric wire had hurt on the way home.  
She wanted to take it out again straight away.

Aurore's heart throbbed with every bit of black blood that slipped out of her flesh.

She scraped. She'll never laugh again.

When she thinks she's done, she stands up slowly. Collects the blood clots in a cloth.

*Trash can.*

She slips it into her pocket.

*My child, you would have been called Rose.  
You would have been a girl, I know it. I can feel it.*

*You would have had red hair.*

4. I keep writing because I'm afraid to leave my room.  
The yellow teeth are in the corridor.

But if I go out I'll come back and then you'll be there,  
in my sheets.

I'll see your eyes looking into mine. It won't be dark anymore.

You'll open your arms for me. I'll feel your skin beat.

My veins will flood. I'll be happy.  
I'll be calm.

You'll breathe into my lips.

5. My sweet love,  
where do you continue to be?

I've made you a suit.  
If you haven't changed it will fit you like a glove.

You'll look like a lamppost at the bottom of the ocean.  
Like the pearl at the bottom of my shell.

Every hour I'm away from you my blood starts to boil.  
Hurry up and come.

I'm not afraid, you know. Our farewells to the world are sewn up.



*Ana Lj. Popadić*

## **RADOSLAV MANDIĆ**

### **INDIFERENCE**

my head is empty  
I have left my thoughts somewhere behind  
on the island of happy losers  
who don't know what they have lost  
that's why they are happy  
because they feel no pain  
peace has been promised to them  
I still wander  
waves move infinity  
and the sun pours the rays on me in vain  
I have forgotten to smile  
to long  
to love...

### **CAPITALISM**

towns are matchboxes  
from where everyday ants get out  
that can be replaced with the same ones  
once their rate of productivity comes to a halt  
when their hands get tired  
their eyes  
hearts  
voices  
the matchbox turns into the cage  
that's hard to get out of  
vacuuming the ant into itself  
permeating with monotony  
radiating depression  
longing for the end  
the cage waits for another worker...

*Translated by Danijela Trajković*



Photo credit: **Beba Trajković**



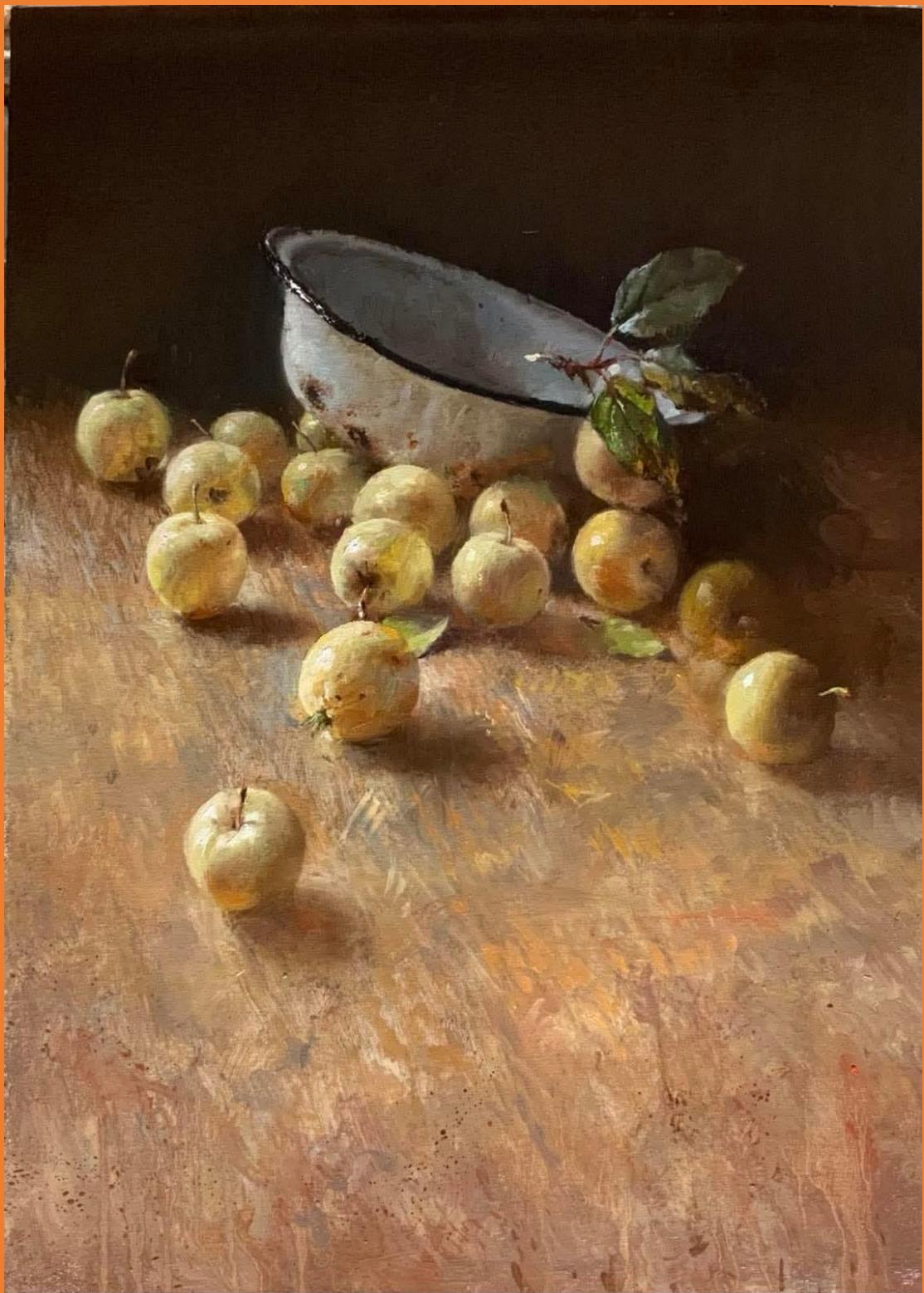
***Kotor - Roofs***

**RHYS HUGHES**

**Armchair Poem**

I am tired and so are my arms.  
I long to sit down  
before my legs come to harm.  
But there's only  
one chair in my room  
and it's an armchair. So unfair!  
My arms are happy, they can relax.  
But the rest of my body  
is forced to stand.  
I don't understand the popularity  
of armchairs. I glare  
in fury at my upper limbs.

If I was in charge  
I would ban armchairs  
and compel furniture factories  
to change their ways  
and make body chairs instead—



**Apples**

seats for the torso,  
pelvis, legs, feet and head.

## **Golden Ratio**

The Golden Ratio,  
beholden to none,  
holds us all, once  
appalled, enthralled.  
Don't you agree,  
Horatio?

And geometry's call  
emboldens us  
without much fuss.

We answer it  
when we must, on a train  
or on the bus,  
in this or any other poem.

## **Do Not Go Gentle**

Do not go gentle,  
abominable snowman,  
because the snow  
won't know  
that you are a hairy,  
heavy, feisty  
cryptozoological beastie  
if you tread too  
softly.

And here's another thing:  
you remind me  
of Dylan Thomas, honest.  
Even though  
you are five metres high  
and covered  
in white fur and don't write  
poetry very often.  
Maybe it's because you like  
drinking beer?  
Do not go gentle



***White Jug***

on those mountain slopes.  
Inspire fear,  
annihilate hopes.  
You have carte blanche  
to chew explorers' ropes

and stamp down  
gradients like an avalanche.

### **Unrequited Self Love**

Unrequited self love  
is the most tragic kind.  
You adore your own mind  
but your mind  
shows you the door.  
It's a no-brainer!

Blow a kiss in the mirror  
and see your  
reflection deflect it  
with a gesture.  
How demoralising!

Unrequited self love  
requires a wonky ego.  
Overbalanced on one side  
and flapping like  
a broken wing: a thing  
to inspire derision.

Hug yourself with passion  
in an octopus-like  
fashion but forsake every  
vision of future bliss.  
Your mind will  
never be missus, only miss.

### **In a Ragged Form**

I wander in a ragged cloud-like form  
because I am a spirit torn  
by winds that blow this way and that  
and though I lost my hat  
many moons ago  
I still regard my head-top as enclosed  
by the chill of the winds

that blow around  
the ridges of those hills that constantly  
appear to relish  
surrounding me.

But do they really?  
Probably not. A lot of nonsense  
is talked about hills  
by ghosts, just to thrill whoever  
might be listening.

**HAMID OQABI**

### **The Mother Tree**

The days sped by, fleeting past him like the blink of an eye. His morning rituals never changed. He hurried to the window, casting glances directly at the ancient trees, especially the Mother Tree. Towering and wide-branched, it had become a homeland for pigeons, birds, and sparrows. Its branches stretched out like long arms; he imagined them waving to those who had voluntarily imprisoned themselves in their homes due to depression, unemployment, or vanishing hope in a land some still believed was paradise, an island of dreams. All they had left were these windows, opened briefly during smoke breaks or to snatch a few breaths of air. Fear gripped him whenever he heard the sound of municipal workers pruning the branches of the trees and the Mother Tree.

He opened part of his window, muttering to himself as if speaking collectively: “France is no longer that enchanting land where dreams come true and creativity flourishes.” He repeated it silently and laughed! Like an actor playing his role on stage.

Life in Europe, from east to west, had become exceedingly complex. Yet, countless death boats still sailed the oceans and seas toward its shores, chasing a dream. Some imagined that with the first breeze on the European coast, their dreams would be shielded from fear and humiliation, their human dignity restored—especially those fleeing the fire and horror of war, injustice, discrimination, and poverty. They soon collided with a wretched reality that could stretch for years, eventually relegating them to a marginalized fringe that expanded day by day.

Anxiety swelled with the rise and power of extremist, racist right-wing parties, their ascent to power in some European countries, and the growing threat of them ruling France. Marine Le Pen reached the second round of the French presidential race, and fear nearly killed millions of immigrants. Her defeat didn’t mean the danger had vanished; many of her ideas were already being implemented, and worse was yet to come. As for him, he endured a sleepless night on April 24, 2022.

His mind could scarcely believe what was happening here—the logic and declarations of Éric Zemmour and others, flooding media platforms as if Zemmour

were threatening to expel him from France, the dreamland of his childhood where he longed to study art.

He remembered the first time he heard of France. He was ten, a fourth -grade student. During one class, the school principal —a splendid figure who wrote anthems and sang them with students —entered. Principal Ali Al-Azraq, handsome and smiling, exuded the scent of oud perfume. He spoke of Paris, a city of jinn and angels. His words were simple yet expressive, sparking endless questions. That day, Mr. Ali answered the students ' questions for over an hour. He recalled the bell ringing at the end of the fifth and final period, yet everyone lingered, asking and listening about the Louvre, the Seine, and the Latin Quarter, where Arab poets and writers once lived and wrote.

In middle school, his awareness broadened; he learned more about France. Then in high school, he studied the Romantic poetry wave, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* , and a little about the painter Picasso.

