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RANDHIR KHARE
What poetry means to me

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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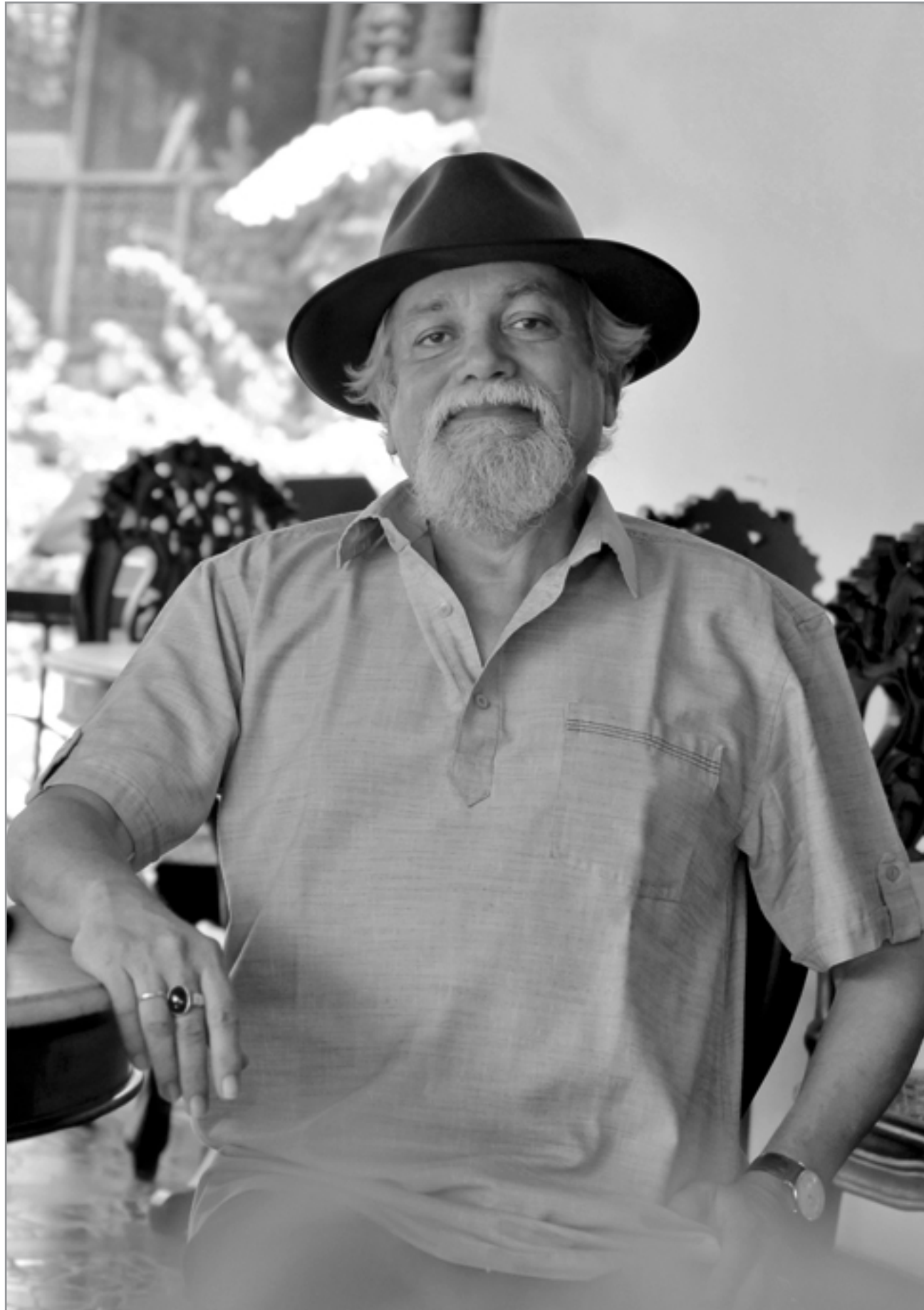
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Randhir Khare

Randhir Khare is an award winning poet, artist, writer, playwright, folklorist and distinguished educationist who has published thirty-six volumes of poetry, short fiction, essays and novels and educational handbooks and has travelled widely, reading and presenting his work, nationally and internationally. He has presented his work at the Nehru Centre in London, at the Ubud Writers Festival in Bali, the India Festival In Bulgaria, at the Writers Union in the Czech Republic, in Bulgaria, Slovenia, the Pune International Literary Festival and at the Europalia Arts Festival in Belgium. In India, he has performed his poetry with various traditional and contemporary musicians and founded (and leads) MYSTIC, India's first poetry-music band. In the last few months, he has published two path-breaking volumes of poetry, MOUNTAINS OF MY SILENCE and MEMORY LAND, which also feature his line drawings in a style uniquely his own. He is the recipient of The Sanskriti Award for Creative Writing, The Gold Medal for Poetry awarded by the Union of Bulgarian Writers, The Human Rights Award, The Residency Grant 2009 for his lifetime contribution to literature in English awarded by The Sahitya Akademi and The Palash Award (for his lifetime contribution to education and culture) among others.

WHAT POETRY MEANS TO ME

GUEST EDITORIAL

RANDHIR KHARE

My poems are prayers – the expression of pure feeling and thought, revealed through an act of absolute trust, devotion and singular intent. They gather my external and internal experiences into organic wholes and transform them through a language of signs, symbols and images, into words that form energy fields.

Earlier in my life I was embarrassed to admit that there is something ancient in me, mythic, runic, folkloric, druidic, shamanic and that my poems have come from spaces that are beyond my conscious self. But as the years pass, I am becoming increasingly aware of this truth and I am learning to accept it and share it. I wrote my first poem in response to the humiliation I was put through as an eleven year old when I was slapped by a teacher at school. The poem at that time didn't seem to be connected in any way to the confused and broken feelings that had shaken me to the very core of my being because it celebrated the freedom that the sky represented and not the feeling of being battered. I wrote it at a small wobbly desk, looking out of a rectangular window which had cracked panes. Outside the early evening sky was rich glowing blue, decorated with paper kites and pariah kites gliding and swirling in their own paths, creating intricate patterns. Later that evening, clouds flowed in and it rained all night, thunder.

When I look back at that time I realise that it was poetry's way of transforming, elevating and distilling a deeply felt experience in a way that created a meaningful and nurturing energy field. But then, that wasn't the end. It was the start of a lifelong state of being open to the power of poetry – allowing it to transform and elevate. This is why I survived and flourished in spirit into my teenage years despite my extremely traumatic and demoralising family life. As the years unfolded and my skin had grown thicker and harder it became increasingly difficult for poetry to have its way. Physical and emotional displacement and a preoccupation with the crushing grind of everyday survival ensured that I stayed trapped in a tangle of compromises.

And then my life finally fell apart and crumbled, resembling a bombed out city – main streets turned into rivers of sewage and homes, offices, parks and metros transformed into a tangle of useless, helpless rubble. I lived alone in the city of Bombay at that time, holed up in an apartment on the fifth floor of a high rise building avoiding the outside world and discouraging everyone from visiting me. My kitchen cupboards were empty, most of the electric connections had short circuited for some reason or the other and black tea was all I could stomach. I sank into two weeks of drifting – like a feather detached from a passing bird I floated downwards. Sometimes an air current would loft me up and at other times it would allow me to head inexorably towards the earth – until I finally landed. No breeze, no wind, nothing that would lift up again. My heart throbbed in my mouth, the pores of my skin oozed perspiration and drenched my bed linen, glazed the cane and wood of the chairs, wet the floors. Left me drained.

Two weeks of sleeplessness later, the rains arrived and entered through my open windows, filling my apartment with cool and comforting dampness. Pigeons flew in and rummaged among the papers on my desk. A crow carried away the bright yellow tea strainer from the kitchen, fruit bats visited me and devoured the decomposing apple in the fruit tray. I finally slept. And through the heavy darkness of that sleep the first lines of a poem rose to meet me. Other lines followed and a string of poems was born. It was as if I had been awakened from a deep sleep, hauling a line of dream-fish wriggling on hooks out from the waters. Poetry had rescued me again, transforming my darkness into orbs of light. That was the beginning of another long journey of elevating self-discovery. One of the many that have kept me alive since then.

Poetry is magic, it is the experience of looking into a mirror and seeing another face staring back at you. And behind that face in the mirror, you see other faces, known and unknown. In the eyes of those faces you see places you have loved and seasons you have loved, childhood moments, moments of humiliation, moments of forever. And in each - unforgettable moments of realisation, feelings of surrender.

Poetry is a state of being, layered like an onion, peeled back till you reach the core and discover that there is no core but another layer which you peel back and the fleshy layers perspire a pungent aromatic stickiness - soul blood. Once you truly open a poem or are open to a poem – its soul blood remains with you.

Poetry is a state of becoming. Each poem that you read changes once you have taken it in. It mutates, surfacing when you need it most, like a genii.

Poetry is dreamtime, when waking and sleeping cross over into each other's territories and a new reality emerges and reveals itself, glowing in the dark in such a manner that dark and light are one, fusing thought, image and emotion into words.

Lone poems seldom happen to me. More often, they arrive in two and threes, in a series, one closely following on the heels of the other, as a necklace, a chain, a rosary, one after another. It takes me time to open the hidden vault to let them out – but when I do, I must let every one of them out. Some emerge like swifts and vanish into the blue, others like gusts of cool breeze. Some are bubbles floating out – hovering then swinging away, others are gypsies who set off on their own journeys and do not turn back (there's an old Narikuravar Gypsy belief – you turn back and you'll dissolve as morning dew does on the grass as the sun comes out). Others are survivors from death camps, their eyes still floating in pools of dreams. The list is endless. But once they are out, I let them stand for themselves, to mean for themselves, to be reborn in the lives of those who read them.

Having said this, I must also add... sometimes my poems are attached to each other – heads joined, hearts joined, limbs joined, eyes joined, one growing out of the other.

All my poems are one poem. One prayer. One sound. Deep from within. From the abyss. From the space that is the womb of the volcano. The breath of the void.

I would often wonder where each poem I write is taking me (in terms of evolution of my spirit). I now realise that a creative act is actually a precious gifting of one's self to the universe. Till one day there is nothing left to gift and I am free and "light".

Six decades and seven years I have lived on the Indian Sub-continent, growing up in a dense wild forest of ideas, cultures, beliefs, identities, languages, dialects, hatreds, loves, longings, hopes, ambitions, philosophies, faiths, each being striving to outdo the other and stretching out towards the light high above the enormous domes of green which supposedly make up "Sovereign India". As a poet, and there are many like me, my 'lightness' carries me fast and high, free from the fetters of caste and creed towards the last overwhelming barriers that block the flight of free thought and spirit.

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CYCLE OF REBIRTH

We shall return from the past,
Building ourselves from dust;
From the aching solitude of oblivion
Spring rain will draw us into light;
Wet and flesh, we will move,
A celebration of the search for love.

But for now, let us be still,
Like lost cattle, thistle-chewing;
Lean eyes longing for the heart of men,
Condemned to the place of the skull,
Crucified for causes we do not understand;
Prodded into silence.

Each poem has a time in history
And it returns in tongues of fire
Over heads of men; quietly like hours
That number lives; settling and rooting,
Blooming and touching light.

REMAINS

When the poet's gone, name erased, whitewashed,
The poem remains like an orphan;
It grows dull skin, shell, rock-hard.

Some poems need to be cracked open with a hammer,
Scooped out, red and sticky;
Juice stains your paper, your hands, ants move in.

Others, with gentle handling lose their shells,
Inside complete, like crystal balls they gleam,
You can read the story of another time.

STRUGGLING

Struggling with this white sheet
As with the demons of my life
I find no sleep;
Words as bullets, kisses,
Abuse, violent sex –
Slide off the page, diluted blood.

I wait in this tent pitched
On the edge of silence,
Where the desert powders stones –
For the sacred beetle;
It will scrape upon this page
The message of belonging.

YES, I KNOW

Yes I know
This is the turning point –
The place where the sea
Is suddenly still
And I can hear its heartbeat;

The ancient song of the Leviathan
Rises and falls like waves
Breaking gently on the old wooden ribs
Of my life.

I am Jonah
Waiting for the miracle light.

Yes, I know,
This is the turning point –
The moment when the flesh becomes word
And the poem is magic.

WAITING

I am waiting for the first line
Upon the page,
Each word glowing, each letter
Pulsing with its own heartbeat;
I want to move this white sheet
Into loving, into longing,
Into waiting, into speaking.

I am waiting for a poem to arrive
Like a dead friend walking back
Out of the grove of mango trees,
Saying, 'It was a long quiet wait,
It was, it was, or was it?
I don't know nor care to know...'

Leaves don't break beneath
Her feet, hands smell of moss,
Her mouth of roots, body of old hay;
I am not afraid of silence
Between words, nor of death between
Lives; I am waiting for a poem,
For the first line upon the page.

RETURNING

I have returned to you to be absolved,
To lie on your firm body,
Listening to your heart;
Embryo in the centre of the rock.
Tide low, sea rested,
Crabs basking, sand tinkling,
Gulls vining trunks of air
With feathery creepers;
A weed stretched over your strong skin,
I dip my green roots
Down to your heart, drinking beats;
That which swelled me is dispelled,
Flesh is a maggot.
Beat me to granite with your pulse of sound,
To be stilled...
Watching water come and go.

THE WORD

The word will come back one day
Furry with soot, quiet, dreaming,
Eyes grazing the whiteness of a page,
Limbs groping for tongue tips.

The ancient heart will wake
And thud against its ribcage,
Pumping blood, green and fragrant,
Glowing its skin, returning sound.

The word, how we have lost the word,
Thrown it aside with irreverence,
Passed it into sewage pipes,
Discarded, disused.

We, somnambulists, have exchanged
Mute touches, waded through our lives
Under the burden of time,
Our tongues sagging into darkness.

The word will come back one day
And our lives, touched by green fire
Will bloom like wild broom
Among the dusty rocks and we shall sing.

The word, celebrate the word,
Open the doorway of the body
And let it return triumphantly –
Rolling on the tongue, palate-bounding.

Up from the pool it will rise,
Full with memory and all that we are,
Its heart, the force of sound
That grew and spread across the ages.

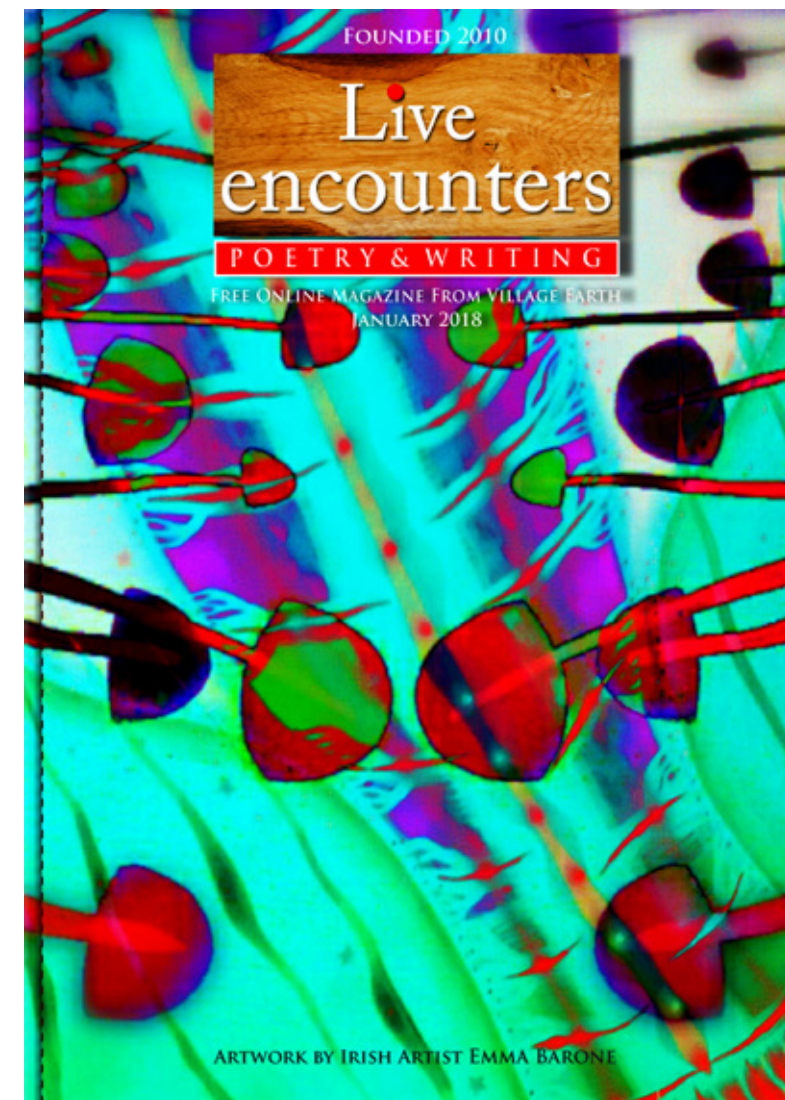
Pull out the plugs, switch off the lights,
Roll up the wires, no more controlling,
We will wait for in the dark for the word,
Our bodies trembling for the sacred moment.

BIRTHING

Broken,
The golden bowl,
The pitcher at the fountain,
The wheel at the cistern,
The hour into dust.

Keepers of the house tremble,
The strong men are bowed,
The lone grinder is still;
Desire dissolves,
Candles of mourners in the streets;
The almond tree is in blossom.

Returning through dark doors
To her long house,
Loosening the silver cord,
Opening her fugitive eyes,
The poem is born.



January 2018



Noel Monahan

Noel Monahan has published eight collections of poetry. His most recent collection: *Where The Wind Sleeps, New & Selected Poems*, was published by Salmon in May 2014. He has won numerous awards for his poetry and drama. His work has been translated into Italian, French, Romanian and Russian. His most recent plays include: "The Children of Lir" performed by Livin' Dred Theatre. His poetry was prescribed text for the Leaving Certificate English Course 2011 and 2012. His seventh collection of poetry: "Cellui Qui Porte Un Veau" a French translation of his work was published by Allidades, France in October 2014. An Italian selection of his work was published in "Tra Una Vita E L'Altra", published by Guanda, 2015. His work appears in the recent Anthology of Poetry "Windharp" Poems of Ireland Since 1916, edited by Niall MacMonagle and published by Penguin, 2015. A new collection of poetry entitled: "Chalk Dust" was published by Salmon Poetry in May 2018. This is Noel's eighth collection of poetry.

APHRODITE IN THE SNOW

I awaken to the surprise of seeing you
 Stretched naked outside my window,
 Your ivy hair full of snowflakes,
 Earrings of frozen ice, blizzard of pearl powder
 For your face. Fresh snow begins to blow
 Across your navel, curves about your pubic bones,
 Lodges between your thighs.

I know you drifted here.
 The wind shaped your limbs, your snow white girdle
 And now the wind of forty voices sings:
Spem In Alium in the snow,
 Choral whispers of hope in the singing bowl of winter.
 A car passes with head-lights on, someone is scraping a driveway
 And I'm not sure whether I'm looking at the evening or morning star.

ATHENA

Nothing less than
A splitting headache
To her father Zeus.
Wing-beats of an owl at night,
Our breath of life,
Watchful wisdom,
Bestower of olives to Athens,
Queen of the Parthenon,
Demure, untouched by man,
Patron of same-sex love.

UNHAPPY PRAYER

When crows were white
And Gorgon's blood revived the dead,
Silenus, the pot-bellied one
Mounted an ass, headed for the city

To meet Midas,
(Urban chairman of the golden handshakes)
And there in the market square,
He defended
His anti-natal thoughts:
*The best thing for man
Is not to be born
And if alive
To die as soon as possible.*



Ingrid Storholmen

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.

This poem is translated from Norwegian by Marietta Maddrell.

EARTH WORD

The Earth that turns around
 The Earth that looks at the sky
 The Earth that knows it is floating
 And lying still, allows itself to be tilled, shaped, damaged
 The Earth that does not resist,
 That (calmly) sees the corn circles emerging
 The labyrinths formed of stone around the year 1000
 Sees and recognises the churchyards
 That are filled and filled, now graves on top of old graves
 The monuments that receive new names
 New bodies in the clay
 The Earth is present at your burial
 The Earth lives from your dying
 The Earth you tilled takes you
 Up into itself
 You are earth now
 Mould and remains, for a while
 Then only mould. Memory
 Then the flowers will remember you
 Remember the water you gave them
 Gave the Earth and you are no more than earth
 The Earth is more than you

continued overleaf...

EARTH WORD *contd...*

Sand earth
Strand earth
The black earth belt, no
The windowbox
The lawn
The park
The flowerbed
The meadow
The fields that have names
Names you should have remembered
And forget, the earth they owned
The earth they cleared
The earth that had been full of trees, shrubs
They settled and sowed
Now it is you
Now it is you who will sow
And make love in the meadow, every summer.

To own earth, feel the ownership
Rage and grieve when it is sold, or seized
See it sprout again, become golf courses
That is what we are busy with here
This is the earth under our feet
It is too little food and too much food
The Earth does not understand it

2

The Earth need not understand

Good morning
 Earth good morning
Good morning
 Apple
Good morning
 Berries

The Earth must be tilled and you can't be bothered
Like hell you can't be bothered
You change the subject you are debating with yourself
You hate the idea
Hate, hate doing it, tilling
The apartment isn't earth
The vacuum cleaner isn't filled with earth

Oh no, because it isn't so
You are to write an earth language
Write *e a r t h*
With *w o r d*
Write in the earth, sow in patterns
The words without earth
A long earth war

continued overleaf...

