

Some Questions Regarding Poems

for Pearse Hutchinson & Martin Mooij

Can poets change the world?

—Gottfried Benn

Is poetry
a continent
or is it more like an ocean?

Are there more written
or more unwritten poems?

How much does it cost
to produce
a poem?

Which poem
says more about its author:
his first one or his last?

How many poems per month
does an average
family of four need
to make ends meet?

Should a poem contain
everything
that is found in the newspaper
or everything
that is not found in the newspaper?

Which words
have never ever
appeared
in a poem?

If one places
a book of poems
on the scales
and it shows 300 grams,
does that indicate
the weight of the paper
or that of the poems?

What is
the opposite
of a poem?

Do poems tend
to be loud
or to be quiet?

How many old poems
fit in a new one?
And how many new poems
fit in an old one?

What is the difference
between a poem with a title
and a poem without a title,
discounting the fact
that one has a title
and the other has none?

Where does one find
the “best before date”
on a poem?

Is it possible
to extend the durability
of a poem
before its time runs out?

Can poems
bring the dead back to life?

Does a poem
have more or fewer lives
than a cat,
and how many lives
does a poem about cats have?

Can one get oneself
vaccinated
against poems?

What in the world
will poems lead us to?

What possibilities are there
to completely forget
a poem
that one had to learn by heart?

How can poems
defend themselves
against being caged
inside anthologies?

What requirements
does a poem have to meet
in order to become
a favourite poem?

Can poems about flowers
multiply
by self-pollination
or do they always need
a poem about bees?

Does a love poem
have to be good in bed?

Which love poems
are better:
the pre-coital
or the post-coital ones?

Are love poems
bound to one person
or are they transferable?

When, at the very latest,
must a short poem stop
if it doesn't want to risk
being mistaken
for a long poem?

Can poems
be produced artificially?

How many poems
can one read, at most,
if one still has to drive?

How can poems
be prevented?

Can a poem sense it
if it's brushed
by the mantle
of literary history?

Should poems
be provided
with the foot-note
“please delete what does not apply”?

May poems
refuse to give evidence?

Should one throw poems
to the drowning?

What do memorable poems
remember?

Do political poems
represent
the interests
of apolitical poems?

How good must a poem be
in order to be forbidden?

Do poems evaporate
if one leaves the book
lying open for too long?

Is earth
the only planet
where poems
are to be found?

Should poems
be deployed
in areas of crisis?

Has the supply
of poems
for the population
been secured?

In case of emergency
are there any reserves of poems
and for how long
would they last?

How long
can a human being
survive
without poems?

Afterword

by Philip Casey

A Few Thoughts on *Mickle Makes Muckle*



Does a love poem
have to be good in bed?

An excellent question, and one of almost fifty searching, amusing and sometimes hilarious questions about poetry and life which surface in the first poem alone.

Now that you've read *Mickle Makes Muckle*, I trust you are in enthusiastic agreement that, along with being funny and quirky, it is intriguing, provoking and ultimately moving. Perhaps also, like me, you're still marveling that these poems were not written in English, such is the quality of Sujata Bhatt's seamless translation.

But what I hope you agree most about is the quotability of so many lines, or rather observations, where assumption after cliché is turned on its head. I first read this book on a computer screen (yes, I know...) and couldn't resist the impulse to copy and paste great chunks of it. I could well be the very man who has longed for a blue jacket these twenty years but each time buys a red one (actually the other way around).

And yes, I really do feel sorry

for the words *in vain*
because they will always remain in vain,'

though I still haven't figured out why the poet is sorry for that great city, Berlin.

Michael Augustin and Sujata Bhatt are husband and wife, and world literature is at ease in their household, where poetry in languages such as German, English, Spanish, and Gujarati are

taken for granted. There is even a smattering of Irish, such is the familiarity with Ireland, and indeed this familiarity has formed Michael's English-speaking accent, which, on the phone, sounds uncannily like that of the late and lamented Michael Hartnett!

So it is appropriate that Michael's first publication in Ireland included translations into Irish (*Ad Infinitum, Poems and Epigrams*, a German/ Irish/English Selected, translated by Hans-Christian Oeser and Gabriel Rosenstock, Baile Átha Cliath, Coiscéim, 2001).

It's no surprise then, that his association with Ireland stretches back into the early seventies, when he was a student at UCD, and a discoverer of poets such as Pearse Hutchinson, Macdara Woods and Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin. He didn't just stick his nose in books—he went out into pubs where breathing poets were found (at least in those days), and encountered the real, living thing, and has been doing so ever since. He has earned his dues, so to speak. In these pages he has quoted Borges' remark that 'Writers are always on duty', which is true, and particularly true of Michael Augustin.

All of this adds up to a deep satisfaction on my part—and I know on the part of others, too—that Dedalus has published *Mickle Makes Muckle*.

I trust you agree.