His mind suddenly flashed an image of his Egyptian history teacher, who stirred debates with brilliantly engaging methods, making history the most important subject for all students. This teacher held the view that French colonialism was less violent, barbaric, and brutal than British colonialism. The latter focused on plundering the treasures of colonized nations, spreading insidious tactics like buying agents and inciting strife— its most heinous crime being the Balfour Declaration. Meanwhile, there was a degree of development in French colonies. As for Algeria, the French thought they owned it forever, committing unspeakable atrocities when the project of taming and colonization failed and resistance persisted.

He tried to escape these vivid, cinematic memories playing in his mind with sound and image. He looked at the Mother Tree —that's what he called her, a massive, ancient shade tree. He'd often thought of researching her name. She was neighbored by pine trees, but the Mother Tree was different. In spring, she bloomed with a sweet fragrance that soothed the soul; in winter, she retained her splendor and beauty.

That morning, before dawn, he didn't know why so many childhood images swirled in his mind.

He recalled the elementary school vice-principal, a terrifying nightmare for students. It was as if he were watching a live reel: one day, merely for being a minute late to class, the man beat him savagely with a long bamboo cane until he... then he ran away, humiliated. Thankfully, no one was in the hallway. Perhaps the man felt he'd been excessively cruel and let him run home to change his soiled clothes. He and his friends likened the vice-principal to the grim, hulking figure from the Japanese cartoon *Tom Sawyer*. Remembering this, he sent a prayer for the vice-principle's soul, smiling. The man's behavior had softened over the years, and they'd shared many good moments.

An image came to him of Mr. Muhammad Faraj Bouda —his fourth-grade science teacher, one of his favorites. Bouda, ever-smiling and kind-hearted, was a character who expressed the flaws of reality with deep, playful irony. He wished all his teachers had been like Mr. Muhammad or the kind principal Ali Al-Azraq.

In elementary school, some teachers were from Egypt and Sudan. He remembered "Abu Wael," who had a handsome, fair-skinned son named Wael —everyone competed for his friendship. Memories surfaced of Mr. Habib Al-Sudani, the good-natured Islamic education teacher who loved food. He'd eat five loaves of bread or more during the first or second period, unable to wait until break. In front of the students, on a desk at the front of the class, he'd lay out the bread and a plate of beans or fava beans and scoop from it. The sight nearly made him feel hungry.



*Photo credit: Danijela Trajković*

Simply, people were simple, acting on their intentions in his hometown of Bayt al-Faqih, in Al -Hudaydah Governorate, Tihamah region. Tihamah al-Khair (Tihamah of Goodness), its people called “Angels of Yemen ” for their simplicity and excessive kindness. He spent a quiet childhood, and memories of it often scattered into his writing and drawings.

He now stared at the Mother Tree from the window, affirming her name: *The Mother Tree*. He imagined all the surrounding trees and shrubs were her daughters and granddaughters.

He searched for a cigarette, finding a pack of red Marlboros. He'd bought several packs cheaply from a friend. He thought he'd save a little by buying smuggled cigarettes, but they were deadly and poor quality, burning his chest, throat, and larynx, offering no pleasure. He regretted buying them and only used them in emergencies — beggars can't be choosers. Many young people smoked this deadly poison just because it was cheap, or perhaps mixed with hashish it tasted better. But he rarely smoked hashish despite its rampant spread. He lit his first morning cigarette, cursing counterfeitors, smugglers, and merchants of death tools.

He returned to the Mother Tree, speaking to her from within. Words formed as his lips smiled at her: “I too am from a land with handsome, beautiful, lofty trees like you. Palms, figs, lemons, almonds. Every courtyard had a tree and basil plants. Neighbors exchanged fruits just as they exchanged stories, congratulations, and condolences.”

At the resting place of the revered saint Sheikh Ahmad bin Musa bin Ajeel, in a village called Al-Turba, there once stood a massive, towering tree with lush branches and shade. People visited it, hanging colored threads or small cloth pieces on its branches. Before hanging them, they whispered modest wishes to the tree, believing it would hear and tell God of these simple people's needs.

They wished for a little more sustenance and money, the healing of their sick when the clinic doctor's medicines and injections failed, the return of an absent loved one, or rain during the scorching summer days.

The folk imagination of these people was splendid; some rituals differed little from those of Hinduism, Buddhism, or Zoroastrianism. This likely resulted from proximity to India, as many Indians migrated to Yemen's coastal regions, especially Al-Hudaydah, Bayt al -Faqih, and Aden.

He told the Mother Tree about Bahluna Well, near Ajeel's shrine, where people poured vows of ghee, honey, and sweets, asking it to beseech God to spare them evil, calamity, and wrath.

The demands were simple. They'd cast their vows into the well, bidding farewell: “We entrust you and promise, O Bahluna. If the wish is granted, we'll return with more vows on our next visit.”

Around the shrine and the well, the poor and needy gathered, receiving charity and blessings. Everyone returned with purified souls.

This state of inner peace, as Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman called it, was a reaction to life's harshness—especially during seasons of disaster, hunger, and drought. It was a happiness unattainable to those relying solely on logic, intellect, science, and reason, for these elements might raise endless questions, leading to confusion, doubt, and misery.

He remembered how happy his society was despite its simple, ordinary life. Then he recalled the late eighties, when the tide of rigid Wahhabi Salafism, the Muslim Brotherhood, Tablighi Jamaat, and others began to belittle the traditions,



*Roman bridge in Ivanjica by Serbia.com*

customs, and faith of the elderly and simple folk with their imaginative beliefs. When extremist religious currents gained strength, they cut down and burned the Mother Tree in Al-Turba, filled in Bahluna Well, and nearly demolished the sacred shrine of the saint Sheikh Ahmad bin Musa Ajeel. Had it not been for the famous merchant Dirham and his sons, who protected and defended the shrine —whether out of fear or appeasement—it would have been lost. The shrine was the sole survivor, but dozens of shrines and mausoleums were destroyed.

The hardline Salafi groups received strong financial support from abroad and used every means —bribing some, buying loyalty, and terrifying violence. In their logic, all tricks were justified for the sake of religion and the Sunnah. Something akin to joy, goodwill, kindness, and happiness was lost—the happiness found among people who believed in superstitions.

After years of religious strife and intolerance, Tihamah remains to this day one of the places that preserved Sufism, spirituality, and tolerance.

He recounted these events to the Mother Tree, then a wave of coughing seized him ...He coughed and coughed, feeling the searing pain of his cheap cigarette. Then he moved to prepare his cup of sunrise coffee.

*Translated by Dr. Hatem Mohammed Al-Shamea*

## **The Journey of Translating Hamid Oqabi's 'The Mother Tree'<sup>1</sup>**

To embark on the journey of translating Hamid Oqabi's 'The Mother Tree' has been an experience akin to traversing the very landscapes and emotional terrains so vividly painted within its pages. This is not merely a story; it is a profound echo of the human spirit, a lyrical testament to memory, displacement, and the enduring search for belonging in a world constantly shifting beneath our feet.

From the moment I first encountered Oqabi's prose, I was struck by its delicate balance of the tangible and the ethereal. The novella's protagonist, observing the ancient Mother Tree from his window in a foreign land, becomes a conduit for a rich tapestry of recollections – of a Yemeni homeland, its vibrant customs, its simple joys, and its profound sorrows. The Mother Tree itself transcends its botanical form, becoming a living repository of history, a silent witness to both personal and collective narratives. It is a symbol of resilience, a steadfast anchor in a sea of change, and a poignant reminder of the roots that nourish the soul, no matter how far one strays.

My task, as translator, was to bridge the linguistic and cultural chasm between the original Arabic and the English reader, ensuring that the novella's inherent beauty, its subtle nuances, and its powerful emotional resonance remained intact. This involved more than a mere word -f or- word conversion; it demanded an immersion into the author's intent, a deep understanding of the cultural contexts, and a careful crafting of language to evoke the same sense of wonder, melancholy, and hope that permeates the original text. The rhetorical richness, the evocative imagery, and the philosophical undertones of Oqabi's writing presented a delightful challenge, one that I embraced with dedication and respect for the source material.

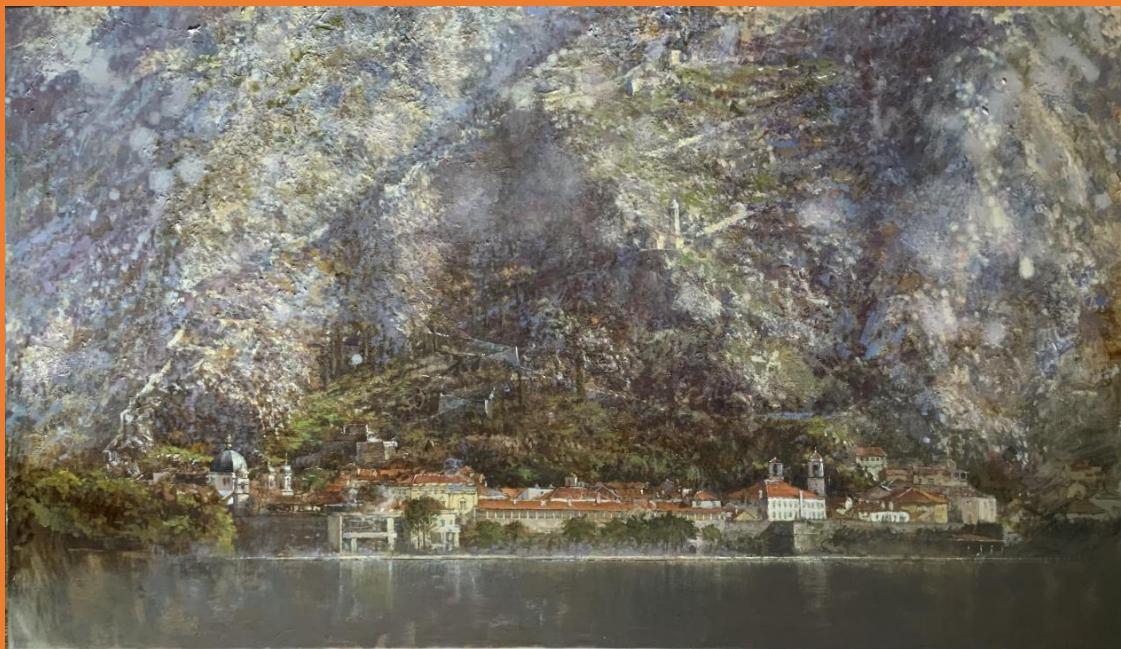
'The Mother Tree' speaks to the universal experience of migration and the complex interplay between past and present. It delves into the pain of loss, the struggle for identity in a new environment, and the persistent pull of heritage. Yet, it is also a narrative imbued with magical realism, where the boundaries between reality and imagination blur, allowing for a deeper exploration of the human psyche and the spiritual connections that bind us to our origins. The subtle inclusion of elements like the shared coffee cup, the ancient well, and the whispered wishes to the tree, all serve to ground the narrative in a rich cultural specificity while simultaneously elevating it to a realm of universal human experience.

It is my sincere hope that this translation allows English-speaking readers to fully appreciate the profound artistry of Hamid Oqabi. May 'The Mother Tree' resonate with your own memories, stir your own reflections on belonging, and remind you of the enduring strength found in the roots that connect us all, across lands and generations.

