

PENNING

TRUTH



DECEMBER 2019



The Writers In Exile Committee is made
up of:

Chair - Liz Niven
Samina Chaudhry
Nadine Aisha Jassat
Moirra McPartlin
Jemma Neville
Gianni Mastrangioli Salazar

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FOREWORD

This issue's guest editor is Gianni Mastrangioli Salazar

Gianni Mastrangioli is a Venezuelan activist and writer who defends the freedom of expression being affected by Nicolás Maduro's administration. He is a professional historian, graduated from the Central University of Venezuela in 2015.

Since 2017, he has dedicated to elaborate literary chronicles which are focused on breaking the silence of persons, situations, and spaces indisputably condemned to the obscurity of censorship. He is the author of the column "El aguacate pensante" (newspaper Caraota Digital), and journalist for World Trade Center Venezuela.

He is Director of Cultural affairs for the humanitarian organization 'Yo estoy aquí'. He currently lives in Edinburgh.



As I was reading through one of the pieces, the one in which both mother and son queue for groceries, I repeatedly rewound that scene where I, too, begged for food in the streets of my hometown Caracas, Venezuela. Each sentence reminded me of those times when my fingerprints were taken at the supermarket as rationing only allowed me to do shopping once a week. Too long I grieved for the disgrace of my misery, for being unable to see prosperity in the near future. But yet there was, in the middle of all it, a sense of both consciousness and self-motivation; a family to protect, a country for which to fight and, surely, many truths to defend: the act to believe that my life still had a meaning was one of them, for instance, not to mention the truth behind the act of survival. Yes. The essence of truth is indisputably universal as it does not rely upon nationalities or contexts. And that is, I assure, the purpose for this PENning issue, that readers can see the reflection of themselves on each one of these pieces as if they were a series of mirrors that are

composed by universal facts.

I am very much delighted for the invitation I received to be guest editor on this occasion. I would like to welcome you all to this PENning edition which is, I am sure you will agree, a powerful issue that shows the joys and misfortunes of the authors in their search for truth. Passing through the Middle East up to Europe, we gathered poems, and prose pieces written by people who experienced what seems to be the conception of truth in our modern society, that is to say, the need for safeguarding our own beliefs and cultural background regardless of external pressure. With no precipitation, the pieces we selected for this issue are good examples of how people can sometimes give up their homes, their place of birth or even their lives in order to preserve either their conviction or integrity.

As a writer in exile myself, it came to my attention that being away from the

motherland was what made most of our authors think of the importance of truth. The more they felt lonely in the new country, the more their identity was reassured. Some of the stories you will read are voices that come from the inside, where truth is, if not a space for consolation, a refuge.

We have also the pleasure to include in this PENning issue the work of Mexican writer Ruperta Bautista Vázquez to whom I felt, I must confess, suddenly connected. As she and I are both from Latin America, it is inevitable for me to celebrate all of her poems because they reinforce the leadership of women in the construction of truth but from an indigenous perspective. Throughout her work, we have the opportunity to see how nature is the utter sense of life, and that that is unchangeable.

Nature is the origin of life, and so are women.

I would like to invite you all to take a seat, to make yourself comfortable – if possible, with a nice cup of tea –, and enter these pieces until you find your own concept of truth. As you may realise, finding truth can be painful. But that is just part of the sacrifice we humans have to accept in order to secure what we really are (or pretend to be). In my case, the urge for finding truth was what drove me to push forward and survive. To get out of those streets of Caracas. To peacefully live in Scotland and to continue fighting for my country fellows' rights.

To pursue truth above all matters.

And for you? What sort of motivation do you need? What does your internal voice tell you?

Gianni Mastrangioli Salazar





FEATURED
WRITER

RUPERTA BAUTISTA VÁZQUEZ

Ruperta Bautista Vázquez is a community educator, writer, anthropologist, translator, and Tsotsil Maya actress, from San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, México. She holds degrees in Creative Writing from the Sociedad General de Escritores de México (SOGEM), Indigenous Rights and Cultures from CIESAS-Sureste, Anthropology from Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas, and a Masters Degree in Education and Cultural Diversity. To date she has published *Xojobal Jalob te' (Telar Luminario)*, Pluralia Ediciones y CONACULTA, México D.F, 2013; *Xchamel Ch'ul Balamil (Eclipse en la madre tierra)* 2008, Primera edición. 2014, 2da edición; *Ch'iel k'opojelal (Vivencias)* 2003; and had her work anthologized in *Palabra conjurada, cinco Voces cinco Cantos* (Coautora) 1999. Her work has been translated into English, French, Italian, Catalán, Portuguese and Swedish.

