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# Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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FEBRUARY 2019

JACK GRADY  
*a celebration of poetry*

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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## We are the music makers\*

The title 'Jack Grady – a celebration of poetry' reflects the author's success in inviting the following smashing poets to contribute their unpublished work - *Christopher Merrill, Pippa Little, David Riggsbee, John Sibley Williams, Jeannine Hall Gailey, Tim Cumming, Graham Allen, Joel Deane, Hugh Hazelton, Ken Meisel, Liz McKeane, Angela Topping, Kevin Higgins, Susan Millar Dumars, Lorna Shaughnessy, Jean O'Brien, and Edward O'Dwyer.*

Thank you Jack. Thank you smashing poets.

We are grateful to *Cathy Altman, John W Sexton, Miceál Kearney and Mary Guckian* for coming aboard with their effervescent work to join the emerging lyrical juggernaut that is LE Poetry & Writing.

This year the world is faced with yet another string of mindless violence, political ineptitude and a self-degrading twisted morality.

All that we have is the music to remind us of the beauty within and around us. Music created by poets to celebrate the soul, the very essence of life, that is Nature, that is the Universe.

Thank you for the music.

*Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om*

Mark Ulyseas

*\*Salaam to Arthur O'Shaughnessy*

## CONTRIBUTORS

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Christopher Merrill has published six collections of poetry, including *Watch Fire*, for which he received the Lavan Younger Poets Award from the Academy of American Poets, and *Boat*; many edited volumes and translations; and six books of nonfiction, among them, *Only the Nails Remain: Scenes from the Balkan Wars*, *Things of the Hidden God: Journey to the Holy Mountain*, and *Self-Portrait with Dogwood*. He directs the University of Iowa's International Writing Program.



## ON ORTHODOXY

*Save the original*, the docent thinks  
After the opening of an exhibit  
Devoted to the deadly consequences  
Of politicians resurrecting rumors  
About the provenance and profane nature  
Of an illuminated manuscript  
Over which blood was spilled to purify  
The language of the tribe—which is to say:  
To strip from common usage words and phrases  
Adopted from a foreign tongue and faith.

Right worship was the sword the faithful wielded  
Against the unbelievers in their church,  
Which had been built with stones and pillars salvaged  
From temples razed and burned in the aftermath  
Of a disastrous war. What heresy  
Is worth the loss of life religious wars  
Exact on individuals unwilling  
To change the way they pray or do not pray?  
The Founding Father called for *a policy*  
*Worthy of imitation*. Heed his words.

Please specify the penalty for the sin  
Of bearing false witness against your neighbors,  
The ones who raised a rainbow-colored flag  
On Independence Day, expecting—what?  
Death, resurrection, and the drawing up  
Of blueprints for a revolution. No,  
They would not tell us where they hid their guns.  
The map they gave us was inaccurate  
In every last detail, and so we found  
A darker route to the interior.

*continued overleaf*

Photograph Pixabay.



ON ORTHODOXY *continued*

An inventory of his imagination  
 Revealed how thoroughly he had depleted  
 The source of his originality—  
 Sand shifting in the dunes where a house stood  
 Until it was swept out to sea in the storm  
 That pushed another house into the bay,  
 Forming an island, which became for him  
 An emblem of his thinking—circumscribed  
 By rising waters, sea wrack, and debris  
 From hurricanes imagined, summoned, named.

---

Political correctness was the theme  
 Of a debate that generated heat  
 Instead of light when the provocateur,  
 A novelist who disdained literature,  
 Praised inequality. And when a woman  
 Rose to her feet to challenge him he took  
 A phone call on his cell, provoking her  
 To call out his behavior—to no avail.  
 He left the stage, continuing to talk  
 Over her protest until she sat back down.

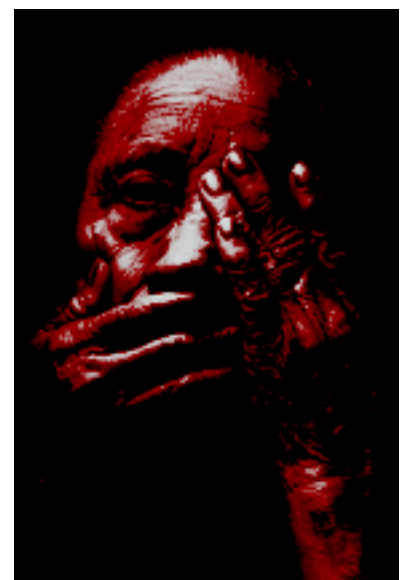
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Salt-bitten and sea-bleached, the house remained  
 Intact and vivid in his imagination  
 Long after the Ash Wednesday Storm destroyed  
 The family home, carrying out to sea  
 On waves of surging water what he loved—  
 A vase of beach glass, his grandmother's seascapes,  
 A Louisville Slugger and a catcher's mitt—  
 And what he feared—unorthodox ideas  
 About the central mystery of his faith,  
 Which he observed less and less regularly.

---

Claude Debussy said, *Pleasure is the law*—  
 Until, that is, an authoritarian,  
 Legally seizing power, writes a law  
 To separate the chosen from the chaff,  
 Who will be locked inside some granary  
 Unless the chosen rise up in defense  
 Of liberty—i.e. *noblesse oblige*.  
 Don't hold your breath. For cowardice breeds only  
 Cowardice. The story ends predictably,  
 In blood and terror. Remember: you were warned.

*end*



© Christopher Merrill

Pippa Little is an award-winning Scots poet, editor, reviewer, workshop leader and translator who lives in Northumberland in North East England, where she is a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Newcastle University. *Overwintering*, (Carcenet 2012), was shortlisted for The Seamus Heaney Centre Prize, *Twist*, (Arc 2017), was shortlisted for The Saltire Prize and *The Spar Box* (Vane Women 2008) was a PBS Pamphlet Choice. She has been widely published in magazines and online across the world including, in the UK, Poetry Review, TLS, New Statesman, New European, and Rialto, and has worked on printmaking collaborations and film poems. A reviewer and translator, she has read at many poetry festivals and events including StAnza and Durham, and has won The James McCash Award, the Norman McCaig Centenary Poetry Prize, an Eric Gregory and others. She is a member of Scottish PEN.



## LAST MOMENT

She is thinking of tunnels,  
how much she hates them  
when he melts through the tube train doors  
slides into the one free seat opposite  
and just before the dark begins,  
weird underwater gloom  
that turns old women into fiends and children  
into moon-faced cats, they look at one another.

She always loved that place in his neck,  
a shy dip between too-big collars.  
She can't recall his middle name  
but remembers pistachio ice-cream  
one night waves reared over the quay  
huge green sea dragons  
with dripping fangs – and the day  
she saw him cry.

What do they do, in these grey  
strobed shadows?  
And what is there to forgive?  
They have survived, after all.  
As the train slows she rears up,  
presses her palm the length of his cheek.  
Further on, her hand burns white  
as a dusty lightbulb  
inside her pocket.

## WOLVSCARN

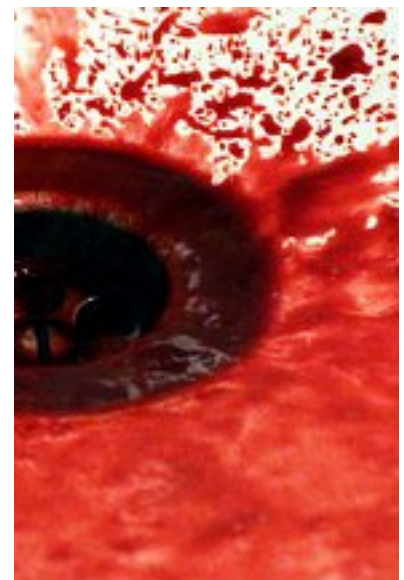
I was born on a battleground  
son of the slain, my mother laid me  
in my father's butchered arms

I was reared up, raised wild,  
none would nestle me, I ripped bairns, hares  
and hens when I starved, otherwise

kept low and close  
to forest side, fell seam, any outer edge  
where humans seldom go

I was the shiver in your hearts  
the grave-dirt rubbing in your eye  
last star falling

now I am the song you will not sing your children  
old as hoar frost, my hoard, from a hard country.



## IN EXTREMITY

My three stricken men are gone  
 the dog died of old age  
 I crouch in a cold pool of light  
 don't know what else to do  
 but this knuckling and scooping  
 of sea glass, my almost invisible runes  
 stolen from the endless pour of the sea  
 at the edge of the world:  
 I was a girl of peculiar fancies  
 breaking and mending,  
 hungry for stones  
 thirsty for salt  
 sorrow fattened me

a blackbird's singing  
 as dusk outruns us

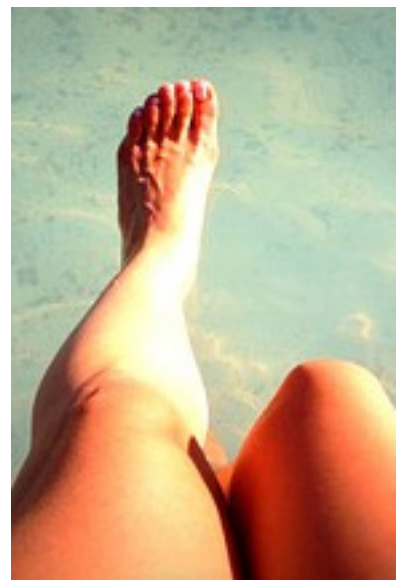
A WOMAN CONSOLES AN ORANG-UTAN  
ON A CRUISE SHIP

*From a black and white 1930s photograph*

Past her best but a looker once,  
 she keeps herself in shape – marcelled wave, no roots,  
 brows like teardrops. I notice, see.  
 He's a matted, sorry lump, a mad professor.  
 Clutching each other like there's no tomorrow!  
 His black banana fingers, her cuticles all  
 Tallulah Bankhead, in a clinch big as the world  
 as if *The End* was about to explode across the screen!

Who's taking the shot, what's the angle?  
 The deck's bare in midday light  
 these last moments before we smooch the pier head:  
 everyone's starboard, waving.

He's whooped himself around her neck,  
 humungous feather boa.  
 Dribble out of gooey eyes  
 dries in the scuzz of his chest.  
 He'll stink in this heat: I bet she smells him  
 hours from now, back in Manhattan.  
 And wherever he's going, he's crying Chanel.



## SO MUCH

While you sleep, summer afternoons slip away  
as heat from an open door: I am learning being still  
the way a horse listens at a skyline, learning to attend  
as my hand loses its memory of being empty  
and the ache of your hand becomes my own.

