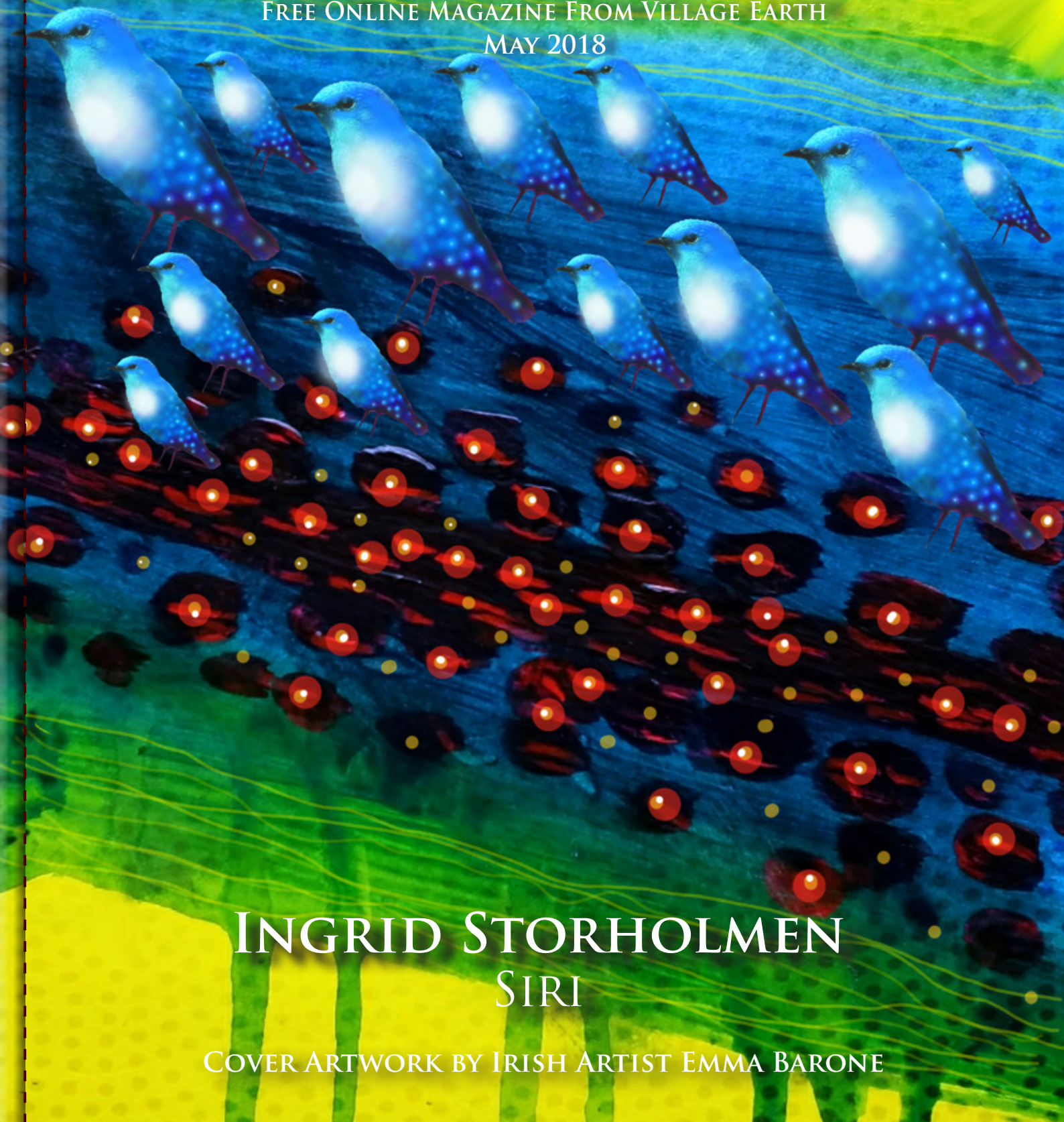


FOUNDED 2010

# Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH  
MAY 2018



INGRID STORHOLMEN  
SIRI

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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## CONTRIBUTORS

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Ingrid Storholmen was born in Verdal, Norway, on 22 May 1976. She studied literature at the University of Bergen, and spent one year at a creative writing school. She was the literature editor of Morgenbladet, a culture newspaper in Norway. For five years, she was the writer-in-residence at ‘Adrianstua’, a writer’s house in Trondheim. She started the Trondheim International Literature Festival during her stay there, and also founded the literary magazine LUJ with two colleagues.

Ingrid has published six books: *The Law of the Poacher* (2001, Shamespeesch); *Graceland* (2005); *Siri’s Book* (2007); *Voices from Chernobyl* (2009); *To Praise Love* (2011) published by Aschehoug in Oslo, Norway. *Here Lies Tirpitz* (2014). She has received many literary awards and prizes for her work, and her poetry has been translated into eighteen languages. .



These poems have bee translated by Marietta Maddrell.

Siri Olsdatter was born in a croft in Verdal in 1800 and died in 1870. She was one of Ingrid Storholmen’s ancestors

**Relationship comes from the language**  
**Each word is related**  
**This glance we have together**

SIRI

Hillside, steep up to the house  
Open from within  
Sun is the biggest word I know  
Sun and Siri!

Now I look like someone who comes from a fairy tale  
This is my calf, I am the one who is going to look after him  
find a name, the white  
spot on her forehead, Pearl? Yes, that’s your name, I’ll take  
good care of you, Pearl  
In the forest, you have to look out for the bear, there’s one  
that goes up the mountainside here, auntie said  
A killer bear. I should have had a silver bullet and shot him  
---*She hit me, Mum, Guri did at school*  
As long as I can keep going without getting scared  
Stretching out my arm  
In the dark, can’t see my fingers, stretching out my arm in  
the dark  
It’s the dark that is the room  
My room to be in  
Do you own your rhythm, horse, walking with cleavage?  
Foot before foot in the swamp sinks  
A shoe rings against rock – soon you can rest in the barn



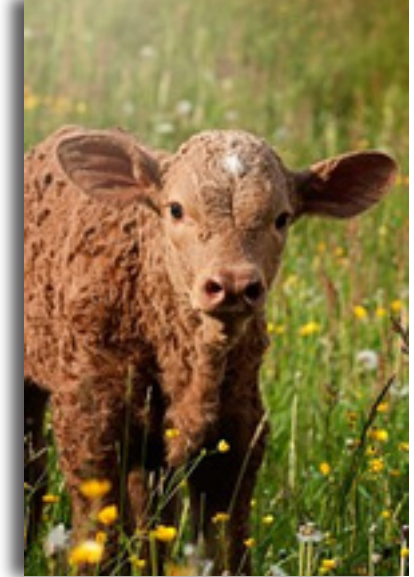




I know about you because you exist in  
 me  
 To inherit is surely to inherit an expectation  
 In stories, in genes  
 And in the name of an overgrown  
 meadow near a chalet  
 If I wait, the thought emerges with you  
 I take this word and let it become her  
 I lie down over Siri, akin

SIRI

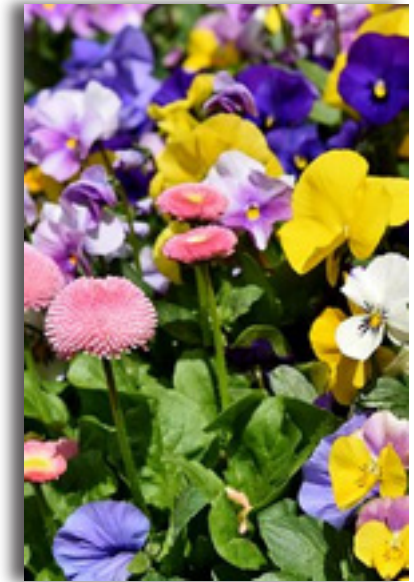
Each day  
 a little strength  
 in the word strength a strength spread over the ground, a landscape with sparrows  
 Spore in the word green as a meadow, do you run faster, you  
 will fall, I run, fall down into clover, one, two, three, four leaves, then  
 I'm saved  
 Wrapped around me, the air, against my stomach. I'm  
 running, look, be praised you happiest of suns  
 I look at a mountain, can I go inside?  
 In the sitting room, a firebrand on the floor, my sheepskin, I lay me beside you in faith  
 Not my noises, these  
 It is the wind wind over the plain here, it is green and I am running  
 swifter than the wind in my feet  
 Wind, be my wind over the hill and down  
 The cold from the earth against my cheek  
 So warm in church dress, I am thirsty and the priest has only just got started  
 Without water we die  
 Mors tua, mors Christi, fraus mundi  
 Gloria coeli et dolor inferni sunt meditanda tibi  
 It is written on the wall of the church. Gloria coeli! In fine  
 letters tibi  
 Father once said it's about death  
 That we should think about death and the sufferings of hell  
 The cows want to be milked and fed  
 Standing, bellowing heavy and ready, and I am ready enough, must help Mother  
 I sleep in a bed with squares  
 A mirror in water and water in a mirror in rings in breath in  
 The veins in my forehead stand out in my skin, want to break open  
 Imagine if I reach the age of twenty, I won't die, I will have vaccine, a word  
 as lovely as a name Hansine  
 Look how the light flickers as the tallow burns up, soot  
 spreading over a cheek that sat too close to it.  
 Hardworking hours in the open air, Sunday with thoughts  
 Mother in word a mother is peace is space  
 In light in sun in work, sing  
 the men rest while we cook  
 Tytti trytti trong!  
 Under the fur coverlet, fall into sleep which isn't restful



