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PRAXIS NOTE

THE TRANSITIONAL HEART: WRITING POETRY ON WAR, GRIEF AND THE INTIMACY OF SHARED LOSS

*Robyn Rowland**

Abstract. A personal note on the creation of *This Intimate War: Gallipoli Çanakkale 1915 — İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915* by Robyn Rowland, Turkish translations by Mehmet Ali Çelikel, published by Five Islands Press: Melbourne, Australia, 2015 and Bilge Kultur Sanat, Turkey, 2015.

My brother did me an unpredictable favour in marrying a Turkish-Australian woman, Sevil. Our shared love of archaeology and her great capacity for history and cooking cemented our friendship. In 2009 I took my younger son, almost 16, and headed for Turkey. We spent six weeks travelling around the ruins and museums, which barely touched the surface of what is held there.

I fell in love with a golden period of Ottoman history under the great Sultan, Suleiman Kanuni, ‘The Lawgiver’, whom the West called ‘The Magnificent’. I was awarded a Literature Board grant, and began my work. On a second trip aimed at studying the period I’d adopted, I was shocked and captured by an experience in Çanakkale. Visiting the Naval Museum there, I learned the Gallipoli story from the Turkish viewpoint and the history of the Battle of Çanakkale, of which I was ignorant. It was uncomfortable to find myself identified with the enemy, the aggressor.

When I was in primary school, I grew up with the story every Anzac Day about the brave boys who went to war. I knew nothing about politics or different cultures. I knew nothing about the Ottoman Empire. (We still celebrated ‘Empire Day’ with fireworks.) Once a year we gathered at dawn to remember them — ‘lest we forget’. Then the film ‘Gallipoli’ starring Mel Gibson came out in 1981, and the story became a tragedy perpetrated by British leaders who used ‘our boys’ as fodder. There was no mention of ‘their boys’.

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I did not know that before Gallipoli, on 18 March 1915, the Ottomans, with few resources, defeated the British Navy, then the greatest navy in the world. After this, they knew the war would advance by land, an invasion Churchill estimated would take four days from landing to arrival in Constantinople. I didn't know that the story of Troy fired Britain's attempt. That historical context is in my narrative documentary poem, 'The Folly of Myth: Prologue 1915'.¹ After that, it is the personal journeys that take centre stage.

The Ottoman Empire had been brilliant in the sixteenth century under Suleiman the Lawgiver but gradually diminished itself through lack of coordination and modernisation. By 1915 it was exhausted from four years of war in the Balkans and unwilling to enter into another. At that point the British were advising the Sultanate on the development of its navy and the Germans on the development of its army. The Ottomans had raised money from public subscription to buy two new battleships from the British. When they refused to ally themselves with the British and enter the war, the British refused to hand over the ships. The Germans offered two ships that were available in the harbour. So began Turkey's angry entrance into the war.

And it marked the end of empires. Australia learned an identity; the British Empire began its disintegration in places like India; the Austro-Hungarian Empire was dissolving; the Russian Revolution was about to change that country. And in Ireland, massive political change was creating hope in many, confusion in some as the Easter Rising of 1916 eventually led to Independence. While the Irish fought for the British in the hope that it might show their worth as an independent country, Ireland itself was changing and unwilling to remember those who fought for the 'enemy'. As Patrick MacGill, the soldier-writer wrote in the 1917 poem 'Lament': 'They'll call me coward if I return. But a hero if I fall.'²

For Turkey, the War of Independence followed immediately on from World War I, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, its first president. An officer who led at Gallipoli, he was widely read and keen for change. His astonishing leadership finished the Sultanate which had been ready to allow Turkey to be carved up by the allies. Under his leadership, the most incredible rate of social change occurred. He created an extensive education system, opened up the lives of women and girls, gave women the vote and banned the wearing of the Fez and of the headscarf in public institutions. He modernised Turkish clothes, he introduced surnames and modernised the economic and industrial systems. He reshaped the armed forces, private publishing and social behaviour. Most strikingly he changed the language itself, taking out many Persian words and replacing the Arabic alphabet with a Latin one, allowing people three months in which to learn it. They did. Literacy increased from 10% to 90%. He remade a dissolving empire into the modern secular democracy Turkey is today.

War forces countries and individuals into transition in powerful and multifaceted ways. It impacts on every single person from the country involved. I could write 100 books with 1000 stories and still not plumb the depths of the experiences and tales of World War I. Soldiers, sailors, airmen, nurses, doctors, the women who were involved in munitions manufacture, the child soldiers, women who lost husbands,

¹ Rowland *This Intimate War: Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915* Five Islands Press Melbourne 2015 p 20.

² MacGill Patrick *Soldier Songs* Herbert Jenkins London 1917 p 31.

father, sons or saw their men return totally damaged in mind and body; the painters, musicians, poets, composers lost. No one was left unscathed.

