

**MANA**



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**A SPECIAL ISSUE ON 'FIRE & WATER'**

*Edited by Cecile Oumhani*



**Adam Aitken**

**The Draining of the Pond**

for Jan Owen

Perhaps they were the sons and daughters  
of the carp I saw before your time, the catfish, the hybrids,  
flapping and gasping on the pond's muddy floor.

Their numbers swollen through concupiscence  
they mostly hid away, eating and loving  
under the surface and the murk.

The day they drained the lake, my world

was emptied then of their gilded fire,  
the haughty and the humble ones  
gasping on the muddy edges of the pond.

Nothing made much sense that day or the days before,  
the day they drained the lake;  
hundreds, parents and juveniles, gone belly up and bursting

in resplendent Selangor, the servants  
pushing brooms across the sludge and goo.  
What else to do that day but watch

the maids gather up the semi-dead and truly-dying  
in wicker baskets, a magnificent haul  
of gold, pink and darker browns

certain to flood the night market, nothing undersize,  
some as long as baby shark.  
Hijjas had ordered the purging,

for the fish had over-swum their welcome.

A guy in rubber boots, the caretaker, patient with the task  
was scraping back the shit, with a resident artist  
sketching on a terrace.

No one made much art that day.  
No one sad, it was ornament turning back to food,  
the Orient made quotidian again.

Crowd control. No refraction or reflection  
in that sludge – no glint, no bright eyed darling  
to be seen, as we leaned over the survivors, from our balustrade.

The smell: an equatorial slaughterhouse.  
The fish looked up, bewildered, gasping,  
their mouths all Oh and Ahh,  
their eyes rolling before they greyed

in their sockets. For me the death of color,  
the end of Asia, no sentiment or beauty in it.  
The end, or the beginning, I could not say.

**Adam Aitken** was born in London and now lives in Sydney. He spent his early childhood in Thailand and Malaysia. A recipient of the Australia Council Paris Studio Residency, he is co-editor of Contemporary Asian Australian Poets anthology (Puncher & Wattmann). His memoir **One Hundred Letters Home** (Vagabond Press) was published in 2016. **Archipelago**, his latest collection of poetry, was shortlisted for the Kenneth Slessor Award and the Prime Minister's Literature Prize in 2018.

## **Muriel Augry**

Translated by **Cécile Oumhani**

### Noon

Where waters rival  
Where the sand coils roughened by sea-spray  
She treads along

The volcanoes pranced  
Distilled the seas  
And muddled the deserts  
From smooth grounds to bustling cities  
They painted on slate  
The revenge of dawn  
At noon they felt  
Their flesh ripen and their fingers mingle  
They inhaled the dry tracks of dusk  
Down to the torrent buried deep under the earth  
They wrapped in linen at nightfall and hushed

Where waters search for each other  
She treads along

### Nameless watchmen

In the dried-up darkness  
Back from the past they show their nails  
Nameless watchmen in the maze of wasted months  
Villains overwhelmed with legends  
Criminals locked in silence  
Dry breaths on the prison island  
Wrecked by the four winds

Blue upon white  
Cells talk  
Doors ajar under a meshed sky  
The watch tower spits its rust  
Over the esplanade

To the hazardous sound of the tarantella

I will go tread the crisp morning grass  
Where the path mingles with the earth

I will search for  
The cove languid with yearning  
Buried deep  
In its wicker collar

Earth sated with ancient heats  
Prone to wild vagrancies  
I will feed upon your lava sighs  
Lulled by the irreverence  
Of your crystalline floors

Sweet venom  
To the hazardous sound of the tarantella

**Muriel Augry** was born in Paris. She is a poet, an essayist and a short-story writer. She obtained a PhD at the University of Paris-Sorbonne. She is currently the Director of the French Institute in Iasi, in Romania.

She was awarded a prize by the Académie française for an essay on Stendhal and Mérimée in 1990. She published a short-story collection entitled *Rien ne va plus* in 2010 and four books of poems *Les lendemains turquoises* (2012), *Les Ecailles du Soir* (2012), *Eclats de murmures* (2018). *Instantanés d'une rive à l'autre* (2019) obtained the Prix Vénus Khoury-Ghata.