Of what happens in a family, hardly  
anything is visible  
Over time the incomprehensible  
unfolds its own architecture  
And we turn away from what we might  
have understood

SIRI

Wolf hours  
Shiver so long it's the way to be warm  
We don't talk, Mother  
It's good then I don't have to lie, think what isn't right  
The priest talks, speaks my name, I am not  
that  
I sit down  
An insect, a louse, creeps in hair down the neck  
It has restlessness in it  
Fingers make marks in flour: I have been here      *my pretty*  
*lass*  
In sheepskin and blue help oneself quietly alone in a corner  
Turn oneself in straw-sound  
the sound is awake  
warms up my bed with me  
The calf looked at me, and I stood ready with the pail, must  
not spill any  
of the blood  
Hard fingers  
I think of meat  
brown cooked meat  
you porridge is meat  
is strength is meat  
I should have gone out to the loo, but it is so dark  
breathes ice  
A small white bed of snow  
I have made for you  
The river shoves ice together  
In the morning large floes lie transparently on the broad place  
here  
For an eye to look into  
Are they angry at me, the children?  
A titmouse pecks seed from a trunk  
How warm my legs get going uphill  
If I go further inside  
my face in the centre of a collar  
be a friend and not a complaint  
One hobbles on two feet when one hurts



Can a mirror hate a face? Or the face  
the mirror?  
I see the features I think of as mine  
See a mother's feature, her mother's  
feature and hers  
They want with their slowness to show  
the mirror image  
what it looks like  
I scrutinise my face so carefully  
That I do not see it changing

SIRI

Those who trespass against us  
We do not speak when we look  
at each other ear  
Your right mine Mother  
red wool  
on the sock, remains  
on the spinning wheel  
Linen bleaches outdoors  
until the Gypsy comes  
with a knife!  
Wait for yourself, Siri  
The knucklebones suddenly first  
remember caresses, the hands  
tell each other about them  
not the fingers in the mouth  
contagious!  
But the children is not going to an orphanage  
said Napoleon, said Father  
We cough at the same time, I and my brother, I am really a bit  
more ill than he is  
It pierces the chest, who will die first, wonder who Mother  
will not give up  
Cross mark, protect me  
In the centre of life is death  
In the centre of the district is the churchyard  
And this I know  
The swallow who cannot fly, only awaits the fox  
My eye is quite calm  
when the priest reads aloud about Jerusalem  
it is a long way there  
Perhaps it is my turn next  
Are you thinking about it again now  
You can tell by the way Auntie walks that someone has died  
Margit has decorated the bed with a pattern of flowers, her  
tiny son  
lies whiter than linen  
everyone has to look at him

**Thomas McCarthy** was born in Co. Waterford in 1954 and educated at University College Cork. He has published *The First Convention* (1978), *The Lost Province* (1996) and *Merchant Prince* (2005) as well as a number of other collections. He has won the Patrick Kavanagh Award, the Alice Hunt Bartlett Prize and the O'Shaughnessy Prize for Poetry. He worked for many years at Cork City Libraries, retiring in 2014 to write fulltime. He is a member of Aosdana. His collection, *Pandemonium*, will be published by Carcanet Press in November.

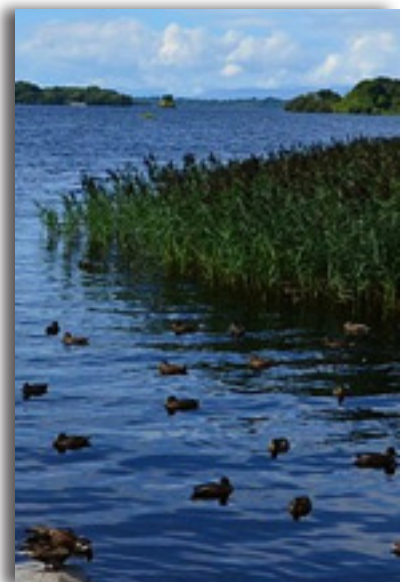


## HIGH NET WORTH

Individuals I've known include this bustling  
Homeless man with the mind of a wizard:  
He has conjured a home out of these three  
Jumbo refuse sacks and a freshly delivered  
Blue sleeping bag. He has asked for nothing  
Except to be left alone to sleep beside this  
Well-established jewellery store. He loves,  
He says, the light from diamond rings, the  
Way such light makes a lattice-work on  
The faces of those who would be charitable –  
As this exile from Eastern Europe is holy  
When he vacates a seat on a wet, windy night,  
A seat for a young woman and her child.  
We live with our debts and excitements, we dine  
Together on the silverware of each other.

## DOG DAYS

You'd forget what it's like to stretch out into the deepest  
Green of summer. The corn is standing high and barely  
Alive near Lismore, the cow-parsley of the Glenshelane river  
Has almost choked the floor of July. Soon it will be  
Our late horse-flies, our early fruit wasps. The nearest  
Spring will be the next one to come. Pond lilies quiver  
With an excess of pond life. The summer turns –  
It needs to be more louche before it become golden  
In its open-neck shirt, in the growth on its chest. Its heart  
Is not in its mouth just yet, but I can hear a murmur  
Of death and reticence, a despairing writerly groan that burns  
Through this feeling of unreal plenitude, of being beholden  
To a process that begins and ends in weeds. See, it is no part  
Of summer to settle poetry or to crush the reed's humour.





**Julia Deakin** was born in Nuneaton, England and meandered north to Yorkshire where she taught, married, did a poetry MA and took up ice-skating. Her collections *The Half-Mile-High Club* – a 2007 Poetry Business Competition winner – *Without a Dog* (Graft, 2008) and *Eleven Wonders* (Graft, 2011) drew praise from nationally renowned poets; her fourth, *Sleepless*, is published by Valley Press this October. A compelling reader, she has featured twice on *Poetry Please* and won numerous prizes – none of them for skating. [www.juliadeakin.co.uk](http://www.juliadeakin.co.uk)



## SCREEN SAVER

Though you almost didn't bother  
with that stone arch in the corner of the square  
which only seemed to frame another wall your head still full  
of Wells Cathedral's wavy steps and hidden octagons and saints  
and bosses and misericords and ogives and the thought  
of all those Jude the Obscures underpinning every church  
you've ever sniffed around and the religious mummary and wars  
and Larkin's Arundel and can you see a tomb without his glasses  
looming mappa mundi cloistered monks and nuns and Dawkins'  
God Delusion yes your mind's still full of all that dark dark dark

as you step through the archway

and the place you saw once in a dream is there that aisle  
of silver stretching off beside a long sheer castellated wall  
enclosing someone's secret garden trees above a single round door  
only boats or swans can reach and two are nesting on a strip of grass  
and six brown cygnets like big balls of wool watch families strolling  
in the shade between the sycamores and lichen coped stones  
receding towards meadows cows a wooded hill an idyll  
your computer has fished up for you and now dissolves  
into another banks of purple heather  
over Langsett Reservoir

## WHARFEDALE GENERAL

Poorhouse, workhouse, hospital – guise after guise –  
females and males processed on opposite sides;  
under the floor a lock-up for troublemakers.

