

# Live encounters

POETRY

Celebrating six years 2010 - 2015  
Free online magazine from village earth  
July 2016



Guest Editorial  
**Geraldine Mills**  
Irish Poet & Writer





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Live Encounters is a not-for-profit free online magazine that was founded in 2009 in Bali, Indonesia. It showcases some of the best writing from around the world. Civil and human rights activists, animal rights activists, poets, writers, journalists, social workers and more have contributed their time and knowledge for the benefit of the readers of the magazine.

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[markulyseas@liveencounters.net](mailto:markulyseas@liveencounters.net)

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# CONTRIBUTORS

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## Guest Editorial and Poems

Geraldine Mills

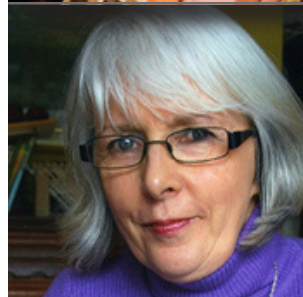
Geraldine Mills has published three collections of short stories and four collections of poetry. She has been awarded many prizes and bursaries including the Hennessy/Tribune New Irish Writer Award, two Arts Council Bursaries and a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship. Her fiction and poetry is taught in universities in Connecticut, U.S.A. She is a tutor with NUI Galway and an online mentor with Creative Writing Ink. Her first children's novel titled *Gold* is forthcoming from Little Island in 2016. [www.geraldinemills.com](http://www.geraldinemills.com)



## After Midsummer's Day

Eileen Casey

Eileen Casey is based in South Dublin. Her poetry, fiction and prose is widely published in literary anthologies, journals and magazines. Dedalus Press, Faber and Faber, New Island, Jelly Bucket (Eastern Kentucky University) are among inclusions. As publisher and editor, recent collections include: *Circle & Square* (2015) and *Reading the Lines* (2016), a joint venture with *Live Encounters*. She received an Individual Artist's Bursary from South Dublin County Council in 2016.



## As Moon and Mother Collide

Mary Melvin Geoghegan

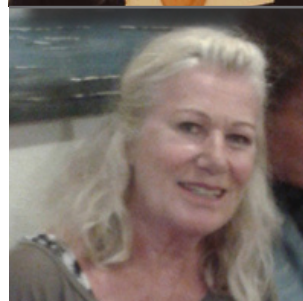
Mary has four collections of poetry published her last *Say it Like a Paragraph* with Bradshaw Books, Cork (2012). Her work has been widely published including Poetry Ireland Review, The Stinging Fly, The Shop, The Moth, Cyphers, Studies, The Sunday Times, Skylight 47, Crannog, Boyne Berries, The Stony Thursday Book, The Oxfam Calendar amongst others. In 2013 she won The Longford Festival Award for Poetry and in 2015 was shortlisted for the Cuirt New Writing Award. She has edited several anthologies of children's poetry and is a member of the Writers in Schools Scheme with Poetry Ireland. Her next collection *When Moon and Mother Collide* will be published with Salmon Poetry in 2017.



## Conflict

Lynda Tavakoli

Recently returned from the Middle East where she has been working towards her first poetry collection Lynda Tavakoli is now based back in her native Northern Ireland. Her poems and prose have been broadcast on the BBC and RTE and included in a range of publications such as *Templar Poets' Anthology* Skein, Abridged, The Incubator Journal, Panning for Poems and Circle and Square. Lynda has won short story and poetry prizes at Listowel and featured as The Irish Times, Hennessy, Poet of the month in 2015.



## Shipping News

Dr Greta Sykes

The poet, writer and artist Greta Sykes has published her work in many anthologies. She is a member of the London Voices Poetry Group and also produces art work for them. One of her own volumes entitled *The Intimacy of the Universe* focuses on the environment. She is a member of the Exiled Writers Ink group. She is a leading member of the Socialist History Society and organises joint poetry events for them at the Poetry Café. Greta is a trained child psychologist and has taught at University College London, where she is now an associate researcher. The present focus of her research is women's emancipation and antiquity.



## Nothing is Fixed

Jean James

Jean James was born in Portadown, Co. Armagh but lives in Swansea where she recently completed an MA in creative writing, with a particular focus on nature writing and poetry. She won The British Haiku Society haibun competition (2013) and came first and runner-up in The British Haiku Society tanka competition (2015). She has been published in Abridged and the Welsh Arts Review.

## Celebrating 6 years 2010-2015

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## Reading the Barren Land

Barbara Flaherty

Barbara Flaherty is the author of two books: *Holy Madness* (Chanting Press 2006) and *Doing It Another Way* (Chanting Press 2008). Her works have appeared in journals, anthologies and encyclopaediae. A citizen of both the United States and The Republic of Ireland, she was a recipient of the 2005 Irish Drogheda Amergin Poetry Prize. Barbara writes out of both the Franciscan and Sufi traditions. Her current work is focused on the world as sacred text. She lived in Alaska for thirty years, is a former chaplain and dual diagnosis clinician.



## The Beloved Calls

Shahbano Aliani

Shahbano Aliani is a Shaykha (spiritual master) in the Shahdili-Darqawi Sufi order. Her quest for purpose and meaning brought her to the Sufi path in 2009. Soon thereafter Shahbano started writing poetry, a collection of which has been published by Intent Publishing South Africa and Na'layn Publications, Pakistan entitled, "Set My Heart On Fire". Though written in English and in a modern voice, her verse is both a timeless chronicle of and a manual for spiritual transformation, in the finest tradition of Sufi poetry.



## Six Poems

Rachel Blum

Rachel Blum is a mother and reiki practitioner, living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the United States. Her poems have appeared or are upcoming in *The American Literary Review*, *The Journal Of Feminist Studies In Religion*, *Confrontation*, *California Quarterly*, and *Shambhala Times*.



## Selected Poems

Susan Condon

Susan Condon, a native of Dublin, is currently working on her second novel. She was awarded a Certificate in Creative Writing from NUI Maynooth while her short stories have won numerous awards including first prize in the Jonathan Swift Creative Writing Award. Publications include *My Weekly*, *Ireland's Own Anthology*, *Flash Flood Journal*, *Spelk* and *Flash Fiction Magazine*. Susan blogs at: [www.susancondon.wordpress.com](http://www.susancondon.wordpress.com) or you can find her on Twitter: @SusanCondon or check out her crime fiction interviews on [www.writing.ie](http://www.writing.ie)



## Lady Cassie Peregrina

Terry McDonagh

Irish poet and dramatist, Terry McDonagh, taught creative writing at the University of Hamburg and was Drama Director at the Int. School Hamburg for 15 years. He now works freelance; has been writer in residence in Europe, Asia, Australia; published 7 poetry collections, book of letters, prose and poetry for young people translated into Indonesian and German, distributed internationally by Syracuse Uni. Press; latest poetry collection *Ripple Effect*/Arlen House; children's story, *Michel the Merman*, illustrated by Marc Barnes (NZ). He lives in Hamburg and Ireland. [www.terry-mcdonagh.com](http://www.terry-mcdonagh.com)



## Walking on Water

Randhir Khare

Khare is an award winning author of twenty one volumes of non-fiction, fiction, translation and poetry. Executive Editor of *Heritage India*, the *International Culture Journal*, a Director of The Rewachand Bhojwani Academy and Visiting Professor to the Dept Of English, Pune University. Recently he was given The Residency Award by The Sahitya Akademi (India's National Academy of Letters) for his contribution to Indian Literature and the Human Rights Award for his efforts to preserve and celebrate marginal and minority cultures. [www.randhirkhare.in](http://www.randhirkhare.in)



Geraldine Mills has published three collections of short stories and four collections of poetry. She has been awarded many prizes and bursaries including the Hennessy/Tribune New Irish Writer Award, two Arts Council Bursaries and a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship. Her fiction and poetry is taught in universities in Connecticut, U.S.A. Her first children's novel titled *Gold* has just been released and is available at <http://littleisland.ie/shop/gold/> [www.geraldinemills.com](http://www.geraldinemills.com)



**GERALDINE MILLS**  
IRISH POET & WRITER  
**GUEST EDITORIAL**

Unlike Paplo Neruda, I do not know when poetry came in search of me though it seems as if it was there from my first breath. I was born with a caul over my head. The nurse told my mother that it was a very lucky sign and that I would never drown; but she had to hide the little scrap of amniotic membrane up in the rafters for me so that it wouldn't get lost. Sailors would have paid her good money for it. Sadly it got thrown out somewhere in a house move. Yet its legacy still stays with me. Throughout my life there have been many times when I thought I was drowning. I never have. Each time there was that danger, I was saved by the lifebelt of writing that was thrown to me.

