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Um grande

POESIA AO MEIO DIA

AGOSTO, 2023

POEMS BY MARY O'DONNELL

From *Massacre of the Birds*. Salmon Poetry, 2021

A Husband's Lament for the Massacre of the Birds

Of the five billion birds that fly through Europe each autumn to spend winter in Africa and the warmer countries north of the Mediterranean, up to one billion are killed by humans. Newsweek, 02/07/2015

He does this by counting, he does this by digging.

O loss, loss, for the swallows have not returned,
loss, for the neap tide shows no sandpiper,
nor greenshank, and he digs the garden to plant
what will attract all comers of wing.

All are welcome in his green field, the swifts
that have not returned to criss-cross the sky,

pigeons long shot and bagged,
and songbirds that in Europe are vanishing—
glued, poisoned, trapped—so that the full-bellied
can dine in a rustic restaurant in Tuscany.

He welcomes too in his garden dream
the fan-tailed warbler, glued to death in Cyprus
in an agony of open beak—chaffinch, blackcap,

quail and thrush—O loss, loss, as the songs die,
and little throats close against the final mutilation.

He will continue to prepare each year this place
for the birds, and surely a man can beat his chest
and cry out to his neighbour, *Let us bellow in rage,*
let us bellow in sorrow, let us plant these spaces
to make havens for the hunted.

Gaia, April 2020

for Liz Shen

The first time I heard the word
was in 1983. A young mother

new to the workshop, baby in arms: This is Gaia,
she said.

Now Gaia, bearer of life,

rests in our arms again.

Her supple fists release

thrush and finch

as novelties, she tosses

bees towards uncut,

swollen dandelions,

fondles wood-anemone

in neglected copses.

Her hand cracks yellowness

like an egg, a broken spill

on each dawn. She has

cleansed the thick silts

of canals, muds

of the Rio de la Plata,

the scum of the Liffey,

so that fish may return.

All day, cherry-trees twitch
along tawny terraces,

as sparrows dart
on sprays of pink.

At dusk, her eyes show us
how to gaze higher, deeper:

this haul of stars, brighter
more of them—guiding the eye

through Hawking's cosmos,
with no reverence for anything

except themselves in expansion.

Gaia sucks at the breast,

drowsing while we
stay home and fret,

the anxiety of parenthood
filling us with duties,
obligations.

Message from Malmö

In the market the immigrants
are grappling with clothes,
some to buy, some to sell.

Everybody has something on offer,
a garment or some coins.

The faces of the Syrians, new to the place,
show intent. They are here. They have made it.

Now some sort of life may begin again.

The women wear sadness in their eyes,
thick as the heavy wool garments for sale;
the husbands are cloaked in defiance,
desperation; and the young men, also
defiant, wear invisible undergarments
that sparkle with hope; they are girded
by belts of adventure, possibility,
preparing to mend the great torn blanket
that was once their family, now
left behind in the dust

Ghost

I want to be a ghost in my own house.
You may still live here, you can come and go
in the casual glide of daily tasks.
Just leave me be, happy in my haunting
of this room, which has never had a key.

The secret metal is my writer's heart,
which needs to shrink away from signs of flesh,
becoming white, then paler, less than grey,
so that you hardly notice how greatly
I need this house to submit to haunting,

to inhale my chill. If I am unseen
yet felt, surely that will be sufficient.
I want to be a ghost in my own house.
Do not speak to me. Do not spread fond hands
Along my thigh or breast, just come and go.

Be free. I am haunting myself away
from open doors and friendly passageways,
from that candled nook by a winter fire,
withdrawing behind the shades of morning,
while you inhabit the shell I bequeath.

On Metaphor

I never realised how apt
those old comparisons of female parts

to roses in particular—metaphysical lines
on love, lushness and moisture,

or petals in tactile frills—until the day
I soaped and washed my mother

in her shower-chair,
saw her labia in their dying glory.

Like any late autumn rose,
her petals, hanging loose, had shrivelled,

awaiting the slightest wintry wind
to blow them free.

Even so, I write of them with love,
the metaphysics of a woman's

life in transit, this aged Venus
eclipsed by time.