

# 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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