



AND



FILTHY POEM and FRANKLY WILD

BY

Diarmuid o Maolalai

WHY I LIKE IT: Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...

In 'Filthy poem,' DS Maolalai writes like everyone's business, "flashing / like sunlight on water..." "shouts skipping / through the silence / like dolphins / suddenly at play," "...or like a cat kept inside on a Saturday / murmuring purrs / at the chirrups of birds." Okay, I left out the filthy bits. As for 'Frankly wild,' "– I / could do anything once."... "if I were a real artist I'd have / an affair, but I'm only a poet..." In Feas' opinion, Maolalai just might be entitled to a tryst, or two. (Spacing is poet's own.)

Filthy poem.

flashing
like sunlight on water
or like coffee
with one splash
of cream, girls enter
with the fresh movement of flowers
bouncing under heavy
rain in spring.

they are on lunch
from college at 12:45,
laughed shouts skipping
through the silence
like dolphins
suddenly at play,
bodies glide
on bedsheet white legs
which travel from the tops of their stockings
to that tiny small curves of ass,
visible with each flick from their skirts.

suddenly my afternoon is full of knees
like white flowers
and the earthy smell of the leaves
and distractions from my book.
I stretch out
willing to enjoy the sights,
willing a little
perhaps toward fantasy
in the hungover sunlight by the window
with a cup of coffee and cream,
looking, like a museum patron,
at something you could never touch,
or like a cat kept inside on a Saturday
murmuring purrs
at the chirrups of birds.

The more pressing concern

drinking together
for the first time in months;
fallon lights rollies
and stands on our balcony,
leaves the door open
so he can hear all the talk.
I want one too, but I don't
have or ask for one,
try turning attention
toward our friend instead; jack,
his opinion – something
about the vaccine –
he isn't against it,
just says Ireland has fucked
up the rollout. seems
convinced. read it
somewhere. I don't know,
I've stopped following
all that. will get it,
I guess, when I can
(this is April 2021) –
right now being sitting
a week without cigarettes
feels by far the more pressing
concern. why in fuck would you wait
until the end of the lockdowns
to do this? it seems like last march
would be the sensible
time. I turn back to fallon,
watch him inhale
and blow out a road. smoke pushes
the air in the street
and comes backward,
comes in on a traffic-noise
breeze. I want one. I don't
have, or ask for one. I want
one. I don't have,
or ask for one.

Frankly wild

god, I could make my life
burn down so easily. the house
to myself – I could go
frankly wild. leave the stove
on and leave, or call up
an old girlfriend. I remember
16, feeling much of the same.
buying bottles of wine.
sitting out in the garden. parents gone – I
could do anything once. and then that's
what I picked. and then
now – same again, to be honest.
a lazy young man, too tired
to take opportunity. chrysty away
the whole weekend today. her mother
(who's with us a while now)
away with her. I smoke on the balcony,
drink and type poems. I drink
and read books. drink, fall asleep
on the sofa. if I were a real artist I'd have
an affair, but I'm only a poet;
an amateur half gone on wine,
ashamed of the loudness
of houses without people in them
and houses without that as well.

Too hot.

the dog's hot.
it's summer,
and you're as hot
as she is. she gets
on the bed
and flops down
to the carpet.
snoozes about
for a cool space
to lay. you roll
in her absence
and kick the sheets
over. legs glisten,
like snail heads
come poked
out of shells.
and the window,
a moon caught
in spider's net
curtains. you wake up
from restlessness,
scrape dust
from dry lips.

A flame

my fridge is taking off. perhaps a powersurge –
it's suddenly humming, or maybe it's just
that I'm suddenly hearing the hum. it sounds
like an engine warming up on a runway – outside
on a wing to your left. and I like to sit over
the wings when I sit on an airplane. to look at the flaps
as they flitter to steer and to picture a flame
like a flower at sprout. and today in the office a contractor
dropped over some late christmas chocolates
and wine and we all had a party,
then drove home around 4pm. and I hate
to drive drunk, but I hate to say no
to a colleague and the evening
was good. thank god for bad traffic
and brake-lights and thank god for luck.
though the wine was just terrible – warm as a broken
refrigerator, bitterly chardonnay and fruitily malbec
and grigio as weak as a whisper, ugly
from lunchtime-stained mugs.

THE POET SPEAKS: *The problem with trying to write about poetry in a way that explains what you're saying is that it's an inconsistent medium. When submitting to magazines I don't group by theme so much as by tone, which means that often the poems going out will have a variety of things on their mind, a selection of lyrical contradictions in first person singular. The poems here were written by DS Maolalai – as in, they were typed by his fingers, my fingers – but each were written in completely different circumstances, with first drafts in some cases having cropped up with six or seven years between them. The first attempt at “Filthy poem” was (honestly) far more deserving of the title than the final version ended up being, written when I was 23 or 24 in Toronto – the seed planted in a café near Casa Loma, in a neighbourhood I didn't often visit, full of girls from a college nearby taking their lunchbreak and talking very loudly about sex. I was young and in the sensuous grasp of a hangover – thank god I was wearing sunglasses at the time or they would have seen me staring. Of course, “a 24 year old boy likes to look at girls” isn't exactly a novel seed for a poem, but nevertheless, something about those girls on that afternoon stayed with my where a million others have disappeared in memory, and had me keeping working on the poem even while the rest of my life caused me to change phrasing and turn the tone from lust to wistfulness as the memory went further into the past – I think the phrase “sweet tits” was excised at one point.*

That was seven years ago. I'm married now, living in Dublin. I've lived through a pandemic (I know, everyone knows – I wouldn't bring it up if it weren't mentioned in one of the poems). I've got a dog, a decent job and an apartment with more than one room in it; all things when I was in Toronto that I not only didn't want, but thought I should actively reject if I was to consider myself a serious artist. The idea of writing a poem like “Frankly wild” or “A flame” would have been laughable to me at that time. “Too hot” would have seemed like the kind of cutesy garbage I'd have not only rejected, but outright mocked (to be fair, that one does tiptoe up to the line if it doesn't cross it). These poems were written by a variety of people; single men, married men, smokers and former smokers. Guys who worshipped Charles Bukowski and guys who were more into Ray Carver and Richard Brautigan – three more poets who might as well have been the same man at different stages of their lives.

This is an effect to which poetry perhaps lends itself more readily than any other artform; poetry is the art of the moment, creating a kind of self-portrait time machine. The author of “Filthy poem” and the author of “Frankly wild” are the same person, separated only by six or seven years and the different causes of their insomnia, but united in their arrogance that the poetry they're writing now is the most true form of art attainable; the poetry of their younger selves just juvenilia they had to do as practice, the poetry of their future just sell-out garbage more deserving of the title of greeting card than poetry.

AUTHOR BIO: DS Maolalai has been nominated eleven times for Best of the Net, eight for the Pushcart Prize and once for the Forward Prize. His poetry has been released in three collections, most recently "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (Turas Press, 2019) and “Noble Rot” (Turas Press, 2022).