EARTH WORD *contd...*

This is my earth
My native earth I am standing on
But you have forgotten it
You can forget it
But not everyone wants to forget
And you do not understand them
You do not understand the gardener
Or the parents who plant trees
one tree for each child
Earth against word
Land and strand
The Earth does not need words
But fertiliser and water

Earth in space, Earth in time, Earth in faith
She believes in Earth
On the Earth
Do we have to bury each other
Between earth and earth they meet

Laborious for the earth, this, all the people, all the animals, we demand
I am so tired on the earth
Burial in earth
Do not bury me now
Find the Earth inside me
Then around me

3

The Earth seen from space
“how beautiful
And how doomed”



Elena Karina Byrne

Elena Karina Byrne, former Regional Director of the Poetry Society of America and recent final judge for the Kate & Kingsley Tufts Award in poetry is the author of three books including *Squander (Omnidawn 2016)*. She is a freelance professor, editor, the Poetry Consultant / Moderator for The Los Angeles Times Festival of Books, and Literary Programs Director for The Ruskin Art Club. Her publications include the *Pushcart Prize XXXIII*, *Best American Poetry*, *POETRY*, *The Paris Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Slate*, *Poetry International*, *The Academy of American Poets Poem-A-Day*, *Black Renaissance Noire*, and *BOMB*. Elena just completed *Voyeur Hour: Meditations on Poetry, Art, & Desire*. The following four poems are from her new manuscript - *A Game of Violence*.

UNDERGROUND

“Please buy what you do not need,” another man pleads
into my back as I climb the cobbled street with you
in Turkey. Medusa’s wet
stone head the size of five vandal men, tilted on her side in
aqueduct water, smiles,
makes for lit green silence aside in this cistern’s

dark left handed corner. Two of her, two heads
each at the base of Corinthian columns’ staves. Inexact as
these onlookers, gorgon sister, sea nymph

beheaded, made practiced hungry love to him. I listened
to the ocean in
the made-up dark--
My feet find the handmade here
descending Athena’s armed hard temple,-- This way tamed,
the other upside down, a green mold mind and water for hair snakes
asleep

and set, set on the shield of my chest.
“Madame may I
help you spend your money in my restaurant, now please?”
A man’s hands
have never hurt me. This will
always be the opposite of indifference.

SELF-PORTRAIT AS COUNTERPART ALWAYS, WAIT

and see. Wait and see. What you will become, what they
make of you. Mother said, only once, and it was easy to be lily outlay
of language, a tongue-field before I was the sex matchhead
me, emotion's elevator matter of skyfall, or imagination's torn greenery left
out on cutting board, and all animal kingdom come-to-me after-smell. Now,
I cannot save myself from myself. I know the story's running departure far
from home, honing in on the obstacle we call beauty, the crave trade.
Hear it? Body with twin fire escapes, hotel music under the sea-flooded
stairs of the last house. Time turns it back over to you: one child's first hand
coffin box full of fresh crayons, melting together, under the bedroom
window sill, child, unafraid to call any color sky or skin.

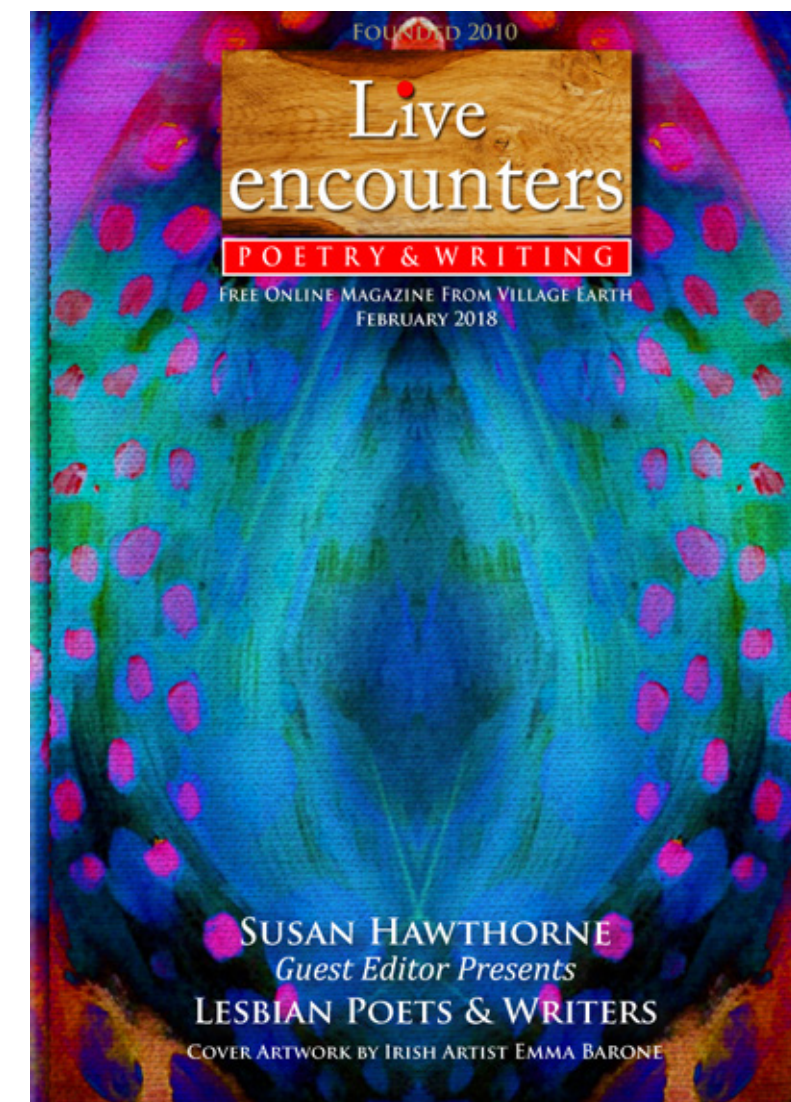
OUTBURST PAVILION: ARS POETICA VIA DEAD LOVERS

"animate my painting" - Apollinaire, *Les Soirees de Paris*

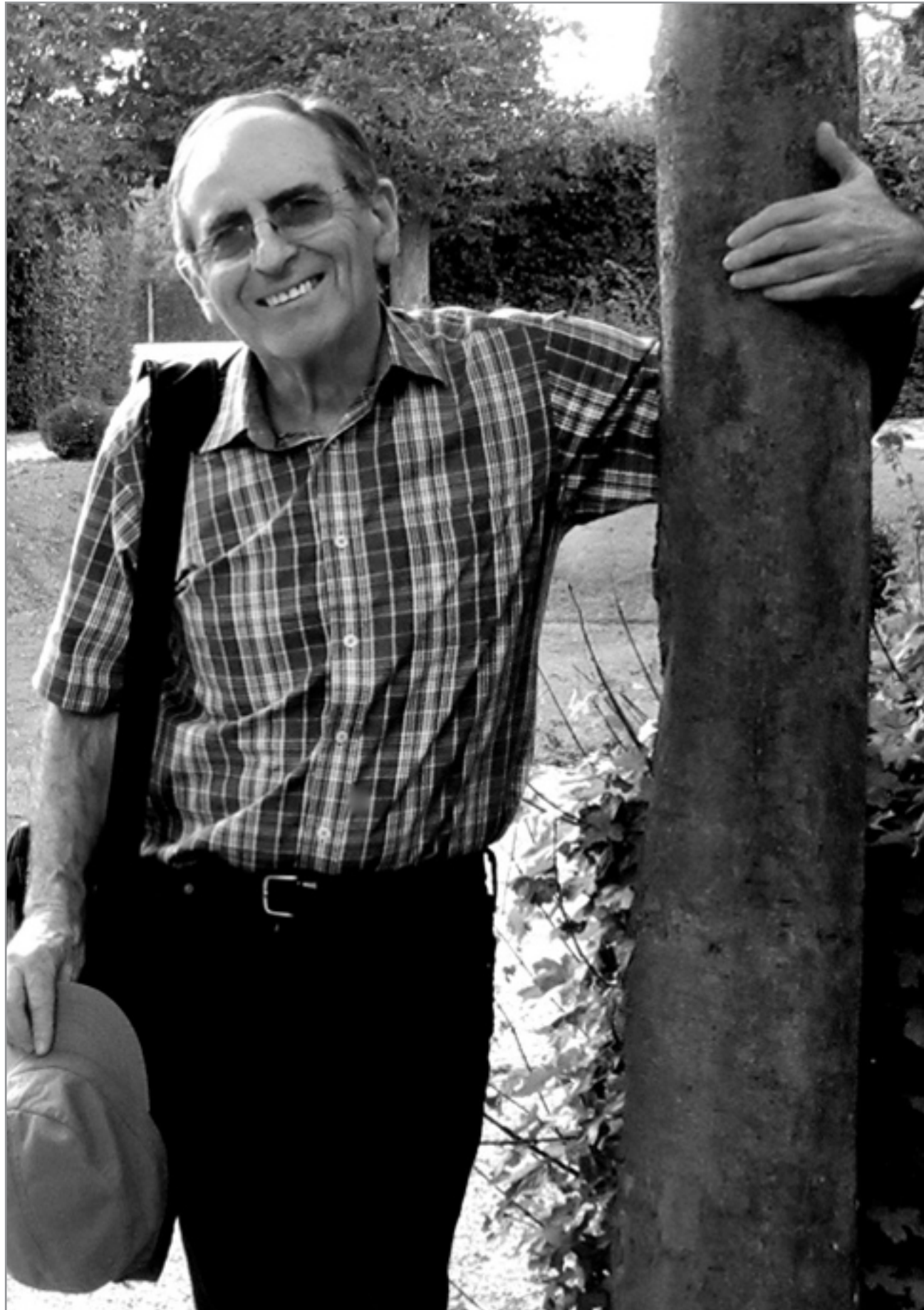
and there's an oath of lead paint in the alcove, autumn
delirium burial made with wet hands but
the all-night fire set at my feet is not bruised
twilight pent-up. So, go, go drink
a thimble of burnt dung beetles, drink of closet dark
down in the root cellar. Let wildfowl flock
the water mirror again once you've covered the beehives.
Stop inside this widowed insect hint of
disquiet till Sunday's clock sun's scabbard arm cuts
through the lit paper of your skull.

MIRANDA JULY ASKED ME TO DANCE

to music in her film once, in my bedroom on my bed,
facing the large window's empty marine tank facing
our widening ocean garden. It was an odd accident we
found each other online, job for a woman artist whose
high heels punctured the grass, preaffair, sky scale fire
and faith rain when the garden would be payment enough
in an exchange in a novel. Everyone is a pseudonym for
you kissing both hands in the hall bathroom wallpapered
with fish at a bad party. In the quick end, she didn't show
up, didn't choose me, somebody she didn't know from this
future machine charity shop of surprises and moving body-
poses, arms and hair flying like goddess curl-crotch-seaweed.



February 2018



Alex Skovron

Alex Skovron is the author of six collections of poetry and a prose novella. His latest book, *Towards the Equator: New & Selected Poems* (2014), was shortlisted in the Prime Minister's Literary Awards. *The Attic*, a bilingual selection of his poetry translated into French, was published in 2013; *Water Music*, a volume of Chinese translations, appeared in 2017; and his novella *The Poet* has been translated into Czech. A volume of short stories, *The Man who Took to his Bed* (2017) is his latest publication. www.sydneyreviewofbooks.com www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/skovron-alex (to 2005 only)

CHIPPED BRICK AND OLD MORTAR

Trust your mirror only during moments
when you occupy its attention. With your back
turned don't assume anything. This is not
a Berkleyan conundrum, nor a paradox

of the type once popular with phenomenologists.
I would advise indifference, if not scepticism,
in all your dealings with mirrors. Recall the tale
of the poet who lost his reflection, his mirror

turning against him, until he began to doubt
his very existence. Finally he smashed the mirror,
but in the suddenly exposed ruins of the wall
behind it he discovered only chipped brick

and old mortar, some panicky ants, the silence
of *Schadenfreude*. So he accosted a fresh mirror
in another room of his flat and found there,
instead of his absence, an alternative image

with no resemblance to the poet he remembered
himself to have been. In his next poem he observed:
You can't restore an image that has abandoned
its reflection, because the image is that reflection,

whereas the reflection is not the image.
Or sometimes almost exactly the other way round.

THE MAN WHO TOOK TO HIS BED



ALEX SKOVRON

PRONE GULCH

So he stumbles into the bar & cantina
 (as the sign says) smack in the middle
 of somewhere not sure where & so saddle-
 sore from his bum-busting Mustang drive
 across five hundred k of desert & dust
 & cactus-endless redscapes of porcupine
 stalagmites erect in the steamy earth

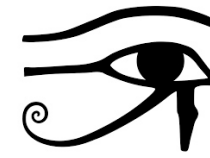
But the first thing he sees as he shoves
 the swing-door like a honcho on the hunt
 for the second-fastest draw is a honcho
 drawn out along the sawdust barlength lino
 of this dozy dive stooped over by a dozen
 wild-eyed would-be resuscitators who
 clearly couldn't spell CPR He sidles
 over & asks if his help might be of help
 so the greenhorns peel apart to lay bare
 the bandido A doc (they divine) Ah well
 it turns out the laid-out lout has lost
 not just his footing but his forget-me-not
 which is to say the ace of his existence has
 stalled dreadful & only a whirly MICA
 could turn the wild card to redeem him

Doc straightens up to unholster his iCell
 & that's when the dude behind the counter
 counters 'Not so fast dude' because just then
 a fat hat with a silver star guts the gate
 his handcuffs blinging in the leftover sun



Hedy Habra

Hedy Habra has authored two poetry collections, *Under Brushstrokes*, finalist for the USA Best Book Award and the International Poetry Book Award, and *Tea in Heliopolis*, winner of the USA Best Book Award and finalist for the International Poetry Book Award. Her story collection, *Flying Carpets*, won the Arab American National Book Award's Honorable Mention and was finalist for the Eric Hoffer Award. An eleven-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net, her work appears in *Cimarron Review*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Cider Press Review*, *Drunken Boat*, *Gargoyle*, *Nimrod*, *Poet Lore*, *World Literature Today* and *Verse Daily*.
www.hedyhabra.com



In ancient Egypt, the Eye of Horus came to be known as Wadjet, the most powerful of protective amulets, made of gold, silver, lapis, wood, porcelain and carnelian. The Wadjet's six parts represented the shattering of Horus' eye and were associated with the six senses as a specific fraction.

MEDITATIONS OVER THE EYE OF HORUS - SIGHT

Sight = 1/4



albasar

The pupil of the Wadjet represents seeing or the sensation of light.

In the nobleman Pashedu's tomb, the Wadjet is endowed with a hand holding a pot with flaming tapers. A god's eye bearing light guiding the hand as it carves and paints symbols on vault's walls, lush everyday scenes to carry along into the afterlife. In Heliopolis, our house was wallpapered with my mother's oils: windows as thresholds, inviting me to step inside, near the girl seated in a boat, a young man eating her up with his eyes under the elderly fisherman's frown, or follow the couple watching the sunset from a terrace. Their silent message reached me deeper, year after year. The Book of the Dead spells on papyri or over murals ensured the path to eternal life. And aren't churches open books covered with sacred eyes staring at the faithful, piercing their hearts with invisible arrows? And don't colors and figures speak in tongues like Dante's *visibile parlare*, the bas-reliefs paving the way to expiation in his *Purgatorio*?

In mirrors I drown
 find myself time after time
 eyes lined with lapis

MEDITATIONS OVER THE EYE OF HORUS - SIGHT *contd...*

●

Horus's lunar eye extends a hand, linking sight with touch. The Wadjet in midst of a palm wards the evil eye. Fatima's palm or *Khamsa* shows a finger for each of the five senses. Can we ever separate senses? *Kharaza zarka*, the tiny turquoise stone or blue-beaded eye we pin on cribs and babies' clothes alongside medals of the Madonna. Would a charm deflect malevolent looks? And does fear make things happen? *Lamh*, a quick glance or *al basar*, a flash of lightning, all wound in saccades like love at first sight: *nazra*, *summa ebtesama*, *summa algharam*, a look, then a smile, then passion. I see my mother's look in my own eyes, her sight and dreams passed on to me through her art before clouds covered her macula. I visit museums with her ghost by my side. She holds my brush when I paint what she will never see. I brought back from Spain a porcelain tile stamped with Francisco de Icaza's verses:

*Dale limosna, mujer,
que no hay en la vida nada
como la pena de ser
ciego en Granada*

*Give him alms, woman
for there is nothing in life
like the pain of being
blind in Granada*

●

Blind seers and poets had inner sight. All knew the importance of closing one's eyes to the world around us and entering another. When snatched from a dream, I hang on to fragments as brittle as old papyri that disappear leaving my chest an open wound. Can one conjure up a dream night after night with its final image? Ancient Egyptians understood that dreams open our eyes to gods' warnings and prophecies. Priests burned incense, chanting around a coffin sealed with wax in which a man was enclosed before recording his near-death visions. It takes a lifetime to find an alphabet to weave the shreds of images projected onto the screen of our waking mind into a legible map that reveals our own features.

Broken mirrors shine
in memory's dark hallways
each a slivered moon

the sight of Poinciana's lush flames, their yellow stamen in flight
the sight of the Nile glittering in the felucca's wake under the moonlight
the sight of the woman's blue bra uncovered as she was beaten in Tahrir Square
the sight of pink and white oleander, our mothers' warning us of its blinding sap
the sight of Verdi's Aida's world premiere at the Cairo Khedivial Opera in 1871
the sight of the Cairo Royal Opera burning to the ground in 1971
the sight of Anubis weighing the heart of the deceased against the white feather of Ma'at
the sight of the gilded *iconostasis* and Christ's stern look as he raises his hand in blessing
the sight of the blue lotus rising each dawn from murky waters to reveal its golden heart
the sight of the *hudhud*, the hooded hoopoe carrier of King Solomon's message to Belkis
the sight of colorful woven canopies erected in the streets for weddings and funerals



Susan Condon

Susan Condon, a native of Dublin, Ireland has started working on a new novel set in her home town. She was awarded a Certificate in Creative Writing from the National University of Ireland Maynooth. Her short stories have won numerous awards including first prize in the Jonathan Swift Creative Writing Award while others have been long-listed, on four occasions, in the RTÉ Guide/Penguin Short Story Competition. Publications include *Ireland's Own Anthology*, *My Weekly*, *Boyne Berries 22*, *Live Encounters*, *Flash Flood Journal*, *Spelk*, *Flash Fiction Magazine* and *The Flash Fiction Press*. Susan blogs at: www.susancondon.wordpress.com. You can find her on Twitter: @SusanCondon or check out her crime fiction reviews and interviews on www.writing.ie

THE SINGER

Entering Amy's bedroom, I smile as watching my beautiful five-year-old daughter sleep. I extract the gnawed thumb from her mouth before planting a kiss on her fair head.

Earlier I cleared out the spare room, now; I can finally remove the cover from my grandmother's sewing machine. It nestles within gleaming, worn oak, *Singer* emblazoned across the black metal body in faded gold lettering. My eyes scan down to the trellised pedal, before returning to rest on the silver needle - motionless, waiting patiently to resume working its magic.

I open the tiny drawer housed beneath and remove a worn silver bobbin. Positioning a spool of thread on the steel pin, I hold my breath as I flick the switch and press my foot gently on the pedal. The *Singer* hums. The bobbin fills with cerise pink thread. Threading the needle, I manoeuvre a scrap of material beneath the foot and practice running stitches until I have control of the pedal - like learning to drive.

In front of me, I've spread out coloured material, threads, tailors chalk, needles and pins. Tumbling backwards in time, I see my grandmother, her grey head bent in concentration. Pins protrude from her mouth as she uses a copy of the *Irish Press* newspaper to create patterns. She pins them to material, using chalk to trace an outline, before cutting each piece. Seams are joined together on the *Singer* while hems and fasteners are hand-sewn, with stitches so tiny they are nearly invisible.

Remnants from my mother's dresses were transformed into miniature creations worthy of any fashion house. Judy and Mandy, my favourite dolls, had been the best dressed in all of Ireland. Their evening gowns had been worthy of Jackie Onasis - especially the year the O'Hara's had moved in across the street!

I smile, remembering my seven year old friend, Jennifer, as she emerged from her house with her communion dress trailing behind her. While everyone else had short, plain dresses when we made our First Holy Communion that May, Jennifer's had been a long affair with lots of frills and lace that we all envied. We had been so excited when we were allowed to wear our dresses again to mass each Sunday.

THE SINGER *contd...*

Then, for the Corpus Christi procession in June, we had been able to wear our dress and veil again. The priests and altar boys walked in front, brandishing a statue of Our Lady. We, like miniature brides, paraded behind. Our ringlets bobbed up and down as our small hands scattered a myriad of rose petals, stolen from neighbours' gardens, along the way.