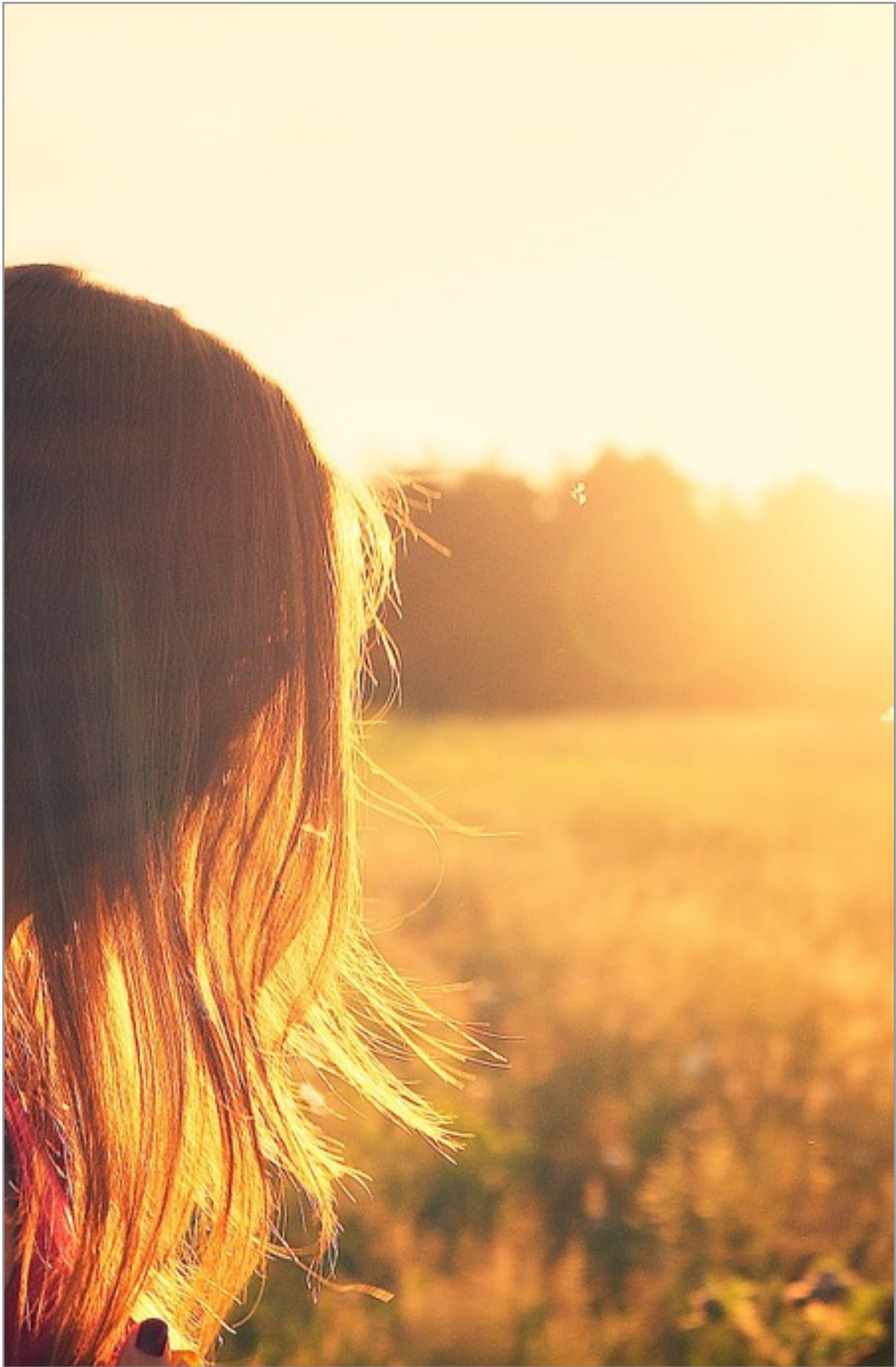
Your dreams rise into your mouth, I can almost kiss them  
then pain shorts its fuse in mutter of might-be words'  
white noise. How long it's taken me to address my breath to yours,  
slow down to calm as best I can, this long to learn  
so much no longer matters.

## DOWNCOMER

A short while after the shower makes its presence felt  
drumming on windowsills, eaves, dustbin lid,  
the downcomer clears her throat and begins  
as growl, guttural sibilance, a tumbling contralto  
of disparate notes - a toy car of red tin,  
a fluster of tortoise-shell buttons, my grandmother's  
moonstones – *tickety tack*, the drainpipe loves them all,  
rolls them under like a laundromat  
*down down down* then turns them out  
a spray of bubbling grey froth like frogspawn,  
like the world the moment it began, before wet or dry,  
before the damage.







Photograph Pixabay.

David Rigsbee is author of, most recently *This Much I Can Tell You* and *Not Alone in My Dancing: Essays and Reviews*, both from Black Lawrence Press. In addition to his eleven collections of poems, he has published critical books on the poetry of Joseph Brodsky and Carolyn Kizer and coedited *Invited Guest: An Anthology of Twentieth Century Southern Poetry*. *Dante: The Paradiso* will appear from Salmon Poetry in 2019.  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/david-rigsbee>



CANTO XXIX

*[Beatrice’s face is fixed on God as she explains creation and God’s eternity. She then explains angelic time, before turning to a denunciation of false teachings.]*

When both Latona’s children  
sit on the horizon line, the one rising  
in Ares, the other setting in Libra,  
  
as long as the zenith fulcrum  
holds the scales in balance, until each  
moves, changing hemispheres, 5  
  
just so long did Beatrice pause  
smiling, her eye fixed on the Point  
whose light I could not endure.  
  
Then she began, “I do not ask;  
I say what you wish to hear, for I already  
foresaw it where *when* and *where* are one. 10  
  
It is not to acquire more good—  
which is impossible—but because  
reflected splendor may declare, *I am*, 15  
  
in His eternity outside time,  
beyond all limits, as it pleased Him,  
Eternal Love into new loves.  
  
Nor was He idle before this;  
for neither *before* nor *after* was, before 20  
God’s going forth upon the waters.

*continued overleaf*



CANTO XXIX *continued*

Form and matter, joined or mixed,  
came into being flawlessly like three  
arrows shot from a three-stringed bow.

As in a glass, in amber or crystal, 25  
a sunbeam flashes so that no interval  
exists between its coming and being,

just so the Sire’s threefold effect:  
his beam flashes, with no distinction, no 30  
interval, into existence at once.

Order was created in the substance  
of things, and it was at the top of the world  
where these ones were produced by pure act.

The lowest part held pure potential,  
the middle tied potential with act, 35  
a bond that shall never be undone.

Hieronymo wrote you about the stretch  
of centuries between the making of angels  
and the creation of the rest of the world,

but such is written in many places 40  
by writers inspired by the Holy Spirit,  
and you will find it if you read carefully.

Even reason can grasp it partially:  
it cannot concede that angelic powers 45  
could exist so long minus perfection.

But now you know where and when  
and how these Loves came to be, thus  
quenching three flames of your desire.

But faster than you could count 50  
to twenty, a party of these angels  
shook the elemental foundations.

The rest remained and began  
the dance that you see here with such delight  
that their whirling goes on forever.

The reason for the Fall lay 55  
in the presumption of one you saw below  
crushed by the weight of the world.

These others you see humbly  
acknowledged the goodness that made  
them capable of great understanding, 60

so that their vision was raised  
to such a degree by God’s enlightening grace  
that their will is committed and whole.

Now beyond a doubt it is certain 65  
that this grace is received in proportion  
as the heart is open to receive it.

And now, if you have taken  
my word, you should be able to consider  
this sacred body without further aid.

*continued overleaf*





CANTO XXIX *continued*

But since on earth you teach  
in school that the angelic nature includes  
understanding, memory and will, 70

I will say more, because you see  
the pure truth here that is confounded  
below by ambiguous teachings. 75

Since they first saw it, these beings  
took delight in the face of God, for whom nothing  
is hidden, and they never turned away.

As a result, their sight is never  
divided by something new; they have  
therefore no need for memory. 80

So on earth men dream awake  
believing or not the truth of what they say  
and in the end, more's the sin and shame.

Your philosophizing does not  
lead you down a path to certainty: rather,  
you find infatuation in appearance and wit. 85

Yet even this is met here above  
with less insult than when the Holy Writ  
is greeted with disregard or traduced. 90

Men do not seem to care how much  
blood is required to plant it in the world,  
nor how pleasing is the humble, devoted man.

Each is pretentious, a master  
of inventions, which preachers pass on as if  
gospel, while the real Gospel is silent. 95

This one says the moon went  
backwards to eclipse the sun during the Passion  
so that it was deprived of light—he lies.

That light hid itself, and hence 100  
Spaniards and Indians alike, responded  
to the same eclipse as the Jews.

Such fables are shouted  
from the pulpits left and right, more  
in a year than are Lapi and Bindi in Florence! 105

So that the sheep, knowing no  
better, come from pasture full of wind:  
their blindness from harm being no excuse.

Christ did not say to the disciples,  
“Go into the the world and preach nonsense” 110  
but rather gave them a foundation of truth.

With only this on their lips they  
went forth fighting to kindle their faith,  
having only the Gospel for lance and shield.

Now men go forth to preach jokes, 115  
anything to make the people laugh,  
to puff up their hoods: that’s all they want.

*continued overleaf*



CANTO XXIX *continued*

But in the cowl is such a bird  
that if the people were to see, they would  
know the kind of pardons they had relied on. 120

So much folly has grown on earth  
that, without testimonial proof, they run  
after whatever promise is offered them.

By this is St. Anthony’s pig made fat,  
and others, who are worse than swine, 125  
pay their way with counterfeit money.

But we have digressed. Therefore,  
turn your eyes back to the true path  
so as to adjust our time to the journey.

This nature multiplies itself in such  
grand numbers that there is no speech 130  
that can keep up, nor human fancy.

If you look at what is said  
in the Book of Daniel, you will see that  
in his thousands the actual number is hidden. 135

The First Light shines and irradiates  
them all in as many ways as there  
are splendors for it to penetrate.

Thus, since the visual act precedes  
the act of love, the sweetness within varies 140  
accordingly, whether burning or warming.

And now you see the pinnacle  
and breadth of Eternal Worth, seeing  
itself divided and mirrored, reflecting Itself  
  
as One, as it was before.” 145

Notes:

1, *both Latona’s children*—Apollo, the sun, and Diana, the moon.

37, *Hieronymo*—I.e., St. Jerome (ca. 342 - 420), one of the most learned of the Fathers of the Western Church.

105, *Lapi and Bindi*—Common Florentine names.

118, *But in the cowl is such a bird*—I.e., Satan.

124, *St. Anthony’s pig*—St. Anthony the Great (ca. 251–356) was commonly depicted with with a pig, representing the demons with whom he would have struggled in the desert. Here, it represents corrupt clergy.



John Sibley Williams is the author of *As One Fire Consumes Another* (Orison Poetry Prize) and *Skin Memory* (Backwaters Prize). A nineteen-time Pushcart nominee and winner of various awards, John serves as editor of *The Inflectionist Review*. Publications include: *Yale Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Massachusetts Review*, and *Third Coast*.



## CRADLESONG

See how the unfed roots of the tree  
with nothing but shadow growing under it

burst from hard winter earth, handward.  
How the long scar a dam cuts into a river

makes a constellation of our city & keeps  
the night at bay. That even having lost

one dimension your dead grandmother's  
face in this photo still catches & frames the light.

Under just the right conditions, regardless of instinct,  
any man can be molded into a kind thing.

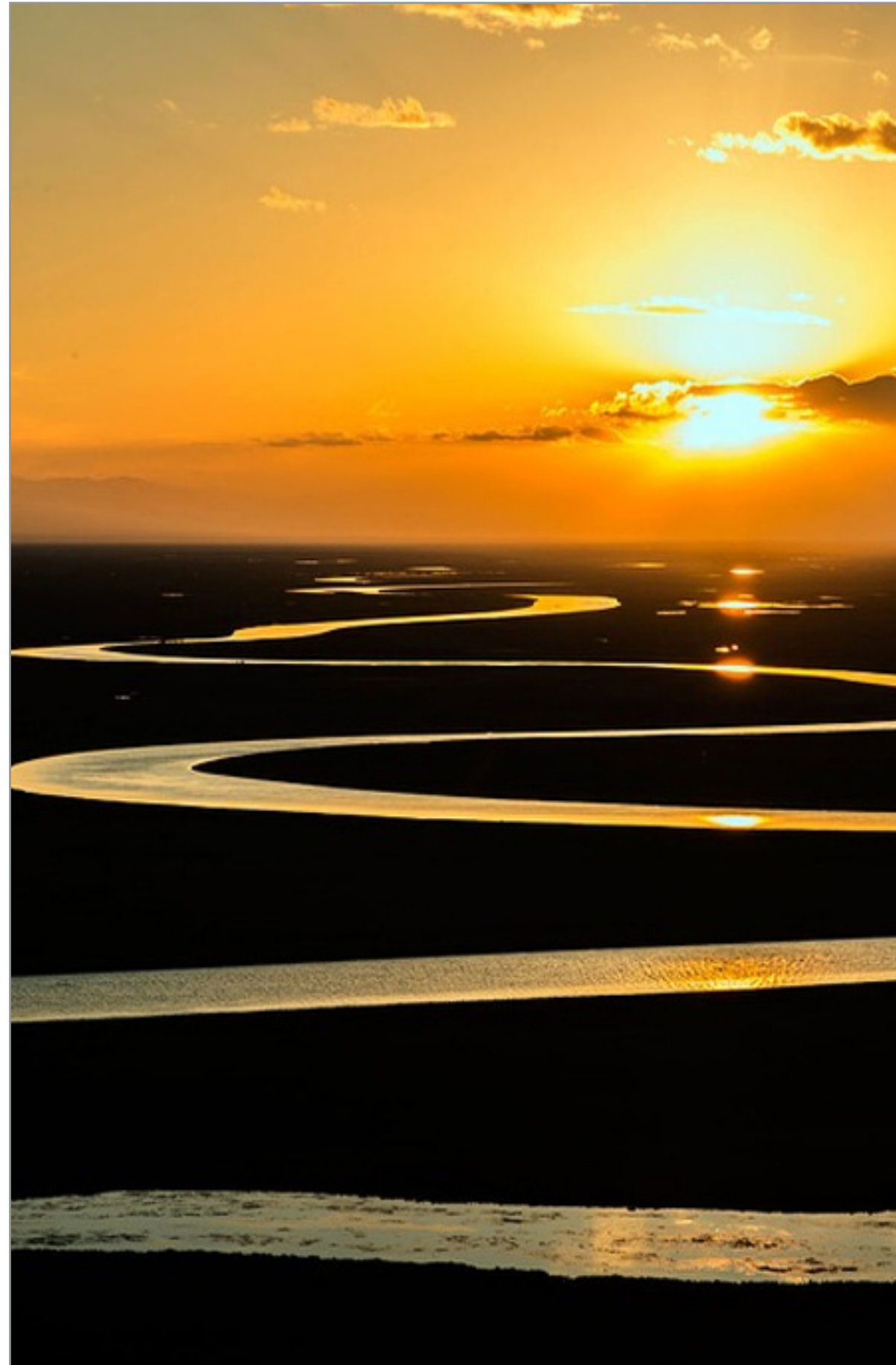
Even me.

