**The Yellow Light** *by Sheila Aldous*

The guttering candle is waxy in the yellow light.

A halo falls on his gaunt face, throws his long shadow

into the narrowing corner of the shit-walled cell.

The letter he is writing is blotted, torn with tears.

He wished he had not seen his mother yesterday.

She had grown old overnight. A body cancelled:

lined like Renoir’s Old Woman accepting the dark.

He had admired that portrait, the debates with his students,

their essays on the light, the yellow light.

He feels his bowels slacken. A mute hope for leniency.

That somehow he will eject the stench of the sentence

like the reprieve winter gets sometimes from spring.

He waits for the priest who will mutter words of Christ’s pardon.

He considers this barterer who will haggle without blinking

for his soul, for the promise of a fag and dinner.

He will be given the finest cutlery, whatever he fancies.

Not the woman though, he will decline that treat.

She would not charge of course: but fuss, cry, spoil it.

He cannot see the place it will be — the yard blanketed

by a ceiling of shawl-blue sky, drowning in the stain of blood,

but he’d heard the commands, the silences, the volley.

He had been told they would be precise, like swifts winging

through a black tunnel to the sun’s yellow light —

that it would be quick.

*Patrick Pearse, a teacher, was executed at Kilmainham Jail, 1916 for his part*

*in the Dublin Easter Uprising.*