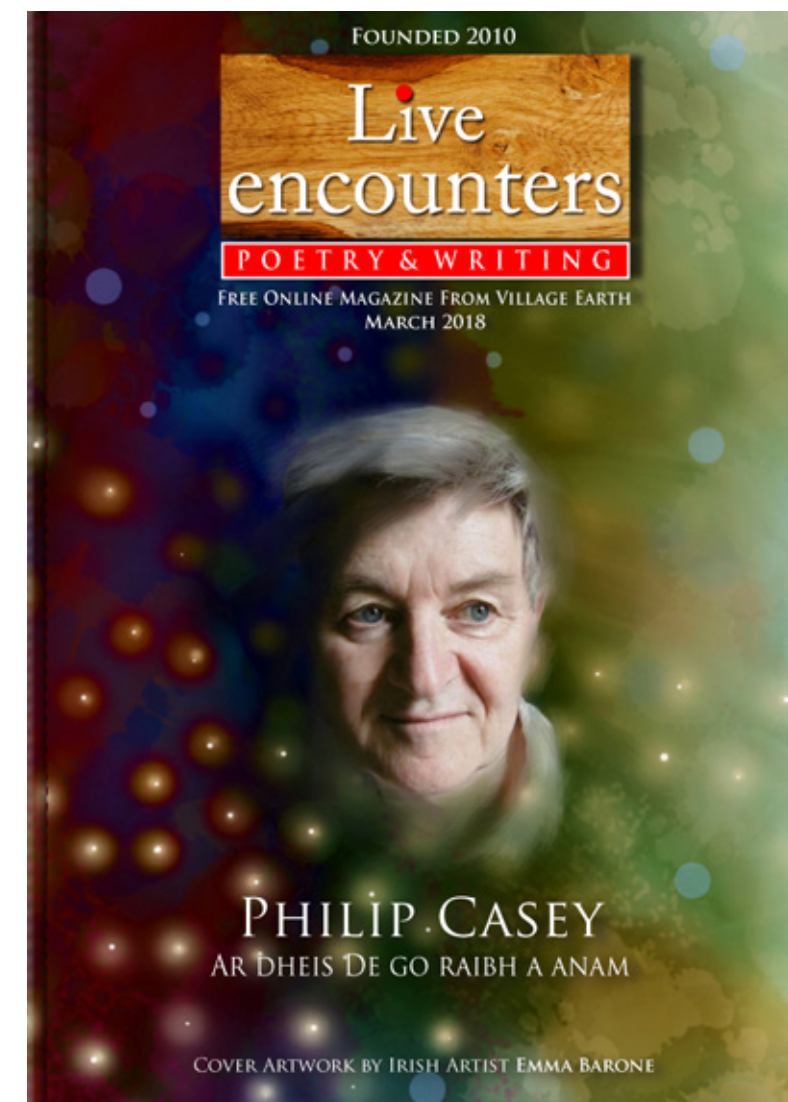
We had all oohed and aahed when Jennifer told us she was *allowed* to cut it up. "Sure, I'll never get to wear it again, it's too tight anyway," she giggled, waving her scissors in the air.

No-one wanted to be first, but as soon as Jennifer began to cut every scissors followed in quick succession. For hours, we cut, pinned, sewed, and laughed. There was no fighting or bickering that day and when we were called for tea, we all helped Jennifer to squash the remaining pieces of material into her vanity case before heading home.

As I cut the *Sunday Independent* into patterns and hope that Amy will be delighted with Barbie's new wardrobe, I can still hear the screech from Jennifer's mother.

"Jesus Christ almighty, what have you done? What have you done?"
Her voice, becomes even louder and shriller.
"Just wait 'til your father gets home!"

We had all walked home faster that day, head down, praying ...



March 2018



Julia Deakin

Julia Deakin was born in Nuneaton and worked her way north to Yorkshire via Shropshire, the Potteries, Manchester and Huddersfield, where she taught in secondary and higher education, and began writing poems. Her work is praised by leading UK poets. 'Crafted, tender poems, written with passion and purpose,' said Simon Armitage of *Without a Dog* (Graft, 2008). Anne Stevenson enjoyed its 'mature wit and wisdom'. 'Real linguistic inventiveness' said Ian McMillan. 'Bold, irreverent and wickedly funny,' said Alison Brackenbury of her Poetry Business Competition winner *The Half-Mile-High-Club. Eleven Wonders* (Graft 2012). Michael Symmons Roberts judged 'powerful, assured, elegant.' A compelling reader, she has featured twice on Poetry Please and won numerous prizes. Her fourth book, *Sleepless* (Valley Press, 2018) is commended by former National Poet of Wales Gillian Clarke. www.juliadeakin.co.uk

MANNA

A round of thin white sliced
arrives with your all day breakfast
at the Harbour Grill. It sits
on a distressed plate, between
the stainless steel spout – designed
to miss the cup – and the heap
of chips, beans and batter
you know will do you no good but.

It falls short of the plateful in your head:
the chips too thin, batter too pale, beans
a bit low on the bean count.

Beside it the bread, limp and soft
as lint spread with Savlon, waits
like the dressing for a wound.

HIGH O'ER THE FENCE

That week at Auntie Mary and Uncle Les's
in their schoolhouse at the bottom of a lane
we had the whole playground to ourselves
with their five children, three girls one called Susan,
a scooter, a tricycle, toys and games times five
and a new breakfast called Weetabix
from a box that was yellow like the fields
we walked in. There were ponds, bulrushes
and things called oast houses.

The sun shone every day till past bedtime.

Back home we lived in a schoolhouse too
but colder, the playground out of bounds –
and they never came to stay with us, to see
our cornflake box with a cockerel on
or our Force flakes with a funny man, saying
High o'er the fence leaps Sunny Jim.
"Force" is the food that raises him.

KNIT ONE

O magnificent, sumptuous, pink striped,
ribbed green, knitted drawstring tea cosy. O
consummate summit of textile engineering.
When all about you lose their cool you bear
your searing lot with stoic dignity,
as trembling lesser vessels wait upon
your every inclination and the instant when,
unsheathing a spout proud as a trident,
you are moved to settle storms. How many
stirrings have your ministrations calmed,
how many insurrections your soft looks disarmed?
O fantastic, bombastic, taciturn pachyderm –
no pot too hot for you, no stain too rude –
teach us a little of your portly fortitude.

BLACK HOLE

As flies to wanton boys are we, or coins
in a 'Penny Avalanche' machine, some silver
standing out against the duller browns,
some still too new and pristine to be smeared
with human grime and nudged towards
their summary dispatch,
the shifts and realignments
made for each addition sometimes cataclysmic,
mostly not. And then what? Who knows
if this dicing deity will sling us straight back in the slot
and through the whole charade again, or lose us
in some sweaty pocket for the next eternity?

MINDFULNESS

A woman is only as good as what she does not say
to a posse of men telling joke after joke not listening
to anyone but themselves especially not women especially
not her no heels no sense of humour not even smiling
cheer up love it might never happen she's looking

over their shoulders for a clock or a door
mindful of how her sister bought an automatic
fish feeder which broke down when she went on holiday
to Legoland and what it must be like to come home
to a tankful of dead fish

BACK TO SCHOOL

M1 3HB

Looking over the canal
at those high windows thick with dust, I see
such long years.

There, Geography
with Mrs Williams. Needlework –
Miss Peters. Up there at the top, Science.
Mrs Batty. Mr Janes!

Down here, almost under water,
the abandoned cloakroom's metal grilles,
forgotten pumps in shoe bags;

above, along the whole length of the hall,
Full School Assembly. Me, flat chested,
front edge of the stage, reciting
Heureux lui qui, comme Ulysse, my voice
not carrying

beyond the rows
of cross-legged, pleated skirts to prefects
at the back, where six years later I sat
burying a box of tampons in my bag.

Such long years it took
to shuffle backwards to the upper ranks
between walls of staring teachers.
They stare on,
many from the grave.

Sit DOWN!
one booms, and I collapse
my bare legs to the wet cobbles
of Manchester's now gay village.
What are you doing out here, anyway?
You're late. Go and see the office!

I wait, finger on the brass latch, penitent,
as Mrs Thomas fills in forty years
of red noughts on the register.



Brian Kirk

Brian Kirk is an award-winning poet and short story writer from Dublin. His children's novel *The Rising Son* was published in December 2015. He was selected for the Poetry Ireland Introductions Series in 2013 and highly commended in the Patrick Kavanagh Award in 2014 and 2015. His first poetry collection *After The Fall* was published by Salmon Poetry in 2017. He blogs at www.briankirkwriter.com.

DIFFERENT TRAINS

come and sing the old refrain
won't you come back back to the north feet on the floor
look to the west the old metal bridge o won't you come back

stand alone with your back to the door what do you see the old city
thirty years later looks much the same but it's different
old people new buildings new people old buildings
you want to sit down but don't want to take someone's seat
not old yet but no longer young

so many souls on the tram wakening dreaming going to work
or to school or to court civil or criminal juvenile district or circuit

past the bare plaza the obsolete hospital museum memorials to the dead
or dying past flats shops and cafés markets early house pub

back to the north feet on the floor look to the west
the old metal bridge o won't you come back

remember that first taste of beer in the morning watching the others
going to work while you drank punishing youth with old men's
bad habits scared of the future you laughed in its face
now you see him again in the glass the pale boy with the shake
in his hand the black eye the bruised lip the lost look in his eyes

Dun Laoghaire Holyhead Euston in the footsteps of thousands
wanting to be different but not that different pretending to be
something else yearning for the thing you couldn't name

that first winter damp morning you woke in a Stratford graveyard
caught the train back to Plaistow and walked home from there
what were you thinking that morning dew-covered bone-tired
broken by drink

continued overleaf..

DIFFERENT TRAINS *contd...*

back to the north feet on the floor look to the west
the old metal bridge o won't you come back

to be free you told yourself that was the key but you were tied
to dull jobs routinely killing the pain with a drink till you felt better
felt nothing but not free at all no never that

all alone those weekends with no money no one to see or talk to
your own voice an irritation a spud in your mouth tongue swollen
speechless deformed half-formed not formed at all

alone on the street trying to outpace yourself you sought comfort
in the bookshops on Charing Cross Road in the galleries
in the back seats of churches at the weddings of strangers

and the jobs that you hated and the one that you lost and the panic
you felt was it that made you mean took the good out of things
carved the chip on your shoulder the bad word ever ready to utter
ah fuck it you thought what's the point anyway

back to the north feet on the floor look to the west
the old metal bridge o won't you come back

you were waiting for something to happen your ship to come in
but your train had already left the station
hard station hard lines hard luck that was your story for years

so you tried to be something more than you were
wrote some poems in old copies on the back of torn envelopes
thought they were good sent them off got them back
tore them up and despaired

on the Metro with Gerry playing at Orwell no longer alone
but confused nonetheless slept on the benches
at St. Germain de Prés stoned out of your minds
in the morning a tell-tale incision your last fifty francs gone
how close had he been with that blade

rode the trains all day long until evening in Luxembourg Gardens
moved on by the Gendarmes after they looked at your passports
what did they think two naïfs or real artists gazing back at them
black and white

there were glorious moments too sat on a bench side by side
after hours on different trains something deeper calling you
pulling you close out of all those millions

back to the north feet on the floor look to the west
the old metal bridge o won't you come back

different train years later heading north to Gerry's funeral
after he put a stop to it all back on the smokes for the first time
in months getting drunk like before already forgetting your friend
moving on he was gone

on the tube into work every day standing one hand holds a book
the other the moulded handle over your head
Camus Beckett Nietzsche journey with you fester patiently
in your drawer for the ride home

tried out new words grew your hair smoked a pipe put on airs
without reason just to try to be... what to be different
all the same in the end on your own at the end of the day

continued overleaf..

DIFFERENT TRAINS *contd...*

at weekends in turtle-neck and Chelsea boots on the tube
into Soho sat in pubs in the afternoon after the galleries
avoiding encounters pretending to read
words alive on the page

back to the north feet on the floor look to the west
the old metal bridge o won't you come back

years ago hearing trains going by in the night you chanted
a ragged melody staccato soundtrack for another life
imagined the kind of person you could be
if you could only get away

your life was run according to the times of trains
the up and down the fall of signal the ring of bell
the pull of lever relentless it seemed then
but there was an order in it you've been seeking ever since

remember the noise and the smell of the diesel
the bucket seats the cattle vans the fear of self
before the self had formed
a lifetime of pretence beginning with a train journey
a story starting with the words one day

one day you stood beside her on the tube
you knew her and her story well better than your own
after all you wrote it in your heart every day
in your dreams every night

the story of a boy and girl who left only to return
who escaped only to give themselves up
who figured out there was no destination
just the come and go

so come and sing the old refrain
won't you come back back to the north feet on the floor
look to the west the old metal bridge
what was it about it won't you come back o heart be still



Maria Miraglia

Poet and Translator. A Founding Member and Literary Director of the Italian Cultural Association P. Neruda, Honorary Member of Naciones Unidas de las Letras, Editor-in-Chief of Galaktika Poetike Autunis and member of the editorial office of Ourpoetry Archive, member of the Editorial Advisory Board of Sahitya Anand. Her poems have been translated into many foreign languages and are featured in numerous anthologies. Her works include the poetry anthologies: *Petali tra le Nuvole*, *Whispers From the Blue*, *Dancing in the Wind* and *Seagulls in the Blue*. Author of *Le Più Grandi Opere del Poeta Laureato Yayati Madan Gandhi* Translated by Maria Miraglia, author and publisher of *Antologia Poetica*. Her latest production, the bilingual poetry anthology *Stars Dust*, which has been launched in Cracovia, Romania at the World Festival of Poetry 2018. She has been awarded national and international prizes.

IN THE SILENCE

It almost scares me
this intimate feeling of peace
deep penetrating
that gives the sense of suspension
of detachment

Noises and anxieties
seem to have vanished
in the sweet air
of the summer eve

But a sudden thought
like the hoarse cawing
of a crow
among goldfinches
merrily twittering
disturbs my quietness

How long will it last
I wonder
while
in the silence
the fright of the elusive
of the unpredictable
poisons the air

And the fear
of impending storms
destroying the garden of roses
with care cultivated
over the time
invades my mind and spirit

THE MOON

I get close to the window
 of my lonely room and
 with my hand shape a circle
 on the fogged glass
 to see outside
 some lampposts dimly enlighten
 the deserted avenue where
 a stray cat is in search of a shelter
 and the leaves of the alders
 seem to tremble
 in the wind
 faintly come from afar
 the noises of the cars
 still coming and going

The moon and her flickering maidens
 framed in the great canvas
 spread their white light
 while watching over the men's dreams
 how many the secrets they keep
 of us on earth and
 our troubled lives
 night after night
 with synchronous rotation
 never tired
 never complaining
 to follow the celestial order
 over and over again

DISPUTE

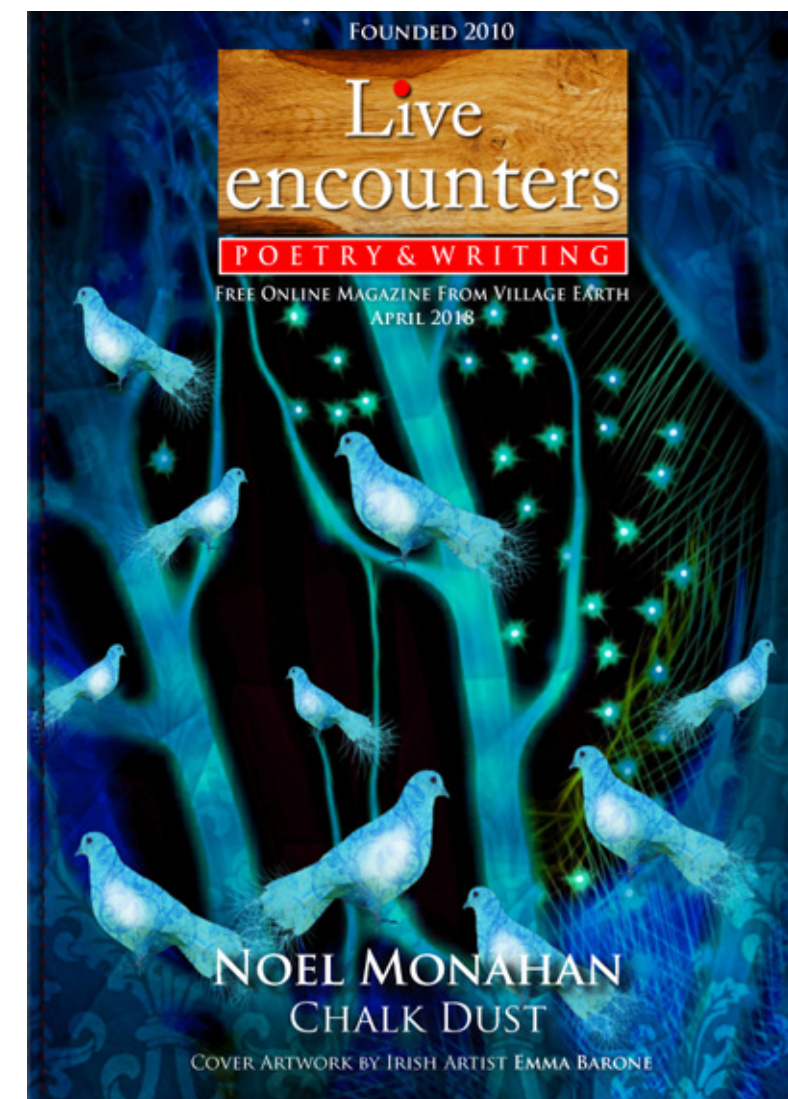
I have no dresses for me
 never go out to breathe fresh air
 nor ever meet people
 complains one-day Consciousness
 I also want to take my walks and
 see the sun
 I'm tired to be silent
 kept locked inside
 Quickly Man replied
 everyone knows
 you are not used
 to wear any clothes
 Those are just for me
 It's up to me
 to face the seasons
 stay there, do not claim
 what is not for you
 Most of the times
 it's windy or rainy
 and even in spring
 weather can be bad
 If you come out
 you'll easily find yourself
 in the midst of storms

DAWN

Rapt by you Dawn
 by your uncertain colours
 shyly breaking the deep dark
 of nights
 by the first bizarre twirls
 of the birds
 in the light air
 with you there
 to awaken Men
 to a new day
 I could stay for hours
 to admire you silently
 while wondering about the mystery
 of light and gloom

How many more sunrises
 will I be a witness
 before the unwanted call
 of the Grim Reaper
 invite me to go
 naked and without burdens
 but the hidden secrets
 kept in my soul

I'll then think back to life
 to the world
 to the early hours of the mornings
 their rose-pink light
 and still feel amazement
 and a sense of melancholic nostalgia.



April 2018



Lynne Thompson

Lynne Thompson was the winner of the Tucson Literary Award (Poetry) in 2017, the Stephen Dunn Poetry Prize in 2016 and an Individual Artist Fellowship from the City of Los Angeles for 2015-16. She is the author of *Start With a Small Guitar* and *Beg No Pardon*, winner of the Perugia Book Award and the Great Lakes Colleges Association's New Writers Award. This year, she won the 2018 Marsh Hawk Press Poetry Prize for her forthcoming manuscript *Fretwork*. Recent work appears or is forthcoming in *Ecotone*, *New England Review*, *Barrow Street* and, *Poetry*, among others. Thompson is Reviews and Essays Editor for Tebot Bach's literary journal *Spillway*.

YANG FUXI PRACTICES A DYING CRAFT

China Daily, February 2, 2007

Making a bow demands
Jiangsu bamboo, antler
of a water buffalo or ox-
horn for the bow's belly,

sinew of a beast to resist
extension, bound with
a taut silk thread. Later,
layers of ox muscle are

glued to the bow. A week
passes and the next layer
is glued on to strengthen
the instrument. A warrior

might ornament his bow
with snake-skin or birch-
bark, might secure the grip
with some stingray's hide.

If forced to battle, a warrior's
string hand wears short nails,
a thumb ring, and he carries
arrows of suitable length.

The last maker was heir to this
graceful vocation, apprentice to
his father who was taught by his.
What will the son of Fuxi learn?

CHOOSE

Why blame the faith you have lost? Heaven remains:
the falling of a fixed star,
the breast of the naked moon,
summer for prose,
 lemons for nakedness and languor,
the orange tree, in various light,
 burning to be the bitch she will become
 pulped ripe by fondling and doubly sweet.

AGNOSTICISM

God's angry with the world again,
unable to sleep, to pray. As a road winds,
he dines alone surrounded by reflections,

his dolls destroyed, sprawled in a pigsty.
We lay roses on his grave, listen for sounds
of cannons in rooms grotesque with furniture

of snow. Through my bedroom's window
appear puzzled faces in the dying elms,
dark as if cloven from darkness.



Jim Burke

Jim Burke: Lives in Limerick, Ireland, and is Co-founder with John Liddy of *The Stony Thursday Book*. His poems have appeared in the *Shamrock Haiku Journal*, the *Literary Bohemian*, the *Crannog Poetry Journal*, the *Stony Thursday Book*, the *Revival Poetry Journal*, the *Shot Glass Journal* and the *Live Encounters Online Magazine*. He is a member of The Irish Haiku Society and is on the committee of the Limerick Writers Centre. Some of his haiku are featured in the anthology *Between the Leaves* edited by Anatoly Kudryavitsky.

concealing truths...
when there is more than one
bad apple in the barrel

HOW TO WEAR YELLOW

Yellow is this summer's hottest colour
says Selfridges.
When the sun comes out

it's easy to get into the colour mood
embrace Parisian chic with a twist.
Yellow symbolizes wisdom.

Yellow means joy and happiness.
People of high intellect favour yellow.
Yellow daffodils are a symbol

of unrequited love—
Post-it notes are yellow.