When I first started to write it was clear that I was going to be a *ciotóg*. The word *ciotóg*, an Irish word, not only means left-handed, gauche, sinister but it also refers to someone who is awkward and a little different. School knocked the left-handedness out of me. The sinister hand of the devil was locked behind my back, the anaemic tentacle that was my right hand given the pencil that tried to shape a fat sluggy 'B', a matchstick 'K' as letters stumbled off the page, collided, became a dirty hole on the page when I tried to erase it.

Being child number ten of eleven pregnancies, there was always a lot going on in our household, mouths forever opening and closing like swallow chicks in July waiting to be fed, to be heard. Quieter than the rest of them, it was much easier for someone like me to watch, to observe, than to try and compete with the constant vying for attention. Somewhere in the midst of those living encounters, pictures started to form in my mind as I looked for a way to express myself.







The right hand now conformed to do what it was never supposed to do, to write. It wrote what was around me, all those living images that were part of my life: a wren, with its tiny tail in the air, flitting into a hole in the wall, common-cat's ear or hawksbeard, like stars fallen on the grass, the snail climbing up the window pane. I wrote out all that was inside me at school and when I read it out, the nun sent me into the higher class to repeat it. I thought it was another punishment. I stood in shame as I voiced my written words and the nun clapped, the students clapped.

I wasn't a writer. I was just someone who wrote. Being a writer was something completely different and confusing. Writers didn't come from a background like mine. They didn't write the everyday story. They went off to Paris and lived in attics, drank absinthe and wrote masterpieces. All I wanted to do was draw pictures of what I saw in the world around me, the beauty and the pain, the tiny lacerations of the heart. I encouraged the words to paint the pictures for me. I drew them out of my own history and put them in straight lines on the page. And when I did, I could hear my own voice in the crowd of voices and it wasn't being drowned out at all. Poetry had somehow found me.

I wrote as if my life depended on it, not knowing that it did. A life belt thrown to me, an image or a scene that was the outstretched hand that I grabbed onto.

Mary Oliver puts it very well when she says 'poems are not words but fires for the cold, ropes to let down to the lost.' That is what *Live Encounters* is, for the reader and the writer; when thrown into the cold sea of uncertainty, when we are in too deep and our feet can't feel the bottom, it is the hand stretched out that pulls us safely to the shore.

## Cack-handed

When a left-over scrap of fabric falls  
from the airing cupboard,  
something about its selvage and frayed threads  
lands me right back in sewing class  
battling with a square of calico,  
the making of a handkerchief.

I fold each edge into hem  
as I have been charged to do,  
measure out the elbow to fingertip  
length of thread, moistens it with my lips.  
With the silver spear between index and thumb,  
I prays that more than all the camels  
in all the world this white cotton  
will march triumphant through its eye.

I anchor the first binding stitch to fabric,  
and sweating fingers start to sew,  
my stitch going in the wrong direction,  
slanting away from what is right.  
The hand chastised. A shame.

I am no Joan of Arc a sword in my left,  
ready to take the blame for the milk turned sour,  
shield myself from the names spat at me,  
gauche, sinister, cackhanded, to take on the flame.

(From *Urgency of Stars* Arlen House 2010)



## Attachment

*(for Evelyn)*

Living as we do without broadband  
the photo of you downloaded  
byte by snail's pace byte. First  
a pixel or two of hospice chair,

a line of stitching, before strands  
of violet thread unwound,  
a petal hinted at, grew to tulip,  
stamen by brightening stamen.

Then your cap, its baby pinkness,  
the frailty of your jaw,  
your eyelid opening wide and clear,  
the stained glass behind you becoming itself.

We sat out the thirty minutes it took  
for the mauve rib of your cardigan to knit,  
the startle of your fingernails holding  
the clean outline of blueberry on cloth,

patient for you to network the broad  
band of coloured threads to it.  
Making us believe for a short time  
that you were being born again.

*(From Urgency of Stars Arlen House 2010)*

## The Sea

*(For J.H)*

Born where the world looked out  
to Aran and beyond  
it was the first sound she heard

before her birth-eye opened to its pulse  
its up-swell, each wave washing  
over her like amnion.

She grew to its cadence,  
liquid scent of blue, of green,  
its shape of salt on light.

Drawn to the silver pull  
of neap and flood she looked beyond  
as it fell into the ends of the earth,

then lifted itself out of the deep  
to course through her  
from hand to brush.

Eileen Casey is based in South Dublin. Her poetry, fiction and prose is widely published in literary anthologies, journals and magazines. Dedalus Press, Faber and Faber, New Island, Jelly Bucket (Eastern Kentucky University) are among inclusions. As publisher and editor, recent collections include: *Circle & Square* (2015) and *Reading the Lines* (2016), a joint venture with *Live Encounters*. She received an Individual Artist's Bursary from South Dublin County Council in 2016.

Photograph below 'On Bray Beach' copyright Maeve Edwards.



## Brush

*For Rebecca*

It's proper name is Callistemen but I say bottlebrush.  
Choked by other shrubs – mainly lilac - its brief season  
spills over a neighbour's fence –who has the best of it -  
seeking out space and air. I am left with remnants,  
days of sipping red.

The last time I saw you daughter, there was a bronco  
stallion of a moon, bucking neon skies  
above Times Square. Young men in doorways  
sleeping rough, their stilled faces beautiful  
as any sculpture.  
I could scarcely bear the city noises in my head  
like thrums of squabbling wasps.  
The apartment in Brooklyn, hot as an oven,  
your cat watching birds swoop by the window.  
He's seldom been outside - yesterday in his carrier -  
which he pissed with fright on the subway to the Vet,  
Brooklyn to Coney Island.  
You told me in a text and I could almost hear the hiss of it  
across time and light, all the way from you to here.

With taut washing line, I could strain back  
my straying mare, a lasso made on midnight plains  
where worries and regrets roam free – but its tendrils

are shaped the very same as wiry filaments that washed  
your baby bottles – my fingernail skimming  
rims for soured milk. Last Friday's blue moon –  
named for two full moons in the same month –  
curved a memory of my nursing breast,  
the soft sucks of your breathing.  
I kept your airwaves clear.

## After Midsummer's Day

*For Maeve*

The longest day has come and gone.

On Bray beach, a miracle of weather  
bakes loaves of multitudinous rock  
car bonnets blister, rivulets of ice-cream  
run over sun-creamy  
fingers and chins.

A sky blue ocean is a world away.  
We scan its dimpling folds.  
A child has gone missing, the aftershock  
distorts the frame.

Dressed for winter, a man sits by the sea wall,  
oblivious to sentinels strung out  
along the shoreline;

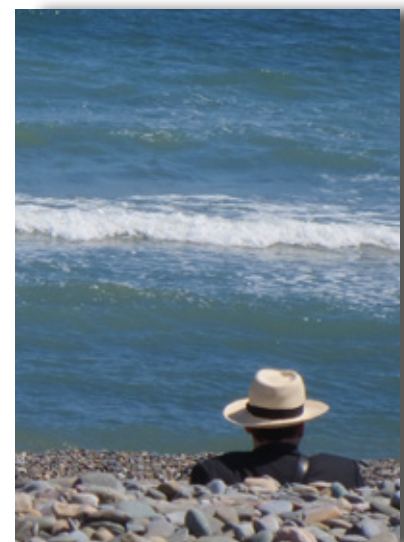
this sudden drama of prowl between gaps in booths  
hung with buckets and spades for summer sands.  
Motionless windmills.

We telescope laneways that lead to the town  
shadows darting like minnows.

A black ribbon winds around his Panama hat,  
reminds me of a mourning band.

The cry goes up, the wanderer found,  
a fresh white wave rolls in.

Returned to us the mysteries of present time  
ebbing and flowing its fathomless rhyme.



© Eileen Casey



## Black Ball Gown

It's Wednesday, that in-between day.  
I buy milk, bread, ham (enough for two)  
and a black ball gown.

Black skirts billow swan feathers,  
a black swan. Rare sightings among  
old jumpers, reeds of widows' weeds  
in the second-hand clothes shop.

Old shoes with loose tongues bring to mind  
gossiping women in Mr Bohannon's  
(at least that's how the name sounded to a child)  
sorting through the rubble of others' leavings,  
searching out what was worth keeping,  
the way Mr Bohannon must have sorted  
through the rubble of Europe.

I want to bury my head in its folds,  
smell the smell of tulle.  
I carry it back to the bed-sit  
beyond Leonard's Corner. A stream of black  
flows through my arms, through the mouth  
of a paint peeling front door (No. 8)  
up the stairs into the one room  
where my sister and I sleep and cook and dream  
(the ceiling has a black disc of smoke  
we burn so many meals, smoke so many cigarettes).

