

DS Maolalai

Chinese Character

it was all you can eat
and we were getting into
our third plate of sushi
before they'd even lit
the stove. then meat came,
sliced like thin piano keys, white
and brown as wood. I devoured salmon slices,
ate lamb,
and drank water
from shallow cups
printed with chinese
characters. and the scene
had a pleasing chineseness to it,
too—chrys said so—
just shoveling the mouthfuls with no tired softening
to please our western palates. we ate
for two hours steadily,
deliberate as the movement of a clock, skewering
what I couldn't hold in our chopsticks
to get it down. beef
is a cruel meal
to eat. value
a taste
which doesn't require seasoning.

The Hawk

in my garden
turned upside down;
this metal
tin. in the morning
it was safe
and steady, jammed in treebranches, filled

with peanuts
and torn up
bread. I wonder
at the size of the hawk
which landed there.

such embarrassment,
to fly
like paper in gales, see food
and knock it over.

Vancouver

was all good cafes
and also
some good
bookshops
and some art-stalls.
I was visiting
with my family,
staying
in a cheap hotel
which turned out
(of course)
on the bad side of town. a walk
our first morning
to catch a little sun
saw this guy on the street
dancing with a needle. I didn't notice
at the time
and afterwards
my sister complimented me
for carrying myself
so cool.
we saw the Jimi Hendrix museum with statues
which wasn't spectacular
but I picked up some Black Sparrow books

by Diane Wakoski
and Clayton Eshleman. I got a suntan walking around
and we ate bacon and eggs
and drank black coffee.
one day
we went to the beach. I dropped my glasses
there
and was stuck like a tool
wearing prescription sunglasses
even indoors
the rest of the time.
if anyone finds them
please let me know.
I'll even pay
for the postage. I think
they are somewhere
between those statues people like
on the wilderness trail
and that other place
where you can rent bicycles.

Hygiene

the soap
smells like chemical
apples
and it has that texture; scabbed
at the top
and dry as biscuits. this
is a room
rarely used by anyone;
there are all these details
which tell.
last night
our host
explained the shower,
now I don't remember
what it was
he said to do,
and with which switch
I should do it. in our room
his brother,
my friend,

snores his hangover -
with my head bent sideways
I wash out
mine. donegal - the sea outside
eroding rocks
like aspirin. downstairs
children run around
and throw animals. last night
we did the same. a birthday party -
she's 30
with two kids already. I pick up the towel
and it drops dust
and old beachsand, grey in morning's light.
through the floor
the smell of breakfast comes,
and obligation.

A Beach near Cahersiveen

the fire
crapped out
a flat red
light,
flying limp
like a flag
against the sky.
there were three of us
camping, our tents
set shoddy,
by hands
tired
after cycling all day.
then wine
picked up at a petrol station
to push a final pump
on our exhaustion.

at the island
they charged 30 quid
per tent
for camping -

fuck that.
we took our tickets
for the ferry
and sailed back toward the mainland,
sick and sleepy,
striking out to find a spot.

at 10
we fell,
easily
as worn tires,
and woke
with our backs
pressed onto rocks.

the sun
came up
like thrown tinfoil
on sea-views
that would make
a painter
piss,
and the embers
were black
and soaking
bones,
broken
and folded in peatmoss.

I was the first awake -
tried the door
to the public toilets
and found them open.
I drank deeply
the brackish
tap-water,
shat,
spat yellow,
and winced
as I brushed
my teeth.

Howth Junction

11pm. the sky strains
yellow on blue
as lamplight catches
at low cloud
and pulls it,
like tea
on shallow bruising
all over, like the world is only just
a space outside your chin. in Howth junction
carriage shunts
and changes stations - trains tear
the night's carrion
to pieces
and sound
breaks windows
and topples
toilet seats. your hands
in your pockets
sweat against the coming cold
and breath jumps at your face
like a puppy
bounding at the door
and very excited
to see you.

American Voices

I turn on the radio,
tune it to lyric
and catch the applause
like trees falling
just as
a symphony
ends in eastern europe,
and sounding like

it was a good one.
everyone
is happy,
bowing and
letting flowers up onstage.
I like it
but I could do without
the american color commentators
giving a blow by blow
of the singer's steps
as she thanks the crowd
and the orchestra.
they liked it,
you can tell,
but god
there's some class
that american voices
don't give
to classical music.
I listen to
the whisper of claps
trying to fill a large room
and don't want to hear
upbeat american voices.
I always think
they're going to award
points out of ten. just
give me
rhythm
counterpoint
treble
melodies.
not american voices
sounding
like they're setting down a waterjug
preparing to say something crass.

Dingle

the town
rolls around the seafront
like flowers
burst on a footpath - piers
reaching out
to be pruned by stormwind, boats
blowing
and sometimes sticking
in the surf. I wake
and walk to the shop
slowly, looking
for bread and milk
and a can of coca cola
to sooth the hangover
since somehow
the house has no coffee. we got in
last night
and dropped our bags
at the staircase, then it was
straight out, like urgency
is a priority
down here, like we were beetles
trundling business under the petals of viburnum,
rolling burdens
we have not learned
to shed.

About the Poet

DS Maolalai has been nominated for Best of the Web and twice 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).