Lucina Kathmann has been a member of PEN San Miguel de Allende since 1986 and is the former chair of the PEN International Women Writers' Committee. Lucina is a novelist, short story writer, journalist, and essayist in Spanish and English. She also edits the trilingual publication, *Network/Le Réseau/La Red*, by and about women writers.

Beth Pollack is an educator and translator based in New Mexico. She is formerly the Associate Dean for Academics College of Arts & Sciences at New Mexico State University. She has translated a number of books, including *The Road to Tamazunchale* by Ron Arias, which was nominated for the National Book Award, alongside Ricardo Aguilar.

MA'UK ECH SJAM

Original Tsotsil version

Jtos no'ox spas yabtelik ti bol j-ilbajinvanejetike
totil pukuj jnuts tak'inetik xpamuk'tavanik
ta yunenal jun ak'ubal
xch'am ik'tabe no'ox smuil ti lekilale.

Snak' sba ti tsatsal jk'uleje
ti lekil chapanele chich' batel ti anil,
a' stunes k'alal xtun yu'un xai'e
j-ak'vanej ta me'nal.

K'alal ta stoylejal slo'lavanej na
stubta yalel tal epal mil bail
te ta yalbale,
xvochet no'ox ti me'nal lajelale.

Totil j-ilbajinvanejetik slajesik ti kuxlejale
xulesik ti k'usitik lek jutebe,
ta jcha' ilbetik svokol ti ch'ul osil balamile.

UNNECESSARY REALITY

English translation

LIBERTY

Apostles of money watch...
Inept inordinate monotonous attitude...
On a cool night
They smell the perfume of innocence.

The powerful one hides.
He has injustice in his pocket,
Provokes hunger,
Erects monuments to poverty.

From his castle of trickery
He spits out foam of confrontation
And under his tower
Roars a river of prayers.

Those who rape liberty
Shoot at any trace of it, they can see
The wound of time repeats itself.

Translated into English by Lucina Kathmann

LUNEX TI CH'ENALO'

This poem commemorates the massacre of Tsotsil villagers at Achteal, Chiapas, Mexico, Monday December 22, 1997.

Original Tsotsil version

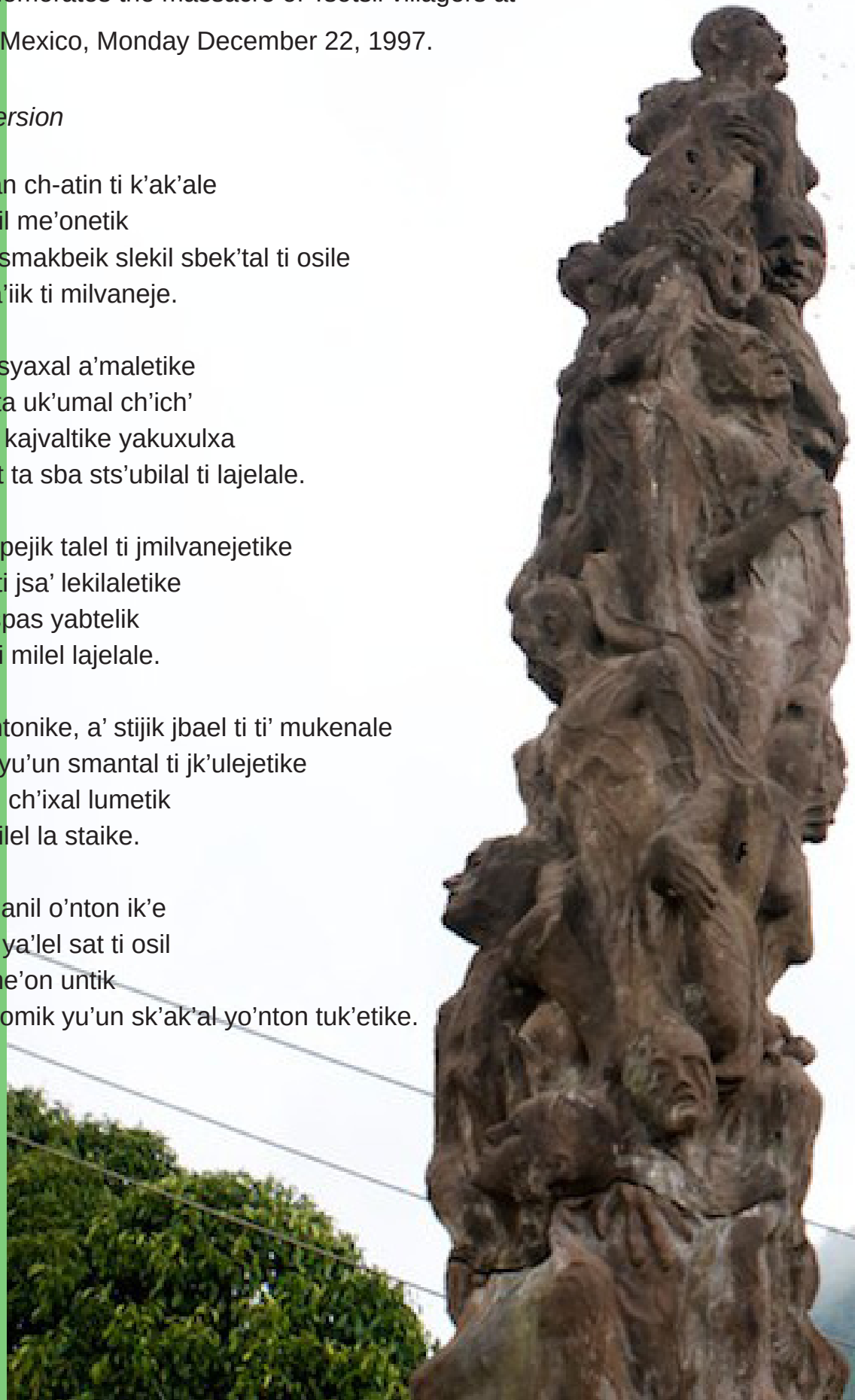
Ta yunenal ikliman ch-atin ti k'ak'ale
spomtabe xch'uivil me'onetik
jpanmuk'tavanej smakbeik slekil sbek'tal ti osile
sts'ujet no'ox cha'ik ti milvaneje.