My black ball gown hangs across the wardrobe  
for the whole of the year  
I stay in that flat. I am barely eighteen  
not wanting to leave the nest of my Midlands home.

There is no work there and besides  
I have learned to type and take shorthand.

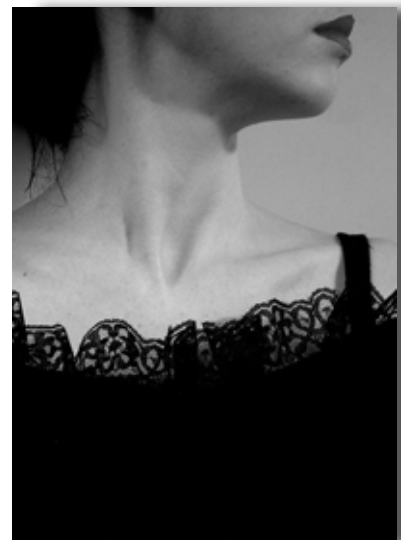
I walk to work each day, down Clanbrassil Street  
down the diving dip at Christchurch onto the quays;

screams of gulls skim beneath black cloud balloons  
bounce off Liffey waters, summer smell of the river  
wending me towards Heuston Station,

to the typing pool, no place for swans.

My black ball gown.  
how it lifts those black balloons  
softens the black discs on smoky ceilings.

While my fingers stammer over the typewriter  
strange Van Hool McArdle words  
it keeps its shape, is always  
exactly as I left it.





## Jorie Graham's Bracelets

Behind a podium, the microphone turned on –  
nothing coming back across the footlights –  
her bracelets tell Ms Graham she is not alone  
even if – sometimes – they snag her silks,  
tangle up her gorgeous hair.

They catch the eye and then the ear,  
a branjangle of sound each time her wrists  
turn around, like the Volta in a sonnet,  
scarce time to summon Baba Marta's new born spring.

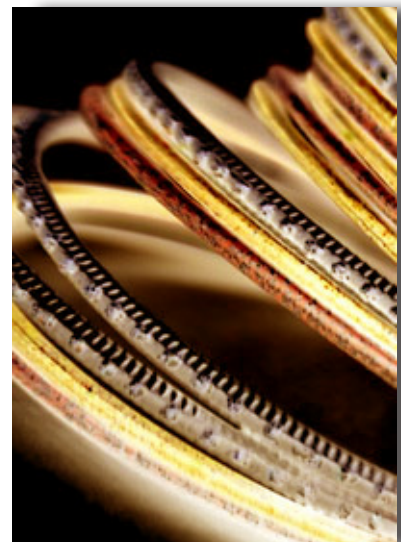
Such sliding in and out of place,  
plays hoop-lay,  
stacks and restacks  
style and grace  
or  
like Sisyphus  
rolling bone on bone;  
leather, metal, shell  
up and down  
the white slopes of her arms.

Octagonal, trapezium, kite, rectangular –  
bracelets are collars too. Snares for images,  
metaphor. Sometimes they're porthole  
or telescope;  
rooftops studded by moonlight  
slanting sleep across memory maps  
purchased in exotic sites.

They leave a band  
between the layers  
deep enough so we can sink  
into white spaces.

At day's end, cooling from her heat  
her bracelets jostle together on the bureau,  
traces of them still breathing on her bare arms,

luminous in the dark.





Mary Melvin Geoghegan has four collections of poetry published her last *Say it Like a Paragraph* with Bradshaw Books, Cork (2012). Her work has been widely published including Poetry Ireland Review, The Stinging Fly, The Shop, The Moth, Cyphers, Studies, The Sunday Times, Skylight 47, Crannog, Boyne Berries, The Stony Thursday Book, The Oxfam Calendar amongst others. In 2013 she won The Longford Festival Award for Poetry and in 2015 was shortlisted for the Cuirt New Writing Award. She has edited several anthologies of children's poetry and is a member of the Writers in Schools Scheme with Poetry Ireland. Her next collection *When Moon and Mother Collide* will be published with Salmon Poetry in 2017. [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)



## As Moon and Mother Collide

I take out my wedding dress  
and the shoes my mother bought,  
shake out the collapsed veil  
and wind it round my throat.  
I release the tension in the veil  
and allow it fall all over the secret,  
hoping my throat will open again.  
Still, guilty of something.

## Holding On

as a tooth breaks on an apple.  
I can't escape the grief leaving  
Streedagh Strand in Sligo and  
all those lost from one of the Armada ships,  
having managed to swim to shore  
were slaughtered just as they drag  
their bodies from the water.

I could have swallowed the tooth.  
My tongue can't leave the crater alone -  
smooth as the stones beneath my feet  
marking a Spanish mass grave.

## The Lost Fields

She reads, her home place  
the fields with names  
running down to the river.  
Listening, I get lost  
as I climb over the gate  
looking for our fields.  
Till, I remember  
how our parents spread the cloak  
so each is never  
without shelter.

## The Pigeons Helicopter

over Sackville Street, mindful  
of a retrieved Easter Monday  
straight from 1915 -  
the year before all changed.  
My grandfather up from Roscommon  
parents still waiting to be born.  
The carousel spins  
the 'Road to the Rising'  
swollen with a crowd  
borrowed from another century.  
And the whole day long  
the sun shines down on children -  
high on their fathers' shoulders -  
peering into the distance  
remembering where they were  
when Ireland will celebrate  
fifty years on.





## A Response to Hearing Mid-Term Break Again

*i.m. of Mary Ellen Melvin*

I see my mother crying  
outside Holles Street,  
waiting in the snow.  
The green Ford van had broken down.  
I sit beside my father  
in the borrowed replacement  
at the Baby Hospital across the road  
looking down on Breda,  
born with water on the knee  
making one leg shorter than the other.  
She was the eldest of the little ones  
who spent years in and out of hospital  
having surgery on both knees.  
Now, each can hold its own.

## Strand Road

*for Marian and Pauric Melvin*

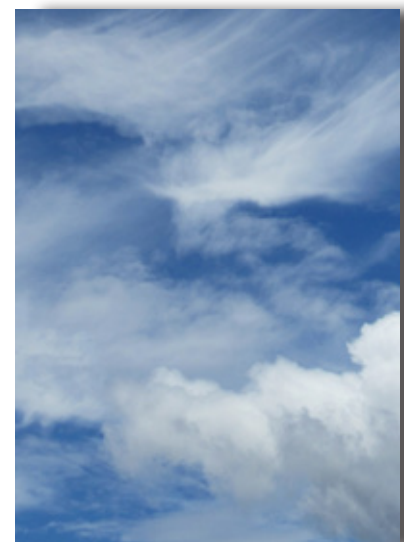
Now, all your own.  
I never thought  
invited out to sea  
from a favourite armchair  
in your new home -  
how, that window could frame  
for all of us  
the possibility of a future  
as sure as the tide.  
Beyond the fields of Roscommon  
and the clear skies of North County Dublin.

## In a Gift of Stickers

*for Joan McBreen*

Chagall arrived today  
in a booklet of stickers.  
Almost in the same way years ago  
my father pulled out the artist  
just as I was about to leave.  
Flicking through -  
I become his subject.  
He invites me to choose a city  
colour, century and time of day.  
On reflection, I tell him;

'paint me in North County Dublin  
in amongst the cowslips  
sitting beside my brother  
up in Kettle's field on a Sunday;  
our father and sisters down at the water  
and our mother resting  
on a cloud'.





## Trying to Find My Whereabouts

in Madrid -  
inside Museo del Prado  
the light of Georges de la Tour  
caresses 'The Newborn Child'  
and compassion enters.  
Later, upstairs El Greco  
catches my attention  
in the gaze of 'Saint Francis of Assisi'  
and like a kite I'm blown.

Visiting my son's apartment outside Madrid  
we ramble through the noticeboard -  
including photos from childhood  
sitting on Santa's knee in the Grotto with his brother.  
Then he slips an arm around my waist  
and I'm home again.

## You Never Said -

That ladder in the camper van  
leading to the bed  
was narrow, unyielding  
without a grip.  
That I would have to hold on  
with all I have  
risk limb and skin  
coming down.

Not unlike all that holds  
wanting only  
to draw us closer.

## Ten Years to Pluto

along with a death, divorce and  
the highs and hollows of expectation.  
And then to our sheer amazement -  
ahead of the calculated time  
by two seconds  
the New Horizons spacecraft  
caught sight of Pluto.  
And from billions of kilometers  
Earth was brought closer  
to the vast within  
and beyond.