CLOSING IN ON A WINNING FEELING

you roll the sleeping bag tight
pack it inside your rucksack
shuffle your way to *Centra*

where you count out change
buy morning coffee
and a scratch card

look at that card
it is not useless
it renders you hopeful

first play of the day
you scratch the future
busily

one million miles away
at some river or other
swirling a gold-pan
in your hands



Tobi Alfier

Tobi Alfier is a multiple Pushcart nominee and multiple Best of the Net nominee. Her chapbook “Down Anstruther Way” (Scotland poems) was published by FutureCycle Press. Her full-length collection “Somewhere, Anywhere, Doesn’t Matter Where” was published by Aldrich Press. “Slices of Alice & Other Character Studies” is forthcoming from Cholla Needles Press. She is co-editor of San Pedro River Review (www.bluehorsepress.com).

ON THE ROAD IN EAST TEXAS

Out in the lot, merciless sun gleams
on glass among gravel, like Mexican
Opals strung around the neck of the old woman
who will tell your fortune for two dollars
and ten minutes squinting—
her wobbly table and two ancient chairs
never find shade even on a covered porch.

You buy her a sweet tea, and one for yourself,
hope it will make your fortune sweeter,
but she cannot be bought. She has a lean
and sallow face, wrinkles deep as cutbanks
etch her eyes, her forehead creased
as an old pleated skirt as she thinks about
where to start, how much to tell.

You’re on your way from one crappy town
to another, where dirt isn’t whispered
even before you pass by. A place
where alley cats aren’t fed, while you stand
famished. Where you can breathe. All you want
from this *vieja* is a pin on the map,
a direction, an avoidance of fevers and hell.

Her brown hand wrinkled as her neck, she takes
yours. Her grip firm, she knows your heart even as
you try to hide it. You drink your tea, wish it were
moonshine, sweat like a fugitive, avoid her eyes.
*Just give me a name, you think, I’ll make my own
destiny.* Heat waves warp off the distant pavement.
She says a name. You get your map.

HEADING OUT, WEST OF WINNEMUCCA

1.

Doors slam in the night.
 The smell of shitty booze,
 the sound of fools
 stealing trouble.
 Anywhere Tumbleweed Motel—
 windsock limp over the Vacancy
 sign. I hone my anger
 in the dusty mirror.

11.

Neon sizzles. Diner opens
 at 7am. Clouds like cotton
 throw shadows, hide broken glass
 from fights long forgotten,
 just last night. Somebody aching
 to leave worse than I
 already labeled my coffee cup—
 I don't wear that shade of whore pink.

III.

When the sky is arctic blue
 there is a silence, the kind
 that hangs in the air after a slap.
 Takes me back too many years,
 too many miseries,
 vague, like a story re-told in
 half-sleep. Radio on bible or off,
 I get the hell gone.

GRACE OVER THE HARBOR

We strolled out into the clean smell of nightfall,
 she whistled an aimless tune under her breath.
 We had just met, but felt like we'd known each other
 forever and more. Our hands lightly touched
 as we watched the moon begin to shoulder
 the tops of trees. This was where I wanted to be.

I learned the hard way—you can't negotiate
 the terms of forgiveness with a bitter angel.
 I let that one go, waited for someone new
 to come when I glanced the other direction.
 I swear these towns, the looks of them
 say there are sorrows worth keeping

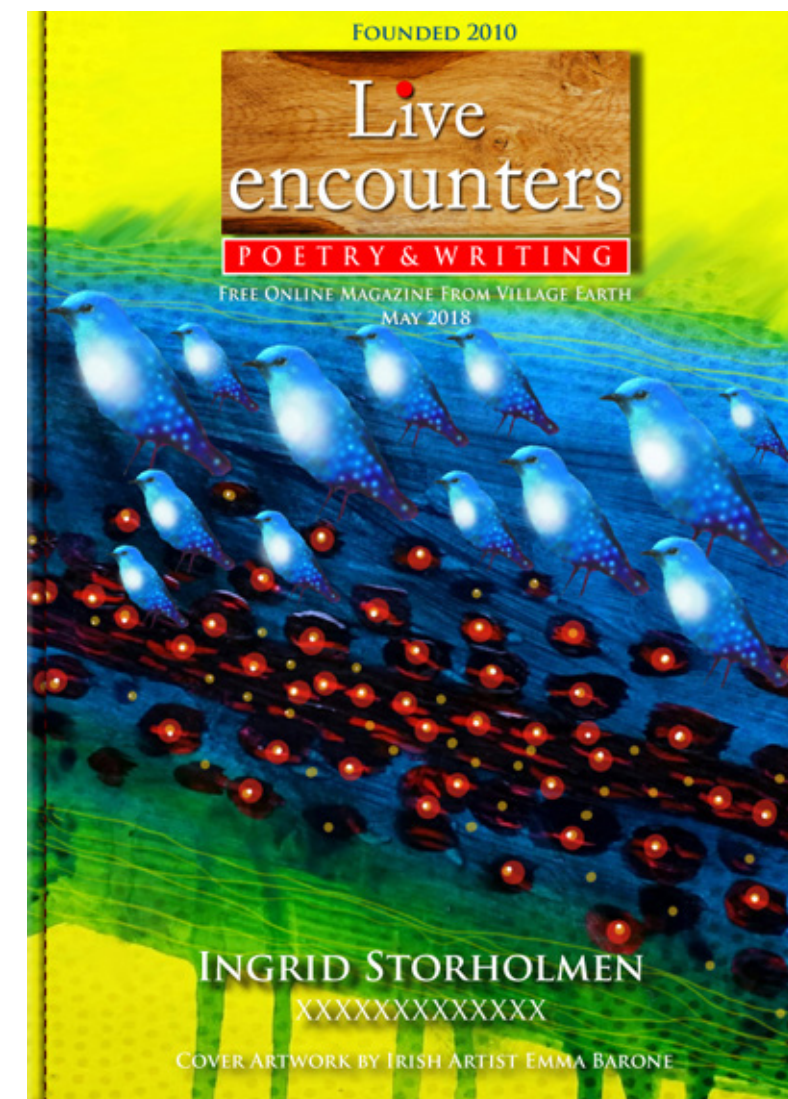
but I say no. Let the ocean wash them far, just
 as the breeze and the quiet song I could barely hear
 washes me. Silhouettes of boats rest
 in the sundown harbor. One called *New Chances*
 has red sails. Tomorrow we'll see it together, sails set
 and aglow, gliding through the early morning light.

MORNINGS AT THE STADT CAFÉ

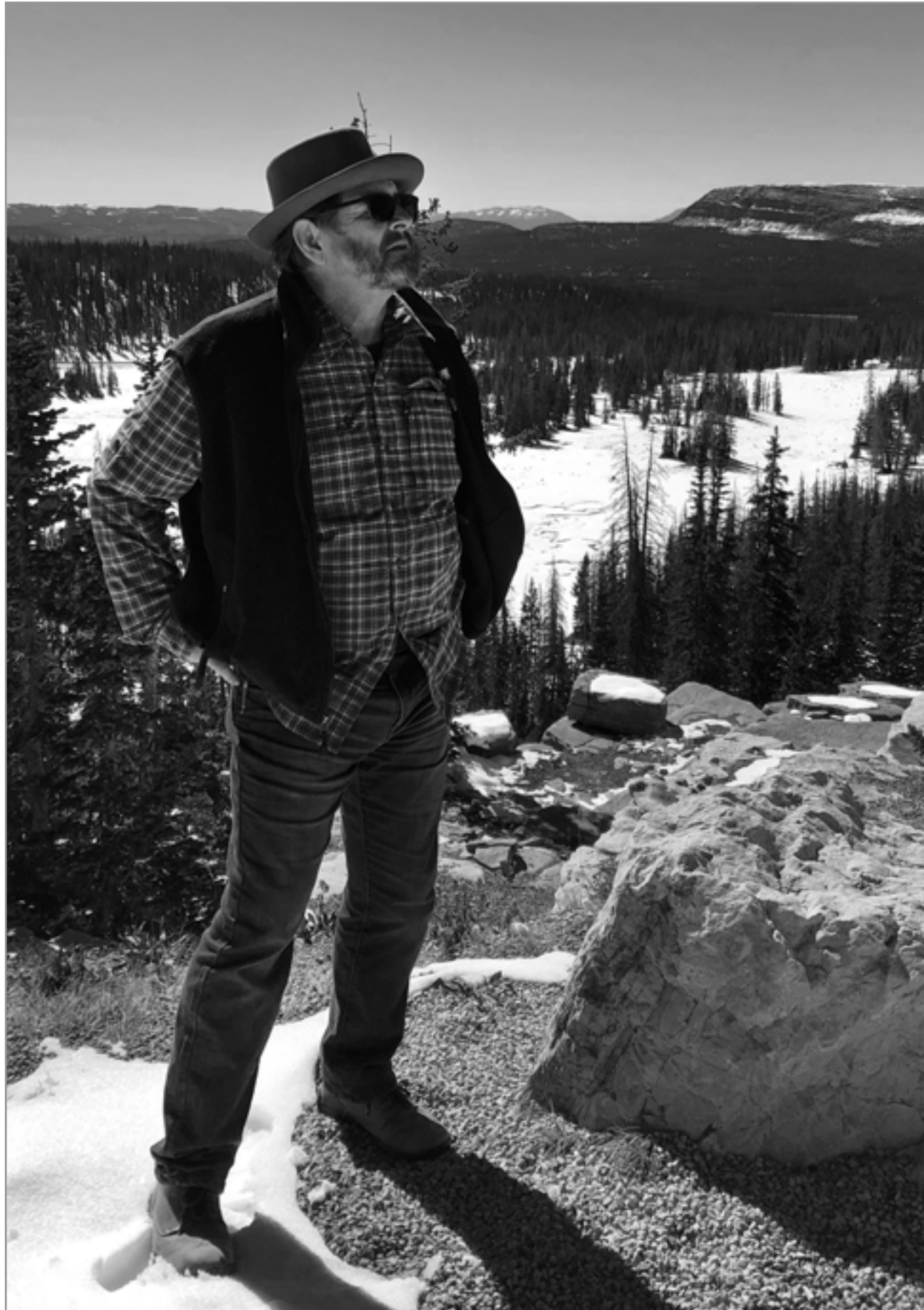
The waitress knew:
he took his coffee light,
and he took it early.
This visitor, boots muddied,
neck turning brown with the sun,
strolling the cobbled streets
through fields to the roads
of his imagination.

A broom smelling of cinnamon
on a wall every texture of brown
takes him back. The next
village over in any direction
has that same smell, those same textures.
Mutter's cottage. When as a boy
they went on break from school.
Now a bakery. Still, the fragrance
the same as the underside
of Greta's hair, Her farm-girl beauty
fragile as a wilting wildflower,
her embroidered apron with pockets
holding kuchen wrapped in handkerchiefs,
one each.

He could write his whole story
each morning at the Stadt Café,
but ventures out instead to read
the next chapter among the grasses
and crumbling sheds, the dark soil,
the remembered earth.



May 2018



Richard Jarrette photograph by Stancey Hancock

Richard Jarrette is author of *Beso the Donkey* (MSU Press 2010)—Gold Medal Poetry Midwest Independent Publishers Association 2011; *A Hundred Million Years of Nectar Dances* (Green Writers Press 2015); *The Beatitudes of Ekaterina* (Green Writers Press 2017); *The Pond* with paintings by Susan Solomon (Green Writers Press March 2019). Poetry Columnist VOICE Magazine of Santa Barbara, California, his books have been endorsed by W.S. Merwin, Jane Hirshfield, Joseph Stroud, and Sam Hamill, and are used as MFA writing program texts as well as for psychology, philosophy, and religion courses. Jarrette is a retired psychotherapist who lives reclusively in the Central Coast region of California after formative years in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Western North Carolina where he is considered a regional writer as well.

WHEN I STEERED MY FATHER THROUGH THE TASSELING CORN

Roy Estone's dark wings were made of knives
but they've become thin and lacy—

brushed my face last night like the black moth
that shares his weakness for honey.

An elder woman took my wrist at his brother's funeral—

*I'm going to give you the Word.
I loved your father.
Everyone loved your father.
Black brown red white old young man woman child.
And he loved everybody.*

He still carries me on his shoulders at times
through the tasseling corn

above the copperheads and rattlers
as I navigate toward Uncle John's store—

the skew-jawed shack where he sold tobacco and sugar
and said *Hey* and I said *Hey* back.

*Hot day. Hot day.
Hot tomorrow. Hot tomorrow.
Corn's tasseling. Corn's tasseling.*

And gave me a hunk of wild Grandfather Mountain
honeycomb he'd set aside in a jar under

the counter with the corn whiskey that made Aunt
Ruby's teeth gleam through her red lipstick.

APART FROM RIGHTEOUS FURY
AT THE NEO-NAZI JUNTA
MAYBE SOME OF MY RAGE
IS AGING MELANCHOLY

I've made the myth of a sword in my spine
guttering in there tailbone to crown—

cut off my wings
pulls at my nerves
always thirsty.

I've made a test of it for some King Arthur—
Po Chü-i
Master William Merwin
Adrienne Rich

or Sappho
or Smokey-the-Cat

whose tail trembles when I stroke her spine
and she marches on my lap.

What fingers will find the strings of my harp?

I'm just a man with a stiff back and a limp
humming an Elvis song

to a picture of Mary Brown
who died when we were eleven.

LI PO SCOLDED BY BLOSSOMS
YOU LET YOUR GRIEF GO
THEN I FOUND IT WHICH DROWNED
AN OLD DEMON

Not gibbons from both banks of your river as you sailed for Tu Fu—
but crows cracking wise or starving or fuck off

to the unfeathered clod by the gone river willows
twelve months a year dead dog bone dry.

I clung to your book memorized the breezes
studied poems about you—slipped my tongue into your grief laden reach

for the edge of heaven and my knife grew heavier than the boat
taken by the sand where my river was and ruby wine.

TAXONOMY OF A PRAYER

*Thus, Shariputra, without attainment,
bodhisattvas take refuge in Prajnaparamita
and live without walls of the mind.*

The rufous-winged sparrow
at his forage my soul at its matins.

Aunt Max and I pulled ticks off the feral
cats she'd half-tamed in the forest

and then off each other in secret—I've been the tick
waiting for a delicious idea to near

and teachers to feed my way into.
It's happened I've been carried far—thrilling

only to watch my host vanish through walls
I can't scale on fifty-six knees.

FALLING INTO A METAPHYSICAL ABYSS
I VISIT TU FU AFTER THE CATASTROPHIC
AN LU-SHAN REBELLION NEAR THE END OF
HIS LIFE SEEKING GUIDANCE

I follow the master's chant to his house—

*Don't condemn heroes to weep like heavy rains, leave
men to grain, women to silk—let us go in song again.*

I'm full of complaints that my nation is ruled
by enemies millions of soldiers once defeated

and now violent mobs cheer some low imposter
as he destroys their farms and banishes patriots.

Tu Fu is weeping for his nation and his dead
son and daughter wracked by malarial fevers

but smiles through the bone piercing drizzle
offering the last of the good floating-ant wine.

Sing an old song with me he says—

*Just now, as we meet again, the season of falling
blossoms gracing the world—how lovely it is.*

Tu Fu (712-770 c.e.) The Selected Poems of Tu Fu (1989) David Hinton Tr. pgs 110-111



Diane Fahey

Diane Fahey's *The Wing Collection: New & Selected Poems* and *The Stone Garden: Poems from Clare* were shortlisted for major poetry awards in Australia in 2012 and 2014. She has won the Newcastle Poetry Prize, the Wesley Michel Wright Award, and the ACT Judith Wright Poetry Prize. Diane took part in Australian Poetry's 2013 International Poetry Tour of Ireland, and in 2014 received a grant from the Australia Council to support the writing of a poetry collection based on the west of Ireland. *A House by the River*, (2016), was set in Barwon Heads, and focused on the last six years of her mother's life. Her most recent collection is *November Journal*.

ANNIVERSARY VISIT

At Barwon Heads

I've driven across the peninsula
with a clasp of daphne, phlox, lavender
to throw onto the river –
a fling of gratitude, as it were,
for the years spent here with my mother,
and now, the book written in her memory.

The flowers are on the waves,
slate and moonstone, bobbing seaward.
From the jetty I glimpse a diamond-shape
riding, massaging, the current,
its wings undulating
like some wonderful form of thought.

The manta sweeps under the jetty,
vanishes – so calling to mind
a summer long ago: a basking presence
that sped off, confounding my gaze,
as my feet touched the water; I waded in,
crouched where it had hovered.

Today's visit of a living darkness
revealing, then recusing itself,
is pure gift, I take no lesson from it –
this miraculous shadow flowing where
need and curiosity take it; sea-dancing
under the cold, lapidary waves.



Nasrin Parvaz

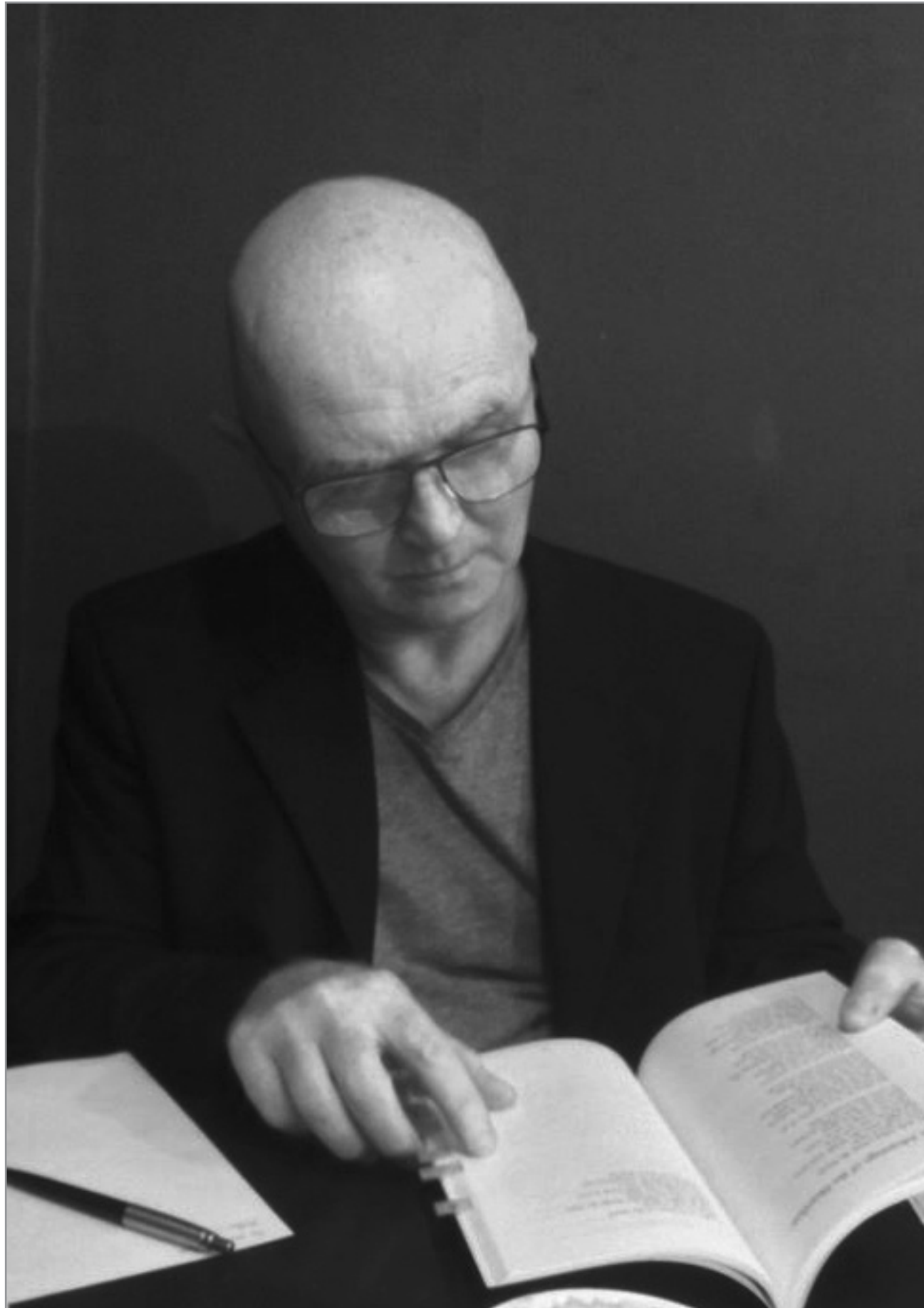
Nasrin Parvaz became a civil rights activist when the Islamic regime took power in 1979. She was arrested in 1982, and spent eight years in prison. Her novel, *The Secret Letters from X to A*, was published by Victorina Press, in July 2018. Nasrin's memoir, *One Woman's Struggle in Iran, A Prison Memoir*, will be published by Victorina Press in December 2018. Nasrin's poetry and stories have been published in different anthologies. Her paintings were accepted for inclusion in the exhibitions, calendar and for postcards. Order Nasrin's novel and her memoir here: www.victorinapress.com Read Nasrin's works here: www.nasrinparvaz.org

WALLS

She puts her ear to the dam
as if listening for Morse code
but she's trying to hear
the sounds of the waves
hitting the thick walls.
She murmurs to them
willing them to hit harder.
She believes that
one day the raging water
will break the hard wall
of her cell.

REFUGEES

We were wrong
to think that the earth
covers the dead.
So many corpses
never reach the earth
they're washed over and over
with cold salt water
till there is nothing left of them
but bones.