Yes, yours are the same bars a prisoner  
stabs his hands through to get at

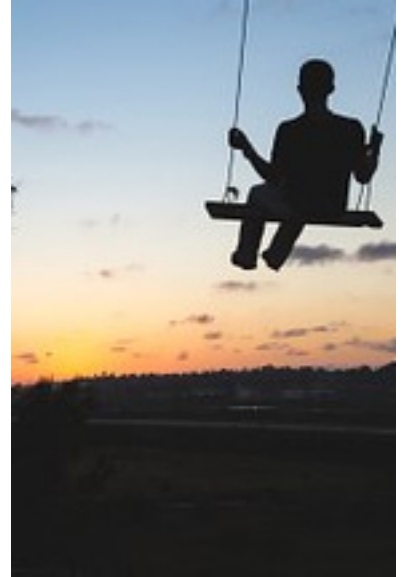
another's throat, or to hold, briefly,  
a lover's cheek. See how every touch

opens or closes a wound. How the river  
is always revising. Even if it's never been true,

how necessary it is to believe: sometimes  
an empty, oarless boat finds its land.



Photograph Pixabay.



## SWING

You push hard from behind. Earth runs perpendicular beneath. My feet strike the air in great blows meant to ward off the gods. Those wished-upon stars not so unattainable, cold. I am no longer just a body wrapped in body wrapped in impossibilities. Where something brutal once hung, a plank of wood & two cuts of rope. When we cannot conjure metaphors of our own, we borrow, repurpose. Thrust & trust. Sweet sweet sway. It all feels too much like sex for me to think of childhood. I cannot tell which of us is entering & which is the door we are hoping to close.

## AWAYLAND

I hold the board book like a shield:  
green spears of grass, impossibly white skies,

a stippled sun massaging a field where talking  
animals never seem to eat each other.

As if our story can be told without that kind  
of hunger. As if learning to read means something

different now that the world can be contained  
behind page & screen. There are too many words

here to pinpoint where silence begins & where  
silence should end. & I read every one every night

over their cribs like a protection spell, a mantra, an attempt  
to convince myself. I know I should let them gnaw

away the spine, leave their mark, be marked. I'm terrified  
I love this story too much to throw open the windows & let them see.





## BRAT

A road, once. Kicked-up dust & destination  
enthused by promise. That all things believed in

are attainable. That these boxes we fill over &  
over again with the photos & watches & unstruck

matches that together are meant to assemble a life  
in fact assemble a life. At some point you

just stop counting the years between homes,  
stop expecting movement to soften the bite

of the past, stop asking the sky for worldly things.  
At the end of what you've named, a whole

town resplendent & new & ready to dull  
in your mouth. The way it takes a body

or vein of water to call a strand of sand  
*shore*, so it takes knowing a place like both

a soft palm & the slap of a hand to say  
*I am here*. The way it takes two wars

to call the months between *peacetime*,  
it takes seeing your father naked of

fatigues & flags, crumbled on the cold  
kitchen tiles, wailing, feigning prayer,

like any man who thinks the world isn't  
looking, to say *I know; I'm hungry too*.

## INTERSECT

*inspired by 'Christ Carrying the Cross' by Hieronymus Bosch*

Silence in din. The calm  
an uproar calls its heart.  
Not that I'd consider  
crucifixion *heart*  
or wood angled hard  
against wood a good  
place to hang a body.  
But there's something  
about the condemned:  
that slight shade of guilt  
on my father's face  
when my mother began  
her dismantling: blood  
on the pillow kindled  
by moonlight: the murderer  
watching his rope knot. No,  
not all of us will outlive  
tomorrow morning.  
Most cities built on  
the bones of other  
cities will burn brief  
& bright & themselves  
be renamed. They say the sky  
can be broken into syllables  
no mouth can pronounce.  
I have no idea what it means  
to settle for beauty.

American-born Jack Grady is a war veteran and a founder member of the Irish-based Ox Mountain Poets. His poetry has been published in *Live Encounters Poetry and Writing*; *Crannóg*; *Poet Lore*; *A New Ulster*; *The Worcester Review*; *North West Words*; *Mauvaise Graine*; *Outburst Magazine*; *The Runt*; *The Galway Review*; *Algebra of Owls*; *The Irish Literary Times*; *Skylight 47*; *The Ekphrastic Review*; *Dodging the Rain*; *Mediterranean Poetry*; and in several anthologies. His 2017 poetry collection, *Resurrection*, is available from [Lapwing Publications at Jack Grady – Lapwing Store](#).



## THE DRAGONS OF TET\*

You enter the locked compound,  
cross to an open-sided shed;  
watch the prisoners watch your back  
while they gouge and rasp,  
carve and plane to the whirr of a lathe,  
where another prisoner pumps its pedals  
and turns a blank of square-edged wood  
into a spindle made smooth.

And, if you dared to remain,  
you could watch his skew cut grooves,  
you could watch ridges, furrows,  
sloping rises take shape,  
you could watch a man with one leg  
use the finished spindle as a cane,  
while he takes it away so the one at the lathe  
can resume his pumping of the pedals;  
mould the next leg for a table and chairs  
for the dining room of a Saigon general.

You spot their foreman –  
a sergeant of the Viet Cong –  
but he no longer hurls a grenade,  
nor does he aim an AK-47 at an American face.  
He no longer wears a uniform of pyjamas  
in ambush black for night attacks.  
He no longer looks like a scavenging rook  
rooting among the roadkill.

The pyjamas he now wears are the colour  
of faded mauve taupe for a prisoner of war  
or the remains of Tyrian purple  
that has yet to bleed out in the washes that count  
the time he's been detained for the duration  
or until his return  
if there is ever a prisoner exchange.

Once, he had a vocation in woodwork himself,  
but, plunging unseen from thousands of feet,  
a bomb cut his options in that craft in half,  
its blast silencing an eardrum,  
its spit of hot shrapnel  
slicing a chunk from an arm,  
leaving a crater in the place a bicep once filled,  
a depression now wrapped under sunken, scarred skin  
to remind him of the crater, fifty feet wide,  
left in the jungle as an open-air grave  
for the rotting remains of six comrades.

You pay him a carton of *Marlboros*  
for a personal order filled.  
He stuffs the carton against that crater in his arm.  
He hands you a carved *bong*.  
The incisions in the bamboo of the water pipe  
form a pattern of dragons in red.  
You wonder if the paint is blood.

When, that night, you smoke from the pipe's bowl  
the weed they call Cambodian Red,  
you try to sleep, but, instead of sheep,  
you count teeth in the craters of Vietnam.  
And, as you watch from each a dragon arise,  
in Saigon's streets, the war arrives.



\*1968



## RACEWAY TO NO RETURN

*'If you get into that car at all, it's now Thursday... by 10 o'clock at night next Thursday, you'll be dead....'* – Alec Guinness's warning to James Dean on viewing the young actor's new Porsche

Cliff was no James Dean, no star of Giant,  
no Hollywood icon travelling East of Eden,  
but he was our own Rebel without a Cause  
and the heartthrob of all the teenage girls in town.

He drove like James Dean at full speed  
as he raced at night on back roads,  
but he steered no fancy Porsche,  
just a grease monkey's hot rod of cannibalised parts

from old 40s and 50s Fords.  
He and I had no fear of death. To us, it wasn't real.  
Even soldiers only died in combat tales  
our fathers tried their best to conceal,

or we would see a hero in a Hollywood film  
jump on a grenade to save his pals,  
yet still have time for a dying farewell,  
exhorting his buddies to 'give the Nips hell!'

Then, there were those hundred toy soldiers endlessly reborn  
from dead piles in our childhood when needed  
for the next defence of Pusan, for MacArthur at Inchon,  
or for the hundredth replay of Davy Crockett at the Alamo.

When death finally said 'hello',  
we were in our teens and Cliff turned on the ignition:  
We heard a scream, raised the hood;  
found a cat chewed up by the fan blades of the engine.

Other than that, death was too distant to notice  
until our idol, James Dean, would not heed  
the premonition of Alec Guinness;  
decided to break-in his Five-Fifty Porsche

with some 'seat time' on the road to Salinas.  
And, for an instant, we could feel the smash of its steel  
against the sturdier mass of an oncoming Ford,  
shudder at the red splash as a head crashed through glass;

sense life erased as we stood at its edge  
and gazed into the vastness of oblivion.  
But, within a day, death was forgotten again  
until death dared our Cliff to a race one night.

And that's when we all finally heard  
our own dragster-rubber burn  
on a raceway to no return.



## SHIPS PASSING IN THE NIGHT

I google a house on Street View,  
a house a hundred years old or more.  
Though it was only middle-aged when I lived there,  
even my parents thought it ancient back then.  
It has today the same colours of paint,

the same brown and cream,  
but the paint is fresh, and the porch in front is quaint  
with little panes of glass I never noticed  
in its windows before. A woman once stood  
in the gap between garage and porch

in an earlier Street View of this house. She looked  
like my mother, though I knew it wasn't she,  
but perhaps her ghost was caught  
on the day the photo was snapped. But now,  
neither person nor ghost remains in that spot.

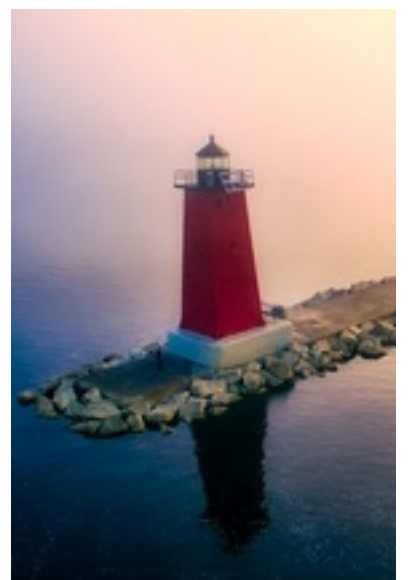
And I notice the pear tree has vanished from the yard.  
It must have gone the way the old apple tree went  
when it could no longer produce edible fruit,  
its bones chopped as food to assuage  
the hunger of a wood-burning stove in the cellar.

Even now, I often stroll through the rooms  
of that house in my dreams, work in the garden,  
trim the lawn, rake up the leaves, respond  
to my mother's shout to supper; only to discover,  
when I enter the kitchen, no one is there but me.

I wonder if another grandfather now smokes a pipe  
in an armchair in what once was my grandfather's room.  
Does he listen to every sport on the radio full-blast,  
keep the house awake with late movies at night,  
sneak a nightcap of whiskey after his snack with tea,

scuff in his slippers along the hall  
to the bathroom for a midnight pee?  
Is there a table lamp clock in his room?  
Do two schooners rotate round its base,  
pass each other when the clock strikes the hour,

then sail behind a lighthouse that can keep the time  
but could never flash a beam? Does he point  
at the clock and tell his grandson we are like  
those two ships, you and I, each of us  
on our own journey and just passing in the night?