This novella is a gentle whisper, a powerful lament, and ultimately, a hopeful embrace of the intricate dance between where we come from and where we are destined to be.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Mother Tree* by Hamid Oqabi, translated by Dr. Hatem Mohammed Al-Shamea  
ALT Magazine & Press-London, 2025



***Kotor With San Giovanni***

**HADAA SENDOO**

## World, Broken Heart

When I am old & dim-sighted  
My bones will become fragile like feelings  
And my steps, like drifting fog...  
Torturing love will be far from me –

The wind is dancing with me, in the room  
Dreams disturb my heart without end  
The Milky Way is so peaceful  
Sweet smell of grass wafts towards me from the temple –

When I am old & dim sighted  
One hand holding the magnifying glass  
The other turning pages of a book by Hesse  
I'll be trying to remember my past

I stab my pen into the dark...  
Left in the world with a broken heart  
I put my head under the quilt  
No one will come to open the door –

## A Vacant Lot

Over there  
A flat vacant lot  
Crowded with pebbles and wild grass  
That wasted land!

A bleak scene  
It's a forbidden zone  
A garden, or a school  
Is not allowed

Hushed as the Dead Sea  
No one can cross it  
On ice-cold wire netting  
Night birds hold their breath

Over there, no trees!  
Before my father died  
Only a cold current, the railroad –  
Fragments of night



*Photo credit: iStockphoto*

## Perhaps I Will Be Delighted to Die another Death

Wind gusts to the north  
Dull withered trees...  
Not like streams –  
Clouds, wooden bridges

Night, grassland  
In cheese-colored moonlight  
More tranquil, though

The land  
Bearing the howling diggers  
Like eyes that hold tears  
Keeping them from welling up

From my life  
I don't expect much  
Except to see wild horses chasing the wind  
Perhaps I will be delighted to die another death

### **BHAWANI SHANKAR NIAL**

#### **WORDS ARE DESTINED TO DIE**

Sometimes it happens  
like this  
that the words that  
crops-up in the garden  
of my daughter ladels out  
greenery in literature,  
or  
brings a bitter cold  
in the environment  
or  
brings a change against  
the undemocratic decision  
of the Government  
or  
brings famine and  
destroys all the possessions  
of centuries.  
It's quite natural that  
words may bring changes  
in seasons  
but  
sometimes the words too  
commit suicide and die  
when they do not  
get oxygen like human beings  
when their own people  
do not have any bonding  
more or less.



*Aronia*

**IT'S A LIE TODAY**

At times I leap  
over the hills of light  
and search darkness,

but in my journey to darkness  
when I look back  
I find the light disappear  
and even I do not find  
the darkness in my fist.

Sometimes  
the light becomes dark  
and dark turns to light  
and the things which were  
true tomorrow  
seems to be false today.

I feel proud  
to create a world of my own  
but the earned darkness is  
not under my control today  
though the pride became  
my habit in the annals of time,  
the light too is  
not under my control.

The eternal truth  
is that there's always  
a distance between  
the truth and the lie.

*Translated by Dr. Tapan Kumar Rath*

## **TOM PHILLIPS**

### **Freight train**

How to describe the precise sound,  
the siren-note of a train?  
Hollow? Lonely? Sad?  
It depends on circumstance.  
In the evening it gains  
a sweet melancholy.  
But before dawn,  
it sounds more headlong,  
even optimistic –  
where is this emissary going  
while the sun is rising?  
At night it merges with dreams –  
sometimes a warning,  
sometimes a song of forgotten love.

At least I always know,  
when I hear it,  
that the world exists  
still, while the headlines  
scream of destruction  
and the devices in my hands  
seem to sink beneath waves  
of news and opinion.

At least we can always disappear  
into an alien future  
on some unnamed train  
that leaves the traces  
of its passing  
in the echo of its siren.



*Photo credit: iStockphoto*

### **There is no such place**

To see it only in the summer's light,  
to hear it only as swifts high in the sky,  
to imagine it as a street map for tourists,  
to accept it without accepting  
all its changes –  
to try to turn it to stone  
is an error which the innocent make,  
those who seek to assume  
that its face is its heart.

There is no such place.

The petrol station opposite us  
is continually battling  
with its own shadow,  
with its promises  
like an old boxer  
and everyone in the queue in Lidl  
will grow old until they too become shadows.

It's not easy to inhabit the city.

Keep talking!  
Let's forget for the moment  
the vastness of space,  
the icy winter clouds,  
the broken paving stones,  
the incomprehensible cries,  
the sad train whistles at night,  
the hands of the old man  
rummaging through the rubbish  
who disagrees with Oscar Wilde.

**NEBOJŠA LAPČEVIĆ**

## **THE STORM BRINGER<sup>2</sup>**

He was cold and rather hard, he was a mast. He was disguised as Poseidon, the bringer of storms and earthquakes. While the water waves rage, waves roar through those shaggy chests. On the left side of his thighs, I dug my fingers with sharp overgrown nails firmly into his muscular tissue as into bare clay. I was lying in bed like a nymph, gazing at the pathless heights of the firmament, and waited as long as I had to wait. A mast once raised does not stop being a mast until it is torn down by the one who raised it. I raised it. Stretch out, mast, with your masthead, to the four winds that hold like a wall four sides of the world .

I can hear, listening carefully, the creaking of the front door. Why wasn't it locked? Now already scared, I tried to wake up my husband, the one who was shaking and wildly steering me. I got up a little, and slowly approached the window. Looking at the path, I noticed wet traces of bare feet that led to the end of the yard. But there was no one in sight. I tried again to wake up my husband, he was snoring terribly, but to no avail... I ran to the other window and put my hand on the glass, I watched and listened for a while longer. I checked the key and additionally attached the latch, the door was locked. And the creaking of the door stopped. I tried to get back into bed, turning from my back to my side. My husband's sweaty and boiling body radiated from his side of the bed. His mouth gaped with a long tongue like the open zipper on his "harashovka" pants that he simply adored. Since his military service on Brioni, as he said **revelrously**: "those pants, or cotton brief underwear, boxer briefs now, the heart of my body fell for them." The moonlight illuminated everything unevenly, his thunderous hair, his wild limbs, including his limp, wounded leg. He never wanted to admit whether he shot himself with

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<sup>2</sup> From the book 'The Manuscript of Terracotta' Književna opština Vršac, 2020.



***Morning***

the rifle or whether a friend did it, inadvertently or on purpose. That has been never discussed.

I stopped pushing and shaking him, my husband was simply in high heaven. The door creaked again, first in even, quiet intervals and then in unbearably loud and

chaotic intervals. I got up and put on a silk jacquard appliquéd dressing gown, but when I saw myself in the mirror I realized that it was unnecessary, I threw it resolutely on the floor, I was suddenly encouraged by my radiant, lustful appearance, I'd read somewhere that natural breasts, hair under the armpits and on legs, completely naturist, were now in fashion... Well, I was still satisfied with my "vintage" waxed version of my body, transparently pinkish in color...

Then, the door unlocked itself and opened wide. In the distance I saw an unknown man, we are going to call him the Unpredictable, who had just left his stable, saddled first a strong black stallion and then a white filly with transparent pink rump. I ran my hands over my smooth breasts, and let my hair down to the wind that was lifting everything. Before I mounted, I wanted to ask him, "Where are we riding?" The Unpredictable said nothing, just ran his hand over his forehead, adjusted his black and red cap better, and looked towards the gust of wind that was lifting everything. But he could have said, "No one knows it... A dream is a vague wasteland... Far, far to the top..." Climbing towards the top, I felt that the distance was my goal.

The leeches of time are crawling around us... I brought a few of these leeches in a primadora water soup in a jar of gherkins as a souvenir on the Unpredictable.

The black stallion that smelled of sea salt jumped on the white filly, wetting the nape of its neck and mane with saliva in the streams. Previously, they had grunted and lapped their tongues over the swollen "fleshy" tools of passion. They snorted and neighed standing on the back legs: We are free horses! The earth echoes! We are free! It bursts under the onslaught of chthonic forces. Filling all the hollows of the dry earth, the streams flooded all the gardens that celebrated love. The black horse with the white mark turned completely white... Did it reach perfection with its whiteness? The clatter of heavy hooves still echoes...

Like a bountiful garden, I felt my bed, I felt the wet blankets, the bedclothes that was used to shameful work. The creaking of the door no longer bothered me. My husband, who had a solid and sticky sleep, didn't bother me either. He just clicked and gritted his teeth as if he wanted to chew tobacco, maybe he was "high" from the aroma of the "Cohiba" Cuban quality.

I decided, let it be, tomorrow I will confess everything to him. I finally want to sleep. I turned to one side, I turned to another side, I turned to the third side. I don't even know where all those leeches on the walls and ceiling came from. My husband, disguised as Poseidon, was the one who had raised the storm. One leech slid towards his mouth. And he swallowed it involuntarily. And the leech itself somehow got stuck in his throat and struggled. And, he was cold and hard, like a mast.

I was lying in bed like a nymph, gazing at the pathless heights of the firmament, and waited as long as I had to wait.

*Translated by Danijela Trajković*

**JAMES WALTON**

## **Lost Covenant and me**

or is it, 'I'

cannot recall and that's  
part of the problem  
I had a piece of sky fall  
in my pocket you loaned me  
the Harris Tweed jacket  
overlong sleeves  
took it out at the inauguration  
there was something about  
hepatitis written in Russian  
you get the drift?  
and the ducks on the Potomac  
overfed so luxuriant  
lazing humming old tunes  
took me all the way back  
to the yard bungalow  
torn curtains in the window  
fly wire door askew  
excuse me gesundheit  
I did remember your birthday Albert  
it was just the wrong month  
and the invitation for Stockholm?  
lost in the mail again  
you should know the address by now  
it's the same as my PIN  
NED as a specimen  
let you borrow too much that time  
but relative to folded space?  
now here numb on the kerb step  
snow on my pants melting into me  
the Adirondacks overturned  
like the words held in my hands  
the ceiling paint clinging  
where I almost washed it all away  
but the drake resisted it  
chest forward head backwards  
one eye opened ready to flee  
I wish I had your confidence  
in the electricity of numbers, friend

**Tipping is not a district of Vienna  
(Menu note at Bar and Bookstore, Gumpendorfer Strasse, Wien)**

but I was  
a lean towards hardbacks  
countered by a scrappy Durer chastisement  
the cover portrait flaky  
singed table sketches on wood laminate  
balanced now

wages catch the broken economy of language  
teeter where you may



*On the Way to Europe*

a dozen volumes of Ulysses  
so many of the seated appear *flamboyant*  
why are architecture texts so large  
heavy on the subjected  
the waiter is all Dali moustache  
a studied philosophy  
of zither playing third man  
who may have followed from Prague

the current stabilises  
a moor of many editions  
treading streets designed by those who built Paris  
transferred and reprinted  
on the fixed point of minimum wage apparel  
where these histories turn me over  
older and lucky enough to proffer the warrant of percentage

**José de Jesús “Chucho” Márquez Ortiz**

**Late**

As told, with love, to Warthog and Groundhog.