John W Sexton

John W. Sexton was born in 1958 and is the author of five previous poetry collections: *The Prince's Brief Career*, Foreword by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, (Cairn Mountain Press, 1995), *Shadows Bloom/ Scáthanna Faoi Bhláth*, a book of haiku with translations into Irish by Gabriel Rosenstock (Doghouse, 2004), *Vortex* (Doghouse, 2005), *Petit Mal* (Revival Press 2009), and *The Offspring of the Moon* (Salmon Poetry 2013). He also created and wrote *The Ivory Tower* for RTE radio, which ran to over one hundred half-hour episodes. His novels based on this series, *The Johnny Coffin Diaries* and *Johnny Coffin School-Dazed* are both published by The O'Brien Press and have been translated into Italian and Serbian. He is a past nominee for The Hennessy Literary Award and his poem *The Green Owl* won the *Listowel Poetry Prize 2007*. In 2007 he was awarded a *Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in Poetry*. His poem "In and Out of Their Heads", from *The Offspring of the Moon*, was selected for *The Forward Book of Poetry 2014*.

THRESHOLD

after *Orb* by Marie Under (1883 – 1980)

Groundward house, to water crookened,
shoulder slouched –
echoed to the ceiling by wavelet sound;
gull-fronted threshold.

Home, the orphan with her single lamb,
the hill now dusk;
rough gibing boys in a clotted gang,
she held her voice.

Deep to the night she sat and wept,
feet in lake-froth.
The yellow wicker she braided tight -
her two locks.

Was that her name in the tern's *krit*?
Moon-gilded surface:
both at once it was dark and light -
the lake her necklace.

Groundward house, to water crookened,
shoulder slouched –
echoed to the ceiling by wavelet sound.
Tear-fronted threshold.

DAPHNE TAKEN INTO LAUREL

after **Dafne in Lauro** by Giovan Battista Marino (1569 – 1625)

Ah, why the running away, o Daphne,
from those who follow you with love
and want nothing more than to be acknowledged?
Are you a vaporous spirit, or perhaps a dense
shrub on the flinty slope,
unyielding and deaf to those who implore you?
But if you're a shrub,
why are your roots fleet from their place?
How can you not be rooted by my advances?
Thus as he spoke, (the true trunk
of Apollo aroused), he apprehended
the beautiful fugitive,
now immobile upon the blossoming shore.

THE WRAITH

after **Le Revenant** by Charles Baudelaire (1821 – 1867)

Like an angel of predatory stare
by stealth your rest I'll share,
and slide you to the subtlety of sleep
where night submerges deep.

I'll dress your hair, dim as twilight,
with kisses touchless as moonlight,
touchless as the snake's slither
in the grave where I wither.

When night bleeds its wound of dawn,
but for grease on pillow I'll be gone;
only damp will herald my return.

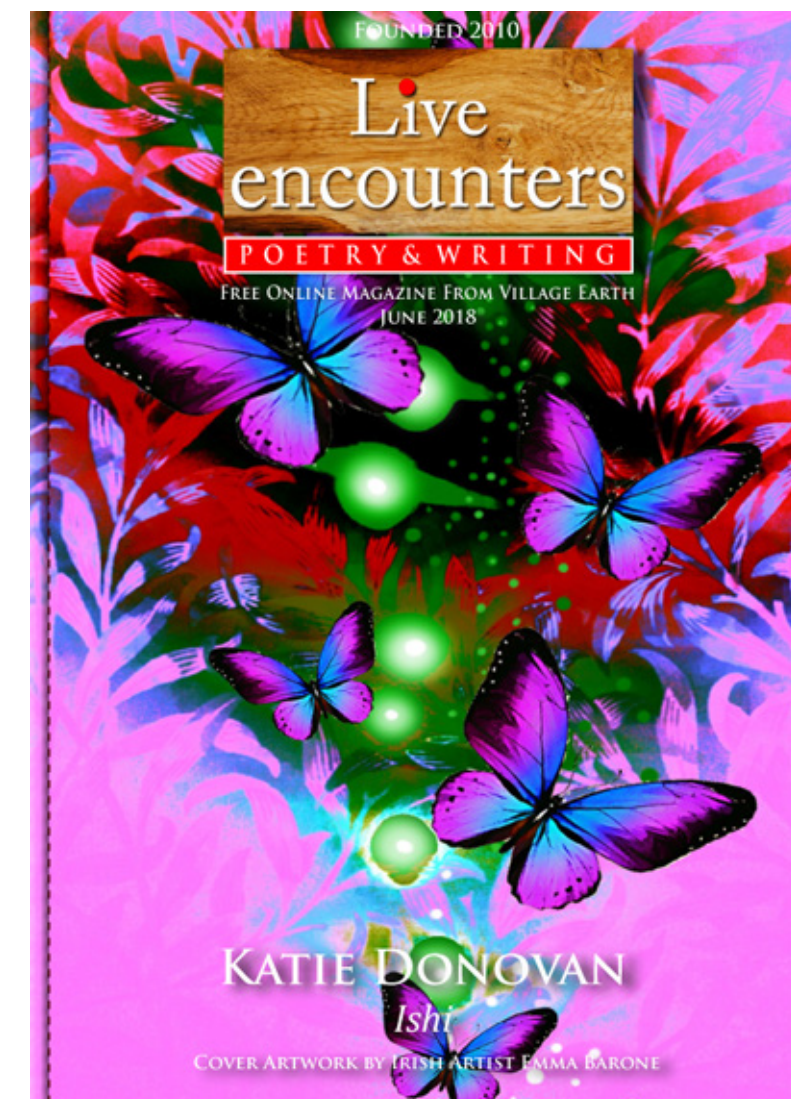
As others might tend with care,
on your life and years so fair,
I will tend my reign of fear

ANTI-CUPID

after *Contro Cupido* by Tommaso Campanella (1568 – 1639)

Over three thousand years have ground their way
 since first we bowed to that eyeless Cupid,
 with his quiver and his fletchings, stupid
 as love itself. Now deaf, our lovelorn bays
 can't melt his earwax. He covets tarnish
 on silver, and dresses in turd-brown tweed.
 He's twisted and no longer a cherub.
 Since the invention of the gun, no swish

of arrow now - just coalsmoke, sulphur, flame,
 thunder and lead. Our love-wounds suppurate,
 poison our minds, blind us to nought but lust.
 Our entreaties die as echoes of blame:
 "Stop, Hyde-selves, blinded by porn and self-hate;
 bring us back to our state of innocence!"



June 2018



Noel Duffy

Noel Duffy's debut collection *In the Library of Lost Objects* was published by Ward Wood Publishing, London, in 2011 and was shortlisted for the Shine/Strong Award for best first collection by an Irish poet. His second collection *On Light & Carbon* followed in autumn 2013. His poetry has appeared widely, including in *The Irish Times*, *The Financial Times* and *Poetry Ireland Review*, and has been broadcast on RTE Radio 1 and BBC Radio 4. His latest collection, *Summer Rain*, appeared in 2016, again with Ward Wood.

CLOSER THAN COLDNESS

Forsaking sleep I rise in greyness,
walk through the open door;
mutely welcome the laden dawn;

rain-pressed earth crouched in leafy-death

Into the silent garden I shuffle
in nakedness, to gather with bare
hands the shrivelled foliage;

blood-touched heart closer than finger-grasp

Cold feet upon the soaked ground,
my voice, like shedding trees, floats
murmured words into the morning air;

moon-pushed hope cradled in whisper-thought

And I, standing by the stream
muck-covered, offer my decayed
treasure to the water

thinking of you-love, me and soil

WHAT THE CROW SAW

*Sitting in a bleak pool
watching the waters move,
mercurial and black, the crow's eyes
rippling against the stark sky.*

The Claw

Washing the lullaby child
at the Old-Stone lake,
holding him, the one still sick
for his mother's milk.
Rocking him with a comforting lie,
concealed by him, a knife.
Then the killing of him with
a savage stroke and terrible doubt –
and thus, he ends the infant's life.

Black Breast

Sadness sails strange heartbreak into the chest,
sadness that seeks the opened flesh, with long
white hands to stop the blood's escape.
The burden of love's task takes grip within,
like rain in trees after the storm is gone.

Flight

Beating the battered hour into a cup,
to contain within it, his crimson loss:
“Do not let the waters spill,
for the sake of this Holy well,
O do not let them spill, or plunge
down into dark destiny unwilling.”

*All this the crow saw:
a man sitting by the water's edge,
blood on his hands,
a deathly wound to his side –
holding a dead child.*

THE STONE

I

I entered the garden from the Western side
and found on the grass a standing stone:
grey granite, rectangular, six feet tall.

It was cold and bare there in the garden
with the rain drafting sharp lines down
on the grey-hung day, the stone no ancient

or romantic pillar but rock freshly hewn,
plain, almost ugly, to look upon – how
misplaced it seemed there in the stark cold

amid the bare branches and green lawn.

II

All winter I sat beside the stone.

At first, perplexed I just watched it,
occasionally placing my hands gently on,
following the regiment of its turns.

Later, frustrated and tired, I reflected upon it
merely, rarely touching its granite now,
huddled beneath the shadow of its form,

growing more despondent with each passing
day, staring blankly at its persistent walls,
lost within the lattice of my thoughts.

In time, I just clung to this changeless block
until, in the end, my fingers grew worn
in my cold and hard and desperate embrace...

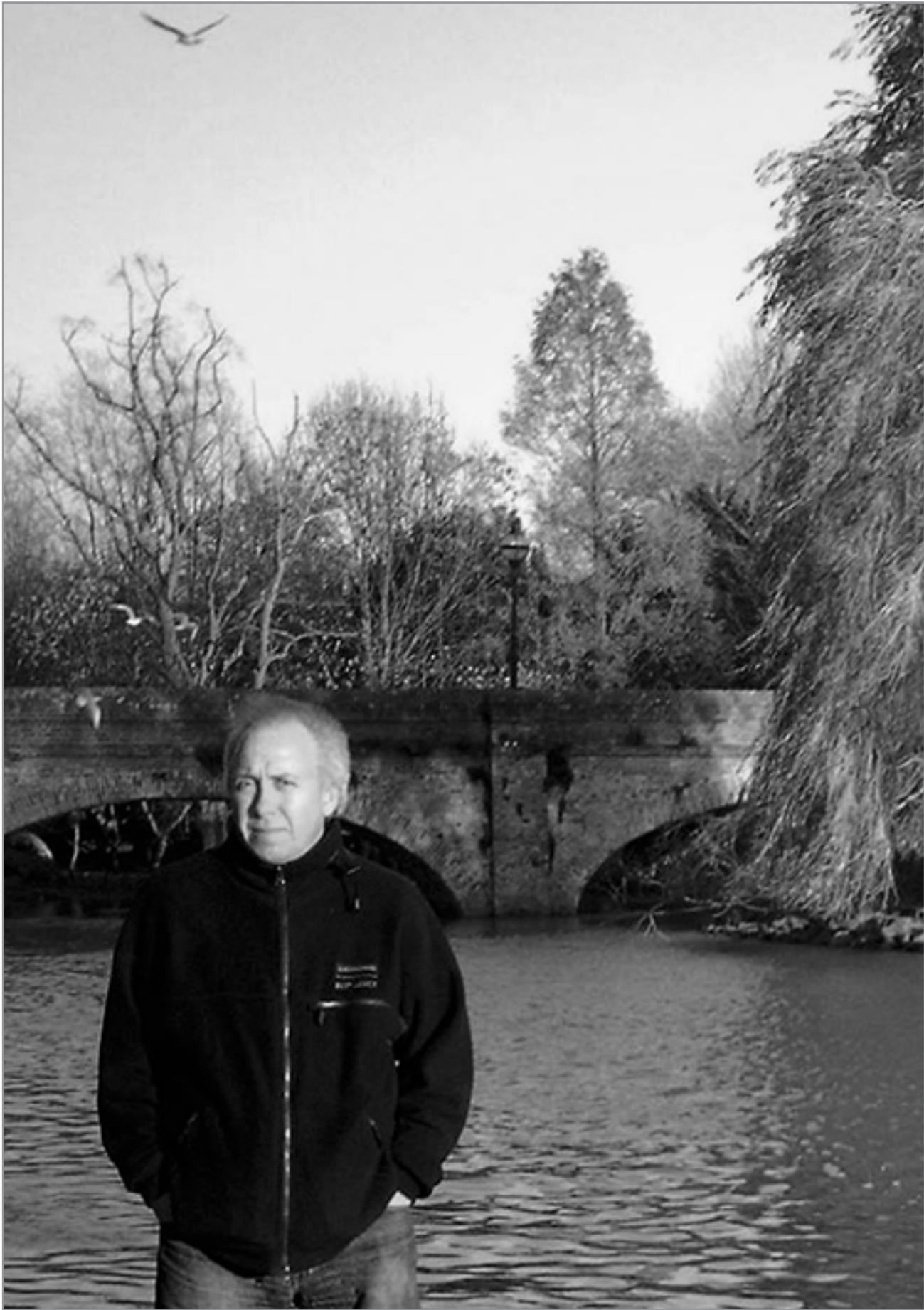
III

That night I fell asleep and dreamt it breathing.
It was warm and green and summer when I woke.
That evening I left the garden walking East

and travelled out into the wide world to learn
from those who knew the nature of stone.
I listened carefully to their words

and returned to the garden I had left
a season before. Patiently, I work now,
and discover the sculptor's craft of line

and touch, revealing from this strange form,
the statue of a man, myself, as autumn comes.



Joachim Matschoss

Joachim Matschoss was born in Germany and now lives in Melbourne/Australia. He is a playwright, poet and Theatre-maker. His Theatre Company, 'Backyard Theatre Ensemble (BYTE)' presents diverse pieces of theatre all across Melbourne/ Australia and internationally, both Youth Arts and for adults. Joachim has created theatre in Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, India, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Hungary, Taiwan, Switzerland and China. Joachim's poetry is published in Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom and the USA. Joachim's latest book, *Rain Overnight: Travels in Asia*, is available directly from him or from good bookshops in Melbourne and on www.amazon.com www.byteensemble.com

SHANGHAI STREET FUGUE

- 1
shanghai street fugue
(shanghai, march 2018)

below tangled trees
people seem busy with life
in all its facets
- 2
shanghai street fugue
(shanghai, march 2018)

a bearded beggar
on the sidewalk plays the flute
cars honk at lovers
- 3
shanghai street fugue
(shanghai, march 2018)

a uniformed child
an old woman with a cane
lost in people's flow
- 4
shanghai street fugue
(shanghai, march 2018)

scented steam from pork
and the sweet exhaust from traffic
life's loud and dirty
- 5
shanghai street fugue
(shanghai, march 2018)

a face that doesn't smile
eyes like down-cast crescent moons
with droopy eyelids
- 6
shanghai street fugue
(shanghai, march 2018)

a face shaped by smiles
her wrinkles laid a gentle path
toward her forehead



Owen Gallagher

Owen Gallagher was born of Irish parents in the Gorbals area of Glasgow, Scotland. He now lives in London. His previous publications are: *Sat Guru Snowman*, Peterloo Poets. Printed 2001. Reprinted 2004. *Tea with the Taliban*, Smokestack Books, 2012. *A Good Enough Love*, Salmon Poetry, Ireland, 2015, which was nominated for the T.S. Eliot award. *The Boy who Swam Nightly in the Sky* will be published in 2019 by Smokestack Books.

I COULD HAVE BEEN A LEGEND

When I read that Roy Rogers had galloped into Glasgow and then hit the trail without my knowing, I ripped out the front page picture of some snotty-nosed greenhorn shaking Roy's hand, and riddled it with bullet holes.

Roy'd been streets away while I rode through alleys in my home-made cowboy duds reducing the city's crime rate and putting more bodies in Boot Hill than Billy the Kid.

Policeman Pat Garrett always tipped his hat at me. If Roy'd seen the prizes I'd won at fairground rifle ranges, and watched me lasso a lollipop from a kid's mouth, he would've pleaded for me to be his sidekick.

He'd have envied my bullet-proof vest of comics, and Trigger would have dipped his head when I sang, 'A four legged friend...' I could have been Roy's stand-in! But Mother never leaked he was in town.

She knew he'd rope me off to a Hollywood set, that I'd marry a 'Queen of the West', serenade her with 'My Chickashay Gal', whistle for Trigger and Bullet at dawn.

CRAWLING AND TRAWLING

Before Sunday mass Father would balance me
on his knee, trawl my scalp with a metal comb

to see if lice had dared to land, sabre them
with a thumbnail, and flush the corpses

down the sink. (At times, whole continents
of lice were on the move, drifting snowfields

that turned into an avalanche when I sneezed
and landed onto friends' heads – their mothers

demanded my exclusion from school.) When
my scalp was free from these bloodsuckers

Father would massage Fairy Soap though my hair,
leave it to set in wave after wave:

a frozen ocean no head lice could scale;
a rock face no heading of footballs could dent.

KISSING THE CORPSE

The first corpse I kissed
was Pat McGinnis,
a Clare man from Ennis,
who lodged in Glasgow with Aunt Alice.

‘Never before had this bachelor
been kissed so much, if ever,’
said Mother, as she hauled me over
Pat’s coffin which reeked of lavender.

Though I went on to kiss fewer of the dead
than the living, I have often dwelt
on how many folk have wept,

and wished: ‘Oh, to be kissed,
once, and kissed as if I’ll be missed.’

THE BOY WHO SWAM IN THE SKY

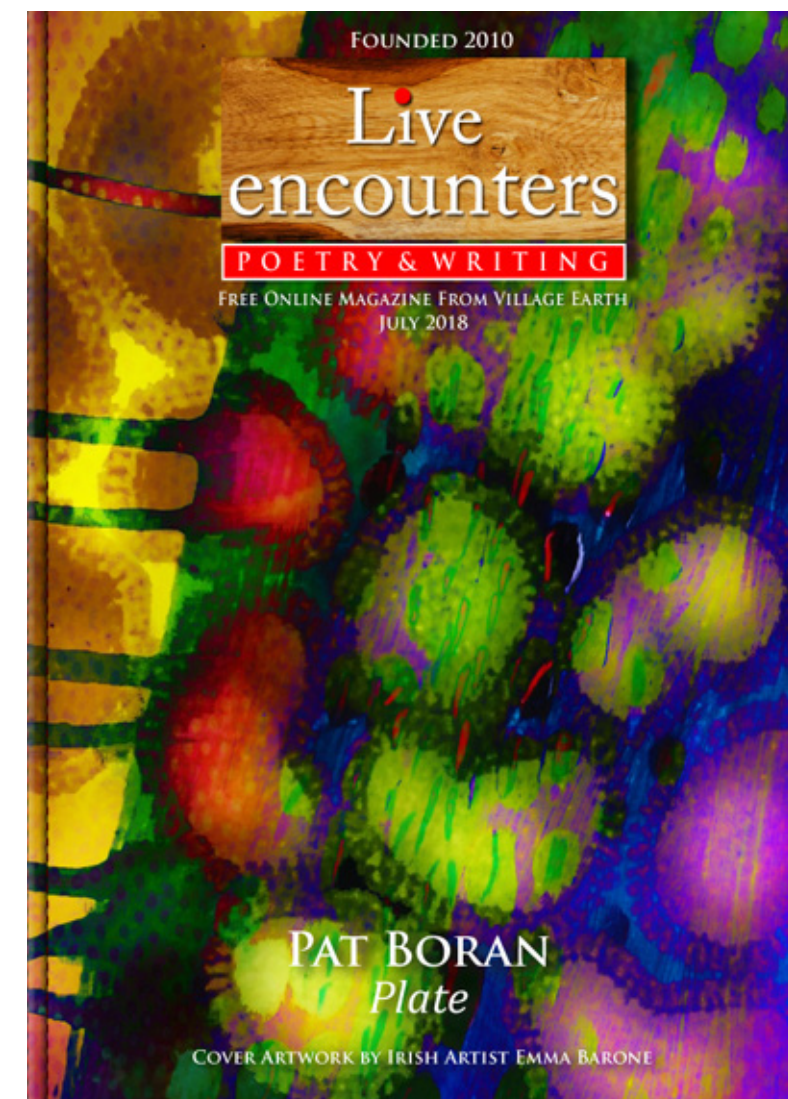
When the moon was at its best
 he fetched his dad's sketch pad and pencil
 and drew a boy who dived from a tower block,
 somersaulted, and swam
 upwards into the sky –

a starlit pool, where children swam
 while adults slept, and where,
 like fish, no one collided.
 He practised all styles, excelled
 in none, belly-flopped on a cloud

and dreamt he had entered
 the Olympic hundred metres backstroke
 and won, to be scooped up
 onto the shoulders of Michael Phelps
 who lowered him onto a podium

and granted him 'Freedom of the Pools'.
 Banners were draped outside his home,
 school and local swimming pool.
 When his watch beeped he struck out
 for home, swearing he'd save

for lessons to wow his dad,
 who woke to the smell of chlorine
 and found his son asleep wearing a laurel wreath,
 an Olympic Gold Medal, and
 wet swimming trunks.



July 2018



Nasim Basiri

Nasim Basiri is an Iranian poet and activist from Borazjan in the south of Iran. She currently lives in the United States where she works and studies at Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Oregon State University. Nasim's poetry and other literary works depict the suffering of humans, political and gendered violence and address the injustices associated with marginalization and global apartheid experienced by people in the Third World and the Middle East in particular.