## TRAINING FODDER FOR THE FLIES

Let's play a game on the PC.  
Let's play Armoured Assault on Mars!  
Let's play Space Alien Tank Invasion!  
Or, if you prefer, we can resurrect the Second World War  
and match Shermans against Tigers,  
Panthers against Grants or T-34s.  
Or let's play an impossible, what-if war  
and pit Leclercs against West German Leopards  
or one of today's mighty Abrams  
against a battalion of NVA from the Battle of Lang Vei.

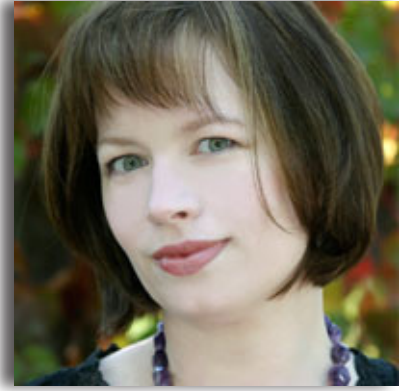
Let's aim our barrels down tunnels  
and shoot trains off tracks like rabbits in an arcade.  
Let's play Battle of the Bulge or Tank Tussle in the Sinai;  
or, better yet, we could play Race for Baghdad,  
its goal the capture of Saddam's head  
or the smashing of his statue in Firdos Square.  
So much fun, who has time to check the score?  
But, if you hear a beep, you've been hit,  
or, if it's a crash or a roar, you're dead,  
your tank just an X and a black plume of smoke  
fading out on the screen.

But you won't find yourself in a tank transformed  
into a kettle on a hob. You won't feel your flesh broiled  
when your tank is hit by an HE round  
and suffers collateral spalling.  
You won't become a puddle of liquid fat pissed out  
of the tank's roasting bladder, and you won't see  
ten thousand flies feasting on that puddle  
under the wrecked hulk of sizzling metal.  
And, though someone may invent a game with graphics like that  
or even with graphics you can feel, I doubt it would sell,  
but who knows? It just might.

And, what if, in that game, you could actually die?  
Who knows? You just might.



Jeannine Hall Gailey served as the second Poet Laureate of Redmond, Washington. She's the author of five books of poetry: *Becoming the Villainess*, *She Returns to the Floating World*, *Unexplained Fevers*, *The Robot Scientist's Daughter*, and *Field Guide to the End of the World*, winner of the Moon City Press Book Prize and the SFPA's Elgin Award. She's also the author of *PR for Poets: A Guidebook to Publicity and Marketing*. Her work appeared in journals such as *American Poetry Review*, *Notre Dame Review* and *Prairie Schooner*. Her web site is [www.webbish6.com](http://www.webbish6.com). Twitter and Instagram: @webbish6.



## LAST FLOWERS

End of September. The sunlight has turned golden,  
 shadows come early. A row of sunflowers nods  
 as the valley darkens. The last row in the light  
 are crumpling, turning to seed. I've spent too  
 much time in a hospital, away from the long  
 sunny evenings of August, the earliest signs of fall.  
 Without me, the woodpeckers continued to appear  
 each morning on a row of dead birch trees,  
 Without me, a row of dahlias, splendid,  
 bloomed in my garden, peach and pink,  
 their fireworks almost over.  
 Red and pink roses are still hearty on the shores  
 of Lake Washington – rosehips fattening on the hedge.  
 Geese honk overhead and crows are gorging on the newest grapes  
 in the winery yard, the display vines whose  
 leaves barely turn before they fall. The lavender  
 surprises us with a second blooming, their  
 smell on the air in the last light. I break off  
 a stem and crushes the buds beneath my fingers.  
 A jay screams on the pine branches, a flicker leaves  
 the chimney in a flash of orange. A pair of peacocks,  
 a charm of finches, the flash of hummingbird throats –  
 I walk slowly in the dimmer light, leaning on my cane,  
 not yet too late to enjoy the last peaches, the first apples.

## CHARMED

I.

I am often looking for charms, magic, in the stones on the ground, in the seaglass near the water. I could use some luck. There's a charm of noisy goldfinches darting back and forth on the dead birch trees. A goldfinch in a painting years ago meant resurrection - something to do with sun, with brightness. I grew up in a radioactive forest, dark, the swallows building nests for eggs heavy with cesium. Comfortable only in shaded valleys, by the light of foxfire. I am some kind of sign, a mutant outlier afraid of light. Harpies were said to fear the goldfinch. I am no harpy, but I'm thinking of training up in witchery, healing potions and such. Maybe carry some peridot or rose quartz in my pocket. I planted sunflowers for luck, outside my window, their faces reliable, turning to the light. The goldfinch lands among the yellow flowers, paying attention to crumpled petals, the seeds within. We look for hope in the trees.

II.

It was said that an Aztec god died and was reborn a hummingbird. Aztec warriors resurrected as hummingbirds in the gardens of paradise. They were worn around the neck as charms. Sometimes there are swarms of new baby hummingbirds in my garden, raucous and confused. These are also called charms. A lone hummingbird hovers close to my face, challenging me for flowers, moving me out of his turf. The hummingbird can turn his colors on and off at will, a trick of light and angle. If I could disappear or dazzle. By which I mean, enchant.





## NOVEMBER DARK

In November, the days grow dark,  
like the underside of raven's wings in shadow.  
The light that shows through thinner,  
the dawn later, twilight earlier.

In November, you can't help but remember  
death, a little row of graves in every  
mass of pinecones. The leaf skeletons  
already decaying beneath your feet.

It's wet, the wind cold, you never quite  
grow warm beneath blankets.  
Every red gleam – fire, sunset, stovetop –  
a promise unmade, a lost spark.

Someone else will tell you a story of comfort,  
the myth of spring, seeds beneath rot ready  
to be reborn. Let someone else warn you –  
the last warmth may already be past.

## HALLOWEEN, 2018

The children came to our doors as always,  
and we gave them candy, we were happy  
even though the dust of the week in our mouths still tasted  
like gunpowder and pipe bombs, like the seventies  
were still here, when there were poison scares about candy,  
bombs at synagogues, I was dressed like a small cowboy or dinosaur,  
and there were Klan marchers on our street,  
angry at other people different from them, and I  
didn't yet know to be afraid but was afraid.

I didn't know what questions to ask, yet.

The moon was just a sliver, tonight, and the clouds  
were spinning, we had ghosts dancing in front of our house,  
there were pumpkins in as many colors as we could find,  
and spider webs. We ate candy after dinner, too much.  
We did not watch any news about hate, but we watched  
a little boy dressed up as a dragon and little girls  
like princesses. We said hello and good night to our  
neighbors, and we did not ask where they were from,  
what they were doing here. We were just neighbors.  
I put on black lipstick and wore a raven on my head,  
and the children smiled at the glitter on my fingers  
under the porch lights, in the rain, and I felt for that moment  
we would all be fine, that this was my America again,  
that they could not come and take it from us by force,  
that we would resist, it would be sweet as candy,  
that the children of our neighbors could sleep and be free.

Tim Cumming is a poet, artist, journalist and filmmaker from London. He was born in a children's home in Solihull and was brought up in the West Country. His poetry collections include *The Miniature Estate* (1991), *Apocalypso* (1992, 1999), *Contact Print* (2002), *The Rumour* (2004), *The Rapture* (2011) and two collections from Australian press, Pitt Street Poetry, the art and poetry of *Etruscan Miniatures* (2012) and *Rebel Angels in the Mind Shop* (2015). A new collection *Knuckle* is due from Pitt Street Poetry in 2019. He made the acclaimed *Hawkwind: Do Not Panic* documentary for the BBC in 2007.

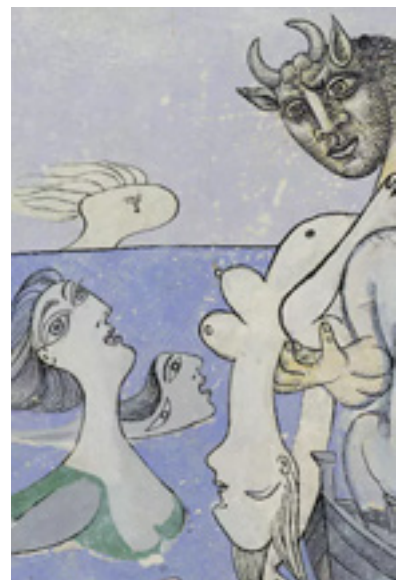


## EARTH

You've got to appreciate the atmosphere,  
a day's humid haze rising from the page,  
voices off, traffic through the night,  
candlelight on the arm of Picasso's minotaur  
lit by a child's raised light in a Mayfair gallery,  
women overlooking from the balcony  
of a lap-dancing club, ships on the blue horizon,  
the blue in the eyes of brave Ulysses minding  
the traffic, lights red, moving with purpose.  
Scooter gangs sing like sirens.  
The traveller needs a room, a telephone,  
a door to the roof, a young girl  
with her lamp, down the fire stairs  
to a back alley, sign above the door,  
a suitcase in a station locker  
and inside the case, Picasso's minotaur.

## MARS

People with hands on heads  
walk through Southwark at night  
as if hands on heads was the new thing,  
the veering van a pen in the hand  
of volatile fate scribbling down names  
over and over in random colours  
until nothing is clear except that  
it happened today and it happened here.  
What else is there to say?  
One of them said, you must stop living  
your life this way, then put the knife in.  
Now we play Simple Simon Says  
and walk away with hands on heads.  
I half-expect a second wave the next day  
or the day after that, the surge of a crowd  
as I'm passing through security,  
pressing a lanyard to the screen  
that recognises me and lets me through.  
From my work station, I know all  
the emergency exits, the flow of traffic  
down Buckingham Palace Road.  
From here it's barely a murmur.  
I don't let my thoughts wander  
further than my hands can reach.  
On the journey home, eyes down  
and half asleep, a surge of images  
rolls by like thunder. I let them pass,  
one by one. I think I might follow  
a few of them, before I leave the  
waking state, and go under.



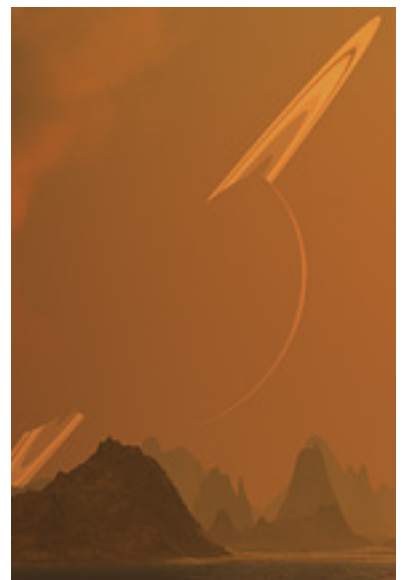


## JUPITER

I said I would keep my head straight,  
my words plain, but I can see what has fallen  
and how I seem to be falling away  
not only from you but from every narrow way  
we found and I knew what was being lost,  
because beneath us is the ground,  
it is full and tired and lets in very little light  
and I want to keep my distance from the ground  
but the laws of physics make that difficult.  
You're too busy to be interested right now,  
but on the backs of my hands  
appear the first few spots of decay.

## SATURN

The metal bending intensity  
of what was exchanged.  
It felt like penetration,  
the searing chemical kiss  
of a contact sheet rising from  
its bath in the dark room  
to flood our page with images,  
eyes adjusted to their maximum  
rate of exposure, light-sensitive  
film of longing and desire,  
the fuel of zodiac stars  
whose arrangements open books  
to those that know and see  
the signs underneath the skin.  
What we saw was the far side  
of each other, coming in from  
the outside where it is cold  
and seeking where it is most warm.



## URANUS

I am with the magician Cagliostro and his  
mistress in Paris in the autumn of 1781,  
staring up at the same spot of starry sky  
in the slide of a magic lantern.

Herschel has just discovered Uranus,  
and he is so ridiculously pleased with himself  
he could pull that fine crescent moon  
from its cloudless city sky at dusk and hang it

from the animal in his nature. Between us,  
the birds evening chorus, synesthetic distances  
blending with sirens in the etching mind.  
I check my phone. The passage of time was in dispute,

lurching from its carriage in a morning suit,  
reeling drunk from dawn to dusk  
between Cagliostro and his mistress  
dressed as double agents of love and doubt

slipping about on a treacherous slope  
where any sense of self is more subtle than a scent,  
sky hung with the planets of our nature.  
The lights of every room they came to frequent.