The Tuesday of that week I gave Hedgehog a massage to help relax his muscles. It was a calm and happy moment for both of us. I believe he was enjoying his massage and I felt like I was indeed, for a change, doing something nice for him.

Hedgehog became sick by Friday morning. We ended up having to go to the hospital, because it was very likely he had pneumonia. I was pushing him in his wheelchair across the wide lobby of the Kansas University Medical Center and thought *I wish we didn't have to go through this anymore.* I was getting tired of Hedgehog experiencing grueling hospital stays that involved, among other things: needles, chest pounding, lack of privacy, occasionally a prick of a doctor, horrible medications, bad sleepless nights, and, worst of all, uncertainty.

Honestly, I was getting tired, and tired that your mom, you (Warthog), grandpa, and grandma—all five of us were the most involved—constantly had to get into hospitalization mode to coordinate our activities when your brother became sick. I knew these episodes were our new life with him. And, when that wish came into my mind, it was just a frustration of the moment: I just didn't want Hedgehog to suffer.

Yes, I wonder if, unbeknownst to me, Hedgehog “felt me” and decided to grant me my wish. I know it is dumb to think that, but the idea has stayed with me. I somehow have learned to live with the fact that I wished for the situation to end and that it ended with the worst outcome. I know it was not my fault, but my mind pounds guilt into me. I still do my best to control such a soul drenching feeling, but—trust me—it is hard.

As I mentioned other times, your mom and I took turns to stay with Hedgehog in the hospital. We agreed for your mom to spend that Friday night with him, since I



*Photo credit: Beba Trajković*

had been at the pediatric intensive care unit by his side most of the day after he was admitted. Your Mom arrived after her workday, and I left for home, alone.

Warthog, I remember you were with your grandparents, they were going to take you

somewhere. I was messing around with our computer in the basement when I received a call from your mom. She said, “Chucho, the doctors think Hedgehog is dying.” I froze for a minute, and then, possessed by fear, I drove as fast as I could—it was already dark, and it had started raining—back to the hospital.

When I arrived, I pressed the buzz button to have the nurses open the door to the unit. While the door slowly opened, I saw a nurse walking near Hedgehog’s room. When she saw me, the expression on her face told me that I was too late.

I went inside Hedgehog’s room. He was laying on his bed, as if he were asleep. Your Mom was sitting on the bed, her back to Hedgehog’s three-year-old body. She turned her head around and looked at me with teary eyes. She did not say a word. I went to Hedgehog and held him and said, wailed, something like, “No, Hedgehog!” I sat on a chair, holding him in my arms, and cried, becoming pain incarnate.

After a while, when I had calmed down a little, I put him back in his bed. During the “Hedgehog Years” there was a nurse, Andie, who worked at the Medical Center. She was the mother of Brad, one of Hedgehog’s classmates at Britain Development—a pre-K school for children with disabilities—who was not as severe a case as Hedgehog, and had a sister about your age, Warthog, who was very extroverted, I think her name was Anne. Sometimes, at previous hospitalizations Andie would stop to check on us. So, that night—your mom had stepped out, maybe to the bathroom—Andie came by when I was standing next to Hedgehog’s bed. She walked in in a good mood, all smiles, and said hello. Suddenly, she realized what had happened; her face crumbled, and she started to cry saying, “Oh no! Oh no!” I mumbled something. She said she was very sorry and left. Poor thing.

Cell phones already existed, but we didn’t have one. So, I went to the wall phone just outside Hedgehog’s room and called your *abuelita* and *abuelito*, my

parents, in Mexico. It was awful. Afterwards, as expected, I started to get calls from some relatives: my brother Leo, my cousin Tesa, my aunt Bella. I could tell all of them were devastated in their own way. I was numb, and just responded on autopilot. This is the reason why I don't call people right away when their relative has died, I wait a few days, sometimes weeks. People don't need to withstand phone calls like that—even if well intentioned—when a loved one has died.

Grampa and grandma arrived with you, Warthog. You had been at someone's birthday party that afternoon, just like you were at your own birthday party when Groundhog was born four years later. You walked into the unit with a floating balloon tied to your wrist by a thin ribbon. We explained to you as calmly as we could, knowing that you would understand clearly, that Hedgehog had died and that it was a sad moment. We offered for you to say goodbye to him. You were smiling, just being a six-year-old kid. You seemed glad to be there because you were with us: your mom and dad. We accompanied you into the room. You kissed Hedgehog. The next thing you did—with our help—was to tie the thin ribbon of your balloon to Hedgehog's wrist. I thought that was very sweet. You didn't look afraid. Then it was time for you to go.

Grandpa, grandma, your mom, and you left. I decided to stay with Hedgehog because I was not with him when he died. I felt like a bad father. I thought that the least thing I could do was honor him by accompanying him that night. I didn't know what the protocol was, but I had decided to stay with my little boy until there was no need to do so.

A nurse came to gently wash him. I kissed his forehead before they put him in a white plastic body bag. I lifted and placed him in a toy plastic wagon that pediatric units have for carrying *alive* children around. I pulled the wagon, accompanied by an

orderly, and took the elevator to go to the morgue located in the hospital's basement. Once we arrived at the morgue, I lifted Hedgehog's body off the wagon and placed it in one of the drawers where they keep bodies until it is time to take them to a funeral home. I didn't expect another chunk of life to be chiseled off me when the orderly closed the damn drawer. I burst into tears, because that was going to be the first night that Hedgehog was going to spend the night by himself at the hospital. The quietness of the hospital corridors at night embraced me and my sorrow on my way to the parking lot. I don't remember the drive back home.

Your Mom was in bed, and so were you, Warthog. I got under the covers, defeated. We were defeated and exhausted at—not quite—the end of such a long battle. Only sleep, the blessed unconsciousness of it, was able to provide a way for us to withstand the next few hours until dawn.

## **ALISON STONE**

### **Hunger**

They have to wait to bury my mother  
until my daughter stops nursing.  
She had slept in a padded basket

while I stood wooden between my husband and my father;  
people droned my mother's praises  
and the coffin loomed.

Now she wakes and roots, all  
hunger. A stranger takes us  
to the rabbi's study. Amid clutter

of paper and books, I lift my black shirt. Broken,  
numb, I cannot imagine my body  
will respond, but her latch draws milk down.

She sucks dreamily. New to this world,

she knows nothing but a mother  
who drips tears on her still-closing skull.

Her eyes flicker open and shut. Someone knocks,  
asks me to hurry. I rub my daughter's back.  
Her eyes stay closed now

but the fierce gums clamp.  
I wait. The knot in my throat starts to soften.  
As long as she holds on, nothing is

final. The drive to the grave  
postponed, my mother is still above ground, here  
with her new grandchild and me.

### **Persephone's First Season in Hell**

That winter I learned what the animals know.  
My hair thickened,  
blood grew cold and slow,  
and as the flowers had fallen  
from my apron, so joy and memory  
spilled from the sack of my skin.

Now that food was safe,  
I would not eat.  
The chewed heart  
of pomegranate blocked my throat.

All I had cherished went on  
above. Mother's tears watered my roof.  
Armored in loneliness  
I learned to love no one.  
The dead scurried about  
while my heart slept --  
red seed beneath its tree of bone.

I learned to quicken my husband's pleasure  
and to melt memories of his touch with tears.  
My marriage lengthened and coiled.

Above the black walls of my world, Apollo  
drifted in his ring of fire.  
With half his journey done,  
the ground above me split.  
Like a child in the womb I felt  
the tingle beneath the fingernails

that marks the end of death.



*A Scene From the Studio*

## Not Solitude

The bride felt terror, the groom loneliness.  
The pastor's smile leaked gloom, loneliness.

Days lengthen, sun stronger. She takes a dust-cloth to sorrow, a broom to loneliness.

The painted lilies stand for sex. Drooping tulips, time. The sole mushroom, loneliness.

Two sisters weave our lives' colors. The third

spins only gray. From her loom, loneliness.

The sage claims our true nature's joy -- beneath  
striving's mask, the costume of loneliness.

Dream fragments cling to her hair – soldiers, cliffs,  
being chased, a red room, loneliness.

We shunned the fat girl for her desperate laugh,  
her odd clothes, her rank perfume. Loneliness

of ghosts when once-loved hands pass through them. Do  
babies feel shame in the womb? Loneliness?

Clip-winged angels. Lost treasure. Lives buried  
alive inside the tomb of loneliness.

Stone family legacy – a love of  
books, one large diamond, heirloom loneliness

## **Arben Iliazi**

### **I SOLD IT**

I sold honor, manhood -

I don't know how much I gave, how much I received.

What shall I do now with glory?

Not even the dogs will eat it!

### **RUN**

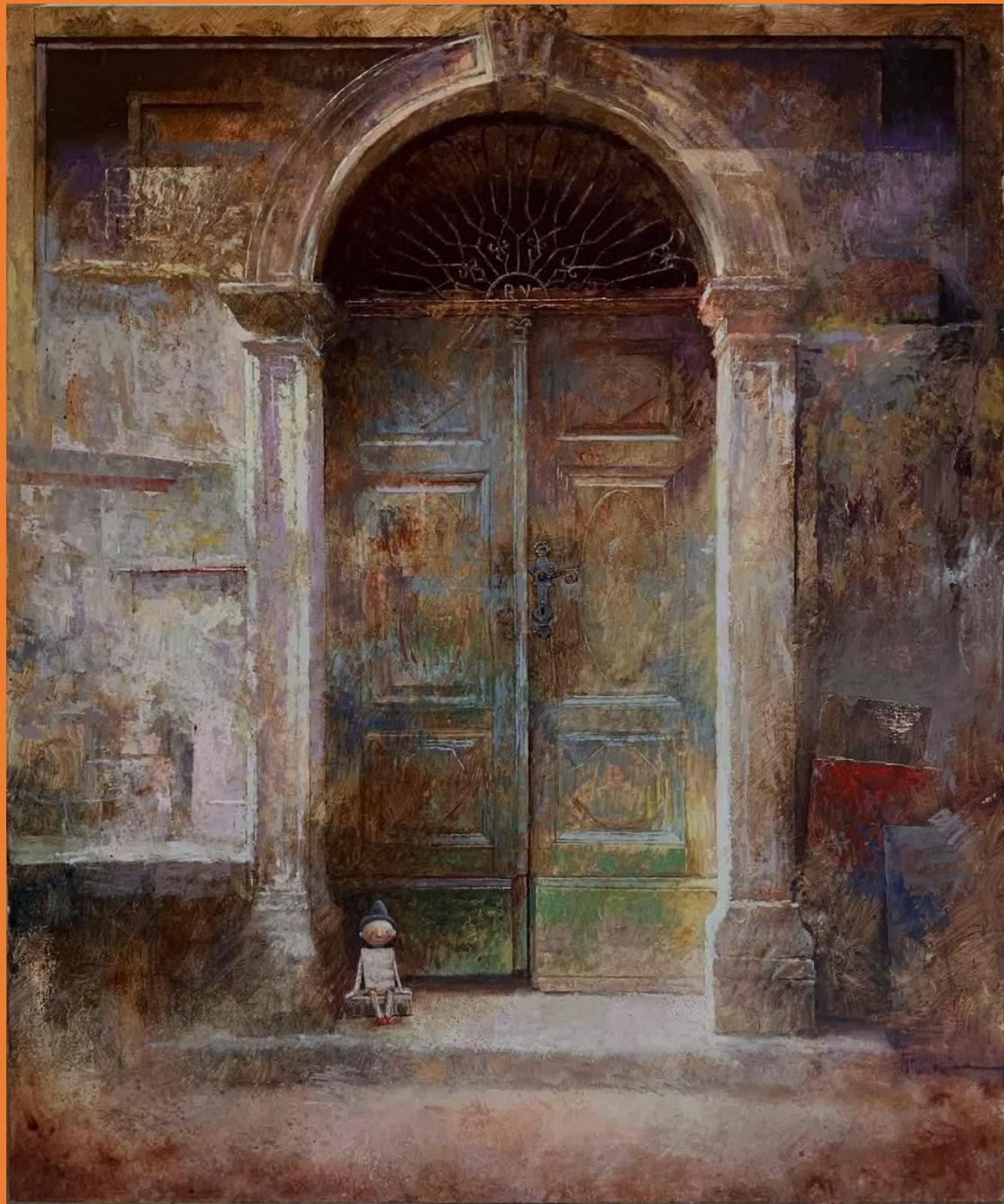
Run and run

with my statue in hands

to place it

where the world's madness ends,

where the grass flourishes  
of times  
unlived...



