

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).