She has worked in dialogue with artists, such as Marco Nereo in Italy and published artist books with painters Abdallah Akar (Tunisia) and Youssef ElKahfay (Morocco).

**Eva-Maria Berg**

Translation: **Yehuda Hyman**

irreplaceable

and again is the sea  
the frontier between men  
and again is the frontier  
only geographically clear  
but no missing space alone  
memory alive stands  
the sea almost forgetting  
forgetting to go ashore

\*

and you go until the shore  
to experience the metaphor  
sea and horizon of  
the human is  
no longer the question  
essence of being the eyes  
and the mouth the ear  
opened only  
the picture from the sky  
turned on its head  
perhaps still some  
steps not touching ground  
the old saying about the path  
as the destination has to be intersected

\*

there is the beach  
of former times  
now excessively  
crowded those  
looking for sun  
would best plunge  
into the bath of  
bare bodies

without suspecting  
whether they are addicted  
to full figure  
brown skin  
or inanimately  
posing like  
trash washed ashore

\*

the guide  
jumps ship  
to pick up  
the sunken stories  
taking them ashore  
to revive  
the humans

**Eva-Maria Berg** was born in 1949 in Düsseldorf, Germany. She studied German and French at the University of Freiburg. Domiciled in Waldkirch, she regularly has residencies in France and is a participant of poetical interdisciplinary cross-border conferences and readings. Her books, often in collaboration with other artists, are published in Germany, France, Switzerland and some of them are translated in English, French, Spanish. She has done reciprocal translations, mainly with the American poet Yehuda Hyman and the French poet Max Alhau. She is a member of the editorial staff of the magazine *Les Carnets d'Eucharis* and the electronic magazines *Recours au Poème* and *Levure Littéraire*.

- official website <http://www.eva-maria-berg.de>

**Yehuda Hyman** was born in 1955 in Los Angeles, California. He is an award-winning playwright, choreographer, actor and the Artistic Director of Mystical Feet Company in Brooklyn, New York.. His plays include *The Mad Dancers*, *Center of the Star*, *Swan Lake Calhoun* and *The Mar Vista*. He received his Master of Fine Arts degree in Dance from Sarah Lawrence College (2014) and currently teaches Devised Theater at Manhattan School of Music. His essay, "Three Hasidic Dances" was recently published in *Dance in America, A Reader's Anthology*, Library of America.

- official website <http://www.mysticalfeetcompany.org>

**Claudine Bertrand**

Translation **Alan Lord**

OF FIRE AND WATER

I am water fire  
I am ice  
I am endless boldness  
I'm reborn in wide open spaces

I am rain wind river lake  
I am of all species  
Endangered

Words and thoughts  
Ignite  
Aboard ship on fire  
Like that of the exiled

Their face is empty  
Of all memory  
Their words are trapped  
And during storms  
Thrown overboard

The waters have invaded  
The earth-tsunami  
Tearing off roofs walls  
Destroying towns and villages

Water called the fire  
From further  
Than the burning ashes  
We hear  
The heartbeat  
By waves breaking

Mother Earth  
Is exhausted under our feet  
Ice floes drifting  
Between thunderstorms and fire



In the Amazon forest  
Carrying their pollution  
On bad winds

We divert waterways  
Glaciers battle  
Like the words  
During incendiary days  
I am fire and ice  
Unreason and chaos

To scatter any useless chain  
Freedom breaks out takes off  
Like the river raising the dam  
That held back the water  
Like the fire of words  
Raised on the unspeakable

©Claudine Bertrand

In her thirty years as a writer, **Claudine Bertrand** has published over twenty volumes of poetry and artist's books. Her work has been rewarded many times: The Tristan Tzara Prize, The Saint-Denys Garneau Prize. Through her books and her involvement, Claudine Bertrand actively contributes to the promotion of poetry in Europe. In 1981 she founded the magazine *Arcade*, dedicated to the female voice, and ran it for 25 years. She hosts a weekly literary radio show. She holds an Honoris Causa doctorate (Plovdiv University, Bulgaria, 2016), the Alexandre Ribot Prize 2016 (Paris) for *Fleurs d'orange* (*Storm Flowers*) and the Virgil Prize 2017 for *Emoi Afrique* (*Africa Stirrings*), Paris.