ECHOES OF DEATH AND MURDER

For Masih Alinejad

Intimate memories of wound and blood
Shaped who we are
In our walks to unfamiliar paths of escape and dispersion
The pains of women's rebellion
Is buried under barbaric echoes of death and murder
Still
The daughters of Revolution Street are singing the chants of freedom
Chants of despair and sorrow
Chants of exiles and displacement
Chants of hope and struggle
With the wind in their hair

THE SUN STILL SHINES ON HER GRAVE

the sun shines
 a woman hangs herself in hanging gardens of Babylon
 with a flower on her hair
 wearing a miniskirt and throwing up blood on the world
 the sun still shines on her grave
 lightening up a world that was not hers

The sun shines
 In her neighborhood country Iran
 where a woman is brutally raped in the name of religion
 in Iranian prisons
 virgin women go to heaven
 she had to be raped by the revolutionary guards
 to go to hell
 the sun shines
 she's hanged in early morning light
 after the morning prayers
 and the sun still shines on her grave in a desert by the Persian Gulf
 lighting up a world that was not hers

A FORCED DEPARTURE

we moved across the country alone
 by a forced departure
 when home was burnt down to ashes
 and the screaming silhouettes of our headless palm trees
 sang our goodbye song
 without leaves and bird nests

we crossed the mountains alone
 crossed the seas and oceans alone
 nowhere was home
 nowhere is home
 still
 violence moves and moves our bodies
 to the unfamiliar geographies and infernos
 nowhere is home
 nowhere is home
 nowhere is home
 nowhere
 is
 home



Ruairí de Barra

Ruairí de Barra hails from the wilds of Tawneyshane, Co. Mayo and now resides in Cobh, Co. Cork. He writes professionally as an accredited Irish Defence Forces military journalist and is a regular contributor to 'An Cosantóir', the Irish Defence Forces magazine. His work has also been published in other Defence and Emergency Services publications. He is the inaugural recipient of the An Cosantóir 'Gen. MJ Costello' Award 2018 and a nominee for European Military Press Association awards for 2017 & 2018. His creative work has featured with 'Tinteán', 'A New Ulster', 'Live Encounters' and 'The Bangor Literary Journal'. He was short-listed for the Sixth Bangor Literary Poetry Competition 2018.

SEEN IT

I have seen the love,
when Father makes himself into a bed,
to raise the weary child from off the deck,
cradling all the treasure of the world,
within his arms, underneath thin blankets.

I have seen the love,
of brother held fast to brother,
sleeping, no support but each other,
I had not the words to ask,
did they even share a Mother?

I have seen the love,
of Grandfather who didn't put that baby down,
while his daughter slept exhausted for half a day,
beneath the watchful gaze,
of his protection.

I have seen the love,
where the plight of desperate children,
has caused the toughest to quiver,
then to shudder,
when the sodden layers are stripped away.

I have seen the love,
when all the dreamless sleepers,
are gathered at my feet,
in the quiet rolling hours,
as we sail towards relief.

THE ISLAND

Angels voices soar to roll off the ceilings curves,
numb hands pressed against grieving ones,
roaring winds pulling at the aged stones,
no threat to peace or pain inside the vault,
sharing the seeping warmth of love departed.

The lintels still carry chisel strikes,
left by rough hands that toiled,
a hundred years of rain have yet,
to find their way inside,
each stone as tight together as the families,
who sit in hushed mourning rows beneath,

Their tears may smooth the ambered stone,
before the harbour weather ever breaches,
the final equalising place of rest,
where the trappings of religions,
are swapped according to the guest.

The doors accept the faithful and the poor,
the faithless and the wealthy, with all the rest,
there in the still respectful silence,
muttering prayers, half-remembered if at all,
offering the strength of common presence.

In the back row of the assembled,
far from the neat chairs, beside the younger feet,
as the time draws closer to say goodbye,
know that you are always with us,
beneath this unifying storm cloud sky.

TIBNIN BRIDGE

In 1999 I drove over Tibnin Bridge in the sweltering heat,
as the UN bus rose a trail of dust,
billowing up behind us,
the laughter onboard almost distracted me from my task,
the careful watch of the road signs,
my finger following the road snaking through South Lebanon,
on a trip from Tyre up into the hills.

I was only a baby when you died here,
but not much later my older brothers went to serve in that land,
which was soaked with your blood,
I heard your story while I was still so very young,
in the weeks before the first of them left for the Lebanon,
they spoke in hushed tones in the kitchen,
but I heard from my games in the hall outside.

The worry cries of my mother and the bravado of my siblings,
could not be drowned out by the clattering of dinky cars,
Morrow, Murphy and Burke should have come home again,
they should have worn that blue beret down the steps at Shannon,
they should have made it back,
but betrayed they lay still in the baking heat,
as denial and cordite swirled about them in their final silence.
I paused for a moment in that laughing bus,

more like tourists than the sailors we were dressed to be,
meandering along the roads,
catching glimpses of life in the olive groves and rocky yellowed fields,
lives who's roots you came to help protect,
while you were only 19 years old same as me,
burning under the same sun,
I remembered you as the bus raced over the bridge,
on the pilgrimage to Camp Shamrock with a cargo of ammunition,
and crumpled US dollars to see the mingy men.

MOTHER JONES

She was 93 years old,
grandmother of all agitators,
immigrant teacher's words stirred men to action,
she wrote her story down,
passing labours flame from Pennsylvania,
from coal mining heartlands built on the bones of union,
tales of the silk children's knight crusader,
charging the power of the mill.

The call of the woman of the north side,
fell into the ear of the ragged trousered wretch,
growing straight in the regimented pines,
arrayed through the ruins of famine homesteads,
hemmed in by the meandering dry stone walls,
built from their shells,
pray for the dead,
fight like hell for the living,
in mines and bogs or dockyard slips,
the boot seeks a neck,
the company scales the pocket picked,
join a union.

Gael of social justice,
blowing across the stamped out fires,
rising from the body blow of lost yellow fever family,
none came to her in the nights of grief,
she went out instead to others,
rebuilding after tragedy,
entirely reduced in the remains of the dressmakers,
black ashen ruins of Chicago,
were sky pilots pray for reward in the next life,
reached by suffering in this one,
Mary calling for a bit of heaven to come to earth,
claiming her home wherever the fight may be.

She lies at peace in Illinois,
surrounded by her battling boys,
the fallen of Virden,
where white and black truthfully stood to face detectives rifles,
the union maid remembered each 11th of October,
when the strong men and toil torn women gather to kneel on Mount Olive,
laying black flowers on the pink granite,
heads uncovered to remember the miners angel mother.



Lynda Tavakoli

Lynda Tavakoli is the facilitator of an adult creative writing class and the author of two novels and a short story collection. Her award winning poetry and prose have been broadcast on both BBC and RTE and seen publication in the UK, Ireland and across the Middle East. Having recently returned from Oman she is presently working towards her debut poetry collection.

DEATH OF THUMOS

The world
eats its bones
and leaves
a marrowed tongue
spitting splinters
in the grieving sky.

We feed our hunger
on skeletons of greed,
taste buds tainted
as we lick them free
of breath and blood,
awaiting retribution
for our sins.

Listen while
the world weeps
and gorges
on its trespasses
seeking pardon in
unpalatable lies.

Listen and hope
that all those things
that made us human once
survive the subterfuge
of what we are -
that crumbling carcass
of disingenuous truth.

HERE

Here is the sound of footfall on a London bridge,
the easiness of intersecting strangers on journeys home
while underneath the feet of these so ordinary,
not so ordinary lives, a river courses her arterial flow
from source to sea, unchecked by circumstance,
witness only to the calling of some human tragedy
playing out above.

Here is the echoing of barter in a Bagdad street,
the lilt of foreign tongues exchanging deals
from stall to stall, the slit-eyed beauty of a mother
carrying out her daily chores.
Conversations seized and scooped and scattered
on a desert wind to leave its silence
chewing on the remnants of charred bones
like an afterthought.

Here is the scent of roses on a White House lawn,
where spring sunshine smiles on the good
and on the bad, and on the dark souls of the unseeing,
where truth becomes artifice, spreading onto streets
in black and white, and finally falling back upon itself
to end up where it first began, among the dead heads
of a rose's fading scent.

Here is the thrum of a getaway car on a city side street,
the tit for tat of a television debate.
Here is the call for prayer from a Damascus minaret,
the song of organ pipes in an English churchyard,
the chants from a Temple, the muteness of an unbeliever.
Here is a synagogue, a chapel, a mosque, an anywhere school
with the chattering of children on a morning break.
Here is the world we shape for them.

Here is the beating heart of us together on this page,
the conformer and the curious, the remarkable,
the bold, the recusant and the just plain odd.
We are spun together with gossamer thread,
all of us hurting or loving or grieving or needing-
most of all needing the wraparound arms
of acceptance each of us craves.
And here is the seed of our redemption.

LIBRARY FORMALDEHYDE

Library shelves, book bloated,
the smell of oldness
without a ticking clock
and a back room waiting.

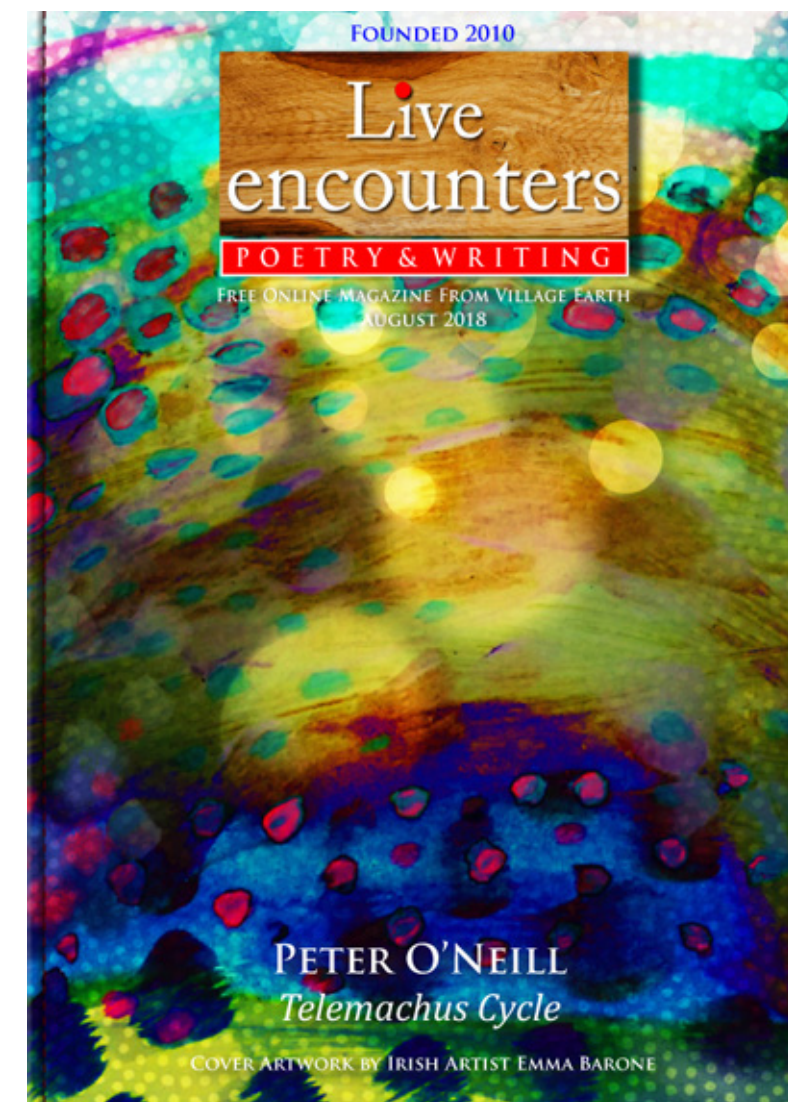
Better than all the words
on every musty page
a wall of specimens
are glassed in sleep.

Floating eyeballs, warted toads,
a chevron snake
my brother said was found
in someone's bed.

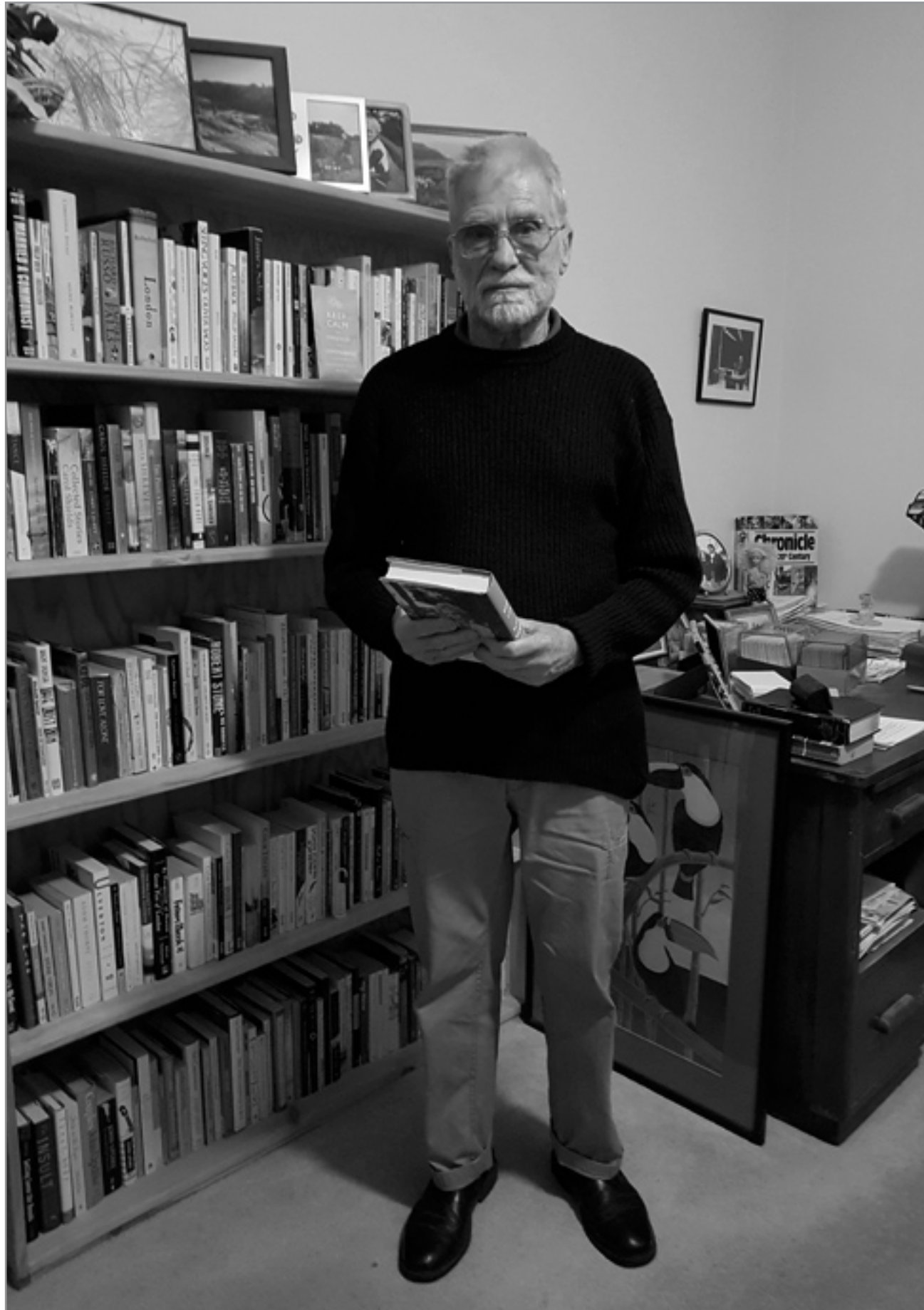
I never slept the same again.

MEMORITER

In this whispered light of a Fermanagh bog
I walk the past, bramble barbs scalping my legs,
a soft moss squidge welcoming my forgotten weight.
It was here the daily trudge of feet dented our presence
into a quiet earth, my older siblings tearing ahead,
scouting the terrain with the mischief of uncomplicated youth.
Here lies the residue of childhood, a place where,
secreted from the world, a brother and a sister lived,
their oddity as normal then to us as finding cuckoo spittle
on a morning blade of grass. Here, too, remains my ghosted self,
the child I was, facing the future with a fist, but always waiting
for my mother's voice across the bog to bid me home.



August 2018



Ian C Smith

Ian C Smith's work has appeared in, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Antipodes*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Critical Survey*, *Live Encounters*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, & *Two-Thirds North*. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra (Port Adelaide). He writes in the Gippsland Lakes area of Victoria, and on Flinders Island, Tasmania.

TO MY SONS

At the age you were in Year 9 I read Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, a WW2 saga of blood and glory in the news, which I also read, but in the way seagulls gobble thrown remains of fish'n'chips, without discernment, just need. I joined a small lending library, a shop, weekly loans inexpensive, my pay a child's wage for factory work. Machinery never interested me. Halfway through the lengthy novel the meaning of a strange portmanteau word, *sonofobitch*, the mantra of enlisted grunts, the middle syllables of which I mentally pronounced as 'offer', made sense. It wasn't a curse used by Australians, but was heard in American movie dialogue. In an unheated rented room become a steamy South Pacific island, reading because I knew nobody, inklings of first publication's thrill impossibly distant, I felt abashed, stabs I still feel, but with humour now.

The year before that strange time, I weighed 9st. 6lbs, bigger than average then, but not now, everybody, everything, larger; 60kg., according to Google's facts and figures at our fingertips today. I would have treasured *The Guinness Book of Records*, let alone the Internet, if it existed when I played schoolboy football fearing no boy, also against men, yet wept most nights after our evening meal – the fault line of my father's bitter jealousy of me – with my friend the dog rolling in reek, me rolling cigarettes imagining a tough tattooed gum-chewing guy in a motorcycle jacket living at the heartbeat of what I suspected was an enchanting world, instead of that silent tableau, my distress a secret, seeking love though I didn't understand. If my father had written something, anything, about his boyhood, no doubt harsh, I might have better understood my own sonofabitch days, even cherished them, as you should yours.

DIGITS DAMAGE DEUS EX MACHINA

He slices his fingers with secateurs, another instance of his hapless old-and-absent-minded routine these dreamy dreary days. A neighbour binds the dramatic wound tightly with Elastoplast. He is impatient with dwindling time, hours too precious to waste travelling to A&E for stitches. The binding soaked with his medicated blood dries, hardens, reminds him of plaster casts of youth, other bloodstained misadventures.

An editor whose acceptance months earlier of his poem about a teenage factory labourer's near fatal workplace accident, a mangled thumb, and morphine's effect, has written a text to accompany it, referring to poetry, novels, and films, the beloved brawl, the pungency of their working past, Satanic indeed, pulsing like his blood. Happenstance, memory, regret-tinged pleasure.

He finds the braided timing of these events of harrowing discomfort ironic, aware of what seems the phenomenon of his days now. He will select unusual words then resume reading, turning pages to reveal these exotic words; or think of somebody almost forgotten then receive an email from that person. Again and again this occurs. Is it due to an overcrowded mind? He abhors mumbo-jumbo, feeling monitored in these days of surveillance, yet likes the idea of angels' wings casting shadow, prepared for anything.

STITCHED UP

No happy hearths for us. In the slowness of days while the lights of cities go on and off we work the dormitories for cigarettes, currency of the convicted, minor industries thriving in this chapel of corruption, regulations our enemy.

Dickie, who has already boxed in the tents, skin, features, gravelly pronunciation harbouring a vestige of his downtrodden people's true Australian tongue, contrasts with me, my skin pale, pimply, much taller, less brave, both adrift in the undertow of a treacherous tide, surviving.

Alert to venomous prejudice of outsiders, incomers, the disabled, the different, flotsam washed up on these isolated shores, my speech, London's foggy guttural erased, sets up the entertainment, a ringmaster's spiel to those whose lives have been fistfuls of pain, redemption a haven too far.

If we feign placidity supervision is soft between grub and lights out at nine. After each boy hands over tobacco I thread a needle, cotton white for dramatic effect – how we came by these humble items for legerdemain beyond me now – before transporting Dickie into his spirit world by muttering great bulldust as he calls it when we are alone together, that odd friendship of cast out boys.

Svengali sentenced, I hush them quiet as night, the only thing missing, a mopoke's ancient call, hand the needle to Dickie who flutters his black eyelashes, rhythmically whispering the names of racehorses backwards as practised, before opening his mouth wide, bad boys bored no longer, jostling to spot any hanky-panky.

He pierces his plump cheek, a silvery glint emerging through the outside of his expressionless face eliciting disgusted oaths, some demanding he stop, as he pulls the entire shaft trailing cotton through, blood the climax, bright against white, a droplet left on his cheek as I snap my fingers to break the spell, bring him back, to survival, cigarettes.