I wrote them all into my book, *This Intimate War: Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 —İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915*, a book of poems reflecting the experiences of both Australians and Turks during the Çanakkale/Gallipoli campaigns. The book is historically accurate. But it is not a history. It is poetry out of history. It is my attempt to put balance into the Anzac story and to create a book that Australians, the Allies and the Turks will relate to. I had to work hard to find a publisher and funding for it in bilingual form as I believed so strongly that both English and Turkish should be together side-by-side in this book. Clare Rhoden writes in her review: ‘The decision to face each poem with its Turkish translation . . . is a sharp and provocative representation of the anomaly of the Gallipoli campaign itself.’³

With many Turkish friends now, I’m always amazed at the forgiveness Turkey expresses towards Australia. That friendship continues too with my translator, Mehmet Ali Çelikel, and with the painter, Fehmi Korkut Uluğ, who allowed us to use his painting on the cover. ‘Mehmetçik ve Johnny Mehmetçik’ represents so well the unusual relationship created during the Gallipoli/Çanakkale wars because ‘at first glance it is not clear which is the Turk and which the invader, or who is supporting whom’.⁴ My coming across his Gallipoli series, my inclusion of a poem on it and the fact of his grandfather having fought at Gallipoli and survived, form one of the notable and mystic stories that accompanied the writing and production of this book.

It is impossible to grasp that the total number of military and civilian casualties in World War I was over 37 million: over 16 million deaths and 20 million wounded. The total number of deaths includes about 10 million military personnel and about 7 million civilians. Those soldiers left at a least 3 million widows and 10 million orphans, of those who could be counted.

It was appalling carnage, with the introduction of a kind of warfare unknown before and one for which nurses and doctors could not have been prepared. Trained to heal, they now found themselves facing the savagery of mechanised war. As nurse Ellen Newbold La Motte (1873–1961) wrote: ‘Thus the science of healing stood baffled before the science of destroying.’⁵

Militaries call it mopping up — killing the last vestiges of an army.
 Women mean, cleaning up, repairing, making spotless.
 Florence taught what they all learned, west and east —
 compassion is the salve beneath the gauze that heals.
 Yet for some pain, *morphia*, good as it is, is not as good as death.

³ Rhoden Clare “‘Poppy-Hunters, Poppy-Picking’: Review of Robyn Rowland *This Intimate War: Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915*” (2015) 19(2) *Text* <http://textjournal.com.au/oct15/rhoden_rev.htm> Accessed October 2015.

⁴ As above.

⁵ Newbold La Motte Ellen *The Backwash of War: The Human Wreckage of the Battlefield as Witnessed by an American Hospital Nurse* G P Putnams & Son New York & London 1916 republished 1934 p 55. See the poem ‘Mopping up’ below and Rowland Robyn ‘The Other Hero of Anzac’ (2014) 24(20) *Eureka Street*.

They stitched, cleaned gastric away, gagged on gangrene stench,
soiled their own skin with blood and spit, shit and foul language.
They held eyes that dangled, shot out; pressed their elbows into holes in backs
blown away by mortars; stuffed their fists into spurting arteries.
They saw through to the bone in every way.

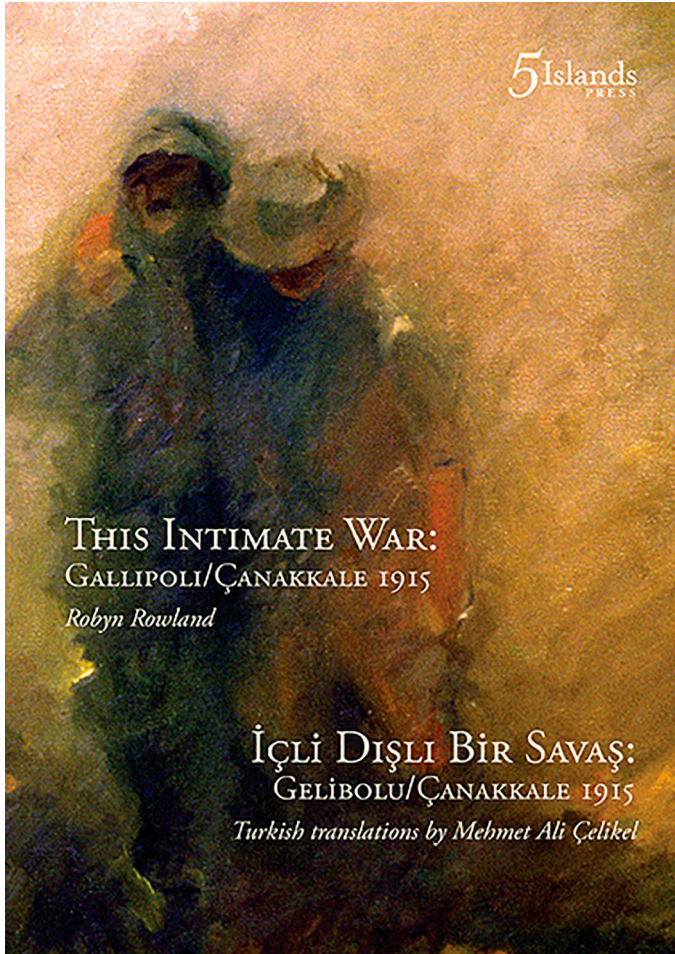
They learned a deeper pain in nursing, not for health,
but to refit an armed force with patched-up husbands and sons,
knowing that ripped apart in body and mind, as soon as flesh was
repaired, they'd shrug up their rifles and packs, strap their faces
into the resignation of obedience, and go back to be shattered again.

from 'Mopping up' in *This Intimate War*.