Climbing over the wall into the next walled garden,  
night jasmine exhales itself in one great exultation,  
Cagliostro rises and his mistress climbs behind him  
into the starry sky and I can't take my eyes from them

moving as one high above the city lights.  
What does a new body add to the system?  
Hearts turn full in the afterglow of a kiss.  
Nothing of this is visible to the naked eye.

I felt dizzy for ages, following their lengthening shadows  
into the lamplit city's nocturnal abyss until I knew  
they were gone, and I was lost. At dawn, I found  
my room, folded back the sheets. The shutters were drawn.

Whisky from the mini-bar, the flicker of a magic lantern.  
They say it will be hotter here today than it is  
in the Sahara, though I do know it grows  
very lonely and blue in the desert at night.



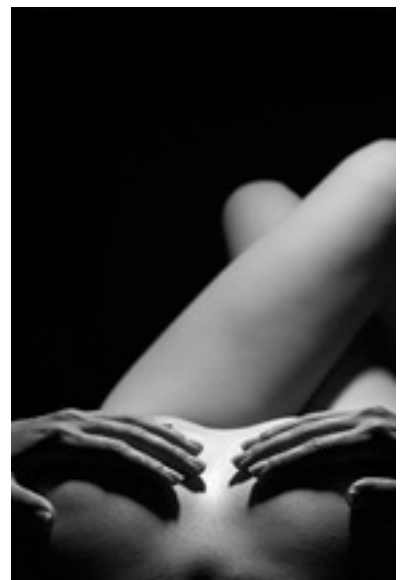


## NEPTUNE

He'd look out for her  
as if she'd be everywhere,  
stacking up signs, signals  
from distant places, all the stuff  
you'd like to hear, enough songs  
to fill an atmosphere, right up  
to the cold emptiness of space.  
Repeat to fade and the long  
night's chatter: it was like being  
stuffed into a vacuum-packed box,  
inarticulate matter and a combination  
of dead locks pressed into  
service of the human condition –  
eyes, lips, blood flow, temperature –  
stealing through every kind  
of drama that feels real when it  
passes the lips, words for songs  
casting off like ships between  
you and your significant other.  
Between us the heart's mirror,  
images roam and stretch on  
the other side of the glass  
which is where we are crawling all  
over each other, fluid in our mouths,  
the dark backing on this tarnishing  
with a brush the steady light of day.

## PLUTO

Once the mechanism had been set  
into motion it was like someone had  
turned the lights on in a hidden room  
crammed with all sorts of incredible  
acts of creation and there were chests  
of treasure glittering down there,  
things you could almost reach for  
and touch, as if they felt the very  
same emotion, but she had to offer  
them up herself or the room stayed dark  
and he'd lie in the middle of it conjuring  
the subtle formations of her mouth,  
the drawn bow of the upper lip,  
the muscle and the feeling that  
reflected each other down through  
the hall of mirrors upon which he'd  
settled himself for contemplation.



© Tim Cumming



Photograph courtesy Tim Cumming.

I was born Brendan Quinn, an amalgam of my birth father's Christian name and my 17-year-old birth mother's maiden name, in Father Hudson's Children's Home in Solihull in the winter of 1963, and became Tim Cumming, the youngest adopted child of a family of four children, growing up in Dorset to loving parents who were artists. I was later told that my birth parents had been artists, too, and that the nuns suggested the placement. So art had a hand in redirecting my identity and future life from the very start. This essay, from a manuscript called *The Re-Enchantment*, looks back to the first stories I was ever able to read, at the age of seven or eight. Fairy stories. As a remedial child, a late learner, I can still vividly see those black marks on the left hand page of the Ladybird books scurrying like insects across the page and into words – like some charm from a fairy tale ...

## WELL LOVED TALES

Some events in life remix your colours in ways you can't imagine. Mind and matter mix like pigments and it's the strong colours that bleed through. Your gravity shifts, you hear a new bass line, and your moves change. Being adopted, exchanging one name for another, is like being mugged of your identity. There's a violent wrench a long way beneath the surface and all this wreckage to deal with after the storm, except you can't classify it as wreckage because you're dealing with the basic material that makes up your life. And the most basic of all is that identity switch, the first dislocation, the unexplainable disappearance of the mother who bore you. It's the plot of a fairy tale. Sublimate it and bury it as deep as you like in anger or acquiescence but it's not going anywhere. It surrounds you, it's your wagon train. It's your story. How are you going to tell it?

The first story I ever read was Rapunzel, a Ladybird edition with watercolours on one side, 14-point text on the other. Whoever did the Ladybird watercolours were professionals of their craft. The tale is full of nasty forks and twists and I felt them all. The couple who can't have children, the wife who conceives a child and pines for the old woman's greens, the sustenance she lacks. The timorous husband who climbs the walled garden, way beyond his years, and picks the vivid salad greens from their beds of saturated colour, a colour so strong it has a life and movement of its own. His capture, their agreement. The birth of the child and its adoption by the old woman – with fairy tales, it's amazing how many foundlings and orphans and adoptees blaze in their furnace.

The old couple disappear after that. Whatever they did was irrevocable, and it was done. They cross the line then fall into a vacuum of not here, never was. The woman will pine for the witch's green rapunzel till the universe spins itself out to a series of dots and dashes. Rapunzel, Rapunzel... Let down your hair... The young beauty in the tower, the young wandering prince who climbs her tresses and makes her fat with sex and progeny. The old witch puts a measure to the girl's waist. She is the hated Second Law of Thermodynamics. "Something from nothing? You dirty little bitch!"



The pictures in my mind of the witch's garden, and the tower through the trees of the forest that the young prince sees, I'd feel them twang and vibrate and shimmer. They'd begin to move, and I'd see the old man creep through the darkness, enormous dark green leaves hanging in still air. Not a sound, not a breath of wind – and then the witch's finger.

You!

I twitched, looked up from the first story I could read, climbing the fine hair pinned by a nail and ending in dead fingers, speaking in tongues. What was the girl virgin to the old witch? And when she was swollen with child and cast out into the thorny wilderness, I saw the skulls of Golgotha in dad's painting above his bed, done some time between art school and the war. Christ on his knees at the mouth of a cave at night, black and grey but for his crimson djellaba. Dad's voice from an underworld studio.

"Rose madder." Madder from Friesland, a plant for the colour of panic and life and blood, the prince's eyes bloodied by thorns, the thorns and petals of a red briar rose. I can remember learning to read the thorny black marks into words, the prince stepping through the parting wood and looking straight at me.

And then the witch vanishes, and so does the tower, and the rapunzel. Never here, never was. Just years in the wilderness, until he hears her sing and her tears heal his sight. Remote vision: I remember the ache and terror built in to that little paragraph: "And he wandered alone for many years." So light on the tongue and the fingers, and so unendurable. I stared into the mouth of the story and never blinked. It was like staring into the mouth of a dark cave, one that had once been inhabited, and you could very faintly scent the habitation. The thorns, the prince and the old witch and the girl in the tower and the fearful husband and the greedy wife – they moved and flickered like figures on a cave wall under the light of a fat lamp. Fairy tales are the cave art of the ears and tongue. I think they are just as old, stirring in the minds of the young.

Every terror in life, and the terror of death, has been felt out first for us in fairy tales. A great scientist once acquainted them with stories for people afraid of the dark. One of his anti-religion raps. He didn't know his subject. They are instructional, not escapist. They're there to make us fear the dark, not protect us from it. Riddles wrapped inside an enigma dropped in to a well, and you hear a faint echo.

Like you're on the way to Thebes, and there's this floppy bitch with claws resting under her dugs, waiting to tear your head off and feed it to a ravenous, disc-shaped sawmill of a mouth. The name's Oedipus, and you're the original tragedy. The foundling marked by the claws of an eagle. All adoption stories pull in their thread from the labyrinth and they all end at the foot of Oedipus, the baby tossed in to the wilderness because of a promise and a curse.

"Motherfucker killed his father, sired his own brother." Kept on punching holes in his social network. He married his mother and killed his father and solved the riddle. How would my fate slot in to that mythic template?

Because they are questions loaded with weapons, riddles feature large in myths and tales and songs, like holes in a Swiss cheese. The current academic fashion is to date nothing in folklore further back than its first documentation. It's an odd twister of a position to take on an oral lineage of descent from the collective tales Carl Jung wrote about, the prince and the witch and the girl in the tower, forbidden fruits and blinding thorns. They live in a steady state, way older than written matter. It's worth noting that one of the Grimm's sources for the tales they collected was a neighbour woman who came to clean their house. Once, after telling them a tale, she returned, concerned that she had placed a word incorrectly, and in the tales she told and had heard and learnt, every word had a place as firmly fixed as the stars.

Songs, we know, are more protean; they're carried to be spilled, and one song often pours through another. The devil riddles a young boy on the road; a gentleman lover puts life-changing riddles to the beautiful young sister who will take him to her bed; The Bells of Paradise is all riddle, drenched in the musk of grail imagery.

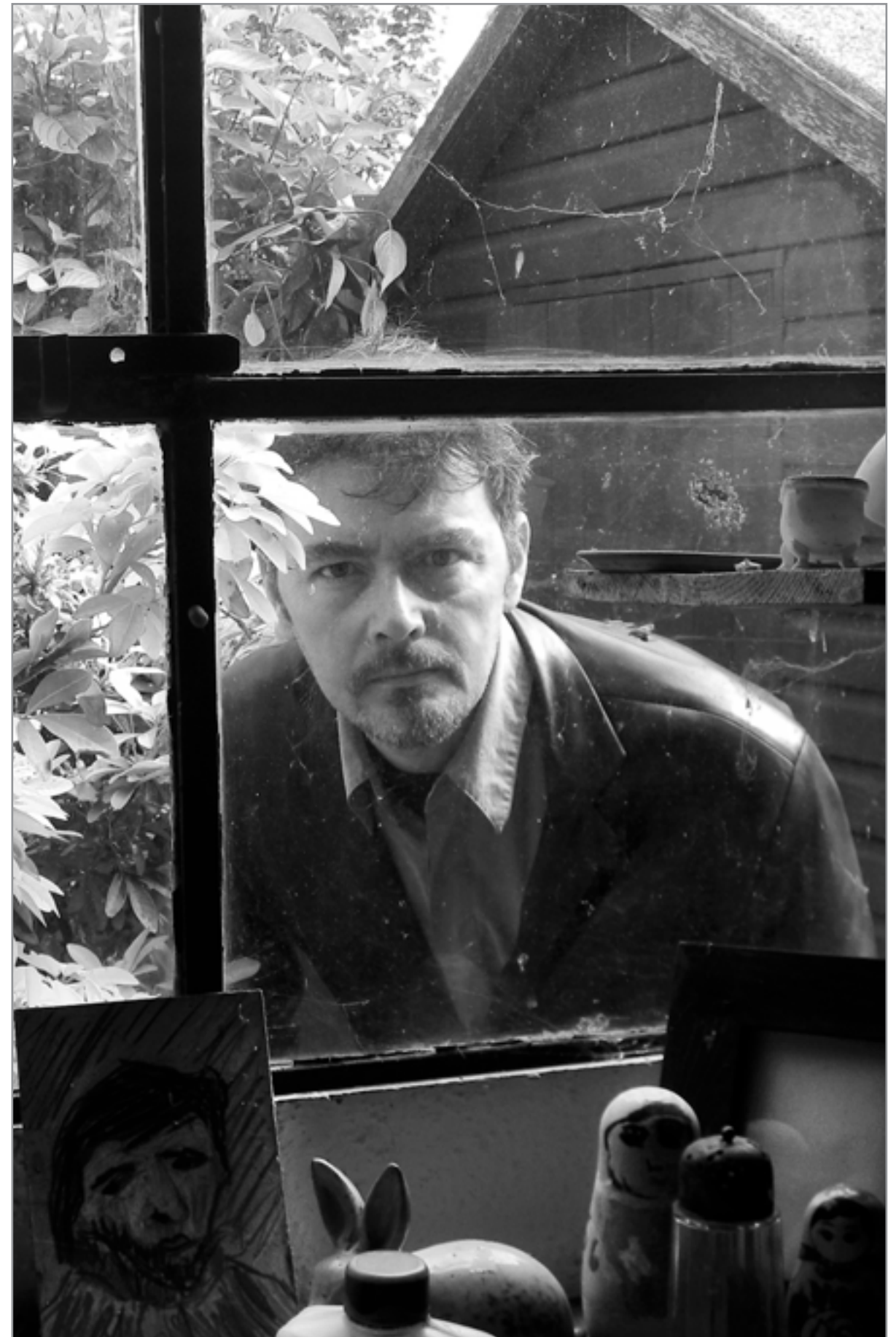


“One half runs water, the other runs blood.” John Barleycorn, dealt with as if he was one of the bog people garrotted over the peat workings of ancestral neolithics. Barleycorn finds an antecedent in the Exeter Book of Riddles, pages of which were used, some time in the 10th century, as beer mats.