Ti ch'uivil xchi'uk syaxal a'maletike
j-ok' no'ox k'ataj ta uk'umal ch'ich'
ti yich'el ti muk' ti kajvaltike yakuxulxa
te xa no'ox xkajet ta sba sts'ubilal ti lajelale.

Junxa yo'nton nopejik talel ti jmilvanejetike
ta sba xch'uletik ti jsa' lekilaletike
a' xchi'ilik pukuj spas yabtelik
lek xvinaj ti a'iel ti milel lajelale.

Ti buch'u lek yo'ntonike, a' stijik jbael ti ti' mukenale
k'okbatik snuk'ik yu'un smantal ti jk'ulejetike
chanavik ta pixbil ch'ixal lumetik
xchi'uk sujbilal milel la staike.

A' la jyiil ta sat ti j-anil o'nton ik'e
xchi'uk xch'ich'el ya'lel sat ti osil
smakbeik sat ti me'on untik
ch'och'obtasbil ikomik yu'un sk'ak'al yo'nton tuk'etike.



MONDAY AT THE WELL

English translation

The sun bathes the day's infancy
Suffuses the morning prayers of the humble
Their daily life watched, an intense vigil
The traitor always alert.

In minutes a river of blood
Their prayers, steam in the jungle
Praise turns to agony
Floating on gunpowder

The assassins march with heavy steps
Cowardly, evil--the sound of the slaughterhouse
On humble souls begging for justice

The innocents knock at the door of the tomb
Their throats slit
By order of the invader's proclamation
They must walk over thorny ground inexorably toward their death.

The desperate air and the red tears of time bear witness
Cover the faces of the orphans
Shot through by cannons of hate.

Translated into English by Lucina Kathmann

CHAVAL

Original Tsotsil version

Chaval chatse'ta ti ya'lel jsatutike
chak'elbe sme'nal ti ma'satetike
unenot to akuy aba, mu xa na' me mu xalik yu'un ame'lubel
skoj li' me'nale nichim no'ox avo'nton cha'ak'otaj

¡Ay chulti' me'el!

Chaval chapoxtavan, a' no'ox chayajesvan xchi'uk ayolom k'ok'
chak'anvan, a' no'ox chak'elan jyom sk'ak'al avo'nton
chalekubtasvan, a' no'ox sts'itet avu'un tup'vanej

¡Ay chulti' me'el!

Chaval chana' lek' a' no'ox akiloj abolil
chava'i lek, mu xa na' me pak'chikinot
lekil antsot, bats'i yan apukujil
chavavta lekilal, a' no'ox chailbajinvan skoj apukujil

¡Ay chulti' me'el!

Chaval chasa' lekilal, a' no'ox chavilbajin ti jchi'iltaktike
chak'an ko'oluk li kuxlejale, a' no'ox chapech' ti tek'el me'on
chavil batel, a' no'ox cha pojbe xik' ti yantike
chak'an oyuk lekilal, a' no'ox chalikes majbail milbail
chulti' me'el ¿K'uchal mu xa ch'ani jutuk?



YOU SAY

English translation

*"Chulti" means liar in the Tsotsil language;
"ants" means woman*

--

You can laugh at our tears,
Stare at us without seeing.
You're young, but your flesh weighs of ages.
You're happy dancing in our poverty.

Ay, chulti' ants!

You say you heal and pray,
but throw fiery barbs that torment us
You say you love but send hate.
You construct ideas only to destroy them.