Born in 1954, **Alan Lord** is a trilingual writer/satirista musician/songwriter civil/structural engineer based in Montreal. He has been called "the Canadian Boris Vian". He was an avant-scenester in the '80's, producing festivals that featured William Burroughs, Kathy Acker and Chris Kraus, among hundreds of writers and musicians. He published a few books - notably *ATM SEX* - and is mentioned in several books, including the biography of Beat legend Herbert Huncke.

## **Tim Holm**

### On Fire and Water's Touch

1.

Water was first, there to quench the thirst  
of everything that grows

and by its grace the flower world arose  
in the touch of warm sunshine close behind,

the blending of freshness all of nature knows  
and that led to the birth of humankind.

When we awoke, we saw how our future  
glistened of hope through the branches of trees.

We listened to song birds warbling  
and obeyed the call of arousing bees

as rain's touch brought prismatic color  
to the sunlight's caressing rays;

naked, we tracked through streams and rivers  
while brushing off reason's blurry haze.

We stopped to bathe in the fountain of youth  
myth, vain glory and our own vision of truth.

II.

I wonder now if even a rainbow  
can lead us to a dream come true

or if its soft color full aglow  
conceals a dark, bewitching hue.

I notice empty smiles that fill  
the sky with alluring promise,

yet, that wash away like a face in clay  
throughout the flooding years,

then turn into cracks, footprints in dried mud  
as history's trace of the human race

disappears into the blank handkerchief  
where we have hidden our most cherished tears.

I long again for rain to filter through  
a cleansing sieve between the clouds  
and fresh garden that we once knew.

Still, I would not have an ocean rob  
great forests of their breath,

nor want our earthly haven dry and brown  
in pain or to meet a blazing death.

III.

Then came fire, dancing arm stretched into night,  
poking its flaming fingers through the sky

in a seasonal, frenzied funeral rite  
as nature teaches what it means to die,

to understand furious cries and moans,  
screams and groans of jealousy and desire  
turned ember, putrid odor and charred bones.

Fire, that laughs out in coughing and crackling  
as a fast breeze spreads its destructive sweep

Born in 1949 in Nebraska, USA, **Tim Holm** earned a Master of Arts in Creative Writing in England with an Antioch International Literary Fellowship Award and also holds a D.E.A from the Sorbonne in Paris, France. He attended the W.B. Yeats Society Summer School in Sligo, Ireland on a Yeats Society Scholarship Award, and was an "honors" student in the B.G.S. degree program at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, USA. Some recent publications include his translations of, "Sacred Laced Art/Dentilles d'Art et de Sacré," Chantpoems by Jean-Claude Cintas, published by Editions Comme Unique, and the life of ADN, Alexandra David Néel, written by Marianne Zahar, which was performed on stage recently at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and in 2019 as part of the Rishikesh Festival in India. His work was recently included in the first issue of Globalit, edited by Shurid Shanhidullah, and has appeared in numerous reviews, including La Traductière 2019. Tim Holm is formerly the Representative in France of the International Writing Program at Iowa City under the direction of Paul and Hualing Engle.

## **Paul-Georges Leroux**

### **From Resolute to Krisuvik**

from your adopted Nunavut to my exiled Iceland, your card took six months. You say you were in the Middle East when you wrote down the words in your notebook a year ago and that you waited five months before sending them to me in a postcard. A space-time continuum of distention. On the front, Lawren Harris's painting of Icebergs, on the back, letters like sled dogs hauling words to the hamlet of sentences. A string of words scribbled one afternoon, when a declining sun fastened shadows on them

I read the four final lines with your voice in mind, trying to detect the rhythm, the timbre, but especially the tone, this infrared of language. I could hear my own voice inside your longing

*My land was on fire  
My life was on fire  
Our love became a river of fire*

*The current runs only one way*

What if our story was such a river? But a river that keeps ongoing, keeps on flowing until it heals itself and becomes another river, another story where fire keeps warm and the current streams death away