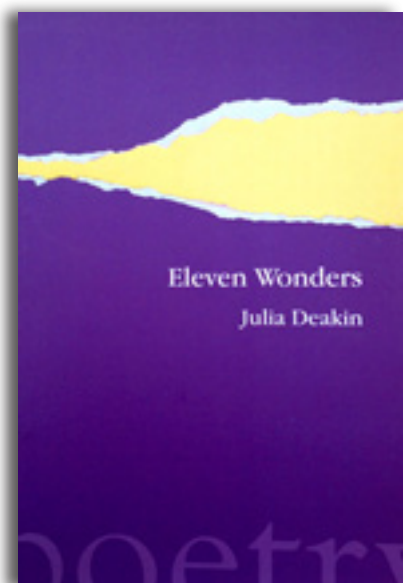
Wind in the central archway shivers.  
Concealed in the leaves of its carved Corinthian pillars  
a vagina on one side, a penis on the other.

A mason's snigger, missed by Inspectors,  
Guardians, city fathers? This was their entrance.  
Inmates were brought to the back. Or

a warren of conduits, links and signs  
for those in the know? A dark web, centuries old?

Jersey's *Haut la Garenne* means 'top of the warren':  
well-stocked hunting grounds, reserved for the king.

Deeper and darker the pit, when spade hits bone.  
Deeper and darker the silence, closer to home.



## SLEEPLESS

think of lakes. Lakes you have known  
and great ones, the size of countries, known  
only of. Of how you can – if you can – know

a body of water. Waters you've skirted  
as they kept pace and held their peace.  
Lakes whose hems you have touched.

Under the same more silent dark, find  
all the lakes of the night side hemisphere –  
reach beneath their skin. The Cumbrians

flooring the fells – prone but restless,  
acres and acres of eyes, out staring  
the livelong night, reflecting nothing in parts

but moonless sky, drowning its negligible stars;  
then all the lochs and lochans of Scotland  
in the colder dark, under the same sky

ticking, lapping, breathing, systole/diastole:  
dive to take that wild arrhythmic pulse,  
taste that deep indifference.

## IN THE SANCTUARY OF MERCY

*Borja, Spain*

They crowed, all those reporters – tore in  
to my good work as if I was a criminal.  
The priest disowned me, but I've made him rich –  
packed in the crowds like his mass never did.

He just prayed – for the damp to stop, for cash,  
a miracle – but we know who God helps.  
Worn out, His face was – eighty years  
stuck in a doorway takes it out of you.

Who knows what Our Lord looks like anyway?  
Why not bad hair or shapeless clothes, if He  
was poor like us? *Lovingly* I patched His coat  
a warm brown from Brico King. That eye  
took hours. The nose I'm quite proud of, too –  
that's how Picasso does them. Had a few goes  
at the mouth, but when you get inspired  
where do you stop? He looks more – manly –  
somehow. As if he might put up a fight.

Much thanks I got so yes, I'm suing –  
and He's on my side, I reckon. Smiling, look.

The half-mile-high club  
Julia Deakin





## FOR THE RECORD

He tours my jaw with a prong, a spike and a speculum, gauging  
each tooth's return on investment, murmuring numbers to his wife.  
Much between this pair goes unsaid, who long ago put the dental world to rights,  
drawn to each other's immaculate incisors. *Just close a bit for me now.*  
So I sit guessing at their overview of my sub-cranial furniture.

I wouldn't know myself from my teeth – my last-ditch forensic ID.  
Presciently he hands me a mirror to point out a minuscule crack  
I'm not sure I can see because I need an eye test: I'm at that stage  
when all your appliances go at once. I squint. It's the nearest I'll get  
to inspecting my personal cave of stalagmites, stalactites, clints and grikes.

*Three, distal palatal.* There's a gold filling up there I'd forgotten –  
some bruising transaction I must have stumbled numbly from  
and shoved to the back of my mind. *Two, occlusal.* What kind of person  
does that gold bling imply? Flash? Shifty? Status perhaps  
for my grandparents, who swapped their own teeth on their twenty-firsts

for film star dentures. I pass back the mirror and drift off to Malham,  
Treak Cliff Cavern and assorted school trips where I tried to learn  
to smoke but gave up. It ages the skin. *Bite down now please. Deep overbite.*  
Those Calais children's teeth would surely tell the truth  
behind their tired eyes. *Now stick your tongue out to the right.*

My blind tongue lives with this chorus line and lets me envisage them  
all white when they're yellowing, black and grey. Pricier porcelain,  
I remember, I thought then a needless expense for one hidden molar. But  
if I am rendered 'unknown human remains' this handful of clinker  
will speak for me. *Have a good rinse now.* What will survive of us is teeth.

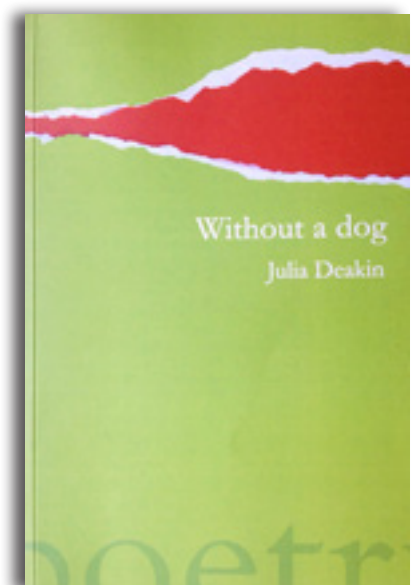
## FIRST EARLIES

Sometimes, digging, a fleck of glaze  
bright as a postage stamp winks up from its cast  
and you, benign god, lift it  
from how many centuries  
to fragmentary afterlife.

No true god, though, you cannot project  
its curve to cup or plate,  
grow its flowers, restore its entity.  
Whose food it bore, whose lips it touched –  
what tunes they hummed,  
which wars and despots ruled their lives –  
are in that ditched letter.

Each of the vessel's unfound parts  
and their scattered kin – tea-set  
or dinner service – churn  
in slow soil currents  
further and further from home,  
blind constellations

deep in soil's space – clay  
that once wheeled through air, a butterfly –  
turning, if earth spins long enough, to clay again.



Azril is a Peruvian Agricultural Engineer and Sociologist. He has published extensively on issues of education (2013, 2015), Cultural Diversity, Anti-Racism, Cultures of Peace and Citizenship. Amongst his publications - ‘Citizenship and National Identity in Latin America: The Persisting Salience of Race and Ethnicity’ in Oommen (ed.), *Citizenship and National Identity: From Colonialism to Globalism*, 1997; *Ethnic Discrimination: Comparative Perspectives*, Uppsala Universitet: Research Report from the Department of Sociology, 1992; 2 ; *Ethnic Discrimination in Sweden: Basic Issues and Reflections*, Uppsala Universitet: Op. Cit. 1992: 53-69;

*From Organism to Identity: The Road from Psychology to Social-Psychology. Towards an Epistemology of Self-Determination*, University of Karlstad, Department of Social Sciences, Section of Communication, Working Paper 1994; 1. Ethnic Identity Responses of Mexican Americans to Ethnic Discrimination (Gothenburg, 1994), Quality of Working Life and Democratization in Latin America (EID, 1991). A poetry book “Refracciones Itinerantes” (Uppsala, 2010) - and currently in press with a second and enlarged edition, Fondo Editorial, UNALM, Perú (2017) In Press.



HAIKU

While looking for  
bottles she found daisies  
in the garbage

---

To the flowers that  
distract my attention I  
call “pensamientos”

---

Your yellowness  
struck me, made me wish to  
be green and guard you

---

Clouds and dreams embraced  
while dancing a tango  
in the Autumn sky

When a child begins  
to explore his world both  
smile to each other

---

Happily caught the  
sunlight turns into vine  
grape and wine.

TANKAS

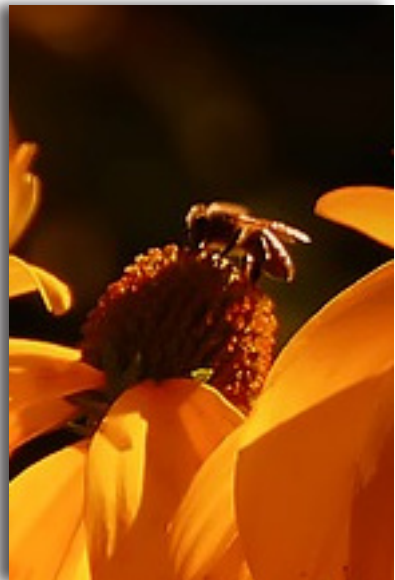
Laughter and tears  
are sap turned into  
music and lyrics  
in voices whose tones  
we listen to in poems

---

Some vowels keep  
singing under the full moon  
they are crickets,  
disguised aleph-bets in  
the alphabetal darkness

---

This Fall has fallen  
in haste it has stolen  
the taste from us  
of summer’s wild berries  
of a summer that wasn’t.