Ay, chulti' ants!

You claim to understand us,
but carry only burdens of ignorance
Say you listen, but are deaf.
Say you are good, but are evil.
Cry Liberty, but enslave us with your greed.

Ay, chulti' ants!

You say you seek justice but curse humanity,
Say you want equality, yet climb over the poor,
Like to fly, but clip our wings,
Want peace, but sow hatred and war.
Chulti' ants
Why won't you stop your lies?

Translated into English by Beth Pollack

FICTION

Xinyi Jiang was born in China's Qingdao and studied in Nanjing and Shanghai. She taught in Fudan University before moving to the UK. She had lived in England and Wales before settling in Scotland. Xinyi discovered poetry when studying with the University of Dundee and had poems published in Dundee Writes, New Writing Dundee, PENning, and Gutter.

**XINYI
JIANG**

**GREG
CHATTERTON**

Greg Chatterton is a freelance writer, reviewer, literary critic, and philosopher. Originally from London, he has been based in Dundee for six years.



1976: THE HOTTEST SUMMER, COLDEST WINTER

Xinyi Jiang

There had never been a hotter summer, she said. As nights fell, they stepped out of their one or two-room homes from the U-shaped six storey block, small foldable stools in one hands, chipped enamel mugs in the other, and gathered in the courtyard. Seated in circles, they stretched their legs out, waved their threadbare straw fans, spit out their three-year old tealeaves, chatted and laughed. How I wanted to be there, playing with other kids, getting cuddles from my nanny. But she was gone, back to her folks, to get married before becoming an old spinster. As for mum, she hardly talked to the neighbours. One day, she came home with three reject goose feather fans for export. We went out. Waving her beautiful fan, she said the long heat wave was a bad sign. A few days later, they said an earthquake had stricken Tangshan.

Old ladies from residential committee sat by our table and told us about hiding under it, or the bed. And communal shelters. Then one evening the courtyard was busier than usual. They had beddings and bamboo poles that were for supporting mosquito nets. They were loud and cheerful. I watched, not hearing mum's call for dinner. Then sheets in red flowers and green leaves were transformed into structures that looked like cones in varied sizes. I walked closer to admire the marvel which reeked of sweat and grease. I had watched a movie, a peasant family stayed in a place like one of these after their home being taken by an evil landlord and his fat wife with a big mole above her flaring nostrils. Their kids with skins over nothing but bones shivered as the snowflakes flew inside. But this was a dry summer night. People were laughing, talking loud. How exciting.

I wanted to be part of it, singing and dancing, waiting for the quakes. They said that we had had minor ones and swore they had felt the tremors at night. I wished I hadn't missed them. My friend Red, who was one year older than me, came to our door. Mum said no. I missed nanny. She would have taken me. Red promised to look after me. Being one of the five siblings, Red was able for her age, despite her runny nose, mum said. Except I once fell over her shoulder when she gave me piggy-back rides and my nose tip was scraped in blood. 'OK', on the third day, mum

agreed. We jumped up and down.

But it was terrible. Mosquitos bigger than spiders hovered around and hummed like helicopters, unafraid of the swats. So many cigarettes were burning that the air turned blue and stung my eyes. After most of the lights from the block were switched off, they were still drinking Erguotou, shouting and laughing at strange jokes.

Before the end of the summer, I went to the hospital nursery, dreading the daily naps, which lasted forever. Lying on the narrow and hard lower bed of one of the bunks, I felt my shut eyelids shudder and smelt the stale pee from the thin cotton mattress. Mum said I had a dog's nose since I was born in the year of dog. But most of us were 'dog kids' and why it bothered no one but me? Was I the only one to pretend to be asleep and end up with dead arms, legs and cheeks? They were nursery veterans. I was new. I missed nanny.

On the other hand, I learned skipping rope and got No. 3 in the competition, one week after I mastered the technique. I had a friend Yi, though like the others, she always fell asleep the second we were told to lie down after lunch and left me fidget on my own. Yi's parents were both doctors, her mum from Shanghai and dad an Indonesian ex expats. The name of Indonesia sounded so beautiful. Mum was pleased. Yi's clothes were nice, some must be import she said. One day, I took my knitting to show Yi a hat I was knitting for one of my two dolls. One of the staff members, Auntie Li, folded her brows and screamed. She looked worse than the landlord's fat wife in the movie, with her small triangle eyes squinting, white spit gathering in the gaps between her buckteeth.

The broadcast news of the passing of Chairman Mao changed everything. They all looked beyond sad. Instead of bickering all the time, mum and dad would only bicker sometimes, and it wouldn't last that long. Dinner time was quieter. I was sent to bed earlier, which was hard after the long naps in the nursery. But the look on mum's face told me not to protest. There were no songs or children's programs on the radio. Only sad talking and sad funeral music. They all wore black clothes, some with a black arm band, or a white paper flower on their chest. Mum put the red butterfly hairpin that dad bought me from one of his business trips in Shanghai in the drawer. I didn't dare to protest.