All rivers carry on a sky

## **Made of Water, Born of Fire**

The alchemist compendia *Liber de arte chemica* is nowadays usually attributed to Marsilio Ficino. Few figures of the Quattrocento have influenced as many scientists, philosophers and artists as Ficino

A chapter of this work is devoted to *The birth of living beings from matter*. The philosopher asserts that nothing formal pre-exists in matter. Under the pull of stars, organisms and surfaces evolve into their unique forms from the four elements

The fish is shaped by water

The bird by air

The worm by earth

Composed of 60 per cent water, our body becomes a thin awkward stalk to support our eyes, which have established a tyranny over our senses

Our vision makes us creatures of fire

## **Siddhartha**

In the shade of a fern  
close to long rays of intense light  
amber ground gives birth to water

Some stones echo this mystery  
A silvery stream makes its way  
among the deep green of the forest  
becoming far, far away a rustling river

But when I look down on this fluid depth  
fiery solar sparks entrance my fleeting reflection

As if I found  
here and forever  
of all absence, the happy source

## **The Dry and Cold have their own agenda**

The dry and the cold set their own agenda  
for neuro-degenerative diseases  
harvesting the body and mind for water and fire

An invasion of forces break forth  
both physically and mentally  
arising from within my body's hinterland  
reaching far beyond known territories  
opening my deepest innermost shadows  
to sudden attention

Dementia taps into neurotransmitters  
to permute the Hippocampus' sidereal algorithms  
mesmerized by some black Rubiks Cube from outer space

Metal-tasting medications grant me lunar gravity  
8 hours of moonlight, 8 hours of darkness  
plus 4 X 2 of living within a continuum  
where cognitive asteroids test a weak magnetic field  
impacting words that anchor memories  
memories themselves detaching, fading out of reach  
ghost shells finally canceling themselves into oblivion.

Loss is just another word for desiccation  
and letting go is frost  
for those with nothing left to lose  
before losing their mind



## **ABOUT THE POEMS**

### **FROM RESOLUTE TO KRISUVIK**

This poem takes its title from the northern city of Resolute, an Inuit hamlet in Nunavut, at the northern end of Resolute Bay and the Northwest Passage. I always wondered what it could be like to inhabit a city with such a definitive name. During my Iceland years, a close friend of mine lived over there. She was Syrian. She once wrote me when I was living in Krisuvik. We hadn't communicated for two years. Life with its unbecoming events, this "river of fire" had broken us apart and sent us both to remote places. This vast distance between two wintry places presented itself like the perfect canvas for a meditation on a love which events had left incomplete, for a couple which had been broken into two solitudes.

### **MADE UP OF WATER, BORN OF FIRE**

The idea that humans were creatures of fire haunted the late middle ages and early Renaissance. With the wildest imagination, both philosophers and alchemists wrote works entertaining that notion which appeared to me so poetic. Our bodies made up of water, our human nature born of fire. Throughout the centuries, Marsilio Ficino influenced Galileo, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Newton, Poe, Baudelaire and Apollinaire,

### **SIDDHARTA**

This text arises from the reading of Herman Hesse's book. It tries to render an alternative version of the precise moment when Siddhārtha Gautama became the Buddha or the "Awakened One", attaining liberation from samsara, the endless cycle of rebirth, suffering and dying again. In the book, he looked down into the river where the water reflected back his emptiness at him. He found himself to be entirely filled with the wish to let go. I turn this moment into a revelation trying to depict that *mode of perception in which one neither adds anything to nor takes anything away from what is present*. A contemplation of WATER where he extinguishes the FIRES of desire, hatred, and ignorance.

## THE DRY & THE COLD OF NEURODEGENERATION

Two years ago, an accident left me with damaged cervical discs, paralysing my forearms and hands. I had to wait 6 months for a surgery. The medication given to me was so strong that I was lucid six hours a day more or less. I couldn't hold anything and couldn't do much. My state made me aware of the helplessness that people suffering neurodegenerative diseases must experience. This poem is one of the text I wrote about this period of my life. My body was always wanting two things: something to drink and to lie down close to the fireplace. My body's enemies were the dry and the cold.