This was a difficult work to write. It took over two years and the search for Turkish voices and history in English. It involved many days scanning the web for footage or photos hidden in obscure places, in order to get the details right. It meant tracing films and diaries. Often, after intense periods of research and writing, I had to stop to recover from the onslaught of that story: the loss, the horror, the stupidity, the waste. From the first moment it was hand-to-hand killing, shocking physical violence, the physical closeness of its soldiers unmasking the depersonalisation of the propaganda of war. In the end, I found it hard to let go, to let go of all those voices that have disappeared into the earth, particularly the 'boys' from all countries. I felt I knew many of them, and wanted them here still.

2015 was the centenary of Gallipoli/Çanakkale, and coincided with a special year to celebrate relationships between Turkey and Australia. In 2012 the then Prime Ministers, Julia Gillard (Australia) and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Turkey), agreed that 2015 would be proclaimed the *Year of Turkey in Australia and the Year of Australia in Turkey, to be marked by a series of cultural and other events*. From the demonised 'other' and the enemy, to friendship — a strange and compassionate transition after such a war.

A selection of poems follow from the book *This Intimate War Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 - İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915* by Robyn Rowland, with translations by Mehmet Ali Çelikel. It was published in Australia (<http://www.fiveislandspress.com>) and in Turkey (<http://www.bilgeyayincilik.com/kitap.asp?ID=735>) in the centenary year, funded by the Municipality of Çanakkale, attesting to the continuing close relationship between the two countries post-war. The cover image ‘Mehmetçik ve Johnny Mehmetçik’ is from a series of war paintings by modern Turkish artist, Fehmi Korkut Uluğ. ‘The image intriguingly blends the shapes, emotions and motives of the two soldiers pictured, so that at first glance it is not clear which is the Turk and which the invader, or who is supporting whom (Clare Rhoden, ‘Poppy-hunters, Poppy-picking’, *Text*, Vol 19 No 2 October 2015. <http://www.textjournal.com.au>). In addition, a poem in the book on Fehmi Korkut Uluğ’s work, includes the story of a regiment of which his grandfather was the only survivor.



From 'The Folly of Myth: Prologue, 1915'

Part I Desire and myth

Think of fighting ... on the plains of Troy itself! I am going to take my Herodotus as a guide-book.

— Patrick Shaw-Stewart, poet and soldier at Gallipoli

Three small boys, ten years old, careen among torpedoes, mines,
in green grounds around Çimenlik Kalesi, stone fortress
built by Mehmet the Conqueror, to stop Crusaders, Venetians,
protect the Dardanelles. Mimosa sweetens a grey sea of weapons.

Valerian, deep pink and white, flowers between stones of its high walls.
In orange T-shirt, the tallest has a smile bigger than a cannon's mouth.

They climb steel-net anchors used to stop allied subs with
black-and-white arrowhead hooks to dig into sand.
If all three boys splayed along the huge shank from its throat
they would fit with room to spare. They love the camera.
Fearless they quiz and laugh repeating, 'hello', 'hello'.
Go serious. Pose for destiny. Think of wars and heroic deeds.

Troy is just down the road. Bone-house of heroes.
When my boy stood there he saw Achilles and Hector,
armies over a hundred thousand, blood on their spears.
I smelt fear, heard the scurry to hide girls. At that crumbled gate
Priam watched his son's body dragged ragged behind horses.
I prayed to any god that my sons navigate manhood without war.

When the British came they sailed in the wash of Agamemnon.
Every English Officer and Gentleman grew up with
Homer in his hand, unruined Troy on his horizon.
Greek history was furrowed ground where skeletons of immortal
dreams sprout to life. From a country where the rich built
fake ruins for their 'follies', they longed for ancient valour.

Bred on the classics, lusting for another Troy, they camped
in castle grounds on Tenedos and dreamed at night
of sending their ships up the straits to the city of gold.
Straddling present and past above the cove in which the Greeks
waited for a signal that the Trojans had accepted the horse,
modern pride swelled to think they would follow in their wake.

They carried their empire with them — the defeated, the colonised,
the unaware. They so desired Constantinople, mythic, it floated as a
jewelled palace in their minds; like forbidden fruit, it stirred their
loins; exotic, it wove gauzy dreams of riches, of women, wanton,
depraved, eager to be unveiled. *To Constantinople and the Harems*
screamed one Australian troopship's banner.

‘Mitos Aldanması: Giriş, 1915’

I Arzu ve Mitos

Vuruşmayı düşün ... Hem de Truva düzlüklerinde! Herodot'u rehber alacağım kendime.

— Patrick Shaw-Stewart, şair ve Gelibolu’da asker

Üç küçük çocuk, on yaşında, koşturuyor mayınlar, torpidolar arasında,
Çimenlik Kalesi’nin yeşilliğinde, taş surlarında,
Fatih Sultan Mehmet’in yaptırdığı o surlarda, durdurmak için Haçlıları, Venediklileri,
koruyorlar Dardanel’i. Mimosalar tatlandırıyor silahların gri denizini. Kedi otları çiçek
açıyor, pembe ve beyaz, yüksek duvarların çatlaklarında.
Turuncu tişörtüyle en uzun boylunun, top ağzından büyük bir gülücük
var ağzında.