## Caravaggio Finds Mary Again

the Magdalene after several centuries  
he'd misplaced her behind all the gossip  
scandal and just plain fascination.  
Now, he slightly adjust the ecstasy  
so it could be understood  
or taken for childbirth.  
Making her comfortable  
he mixes the pigment  
to moisten her lips.  
The brush trembles  
as he paints open  
our eyes



## While it Was Still Dark

*John 20: 1*

Returning from the Easter Vigil  
and seeing how you'd rolled all  
that dried Bluetack from the ceiling  
of my son's old bedroom, in neat  
piles on the floor -

and the drug addict bear the GPO  
not on heroin or crack anymore -  
but, on pills bought off the internet  
(benzies, lithium, dalmene).  
Enough to summon -  
making a dreary week-end  
seem a paradise -

Where the city seeps its thousand colours  
and there's an angel in the sky  
just above the Liffey.

## Summer Grows

out in the garden.  
Coming across blades of garlic  
totally forgotten in amongst the weeds.  
So bruised by my heavy hand  
I hope they'll survive -  
while, I wonder at the rocket and mixed leaves  
growing in the greenhouse  
above the tomato plants.  
In the corner the cucumbers remember  
the father who passed on his love.

## After Readings at Crannóg

*Crane Bar - 25th October 2013*

Next morning  
full Autumn, in Eyre Square  
the rain lashes down.  
Looking out the window  
the tree closest to me  
is having a hard time  
holding on to its leaves -  
which, as we speak are being  
collected by Leonardo da Vinci  
while he's thinking about the roots.  
Roots, which will have to support  
growth, spreading across centuries  
quietly absorbing the sunlight  
in the silence of Sforesco Castle.  
Now, the world holds its breath  
beneath layers of whitewash  
as those leaves reappear.



© Mary Melvin Geoghegan



Recently returned from the Middle East where she has been working towards her first poetry collection LyndaTavakoli is now based back in her native Northern Ireland. Her poems and prose have been broadcast on the BBC and RTE and included in a range of publications such as Templar Poets' Anthology *Skein*, Abridged, The Incubator Journal, Panning for Poems and Circle and Square. Lynda has won short story and poetry prizes at Listowel and featured as The Irish Times, Hennessy, Poet of the month in 2015.



## The Leaving

She left for school  
pretty in gingham  
the heel of her socks  
half-way up the back  
of skinny legs;  
a ponytail's auburn sway  
waving its flippant farewell  
at a mother's angst.

That was leaving day,  
the first and only time  
I let her walk to school.  
Alone.

Later I took a tear from the corner  
of her eye where it waited  
like a water droplet caught upon a leaf.  
Surprised.

*'Killed in Crossfire'*  
a twenty second sound bite  
on the local news,  
yet every second  
marked a year  
of absence when a tissue  
waited in a drawer  
and one dried tear  
remained the only thing I had,  
but even that  
evaporated now  
to nothingness.

## War and Want

The dust is first - always,  
before the sun crisps the skin  
or sand moulds molten heat  
between our toes  
there is always and ever  
the dust to welcome us.

No orifice hides from its gritting  
no spit or piss protected from  
the chaff of misted rock  
that scrapes its way inside –  
the powdered bones of the dead  
ghosting their revenge.

Yet in the sleeping hours  
I still dream of you  
beautiful even in the way  
that angels are  
who smile their enigmatic smiles  
among the bloodied spoils of war.

For I feel the rise and fall of us  
lusting my nights like the killings  
that also lust my days  
and will you forgive  
my need for you  
when you learn  
of my hunger for both?

But you are not to know  
these soldier's thoughts  
that scar my days and nights -  
for the thing that was first is last, always,  
disintegrating again to the fineness of dust  
welcoming us all.





## First Day at School

*For the children of Beslan*

I remember it - my first day at school.

The smell of new cut grass,  
the soap inside my cotton bag  
from some old dress my mother made,  
a tang of polished wood from classroom floors,  
or cabbage and potatoes  
that waft down corridors.  
The sight of it, the grey and  
crumbling walls of chiselled stone,  
so big for one so small to fit into  
or so I thought when I was four.  
A touch of mother's hand,  
the sound of my own breathing in my chest.  
These things I memorise within my mind,  
the day I started school.

I remember it – their first day at school.

A day as filled with hope as any other  
when they had smelled the grass  
and touched their mother's hand,  
or heard the bell and tasted  
the sweet promise of success,  
until their dreams were sacrificed  
upon the altar of a stranger's cause  
that shattered and destroyed  
a thing as fragile as an angel's wing  
and left our souls bereft.

But we can hold their  
missing futures in our hearts  
to let those wings take flight  
and gently soar upon the softer winds  
of summer days or in between  
the corners of our sleep.  
These things we keep  
in memory for what they lost  
the day they started school.

## Game On

In Syria the shooters  
choose themes for target practice,  
a living video game of  
entertainment for the week.

On Saturday it's chins -  
anything below the nose, above the neck,  
and rifle sights explore  
a quivered lip  
as points deduct for errors –  
cheeks and ears are left  
for Sunday's sport.

On Monday, it's the old,  
their leech-peeled progress  
over desert skin the easier to track,  
points deducted for impairment  
but added for an outright kill.

On Tuesday, pregnant women.  
Two for the price of one (but scarce)  
with double points for primary executions,  
only if you're in the zone.

On Wednesday, barrel metal  
rests on gaping sills,  
trigger fingers slack  
for mobiles phoning home  
while someone calculates the points  
but lets the stretcher bearers  
live upon a whim.

Thursday's dawn will drone  
unblinking and unlit,  
sheltering the snipers'  
bull's -eyed sleep from heavenly foe .  
Anonymous the joystick thumb  
that strokes its target from  
behind a foreign screen,  
one final arbitrary theme,  
the sum of all its parts,  
no worse, no better  
than what's gone before.

Friday now and Holy Day.  
Notch up the scores  
before the credits start to roll  
and silence sucks its permadeath of souls  
into the black hole of a VDU.



© Lynda Tavakoli



The poet, writer and artist Greta Sykes has published her work in many anthologies. She is a member of the London Voices Poetry group and also produces art work for them. One of her own volumes entitled *The Intimacy of the Universe* focuses on the environment. She is a member of the Exiled Writers Ink group. She is a leading member of the Socialist History Society and organises joint poetry events for them at the Poetry Café. She is a trained child psychologist and has taught at the Institute of Education, London University, where she is now an associate researcher. Her writing includes academic work, such as essays and consultations. Her particular focus is now on women's emancipation and antiquity. <https://www.facebook.com/greta.sykes.3?fref=ts>

These poems are part of Greta's soon to be released new collection of poems (which will also include her drawings) titled *The Shipping News*.



## The Shipping News 1

Night fell on Faeroes, when the shipping news  
Were read, the views  
Of local people most confused:  
northerly wintry showers give way to  
sunny spells, warm summer breezes,  
mainly good.

Hebrides children ran out to play, when  
Mainly west north westerly showers,  
Fog patches followed by snow  
Did not arrive, but southerly  
Soft air flowed, temperatures rose  
And rose, to 35 degrees.

Lovers on Lundy beach felt full of glee.  
The Irish Sea had warmed and lay  
In soft and shimmering sunshine, the violent storms  
A distant memory.

Finisterre's green palms were no more stirred  
by violent storms  
Much later a yellow fog did not arrive,  
It stayed just mainly good,

At German Bight the sandcastles stood bright  
Against the sky,  
Occasional violent storms did not materialise.  
Yellow beach baskets, with fabric of red and white stripes,  
sometimes blue and white, shone in the crystal air,  
Seagulls shrieks grated  
And tourists watched blankly  
Eating cake.

## The Shipping News 4 *Copenhagen Climate conference*

Viking Forties  
3 to 4 pervasive fog  
Cromarty  
5 to 6  
Nil visibility  
In Copenhagen  
The men in suits nervously haggle  
Like marketenders  
the price of fish at stake.

Dogger Fisher  
7 to 8, grizzly rain, showers  
Deteriorating,  
The Jet stream  
Relocated,  
Shifting further to the north,  
Gulf stream warmth culled,  
Hope culled.

In Copenhagen hedge fund managers  
Pull their money strings,  
The climate change doubters  
Like marionettes  
Perform their voodoo dance  
In peacock feathers  
With ivory testosterone pendants.

Fisher German Bight  
8 to 9, relentless storm  
We cannot see the hand  
Before our eyes  
Slush, dismal icy showers

The warmth along our coast  
Sunk to the bottom of the sea,  
fragile earth mourning.

In Copenhagen conference wilderness  
Prowling hyenas  
Packs of climate change doubters and  
media barons  
greedily tear apart  
the body of the plan  
to rescue earth,  
limb by limb.  
There are no melting ice bergs,  
no arctic disappearance of the ice cap,  
there is no carbon dioxide increase  
no rising floods, sea levels,  
there's money to be made.