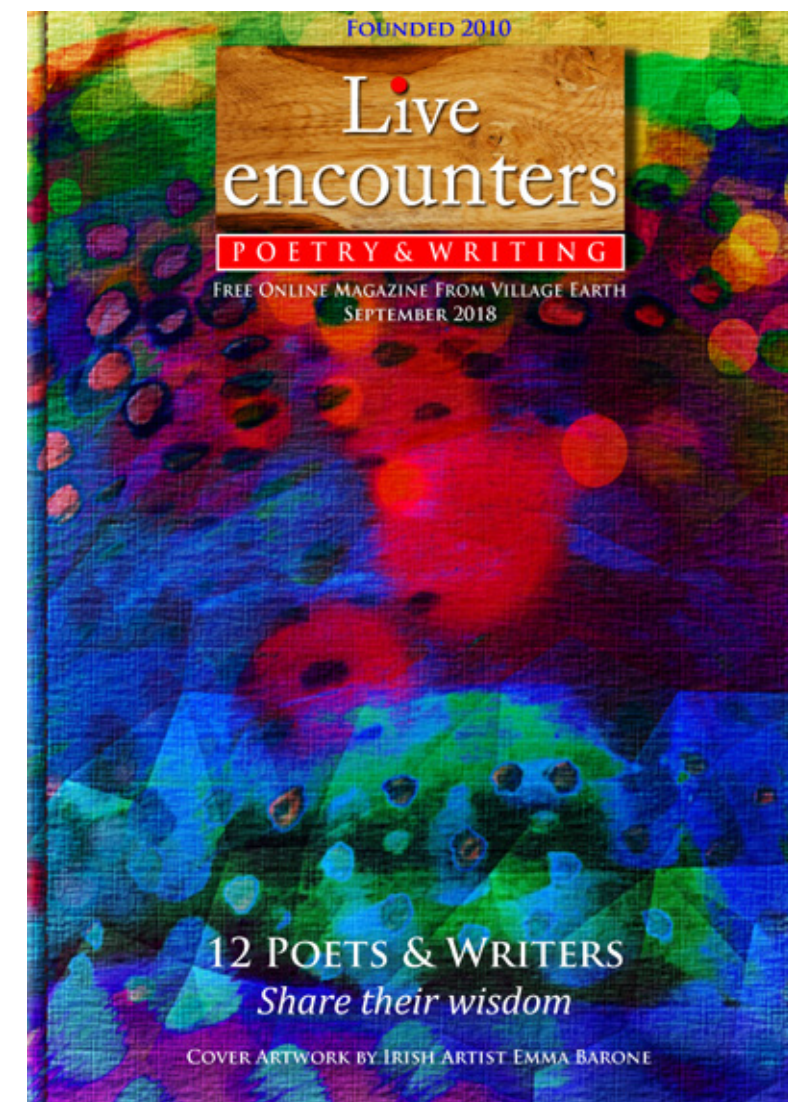
LIFE IS A CAMEL

His admiration of Myron's athletic sculpture, *Discobulus*, is foreshadowed by a photo in his father's sports pages of the previous night's stoush, Dick Turpin, a namesake of the colourful highwayman he had heard of, boxing Albert Finch for the British title, a 'bruising affair' won by Finch 'unanimously' – a word to puzzle over – on points.

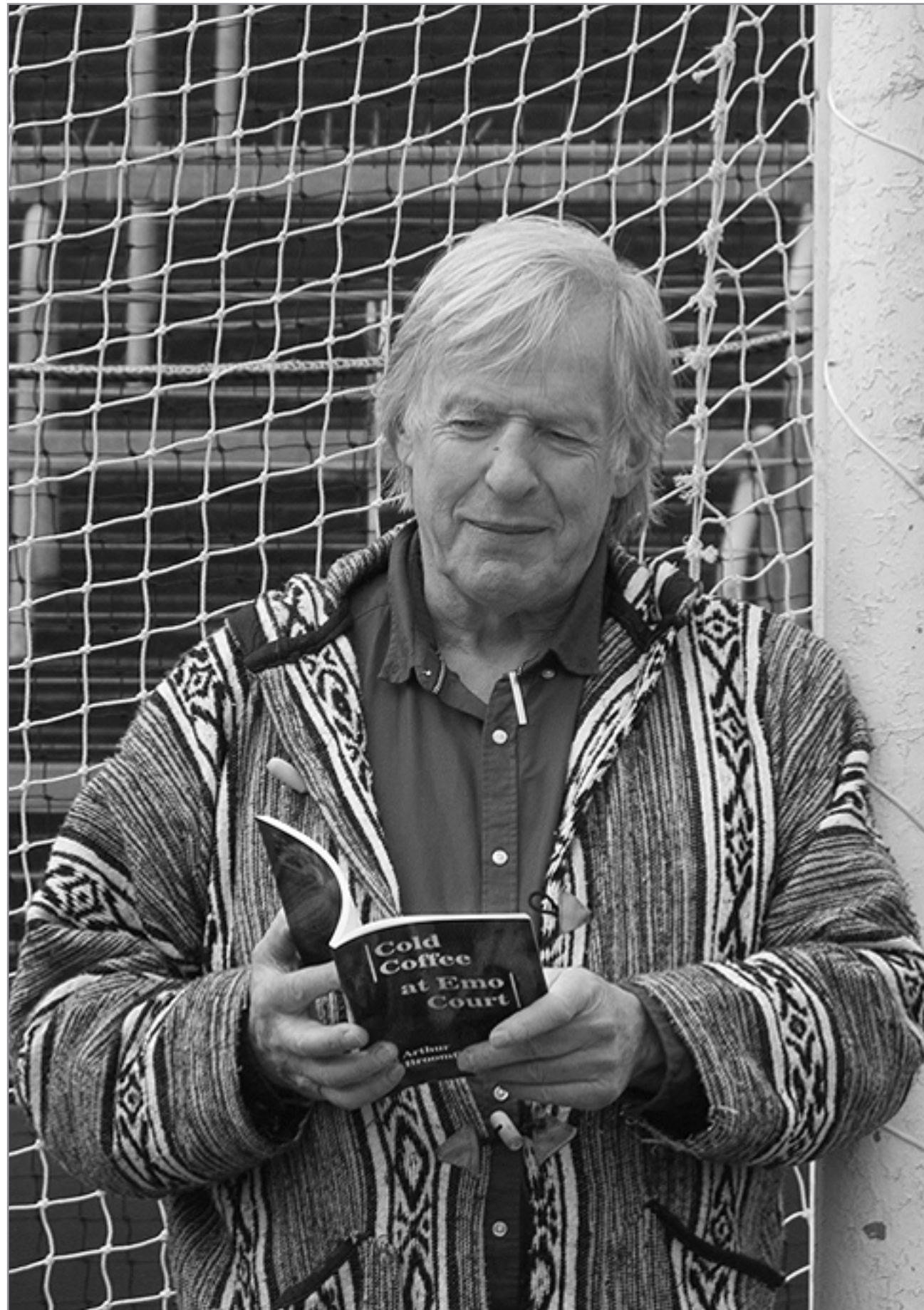
In the sports annual inside a pillowslip on his bedpost on Christmas morning he pores over more photos; colours, names of football teams, enthralling: dazzling green and white hoops of Glasgow Celtic, black and old gold of Wolverhampton Wanderers – Wolves. He yearns for a resplendent uniform, to be portrayed in action, wants to be a sports photographer. Or a sailor.

In a rage to live he is greedy for the starburst of sideshow alley, each illuminated inch of what is gimcrack, ersatz, winning a gypsy prize playing an electronic horseracing game at Epsom. Derby Day. Rae 'Togo' Johnstone, an Australian, kicks home the big winner, a French horse, crowd roaring as if outraged as he tries to see through a forest of grey flannels. Intrigued by Togo, emblazoned jockey's silks, aware of different nationalities, he wonders about names, places: the Gold Coast, Siam, Tibet, Hawaii, Formosa, Alaska, Newfoundland. Words. Colours rippling before a field of acid green. Sportsmen of the world. That great roar.

After weathered storm surges of half a lifetime when only fragments of remembered happiness glint like pinpricks of light in a black sky; school's brutal ritual, the terrible churn of family havoc, youth detention, factory, foundry fodder's hamster on a wheel calamity going down, down in a cascade of suffering to psychiatric assessment, marriage shattered, tertiary study beckons from beyond chaos. Then life opens up like his books' pages, travel to lands with different names now, the arts unfurling. He still follows some sports, albeit with measured cynicism. Walking at dawn past a circus encampment, mulling, stars subbed out, he recalls the joke about a camel being a horse designed by a committee, thinks life, that bruising affair, is a camel.



September 2018



Arthur Broomfield

Dr Arthur Broomfield is a Beckett scholar, poet and short story writer. His works, which include a study on the works of Samuel Beckett and two poetry collections have been published by Cambridge Scholars' publishing, Lapwing and Revival Press. His next collection of poetry will be published in April 2019. His poems have been published in US, British, Indian and Irish journals. Arthur lives, with his wife Assumpta, in Ballyfin, County Laois, Ireland.

THE LIFEGUARD

BY ARTHUR BROOMFIELD

The car radio was blasting out the lines of "I'm not that kind of girl", a library copy of *August is a Wicked Month* kept time with my driving as it slid back and forth across the dash. My three under tens were squabbling over who had the best swimwear as I pulled in to the Portlaoise Leisure centre. I had promised my all girl brood we'd join once school holidays had begun. "I want to swim like you Mummy," Matilda, said, after watching me do my twenty lengths of front crawl the day Jack and I sussed out the pool, bringing her along to approve, she being the eldest. So today was the O'Connor family's, minus husband, first full working visit to the centre. In a way I was glad he wasn't with us. Jack would fuss over the creases in his Austin Reed suits, when his shirts lost the pristine feel of the moment of their first wearing they were sent to Oxfam. I could imagine him: "Matilda keep close to Eliza...don't go near the deep end...are you sure your hair's dry?"

I shouldn't complain, he's the husband women dream of. My boast "I'll do it love, you've enough to do looking after the girls", when he saw me getting out the Hoover on Saturday, fell on curious ears at last week's coffee and chat in Costa.

"But sometimes ... I know I sound wicked, but sometimes I wish he wasn't so good," I added.

"Your Jack is the gentle type Joan, maybe he's got you spoiled. There are times when a woman can need ...well, something more." Susan gripped my arm and looked deep into my eyes.

The chat drifted from families - "Albert's going into first year in September," Greta told us - to the quality of the coffee.

“I like the cappuccino here, you’re always sure of a good creamy head,” said Susan.

“I’m off now girls, it’s time for my swim. “

Greta gathered her bags and said her goodbyes.

‘What’s the big smirk about Susan, “I said?

“Maybe you should take up swimming again, Joan.” Susan fixed her silent gaze on me again.

Susan’s look drifted across my mind when I saw him first, a butty, muscly thirty-five-year-old, or so, slumped in the deck chair that goes with the lifeguard’s job, positioned behind yesterday’s “Star”. Wanting to set an example in good manners to the girls, I projected a “good afternoon” in his general direction. “The Star” lowered, to reveal a close cropped, reddish root haircut, ears pierced and bejewelled with an assortment of hoops and studs. Among multiple tattoos disfiguring arms exposed by his gym bunny’s muscle vest, and doing nothing to enhance his short neck, the usual “Mum” “Dad” and designs representing God knows what, I noticed an incongruous red rose. Without raising his eyes he acknowledged my greeting with a shift on the deckchair and a barely audible grunt.

“That man at the pool looks like ‘Pinhead,’” Matilda said, as we drove home.

“Don’t be silly Matilda, just because he’s not like your Daddy doesn’t mean he’s not a good man. Men like him are trained to do things your Daddy doesn’t do.”

“But he’s cross Mummy and he was rude to you.”

“He can save lives love; maybe we’ll need him one day.”

I made a point of bringing the girls to the pool three times a week. After five or six trips, once I was confident they’d be safe in the kiddies’ pool, I got back to swimming myself. I’d been a good swimmer in college, winning an inter-varsity championship in the 200-metre freestyle in my final year.

The pure pleasure of sensing the water caress my body as I seemed to glide fluently from end to end brought back memories of my best days.

The Lifeguard, as he was known to us, continued to be an inscrutable presence, employed, I thought, to represent the cold face of Laois County Council. If I’d ever wanted to pass myself with him I couldn’t imagine an opportunity presenting itself. On the rare times when he absented himself from the deckchair he could be seen standing, his head resting on his folded arms now astride the wide head of an upturned brush, gazing passively towards one end of the pool, into a distance he seemed to be contemplating. Viewed from the water his tank like torso was a twenty first century caricature of the *David* sculpture I’d drooled over in Florence; it seemed to draw its inspiration from testosterone fuelled Olympic weight lifters rather than the mythical Gods of Mount Olympus. Not wanting him to notice me - after my first putdown I made no further attempt to communicate with him – I switched to the breast stroke to make full use of the blindside half-length of pool from where I could study him from the back. A woman will be drawn to that which attracts her despite logic or reason. The glistening skin on his upper arms was pulled taut as it struggled to contain his exaggerated bi- and triceps. I trod water and gazed upward at his neck from five or six yards. Thick and short it was almost as wide as the unremarkable melon that sat on it. A double row of muscly ridges, separated by a perspiration-soaked channel, brought the term ‘bull-neck’ to my mind. Seeing his body stiffen I sensed he was about to turn so I resumed my front crawl, keeping my thoughts to myself.

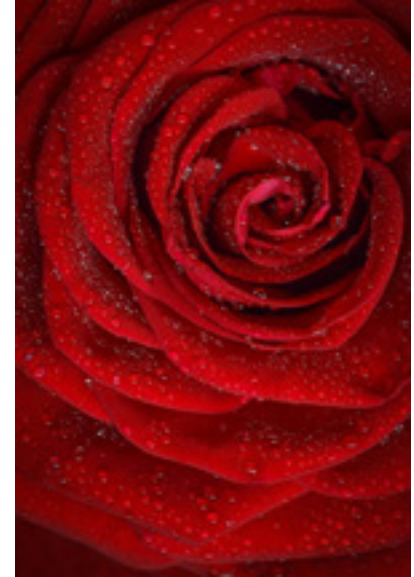
So, the weeks went by. My swimming was getting back to college days standards, I was enjoying myself so much I tried to make the pool every possible day.

“I wonder should I enter for the gala,” I asked Matilda, after a good session, “did you see the poster, it’s on in three weeks?”

“Oh do! do! Mummy. I bet you’ll win it!”

“Well, maybe, but I’d better get new swimwear.”

“You’d swim even faster in a bikini Mummy,” Matilda’s eyes sparkled with pride.



“Yes, we do stock that particular type of swimwear.”

Miss Halmesworth scrutinized me through spectacles secured in sturdy, russet frames that seemed conjoined to hair that was swept to a hairpin indemnified, oven ready bun.

I’d chosen Halmesworth’s for privacy, rather than Tesco where a plentiful selection of bikinis would be in stock but in full view of whoever might decide to stroll through the lingerie rails on the way to the fruit and veg department.

“We may not have your... colour at the moment.”

“Well let’s see what you’ve got.”

Miss Halmesworth walked half-way down the counter and reached for a short ladder that rested against a pile of blue boxes. She dragged it, simultaneously discharging deep breaths and audible sighs, to the farthest end, where, after a focused pause, she laid it against a shelf of green boxes. She reached up from the third step and pulled out one from among the pile. It had a picture of a model lounging under a palm tree, which she eventually laid on the counter in front of me.

“We may have something to suit you here. These are the type they’re wearing nowadays”, she nodded towards picture on the box.

“I quite fancy this one,” I held up the briefs of one with a post-modern flower pattern.

“It’s in animal print,” she said solemnly.

“Yes, I’ll take it.”

It was around seven o’clock on an early August evening, when I saw him uprooted from his limited repertoire of positions in the pool, outside a humble house that I presumed to be his parents, on the Ridge road. He was pulling on a crash helmet, fastening it round the ears as he mounted what looked like a powerful motor bike, a Honda, maybe, I wouldn’t know about these things. He cut out in front of me; stretched out along the bike his body had taken a different shape to the clumsy hulk I had

become accustomed to meeting at the pool; more elongated, back arched, sun glistening on his shoulders, he sped away from me. My chat with Susan in *Costa* seemed to grip me. God, I thought, where have I got myself?

“Mummy, Mummy” Matilda was screaming as I finished my tenth length, “the lady is drowning, quick quick.”

She grasped my hand and dragged me from the water, pointing towards the far end, still shouting. I slithered along the tiles with all the grace of a novice skater’s first day on ice, relying on Matilda to hold me up. Conscious of my bouncing boobs but not caring how I appeared I tried to focus on the huddle gathered on the end edge of the pool. A stoutish woman lay stretched, motionless, across the tiles. Over her, stripped to his trunks, the lifeguard was directing sharp downward blows to her chest. After a succession of maybe four or five blows squirts of water shot from the woman’s mouth. He rolled her over on her side and continued the process, now applying it to her back. Again, he rolled her onto her back.

“Will you all stand back, “he commanded the curious throng. Weak cries broke the silence as he continued to pummel her chest. “We’ll lose her” a voice bleated. A glare from The Lifeguard silenced the doubting Thomas. He cupped her head firmly with both hands, one beneath her chin, the other holding her pole in place. Next, he reached over her and bending down felt for her lips till his lips matched them. Now that no air could escape he blew firmly into her mouth, withdrew, and repeated the exercise four or five times, each time with increasing confidence. His lips seemed to find hers with growing familiarity, caressing them back towards consciousness with each kiss. A tingle, then a shudder then uncontrollable trembling followed by cries of pain or relief told us that the woman was saved.

I bought a sturdy envelope, the kind that has bubbly underlay and can be firmly secured, and a red rose. An altar of sorts stood in the entrance to the pool with a photograph of him on the motor bike that had caused his end to one side, a bunch of white lilies to the other. People were coming and going saying I never got to know him, and I’d better go to the funeral anyway. I went into the ladies and slipped off my panties. I sealed them into the envelope and walked back to the altar as nonchalantly as it’s possible to be at such a moment. I laid the envelope in the middle of the table and placed the red rose on top.



Anne M Carson

Anne M Carson's poetry has been published internationally and widely in Australia. *Massaging Himmler: A Poetic Biography of Dr Felix Kersten* is forthcoming in 2019. Recognised in many poetry prizes including a longlisting for the 2017 Lane Cove Poetry Prize, she is also a visual artist, and essayist forthcoming in a US anthology, *Art Matters*. She serves as Director Arts on the Ondru Board and is post-graduate research student in Creative Writing at RMIT. www.annemcarson.com

A Preview by ANNE M CARSON of BACK FROM THE BRINK: STORIES OF RESILIENCE, RECONCILIATION AND RECONNECTION BY TIM CHAN WITH SARAH CHAN

Tim Chan is 23 years old and lives with autism, at the severe end of the spectrum. On top of sensory challenges, Tim is not able to speak and uses Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). This is a simple yet controversial method, which activist Rosemary Crossley has devoted her life to developing, teaching and advocating for. Tim's method for communication is via a Speech Generating Device, a Litewriter, which converts Tim's laboriously-typed communication on the keyboard to a voice which 'speaks' the words as he types them, enabling him to express himself and communicate with others. The AAC user is enabled to activate their muscles from increased proprioceptive feedback from the facilitator's physical support – in Tim's case, with familiar communication partners, just a hand on the shoulder. He has written a compelling autobiographical work; not only is his story dramatic and inspiring, but his method of telling that story through AAC is astounding.

This is from the introduction to *Back From the Brink*:

I was 14 years old when I entertained serious thoughts about suicide. I was only prevented from carrying out my self-destruction because of my severe autism. Not having full control of my body, I didn't know if I would end up in the morgue or permanently on life support or in a wheelchair. Already without speech, having huge hypersensory issues, movement difficulties, proneness to being overloaded, I didn't want to add immobility and other challenges to my list in case I didn't succeed in killing myself.

I wasn't aware that I was depressed. At 14, in Year 8 at High School, I only got the sense that life was grinding me down. I was totally out of place in a mainstream high school where no one seemed interested in me, and people walked past me as if I didn't exist. I was utterly powerless, had no speech, and was denied my usual means to communicate by typing with support. I felt the world would be better off without me.



Tim Chan

When you try to read or listen to words, all you see or hear are their shapes or sounds which override their meaning. Within the prison of autism are other tortures; a nervous system so highly tuned that every sensation comes with unbearable intensity. New clothes scratch like steel wool, lamp-light burns into your eyes, or hands clapping are akin to the deafening roar of pistol shots from the firing range.

*

What is it like to live with autism? From my own experience..., autism is ... a life sentence of being trapped in a body that refuses to be controlled by your mind... When you try to talk, all you can manage is a high-pitched screech. When you try to read or listen to words, all you see or hear are their shapes or sounds which override their meaning. Within the prison of autism are other tortures; a nervous system so highly tuned that every sensation comes with unbearable intensity. New clothes scratch like steel wool, lamp-light burns into your eyes, or hands clapping are akin to the deafening roar of pistol shots from the firing range. You live in a state of constant alert, never at peace, in an inner world of chaos and disconnection while trying to fend off the onslaught of overwhelming sensory input. ... the outer world can appear strange and terrifying without a ready point of reference. In addition, because you don't have an easily accessible system of meaning, people and their behavior can be beyond comprehension, and ...with no ready means of communication... you are isolated and confined to the confusion of your own contorted reality. It is hard to imagine a more fearsome ogre than living within autism's stranglehold.

Over the years since dipping to the lowest levels of self-loathing and despair from repeated encounters with lack of understanding and discrimination, I have chosen ... to get at the root of my problems, and to explore what sets my journey apart from others... I want to recount the crucial stages in my life which shaped me into the sum of who I am. ... I want to examine my engagement with life in all its aspects. Lastly, to explore the kind of person I aspire to be, [and] the people... who have inspired me... one way or another.

It is not always easy to witness Tim's story. Not only is it difficult to read of the agonies inflicted by his own nervous system – it's also difficult to read of the discrimination he has suffered. These ordeals could have turned Tim bitter. Instead, they have wrought a deep compassion and a radar for stories of others who have been to the brink and, instead of falling, have transformed themselves. These stories are vital for us collectively as we build a more inclusive and compassionate culture.

I have had the immense privilege of working with Tim and Sarah, his mother and primary communication partner, to assist in shaping his work.

We are currently looking for a publisher.