Çelik ağırları tırmanıyorlar uçlarına siyah beyaz oklar bağlı
müttefik denizaltılarını durdurmak için uçları kuma saplı.
Üçü de geçip ağın boğazından sarılsalar gövdeye eğer sığıp
çıkacaklar boşluğa. Objektifleri pek severler.
Korkusuzca sorup dururlar ‘merhaba,’ ‘merhaba’ diye selamlıyorlar.
Ciddi ol şimdi. Kaderine poz ver. Düşünülecek şey savaş ve kahramanlıklar.

Hemen yolun altındadır Truva. Kahramanların kemikten evleri.
Oğlum durup baktı, Akhilleus ve Hektor’u gördü,
orduları gördü, mızraklarının ucu kanlı yüz binlerce askeri.
Ben korkunun kokusunu aldım, telaş içinde gizledim kızları. Parçalanmış
o kapıda
Priamos oğlunun sürüklenip lime lime edilişini izledi atların ardında.
Tanrıya yakardım, oğullarım insanlığın yolundan gitsin savaşız bir dünyada.

İngilizler, Agamemnon’un dalgalarında yelken açıp geldiler.
Her İngiliz subayı ve Beyefendisi ellerinde Homeros,
ufuklarında yıkılmamış bir Truva hayaliyle büyüdüler.
Ölümsüzlük düşlerinin hayat bulduğu bu topraklar
izlerini taşır Yunan tarihinin. Zenginlerin sahte kaleler
minyatürler inşa ettiği topraklardan gelip, eski çağlardan hamaset aradılar.

Klasiklerden beslenip, yeni bir Truva ihtirasıyla, karargâh kurdular
Tenedos kalesinde, gemilerini boğazlardan geçirip
göndermenin düşünüyordular geceleri taşı toprağı altın şehre.
Bir ayakları geçmişte ve bir ayakları bugünde dururlar Yunanlıların
Truvalıların atı içeri aldığı işaretini beklediği kovukta,
uyanınca onların izini süreceklerini sandılar modern bir gururla.

Yanlarında taşıdılar imparatorluğu – yenilmiş, sömürgeleşmişti,
farkında değildi. Öyle istediler ki Constantinople’u, bir efsaneydi,
akıldan çıkmayan mücevherler, yasak meyve gibi, arzularını kabarttı;
o esrarlı şehir, puslu zenginlik düşleri; peçesi açılacak, baştan çıkarılacak
kadınlar. *Constantinople’a ve Haremlere*
diye bağırıyordu Avustralya savaş gemisinin coşkulu pankartı.

‘Close’

*Who can dig a sepulchre great enough for you?
History itself, say I, cannot contain you*

— Mehmet Âkif Ersoy (1873–1936) *To the Martyrs of Çanakkale*
Trans. Prof. S. Tanvir Wasti

close in every sense, air humid and heavy in
march, freezing and snow-bound in november,
trenches stained red, oozing water then
flooding with bodies washed to the sea,
but nothing to drink. i’m so dry.

a sea once vivid blue, now claret mud,
its crust of white in the wind scarlet.
no use when my body, lice-ridden,
can barely crawl for hunger, not swim.
and the thirst. we can’t drink it.

close, the enemy trenches, feet away
rattling bullets or worse the steel,
upward lunge of a bayonet driven home,
jugular spurt, no need for medics,
if they could be found.

we throw notes over a sandbag that separates our ditches.
one said ‘you are too weak to advance, too strong
to retire, and we are the same, so what shall we do about it?’
i can smell his cigarette in the break
as if we have rest periods to breathe.

i can smell the squelchy corpses. our shared dead.
briefly a white singlet on bayonet tip rises.
stepping out to look into our eyes
that’s when we know them, suddenly, smooth hands,
voices, smiles, they are boys like us, young.

after, we go back into our holes. it’s harder now
close up, i see him carrying his wounded
enemy, lifting him gently, laying him down
carefully for us to collect and he will probably
be shot returning and our soldier die anyway

and still he does it because
bravery isn’t to do with this but with finding
himself again in some small act, some care.
another note lands: ‘if you don’t surrender
in 24 hours, we will!’ we have humour at least.

‘Yakın’

*Sana dar gelmeyecek makberi kimler kazsın?
‘Gömelim gel seni târihe’ desem, sığmazsın.*

— Mehmet Âkif Ersoy (1873–1936), *Çanakkale Şehitlerine*

her bakımdan yakın, hava nemli mart ortasında ve
ağır, dondurucu soğuk ve kar havası kasım,
siperler boyanıyor kıvıla, sular sızıyor ardından
sel olup bedenleri taşıyor denize,
içecek bir damla yok oysa. kurudum susuzluktan.

bir zamanlar masmaviydi deniz, şimdi çamur kırmızısı,
dalgaların beyaz köpüğü kıvıla boyandı rüzgarda.
neye yarar bedenim, bitler içinde kaldıkça,
ne sürünecek gücüm var açlıktan, ne de yüzecek. bir
de susuzluktan. içecek yok bir damla.

yakın, düşman siperleri, birkaç adım ötede
kurşunların çatırtısı ya da çeliktir daha kötüsü, bir
süngü hamlesi ile her şey apaçık ortada,
şahdamarı yırtılır, gerek yok sıhhiyeye,
eğer bulunabilirse onlar da.

hendeklerimizi ayıran kum çuvalının üstünden notlar atıyoruz birbirimize.
biri diyor ki: ‘ilerleyemeyecek kadar zayıf, geri çekilmeyecek kadar
güçlüsünüz, biz de öyle, o zaman ne olacak bu mesele?’
sigarasının kokusu geliyor burnuma ara verince sanki
tekrar soluk almak için ara veriyoruz cephede.