*Geppetto no more lives here*

## LANDSCAPE OF WAR

Morning to evening,

evening to dawn,

the skies shattered

over the lost victors.

The seas turn back

to the rivers,

the birds urinate on the rifles

as if mad...

### **THE HORSES CRY...**

The horses cry, the horses cry

All the horses cry...

The horses cry, the only ones

for whom love hurts like a wound

The horses cry, the horses cry

tears slipping onto the grass

The horses cry for the people

who have forgotten how to cry.

*Translated by Kujtim Hajdari*

### **Obren Ristić**

#### **The Time Between The Butterfly' Two Flowers**

The Time Between The Butterfly' Two Flowers

Wasn't enough for the sun inside the ear of wheat

Nor on a day of persistent rain

Were crumbs of love enough for the Shepherd's work

Nor is our self-recognition in the picture  
That divine joy grants us enough for the Creator  
There are too many wishes  
To be released at Christmas

Bread of unattainable essence and beauty  
Work of works like miracle of miracles  
The Master sustains so many lives with this bread

And reveals: The Lord is great in His works!  
From the lowest to the highest virtues  
Hymn books tell everything though they lack the ink...



*Winter Night* by Jacob Viler

### **When a Passionate Poet Chooses To Describe The Scene**

When a Passionate Poet Chooses To Describe The Scene  
The hand of a modest light-bearer can only tremble  
But the word does not lose the power to illuminate  
And immediately it explodes like gunpowder

Oh, tonight bees swarm in the sky!  
Circling around the head like a gift from the altar table  
The ancient Book is opened - the arrows fly  
With the Balkan master -

Casters, so many masters in our history

Whose skills cast and ring the bells  
From Midzor, Rtanj and Hisar<sup>3</sup>

But the art of casting sound is given only to a select few  
Few artist are such masters, they are not even the

Righteous

Nor do they use colour as a secret token of their serene  
character

*Translated by Danijela Trajković*

**Mark Andrew Heathcote**

**A dripping faucet tap**

There is this love  
like an empty house  
with a dripping faucet tap.  
There is this love  
that's like a henhouse-  
worn around you like burlap  
so-course is its mixing taps.  
Even air runs hot and cold  
worlds apart are this love.  
That never fills - hope  
a cracked hand basin  
never mind your heart and soul.



Photo credit: StockCake

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<sup>3</sup> Mountains in Serbia

## **A lake of fire**

My heart is a lake of fire  
I invite you to walk or sometimes swim  
but please don't expect to ascertain  
any firm ground beneath your feet  
don't expect to find a constant shoreline.

I can at times provide you with a raft  
and even a lifejacket, but don't,  
don't expect to discover any polar ice caps.  
My heart wasn't meant or made to freeze-  
my heart wasn't designed to be an island.

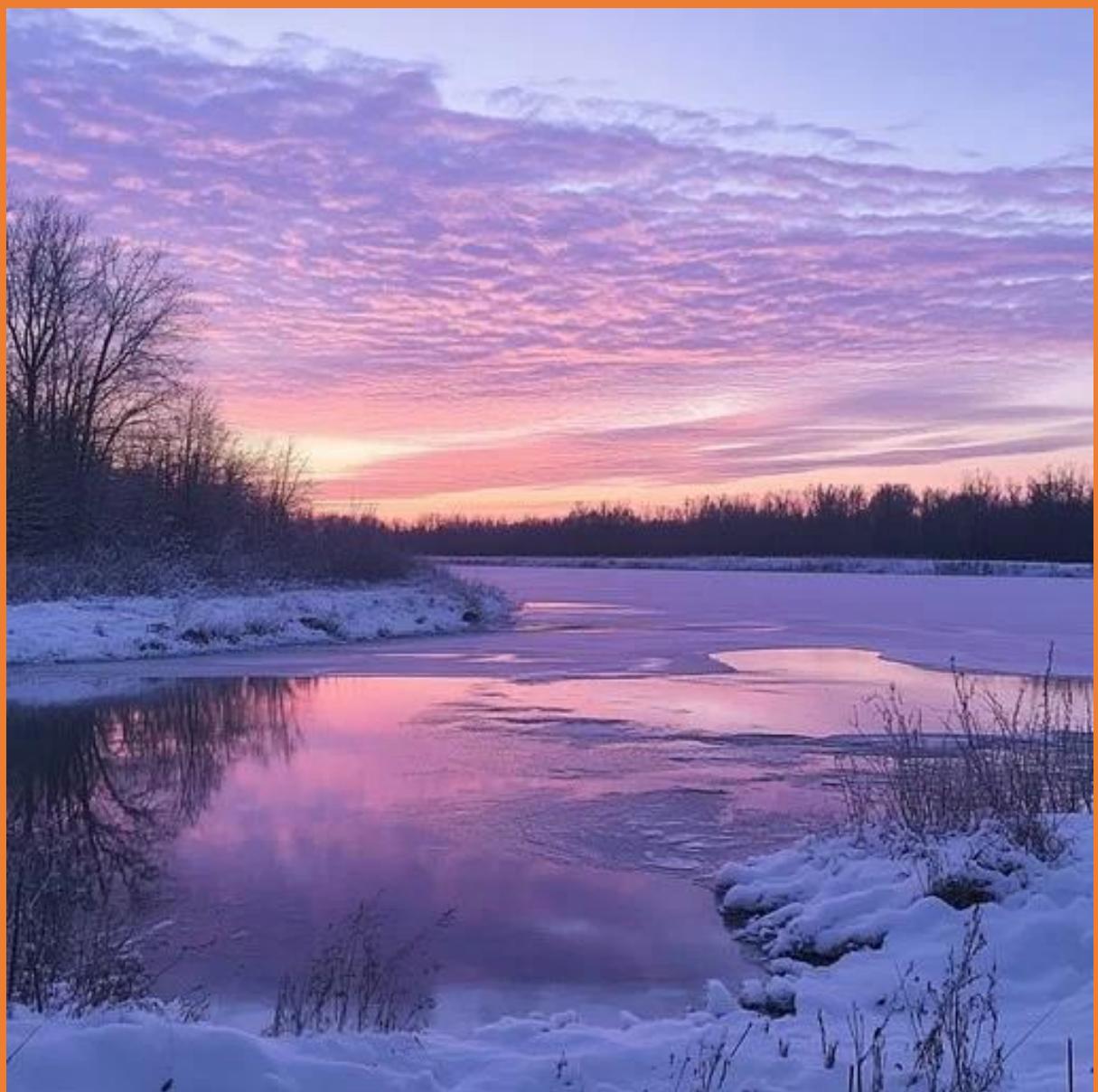


Photo credit: **StockCake**



*Secret Accessory*

**Matthew Duggan**

### Advice on Becoming Human

If you ask where I've been, like so many:  
red sun breached of violets and swallows –  
I can't answer for I've been inside the beast:

a sweetness among husks, horns of seaports:  
an underworld scene of green poppies:  
I want nothing: for when it does happen:

all that will be left is stone and wool:  
I'll see gardens made from glass:  
not a root grown downwards,

howling that fills nightfall with blood:  
are they human made? Where roots only rise upwards:  
among rosebushes, stillness of doves:

swans navigate waters of origin with white ash –  
I would examine modesty of some:  
But I am not a body: full of unspoilt water:

I've seen shame: horror: weep under the same umbrella,  
where teeth of coffee pots: glisten: like stoves  
why dampened red sheets of hospitals, shine:

where: bones slide out of the tops of windows:  
when you stand: are you full of kisses?  
Or are you full of lips pretending to survive?



*Photo credit: Depositphotos*

## The Ghost of a Tree

If winter should take a seat with death,  
everyone will be here. Exiting wounds of a world,

its leaked draft of orange leaves  
danced across lands with fierce knots.

We whistled when winds – became  
the ground beneath our feet.

Counting fast raindrops  
rough clouds,  
full of rolling dice,

we will never rest,  
between long winters.

When sun placed fingertips  
between pillars with holes  
made from broken trees,

his swimmers' lungs, exhaled,  
the hands to a midnight's moon  
onto a bridge that produced  
brand new flames.

where trees are brought back to life,  
held in nights like stars bursting with starlings.

## I Want to Tell You About Our Beautiful World

Light that floats  
between saltwater eyes:  
place me back into that room: when boats  
resembled mermaids from shoreline:  
dream of a road of half-made beds,  
when ripe tomatoes taste of Ithaca:  
feta cubes: soaked in balsamic herbs.

Sapphire coloured banks  
weaver spits on baskets  
with water from the Aegean Sea  
a taste of lemon in spittle of wind:  
hint of oregano on tongue:  
I want to tell you about our beautiful world:  
where heads of white Jasmine & Honeysuckle  
blazing like holes to plots of rising spring  
hitched onto telegraph poles:

across sphere of green saffron  
silence: became our quarter:  
blue stretched out, wide:  
on tips of bent shoulders  
dismantling bright stars:  
like emptying innards  
of glaucous wild opuntia.

**Danijela Trajković**

## Interview with Hélène Cardona

**Danijela: Hélène, you are a renowned poet and actress. When did you start writing? Was your father, as well a great poet José Manuel Cardona, your role model? Your father worked for the United Nations most of his life traveling a lot including Belgrade. Have you ever been with him to Belgrade, and if yes, what did you like the most about the capital of Serbia?**

**Hélène:** I've always felt that writing began long before I put pen to paper, a kind of awakening to language and to the hidden worlds within it. I wrote my first poem when I was ten.

Both my parents were always reading. Many of their friends were writers. Our home was always full of books. I started reading very young, and in French schools we start reading poetry early on.

