PICASSO and other poems…

By D S Maolalai

Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes: Mister Maolalai’s poetry is sublime. Comparing a locksmith to ‘Picasso’ in the absence of hyperbole is a feat of genius. ‘Lying down afterward’ / “in the lapsed heat / of passion” is a can’t-miss. ‘The realist’ is a tribute to, and a handbook for, Everyman who ever needed to be reminded of what is not minutia in order to secure felicitous domesticity: “and the brown taste / of fresh coffee,” “gaslighting” is often the best remedy. 'Apples.' 'Being online.' and 'Baking.' are each endeared to me, but ‘With apologies to Marianne Moore’ has that line, “...the back arching. a watchspring / wound to crisis...” Who could resist?(Spacing and font size are poet’s own) HS

Picasso.

you think it is perfect,  
and it is. it's easy. banging words
in an office for work
like rocks
shattered
to sand.

but today
I went to get a key cut –
waited
5 mins
by this shed
at a supermarket
carpark, while the old guy inside
sliced a fresh one for me,
casual, like a labourer
pulling down stacks
of bananas.

and I had no idea
this was still
how it was done –
freehand
by eyeball
and the guts of their feet. one of those
dying skills, I suppose. typing emails
I can barely beat a sentence
without hitting the backspace
a couple of times

but he spun his hands magic
and like
a conductor
of perfect symphonies; like seeing picasso
paint.
I walked home
with a new key
in my pocket. I'd kept it separate
so I could test getting in,
in case of issues,
and when I tried the door
it worked
perfectly.

he must really
have been picasso
to get it so right
the first time.
2008.

2008. december.

christmas trees
straddling o'connell
like someone's
stacked balls
of shining
barbed wire.
A good peace.

a good peace –
from a window
overlooking the wing
of an airplane,
and even waves
look calm
and ironed on cloudless
days,

and birds in flight
are things of flowing
metal – no feathers,
no crease
in the construction
of machines.
lying down afterward
in the lapsed heat
of passion
like a flower, wilting
in a botanic garden
hothouse. watching
the room
as it rises
to landscape,
the wallpaper
which spirals
away.
The realist.

she complains
my memory's
not perfect. and she's right.
I don’t worry
about detail; don’t know
exactly
what she said
and when it was
she said it. dates
escape me, places. I forget
the name of the restaurant
or even
the name
of the street. don't know
what town we were in
when it happened. sometimes
I don’t even know
the country. my memory
as an abstract painting.
a series:
her bedroom – white no 2.
sky-white
and the dawn in motion
and the brown taste
of fresh coffee. I am an impressionist,
not a realist
painter. the world
collapses
when I pinpoint
a spot. as a joke
I accuse her
of gaslighting –
"you never told me that,
you are making it all up." she pulls out the receipts;
shows messages. it's terrible;
trying to be an artist
when people carry cameras.
Apples.

don't grow
anywhere now.

and my brother?
sick again.

the world
a lonely place
without fish
or plates of tomato.

flowers
can go hang;
tramps
in nice dresses.

every river
piss
and wet shit.

love
is a thing
which doesn't happen.

neither
does anything
else.
The wedding cake.

we clean up
after dinner. well, I do –
you cooked. I stack bowls
and plates, dirty pots
and the cutlery. carry them
quietly to the sink. you go
to the sofa, with the rest of your wine
and the dog. read a paperback
borrowed from the library, idly looking
at your phone. it's june 1st
or thereabouts. the end of may
at latest. through the window
white flakes
like sawed through icing
on the wedding cake
which I haven't
arranged for you
yet.
Being online.

*a hopelessly naive poem.*

it should be more
like real life is
really – think of it
as an office
going away party,
full of people
you work with
but don't really
know well.

just keep
certain things
shut up private
if they're things
which would get you fired
in an office. that way
people generally
don't act all that
racist, and mostly
things slowly

improve. just dumb jokes
about bad spelling
and puns – I remember
when the internet
was all
dumb jokes.
Baking.

life, regular
as loaves
in an oven. five years ago
all my friends
were travelling. now, at parties
we talk about property
and who's getting married
and when. I suppose
in ten years
we'll be discussing divorces,
children doing quite well
at school. I sit at the table,
drinking my wine
and watching my friends
drink their wine. we talk
and heat rises, steady
and wholesomely
boring.
With apologies to Marianne Moore.

no water so still
as the dead fountains at versailles. and no stretch
so satisfying
as the tension of a dog
in yawn. the breaking of extension
and the breaking
of release. the twist
and the tongue extending
like a smooth
and blooming flower
brimming, inviting
to bees.
the tremble around legs
and the back arching. a watchspring
wound to crisis
and pulling against a wrist. how could anyone
put out a hand
and break this. her head
looking upward
very offended.

THE POET SPEAKS: Reader, forgive me—I've never been much of a prose man. Expect me to ramble. For me, poetry is easier—you can hopefully see it there. Once or twice a week I open a bottle of wine, sit at a laptop and wake up to 5 or 6 poems the next day. As far as methods, I think what I do is, in a sense, automatic writing, or hiking a new trail. I don’t start on the road with any destination in mind—just find the place where the first foot rests steadily, then take the next step. Writing isn’t really an art-form, I don’t think—it’s primarily a habit, and a way to order my thoughts. I would never be anything but embarrassed if I were to try describing some great mountain, at the top of which is The Meaning of Poetry. I go to the occasional reading(though I don’t make a habit of going it) and seen plenty of times where the readers will spend longer explaining the beauty of their inspiration than they do reading the actual words. That said, what you could say inspired a lot in these poems is the sense of art as a mundane thing, rather than a higher order—Marianne Moore, who’s various versions of “Poetry” I pillaged for the poem which bears her name, was exceptionally good at this, and wrote with a clipped precision, using a lot of the same language that one might find in an encyclopaedia, as if she were writing
straightforward prose only broken by the form. In the first long version of “Poetry” she describes writing as being about “imaginary gardens with real toads in them” and how “things are important not because a high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are useful” – I think that’s the best way to describe my own attitude. The same thing comes with the attempt at drawing the line between the man cutting a key in a shed in a supermarket car park and Picasso’s painting in “Picasso”, and the connection between memory and the arts in “The realist” – it’s all about bringing down the attitude people have toward the arts, and elevating the attitude they have toward the mundane. Not bringing down the things themselves, I mean, but people’s view of them. Picasso was written about a real guy who worked from a Portakabin in Darndale, a semi-sketchy neighbourhood in Dublin, and cut some keys freehand for me after I lost a set drunk. The fact that he took my spare and carved a new set freehand, just by eye and hand, seems far more impressive to me than any amount of poetry.

AUTHOR’S BIO: ‘A little about myself; I’m a graduate of English Literature from Trinity College in Dublin and recently returned there after four years abroad in the UK and Canada. I have been writing poetry and short fiction for the past five or six years with some success. My writing has appeared in such publications as 4‘33’, Strange Bounce and Bong is Bard, Down in the Dirt Magazine, Out of Ours, The Eunoia Review, Kerouac's Dog, More Said Than Done, Star Tips, Myths Magazine, Ariadne’s Thread, The Belleville Park Pages, Killing the Angel and Unrorean Broadsheet, by whom I was twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize. I have also had my work published in two collections; 'Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden' and 'Sad Havoc Among the Birds'.

D S Maolalai has been nominated four times for Best of the Net and three times for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in two collections, "Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden" (Encircle Press, 2016) and "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (Turas Press, 2019)