So, riddle me this: did I have to kill my father and marry my mother?

“If I saw her again, I’d kill her.”

I once made good friends with Nabila, a young British Pakistani woman. She was the accountant, I was the copy writer. We were often alone in the overspill office together. There was a spark, and the same with anyone I liked, she soon learnt about my children’s home origins. “If that happened to me,” she said one day, apropos nothing in particular – she was settling some petty cash accounts for the book reps – “I would find them and kill them both.” Then she gave me a dazzling smile. Not long after that, a young accountant working on the end-of-year books nodded towards me and Nabila and murmured to his younger male colleague: “He is her comrade.” Their eyes were still and pointed. I was being watched, like the witch watched Rapunzel. A few months after that, her marriage was arranged to a dull fellow with a scratchy beard, and here comes the groom-to-be’s brother to work in the warehouse, to keep eyes on the valuable bride.

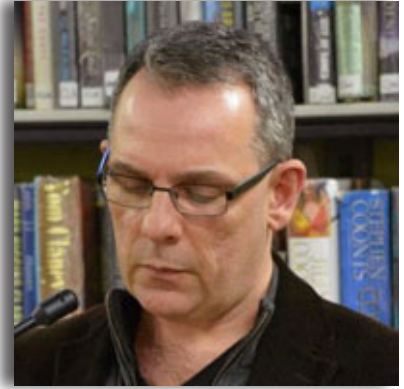


Photograph courtesy Tim Cumming.



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Graham Allen is Professor of English at University College Cork, Ireland. He has published three collections, *The One That Got Away* (2014), *The Mad-house System* (2016), *Holes: Decade 1* (2017), all with New Binary Press. He was the winner of the 2010 Listowel Single Poem Prize and has been short-listed for The Crashaw, The Strong/Shine, The Fool for Poetry, and Listowel First Collection Prize. He was included in Poetry Ireland Review's edition, *The Rising Generation*, in 2016.



## IN A TIME OF TERROR

1.

The centre of hurt is not a target,  
the idea of hate is your own hostage.

Lack of faith makes the idea of God,  
no one with hands can injure your soul.

If the world turns right, face towards the sun,  
indemnities do not hold in the dark.

The loudest scream disappears in the morning,  
even the crows know what you have betrayed.

Take a pillow and smother your conscience,  
the heart of your peace is a ticking sports bag.

The logic you live by has failed its repeats,  
even the mountains cannot conceal you.

On a cloudless day you still hear the rain,  
fear has abolished all silence in you.

If they pleaded with you, you would still play dumb,  
effigy on a stick in the market square.

*continued overleaf*

Hands of a mannequin.



IN A TIME OF TERROR *continued*

2.

I have put my face in front of the sun,  
nothing you can say will save you from time.

The sea drums on a wall of distance,  
the Earth laughs at your arcane cravings.

The book you have all your life imagined  
is trickling away from your memory,

like the sand in which it was originally written,  
mad constellations steering the drifts.

We had been told we would rival the heavens,  
that the age of wandering would come to an end,

the blinded and tortured children of the world  
gathered like angels into congregated song.

We had been told we would re-enter the citadel,  
the animals waiting with their names intact.

Meanwhile, in this new created desert,  
strange birds pick at the unquiet dead,

as melancholic creatures temper their flight,  
waiting patiently for something to drop.

We are not scribes of salvaged fragments,  
or skilled rhetoricians released from the heights,

we are not fanatics, charismatics or evangelicals,  
alien voices inhabiting our throats,

we have no cures, no magical phrases,  
we are simply believers, belated and bereft,

cowering as lightning forks into the prayer room,  
silent in the face of inevitable death.

*continued overleaf*



IN A TIME OF TERROR *continued*

3.

You will not be seeing any stars tonight,  
the weather you ordered has been discontinued.

The wind is up, the clouds have spawned shadows,  
the sun has been dragged to another zone of space.

Knowledge lies smothered in a bombed-out schoolyard,  
what was once good in us is hardened into ice.

This is an age of inertia,  
Gnosis is our only feasible goal,

the one consolation as the big ships go down,  
bleak insight on the storm battered heights.

If we set out now towards the West,  
hope and necessity set in our jaws,

we would not confront our better selves returning  
with blazing eyes and magnificent descriptions.

Put those notions aside, they do not concern you now;  
now is the time to be resolute.

From this moment on you are being scrutinised,  
your every movement set down in the records.

Someone keeps hitting the restart button.  
You are in a loop at the end of an LP.

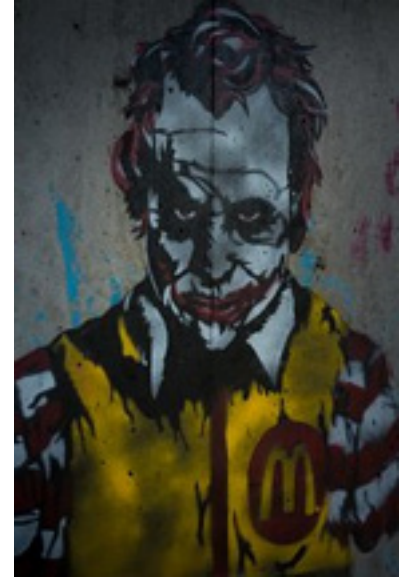
The children you intended to bear  
are inventing illicit torture practices.

The family relations you never forged  
are enflaming a new generation to war.

When they bombed the mosque in the middle of prayers,  
someone was heard calling out your name.

Tonight you will watch as the oil wells burn,  
and listen to cant about sovereign nations.

*end*



## THE NAUGHTIEST THING YOU EVER DID

If truth be known, we would have all our children  
run through fields of ripened wheat,  
free to express themselves  
in the sheer joy of their infinite innocence,  
in a natural world we have finally freed  
from the slavery and scalding pollution  
of mindless business and industrial insult,  
unaware of nightmare cityscapes,  
where masses of the hopeless and abandoned  
weep through their lonely, malformed lives  
in bitter images of uncultivated desire.

None of us believed you anyway.

No, the naughtiest thing you ever did  
was to fritter away the power we gave you  
in playground squabbles with friends and neighbours,  
clinging to your office like a child to its mother  
as you enter the overcrowded passenger ferry,  
toughened by a thousand fruitless voyages,  
spitting like a brat at those who cross you,  
never once stopping at the well of goodness,  
pulling everything and everyone down with you,  
unwilling to halt your mad dash into the void.

## AMERICAN REQUIEM

The out of work actor  
in a Ronald Macdonald costume

is no longer able to hold up the world,  
as he strokes his glistening submachine-gun

and thinks about what high school to visit.  
Lincoln squats and shits on his monument.

The Rushmore dolls hold their heads in shame.  
Emma Goldman buys a pink tutu

before throwing her dancing shoes in the river.  
Walt Whitman paper cuts himself to death.

Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground  
write a song about teeny-bopper day dreams.

The cast of The Brady Bunch drive to Death Valley,  
roasting themselves into non-existence.

Elvis, who for all these years has lived in the mountains,  
cuts off his tongue and feeds it to chipmunks.

Eleanor Roosevelt sets light to her hairdo.  
Rocky Marciano punches himself unconscious.

Amelia Earhart sells her bi-plane on eBay  
and takes to digging elaborate tunnels.

Donald Duck, clutching a Colt 45,  
shoots himself into a world without pencils.

## WE DEMAND VICTORY

after Emerson

With one hand clasping a bar of soap,  
he puts the Passion behind him,  
all sacrifice itself,  
outmoded obeisance and cull.

He washes away the years,  
the death camps still to come,  
the Bomb out-trope,  
the gates unguarded,

the schoolyard clear of guns,  
drawing a direct, irrefutable line  
between the idea of sin  
and money's crass dominion.

He inspires vision, poetry,  
heliotropic travel,  
the search for a sweeter,  
more habitable garden.

Wise men cannot stand his smile.  
Politicians avoid him.  
Babes in arms gurgle  
at the softness of his voice,

imagining angels at the door,  
the radiance around their parents  
dancing away like sprites  
into a night that never darkens,

and the apple trees burning  
with a pure blue heat, its fruit  
in their golden, outstretched palms,  
all power transformed to play.







Photograph Pixabay.

Joel Deane is poet, novelist, journalist and speechwriter. He has published one non-fiction book, two novels, and three collections of poetry. His most recent poetry collection, *Year of the Wasp* (2016), won the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize and was a finalist for the John Bray Poetry Award, the Judith Wright Calanthe Award and the Prime Minister's Literary Award. He has also been a finalist for the Walkley Award, the Melbourne Prize for Literature and the Anne Elder Award. Deane lives in Melbourne.



## WHAT WE SAW

'A rushing, not a wind; different from a wind.  
A white noise, you could call it, like a pressure;  
if pressure could make a noise that is what it would sound like.  
Flames so high; the height of the trees and that again.  
Big, swirling vortexes, swirling masses of flames that burst  
and exploded.'

*What we saw.*

'Went outside again, could hear this almighty roar.  
It was the fire. It sounded like a steam train getting louder by the second.  
I saw my neighbour fly past, beeping her horn like crazy.'

*What we saw.*

'Looked in the rear-view mirror; everything behind me was blacker than night.  
Spot fires were burning around the pony club. Parked at the CFA  
near the public toilets. Outside the police station a four-wheel drive  
with a trailer full of motorbikes exploded. I could hear gas bottles  
exploding all around.'

*What we saw.*

'Everything went pitch black  
and embers like barbecue coals were landing on the car.  
The petrol station blew up. The vet clinic blew up. Trees exploded.  
I could see a man standing on the roof of the hotel in shorts and thongs,  
attempting to douse embers with buckets of water.'

*What we saw.*

'An injured lady. Her feet burnt, her shoes burnt off. Her husband and dog dead.  
Someone broke into the doctor's surgery and took morphine and other painkillers for  
her. Later the surgery exploded.'

*continued overleaf*



WHAT WE SAW *continued**What we saw.*

‘It went golden all around the house. Through every window in the house it was golden.’

*What we saw.*

‘Out the window was a solid column of smoke. That column of smoke was thousands of feet high. Had the sun directly behind it, had white edges to it, but a lot of colour, a red-ochre smoke.’

*What we saw.*

‘The house filled with smoke. It got darker and darker. We were starting to pass out. The smoke was easy, like an anaesthetic. I was going under.’

*What we saw.*

‘If I didn’t get out I was going to die. Grabbed my mobile, grabbed my handbag, tried to grab my files. Grabbed one dog—tried to get the others out—they wouldn’t come. My car was untouched. I took a punt.’

*What we saw.*

‘We had a two-year-old. We had to come inside. We shut all the doors. I got all the ice and stuff out of the fridge, put it on the floor, put the baby there.’

*What we saw.*

‘They were dead. She was screaming so I had to try and distract her to keep her calm.’

*What we saw.*

‘He was twelve. He was just wanting to get out and run, and so we had to try and keep him from going hysterical and running outside.’

*What we saw.*

‘We had the kids in the bathroom, had all the windows sealed with wet towels around the house. Filled the bath, because that’s where the children were going to stay,

in the bathroom, with the dogs.’

*What we saw.*

‘We went to two other houses down the road. As they burnt, we grabbed the kids and that house’s occupants and moved on to the next one. The big brick one on the left-hand side, that’s where we finally took refuge. She had a room underneath the house, so we put all the kids in there and all the animals. There were kids and dogs and cats everywhere. And we went out to fight the fire.’