So many memorial events. Everyday after nursery, I heard mum and dad say that there was this and that, meetings, gatherings. Old ladies from residential committees, who all turned older in their black clothes that smelt of moth balls, red eyes and dishevelled grey hair, came during dinner times and Sundays. All in a sudden, plane

tree leaves turned yellow and fell off. The 'coldest winter' came.

On a grey day as snow melted on our faces, the nursery staff walked us to the main hospital. In a big room where windows were higher than the top of our heads, Grandpa Mao, from a large picture on the wall, above the neat collars of a grey Mao jacket, was gazing somewhere beyond us, just as he always did. His eyes were kind but seeing, brow high and smooth, cheeks rosy and plump, lips red but firm. Even the mole in the middle of his chin was the same. It was a sign of longevity, they said. So many wreaths. The delicate white, yellow, silver and golden paper flowers were made by our mums and grannies, the handsome couplets in brush calligraphy were written by our dads and grandpas. 'Chairman Mao lives forever', 'Chairman Mao is the greatest leader'. I had learned these characters. On the panes of the shut windows, steam started to gather. We were standing in lines and listening to the familiar funeral music, arms sticking out like paper cut puppets, padded cotton jackets stiff as armours, a few fidgeting boys being slapped by the aunties. Like being wrapped up in babbles, my eyelids became heavy. If only the aunties would hum a tune like this during the naptime.

As my head drooped toward my chest, the sound of sniffing and sobbing started to rise. I shuddered and my eyes wide open. Was there an instruction I didn't hear? What were they crying for? Grandpa Mao. Of course. But... but I didn't... know him. They said he was closer to us than mums and dads but ... but he wasn't my real grandpa... I didn't even have one; both were dead before I was born. Were they all missing their grandpas? Heartbroken. They were. Listen, the crying became louder and louder. I looked again with the corners of my eyes. Yes, they were crying, aunties, kids, Yi included. Tears were rolling down their red and wet faces. A momentum was gathered in the chorus; the bodies were waving back and forward, curling up like bows. They were better six-year olds. They knew the significance better. Chairman Mao, who would live forever, was watching, listening, just like his pictures on the walls of our homes, his head, upper or full body statues in white plaster on our desks, sideboards, and. Never a ripped poster or smashed stature could escape his eyes, as there was nothing accidental, but an anti-revolutionary crime that would result in prison or death sentence.

Was there a crying button they didn't tell me where to press? I pinched the back of my hand. Ouch. I yelled out. But it wasn't enough. I rubbed my eyes until they hurt. A few drops were squeezed out. But no clusters of tears to follow. I bit my lips. It hurt. Still no fat hot tears. Think of something sad. Quick. How about that white bunny whose neck was stuck and tangled in the fish net? It wasn't welcomed. Mum said bunnies couldn't lay eggs. The bunny was left in the cardboard box, before a more

permanent home was found. But she was dead the day after. I saw she wiggled her head among the nylon net. But Shao Hua was at the door, waiting for me to play hopscotch. The next time I looked, there was nothing but stillness. Her head lay among the net, her eyes open, staring at me. Mum didn't ask. I didn't tell her. I should be punished. It was time.

The winter before, my granny died in her sleep. It was the same funeral music being played in the loudspeakers at the crematorium, broken at the same place. We went outside to burn paper money. The bitter wind cut my face like hundreds of sharp knives, my throat was sore and tight with the choking smoke, and my tummy was rumbling. They laid the steamed buns, dry cured meat, stewed whole chicken, apples and Satsuma, that had travelled with us on four buses, careful in the dishes on the uneven yellow and dusty ground. Soot and ashes covered them immediately. The sky was thick and dark with the black smoke from the giant chimneys. Sand, dust, ashes and smoke fell on coats and hair, flew into nostrils and mouths agape with crying and screaming, and stuck on wet hot faces.

Next to great aunties and aunties, mum was crying as piles of coarse yellow paper being licked off by the red flame, which crumbled, curled and disappeared. Crying? No, howling from wild animals, crazy witches performing a ritual. Seated on the dirt, one leg out, mum nodded her head, clapped her laps and chanted a tuneless tune, her hair flying in the wind like straw. I wished she had a mirror in front of her to see herself, just like she always did before leaving home. Why didn't I cry? Why didn't they slap me pinch me?