Born in Canada, **Paul-Georges Leroux** was raised in both French and English. After studying English and French literature, he traveled the world, settling successively in Iceland, France and Greece. His essays, short stories and poetry have appeared in numerous journals and magazines and earned him many awards in both French and English. He has scripted and co-scripted documentaries and fiction films in Montreal and Los Angeles. He lives in Montreal where he teaches and works as advisory editor for *Vallum Poetry Magazine*.

*Les Clefs du Monde, Runes, The Whale, Mon ami Diogène, L.I.S.A,* his essays, short stories and poetry have earned him many awards in both French and English. He has scripted and co-scripted documentaries and fiction films in Montreal and Los Angeles. *The Whales are waiting, Another Side of the Forest, Wizard of Odds, The Eraser,* etc. Although he has not published abundantly, his poems have appeared in numerous journals and magazines. Poetry is his native language. He has participated in numerous art editions, collaborated with several visual artists from around the world, including Monique Dussault, Constantin Piliuță, Norval Morrisseau, Michel Madore, Strowan Robertson, Chuck Russel, and François Aubry. In his foreword to *Les Clefs du Monde*, Yves Préfontaine wrote: "... a distinctive writing, both in his poems and in his prose, a telluric obsession that touches me particularly through the quest we share and the investigation of our personal myths, certainly, but also the great myths that brood under the frost and the embers of our nordicity."

## Alan Lord

### THE WORLD IS ON FIRE

The world is on fire  
The river is dry  
They bring water to the village  
By tank truck now

There's no more water  
Just fire in the forests  
The firefighters are thirsty  
Their throats are parched  
And the land become ashes

The animals!  
Where can they hide now  
From humans  
Where have they  
Disappeared to?

What will we tell the children  
Explain that we need to  
Sell more cars  
Because people need jobs?

The world is on fire  
Our lungs are on fire  
And it's still a good time  
To fire off  
A new missile

Where are we going  
How will this end  
No more water  
No more forests  
No more oxygen  
Nothing left to burn  
Scorched earth  
A desert planet

Yes, let's go to Mars

And look for water

Alan Lord - August 26, 2019

Born in 1954, **Alan Lord** is a trilingual writer/satirista musician/songwriter civil/structural engineer based in Montreal. He has been called "the Canadian Boris Vian". He was an avant-scenester in the '80's, producing festivals that featured William Burroughs, Kathy Acker and Chris Kraus, among hundreds of writers and musicians. He published a few books - notably *ATM SEX* - and is mentioned in several books, including the biography of Beat legend Herbert Huncke.

**Jacques Rancourt**

Translated by **John F.Deane** and **Jan Owen**

*Three poems*

1. *Water*

WATER

From lake to river  
the same preposterous water  
sprung from its bed and caught in time  
with its own measures  
of fact

From lake to river  
water blue and brown  
making the hours foam  
foaming along with them  
and no escape from the rasping wind

Water stretched out  
between sand and grass  
in motion about itself  
calms

    drops  
    from fall  
    to fall  
blindly towards the sea

From rivers to sea  
the water sullied as it passes  
laden with wind  
moves forward in waves  
channelling itself in crests and hollows

From rivers to sea  
a blue-green water  
mauve silver white  
rising towards the azure  
waits  
falls again on the strand

The ink-dark water of the lake  
the ash-blue water of the sea  
twilight past light up  
under the same moon send out  
the same trembling reflections

Hat on head  
a fisherman watches them  
smokes with the moon  
and for a few hours  
halts time for ever

At dawn  
the water flows back upon itself  
is lost and found again  
mist

                                vapour                                clouds  
moistening its own planet

(Translated by John F. Deane,  
in “Jacques Rancourt: *The Distribution of Bodies*”,  
bilingual edition, Dublin, the Dedalus Press, 1995, p. 45-47)

## THE OCEAN INCREASINGLY ACID

The oceans are becoming corrosive  
the flora and fauna  
the pteropods, the coccolithophorids and the foraminifera  
will disappear by 2030

One thing is certain  
the migration of plankton towards the north  
explains the diminished stock of cod

Two thirds of deep-water corals  
are threatened by extinction  
but they are little known

Research today raises  
more questions than answers

(Translated by Jan Owen, in *Sculptures sur prose*, bilingual  
edition of  
poems by Jacques Rancourt and illustrations by Wanda  
Mihuleac,  
Paris, Les Editions Transignum, 2007)

## 2. *Fire*

### SUMMER

And is to-day then a house on fire  
as the heat of the cobble-stones suggests  
or rather are we faced with  
a grandiose sculpture of nature  
populated by overtanned passersby  
while the sun from  
the very tip of the clock  
leans out dottily over the sea?