çiğnenmiş cesetlerin kokusunu alıyorum. ortak şehitlerimizin. bir
ara beyaz bir atlet dalgalanıyor bir süngünün ucunda.
bir adım atıyor dışarıya biri bakmak için gözlerimize o
zaman tanıyoruz onları, aniden, yumuşacık ellerle,
sesleri, gülüşleri, bizim gibi genç birer çocuk onlar da.

sonra, dönüyoruz deliklerimize. daha zor her şey şimdi,
yaklaşıyorum, taşıdığını görüyorum düşmanın yaralı bir
askerini, onu usulca kaldırıp, yere yatırışını dikkatlice gidip
alalım diye şehidimizi o gidince
askerimiz çoktan öldü ve o da vurulacak dönüşte

yine de yapıyor bunu
yiğitlik savaşmak değil kendini bulmaktır çünkü
küçük bir eylemde, bir iyilikte.
bir başka not der ki: ‘teslim olmazsanız eğer
24 saat içinde, biz oluruz!’ en azından gülüyoruz birlikte.

we can hear them laugh sometimes, weep others,
call to us at night. we don't know the language but
we know song when we hear it, the sound of a joke.
their songs break your heart open, you can hear home in them.
one of us far away from home, the other not close enough.

close is what i remember of my son five, his smell,
my wife leaning from bed for her slippers, her dark hair
a lost photo. now i know him in the trenches best,
his ribs thin like mine, his bandaged foot,
that cough at night, the black sleepless shape of his death.

we all know each other both sides.
we know our towns, our cities, our families.
we share our breath here, sometimes our sad food,
inedible bully beef, grapes, tomatoes, hard biscuits, fresh bread.
they killed my friend relieving himself at dawn

blew him to pieces and he fell on us all like rain.
close, i love him now, my enemy. i know him. like me
he can't understand the way of it, the charging out,
the sure death, the way they tell us and we do it.
i feel his tremble at the boom of canon, the snipers' zip.

he knows death is here for us, no other way.
line after line of us both sides, one defending the place
he loves, the other knowing it. they don't want us killed,
we'd all be lonely here. we have no boundaries anymore.
we are killing ourselves in this intimate war.

bazen güldüklerini duyarız, ağladıklarını,
bize seslendiklerini geceleri. dillerini anlamasak da
şakalaşmaları ve şarkıları tanırız duyunca.
şarkıları yüreğini burkar derinden, memleketi duyarsın dinledikçe.
bizim uzaklardadır evinden, diğerimiz değildir yeterince yakınında.

ne kadar da yakın oğlumun hatırası, beş yaşında, kokusu,
karımın yataktan terliklerine uzanışı, siyah saçları
kayıp bir fotoğrafta. en iyi siperlerde tanıyorum onu şimdi,
benim gibi zayıf kaburgaları, sargılı ayağı,
geceki o öksürüğü, ölümün kara uykusuz şekli.

her iki tarafta da iyi tanıyoruz birbirimizi. biliyoruz
kasabalarımızı, şehirlerimizi, ailelerimizi.
nefeslerimizi paylaşıyoruz burada, bazen kederli yemeklerimizi,
yenileyemeyecek etler, üzüm, domates, sert bisküvi, taze ekmeç.
arkadaşımı öldürdüler benim idrarını yaparken şafakta,

paramparça olup bedeni yağmur gibi yağdı üstümüze.
yakınında, seviyorum şimdi onu, düşmanımı. biliyorum onu. benim gibi
anlayamıyor bu işleri, ne işe yaradığını,
kesin ölümü, bize nasıl anlatıldığını ve nasıl yaptığımızı.
hissediyorum titreyişini mermiler vızıldayıp, toplar patladıkça.

biliyor, ölüm burada bekliyor bizi, başka yer yok.
sıra sıra bekliyoruz her iki tarafta, biri savunuyor
çok sevdiği ülkesini, öteki de biliyor bunu. istemiyorlar ölmemizi.
yapayalnız kalırız diye burada. hiçbir hudut tanımıyoruz artık.
bu yakın savaşta öldürüyoruz kendi kendimizi.

'Green Road'

This is the way that we went
 to get here — past lochs in early dawn,
 reeds so still they were painted in,
 green shamrocks we'd sewn
 into our jacket sleeves
 never to match those shimmering Connaught fields
 clotted white with sheep —
 but travelling with us anyway. And out of Dublin's
 grey light we came, out of the poor, the cold,
 always hungry and now to be fed by our work.
 And out of Trinity, the future of a new nation.
 They would know us then —
 our imperial overseers —
 know our worth in battle,
 pay the value in our freedom after.
 That is honour. That is why we came.