I peeped again. Yi was crying so hard as if she were crying over the golden fish eaten by her cat. At the end of the row it was Auntie Li, who screamed at my knitting needles with a slapped face. I wished she came to slap my face until I could scream and sob like her. If I hunched up my shoulders and covered up my eyes, would they know I didn't have tears beneath? Dear Grandpa Mao who would live thousands of years, please give me some tears. I wasn't a bad girl. I was sorry mum and dad didn't know how to wave sickles on crops or sweat in front of a weaving machine or steel furnace. But she was good at cleaning and stitching peasants and workers' wounds and he, improving ships to catch fish for peasants and workers to eat. Grandpa Mao, I promise to learn how to cut crops or weave cloth when I grow up. I would never want nice cloths as Yi's, laugh at Auntie Li's buckteeth or Red's runny nose!

Every summer was the hottest, winter, the coldest, especially in the year of 1976.



場廣銷展傢
發批傢傢興文

NOWHERE MAN

Greg Chatterton

Onion soup: Not in the French style as there was no beef stock. It was a conscious-unconscious craving of his lately – it was also all that he could afford or scavenge for. Pungent and sluggish, he hadn't washed in three weeks. The food would act to mask the smell of the loft; camouflaging the odour of this human wasting for at least a couple of hours. The mice would be happy with the scraps of peelings that fell to the floor from the kitchen table. They could share the stale bread, moistened by the liquid of his concoction on the one remaining working gas hob. A refugee's banquet was taking form. He had swapped his Casio watch to pay for the onions: three red; two white. It would give him another week of sustenance. The mice would be happy. He'd find some bread tomorrow – for them all to share.

(Nocturne of the night will break before the will to live gives up its trial.)

He had not eaten meat in months. He didn't miss it and couldn't understand the fuss he had seen people make about being vegetarian and vegan. He had done it unconsciously and without fanfare: A natural reversion to a survivalist Palaeolithic diet of nature in the suburban setting of an unknown city. (Except for the bones left outside of the fried chicken shop from which he sometimes made a stock for the soup.) Vegetables, water, salt. Pulses were a bonus but not a necessity – there were always the foodbank if his cravings got the best of him: not very often, though – for he did not want to take from the needy families of his fortuitous surroundings: a roof; gas cooker; food. And no bombs. Bliss. 'Thank you, God,' he would say every morning and every night before going to bed under his thin blanket on the bare wooden floor. The sound of the mice's feet tapping away around him, acting like a mother's song sending her child to sleep: a rapture of the night's dreams ahead. That beautiful noise that meant there was at least another living thing around you, and that you were not the sole remaining creature in existence. He knew he was alive when he could hear and see all other living beings: mice and insects crawling in and out of the woodwork; birds nesting on the windowsill; children screaming from the neighbours' rooms. All the world was alive when so many hadn't made it past their own front doors, let alone the borders of several hostile countries; and the seas spreading out to oceans of eternal depth.

*

I am not a tourist.

The following morning – in the early hours like a sprite of the night – he went down into the street. It was so early that there was barely another person to be seen; except for those who had not slept, or could not sleep, or had nowhere to sleep. It was a preference for him to be solitary in public (or be as close to solitude as possible) because of his look of the stench and his feeling of alienation from the rest of the human race. The halal shop often left food outside for people to take; obviously not meat as there were foxes and cats around, but there was often a few morsels of edible leafy vegetables, some tins of tomatoes and/or labneh, occasionally there was even something sweet and sugary – the delights of Arabic deserts, such as baklava, that he missed so much. These things were left out on purpose, usually on a Friday – prayer day. The council was the only enemy to the aiding of the poor: a nadir of human evolution – the denial of the unsalable to the benefit of the unsuitably unusable persons.

Fortune favours the brave, they say. But when you are poor, poor as they come, there is nothing but endless poverty of the soul. No matter how brave a face you put on it, you are the criminal that reminds the better-off what could have been their lot, had situations been muddled or simulated in history and time. Bravado is nothing in the face of the soaring waves sweeping you from your dingy. There is only hope, fear and chance. Meaningless compossibility of a comparable world as a simulacrum. All men are complicit in this war against their own species: war is the weaponization of the poor – as combatants, fodder and collateral damage. Air raid sirens replaced by police car sirens; comfort and love replaced by destitution and lice. Wooden floors and mice. Malice and spite.

They sometimes ask me my name. I say, 'Mohammed.' That seems to be what they expect. That is not my name. I give them what they want. This is not my nation; I guess I owe them this simplicity of stereotype.

'My name is not Mohammed!' he screamed from the open window, 'My name is...'

'Shut up!' came a shout from below in response to his desperation.

Mohammed who was not Mohammed never finished his sentence; this world would never know his place. Nobody knew his name; he began to choose to forget

it himself. He had begun to choose to forget himself in totality.

*

He had given the last of the copper coins he possessed to a homeless person he had passed on the street that night.

