

Warm Water + Wine

By

Diarmuid o Maolalai

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... Diarmuid o Maolalai is dazzlingly delicious. He's as enquiring and as inquisitive as that "jackdaw" nestled in my chimbley, warbling and warming me to the bone. Each in 'Threatening weather' or 'Warm Water,' et al, he delights us with both his disappointments and extolments, praises and dismays: Acclaiming, distaining, here's to his cheers and jeer, may he outlive his years. "goddamn – I'm so sick / of this threatening / weather." "chrys says / there's daffodils / showing their necks..." "I'll get drunk, take my shirt off / and stand on the balcony" Diarmuid's a boy's name, right? More's the pity I'm not Irish either. "like a candy in wrapping / which peels itself / slowly"... "your body is soft / with the soap smell of water" Yet, there is so much more, and I offer so little. I am constrained to edit myself. Well there's a taste of him anyway, stuff yourself. Let the gerundy "penders" tongues loll. And let's just hope Maolalai never swaps his quill for a shillelagh. (I'm too old not to be politically incorrect, ageism's a thing too--who swiped my cudgel?) And for all of you lot newly engaged, 'Conversations with strangers' is a must; much more than if only just to see what it is you're not missing. Diarmuid's works begs reading "light spill[s] / like milk tea" "it was minutes; / such minutes"! Up with 'Parasols' and down with periscopes. To steal a scrap from standup, Steven Wright, the man is as singularly, uniquely stirring as powdered water...there's nothing to add. (Each poem is on a separate page. Please scroll down.)*

Threatening weather

goddamn – I'm so sick
of this threatening
weather. all sounds like jackdaws,
the cracking of leaves;
an autumnesque daylight
in winter and jacket
november. I wake,

make my coffee,
wear gloves, go outside
and the air in the garden
is warmed up as just-
finished laundry. chrys says
there's daffodils
showing their necks
in the park there and not even

christmas. the bars
all have tables out. birds
are confused – I'm frustrated.
hell with this weather.
one day there'll be change
I'll get drunk, take my shirt off

and stand on the balcony.
beg for a punch of some snow
or some rain or just
something: hard weather
like slates from a roof.

I look at the world
with my eye like a man
with a problem. like a man
at a bar back door
asking for a lend of a smoke.

Warm water

like a candy in wrapping
which peels itself
slowly, I watch you undress
from our bed. it's late
in the morning – 11am
and you've decided
you'll finally shower.
your body is soft
with the soap smell of water,
and the soft towelled cover
of the gown you are wearing.

I know you don't like
to have water too hot –
just warm – and I watch you
like a kid with a plate
of chocolates
being passed about.
I am warm in bed,
you are warm
out of it,
and there is warmth
here – your body,
my body,
so warm.

Some gossip

an light airy saturday
morning. birds pick about
at the scabs of the roadside
like dust-rag and bone men
in torn-up grey coats,
scratching edible scraps
out of cigarettes. selecting
some oranges
in the penders yard
fruit market, I put out a hand –
some stray scrap of gossip –
*they're saying that lockdown
will be likely extended,
and we've managed well
so close to christmas!*

A common situation

I didn't have much
going on to be honest.
this was some years ago –
weeks back in Dublin,
renting a wet bedroom
studio flat. just home from
Toronto, and a similar
situation, but there
it was better, because at least
it was different outside.

and this? Portobello –
South Dublin. a teacup
and near the canal,
a couple of pubs
and a dog-park.
some Georgian divide-up,
a brick-red and crumbled
brick building, holding moisture
like a bladder on a crowded
night out. I lay, fell like bricks
against bedsheets each evening,
watched the plaster paint shapes
like strange maps in my head.

listened to the radio, the window
slack open, and down on my bed
drinking wine between glasses
of water. no internet connection,
no hobbies or consistent
girlfriends. a common situation
for unsettled young men.
ground floor, a garden
where gathered fine samples
and others. we discussed
how things went and how things
should be going, planted feet
like dandelions at the edges
of uncared for buildings –
pushing our wilting
stamen skyward and
forward, putting out petals
of in circles of opening smoke.