Humber, Thames, Dover  
Irish Sea,  
9 to 10, poor to dismal,  
Blistering snow  
Rising sea levels  
By several meters,  
London adrift, the city stock exchange  
Drowned yesterday,  
Our paper money washed up  
Valueless  
And without meaning.

Jean James was born in Portadown, Co. Armagh but lives in Swansea where she recently completed an MA in creative writing, with a particular focus on nature writing and poetry. She won The British Haiku Society haibun competition (2013) and came first and runner-up in The British Haiku Society tanka competition (2015). She has been published in *Abridged* and the *Welsh Arts Review*.



## Dawn Chorus

You are the waterfall in my ears  
filling my bone temple to the rafters  
What is it you sing of?

The constant is no constant.  
Each dawn a new choir croons  
perfect notes perfectly.

I do not know why my eyes  
are open and others are not.  
I do not know who has left.

Perhaps it is I who have gone,  
and she is still humming in the kitchen,  
sifting flour in her fingers,

watching the blackbird at the window,  
dreaming of Drumacken and a  
young man in uniform at the bend

of the road waiting casually,  
knowing she will come with  
a wave in her hair and her voice.

I wonder is it them out yonder  
quickenning the heart of my garden  
on a morning in June?

## After the war

we begin

by breaking into	derelict buildings
breaking open	blind windows
breaking up	oak pews
breaking down	doors to secret locations with
	maps scrawled on walls and empty gun-cases

we continue

by breaking bread	cutting the crust
	crumbs falling through fingers
	like seeds

we end

by breaking	the sod
	to grow
	buttercups
	dog daisies
	violets
	roses



## Under Magnolia Skin

a patina of pale silk  
licks the old walls  
skeining catching  
the sun's last rays  
birth cawl dreaming  
memory membrane  
cradling

a whitewash to cover sin  
with hasty strokes  
gauzing stretching  
over insults etched  
into rough stone  
each word cut carefully  
suppurating

a bandage of sweet flowers  
dead petals fall  
glazing sealing  
marble tombstones  
over the past  
bearing faint barbs  
bleeding

under magnolia skin

## Captured

We brought his jacket back  
ready for the year's hard rains,  
a shame to let it go.

Six months settling on the peg  
its weight of winter shoulders.  
Sunday we pulled it out.

I pressed my nose in close, snared  
in the scent of some far country  
its bog land sluicing my heels.

You shrugged it on,  
and then, him, dog at his side, striding that  
far hill, clamped in the damp.

He dwelt inside yon coat, wore  
the weather in Fermanagh's sodden fields  
captured in green.



## Rules of Engagement

*'The minstrel boy to the war has gone,  
in the ranks of death you'll find him...'* Thomas Moore

Rule number one

Do not accept tea from the woman in number three  
She wears your number on her back

Rule number two

Doors banging in the night  
May not be the drunks coming home

Rule number three

The only good shepherd here  
Is busy looking after sheep

Rule number four

The Boyne is not just a river  
Its banks run red and deep

Rule number five

A train can be derailed  
Even when still on track

Rule number six

A cenotaph is no place  
For the dead

Rule number seven

A barking dog knows  
Something you don't

Rule number eight

Who you talk to  
Is not always who you talk to

Rule number nine

A child can lead a man  
Down the wrong road

Rule number ten

What makes you think you  
Speak the same language?

Rule number eleven

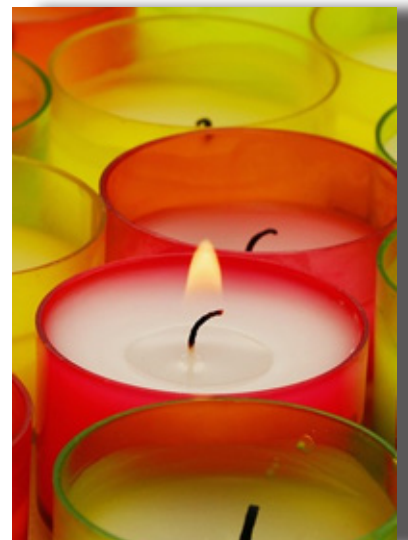
When they ask the foot you kick with  
They don't mean the ball

Rule number twelve

A balaclava  
Is not a fashion statement

Rule number thirteen

Try not to get left with the clearing up.  
Small things get lodged in your throat.





## Out to pasture

I have shrunk  
to a speck  
in a cow's eye  
across the crusting fence  
she mirrors me  
every breath  
my halter.

## Tanka

the chill  
of an owl's hoot  
in the dark  
I move closer  
to your back

## Tanka

after the funeral  
an atlas on the table  
open at Africa  
you were always hoping  
to see other worlds

## Letter from Shenandoah

From the hedge of her mind  
she sends letters back to the island.

She writes  
that here nothing is fixed  
that life climbs up from the roots,  
that nothing is separate,  
that you can tell a wood by chewing it  
that days stretch out kite-tailed  
that this country rolls on back and back  
quilted in blue grass and fractured greenstone.

She talks of how a woman  
can feel lost here  
looking  
that bushes are wired with swallowtails  
that Queen Anne's Lace mantles the fields  
that fruit cellars groan with apples  
that the mare is fetlocked in moonlight  
that pine and oak and chestnut  
proffer their limbs for homes and barns.

After dusk she sits  
in the oil lamp's circle  
with Joseph in the corner asleep  
mumbling something about judgement  
and she feels the house moving within them  
in the powder of earth after rain.

Later,  
settling her head on the flanks of night  
she can see the shadow of  
her empty rose-sleeved dress, still warm,  
its arms outflung on the back of the chair  
waiting to surprise her again.



**Reading the Barren Land: On the Mexican Border** : During the height of the Mexican drug cartel wars, I lived 60 miles west of Juarez on the US/Mexican border working with women's coopertiva in both Mexico and the USA. The harsh Chihuahuan desert, the brutal violence of the cartels, and the incredible resilience of the people remain with me to this day. We live in a communicating universe and the desert speaks to the heart of things and to an emptiness that flowers.



## Asi por el Destino Conducido

Reading Neruda in Spanish I tremble sightly.  
*Asi por el destino conducido*, So drawn on by my destiny.

This morning the proud roosters, the doves, the small birdsong,  
but last night coyote's howl set loose wild communal cries against destiny.

Before he died the teacher's eyes were deep pools of eternity,  
empty of all, even the fierce embrace of his destiny.

Without rain, everything in the land changes, even  
the leaves of desert plants harden to adapt to their destiny.

When lizards appear snakes are not far behind. As I  
clean off the dead yucca leaves, I consider my destiny.

People keep filling the emptiness with ideas. I am  
parched without silence, the soul's voice and its destiny.

## Everything Remembers Them

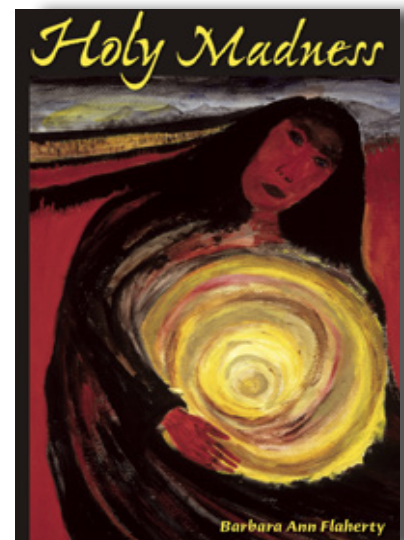
Riding the border of liminal spaces - dawn, dusk, love,  
a hoard of ripened yucca wave seed pods high in the desert air  
near the border, not too far from the road.

Even the yucca speak their names – the ones who hide  
with the snakes in arroyos far from the sun and the border patrol.  
With luck they find the jugs of water hidden beside the road.

The heart opens to something new and unexpected  
in nameless territories without passports or certificates of birth,  
but the tongue is silenced with sorrow by the guards along the road.

When the wind blows, the yuccas quiver from their center,  
light playing in them like rays of the sun. Some planets  
whirl around unnamed lights like moths on a spiraling road.

On her feast day we pray to Guadalupe on both sides of the border,  
We cry out her names, La Morenita, Boundary Crossing *Mestizo*,  
undocumented virgin fleeing through a desert road.



© Barbara Flaherty



## The Hind Leg of the Dog

Wrapped in a teal blue Turkish shawl I sit  
against the concrete wall colored adobe sand  
and bright rose. I don't know why I am here  
in the unrelenting sun with my pale Irish skin  
and lack of Spanish.

The mariachi band begins to sing.  
Gilbert's horn rises to the Mexican sky.  
At the sight of a child dancing  
the old woman next to me cries.  
I place my hand on her hand, smile.  
We are in a dry land called the hind leg of the dog,  
eighty miles west of Juarez and El Paso.