*

‘Mohammed’ was dying on the floor of this attic squat; acquiesced to the inevitable of his situation. He hadn’t eaten in some days or weeks – he didn’t know (a discarded can of cat food he had found in an alleyway had been his last meal), and nobody knew he was there. The mice had fled as there was nothing left to scavenge; nothing at all. They had moved next door or down below or across the street. He no longer heard their angel steps comforting him to his peace. No squeaks of communicating rodents informing each other of their discoveries and plans. Mohammed who was never there breathed a deep breath; the sigh of a fighting respiratory system, failing its lifelong task to keep this body alive. From his childhood home, to school and university; to a successful business – a Rolex watch and fast car; to a family of scattered body parts; to a decrepit boat he had spent the last of his wealth on for barely a place to squeeze in (a false economy); from there to there to here. The Rolex watch got him this living coffin of wood and dishevelled carpet. To wash up on the beach shore, or fall, frozen from a plane: it’s all the same. A little light brown mouse, old and left behind from its family crawled into the hand of this dying man; a warmish nest in which to say goodbye in comfort. They shared the same final breath and slept deep into the shadows of forever: Dreaming deep: Contrived to the will of a dead heartbeat. A heart of humanity that stopped beating when the boats left those foreign beaches and a person could be qualified as illegal on their own planet from which man and mouse evolved. Towards their own foreign beach. Shifting sands. Floating passports and life jackets. Children clinging to the lifeless bodies of their mothers and fathers. Themselves also dead: carrion for the front pages of derision and bloodlust.

*

They said the floodgates would open. They just didn’t tell us that the sea would be swollen with bodies and blood. Anguished, contorted, blue cubist faces, with nothing left but matter behind their eyes.

Nobody had ever known *he* was always there.



POETRY

Victoria Emma has lived in Edinburgh for many years, was born in South Africa to a Jewish-Latvian raised South African mother and a Catholic Mozambican-raised Portuguese father; she went on to grow up in Portugal and doesn't quite know what to say when asked where she's from.

VICTORIA EMMA

DONALD ADAMSON

Writes in Scots and English, translates from Finnish. Collections: *From Coiled Roots* (IDP 2013), *A Landscape Blossoms Within Me* (from the Finnish of Eeva Kilpi, Arc 2014), *Glamourie* (IDP 2015). Honours: 1st prize placings in Glasgow University/Radio Clyde Poetry Competition, 1985; Herald Millennium Poetry Competition, 1999; Sangschaw Scots Poetry Competition (translation), 2017. Also prize-winner in Northwords Competition, 1995; McCash Scots Poetry Competition, 2014; Cornwall Contemporary Poetry Competition 2016; Off the Stanza Poetry Competition, 2017; Sangschaw Scots Poetry Competition (translation), 2018.

Anne B. Murray is a Glaswegian now living in Stirling. Formerly a creative writing group facilitator, she has recently retired to spend more time on her own writing. She has had many poems published in several journals and anthologies. She has published four poetry pamphlets, the most recent, *The Colour Shop* (Terra Firma Press 2019). A passionate believer that poetry is meant to be spoken and heard, she organises public poetry readings and spoken word events and has performed at the Edinburgh Fringe, Glasgow's Aye Write and Stirling's Off the Page Festivals.

ANNE B. MURRAY

A.C. CLARKE

A C Clarke is a poet living in Glasgow who has won a number of prizes over the years and been widely published in anthologies and magazines. Her fifth full collection, *A Troubling Woman* (Oversteps Books), centred on Margery Kempe, came out in 2017. She was one of four winners in the Cinnamon Press 2017 pamphlet competition with *War Baby*. She has worked with the poets Maggie Rabatski and Sheila Templeton on a series of poems in Gaelic, Scots and English, her own contribution being in English. A second collection of these poems is due out later this year.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Victoria Emma

Sitting across me
You open me like a book that you can't read
Struggling to communicate
Like a mail order bride at a first date
We hold onto the small land that is our common ground

Every day you learn a word I say
And every day you forget another one you've said
I stitch a monologue together
And play all the parts like a single child plays charades
I used to put on a one man show
For the folks at home
Now I put one on
For everyone

How is it that you can speak every language
But mine?
How I wish you could read between the lines

I guess silence
Never translates well.



FIDDLING

Donald Adamson

As the tundra blazes,
as flames belch from Amazonian forests,
I can't do anything with truth and true,
godlike and infinite,

I can only
whittle them down
to human size,
to a lifespan, yours and mine

till only ruth is left –
pity
for generations to come,
choking, coughing, dying
in toxic air

and rue –
regret
for time frittered away,
delaying, disputing,

fiddling
while the earth burns.