The breakfast meeting.

at 8am we pause for a coffee.
the meeting's been scheduled
in Belfast for nine.
I'm poured on the back seat,
handling my hangover
like a newly hatched wet
baby bird. Craig is up front,
beside Adrian driving.
both of them smoking
as we pull ourselves on –
the smoke doesn't help,
and the signs so far all still
all have Irish on them. now
at a petrol station
8:15 cafe, hanging
from the side of the motorway
like a dirty plum, wet
on a wet winter branch. we are eating
shrink-wrap packaged
ham croissants,
drinking oil-slick
dirty coffee. I bum
one of Adrian's cigarettes,
grow light-headed as lorries pull in.
Craig's gone for a piss. Adrian suggests
that we mess with him;
move the car to another spot.
I step on the cigarette
and get in the back, hiding my eyes
against daylight.

The music of seabirds

there is not so much obvious
rhythm, but a rhythm
that's there
nonetheless. a clip
of four beats
chopped off from off-
tempo jazz orchestras. they stand
in some harmony; the roof
of our building,
mouths gaping open
like a section of high-
thrown trombones.
calling with notes
which do match
to notation,
playing their function
of cry and response.
and it's interesting,
and its method
is function
not beauty – just as
much of jazz is
when you listen
a while.

Conversations with strangers

going further. always going
further. though these days
I rarely buy cigarettes:
I'm no longer looking
to chat women up
in smoking spots outside of bars
on fridays and saturdays,
sometimes on week-
days. I'm engaged
to be married now;
those days I'm home
and I never get addicted
to smoking. I just like
how I looked nicely
arrogant doing it,
like wearing a shirt
with the collar done two
buttons down. and also,
I liked the way hands
could do something.
conversations with strangers
were open like sign-posted
roads. I remember the drip
of stale water from cast iron
gutters above shaded alleys.
how brickwork would stain
grey as water in blocked
plughole sinks.

Petal-silence.

this was her bedroom.
her two-room
apartment. light spilled
like milk tea
through milkish net
curtains, landing
on white walls, painted
only for photographs
by her penny-cheap
landlord. a movie
on her laptop
and her head on my lap,
her chin on my pulled
open belt-buckle.
I stroked her hair
like a man with a cat
or like someone on a bus
holding flowers. I felt
her mouth, felt me
get into her mouth
and the duvet which rolled up
to cuddle us, surrounded
and cushioned
like petals – like we were
the flower. it was minutes;
such minutes
as that. petal-silence. I was in
her mouth
like that. it was
all of me. petal-
silence, and she was doing it
so well. I melted – made a sound
like a zip, opened
suddenly. shocked,
she looked up;
made a face.

Early on undisturbed mornings.

the fog is cut up
into grids out of motorways,
out of sideroads off motorways,
moving cars' pace –
peace over fields
floating lily pad steadily,
seen from both sides
of the road, it's a magical

hour: fog
off the frost-layer
which clings onto grass
and to brambles; a glove,
pretty fingers –
flats to the tarmac
piano-toned thaw.

I am driving to work.
about eight and no sound
but the heater.
the air quiet and cold
as friends' kitchens
on undisturbed mornings

when you're visiting
and stayed up late drinking
and slept there
and now you're first up
in the morning.
when you're trying to find
what you need to make coffee
and the garden's
embarrassing green.

Parasols

coffee at 11 –
lunchtime
on a burning hot
day. and pavements
have crackled
in lines since mid-
morning, the city's
sweet wrinkling,
like raisins
from grapes. paying
at the take-away
cup counter
and feeling the heat
of the cardboard
as it slams
to your palm. parasols
in the outdoor
seating area snapped
upward as light comes
round the corner. a rhythm
and an opening,
like daisies
toward the early
day sun-
light.

THE POET SPEAKS: *Liz McSkeane, the Turas Press editor in chief who worked with me on my last two books, has told me that she thinks of me as a Pastoral Poet, but Urban Pastoral. I think that's right – certainly I've never been much for personal or political poetry. I don't really think about what I'm going to write before I write it, or what message I want to send or anything like that. I'm sure there are messages, but they're never the point of the poem for me. Just my opinion getting into my sense of aesthetics. These poems are mostly about my life, and the life which occurs around me; I live currently in city centre Dublin, so that's where the poems take place.*

Not Petal silence, though – that's about an old girlfriend. My opinions on my writing are generally only true about 70% of the time; if there were a course on "DS Maolalai" I don't think I could teach it. In fact, I think I'd probably learn from it. Then again, that's true of most writers, I think.

AUTHOR BIO: DS Maolalai has been nominated nine times for Best of the Net and seven times for the Pushcart Prize. He has released two collections, "Love is Breaking Plates in the

Garden" (Encircle Press, 2016) and "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (Turas Press, 2019). His third collection, "Noble Rot" is scheduled for release in April 2022.

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