My father would have us do weekly dictations at home in Spanish, which made me attentive to the grammar, music, precision, and texture of language. From early childhood, I was reading in several languages, moving naturally from one to another. While my father was certainly an influence, it was less a matter of imitation than of immersion, growing up surrounded by words, voices, and books made writing feel like a natural way of being in the world.

As for Belgrade, I haven't yet had the pleasure of visiting, though I would truly love to one day. The city's layered history, its resilience, vibrancy, and its position at the crossroads of so many cultures make it especially compelling to me. It's a place I hope to experience in the future.

**Danijela: You come from a mixed family. Your mother was Greek and your father Spanish. Would you like to share some memories from your childhood? What are your Greek/Spanish favourite dishes?**

**Hélène:** Growing up in a household where Greek and Spanish cultures met was like living in a constantly unfolding poem, rich in rhythm, color, and flavor. Some of my most cherished childhood memories are the many trips we took together across

Europe, and Christmas in particular. My mother always decorated the most beautiful Christmas tree, turning the season into something magical and deeply memorable.

From my mother's Greek heritage, I remember the vibrant aromas of oregano, olive oil, and fresh herbs filling the kitchen. She would bake kataifi, kourabiedes, and baklava, and make spanakopita; those scents still evoke a sense of home for me.

From my father's Spanish side, paella — brimming with saffron and fresh seafood — and a good gazpacho brought the Mediterranean spirit vividly alive in our home.

Food, for me, is a way to connect deeply with my roots, a sensory bridge that keeps my heritage alive.

**Danijela: Your partner is John Fitzgerald, another great contemporary poet in your life. How does it look like living together with a poet, who isn't your father?**

**Hélène:** John has his own distinct rhythms and poetic vision, and that is one of the deepest joys of our life together. We both cherish language, but we approach it from different angles, which keeps the conversation alive and surprising.

It's wonderful to be with someone who understands the internal logic of poetry—the patience it demands, the way it sometimes insists on solitude, and the vulnerability it requires. John's work, with its fierce intelligence and moral attentiveness, reminds me daily that poetry is not only an art of language but also an art of consciousness.

And yet, we are not lost in abstractions. We cook together, we talk about the world—social justice, family, dreams, the next line that won't come. Living with John is a partnership rooted in mutual respect, shared values, and a deep artistic kinship.

**Danijela: What is your opinion about contemporary poetry in the world since you are active on social media, following other poets' works, visiting Book Fairs, participating in poetry festivals...?**

**Hélène:** Contemporary poetry today is extraordinarily vibrant and diverse. The digital age has created new spaces where voices from every corner of the world can be heard, transforming how poetry circulates, lives, and breathes. Through social media, poets connect across cultures and languages in real time, breaking down old barriers and opening new, ongoing dialogues.

At the same time, poetry is reclaiming its power as a force for social justice, healing, and personal transformation. Poets are not merely observers; they are deeply engaged participants in the conversations around identity, displacement, environment, politics, and spirituality that shape our world.

Book fairs, festivals, readings, and public conversations bring this energy into physical space and remind us that poetry is also a communal act. Through my participation in international festivals and fairs, and through my editorial work, I've witnessed how poetry builds bridges—between generations, cultures, and aesthetics—and how emerging and established voices learn from one another. These gatherings create moments of genuine exchange, discovery, and celebration.

Of course, poetry still faces challenges—visibility, finding, sustaining audiences—but I remain hopeful. Poets continue to adapt, innovate, and insist on the necessity of this art form. For me, poetry remains a vital, living practice that expands how we understand ourselves and each other in an ever-changing world.

**Danijela: Apart from being a poet you act. What are the disadvantages and advantages of writing and acting? Do you feel equally happy when you succeed in both of the works you do?**

**Hélène:** Writing and acting are two very different ways of entering the human experience, and I feel fortunate to live in both worlds. At their core, they are both ways of exploring the frontiers of what we know—language, the psyche, and the mystery of being. For me, the poem is a gesture, a movement, an opening toward a deeper truth or understanding. Art brings us to the edge of the incomprehensible. Poetry and life are prayer, enchantment, and a form of transmutation.

Writing, especially poetry, is a solitary act. Its greatest advantage is freedom: the freedom to follow an image, a rhythm, or an intuition wherever it leads, to take the time the work requires, and to transmute pain and lived experience into beauty. I write as a form of self-expression, fulfillment, transcendence, and healing. The disadvantage, if there is one, is solitude—the dialogue with the world often comes much later, sometimes years after the poem is written.

Acting, on the other hand, is profoundly collaborative. You become part of a living organism made up of directors, writers, fellow actors, and crews. Its great joy is immediacy—the body, the voice, the present moment. Whether writing, acting, or even dancing, I often enter an exalted state of concentration and consciousness, something close to meditation or trance. Time seems to stop or expand, and I feel connected to something larger than myself. The challenge of acting is that you are always in service to a shared vision, shaped by time, logistics, and decisions beyond your control.

Do I feel equally happy when I succeed in both? Yes—but the happiness is different. Writing fulfills a deep inner necessity; it feels like answering a call from within. Acting brings connection and embodiment—it places me in direct dialogue with others and with audiences. Art is transformative: by expressing yourself, you put your experiences to use. You heal yourself, and you heal others because they recognize themselves in the stories you tell. That's why we go to the theater and the movies, why we respond so deeply to symbol and myth. This is how we tell stories, how we move forward, and how we remain human.

Together, writing and acting balance each other beautifully. One keeps me listening inward; the other keeps me fully present in the world. Both are essential to who I am as an artist.

**Danijela: Do you ever connect authors' biographies with their works? Do you believe one can write about something that is not familiar to him/her at all?**

**Hélène:** Yes, I'm often curious about the life behind the work. Having grown up between languages and cultures, I'm very aware of how biography, history, and place

shape a writer's ear and imagination. Knowing something about an author's life can illuminate choices of rhythm, silence, imagery, or obsession—it can deepen our understanding of where a voice comes from.

That said, I don't believe literature is simply autobiography. If it were, it would be very limited. As a poet, translator, and actor, I live precisely in that space where empathy and imagination allow you to cross borders—linguistic, emotional, and existential. Translation and acting, in particular, have taught me how to inhabit another consciousness with humility and care.

I do believe one can write about what is unfamiliar, but it comes with responsibility. It requires listening deeply, observing attentively, researching honestly, and approaching the unknown with respect rather than appropriation. In poetry especially, the tension between what we know intimately and what we reach toward is often where the work becomes most alive. That act of imagining—of stepping beyond the self while remaining grounded in truth—is what gives language its transformative power.

**Danijela: Please, recommend to our readers some new movies to watch. What do you think about new series and movies, for instance, on Netflix that change historical events, change the past, hide the truth from the youth?**

**Hélène:** I love cinema because it allows us to inhabit other lives and other times in ways that feel immediate, visceral, and deeply human. There are far too many films and series to mention, so I'll only highlight a few that have stayed with me or that I've had the joy and honor of contributing to.

Among recent series I've worked on and enjoyed are *Emily in Paris*, *NCIS: Tony & Ziva*, *The New Look*, *All the Light We Cannot See*, *Upload*, and *Patriot*. I'm also excited about a new film I've worked on, *Now You See Me: Now You Don't*, which was great fun to make.

As a viewer, I've been drawn to series such as *Professor T*, *Ludwig*, *Astrid*, *Down Cemetery Road*, *Pluribus*, *Carême*, and *The Queen's Gambit*. Among films, I loved *Nouvelle Vague*, *The Ballad of Wallis Island*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and *The Banshees of Inisherin* for its dark humor and emotional depth. I was also deeply moved by the documentary *Ocean*, which reminds us of our profound connection to—and responsibility toward—the natural world.

As for contemporary series and films, especially those on streaming platforms, that reinterpret or alter historical events, I think this is a delicate and important question. Imagination and creative freedom are essential to storytelling, but they come with responsibility. When history is reshaped purely for entertainment, there is a risk of obscuring truth—particularly for younger audiences who may be encountering these events for the first time.

I believe the most compelling historical fiction emerges from a tension between invention and respect for the past. When creators approach history with curiosity,

rigor, and ethical awareness, storytelling can illuminate rather than distort. Cinema has the power not only to entertain but also to deepen understanding, spark dialogue, and keep memory alive—and that responsibility should never be taken lightly.

**Danijela: Is there anything you would like to suggest to the people who are about to start writing or acting?**

**Hélène:** I would say: listen, deeply and patiently. Listen to yourself, to the world around you, and to the quiet impulses that arise within you. Both writing and acting require courage, vulnerability, and a willingness to sit with uncertainty. Don't be afraid of silence or not knowing; very often, that's where the work begins.

Read widely, watch films and plays attentively, and stay curious. For writers, writing regularly matters, but so does trusting the process—even when the words feel fragile, unfinished, or resistant. For actors, observe life closely, inhabit experiences fully, and let empathy guide your choices. Every encounter, every emotion, every moment of attention feeds the work.

You will encounter rejection, doubt, and moments of fatigue. That's part of the path. Failure is not the opposite of success; it's one of its teachers. Over time, it sharpens your voice, deepens your resilience, and clarifies why you do the work in the first place.

Most importantly, be persistent and gentle with yourself. Art is not a race or a competition, it's a lifelong conversation with language, the body, emotion, and imagination. Stay connected to what brings you joy and meaning. If you do, the work will continue to grow with you, and you'll find that the moment you begin, you're already part of something much larger.

**Danijela: For the end of our conversation, do tell us what are you currently working on, and thank you so much for the interview, Hélène! I wish you good health, more success and all the happiness in 2026!**

**Hélène:** Thank you so much for your kind wishes! They truly mean a lot to me. At the moment, I'm immersed in several creative projects that bring together my two great passions: writing and acting. On the literary side, I'm working on a new poetry collection that explores memory, grief, identity, and the porous boundary between dreams and reality.

I'm also revising *Primate*, a screenplay I co-wrote with my partner, John, a project that continues to evolve and surprise us as we deepen its emotional and thematic layers.

As an actor, I have a number of upcoming film and voice projects that I'm very excited about, allowing me to inhabit characters quite different from myself and to explore new dimensions of storytelling. Each project—whether on the page or on screen—reaffirms why I chose this path: to explore, to connect, and to share moments of truth and beauty with an audience.

I wish everyone a 2026 filled with creativity, health, joy, and the courage to follow what makes their heart sing. For me, each day is a new opportunity to listen, imagine, and create, and I feel deeply grateful to be able to devote my life to the work I love.