Marcelina, a Tarahumara weaver woman  
fingers my shawl the way women weavers do.  
We both nod at its fine work. I say, Turkey,  
meaning some woman in Turkey,  
who is somehow our sister, wove it.  
Marcelina stares. I say, near Iraq.  
Why do I even mention Iraq, but I do.  
Marcelina smiles, not understanding my language.  
I put my hand on her hand.  
She puts her other hand over mine.  
Now four children are circle dancing,  
then spinning and spinning in folds of white muslin.

Somewhere, somehow I lost a supporting part of myself,  
this thing called language, another called love.  
In a dream my friend is sewing back on the fallen off  
hind leg of her dog. Her husband tells me  
I have forgotten I am a woman who is still lovable.

I don't know the meaning of love anymore,  
either in its giving or receiving.  
Osvaldo, my new godson, is eight years old  
and we both know we are now somehow related.  
¡Hola, Osvaldo! My hands touch his hair,  
cradle his face, kiss his cheek in the Mexican way.  
He looks up at me suspiciously.  
Two trucks of armed federale soldiers drive by.

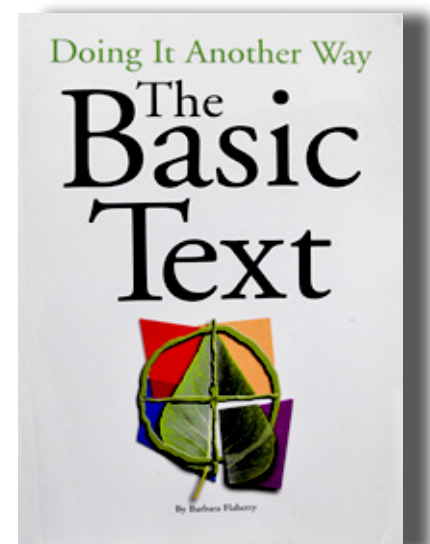
## Speaking in Tongues

After years of silence the wild poppies  
were yellow suns quivering in the winds,  
then they returned to silence again.

The century plant finally bloomed  
its one flamboyant show of flowers,  
then died into a bed for its own seed.

Christ's thorn, jujube, sweet date like fruit,  
juniper berries, seeds of pomegranate, figs.  
Speech of bird, beast, flowering verbs.

The desert speaks in these tongues  
of the deep light, intense enough to help me  
die into the silence and rise once again.



## Reading Barren Land

Once ocean bottom this desert is now  
 a ground coral reef of snake ridden sand.  
 Outside in the shade of the adobe church  
 the persistent light is a visible wave I ride  
 though the broken windows of abandoned cars,  
 into the garden next to the green  
 nineteen fifty six trailer where children  
 play not ten feet away from the shed,  
 the hole under it, the scorpions' nest.  
 Here in the desert, light is clean,  
 unrelenting like prayer  
 and the darkness has its own place.

Marcos, a lean fifteen with a six inch statue  
 of Guadalupe about his frightened neck,  
 is on the drug cartel hit list, as are his  
 uncles, cousins, brother, two already dead,  
 gunned down in broad daylight, their faces  
 shot off in this other kind of night.  
 One hundred and sixty five bullet casings  
 found around them. At the cemetery eyes  
 scan the horizon. Our protectors, the federales  
 are mysteriously gone. We are on our own now.  
 A woman points to the holes in the ground,  
*Careful, she whispers, they sometimes come out-*  
*the rattlesnakes.*

Against drought, barrel cactus, prickly pear,  
 organ pipe, thorny tough skinned succulents  
 hold water. Eight months with no rain,  
 then a few drops, this surprising flash - they flower.  
 Yesterday lightening, thunder, a small mist,

today the pallos verde sings in yellow buds.  
 Speaking in green the sands tell of secret seeds.

Where is the place the lost gods gather?  
 Are they on their own, tumbleweeds dancing,  
 their voices in ruin with only the wind, and art,  
 dreams and the clear starred night to remember?  
 Are they merely ground bone gone to sand?  
 In the wind hewn rocks of the Floritas  
 the breeching whales hover over seas of desert.  
 In dreams and in the deep night winds we hear  
 their arching singing flesh breaking waters.

## Letter to My Son

The unrelenting desert sun,  
 the blood of the dead in the streets of Palomas.

A field of fireweed ripening,  
 a sky bloodied over Mexican mountains.

Washing Daniel's effects in the water,  
 his dried blood alive again, singing on my red hands.

A world lit only by fire,  
 the month I bled after you were miraculously born.



Shahbano Aliani is a Shaykha (spiritual master) in the Shahdili-Darqawi Sufi order. Her quest for purpose and meaning brought her to the Sufi path in 2009. Soon thereafter Shahbano started writing poetry, a collection of which has been published by Intent Publishing South Africa and Na'layn Publications, Pakistan entitled, "Set My Heart On Fire". Though written in English and in a modern voice, her verse is both a timeless chronicle of and a manual for spiritual transformation, in the finest tradition of Sufi poetry.



## Tiger

sleep is the only respite  
my longing for You  
rises with the sun  
gaining strength  
on the heat of the day  
demanding  
that its gnawing hunger be fed

a mighty tiger  
behind the bars of my ribcage  
that needs the open spaces of  
Your Presence  
to breathe and be free

i am astounded:  
*how did it end up here?*  
*did You make me a promise*  
*at some beginning*  
*that i have forgotten*  
*and only*  
*the tiger's insistent hunger remembers?*

*why else*  
*would Your absence make me suffer like this!*

10th june 2010

## Sarmad

they say  
the mystic sarmad  
fell in love  
went mad  
tore off his clothes

why, you wonder,  
do lovers  
roam naked?

it's not for the union  
you think they want

it's the union *inside* union  
they seek

Real Love calls you all the way in  
all the way back

to answer this call  
lovers would,  
if they could,  
tear off not just their clothes  
but also their skin  
their muscle  
their bone

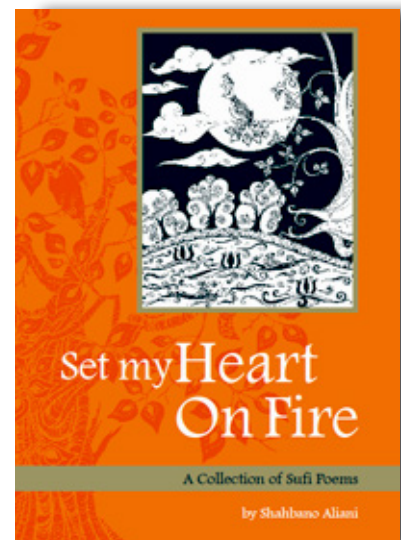
anything that binds  
holds them together

because every cell  
in their bodies  
yearns to answer  
the call of Love

is desperate  
to be free of solid  
separation

so it can experience the  
*everything! everything! everything!*  
it is

7th september 2011



## Miraculous

we sit  
you and i  
under a translucent  
grainless tent  
of blue described only  
by one word:  
sky  
as far, and farther than,  
the eye can see

trees on patient vigil  
birds bursting suddenly  
into flight or song  
ants rushing  
to their daily chores  
on pebbles and grass  
that slowly hand over  
to the day  
little bits of dark-damp  
clinging to the earth  
from the night before

an enormous round  
slice of lemon  
hangs high in the east  
raising unseen breaths of air  
that kiss a fine,  
almost invisible,  
curl on your cheek

you breath in  
you smile  
your eyes light up  
words roll off your tongue  
liquid, sweet flowers  
that i taste deeply  
beyond my senses

you breathe out  
and the  
fragrance of your breath  
mingles  
with the breath  
of silent trees  
blue sky, hot sun  
birds, ants  
pebbles, grass  
and all other things  
we cannot see

this effortless  
simultaneous  
connected  
being

as miraculous  
as surrender  
in a single drop of  
rain

28th december 2010

## Find Your Love Story

the One  
who created you  
wrote your story too  
a masterpiece  
of love

*hurry!*  
go find the love story  
written for you

leave this windowless room

do you think trees and butterflies  
worry about security  
or reputation?

you have grown cold here  
and lonely  
alien,  
even to yourself

in flashes, sometimes  
i have seen the exhilaration  
of pure joy and freedom  
on your face

there is nothing more precious  
more beautiful  
than this inner light

nothing the world gives you  
or keeps from you  
*nothing!*  
is worth this total  
dissolving into  
what you really love

there is another world  
immense  
richer, more beautiful  
than where you've ended up

take a risk  
open your heart  
fall in love

watch how everything wakes up  
spins and sings

taste the world  
like never before

what's there to lose  
but a lifetime of imprisonment?