(Translated by John F. Deane,  
in “Jacques Rancourt: *The Distribution of Bodies*”,  
bilingual edition, Dublin, the Dedalus Press, 1995, p. 28)

### **Jacques Rancourt – *Biographical note***

Jacques Rancourt was born in Quebec in 1946 and lives in Paris since 1971. A PhD in French Literature from, he has published some thirty collections of poetry and artist books, haiku and photography collections, essays and anthologies on contemporary poetry, as well as translations from English and Spanish. From the beginning of the eighties up to 2104, he has been the director of the Festival Franco-Anglais de Poésie and of the international poetry and art magazine *La Traductière*. In 2018, he received the « Dante European Poetry Prize ».



## Shuhrid Shahidullah

### Four Poems

#### To See

In the land of tearless cry,  
    you sell seeds of tears—actually of fire.  
It burns rivers scribbled in blood and  
    on the rest of the unmasked geography.  
Still, men and women float out from  
    the ocean of ashes; I do not know them well.  
But it seems they are my siblings came from  
my own mothers' womb.  
There, from a decent distance  
    I've seen their rehearsal of birth  
    before the falling of tears and the last abortion.  
As if pushing my mother's womb softly aside  
    I've seen as much as a born-blind is permitted to see  
    in the light of a mortal uterus.

## **Situation**

`Water-canon`  
you wrote in ease.

There dropped the pages of the treaty (yet to be lettered)  
after so many questions

You had put down your last sword  
at the feet of your patricide

Then went for sleep  
lulled by patter of letters fallen from a dream of an omnivorous

The history keeps it recorded that  
the water-canon was your mother's uterus.

## Half-Fire

The moon fell asleep after eating up half of the fire.

Backed from despair,  
    you had poured back  
        another half of the fire into people's eyes.

The rain came all alone all on a sudden.  
In her dreams, your mother ranged her voice with the rain-drops  
        and wept whole night.

No sorrows around though;  
who called her then into the darkness  
        deeper than the sorrow?

Intimated with the query, a cosmic neighbour  
        accompanied your mom into her tears.

Now it is almost dawn.

Let's go with the half of the fire to lit-up the sun in its attire.

## **Experimental**

Those, who are still asking for love,  
    their graduated body coming out from the  
        ring of fire  
and pulling my body in that ring instead.

My unexamined body,  
    like a prophecy-scared minor prophet,  
        is trembling on the no-men's land bordering love and fire.  
And my soul, the eccentric forager, instigating the hunger of  
    fire by dancing around it sacrilegiously.

## **Shuhrid Shahidullah**

Poet. Translator. Little Magazie Editor. Born in 1975 in Kushtia, Bangladesh. Five collections of poems in Bangla. Works including poems and interviews have been published in French, German and English. Edits Shirdanra (Backbone), a little magazine for more than 15 years. Major translation works into Bengali include Letters to A Young Poet by Rainer Maria Rilke and two books of poems by French poet Linda Maria Baros; The House Made Razor Blades (published by Ulukhar, Bangladesh, 2017) and Highway A4 and other Poems (Published by Bhashalipi, India, 2018).

Presented poems in Paris English-French Poetry Festival in 2014 and 2016. Associate Editor to La Traductière, a French journal for literature and visual arts.

La Traductière has published a book, 'L'odeur d'antiseptique empoigne la ville' of his poems in French translation in 2018 from Paris.

Shuhrid also edits an international literary web journal in English called 'Glocalit' (<http://ulukharbd.com/Glocalit>) launched in 2019.