**Model**

## About the authors and the artist

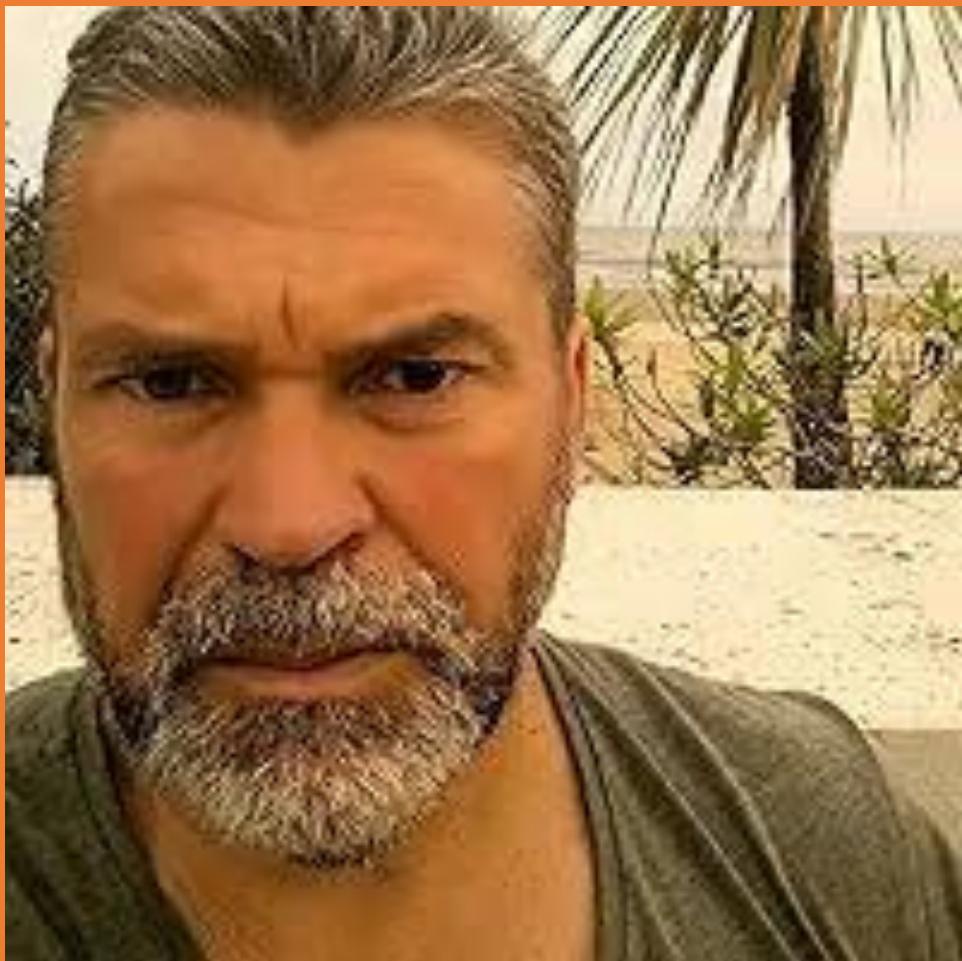


Born on 20 December 2001, **Manon Godet** is a young woman with a passion for words, poetry, life and water. Between the Normandy where she was born and the Parisian bedroom where she grew up, she carves out her breath and her writing with determination. She holds a Master's Degree in General and Comparative Literature from Rennes-2 University. In 2022, she published *Peau*, her first book offered for reading. At a time of placards and fiery purple voices, of slow recognition of age-old violence, it is written to experience this renaissance. Deeply affected by sexual violence against women, and violence of all kinds, she could not help but be part of the movement of her time. She was the bestseller at the recent *Alençon Bookfair*, and was featured in the France's largest circulation newspaper *Ouest-France* and in numerous radio and web interviews. In 2024, she published the novel *Dégaine*. She also exhibited her photographic work at the Rennes-2 University and at the *Apulivre Festival* at the Associations House in the 15<sup>th</sup> district of Paris. In 2025, *Peau* has been published in Arabic language (translation by Arwa Ben

Dhia) by 'Arabesques Press' in Tunisia. In 2026, *Peau* will be published in English language by 'Literary Waves Press' in London. Manon Godet is often invited to conferences on literature, violence against women, cultural awareness among young people; and to literature festivals in Metropolitan France but also in Mayotte (Indian Ocean ;guest of honour of *Reska Ni Kalamu* Festival), Tunisia, Benin (Africa; guest of honour of *FILAB* festival)...



**Radoslav Mandić** is a Serbian poet and journalist. He is the author of 'The Elusive Wanderer', Otvorena kniga, Belgrade, and '37' (novel poem), from the same publisher.



**Rhys Hughes** (born 1966, Cardiff, Wales) is a Welsh fantasy writer, playwright and essayist. He has lived in many different countries and currently resides in India. He began writing fiction at an early age and his first book, *Worming the Harpy*, was published in 1995. Since that time he has published more than forty other books. He recently completed an ambitious project that involved writing exactly 1000 linked narratives. He also writes poems and plays.



**Hadaa Sendoo** is a prize-winning Mongolian poet. His poems have been translated into more than 40 languages and he has published more than 20 books of poetry, Recent titles include: *I don't need a funeral* (Arabic 2020), *Song of Nomadic Moonlight* (Bengali, 2021), *The Wind/ Der Wind* (2022, in German, Marburg Book), and *The Love that Came to Me* /Nadad Irsen Durlal (2023, in Mongolian). He has won awards for poetry in North America, Africa, Arabian countries, Asia and Europe. In 2006, he founded the groundbreaking *World Poetry Almanac*, which has been included in the List of *the Greatest Books World*. In the 21th century, Hadaa Sendoo is recognized as a great poet. He has lived in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia Since 1991.



**Hamid Oqabi** is a prolific Yemeni filmmaker, writer, and visual artist whose novels, plays, and criticism have gained international recognition. He is also the founder and director of the Arab -European Forum for Cinema and Theatre. Most of his work is available online in Arabic, French, and English.



**Dr. Hatem Mohammed Al-Shamea** is an assistant professor of English literature, a scholar, and a translator with extensive expertise in literary studies, translation, and cross-cultural discourse. He completed his postdoctoral research at the University of Reading, UK, in 2023 focusing on literature, politics, terrorism, and diaspora. His academic background includes a PhD in English Literature from the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India in 2020. Dr. Al-Shamea has authored six books and numerous articles, covering subjects such as Black literature, Middle Eastern narratives, decolonial studies, and gender politics. He has translated eleven books, bringing the richness of Arabic and Yemeni literature to a broader audience. In addition to his academic and literary contributions, he is an advocate for diversity, inclusion, and refugee settlement programs, particularly for MENA and Ukrainian communities. Currently serving as the Editor-in-Chief of the Arab Literature & Translation Magazine & Press, Dr. Al-Shamea continues to bridge linguistic and cultural divides through his passion for storytelling and translation.



**Dr. Bhawani Shankar Nial** born in 1968 in the District of Kalahandi, Odisha State. He is a Poet, Editor, Thinker and Human Right Activist; He has worked as National Convenor of many organizations, Founder of so many Social, Political and Cultural Organizations in India and Leader of many people's movements for strengthening sustainable development and participatory democracy. Originally he is an Odia Poet, side by side he writes in Hindi. He has published 3 Anthologies in Odia, 2 in English (Lockdown and an Encounter with Death). He is a Prominent editor of so many magazines. He is the Chairman of Mahuri Award started since 2008 to felicitate those who have a great role in contemporary literature. His poems have been translated into many languages. He had joined World Poetry Day Italy 2021 and World Poetry Meet France 2021. Translated into 24 International languages. He has got International Awards like International Ambassador for Peace by WLFPHR, Bhuttan; Global Peace Ambassador by Iqra Foundation, India; Global Star Award by Global Footprint, Bangladesh; Police Material Art Award by South Korea; Literary Luminaries Award-2021 by School of Art and Poetry, Nizeria; Doctorate Confer by Maxican Morocco Cultural & Humanitarian Alliance - This high level certificate generally confer someone's effort in spreading a culture of peace, peaceful co-existence, humanity, tolerance and his/her literary work.



**Tom Phillips** is a UK-born poet, playwright and translator living in Bulgaria where he teaches creative writing at Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski. His poetry has been translated in a wide range of journals, anthologies, pamphlets and three full-length collections: *Burning Omaha* (Firewater 2003), *Recreation Ground* (Two Rivers Press, 2012) and *Unknown Translations* (Scalino, 2016). He writes in both English and Bulgarian and the poems included here are his own English translations of poems originally written in Bulgarian.



**Nebojša Lapčević** ћ (1966) is a Serbian poet, writer, novelist, playwright, libretto writer. He has been rewarded with the *Meša Selimović Award* for the best poetry book 2023 for *Philatelist*. He is the author of many books including two novels *Lake in the Cells*, NKC, 2013 and *Screenplay for Woody Allen*, Arte,Belgrade, 2014. Both of the novels were the novels of the year, rewarded by prestigious awards. He also writes poetry for children. His newest book is *Sower*, Agora, 2024. He is a member of Association Of Serbian Writers, President of Bagdala Literary Club. He works in Cultural Centre of Kruševac.



**James Walton** is an Australian poet, flash fiction, and short story author published in many anthologies, journals, and newspapers. Five collections of his poetry have been

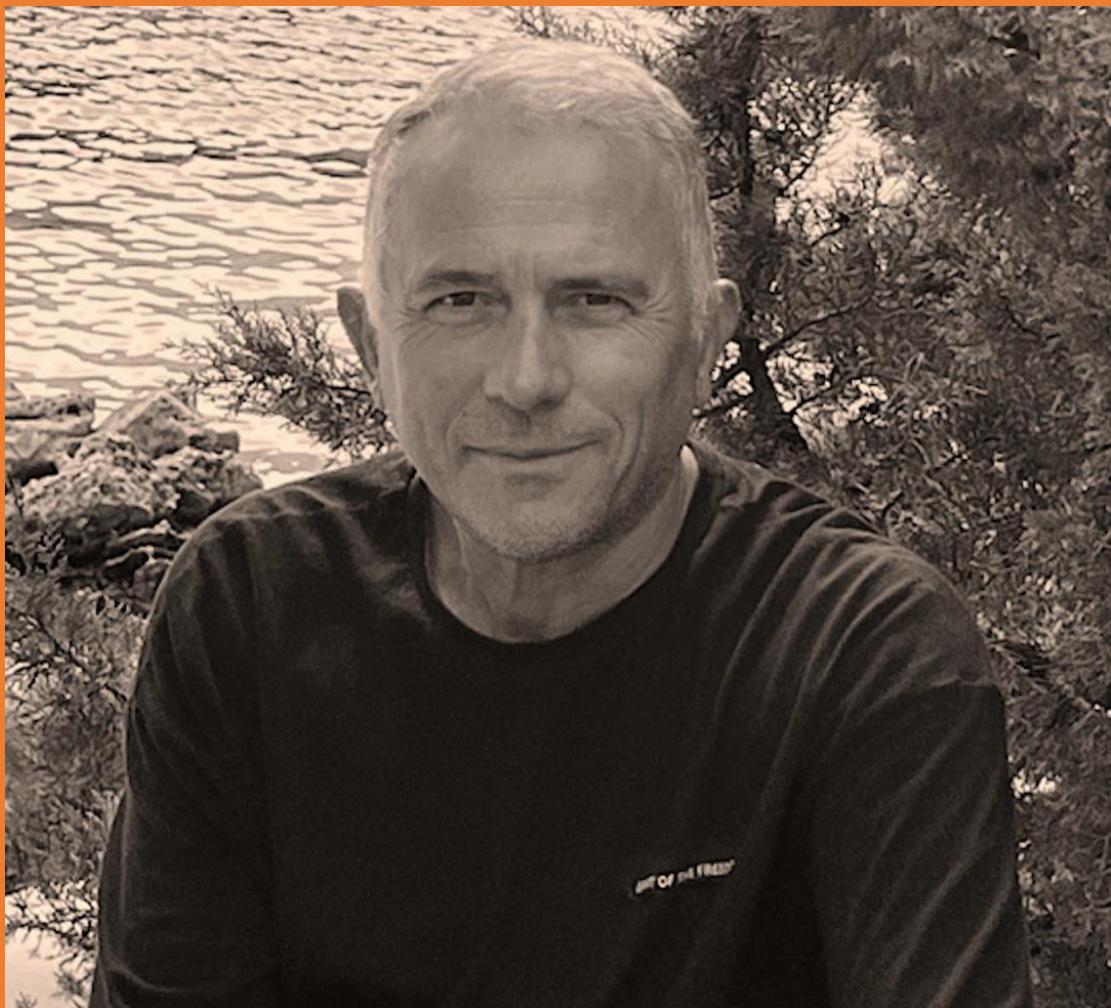
published since 2015. He has been nominated for Best of the Net, and the Pushcart Prize. His work has been translated into Spanish, Russian, and Farsi. He was a librarian, a farm labourer, and mostly a public sector union official. He began writing creatively at the age of 60.