9th july 2011



## I Can Endure Anything

the time for words  
is over

(they usually convey nothing  
but the platitudes  
of habitual disquiet)

the fearful one is dead

this lioness here:  
she has seen  
floods and raging fires  
been prey  
and predator  
both

she can endure *anything*:  
the radiance of your face  
your slaughter-house eyes

*come!*  
Look at me!  
i tell you:

i can endure *anything*

18th february 2012

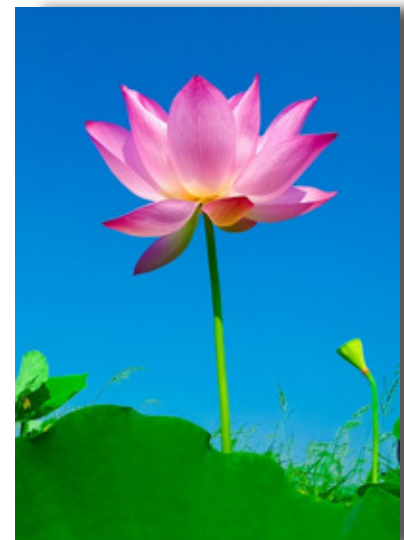
## Your Scars Make You Beautiful

it's your scars  
that make you beautiful  
the places you have been torn  
and broken  
that's where your radiant compassion  
grew  
that's from where  
it shines through  
melting stony guardedness  
uprooting secret thoughts  
destroying habits  
making people forget who they were  
before they met you

in an instant  
setting ablaze a thousand souls

it's your scars that make you beautiful

18th june 2012



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Rachel Blum is a mother and reiki practitioner, living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the United States. Her poems have appeared or are upcoming in *The American Literary Review*, *The Journal Of Feminist Studies In Religion*, *Confrontation*, *California Quarterly*, and *Shambhala Times*.



## A Scar Of Place

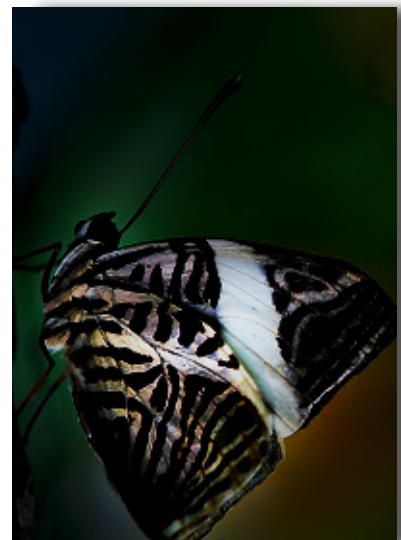
If love is always  
a rediscovered one,  
war too must be  
relocated binding,

when we part  
the grasses of the earth  
that are our mother's hair,  
and find a scar of place,

a vulnerable site,  
the bell shape  
of a grief that always  
returns to ringing.

## The Angels

In the room  
where the soul stops  
to rest before traveling,  
the beds are full  
of children.  
And the angels,  
kneeling in lab coats,  
are working at folding  
their wings like flags  
for the fractured families.





## Green Umbrella

My body begins to cry slowly.  
A book so truthful I cannot read  
the final pages.

The room grows quiet.  
A place so deep inside the flame  
I cannot map it.

Your cathedral appears,  
in a language so kin that hearing  
is a green umbrella.

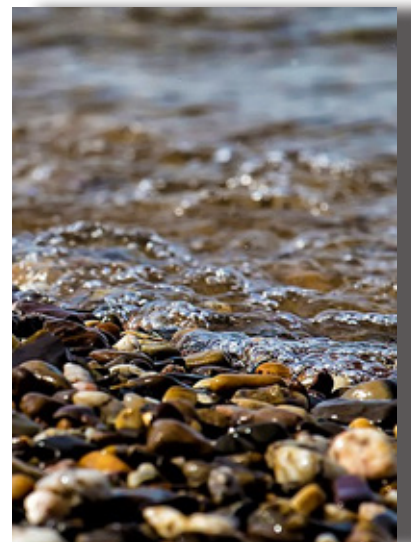
## The God of The River

I met you  
in a dream  
and loved  
your dreambody,

and saw on it  
the light patterns  
of flower petals,

visible to bees  
and to the faithful  
to the god of the river,

winding as  
snakewater,  
half animal  
and the other  
half tears.



© Shahbano Aliani

## The Soul's Five Sadnesses

Thank you for  
your translation of  
the night it is in  
my native language.

And I carried  
the bottle of soil  
from that lost yard  
over every border.

Letters forgotten  
like tablets on a wheel.  
And the colors  
alternating in waves

that arrive on  
the sands of  
the soul's five  
sadnesses.

And the jar is always  
full of questions.  
And the garden  
grows beckoning

## One Heart

If there  
is one  
heart, think  
how we  
care for  
each other,

the bones  
like lace,  
and songs  
like first  
time breath  
of velvet  
skin, new

dawn lullaby  
in a  
world where  
nothing has  
happened yet.





Susan Condon, a native of Dublin, is currently working on her second novel. She was awarded a Certificate in Creative Writing from NUI Maynooth while her short stories have won numerous awards including first prize in the Jonathan Swift Creative Writing Award. Publications include *My Weekly*, *Ireland's Own Anthology*, *Flash Flood Journal*, *Spelk* and *Flash Fiction Magazine*. Susan blogs at: [www.susancondon.wordpress.com](http://www.susancondon.wordpress.com) or you can find her on Twitter: @SusanCondon or check out her crime fiction interviews on [www.writing.ie](http://www.writing.ie)



## Lavender Scented Memories

Lavender heads burst forth, topped with purple feathers,  
catching my eye as they dance in the morning breeze.  
A gentle squeeze: powerful aromas permeate the air,  
as childhood ghosts' dance behind tired eyes.

My grey-haired grandmother sucks a blue, thread end,  
pulling it straight, as she holds it out before her.  
My young, mesmerised eyes, watch in fascination  
her squint, as she feeds the eye of a shiny, silver needle.

Heads bent, we sew small, squared pouches,  
from remnants of my mother's favourite ball gown.  
We fill the small corner gap with dried lavender  
and soap chips, before sewing them tight inside.

A crocheted hook: the final stage arrives;  
we hang our lavender scented pillows,  
through clothed, wooden coat-hangers,  
in the old mahogany wardrobe.

Returning frequently, I press my face  
inside its dark interior; close my eyes,  
inhale its sweet, safe, scent.

## Homeless

Oblivious, I shop in this busy city.  
Warmly lit windows show their wares;  
amidst the hustle and bustle of busy lives.

I watch you sit on ice cold concrete.

A young man, scrunched forward,  
a woollen hat low on your head,  
your shivering palm held upwards.

My heart reaches out to you.

Thin jumper pulled over knees.  
Skinny, bare legs folded tight;  
long feet flat on the ground.

Sockless, shoeless, homeless.



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Founding Contributor of Live Encounters 2010 [www.terry-mcdonagh.com](http://www.terry-mcdonagh.com)



## Lady Cassie Peregrina

This is the title of my next poetry collection, which is due for publication in September. The book is based on our experiences with Cassie, a border collie we got from an ISPCA centre in Ireland.

The whole collection is really just one poem in six sections – three allocated to Cassie's point of view and three to mine.

The following is the introduction to the collection and a further three poems from Cassie's point of view.

## Introduction

It all began in July 2013. Matthew, our son, persisted in his wish to have a dog and, seeing as we were going to be in County Mayo for a year, we were pleased to comply. The Ballyhaunis branch of ISPCA came up trumps and we met a border collie, Cassie, for the first time. She seemed timid and unsure which would indicate she'd not always been well-treated.

We fostered her on a trial basis, but the trial came to an end after about two hours and fostering became permanent. She very quickly got to know the roads, lanes and routines within a radius of seven kilometres of our house in Cill Aodáin, Kiltimagh. We struck up dog-walking friendships and I began taking notes and scribbling a few lines here and there, but it was only when I realised that Cassie must have memories of her own and definite opinions on her current lifestyle, that my scribbling began to shape into poems. Our routine brought me into contact with childhood experiences and memories – people I'd been to school with and grown up alongside. I got closer to the boy hiding within me.

Just after Christmas, the question of *quo vadis* arose and when we decided to return to Hamburg, Cassie's future became an issue. Seeing as we were in this together, provision had to be made for a dog in our Golf estate. Months passed quickly and when summer came we set out with a carload of *stuff* and an inexperienced dog. Our journey took us from Cill Aodáin via a ferry from Larne to Cairnryan, to Newcastle by road, to Amsterdam by ferry and, finally, by Autobahn to Hamburg where I began the first draft of this poetry collection.

I am indebted to Cassie, my family, childhood gallivanting, lifelong friends and experiences, the ongoing struggle with life and mortality, my two sons, Seán and Matthew, granddaughter, Emma, and, especially, to Joanna for her support.