**Roisín Browne** lives in Rush, Co Dublin and has been published in several publications including *A New Ulster*, *The Galway Review*, *Flare*, *Mgversion2*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, *The Gladstone Readings* and *Echoes from the Castle Anthology*. She was shortlisted for her poetry in the Over the Edge New Irish Writer of the Year in 2017, and was also awarded third prize in the Jonathan Swift Awards in the same year. She recently was commended in the Gregory O'Donoghue awards in 2018 and is a member of Poets Abroad, an online collaborative poetry gathering which is truly international in composition. Their recent chapbook, *something we were supposed to do*, shortlisted in the Locked Horns inaugural chapbook competition.



## WEXFORD FIELDS

We climb the stile,  
he doesn't speak  
his stoic frame ahead of me

he turns to see, smiles  
warm as summer honey  
crease his wide worn face,  
I catch the scent of *Major*

the evening air kisses  
my flushed features,  
a couple of sneaky stouts  
sing in my soul,

we take uneven steps  
side by side, swishing  
through night grass  
our legs in easy rhythm

Star drops light the mossy path  
home, dew will soon be settling.

## LAST VIEW, 1978

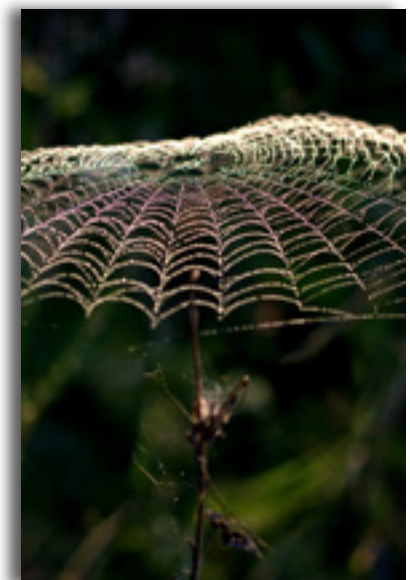
He is upright in his metal Jervis bed  
neat in light striped pyjamas  
two large white pillows encase his borders  
black spectacles offer clear vision to pale blues

She stands at the side, her navy handbag  
crossing her body, her left hand taps its front,  
checking it is still there, the purse inside,  
fat with December notes

He tips his forehead and motions  
to her capped head, a swirl of mauves,  
blues, wines, enquires *as to its use?*  
She pulls on the back of it,  
*dressed for the sales*  
the jaunty reply

A kind of smile returned, from  
a life-long cap wearing man  
as he flanked cattle, drew silage,  
pitchforked hay mounds

she turns to go,  
his last view  
springs out  
to cobalt blue.



SADBH’S SONG

We stand in that small porch  
separate yet huddled  
still, with occasional shifts  
a related mess

some of us look at the grey ribbed carpet  
some of us gaze at the cream ceiling  
some of us read the pinned notices  
anniversary, baptism, months mind

I look at you  
snug in your mother’s arms,  
gentle jigs up and down  
dimpled hands waving  
honey brown eyes smiling  
one year old hair shining,  
a chestnut cap on a perfect head

You  
good and quiet,  
silently singing lovely sweetness,  
bobbing, oblivious.

*Sadbh/Sive is an Irish girl’s name which means lovely sweetness. It rhymes with hive.*

THREAD NOTES

This-

Tessie the Tailor  
Mary-Anne Dennehy  
Dan Sugrue  
John Joe  
Nell Sigerson  
Pud Shea  
Debbie Phatcheen  
The Barrys  
Alice Grady  
The Hartys  
Miss Fenton  
The Master  
Mike Nora  
Bridie Paud  
Mollie  
Gerry Kate  
The Driscolls  
Auntie Julia  
Nora Uncle Dan  
Nell  
The Jackeen  
Paddy Joe  
Castro  
Sailor  
Reen  
Boolakeel  
Dungeagan  
Meeliguleen  
Emlagh  
Kinard  
Libes  
Cloghaneanua

was.

I HAVE

I have in my possession  
a neat snip of your grey-brown hair,  
discreetly taken from behind your ear,  
to remind me.





**Miceál Kearney**; 38. Living and working on the family farm on the West coast of Ireland. Published in various journals both off and online around the world. Winner of various poetry grand slams including Cúirt, North Beach Nights' and Baffle. Read as part of Poetry Ireland's Introduction Series '09. Doire Press published his debut collection; *Inheritance* in 2008. Arlen House published his second collection; *The Inexperienced Midwife* in 2016. He also writes plays and has had four of them staged.



## THE EVOLUTION OF THE CATWALK

Regularly up before the cock – ha,  
all these years and it's still a sin.  
He was often in bed as I milked;  
thinn'd turnips, cut hay:  
an entire days work done  
before breakfast. Then Mass.

I don't know, all we had was  
Sir and Ma'am. Please and thanks.  
Timeout? That was the break  
between beatings. A law is being passed  
to recognise preferred pronouns.  
I've asked the nurse to cis-splain,

I think that's one of them.  
But she doesn't know either;  
one of them foreign ones.  
There's no way the priest would've  
allowed that sort of carry on.  
Straight to Ballinasloe\*.

\*Reference to psychiatric unit

## HYPOTHETICAL

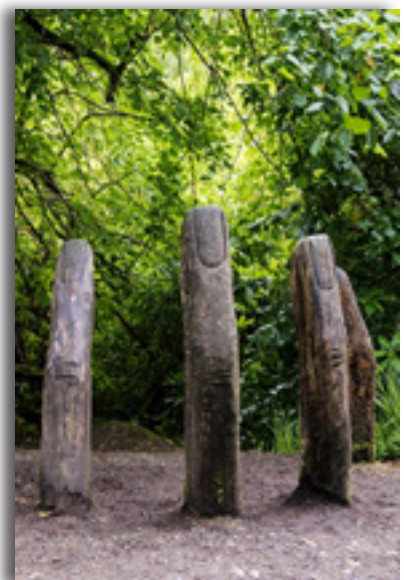
Anorexic obesity is all the rage and  
Faggot doesn't always stay in school.  
Selfie, selfie on my wall: #, like  
and signal boast *Muh Feels*.  
But here I'm safe from all that –

where a skinny white dyke  
and a fat black fag  
politely discuss  
rape culture in a designated  
free-speech Safe-space.

Lard-arse is meat-eater  
while the carpet-muncher's a vegan.  
The white-man hater's Atheist  
and the other queer is Christian.  
Zir is of the opinion that differs from zis.

Now answer me this, if you can.  
I dare you; tell me: what gender  
is the man and who's the person of colour?  
Here's a tip. Do not commit the hurtful  
war crime of assuming, please.

After you Rep Pill yourself  
trying to figure it out  
answers on a postcard  
to the Kill Yourself Crèche.  
I'll even pay the postage.



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## ANNUS HORRIBILIS

Come back Father, please. I nostalgically  
miss your humourless domination.  
The Household fearing your every breath.  
We murdered you out of survival  
thinking it was for the best.  
We're at the point now of Babbling.  
No longer is it just politicians  
whose words are rigid as an eel  
and clear as fog.

Good Friday, 2016 where on the cold  
polished marble floor of living room  
Hugh Mungus raped Zarna Joshi  
while the remaining siblings gathered.  
Cheering. Jeering. Blaming the other  
side of the circle. She tried; desperately  
stretching out her shrinking hands, frantic  
to reason with both inflammable factions.  
Imploring. Hoping. Begging. Bearing.

No one there thought to intervene.  
Her screams were drowned by inaudible  
hyperbole which was echoed and returned  
more egregious – with every thrust and serve  
a little bit of her disappeared. Static serenading  
kept score. Love Love, Love Love...No verdict  
saved Zarna from the slut shaming  
that crucified her and after her Resurrection;  
syllables were lost and one by one: words

literally meant nothing.