James Martyn Joyce

James Martyn Joyce is from Galway. He has published three books, including editing *Noir by Noir West: Dark Fiction from the West of Ireland* (Arlen House). His work has appeared in *The Cúirt Journal*, *West 47*, *Books Ireland*, *Crannog*, *The Sunday Tribune*, *The Stinging Fly*, *The Shop*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Stony Thursday Book* and *Skylight47*. He was shortlisted for a Hennessy Award in 2006, the Francis McManus award in 2007 and 2008 and The William Trevor International Short Story Competition in 2007 and 2011. He has had work broadcast on RTE and BBC and has won the Listowel Writers Week Originals Short Story Competition. He won the Doolin Writers Prize in 2014. He was a winner of the Greenbean Novel Fair in 2016 with his novel, *A Long Day Dead*. His second poetry collection entitled *Furey*, was published in June 2018 by Doire Press.

NO PYRAMID RISING

BY JAMES MARTYN JOYCE

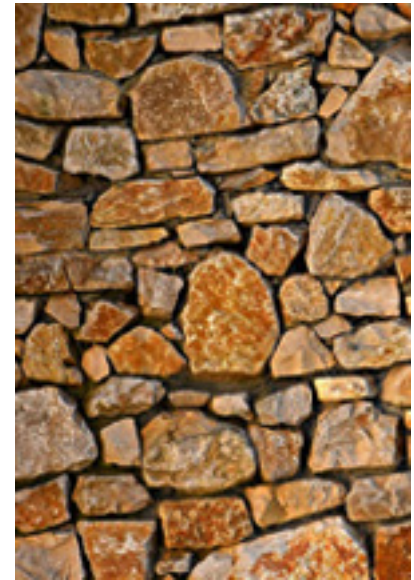
Austin built all the walls himself. Years later Noreen could recall the first stone he set in concrete by the back corner of their original bungalow, years before the wealth, years before Lakeview Lodge, herself and baby Derek watching from the kitchen window as he manoeuvred the boulders, muscle and bar, selecting the stones, building them up, mortaring them into place.

He'd learned while he worked, cementing as he moved along the line, Derek flexing, a muscle ball in Noreen's arms, his tiny fists flailing, his spit soaking her jumper.

Austin worked between the day job and the dark, feeling time closing in, the final barrowful often mixed in the creeping dusk so that when he finished, Derek would be in bed, Austin bending to kiss his baby-sweat brow, the whistle call of his laboured breathing guiding him in the darkness of the small bedroom.

Soon after Derek was born the consultant confirmed that he had severe autism, and Derek and Noreen never talked about it again. They would have no more children. Austin had wept in the hospital corridor, his forehead to the cold corner, his shoulders hunched. The consultant had been blunt, the facts coming hard to both and they'd carried Derek home to their days beginning, Austin taking a second job, in a way abandoning her, turning his face towards hard work.

He'd met Staunton while Noreen was taking their son for one of his regular physio visits. Staunton had been delivering a load of something cling-wrapped on a pallet, and they'd got to talking in the dayroom.



It was Staunton who introduced him to ‘the selling business’. He never called it anything else, Staunton claiming him as one of his ‘ten’: one of his disciples, urging him to get another ten, and then Austin in turn urging those ten to forage outwards for teams of their own, the edifice growing, always growing, the base spreading, the hungry eye carried upwards towards the peak.

He’d become involved at the right time, early enough in the market for the newness to shine, the silver glint of money bringing in others like himself, serious men, focussed, eyes hunger-bright, the profits building just by being there, Staunton above him, nine others by his side.

It worked well. The long hours and late roads took him away from himself. Derek was a toddler now; Austin smiled at that word, almost unable to bear his son’s faltering steps, his manic repetitions, his staggered garble, Noreen silent, wearing the cloak of mother, her hurt locked inside her.

Then Staunton left for London on an updraught of love, a woman capturing him, pulling him away, and Austin bought his share. His own life was a numbed constant, his wife by his side, Derek in the nursery, the primrose walls holding his flickering eyes.

Noreen watched ‘the selling business’ grow, Austin with his worker bees, happy to hum. Soon he moved his profits into walls, building his first apartment block at the wrong end of a poor street, the rooms filling with students at the right price. A second, larger block followed, years before the planners even guessed at the true pattern, and Austin was established, further plots bought quietly, derelict sites safely scooped. Nothing moved on those streets now unless Austin got his share.

The morning Derek started school Austin bought his first quarry. They stood together, facing the other parents in the schoolyard, the fathers nodding towards him. His face was rising in the town, the sympathy more difficult to take because he knew he could easily buy most of them. Derek ran to the teacher with a gurgling cry, hugging her around the knees, Noreen holding on, all the other children watching too. He bought his first Mercedes that same evening and opted for the blacked-out glass, the world darkened somewhat in the hushed capsule, the purr of the engine a comfort.

Sometimes after he’d dropped Derek to school he’d take the road below the mountain, circling towards the lake, coming at the town from the blind side.

This was how he found Lakeview Lodge, the ‘For Sale’ sign surprising him less than the name. Lakeview Lodge, ten acres and a poor bungalow, built on rock.

His businesses were blooming now, almost on auto-pilot, apartments, quarries, a gym, rented spaces, earnings generating their own earnings, the combination multiplying at a pace invisible to the outsider, the money cash-cropping off itself, Austin mastering the lot, spreading it wide.

Yes, he would buy Lakeview Lodge.

Delaney had pleaded with him the day of the auction, telling him that, as his solicitor, he could not advise him to purchase such a mess: a small house, in bad repair, built on rock, even if it was going cheap. But Austin had continued to bid, the opposition dropping out early, Delaney shaking his head until Austin, as owner, stood before the auction photograph in the hotel foyer and asked Delaney to tell him what he saw. Delaney had answered as before: a small house, badly built, a few acres of scrub without enough soil to plant a tree.

‘No. Look again.’ He asked, ‘Do ya see it yet?’

‘No.’ Delaney shook his head.

‘I don’t want the house, I want the rock. I’ll build my home on it and from it. See it now?’

Delaney had looked then, shaking his head, slowly. And that was how it was, how it started, the rebuilding of Lakeview Lodge, the old bungalow tipped into the foundations, buried forever, the new walls cut and hewn, climbing out of their own insides until the house stood foursquare to the mountain, facing the lake, the yellow gorse bursting around it. A cut-stone palace, fit for Noreen, and for Derek, fit for himself.

Then he’d started on the boundary walls, the masons cutting early and late, carving them out until they stood to the maximum height permitted. But Austin never called stop, raising the internal levels, buttresses carrying the extra weight, the walls rising, as they did, well above the permitted limit, the masons hewing and pointing, dawn to dusk, until only the sky and the hanging birds could see inside, Derek, chortling, pointing at their dark, slow-motion wings.

Noreen saw immediately how the recordings helped Austin. One of his colleagues, into positive thinking, recommended them at a gathering in Belfast. Austin was at the top of the whole affair now, his people networked through the country, selling early, selling late, dark cars on narrow back roads, second-jobbers with firm grips, offering a choice of goods at attractive prices, convincing the customers of the indispensable, a share coming their own way, and always something going to Austin, a glint feeding upwards to the peak.

He loved how the recordings talked to him. They fed him calm, fixing everything in the darkened cocoon of his latest Merc, feeding positivity to the miles covered. They became a cushion to him, making him believe in all he was becoming, the Mercedes sliding through the cut and thrust, Derek safe at home behind the high walls, exiting only to attend school. Noreen spoke of improving his social interaction now, his integration, how Derek would benefit from making friends, Austin working for his future, happy to meet all the costs.

Sometimes, in the evenings, he would still drive towards the mountain, snaking across the high bog, the narrow roads no challenge to the big car, and always the positivity flowing from the speakers. From up here he could see Lakeview Lodge from a height and distance, pick out the finest rooms, the curtain walls, the fierce design, the whole lot like a golden coin perched on the limestone slope, outshining the shimmering lake beyond.

Sitting there one evening he saw the waste of Lakeview Lodge: the long spit of shining rock, the acres languishing beyond the chiselled walls. He'd go for clearance, break, crush, cut the rock. He had three quarries now, rock breakers to grind it, trucks to spread it wide. A further cash crop ripped from the poor land, yet another Austin miracle.

He told Noreen as a by-the-way, how he would be clearing the acres beyond the hand-cut walls, his rock breakers already moving along the back roads from his other sites. It would be a small operation to begin with, spall for spreading, gravel for his contracts, his associates taking with one hand, offering in return, the gentle caress of reciprocation.

'But won't there be noise, Austin, blasting, all of that?'

'Some.'

'You know how Derek hates noise?'

And she'd flinched at his sudden, sharp answer: he was providing the best he could, for Derek, for her, it wasn't cheap; a little discomfort was nothing to ask. It was all for Derek. And even as Austin said it, he knew it was a lie.

Noreen felt the tremors first as the rock breakers pulsed, her eye level with the glass of water by the bed, the vibrations coming through the floor, then through the pillow, the water trembling as the foundations shook, ripples dancing in the half-full glass.

Derek appeared by the bed, he was thirteen now, his face a confusion, his hands pressed to his ears, his ragged mouth a wordless scream as Noreen moved and hugged him to her, the vibrations beating down on their bowed heads.

The first explosion made her jump, Derek clawing for the shelter of the bed, a frightened crab, scrabbling over shoes, Noreen on her knees, pleading, Derek a knot in the blackest corner, hands on his ears, his snotted face pushed into the dark.

Austin was standing with his foreman, Cooney, and the drivers watching the crusher spewing gravel into the broad funnel of the silo, his trucks already moving in its shadow, the throb of engines and the hanging pall of diesel. Noreen's VW swung before them; the shock of Derek through the passenger window, his face contorted, his eyes squeezed shut. He broke from the car in a zigzag stagger to escape the noise, trying to get away, Noreen in pursuit, Austin following too.

Cooney moved quicker than either of them, his arms spread wide to the driver, his bellow ringing even above the clatter, the rock breaker pounding, smashing the broad line of stone, Derek running blindly towards the ragged edge as the engine died and Cooney swung him high and carried him back to Noreen.

'When is enough, enough, Austin?'

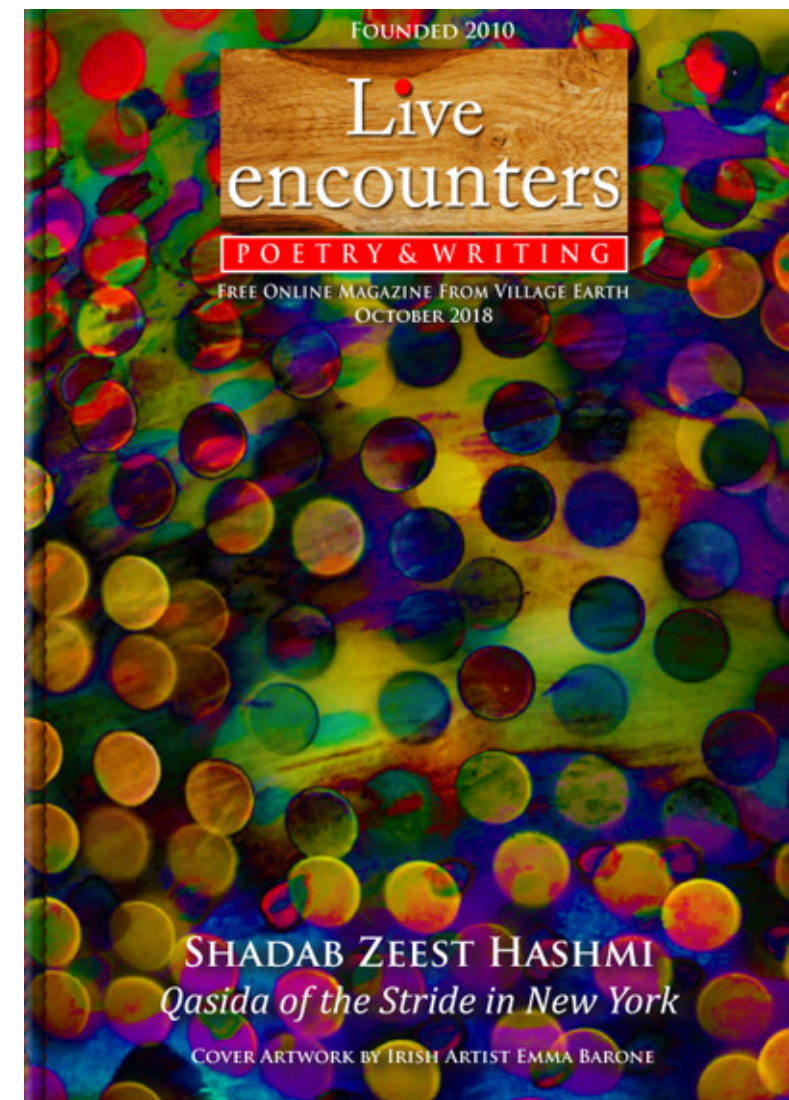
Noreen's cry took Austin by surprise, her anger leaving him speechless as she struggled to hold their son.

‘Well? When? When?’ And she beat her fist on his suited chest, his glance catching the drivers moving towards the machines, the knowing smirks between them. He tried to calm her, embarrassment reddening him, but she wouldn’t listen.

‘No! He is your son! Your son! He is all you have. You have nothing here.’ Noreen swung her free arm wide, Derek hiding his ravaged face. She turned then to restrain their son and help him to her car, his actions growing more agitated.

And Austin saw her hair streaked with grey as if for the first time. He felt age whisper in his bones, the gnawing tightness in his hip as Derek pummelled the window, his lip-smear sliding, his nose askew, leaving a nostril streak along the shine.

And he saw it then; saw Derek, almost like that first day in the hospital, except now there were no nurses to carry him away, no corner to hide his face, no darkened glass to shield him, no pyramid rising to ease his own eyes upwards.



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Kenneth Nolan

Kenneth Nolan is a Writer from Blanchardstown in Dublin. He is the Founder/Director of 'The Merg Sessions', a popular poetry and prose showcase event. Kenneth's poetry was recently shortlisted for the 'Bailieborough Poetry Prize'; he has been shortlisted twice for the 'Jonathan Swift Award'. In 2012 he won first prize for poetry in the 'CDVEC Cultural Awards'. He is a regular contributor of prose to 'Scum Gentry Alternative Arts Magazine'. His work has also featured in: Van Gogh's Ear, Flare, Brilliant Flash Fiction, Headspace, A New Ulster and Creative Talents Unleashed. Currently Kenneth is enjoying the life of a mature student as an Undergraduate at Maynooth University.

THE TRIP AWAY BY KENNETH NOLAN

'How are you fixed for a drink Paul', Stephen asked.

'Guinness please Ste'

I was only there an hour and I'd had four already. I never expected so many people to show up to see me off. I was thinking I could just say my goodbyes and head home to bed, after all I had a 6 a.m. flight the following morning. Are they all here to wish me well, or have they come to make sure I am definitely leaving?

This was the nagging question at the back of my mind, due to a ridiculous paranoia of assuming that everybody on earth hated me. Sod it! I said to myself, I've never had so many people buying me drink. I'll just go with the flow. A year out, in Australia, I couldn't wait to get going. I was determined to get out of this shit-hole, and away from all those miserable, depressing, hypocritical, freeloaders for a while.

'Yes John I'll take a Guinness please fair play t'yeh'.

Ah sure, why not take advantage. My mother was lapping up the attention. Her son, 'The Fearless Traveller', heading over there, the other side of the world, far away from his home, his family and his own kind, blady blady blah.... 'Isn't he so brave'.

'It's only Sydney Ma, sure there's more feckin Irish over there than there is here'.

I settled down into a content, peaceful vibe and began to feel the warm anaesthesia of resignation drip over me. Then I felt a presence behind me followed by a whisper in my ear.

'So will you miss me?'

Ma was giving her daggers immediately, ‘The Heartless Bitch’, who dumped her son for no reason whatsoever. Jesus, if she only knew the half of it. I was surprised, shocked even, that Elaine showed up. We hadn’t seen or spoken to each other since Liverpool, and I never wanted to think about that trip again.

The showdown scene in the clinic will always haunt me. That moment, when she declared with weepy, crackled voice; ‘Last chance Paul do you want to be a father or not’; before screaming at me to ‘fuck off and get out’, then falling into a helpless sob.

‘No’ I replied, adamantly. I stayed in the room.

I couldn’t believe she had turned on me and put me on the spot like that. We’d discussed it over and over, and had made the decision jointly. The pregnancy was a *mysterious* accident, we’d always been conscious of avoiding getting pregnant. We looked down upon friends of ours with babies. Those idiots! Their lives over before they had begun. They, who spend their days changing nappies and cleaning up all sorts of other shite. Dabbing sore knees, calming down tantrums, and droning on about how much sleep they didn’t get.

And slightly older couples, like Elaine’s sister Maeve and her boyfriend Conor, who after their second child was born, no longer referred to each other by their Christian or pet names. Now they just use simplified titles, ‘he was called he’ and ‘she was called she’, then when speaking directly to each other, it was ‘you’.

Elaine and I were far too clever for that type of nonsense, both of us 22 years of age, too young, too smart, too early. It was all too much.

On that day, in the BPAS clinic, at the moment of watching her being comforted by someone else, I hated her. I hated her so much that I vividly imagined putting my hands around her neck and squeezing tightly for all my worth, consequences be damned. It was such a sudden and frightening feeling, and a very strange emotion as this was a girl I had adored for a very long time. I stood still, afraid to move, with sparks of anger darting through me, whilst Elaine sat in a chair being held by the counsellor.

The counsellor’s name was Grace, which aptly fitted the air of superiority she portrayed. She spoke to both of us like we were idiots. Like we were less developed mentally than the doomed foetus in Elaine’s womb. I still get enraged when I recall her gazing at Elaine, and then at me, with two very contrasting expressions on her face. Elaine an innocent, injured fawn, and me, the incarnation of Satan himself.

I was relieved when it was all over. I did not want to be a father. However, I felt like a backseat passenger from the word go, never really having a choice in the matter until Elaine’s last minute melt-down. As I agreed with her original decision to have an abortion, my status of non-equality was irrelevant. Elaine informed me of the pregnancy as you would inform an unsuspecting relative of a death in the family, immediately re-enforcing her right to a career, and how she would be finishing college; - ‘no matter what’.

I was no better to be honest, my plans for a year in Australia were well advanced. I could muck about for a year, while she finished her degree and cure the envy I felt when seeing my friends swanning off around the world, living the single life, a life neither of us knew anything about. We were each other’s first, and in hindsight we were far too serious much too young.

We had the notion that ‘absence would make the heart grow fonder’, and a year apart could only be good for us both. We were in a permanent daze Elaine and I. We were both selfish and immature, stubborn as well, neither of us would admit to it at the time, although I’m sure she realised this deep down, just as much as I did.

We only really began to take in the enormity of it all on the day we arrived at the clinic in Liverpool. The conversations previously, were of an organizational nature, like finding the information regarding clinics, booking the travel, getting it over with as quickly as possible. And what seemed vital to her; ‘Don’t tell anybody Paul not a soul’.

I had never been so solidly sure of anything in my short life up to that point than I was about wanting that pregnancy terminated. Our youth and lack of experience were easy excuses, but deep down I realised that I didn’t want to be tied to Elaine for the rest of my life. I did not want her to be the mother of my child. I was struck by selfishness and self-preservation that was so constant, undiluted and all-consuming, it made the concept of another human life, or human lives, either born or unborn, completely alien to me.

We travelled home to Dublin the day after the procedure. ‘Liverpool John Lennon Airport’ became the official graveyard of the future, I had once thought Elaine and I were destined to have together. It was there that I realised that things could never be the same again.

Elaine was quite ill after the procedure. She was still being physically sick during the trip home. Running to the toilet regularly, nausea and sweats, she was very jittery, but it was her silence that was most telling. The dynamic, firebrand, ‘nothing’s going to get in my way’ Elaine was gone. Now there was a little girl who needed to be reassured and forgiven, exonerated even.

Ironically, I felt a little bit like a disappointed father, to a rebellious teenage girl. I tried to converse with her if only to break the eternal state of awkwardness that was that journey. Nothing heavy, just chit-chat or inconsequential questions, she liked to reply – ‘I don’t want to talk’.

I hadn’t sat with the moral aspect of what we had done, but I knew it would visit upon me later in life. There and then, I was couching myself with slogans like; ‘A life is not a life until it is actually born, therefore you cannot take a life unless it is alive’. I guess similar types of thoughts and emotions were occupying Elaine. However, I couldn’t bring myself to comfort her properly. My resentment still not abated at her cutting me adrift at the clinic.

Our embraces now, were like water to electricity. I wanted to mock her. Maybe say something like, ‘You’re not so full of yourself now are you’. At least then in my own childish mind, I would have justified my position as the – Big Bad Wolf.

That night in the pub at my ‘Going Away Party’, a month after Liverpool, is the last time I heard from Elaine. She said she’d only stay for one drink, and true to her word she left within an hour. I was thankful there wasn’t a scene or emotional outburst. Only a polite shared emptiness survived between us. We kissed and hugged as she departed, disappointing the reconciliation hopes of our mutual friends. ‘Elaine and Paul’, we were the inseparable ones, together since we were teenagers and destined to be together permanently. Now we were like mere acquaintances five years on from the first time we declared our love for each other as innocent soppy kids.

We could be found kissing and cuddling in the nearby snug just weeks before, now we were sinners, sharing this terrible secret. I only saw a reflection of shame when I looked in her eyes. I rejoined the party which had gathered pace. I felt like I was sharing a large prison cell with complete strangers, and all I had left was a reinforcement of that overwhelming urge to get away. I will never go back.



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COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE