

Dr Robyn Rowland AO in an Irish-Australian citizen living in Australia and Ireland. Her poetry appears in national and international journals and in over 40 anthologies, including seven Best Australian Poems. Of her 9 books, two were published in 2015: *Line of Drift*, Doire Press, Galway, Ireland, and her bilingual This Intimate War Gallipoli/ Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915, Turkish translations by Mehmet Ali Çelikel, Five Islands Press - http://fiveislandspress.com/catalogue/ this-intimate-war and Bilge Kultur Sanat, Turkey.

Hyacinth Loving

Errislannan

and what did vou want? *To call myself beloved, to feel myself* beloved on this earth. - Raymond Carver

God or flesh, Persian poets wooed their 'beloved' as if there were no greater gift than to be both namer and the named. Absent, your brown furred body lives in my skin's memory, laughter recalled is my uisce beatha, water of life, your care, the charge of a sun. Every morning, alone here but for the thought of you, excitement tingles in fingertips that tuck in the stray flips of earth tipped from indigo pots at my door, as hyacinths, rising from their dark birth-shrouds, go ruffling for light. Brown onion caps, almost discarded, balance in comedic joy, a small wonder as they protrude into the ice-blue chill above ground. Heads loaded with bubbles of scented flower, they make the sky ache for their pink and blue sweetness. In the cleft of their companions' leaves thrust toward sunshine, clear rainwater is caught, meniscus bulging as if curved crystal. First night back, a pregnant crescent moon slung low, carried before her the shadow-shape of herself to come. Connemara's sky was star-crowded and cold deep airborne cold - and pure beyond diamond. Spring is an act of trust - the sky will warm, buds rise and open, and the great moon sail into her own fullness as a matter of time. Waiting is the necessity for growth. All this readies for you, Beloved, and when you come your soft kiss will give me again the first spring-time of opening. © Robyn Rowland 2016 january © www.liveencounters.net



Burnt Words

'Black Saturday' was named for a series of 400 bushfires in Victoria, Australia, around 7 February, 2009. 173 people died, 414 were injured, 2,100 homes destroyed, 7,562 people were displaced.

Wind was never useful in a poem, but flame, now, yes flame was the core heart aflame, passion aflame, longing aflame; love's burning desire, night's candle of soft light, moon's flare, the altar of Quan Yin with its flickering quiet, flowering stones, pink shells lit by the glow of tapers.

We knew the world was altering. We were told – look to the waters, the shoreline, ice-storms, poles with their melting caps. No-one mentioned firestorm, air-ignition. No-one talked of trees raging with their bursting heads of fire, sky a turmoil of blood-orange air. That our forest would ignite fuelled by its own eucalypt oil, Mountain Ash dried keen enough for self-immolation.

We knew the fire-bombings of Dresden, human forests burning in Nagasaki. Yet still we weren't prepared for the earth itself to turn tenderless, heave up through its green growth the unvielding heat of 1500 Hiroshima bombs. Ember attacks hammered nails through metal and skin, jet-engines roared in walls of fire to deafen the old, flames sucked oxygen from the air, lungs left slack.

And poems? All that 'burning in the line', those 'flame on the tongue' images, seem crude. Too much ash has fallen; too many boneless burials. And poems can't undo the burning. That new language of terror, all the frenzy of flame, has burned away my tongue.

Sailing to Cong along the N59

for Eileen Keane

It's blowing hard. Water cascading down the Bens' bare bones is spume on the ocean, fingers of it stretched across their stone rumps; it's steam from the fat funnel of an old tug struggling in a storm. The road is a slipstream I'm shooting, white line just a vague border to cross and recross in the glide. Exciting,

frightening.

Up to Maam the grasses are old-gold, rose-gold and swept flat by force, juddering upright in the breaks, but after Corr na Móna avenues of tall plane trees shake leaves free, spiralling across the road tight as a tune, then, ungrasped, lost and foundering spin out across Joyce's loughs. It doesn't matter. The yellow and red glee of their flight was worth it.

But I'm following the rainbow. Out of torrential rods of grey, sun has suddenly cleared the sky of cloud so that purple, pink and green can ribbon the earth, a great thread round the perfect gift,

and I'm chasing it with no desire, no need to get over it to the other side, simply to follow along, mouth open in awe, until here it stops at Cong with you on your fiftieth birthday, showering Lisloughrey Lodge with a swatch of colour in that sudden clarity of an autumn day. How difficult it was to get this far, how easy to go on.

from **This Intimate War Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915,** Turkish translations Mehmet Ali Çelikel

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.

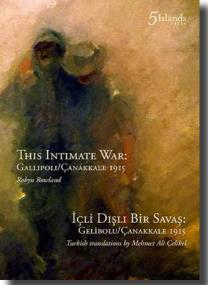
The Fife band of the Irish Fusiliers played *The Wearing of the Green* as we sailed out to war from Devonport, those of us coast-born, knowing the fear of a rough sea and the want of swimming in it. We had thought to save poor wee Belgium. We knew it wasn't France when they shaved our heads for the heat, 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.

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.

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.



THIS INTIMATE WAR

from **This Intimate War Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915,** Turkish translations Mehmet Ali Çelikel

Nightingale

Now more than ever seems it rich to die, To cease upon the midnight with no pain, While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad In such an ecstasy!

- John Keats, Ode to a Nightingale

Sweet bird, rejoicing in clean salted air over Gelibolu, silent ridges full of food, pine forests, nests among filigreed branches under a star-crushed heaven above a cobalt sea. Here you do not need the rose, nor adoration, where you are free and the joy of it rings.

Sweet bird with liquid-throated song a richer nectar than thyme-honey that bees busy themselves with in hives for the village below. Night vibrates with trill, whistle, gurgle, melody of the single male in hope; 'but how will she find you,' he thinks, the boy sitting with his mother's letter open April 17, before the sky was ash. He thinks the song in this day's light a special gift that opened the beauty of place to him, and her letter.

Sweet bird thrilling inside the ear, along the spine, bringing all nature's loveliness to his soldier's eye, the stream laughing, grasses waving, his back against the tree's rough bark, drinking goat's milk hot from the teat, the last for years to come, if he lives. Sweet boy, Hasan Ethem, writes to his mother – 'beauty here speaks to me of God and the love in your letter is a blessing. Amazing, mother, that a nightingale sits on a pine branch singing, everywhere green nature thrives and I must fight for my country, repel invaders, take this song into my ears, trying to drown the fear of what I will hear in combat – a clamour of dying, a crying out; to block the torture of what I must do – to kill, anything, anyone, so foreign to me.' Sweet bird – Hasan listened and sat,

Sweet bird – Hasan listened and sat, watched your feathered throat rise and fall with lyric as it muscled its way to the sky. He knelt and prayed, 'God, you gave this treasury to the Turkish Nation. Grant it to the Turkish Nation still', picked up his gun, led his men out to meet wasteful death.

Hasan Ethem, Turkish teacher, early twenties, died of wounds April, 2015.