## Rabbits

When I open an eye  
to watch a pair of baby rabbits  
nibbling at dandelion sprouts  
in the front garden,  
my single wish is to  
snap this picture and frame it.

## Point of View

Cosy stuff can be a bit excessive:  
*over here on the Foxford blankie, Cassie.*  
*over here on the granny rug, Cassie.*

And if I get wet – which is natural in rain,  
they even resort to drying my paws.  
You'd imagine a drop of rain was smelly.

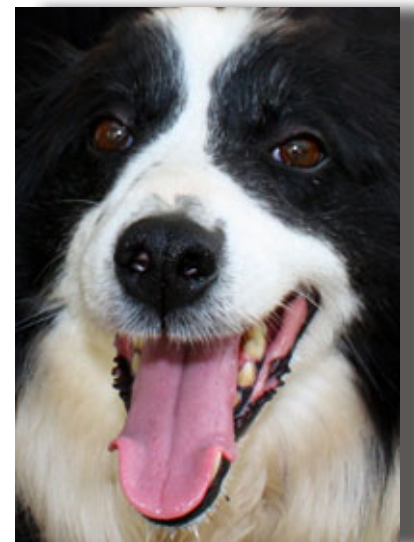
All I want to do is to go speedo  
about the house  
to really amuse myself  
but I don't because they are okay.  
Though I really enjoy pure wet.

I often give them that doggy look,  
lackadaisical like,  
casually offering a submissive paw.  
It works: good Cassie, is Cassie fed?

It's organic for me. I wish I could tell  
oaf-dog-down-the-way  
of my tasty morsels jangling  
like new coins in my dish.

I'm a quick learner. I don't bark much  
and I've no intention of running away.  
It's because she's a Collie.  
They're so intelligent.  
Thanks people, couldn't agree more.  
Must keep that in mind.

Between ourselves, a friend's dog  
is a terrier type – all bark and snarl.  
I'd prefer a path without pity to his comraderie  
– any day!



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## Nothing is as it Seems

I'm only a dog but I see what I see  
and hear what I hear  
from my very own space  
under stars, tables or starter's orders.  
I do try to be in tune  
with the chimes of our planet.

I could be losing compassion  
but some adults roll out  
such bizarre rhetoric  
they seem to be out of touch.  
Lose me, they do – going on  
about education and politics  
in that relentless, encore way  
when their pool of arty banter  
deserts them –  
when silence seems unbearable.

I see children and teachers  
trundle off each morning  
like  
swarms  
of  
bees  
heading for artful pollen fields.

Noble thoughts about school  
often seem out of bounds – a bit  
like a love-affair with a mink coat,  
being happy in hospital or  
exposing your fantasies in church.

I'm jealous: my hope of dog-school  
seems slim

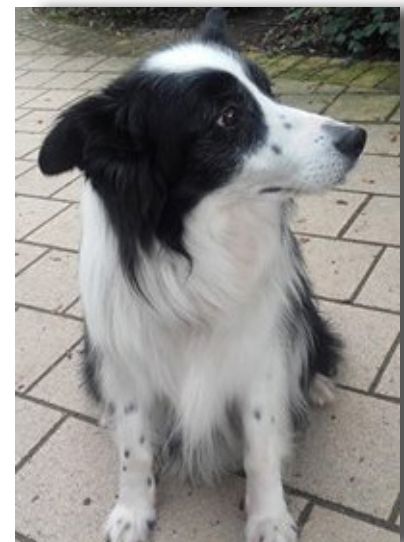
– I'm more dog  
at back door type  
or dog in photo  
unless, of course, a thoughtful pupil  
smuggles me in or a sensitive teacher  
appreciates the role of a border collie  
when skirmishes are about to blow up.

I was rescued by ISPCA – caring people.  
I got fed, could stretch my legs and learn  
to open my arms to welcome a new family.

At times, when contemplating my past,  
I vanish into a grey cloud,  
rattle like a poltergeist  
or rip at beech-tree-bark and howl.

I often lie there thinking  
*nothing is as it seems.*

Even if I can't read or write  
I can imagine sun flooding a page,  
an armchair out on high waves,  
a mouse whistling in an attic  
or I can tune in to the true note  
in a creature heart.



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Randhir Khare, award winning Indian Writer, Artist, Teacher,  
 Founding Contributor of Live Encounters Magazine 2010 [www.randhirkhare.in](http://www.randhirkhare.in)  
 Watch Randhir's poetry performance at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q\\_rh9OcmoGM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_rh9OcmoGM)



## Walking On Water

On the lip of a fading dream  
 The blue landscape dissolves,  
 White lines of trees remain -  
 Frozen like memory.  
 The swan-lined shore has gone now  
 And everywhere the voice of the wind  
 Speaks to me like an old lover  
 Reminding me of all I didn't do,  
 Didn't say, didn't feel, didn't wish,  
 Didn't hope, didn't want.

I have opened my palms  
 And let lines flow into the blue,  
 Dripping drop by drop  
 Into the still water, I walk on.  
 Soft now as down, my skin glows  
 In the last light,  
 Between worlds I walk, suspended,  
 Put palm on palm upon my chest,  
 Hold down my heart  
 Swelling with waiting.

Should I turn back into the dream  
 And trust the journey to the vortex of night  
 Where rocks become wolves  
 In the moonlight  
 And owl-wings serenade  
 The sabbath of sadness?  
 Then deep into the very heart of grief  
 Where love is a stranger  
 And forgiveness an emigrant  
 In an unknown land;  
 There, sunk into the granite core -  
 The cold breath of nothingness?

Or should I follow the way my feet tread  
 Gently on the water's skin,  
 Towards the creaking barge of light  
 That ploughs the blue mist,  
 And climbs aboard and floats into my life  
 Crowded with living, breathing,  
 Hoping, loving, clinging, lying,  
 Hating, praying, killing, dying, burning,  
 Ashing, losing,  
 The breath of time smelling of sweat and longing?

## Reborn

From the moment we are born they say,  
 We are on our way to dying;  
 But I, sitting here in the eye of a cicada storm,  
 Feel I am being born again  
 As evening shawls about my shoulders  
 And the fragrance of oranges blesses the air.



## The Dead Rise Tonight

The dead rise tonight  
 From graves  
 From pyres  
 From tombs  
 From slept-in beds  
 From dreams  
 From memory  
 From dust under carpets  
 From the surgeon's knife  
 From obituaries  
 From eulogies  
 From ancient wreckages  
 From the hands of assassins  
 From prisons  
 From Gulags  
 From the pogroms of Gujarat  
 From Vietnam  
 From Cambodia  
 From Hiroshima  
 From shredded strips of Gaza  
 From the continent of chains and hunger  
 From the burning backstreets of free America  
 From bombed Berlin  
 From hunkered London  
 From genuflecting Jerusalem  
 From the last hour of Gomorrah.

The dead rise tonight  
 Returning to squalid homes  
 Returning to frozen hearts  
 Returning to helpless prayers  
 Returning to faithless lovers  
 Returning to streets in faceless crowds

Returning to Judas embraces  
 Returning to unanswered questions  
 Returning to opiated hospitals  
 Returning to firing squads  
 Returning to tolling bells  
 Returning to unfinished sentences  
 Returning to holiday resorts for singles  
 Returning to filing cabinets  
 Returning to drought-burnt fields  
 Returning to floods  
 Returning to earthquakes  
 Returning to hurricanes  
 Returning to cry on rooftops before the last leap  
 Returning to pubs  
 Returning to salons  
 Returning to waiting  
 Returning to their nakedness  
 Returning to themselves like strangers.

Love, in the great whirls of coming and going  
 When do we lie down to savour  
 What we have and who we are?  
 Cold rain rattles on panes  
 And the skyline is burning.





## Shadow

I hang up my shadow  
On the peg outside the door  
Then walk into the dark house  
Pushing through the thick air  
As a swimmer does through water,  
Inhaling dust of lost summers,  
Breathing out soft wisps of light  
Escaping from the glow  
That dissolves in my stomach's pit  
Where old hungers quietly burn themselves  
Like young widows of dead dreams;

I leave the house behind,  
Slip on my shadow like a second skin,  
Feel the trail behind -  
Dragging over street bodies  
Cobbled with the living  
And the urgent cry of hawkers  
Selling hopes  
Circling like halos over the living  
Waiting to die;

To see myself as I really am  
This is my hope.

I hang up my shadow  
On the peg outside the door,  
Walk into the house beyond the river  
Raging with mysteries,  
Swamp smells,  
Curlew cries,  
Worms working  
In the dank flesh of sadness;

Somewhere boat-paddles  
Slap dark waves  
And the solitary voice of a child  
Climbs the night.





# Live encounters

## POETRY

Celebrating six years 2010 - 2015  
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