## ALT-WRITE

The police came knocking upon my door  
they said they were not happy  
with the Memes I'd shared  
so in through my hall they charge.  
*"Praise Kek, would you like some milk?"*

The Super steps in, shaking and shrills –  
*"You won't understand  
until you unlearn but it is my job  
to ensure that no one gets hurt  
over your problematic posts."*

I then called into question  
the state of their faculties  
only to be Richard Spencer-ed  
for being a Nazi: I no longer  
had rights then branded a Jew.

Too tall to touch: the Super stands  
simply spinning their revolvers' fist.  
*"So why, why, why do you do it then?  
Please, I beg, you won't understand  
I only speak Annunaki cuneiform."*

*I've seen more Channels lost  
and Pages deleted. This is all I have  
now that words have no meaning."*  
The chamber was empty, *"this time."*  
Then billed me for damages to their boots.

So the Super marches off; proud  
to patrol their Internet  
while out in the Twitter-verse  
in every comment section  
the Great Meme War rages on.





## PUSSIES

On the morrow of that starkly  
packed Presidential inauguration:  
ten thousand million feminists  
tried to out trump Trump.

They marched in the rain in Spain.  
Marches at both Poles. Paraguay  
to Uruguay: they marched right  
across the Tropic of Cancer.

From Baltimore to Timbuktu  
with banners and placards  
some even brought cats.  
I heard of marches in Mordor.

While the focus of their ire  
simply sat in the Oval office  
masturbating and not one sandwich  
was made all day.

## THE TRANS-FOX & THE BIGOTED HOUND

*For Stacey*

We'd no idea, had we  
how our genes would mature.  
All those hours spent laughing,  
chasing our tails to end up raging  
from opposing sides at the sheep  
centre in the abyss – using rabid diatribes  
passionately aimed to soothe but landing  
antagonistic in dogged ears finely tuned,  
wounded by the other's wolf whistle.



**Laura J. Braverman** is a writer and artist. She received her BFA from Rhode Island School of Design, and studied poetry and essay with Stanford University, Bennington College and the New School. Her poetry has appeared in *Levure Litteraire*, *Live Encounters*, *The BeZINE*, *California Quarterly* and *Mediterranean Poetry*. She lives in Lebanon and Austria with her family.



## PRAISE

the scent of wood  
as it bakes in sunlight  
and stones  
along the path born  
from lava broth  
now covered  
with damp moss.

Praise

long shadows  
of tree trunks  
sloping  
down the hill  
bright fingertips  
of new pine  
in spring,  
prehistoric furls  
of lichen—  
reminding us  
how much the sea  
once hid.

Praise

speckled riverbed  
pebbles, cairns  
we stack to mark  
our presence,  
the stone  
I leave  
on my father's grave—  
reminding me  
of what is changeless.

Praise

the conversation  
of leaves  
and woodpecker's nimble  
percussion,  
my mother  
who praises the sun.

Praise

mountains  
made from titan  
collisions—now still  
but not voiceless.

Praise

the call of all  
this—rousing us  
to be better,  
to shrug off our cages  
to offer not-knowing  
our faith.



## THE MASK'S REQUEST

I'm on retreat in the Finsterwald—  
the dark wood—home to the Black Madonna,  
Our Lady of Hermits.

I stand still, at the center  
of a disc-shaped room. Windows frame  
fields below leaden clouds.  
I hold a plaster mask  
in my hands—a mess of a muddled  
mask with jarring  
colors and glued-on feathers.  
It's far from pretty—far  
from perfect: the rage of neglected  
parts given form in shadow face.

The Swiss art guide has silvery  
horsetail hair and maiden eyes. Gently,  
she warns me  
when I put paint to paper:  
*We're done with perfection now—aren't we?*  
I paint my own dark  
mother on papers taped together.

The women in the group sit along  
the room's periphery. Their support is silent.  
I dare my twenty-year old fatigue  
to stay silent too—  
hide my face  
in the mask. It prods my limbs,  
the poor plaster thing  
then slowly it persuades my old lead burden  
of fatigue to lighten—  
the electric mutiny of anxiety to soften.

I become a waterfall  
instead of someone sick. I'm a tree:  
my new rough arms bend with wind's  
orchestration. I am wind—  
then, watch,  
I fly. I'm a falcon  
and a falcon is the sun. No more hiding  
from the sun. Now I screech  
in high-pitched jabs. My wings tear sky  
where air is thin—  
then take me hurtling  
down towards a river there.  
I land by water's edge. I'm a child.  
Look: I dance. I dance,  
my leg stretched long  
in arabesque—my pink-hosed little girl's  
leg—as in Miss Denise's class  
when I had no thought  
for measuring life by capfuls.

And here—here are my hands.  
Small hands!  
They cup the glacial water.  
I swallow what has melted down from peak  
and frost, and ask, *Will you change me?*  
I've been ill so long.



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**Caterina Bacal Titus** is from an international family and her goal is to create films that address the issue of globalization. She has a great love of cultures and has studied Sanskrit, Hindi, French, and Spanish and performs Indian dances regularly; her current dance interests are salsa and bachata. She holds a Master's in Professional Writing from Maharishi University of Management, and a BA in Philosophy. As the daughter of peace activists, she was exposed at a young age to the role of the individual in helping society. Her hope is to create progressive and poignant films which ultimately reflect our universality in spite of our differences.



## MOON MUSINGS

Unhinge the door, open the pastures, seek the horizon  
that is yet to be sought....  
Be the wind, because the breeze in your hair,  
and the freshness of your being,  
longs to be set free. The cocoon of the nest is the source  
of the butterfly -  
warmth always exists.

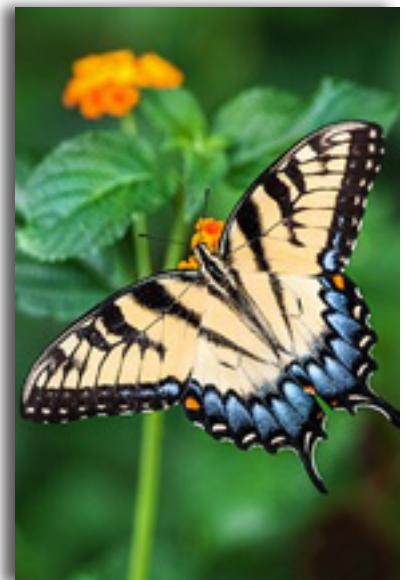
Create, write, paint, sing - show the master you are the copy.  
Demonstrate to the king the reflection of servant, and prostrate to none other  
than yourself.  
Red velvet or not, your crimson lips are yours alone -  
you are the master of this destiny.  
Tell the story you wish to be told, and be the difference  
in an indifferent world.

Nothing replaces the essence of a wing so strong,  
silken threads, interwoven fibers of steel.  
Lightness carries a current ; simply glides into  
unknown, invincible.  
Unlock the key, remove the steel bolts, fly like  
wind, and swim the ocean floor - see the sea for the seasons are mine,  
the spring is yours, and the winter will not die.

Summer upon us - the warmth is here; growth  
beyond budding spring.  
Time basks in the moment - a shoreline,  
the rippling tide.  
Swim in it, love it, be it.  
The unknown is yours, but lightness ours.  
In unknowingness everything is known.

## THE YEAR OF THE BUTTERFLY

The last birthday, the last cocoon, unraveling  
the last remains of a wandering soul -  
the transpiring transformation.  
The shadow of a doubt would never believe  
the crystal ball if recounted on this day,  
never believe the details of array -  
complete and utter transformation.  
So soon after this portal into a new world,  
slipping down the rabbit hole, feet firmly planted  
on unknown soil -  
an isolated and only christmas present to myself,  
self righteous,  
wrapped from myself in my name  
in honor of countless years forgotten.  
But worthiness is counted in selfless gifts,  
and to give indeed wraps selfishness in shame.  
Give it all away - the love, the longing,  
the fingertips of liplocked belonging.  
The butterfly soothes herself, licks her wounds  
to unreachable destinations.  
Tightening wings,  
slipping through the keyhole, through  
the cocoon of comforts,  
a wing is spread.  
The fledgling, surrounded in the summer breeze,  
giving motion, direction,  
new senses explored, fantasies implored -  
anchored in the silk thread  
spun on brilliant white clouds in an azure sky -  
the butterfly slips through.