The Fife band of the Irish Fusiliers played
The Wearing of the Green
 as we sailed out to war from Devonport,
 those of us coast-born, knowing the fear
 of a rough sea and the want of swimming in it.
 We had thought to save poor wee Belgium.
 We knew it wasn't France when they
 shaved our heads for the heat, lads
 running anyways to avoid it.
 We'd heard from the Irish gone before,
 Gallipoli was hell, but when they landed us
 under sheer cliffs, and no artillery, it didn't make sense.

We waited. We waited too long.
 In heat I've never known. Shears your skin off,
 peeling it back, sunburn red-raw.
 Water now, I knew about water, and rain.
 I lived on land that was watery earth,
 it never went dry. But I never knew
 how precious it really is, how alive
 it brings you, how strong it makes you, and
 what it can do to you — going without —
 slit lips, mouth full of pebbles for the wet,
 stumbling about so mad for it,
 you don't care if anyone can shoot you.
 Honest men made thieves, liars,
 some gone so crazy they might kill for it.
 Wild flowering plants over those hills,
 there must have been clear springs somewhere —
 if anyone in charge had a map.

‘Yeşil Yol’

Bu yoldu gittiğimiz
 varmak için oraya — gölleri geçip şafakta,
 öylesine sakın ki sazlıklar, rengine boyanmışlar,
 ceket kollarımıza diktığımız
 yeşil yoncaların
 asla eşleşmemek için rengiyle
 koyunların beyaza boyadığı ısl ısl Connaught tarlaların —
 ama bizimle seyahat eder yine de. Ve çıkıp geldik işte
 Dublin’in gri ışıklarından, yoksulluğundan, soğuşundan,
 her zaman aç ve artık işimizle beslenecek olan.
 Ve Trinitî’den, yeni bir ulusun geleceğinden.
 Öğrenecekler bizi o zaman —
 imparatorluk yöneticilerimiz —
 savaşta anlaşılacak kıymetimiz,
 özgürlüğümüzle ödeyecekler değerimizi sonradan.
 Bu bir onurdur. Bu yüzdendir gelişimiz.

İrlanda Piyadelerinin Flüt Bandosu
Yeşilin Yıpranışı marşını çalıyordu
 biz yelken açarken Devonport’tan savaşa doğru,
 biz sahil doğumlular, hem korkusunu biliriz
 fırtınalı denizin hem de denizde yüzme arzusunu.
 Zavallı küçük Belçika’yı kurtaracaktık
 Fransa değildi gittiğimiz anladık
 sıcak hava için kazdıklarında saçlarımızı
 delikanlılar dört bir yana kaçıyordu.
 Önden giden İrlandalılardan duymuştuk,
 cehennem gibiydi Gelibolu, ama indirdiklerinde bizi
 sarp kayalıkların altında, hem de ağır silahsız, anlamadık ne olduğunu.

Bekledik. Çok bekledik.
 Daha önce görmediğim bir sıcakta. Derini kabartan,
 soyup, altından kıpkırmızı güneş yanığı çıkaran.
 Su lazım şimdi, suyu bilirdim, yağmuru da.
 Toprağı sulak bir ülkede yaşadım,
 asla kurumazdı. Hiç bilmezdim oysa
 bunun ne kıymetli olduğunu, nasıl hayat verdiğini
 nasıl da güçlendirdiğini insanı,
 neler yapabildiğini sana — dolaşma diye ortalıkta —
 dudakların çatlak, sulandırmak için çakıl dolu ağzınla,
 sendelerken su için çılgınca,
 umurunda değildir hiç vurulsan da.
 En dürüstler bile döner hırsıza, yalancıya,
 kimi öyle döner ki çılgına, öldürebilirler seni onun uğruna.
 Çiçek açmış yabani bitkiler var yukarıda,
 su pınarları olmalı orada bir yerlerde –
 kime yok mu gösterecek yerini haritalarda.

This is the way we went and nothing more to know.
Jumping from lighters and drowning,
the chuck of bayonet up the guts,
or hailed into with lead, 'riddled' such a true word.
Say it fast many times — *riddled riddled riddled* — that's it.
General Sir Bryan Mahon, a Galway man,
had a tantrum when he didn't get promoted, resigned and
headed off to an island, leaving his men under fire,
and no-one game to pull us back without command.
The Fife Band was swallowed by Suvla. One great bite.
Most of us were dead in the many ways of war.
Most of us wearing the green, never got back.

This is the way we left, in early dawn,
past the broken wire, small heaps of charred khaki —
wounded burned to death by gorse fires —
bodies heaped so you couldn't tell
what country they were from, scattered about,
half-buried, the smell of crushed thyme
never to leave the company of blood, of cinders.
We sailed over the ones that never made it to land,
never fired a gun, or saw the carnage,
drowning out of the *River Clyde*.
They were from my home-place and I left them there
in those razor ravines, too far from Irish earth.

I shake out of rage now as I did then, frustrated,
throwing stones when grenades were gone.
All I want to do is drink water, drink and drink,
drown in it, drink anything.
Will they pay that honour-price now,
do you think? Will I have my own country
when I get back to it? The Turks have theirs.