*Commissioned by the Victorian Government to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Black Saturday fires that killed 173 people on February 9, 2009. The quotations are edited transcripts of survivor interviews.*

*Note: CFA stands for the Country Fire Authority.*

## ALL THAT REMAINS

And after the worst day?  
What then?  
What monument could possibly make amends?  
What prayer forgive? What hymn forbid?  
What silent moment forget?

There is no easy answer to these questions,  
just the hard truth that the world that is  
is borne out of the ashes of the world  
that *was*.  
And the rolling thunder fire—  
that great uncreator—  
still burns within us all  
like dark matter aflame.

Unless contained, this fire can  
hollow out a person;  
burn skin from the inside out;  
make ghost flames dance across  
bedroom ceilings; spiral into darkness  
towers of smoke that hold no signal,  
only rage.

The only answer, then,  
all that remains,  
is our duty to live  
this day we are given—  
then live the next.

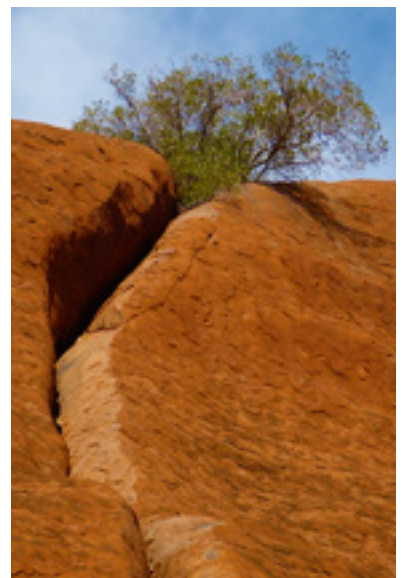
*Commissioned by the Victorian Government to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Black Saturday bush fires that killed 173 people on February 9, 2009.*

## AUSTRALIA DAY

The child climbs  
the ancestral sofa,

Runs a hand over  
soft stolen leather,

Unfolds a virgin blade







## JANUARY, 2017

Lazy Melbourne days  
of ice-cream & sunscreen.  
The city rising from  
its beach towel to bake  
at the tennis, bask  
in cool darkness  
before a film.

It is January again.

Fishermen haul  
yellow-peril bikes  
from the latte Yarra.  
Children cram late nights  
before school starts.  
Grownups strain to make  
New Year bodies remember  
December clothes.

It is January again.

Beneath a clear sky  
paved to fit Hoddle's grid,  
the incoming crowd  
maps with thong & shoe  
the bluestone & sticky  
bitumen of Bourke Street.  
Concrete bollards stand guard.

It is January again.

And I see walking  
with them six faces without  
shadows. Hear six names  
spoken without reply.  
As pedestrian lights click-  
clack green without stopping  
to answer why.

It is January again.

*Commissioned by the Victorian Government to commemorate the first anniversary of the car attack that killed six and injured 27 in Bourke Street, Melbourne, on January 20, 2017.*

© Joel Deane



Cathy Altmann is a poet, teacher and violinist from Melbourne, Australia. Her first collection, *Circumnavigation* (Poetica Christi Press, 2014), won the FAW Anne Elder Award. Her second collection, *things we know without naming* (Poetica Christi Press) was published in December 2018. Cathy's poetry has appeared in journals, anthologies, *The Disappearing* website and on Melbourne's trains as part of the *Moving Galleries* project. She holds a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Melbourne and currently teaches English and Latin at Presbyterian Ladies' College, Melbourne.



## LASCIA CH'IO PIANGA

In that ease of encores, she  
is singing from memory.  
So familiar, even the man  
nearby moans along. The cellist  
has freed his fingers, eyes closed.  
The violinist looks upwards  
as if she knows this moment  
might be holy. The day  
over, birdsong in  
the branches, and men  
and women pulled into  
the soprano's weeping  
cadences. An ache  
moves along my cheek  
bone. I see the singer loosen  
her hands, the grief  
of every woman spilling  
out. The Italian  
like filigree, etched  
onto each note, her  
body holding  
back the sweet  
danger in her throat –

the intimacy of  
bow against string,  
the harpsichordist's  
fingers elaborating  
those last echoes  
of her song, which is  
the wild bird we have  
kept caged too long,  
the tears we never  
shed, the impossible  
sound of shells and  
the breaking of birth.  
She is unburdened  
and we are undone –  
our eyes speaking  
the one seamless  
song.

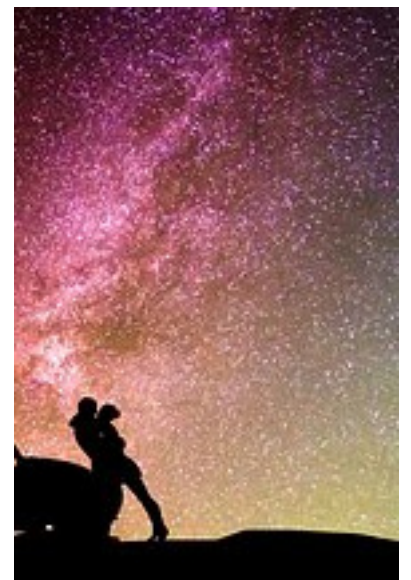
Photograph Pixabay.

## CEASEFIRE

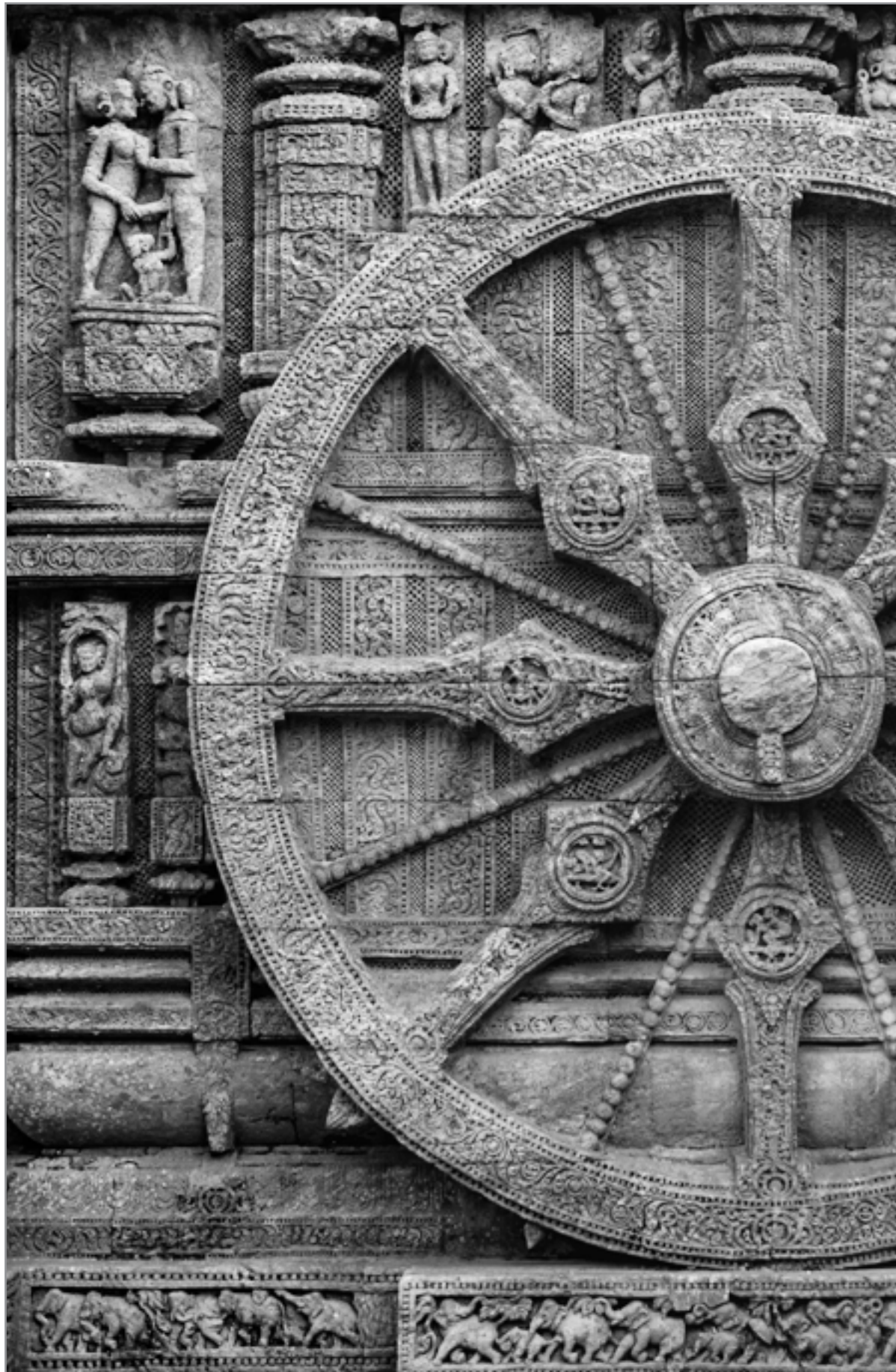
Only the first peace  
lasts. After that it is  
one continuous war,  
broken only by smoke,  
broken only by burying  
the dead. People speak  
different languages but  
mean the same, as they  
drag the bodies onto  
stretchers, move them  
away in armoured cars,  
and deposit them in graves  
on the hillside. The white  
crosses fly like flocks  
of doves, cast adrift  
in the sky but keeping  
their formation. They  
shadow the land below,  
they rain hopeless tears,  
they speak in tongues.

## OVER FIFTY

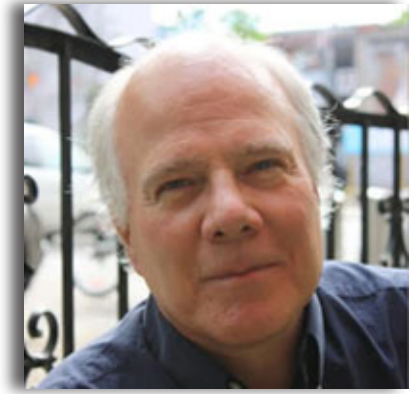
The instinct for survival.  
Those cacti we planted  
out the back of the  
worker's cottage in Carlton.  
We pranced on the couches  
to U2, cooked rhubarb  
and collapsed conspiratorially  
over the dishes. Drinking cider  
and dealing with administration,  
we meet at a café. Jasmine  
threads the iron fence.  
Her eyes still widen; she calls  
me matey. Over coffee the fond  
toasting of each other's parents,  
the pitfalls of growing  
up, over fifty, our next  
holiday in Italy. What the sun  
hasn't done to our cheeks,  
our violins curling up at the seams  
(near the Viking Saddle we sung  
under stars; the mountains  
hung like curtains around us).  
When we step out it  
is night. Sharp as pain  
we kiss goodbye.







Hugh Hazelton is a Montreal writer and translator who has written four books of poetry, including *Antimatter* (Broken Jaw Press, 2nd edition, with CD, 2010), and whose work has appeared in reviews in Canada, the US, Mexico, Chile and Spain. He translates poetry and prose from Spanish, French and Portuguese into English. He is a professor emeritus of Spanish at Concordia University in Montreal and former co-director of the Banff International Literary Translation Centre.