## GOLDEN THREAD

Hiding under a white thermal blanket  
I see your face  
shattered in pieces through the tiny holes.  
Briefly I uncover my eyes,  
You are smiling.

I hear bells from my cradle, calling me;  
Lila's heart, part wolf, stopped beating.  
She doesn't protect me any longer  
from strangers who pass by our house  
on Lima's misty sidewalks.

I hear bells from my cradle  
and I wonder why time began when Jesus was born.  
Why do I dream of being in a far away camp,  
clinging to a baby being pulled from my arms,  
since I've been only to my mother's church.

She says she sees a golden thread that rises  
from the top of our heads, and pulls us,  
connects us both to heaven.  
She didn't see it before, but now she says  
the colors that surround us are the same.

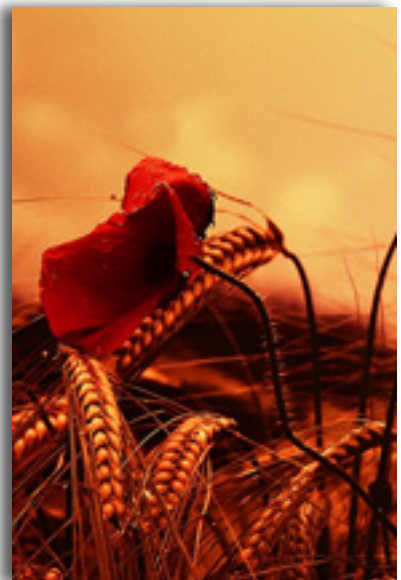
I hear bells chiming, pulling me  
from my cradle, echoing like the bells  
from the small church near Cuzco.  
The mountain winds twist around boulders  
stuck in the road.

Now I'm here in my cradle  
acting as if I'm on the road,  
and faces watch me, as if they believe me.  
My thoughts dance to echoing bells, and I wonder  
if your golden thread moves when I move.

Before time began I made a deal with the angel  
to give me a sign when I saw you,  
and to tie the golden thread when it was time.  
I hope she will call my name as I walk down the aisle,  
and I hope we hear the music only once.

The white thermal blanket creates gaps in my vision,  
gaps like bells that pull me from my cradle.

She plucked two threads  
from the universe - golden light,  
twins that kept intertwining.  
She pulled them like puppets,  
until they could move on their own.



## SIGHT UNSEEN

A princess, a tower, an electric wire -  
a call in the middle of the day just to see if you're ok.  
Porcelain, tea cup chipped.  
Labor pains, a soulmate gained, but who is she?  
An identity renamed?  
Arms wrapped around her waist,  
squeezing life force  
towards mirage so real, that for an instant she felt rain  
pouring on primal forms, electricity gained.  
He took the shirt off his back to protect her from the sun,  
enveloping diamonds and rubies for eons past -  
disappearing as quickly as he came.  
But what is a mirage if nothing but a dream?  
A movie of our lives, an exotic scene?  
Pressing up against a wall, the force of gravity  
to embrace and stall,  
what for an eternity was almost and not all.  
The scene immortalized in a timeless place  
mountains, valleys, bombs, and waste.  
That precious gems can hold - the light of a treasure  
beyond what is told.  
Royalty cannot succumb to the riots, the marches,  
the sun unsung.  
Righteousness, dignity, a soul transformed - a guidance  
unworldly beings, forelorned,  
warning that some cannot be judged as others.

The king decides,  
the judgement day arrives, the rulers override -  
the porcelain chasm.  
The song of her life sung by others  
the stratosphere of time and space...  
On a crown of knowing, the golden threat,  
there is no regret.  
The curtains come down, the film left undone  
to the version of others -  
did you really think this was real?  
The illusion of lights, camera, scenery and script  
nothing but a story that became  
reality - for history to decide...  
It was real and it was a mirage - two planes co-existing  
a dual reality human comprehension, fathoming....  
A tear upon meeting is a memory of a scene -  
a reunion, an embrace,  
a sight unseen.

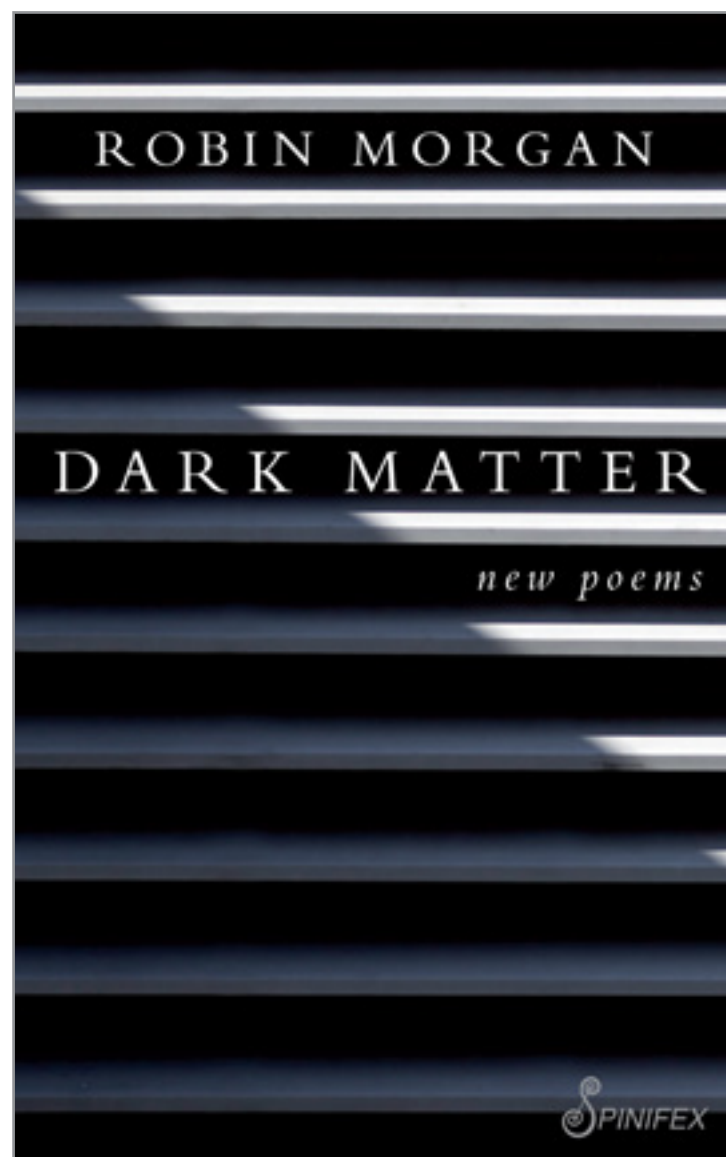


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Patricia Sykes is a poet and librettist. Her poems have won the John Shaw Neilson, Tom Collins, and Newcastle poetry prizes and her books shortlisted in the Mary Gilmore, Anne Elder and Judith Wright Calanthe Awards. Her collaborations with composer Liza Lim have been performed at festivals in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, Huddersfield and New York. She was Asialink Writer in Residence, Malaysia, 2006. A selection of her poems was published in an English/Chinese edition by Flying Island Books in 2017.

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## Review of Robin Morgan's *Dark Matter*, Spinifex Press, 2018 by Patricia Sykes

In *Dark Matter*, her seventh poetry collection, Morgan cannily exploits poetry's ability to be both metaphoric and direct. The voice is often conversational and anecdotal, at other times it is layered and allusive. What drives the collection is a deep and passionate intensity, which only a life spent in endless interrogation and interaction with self and world can achieve and sustain. A tension between altered states of being sets the tone, revealing itself in the first poem, *The Magician and The Magician's Assistant*. In debating dimensions of self Morgan parallels W. B. Yeats' perception that "out of the quarrel with ourselves we make poetry". Dispensing with the roles of both Magician and Magician's Assistant, the poem concludes:

...nothing is left to perform now.  
Sorry to disappoint.  
I have my own bare hands full  
grasping how  
from here on in, all that's left is the magic.

Throughout the collection the self as touchstone, lynchpin, undergoes shiftings and challenges but the magic remains, is there still in the final poem, *Disappear*, offering an eloquent bookend to the opening poem:

It will be harder than expected, less severe  
than dreamt. Bait your language to snare  
particles and constellations. They won't care.

Plan to close with an epic song, naming the sheer  
grace of galaxies, quarks, mitochondria, each atmosphere  
you've loved, every breath, everyone, everywhere—

This is one of the tighter metrical poems, achieving the charm of surprise through deft imagery, more so than is the case in some of the looser, freer verse poems. The diversity of the collection, however, has an allure of its own: modal variety. Not every poem functions at the same intensity. Morgan demonstrates this again and again, modulating, for example, from the wryness of Barbarina's *Cavatina*:

Surely a petty tragedy,  
humorous even, hardly  
worthy of the minor key.

into the fiercer engagement of *Reading the Bones*:

Look! Do you see? A rose, a star! The hourglass fills,  
drains. Ignore the tourists, look away from the window.  
Here, wear the garland; it's meant for you. So are these  
fragments, assembled with passion, indifference, reliable pain.  
Look! Do you see? A poem, layer on layer, words puzzled together,  
bones from the catacomb of a brain.

Earlier in the same poem Morgan invokes one of the collection's recurring themes, the interaction between time and self in the progression towards ageing and death:

Decades ago, in Rome's Capuchin catacombs, I took notes  
to play with in my private funeral games, then dared not  
use them until now.

Much of the poignancy of the collection arises from Morgan's argument with decay. There is no surrender — art and life require courage after all, particularly in the face of mortality — instead there is engagement and re-engagement, resistance, defiance:

...Death's alive  
with activity, bright putrefescent bacteria.  
Compost squirms hot, carbolic.  
Stillness not to be found since the big bang  
shuddered awake through each vibrating string.  
Who are you, then, to mourn? Whitman dared sing  
the body electric. Here's your chance.  
Go him one better, dear. *Dance*.

(*Invitation*).

And dance Morgan does, unreservedly, with gusto, though the dance encounters serious risk, as in *Grey Matter*:

Given decades of picketing, petitions, a jail or two,  
and worse —the torture of meetings —I find  
the diagnosis name hilarious  
...  
What's scientific is a neurological disorder  
they call degenerative (sounds like a moral judgement)  
which prompts my lovely brain to spit

stutters through nerves and muscles...

Deeper into the same poem, Morgan effectively uses the device of apostrophe as a revelation tool:

...So, Brain,  
what do we do now, you and I? You know

damned well you were always my favourite,  
you know I never fell for that trash about having guts  
or the heart as the seat of emotions. You know I knew

it was always you, neurotransmitters abuzz, electro-chemical  
synapses; waves and frequencies jiggling: oh splendid powers  
of the brain, I always loved you best.

Loquacious, affirmative, emphatic, there is a sense throughout the poems that no significant or relevant concern is left unspoken. If occasionally I wished for fewer words I never wished for less verve. Inevitably perhaps the question of biography arises in a collection such as this where the “I” is foregrounded: whose is the voice speaking the poems, which version of the poet in which poem, and in what autobiographical space-time? Unanswerable, clearly, for poetic as well as philosophical reasons:

The old woman is never wholly who she thinks she is  
because she’s also always everyone she ever was —  
though never quite the woman others are sure they knew.

*(The New Old Woman)*

A more salient point is that Morgan establishes connection between the work and the reader through careful crafting and structure, as well as through intimacy and empathy. The topics of family, friends, love, politics, religion, history, myth, activism, art, culture, ageing, death, among others, touch us all. The whole therefore is in the nature of a shared archives between poet and reader, a conversation striving always towards negentropy rather than entropy.

It’s a labyrinthine journey, winding through four sections, four interlinked catacombs if you like: *Doing the Blood Work*, *The New Old Woman*, *Grey matter* and finally *Dark matter*. The accumulative effect of this poetic expedition is one of resonances. Major, minor, augmented, diminished, no key is excluded. Each pays its dues to the dark — ultimately unknown — yet vibrant universe which gives the collection its title.

Dark matter then may operate as a symbolic nemesis but it is not a death sentence, rather it is a stimulus, an opportunity to celebrate beingness above all else. It is no small achievement to end a collection on an unresolved cadence. In so doing Morgan asserts not only the creative privilege of open endedness but of vitality and endurance:

...Opt for a quiet tone, wry tear;  
invoke laughter, step lightly, be of good cheer.  
Live at the ready. Sacred each passing year

within grasp beyond reach, unknowably clear,  
until all you were, crashing against the shallows of here  
as pearls of foam, ebbs, and you just

*(Disappear)*

No end stop, no rigor mortis: “There can be no such thing as closure./When you prod the beast it springs” *(Disclosure)*. If it is wrenching to have reached this hovering shore it has been, for this reader, worth the voyage.



Jim Meirose's work has appeared in numerous magazines and journals, including *Calliope*, *Off-beat/Quirky (Journal of Exp. Fiction pub.)*, *Permafrost*, *North Atlantic Review*, *Blueline*, *Witness*, and *Xavier Review*, and has been nominated for several awards. His E-book "*Inferno*" is available from Amazon. *Underground Voices*. His novels, "*Mount Everest*" and "*Eli the Rat*", are available from Amazon. "*Mount Everest*" has been adapted to a play by a leading west coast playwright. [www.jimmeirose.com](http://www.jimmeirose.com)



## NOMAN AND THE GENERAL NOW

As in anything you do in life, you need to check things before you do them. You need to check there's a gangplank present when you step off of a dock. You need to check no cars are coming before you cross the street, and you know, by the way, Noman learned that the hard way as a boy walking the sidewalk up the hill after school, idly bouncing a little ball, thinking to the blue sky of everything in the world besides where he was, but; the ball abruptly bounced weirdly off a sidewalk crack and shot into the road.

Noman dashed into the road without looking and grabbed it, but stumbled and fell on his big ass in the road, skinning both knees raw but more importantly here came a big black Dodge to nail him, but; it stopped dead slapping the big wide chrome plated word Dodge right in his face and on back into his mind for all forever as something you should do to get out of the way of any evil event ever rushing up to kill him, forever; something about it kind of tattooed it someplace inside his pitch-black skullcap to ensure that he would never forget.

He got Dodge in his mind forever, as in Dodge! Dodge! Dodge, and plus it being a special Dodge that would be a valuable collectible classic today, but—way back today, urp, Noman was grown into a quite tall man, and a much larger soldier. He stood dressed smartly in the pouring sun, with his cap pertly tipped and his trousers creased, one of a mass of clean-washed dressed-up military men on parade way back now, in his military costume with his military weapon empty of bullets and thus, harmless, held straight in a vast expanse of straighter weapons held higher still, and the sun was up in its proper compartment, and the great single-star general-man in size great baggy pants came toward him one man at a time down the formed up line, to inspect each soldier's hygiene and more. The general came at last before Noman, took his weapon, and spun it as a propeller in his spindly liver-spotted hands, then thrust it back to Noman.

Know not Dodge hidden way back when, Noman.

Yes, now, the thing is this nearly senile silly and sloppy here-and-now man of a general.

Soldier, your uniform's a little ragged. When was this jacket issued to you, soldier?

Sir! A while back, sir! I don't know how to measure when exactly, sir! Maybe not yet, maybe years from now, or maybe way back in the past, sir! You know, like yesterday, last week, or years ago, from now—maybe even not yet really at all! Sir!

From really at all, what! barked the general.

From really at all, sir! spat Noman.

You mean, from the now, when the bowling alley is just a plan on the drawing board?

What bowling alley are you referring to, sir!

The one you're headed toward. Where your personal Dodge awaits.

Personal Dodge, sir?

Yes. Personal Dodge. As in with tits and ass. Are you afraid of tits and ass, soldier?

No sir!

You have tits and ass, soldier! What are the possible other parts you may fear? Any that you or I might have, soldier? Any that you or I might have?

No, sir! Nothing you and I might have!

All right soldier! But remember; the bowling alley is just part of some spark in some architect's head, and part in some architect's pen, and part on some architect's paper. And that is just, first draft! Many years will come and go until once more, the moment of truth slams down! So, you see son. You've years yet to worry, son. So, come on, get loose. Loosen up. Slack off a little, you know? Have a mushroom or two. After all, it's nearly the sixties.

Yes, sir!

Now, you know, soldier—your uniform must be perfect! So, let's see—

Several days passed, until at last the General stuck his face in Noman's again.

What are you afraid of soldier?

Noman woke, blinked his eyes, and said, Nothing, sir!

No tits and ass?

No, sir!

Good! Next, your boots must be properly polished—here, let me see—

The General stooped. Days passed. Day/Night/Day/Night cycles passed about him. The rest of the men undressed, got onto sleeping bags, slept, got out of the sleeping bags, dressed, and like that around and around and over and under and here and then and day after day after—all for one pair of boots one pair—of fucking boots! You know, I; never mind. Continue.

The General's face came up out forward out of the boiling blue of Noman's dark uniform.

I heard that, soldier! I heard that! What are you afraid of?

Noman woke, blinked his eyes, and said, Nothing, sir!

No tits and ass?

No, sir!

Good! Now, all your creases have to be perfectly sharp! Here let me look—

Again, Noman stood still, did not age, did not dare speak, for nearly ten days. The General's head bobbed up. Again, he asked the question, and Noman said, Nothing sir!

Good—next there have to be no loose threads, dirt, marks, ruffles or abnormalities on any of your kit, or on your body that’s all hidden because it’s improper to be nude! There has to be a straight vertical line from the middle of your heels, up to your trouser zip and button, through your shirt buttons and aligned with your face. And no male anatomy bulging inappropriately against the cloth, to spoil the effect, if you know what I mean! Let me look!

The General’s blind hand looked, as Noman thought; days, yes, I know there will be days—days like this, yes, days—

It is not flawless, soldier! It is not! Why is it not?

I-I don’t know, sir!

Buck up, soldier! Sociological research has shown that standing tall and looking confident, even if you are not confident, is a good way to become confident. Did you know that truth, son?

No sir! I did not know that!

Oh no? Really. Then I guess you were not listening in class! So, how many other great truths you should know by now, have you let fall in the passing dirt beneath but a second, then gone? So, I suppose you don’t know either, that by behaving like a soldier, you affirm your self-identity that you are a soldier, and will therefore act like one. Do you not remember that?

Noman tried to speak, but it came back off his tight lips and made a silent burp, mixed with the taste of bile—sick feeling yes sick, must chew ten Roloids, then chug a large water kind of sick, yes that kind that will just sicken and sicken and sicken, but into his face was barked and re-barked and barked again more and more sickening every single time—

Do you not remember that either, soldier? Do you not? Do you, do you not soldier—Do you not remember? Where are your eyes! Dare not close your eyes to me when I am speaking!

The word speaking came in Noman’s ears and said speak, yes, go—try and see what happens, and he did—but just bile surged in a wave followed by a hotter thicker multicolored substance mixed in morass of large and small fragments no spoken words none at all not a one and it came up in Noman and do you know soldier so you not sailor do you know marine do you not either what the fuck,

what the fuck, as a full hose of filth came flooding straight at the chest of the General—the flood-gush shouting Dodge all Dodge—driving him back like fire hoses do demonstrators hurling rocks after dark with fires burning in steel drums that bums stand all around as the cold settles and the snow falls, and flying gas missiles shot from the police deep inside Noman fighting off scores of enemies; these enemies stood in the guise of this old General, stricken back multicolored with vomit, of every possible kind and size and stench of chunk mixed in colors all mixed up in dense liquid, and he fell back, his silly little one star helmet blown off and back, down out full length, the back of his skull shattering on impact with the concrete of the parade-ground, on which no expense was spared to construct to remain hard as granite for all eternity. Arms gripped Noman, as his knees buckled—the stress and strain of the months of training and struggling and straining and striving to be the perfect soldier had slowly been building a large hairy blister of gross resentment in him as the fetus of a devil grows, is stressed and stressed some more, until this at last happens, meaning many things; Dodge; that Noman should never have been a soldier; Dodge Dodge; that the aged General should have retired when he got his first sad consolation star, too late to ever get enough done before being senile to ever possibly get another; and this was the start of Noman’s last story.

The Army spat him out dishonorably the very next day. Dodge. As he was driven to the gates of the Garrison at twilight, under heavily armed guard, wearing only the ill-fitting clothing he had worn down to the recruitment station seven years ago, and only having the three crumpled dollar bills that had been in the pocket of the baggy black pants from the day he entered the Army base to the day they forced him drugged and screaming back into the pants to kick him the fuck out for killing the General with the world’s largest gushing puke one man had ever shot-gunned out any kind of maw, Dodge or no Dodge and no ball bouncing away no not any more, clearing the way empty for the memory to smartly step him back into his present-day job in this great big oily freightership he’s sailing in on the way to Shanghai China!

And there’s something very significant about the approximate date he’d get to Shanghai, oh yah there is yah yah, but that is for another time, and better yet yes-for another farther out space.

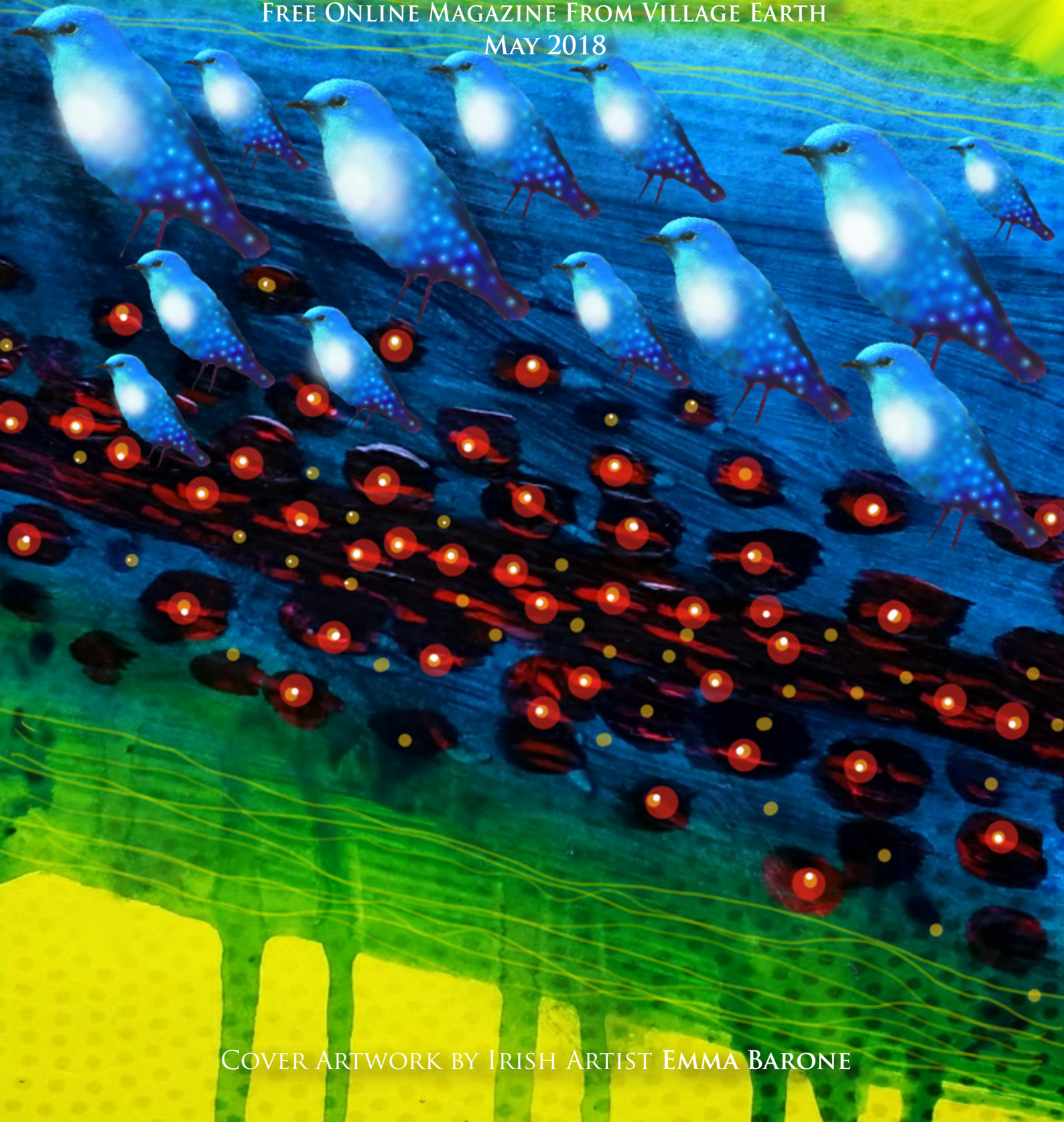


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