TRUTH 2019

Anne B. Murray

whatever truth is
it is not reality

to thine own self be true
goes unheard, unread

no smile, no glasses
the passport photograph lies
the subject is blind

truth is disallowed
privacy laws prevent it

tinny tweets prevail
in days of fake news

+RuTH→



ILLUSION

A.C. Clarke

When the Fatima children envisioned the Virgin
she was dressed in blue and white like a statue

who spoke Portuguese. Mohammed recognised
an angel when he saw one. He knew its name.

Fluent in Hebrew, it found Arabic
as ready to its bodiless tongue.

Someone I knew, when close to death met God,
a white-suited young man who sent her back.

Our ape eyes can't fashion what transcends us
except in the likeness of ourselves

like reading into someone else's poem
what we want to be there.

Kriss Nichol's poetry and short stories have appeared in numerous small press magazines and anthologies. She has published three poetry pamphlets, *The Language of Crows* (2012), *Between Lands* (2013) and *A Suggestion of Bones* (2017), as well as two novels, *In Desolate Corners Shadows Crouch* (2012) and *Monsoons and Marigolds* (2017). A sequence of haibun, *Ancient Anchors*, telling the story of the Earth from the Big Bang to modern day is awaiting publication.

KRISS NICHOL

ANNE CONNOLLY

Anne Connolly is a widely published Irish poet, settled in Scotland for many years. Her poetry encompasses varied themes including the complicated history and challenges of living in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. She performs her work regularly, has three collections and two pamphlets in print, enjoyed being the Makar of the Federation of Writers (Scotland) and their chair for a couple of years. She believes that poetry is a song in its own right.

Mary McCabe's books include: fiction *Everwinding Times* and *Two Closes and a Referendum*, non-fiction *Streets Schemes and Stages* and faction *Stirring the Dust* (Paperback of the Week in the Herald). A children's book and several radio plays have appeared in German translation. Dozens of her poems and stories in Scots, English and Gaelic have been anthologised. *Comin Back Ower the Border* was Scottish Arts Council Poem of the month and *Merch o the Baby Boomers* was short-listed in the Yarrow Ettrick and Selkirk Literary Festival Ballad Competition. Mary is a lifelong political activist and active in Scottish PEN.

MARY McCABE

JULIAN COLTON

Julian Colton has had five collections of poetry published including *Everyman Street* (Smokestack Publishing), *Cold Light of Morning* (Cultured Llama) and *Two Che Guevaras* (Scottish Borders Council). He edits The Eildon Tree literary magazine and contributes articles and reviews. He lives in Selkirk in the Scottish Borders.

LAST RIGHTS

Kriss Nichol

Truganini, one of the last Tasmania Aboriginals, was called a 'queen' by whites and 'traitor' by her people. Against her wishes, her remains were stolen by white colonialists for exhibition and experimentation. After much campaigning the bones were eventually returned 100 years later, her skin and hair another 30 years after that.

the Earth yawned and gobbled me up
wrapped me in her arms and rocked me
until
with spade and pick they yanked me upwards
into sunlight and eucalyptus-scented air
then
scraped my bones stole hair skin and jewellery
separated me across seas continents
finally
laid me in glass cases gawped at me experimented on me
ignored my cries for the earth of my birth
while
the world saw one hundred and thirty winters thousands
of moon and sun rises felt tides turn until
now
I rest re-united with the dust and my ancestors



THE ART OF TURNING A STILE

Anne Connolly

The little one tilted on her hip is crying. He or she is in a twist while mother pushes through the turnstile. Squeezes tight so the older one, all of three feet high can stay in her firm grip.

He is small, too small for the eyes that are wide and wild.
Not the eyes of any child. He knows what a gun is - understands that time is the slowest thing on earth when you are in a queue with nothing to do except wait.

Each time
he does
believe
what
mother
says but
it is hard.
So often
when they
get there
whatever it is
the queue
is waiting for
they're
probably
too late.



WHO KILLED THE TRUTH?

Mary McCabe

Who killed the truth?
I, said the Press
With my caress,
I killed the truth.
Who saw it die?
I, said the lie
Turned a blind eye,
I saw it die.
Who'll make its shroud?
We, said the crowd.
For we can shout loud
We'll make its shroud.
Who'll dig its grave?
I, said the crook
With my history book
I'll dig its grave.

Who'll sing a psalm?
I said the gangster
I'm a jolly songster.
I'll sing a psalm.
Who'll be chief mourner?
I, said the meek
I'll turn the other cheek.
Again and again and again.
All the careless of the world
Take to dancing on the grave
Of the tellers of the truth
The constant and the brave.

REGRET

Julian Colton



I have regrets because my heart is a wide-open space
Full of the despair of all the days
Which were spent in love and fire and disgrace.

I have regrets because I have seen her love filled face
After she waited for me at three in the morning
Coming across the fields with soil on my hands

The emptiness of ambition and pride
Tears running from my dark starred-splintered eyes
Her knowing the dignity in my nothingness.

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