Buydu gittiğimiz yol ve bilinecek başka şey yoktu.
 Dubalardan atlayıp boğuluyoruz,
 dimdik süngüler karınlarımı
 ya da mermi yağmuru altında, “delik deşik” olmuşuz en doğrusu.
 Hızla söyle defalarca — *delik deşik delik deşik delik deşik* — işte bu.
 General Sir Bryan Mahon, bir Galway’li,
 sinir krizi geçiriyor terfi edilmeyince,
 bir adaya gidiyor, bırakıp adamlarını ateş altında, ve
 kumar oynamıyor emirsiz geri çekmek için bizi. Flüt
 bandosunu Suvla Koyu yutuyor. Bir lokmada. Pek
 çoğumuz öldü savaşın pek çok halinde.
 Pek çoğumuz yeşil giyen, bir daha hiç geri dönmedi.

Buydu ayrıldığımız yol, erkenden şafakta,
 geçerek kopuk tel örgüleri, yanık haki öbeklerini —
 çalı yangınlarıyla yanarak ölen yaralıların cesetlerini —
 öyle yığılmış öbek öbek bedenler ki bilinmez
 kimin hangi ülkeden geldiği, dağılmışlar etrafa,
 yarı yanık, ezilmiş kekik kokusu
 bırakmıyor peşini kanın ve külün asla.
 Karaya asla çıkamayanları üstünden sürüyoruz gemileri,
 ne bir silah atabilmişler, ne de kıyımı görmüşler,
 düşüp boğularak *River Clyde* gemisinden.
 Hepsi de benim memleketimden ve bıraktım orada
 o jilet gibi keskin çukurlarda, İrlanda topraklarından çok uzakta.

Sarsılıyorum şimdi o zaman olduğu gibi,
 öfkeyle, taşlar fırlatıyorum el bombaları bitince.
 Tüm istediğim su içmek, içmek ve içmek, içmek
 ne olursa, boğulmak içinde.
 Ödeyecekler mi bu onurun bedelini sence?
 Benim kendi vatanım olacak mı
 geri dönünce? Olduğu gibi Türklerde.

‘When he was young, once’

She only knew his body when it was young.
Not this.

He rode wild horses, tamed everything, everything.
He prayed, or not.
He swept her into life.
His urgency was for her alone
not some idea of history, some vision of a hero.
Now this short year that seemed so long —
and she did not know this body now.
Not this.

Scarred, the leg gone, mind altered beyond
his being able to speak of it except to say –
‘we did things we had to do’.
She had been so hungry. No food.
She had been so alone.
Everything changing, family dispersed,
confusion, no-one to underpin
all that was familiar, known.
She wanted him back.
Not this.

She only knew his body as husband.
She remembered the moustache they laughed about,
her lace veil trailing, her hennaed hands in his,
her happiness, certainty of a future —
never years passing apart, the place falling to dust,
death lists, the fear of news, the understanding
everything had gone now that she knew.
Everything changed.
She didn’t want this.
Not this.

What country is this? Men full of strange energy
they call ‘war’. They call ‘necessary’.
She can see it in a trapped kind of way, that necessity.
But every young man from her town,
every station hand, every merchant in the market,
every father who had seemed so old then.
Now him. Old while young.
She wanted him back, real as the rocks and the sand,
lonely for the ‘him’ she knew in her heart, in her very loins.
Not this.

‘Gençken, bir zamanlar’

Kadın sadece gençken biliyordu onun bedenini.
Bunu değil.

Vahşi atlara biner, ehlileştirirdi her şeyi,
her şeyi. Dua ederdi, ya da etmezdi.
Hayatın içine sürdü kadını.
Sırf onaydı acelesi
tarihi bir fikre değil, kahramanlık hayaline değil.
Şimdiyse bu uzun gelen kısacık yıl —
ve kadının tanıdığı beden bu değil şimdi.
Bu değil.

Yaralı, bacağı kopmuş, aklını yitirmiş
konuşamayacak kadar, şuydu bütün söyleyebildiği —
‘biz yaptık üzerimize düşeni’.
Kadın çok açtı. Yemek yoktu.
Kadın çok yalnızdı.
Değişiyordu her şey, aile darmadağındı,
kargaşada, dayanacak kimse yoktu
güvendiği, bildiği.
Geri istediği bu değil.
Bu değil.

Kadın sadece kocası olarak biliyordu bedenini.
Bıyığını hatırlıyordu her zaman güldükleri,
dantel peçesi sarkıyordu, kınalı elleri erkeğinin ellerinde,
mutluluğu, geleceğinin güvencesi —
yıllar hiç ayrı geçmezdi, darmadağın oluyordu her yer,
ölüm listeleri, haber korkusu, anlamak
bildiği her şeyin yok olduğunu şimdi.
Her şey değişmişti.
Bu değildi istediği.
Bu değil.