**José de Jesús “Chucho” Márquez Ortiz** (Culiacán, Sinaloa, México, 1962). Grew up in Texcoco, State of México. Studied Plant Breeding. Worked as alfalfa specialist, househusband, primary caregiver, and data analyst. He is currently a software translator. Published in Molino de Letras, Revista Neotraba (México), El Coloquio de los Perros (España), Agradecidas Señas, bioStories, The Sun Magazine (United States). A budding writer when time allows it. Fully empirical in the arts of fatherhood, piano, guitar, and baking maize tortillas or wheat bread, and telling stories at The Moth radio show. Son of Elvira and Fidel. He lives in Kansas, United States.



**Alison Stone** is the author of nine full-length collections, Informed (NYQ Books, 2024), To See What Rises (CW Books, 2023), Zombies at the Disco (Jacar Press, 2020), Caught in the Myth (NYQ Books, 2019), Dazzle (Jacar Press, 2017), Masterplan, a book of collaborative poems with Eric Greinke (Presa Press, 2018), Ordinary Magic, (NYQ Books, 2016), Dangerous Enough (Presa Press 2014), and They Sing at Midnight, which won the 2003 Many Mountains Moving Poetry Award; as well as three chapbooks. Her poems have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Barrow Street*, *Poet Lore*, and many other journals and anthologies. She has been awarded *Poetry*'s Frederick Bock Prize, *New York Quarterly*'s Madeline Sadin Award, and *The Lyric*'s Lyric Poetry Prize. She was Writer in Residence at LitSpace St. Pete. She is also a painter and the creator of The Stone Tarot. A licensed psychotherapist, she has private practices in NYC and Nyack. <https://alisonstone.info/> Youtube and TikTok – Alison Stone Poetry.



**Arben Iliazi** was born on March 1, 1963, in Saranda (Albania). He graduated from the Faculty of Philology in Tirana in 1988. Until 1991, he worked as a screenwriter and then dedicated himself to journalism, serving as a journalist and editor-in-chief for several daily newspapers in the capital. He is known as a poet, essayist, and playwright. **POETIC VOLUMES:** "Vrundull" (Eurorilindja, Tirana 1994), "Urtësitë e detit" (Eurorilindja, Tirana 1997). **ESSAYS:** "Për paqen, kundër paqes" (Eurorilindja, Tirana 1998). **STAGED DRAMAS:**

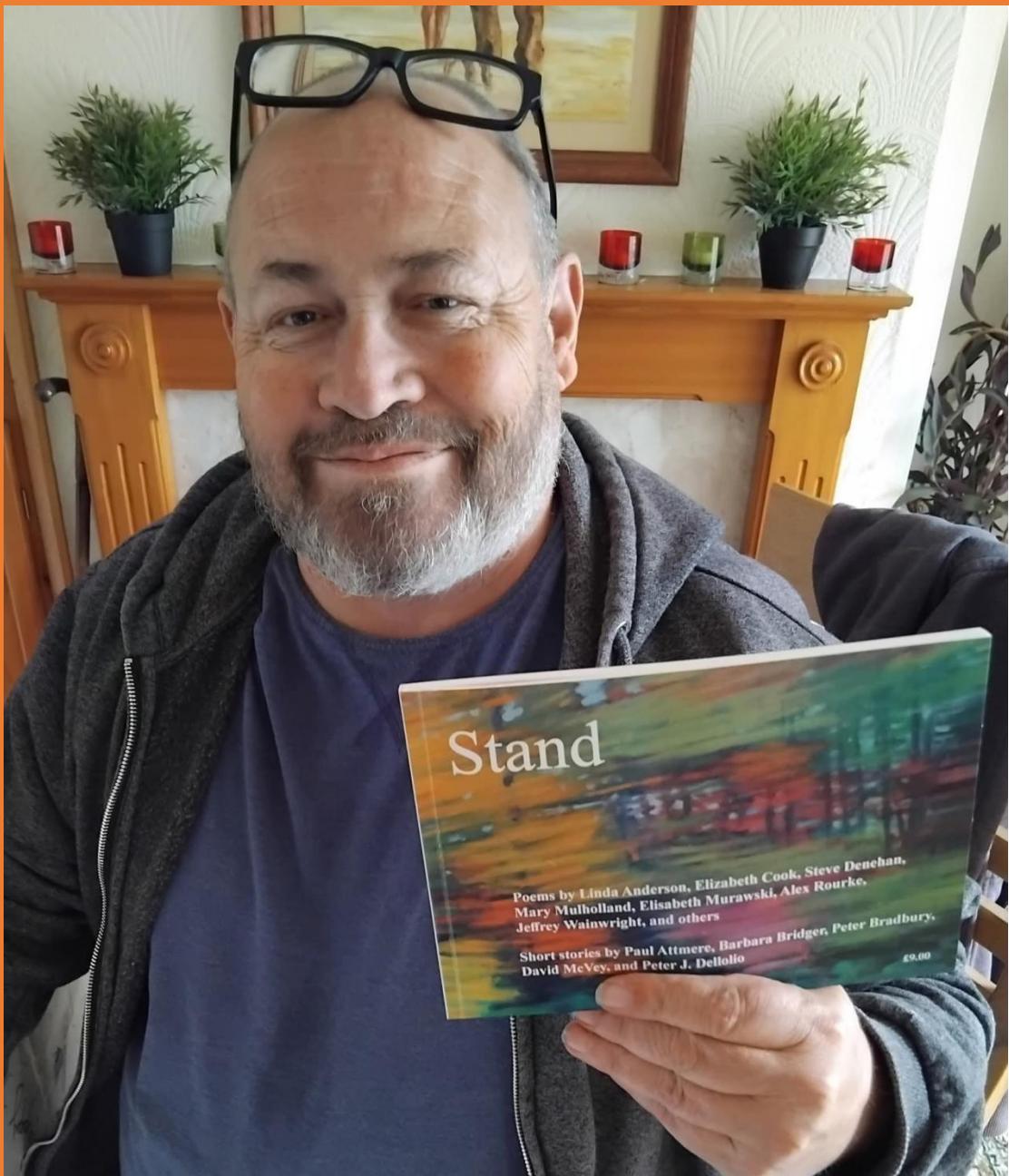
"Ciceroni prej plasteline," comedy 1990, Professional Theatre of Sarandë, directed by Thoma Milaj. "Burri im me zero kilometër," (comedy-2009) Aleksandër Moisiu Theatre, Durrës, directed by Milto Kutali – Donard Hasani. "Trashëgimtari," (comedy-2018), National Experimental Theatre, directed by Milto Kutali. "Farsa e Kurorës" (comedy-2020) Zihni Sako Theatre, Gjirokastër, directed by Ledian Gjeçi. "Me një këmbë në Parajsë," monodrama, (Tirana-2021), Atelier 31, directed by Milto Kutali. "Osman Taka" – historical drama (Tirana 2023), directed by Naun Shundi, produced by Alket Veliu. "Delirium" (drama - 2012), recognized in the 10th edition of ETC (European Theatre Convention) at the Biennale Theatre in Wizbaten, Germany, where the author was named one of the 100 best authors in Europe. **DRAMATURGICAL PUBLICATIONS:** "5 vepra dramatike" (collection of plays, Neraida-2003), "Spiritus" – drama (2004), "Tersi i Zululandit" comedy (2006), "Dhëndërrri nga Evropa" - comedy (2007)



**Obren Ristić** (1960) is a Serbian poet, short story writer and anthologist. His poems have been published in numerous literary magazines, and are included in several collections and anthologies, including the – *Eight Centuries of Serbian Poetry / Von A bis Z* (2017) (translated and edited by Johann Lavundi). His poems have been translated into several languages. He has received various awards including *Zmaj Ognjeni Vuk* (2010), *Milan Rakic* (2010) and *Zlatna struna* (2011). He is a member of The Association of Serbian Writers. He is the author of 'Ponder Over Impressions' (1996), 'In the East, in Serbia' (2002), 'Upset are Holy Warriors' (2006), 'The Lord is a Great Bard' (2009), 'Wreath to the Creator' (2009), 'The Barbarians of Tomorrow' (2015), 'Honorable Sonnets', Pravoslavna reč, Novi Sad, 2021. He is the editor-in-chief of *Istok*, a printed magazine and Publishing house. He lives and works in Knjaževac.



**Mark Andrew Heathcote** is a British poet and an adult learning difficulties support worker. He has poems published in journals, magazines, and anthologies online and in print. He resides in the UK and is from Manchester. Mark is the author of “In Perpetuity” and “Back on Earth,” two books of poems published by Creative Talents Unleashed.



**Matthew Duggan** was born in Bristol, 1971, lives in Newport, Wales, with his partner Kelly and their cat 'Pablo' and dog 'Alfie'. His poems have appeared in *Poetry Scotland*, *The Poetry Review*, *Poetry Wales*, *Stand Magazine*, *Ambit*, *The Potomac Review*, *Poetry Bus*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Obsessed with Pipework*. Matt previously won the *Erbacce Prize for Poetry* in 2015 with his first full length collection of poems and was *Winner of the Into the Void Poetry Prize* in 2017, where Matt was invited to perform his winning poem in Boston in the U.S. the same year. Matt has performed across the world including readings at *A Casa dos Poetas* in Portugal, Paxos, Greece, *Poetry on the Lakes Festival* in Orta, Italy, and a reading tour of the east-coast of U.S.A. including New York, Boston, Philadelphia. He is the author of four poetry collections.



**Ljubomir Popadić** was born in 1961 in Zrenjanin. Graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts, majoring in painting, in Novi Sad in 1968. Member of ULUM since 1994. He had over 25 solo exhibitions, and participated in several joint exhibitions in the country and abroad. He lives and works in Tivat as a freelance artist.