Hangi ülkeydi burası? Tuhaf bir enerjiyle doluydu erkekler
‘savaş’ diyorlardı adına. ‘Gerekli’ diyorlardı.
Görebiliyordu, tutsak bir halde, bu gerekliliği.
Fakat, her genç erkek onun kasabasından,
her istasyondan, her tüccar pazar yerinde,
her baba o zaman çok yaşlı görünen.
Şimdi de o. Gençken yaşlanan.
Geri istiyordu onu kadın, kayalar ve kumlar kadar gerçek,
‘onun’ için yalnızlığıydı bildiği kadının tüm kalbiyle, tüm varlığıyla.
Bu değil.

‘Poppy-picking’

for Meral, Bozcaada island/Tenedos, 2013

Not the soft wrinkled skin of old men —
 papery, easily torn — or the crumpled blooms in our town plots.
 Upright as tulips, Turkish Red Poppies are firm and sure,
 they need just four petals, bright scarlet,
 red as red can get, each with its eye kohl-black.

We are laughing like children,
 racing through fields-full, higher than our knees.
 They crowd the narrow roads of your island
 spilling across runnels, under fences
 as if they were once water, spreading in a flood.

We are poppy-hunters, poppy-picking.
 We run ahead of the other women,
 driving to lane’s end, friends’ building sites,
 competing for the best field to harvest.
 You hold them hostage with talk while I grab and gather.

We pluck the four petals. Pollen-loaded stems are
 shocked, naked, worrying how to attract bees.
 Velvet along our fingers we recall our babies’ skin,
 filling bucket after basket, harvesting till your small green car
 is loaded with the lightness of their feather-weight.

At the house we wash them outside in basins.
 Small creatures emerge to be purged,
 bits of grass, poppy seeds, perhaps enough
 to charm a winged monkey, put a lion to sleep
 on their trudge behind the rainbow.

Over and over we rinse them, the spring heat on our backs,
 flowers ruffling and crinkling in our cool hands.
 It’s like washing silk shirts. The pot in the kitchen is
 boiling its sugary clouds. Your secret ingredient
 that I am to take with me ‘to the grave’ is wafting old Morocco in.

When the jam is ready it cools into dark-claret shades
 ready to sit in my bags with poppy lokum, red-poppy syrup,
 travelling back to a country where red poppies only ever meant
 grief over fields full of the bodies of dead young men,
 a generation of women left unmarried, alone.

Now — you say to me — when you see red poppies you will think of these —
 friendship in spring; wild flowering and its fruit; *gelinecik*,
 which means lovely ‘young brides’ in their ladybird beauty,
 black eyes shining with happiness; the touch of red velvet,
 of sunshine, wet silk; the sweetness of jam on the tongue.

‘Gelincikler’

Meral'e, Bozcada adası/Tenedos, 2013

Ne yaşı erkeklerin kırışık yumuşak cildi —
kâğıt gibi kolay yırtılan — ne de park saksılarının buruşuk çiçekleri.
Laleler gibi dimdik, kendinden emindir Kırmızı Türk Gelincikleri,
alabildiğine parlak, kırmızı dört yaprak,
bir de gözlerine çekili birer kara sürmedir tüm istekleri.

Çocuklar gibi gülüyoruz koşarken,
boyu dizimizi aşan tarlalar dolusu gelincikleri.
Sokaklarını dolduruyorlar adanın
saçılıyorlar dereler boyu, geçip altından çitlerin
sanki bir zamanlar yollara taşan seller gibi.

Gelincik avcısıyız biz, gelincik toplarız.
oşup başka kadınları geçer,
yolun sonuna varırız, inşaatların ardına,
en güzel tarlayı bulmak için yarışırız.
Ben demetleri toplarken lafa tutarsın onları arkada.

Dört yaprağını yolarız. Polen dolu kökler
şaşkın, çıplak, arılar nasıl gelecek diye bekler.
Bebeğimizin cildini andırır kadife yapraklar parmaklarımızda,
tüy gibi yükü dolana kadar o küçük yeşil araba
ardı ardına doldurur sepetleri gelincikler.

Eve varınca yıkarız doldurup küvetlere.
Küçük böcekler fırlar içlerinden,
otlar, gelincik tohumları, yeter belki de
uyutmaya bir aslanı, uçan bir maymunu eğlendirmeye
gökkuşağının ardındaki merdivenlerde.

Üst üste durularız, yakarken sırtımızı bahar güneşi,
çiçekler kırışır, buruşturur sular serinleyen ellerimizi.
İpek gömlekleri yıkamaya benzer. Mutfaktaki tencereden
tatlı bir buhar yükselir. Hoş bahar kokuları tüttüren
senin o eşsiz tarifin benimle ‘mezara’ gidecektir.

Reçel hazır olduğunda koyu gölgeler çöker üstüne soğudukça
hazırım artık gelincik lokumu dolu çantamla,
gelincik şurubumla hüznü bir ülkeye yolculuğa
gelincikler yalnızca genç ölen adamlar,
evlenmemiş yalnız kadınlar anlamına gelir o topraklarda.

Şimdi — diyorsun ki bana — şunları düşün gelincikleri görünce —
bahardaki dostluğu; yabani güzelliği ve onun meyvesini; gelincik,
‘genç bir gelinlik’ kızdır hanımböceği güzelliğinde,
mutluluktan ışıldar kara gözleri, kadife gibi dokunur,
günüşiği, ipek gibi; bir reçel tadı dilinde.