## TEMPLES

we walked together through the temples of Khajuraho  
lost in the dust of the plains of the Yamuna  
the sides of the monumental stone pinnacles  
sculpted with scenes of sexual union in dozens of positions  
and combinations, gods or people bending, embracing, coupling elegantly  
with *Apsaras* attending, helping them hold their positions, twining around pillars  
or simply looking on, combing their hair, glancing into mirrors, smiling or bemused  
as the deity couples bonded converging in *maithuna* to achieve tantric transcendence,  
uniting transmitting spontaneous cells fusing adoring blending duality into a single being  
returning to the act of creation in search of ecstatic catharsis pulsation through pleasure  
their faces focussed serenely joyful smiling lovingly joining together to be transported to new worlds  
becoming one within the other in the completion of the universe  
all from the tenth to twelfth centuries  
and as we left you stopped to adjust your sandal, like an *Apsara* removing a thorn from her foot  
and that night we felt it possible, and like them we combined our bodies and beings  
making love in those same positions and feeling closer than ever before  
together alone in the vast night of India, journeying on  
until Surya the sun god would awake and pick us up once more  
and carry us off to the coast of Orissa  
in his twenty-four-wheeled chariot to the temples of Konarak  
which had similar statues doing similar things  
carved into its sides that were once sixty metres high  
and later that one last temple visit to a place of living pilgrimage  
near land's end at the tip of Tamil Nadu,  
the Ramanathaswamy, with a giant seething gopuram  
rising abruptly above the seashore palms  
and its hall of twelve hundred and twelve massive pillars  
supporting a vast green and orange ceiling of tigers and mandalas  
all leading to the centre of activity  
the great basalt lingam of Shiva  
rising out of Shakti's enfolding yoni  
where women with flowers in their hair  
anoint the smooth stone with sacred butter sprinkled with petals  
that runs down its fluted sides and pools onto the lips of the awaiting circle  
and that night we held each other forever  
our temples touching

By Subhrajyoti07 - CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=64178581>



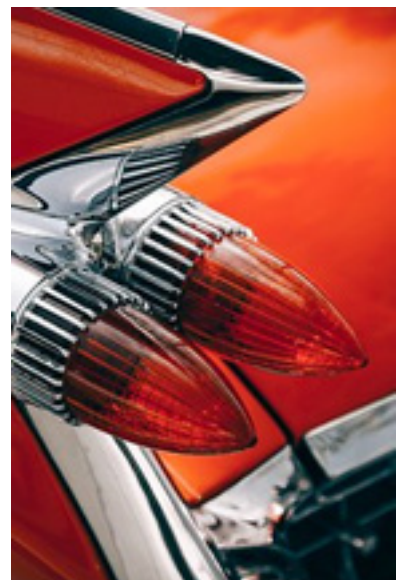
Ken Meisel is a poet and psychotherapist from the Detroit area. He is a 2012 Kresge Arts Literary Fellow, Pushcart Prize nominee, and the author of *Mortal Lullabies* (FutureCycle Press: 2018), *The Drunken Sweetheart at My Door* (FutureCycle Press: 2015), *Scrap Metal Mantra Poems* (Main Street Rag: 2013), *Beautiful Rust* (Bottom Dog Press: 2009.) His work in over 100 national magazines including *Rattle*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *Concho River Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Origins Journal*, *The Bookends Review*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Lake Effect*.



## THE EROTICS OF MEN, WOMEN AND CARS (A SYNOPSIS)

Men choose women like they select  
their cars. They look for beauty,  
for sexy seating and for a smoothness  
of fit. Woman choose their men  
like they choose their cars. They desire  
some perfectible durability in their driveway,  
some dependability with a power drive.  
Contrary to history, men and women  
want it all new. Every single time.  
And they long to awaken within themselves,  
between two bucket seats of a car –  
say, a 64' Pontiac, its fierce lynx face,  
and its long rectangular bronze fire pose  
driving fast as a bullet to the edge of a ridge.  
Cars, men and women seek open road,  
some diorama where infinity can be sought.  
Some animated light where – in the dark –  
they can turn on their lovelights.  
Dial up their radios and listen to tunes  
like *Whole Lotta Love* or *Unchained Melody*  
or even *Turn on Your Love Light*  
while they oppose and collect each other  
into that hot intentionality of lust and passion.

Men adore their women's curves  
like they lust after car fenders. Some demure  
curving, where they can run hard hands over.  
Women love their men for what kind  
of transmission they can bring.  
Some hot seed of loyalty, with moveable  
gears, like a power drive transmittal of heart.  
Women want a dude and a viewpoint:  
a car that *lasts* over the long haul. That drives  
forward, into every creative circumstance.  
We're just gear and valve body; we're  
action and momentum. Men and women  
are like two complimentary elements –  
they don't belong to the same highway.  
An artist drew them here, to hitchhike.  
Thumbs out, eager eyes looking, waiting.  
And, in some convertible, top down,  
they haul on, a set of sovereign wheels –  
into that inevitable sprawl of grace.





## 1957 CHEVROLET 150 TWO DOOR SEDAN

*for Dale Batsford*

Surf Green and dusty, and quietly retired in a one-door  
garage shaded by massive oak trees on the tired,

faithless end of Detroit's far west side, the Chevy  
was box-shaped, with a hawkish set of headlights

glaring above an over-confident front grill that wore  
chrome lips that mouthed the famous GM emblem –

ensconced like a racing medal in the center – and  
a set of embedded metal rockets, cut into its hood.

And, those explicit, fierce, cut angled rear tailfins  
that imitated a set of shark fins so that when you

ran your fingers across them, you could *feel* the car's  
hard metallic edge, and the style by which it sliced

the air above it as it soared forward; no wonder it  
was the year's top hot rod. No wonder, when Dale

told us brothers that it was stored in his grandfather's  
garage, that I pushed and pushed to get us into it.

What is a car that understands its own possibilities  
and its physical limits? That becomes philosophical,

anthropomorphic, like it's some unlimited metal  
and chrome-adorned in-line six cylinder *personage* –

motorized by improvisation and by brute force?  
We boys idolized it, like we'd glorify an athlete.

\*

*Heidegger:* A work of art makes public something  
other than itself: it is an allegory. *A thing-in-itself.*

*Barthes:* cars today are almost the exact equivalent  
of great Gothic Cathedrals; conceived in passion;

driven by a population that appropriates them  
as a magical object. Well, that old man – Dale's

grandfather, Sidney, in the silent dust of his home,  
didn't even realize what kind of art object he had.

I'd stand there, star-struck at the open garage door,  
in some instrumental grasp of art: American art.

The quiet men who designed this car from clay  
must have had some intimate knowledge of death

and eternity: they must have fought with sin –  
with loam and silt – and they must have faced

death on an eerie two-lane highway, and shaped  
an authentic thing. Isn't that the ceremony, *of art?*

Some recessed corner of me knew I was hungry  
for the liturgy – the *rite* – of American auto art.

\*

*continued overleaf*



1957 CHEVROLET 150... *continued**for Dale Batsford*

We'd stand there, hands around a transistor radio,  
 mouthing the lyrics to Alice Cooper's *I'm Eighteen*.

We all thought by listening to it, that song, we'd *be it*,  
 forever. That we'd abolish the fixed boundaries.

All I could dream about was getting into that car's  
 front seat, and hauling my boyhood into a man.

And, when Sidney let us boys finally drive it,  
 I slipped behind the big, curved steering wheel,

and I departed down the road in it, in a kind  
 of frenzied madness, demanding a sliced corner

of the road and track's little cosmos for myself.  
 A sculpture by Henri Moore? Something static?

No, a torch in the dark opening of the world –  
 where right on through it we drove, madly alive.

## 1971 GRAN TORINO (YOUNG BOYS INTO MEN)

*for Jeff Poleno*

Rust-colored to resemble a gun's bullet,  
 this Gran Torino – so packed with boys

not ready yet to be men – rolled  
 torpid and hot down Lahser Road,

the radio, jacked up and booming  
 loud with Kung Fu Fighting

and one of us hauling off, punching  
 the other for missing just one word.

What makes a boy proud to be alive?  
 To be only what he is, and nothing else?

Inside the car's engine, worlds roared  
 and sputtered. We'd watch the belts

spiral around like transported filament  
 or a future, becoming triumphant,

as each one of us, silent in our self,  
 worried how we'd drive on, away.

Wired, we'd clip on, pumping out  
 what songs we had to be powerful,

while the happy summer night  
 danced and faded in zest and imagery.

Laughter defended us against those  
 unaccustomed inner thoughts –

*continued overleaf*

1971 GRAN TORINO... *continued**for Jeff Poleno*

those that broke us, ever so slightly,  
and turned us aslant, guarded with

each other. And the ineffable, always  
hiding within the car's smooth contour,

flirted worse than the girls with us,  
and we'd start drinking to stave it off.

And once, when my friend told me  
he'd made a decision for himself,

I knelt down to pull dead grasshoppers  
from the front grill, hiding my sorrow.

And the girls that ended up with us  
wore small hoop earrings, and they

dug themselves down and good into us.  
Pretended to extol religious imagery

as they broke themselves wide open.  
Maybe infatuation hides a deeper valor,

and we practice it, this infatuation,  
until valor, like an inner torque, finds

a way in. Do we catch this, via a car?  
Maybe the road is where the idea

of sacrifice and bravery captures us –  
turns us into men inside a car made

of perfume and glazed light and a girl's  
soft, clementine skin, her sweet mouth

full of sex and innocence and risk.  
When I kissed her, she went dark,

and pulled my hands all over her  
in a fervor. Then later, after we left,

inside that car I held a boy as he cried,  
leaving for the Navy. Never more

did I love a boy so brave and true  
as that.



## 1953 CHEVROLET (PROPOSAL)

His first car, a 53' Chevrolet.  
The front end boasted fierce chrome fret work  
and two massive, wide awake head lights.  
Dinah Shore called it "a glamorous new star,"  
about the prettiest one she'd ever saw.  
Woodland Green, it stole the night's parade.

Its three-speed manual transmission  
and a rounded roof line made it seem  
elegant, serene. The big dashboard glowed

like an altar in a chapel. In the front seat  
of the car – behind the steering column –  
they sat together, under a bed  
of dandelion stars and the whole universe's  
sweeping glacial stream.

Owls hooted in the silhouetted trees  
and far off, they could listen to the night's  
hallucinatory meridians, parting the clouds.

The song, *Sentimental Journey*, drifted in  
and out of the night's angelic, lawless signal.  
One star glistened on the hood ornament.

Love – because it is a large bird with big eyes –  
disappeared and let these two small  
human starlings do their very best.  
When he asked for her hand in marriage,

she followed him like a bird, accepting his  
solo line of flight. In the twilight glaze,  
her wedding ring resembled a silver meteor.

Her eyes sparkled like champagne.  
Her soft lips, reddened, rose to kiss him.  
Some part of what was wild in him,  
thick with jazz, quieted; it went dormant

like a vireo's call. Just like it always does –  
when you sit beside the prettiest damn  
song bird you ever saw.





## 1974 FORD LTD BROUGHAM (DIVORCE)

Sky Blue, he'd purchased it shortly after he crashed  
the 72' Ford. Its continuous grill expanded wide

through the car's face, and it framed the dual head lights.  
And the tasteful rear end too, was an embankment

of red lights that squared into the main tail lights –  
and in the center, a nice stenograph LTD. Ford

even ran a thin aluminum line down the contour –  
like the old days. The year they divorced – after so

long married – he figured consolation separates us  
from affliction, and so he moved to Florida, and she

moved on with her life, clear sighted, with a little  
peace in grabbing what was left of the everything,

even though she'd have to work to make a living.  
Readied, we drove him down to Florida, the car like

one thread left over from two souls breaking free  
of attachment. What is it, to separate from love?

If prayer incorporates one thing in the many, than to be  
sad is to fling away what was inside, out again, to be

rid of it: like an arrow flung away by the archer.  
Maybe love's archer stows his arrows and, until it

ends, love's languor, he keeps flinging them inside two  
until – at last – one arrow misses the other person,

and love, so green, yellows, and the arrow flies out  
and down into stones, into lax water, or mud cake.

We drove through Florida, found the silver sea.  
Heard Patsy Cline's, *I Fall to Pieces* as we drove

him to his doorstep. And we called her up north –  
to tell her we'd arrive again to her, in one piece.





The Mozart family on tour: Leopold, Wolfgang, and Nannerl. Watercolor by Carmontelle, ca. 1763.

Liz McSkeane born in Scotland and has lived in Dublin since 1981. She is an award-winning novelist, poet and short story writer. Her début novel, "Canticle", was a winner in the Irish Writers' Centre Novel Fair, 2016; in 1999, she won the Hennessy New Irish Writer of the Year. Liz has three poetry collections and she is the founder and director of Turas Press. Liz holds a PhD in Education and consults on education policy for organisations in Ireland and Europe.



## LEOPOLD'S VIOLIN

*Vienna, 1st May, 1785.*

My dearest sister,

He is gone at last and although I should not rejoice at this parting from our father, I own that I am glad of it. He took the mailcoach this morning at first light and should be home in Salzburg by nightfall of the day after tomorrow. God grant that his journey be less arduous than the last – he will not forget those dreadful days of sleet and snow he endured when first he came. Perhaps he longed to see his grandchild, mindful that he never saw the first. Carl is big and bonny and we are thankful for it. Constanze remembers still your words of comfort during those terrible days when we lost our little Raimundo. She kisses your hands and asks when we may see you here in Vienna with your new husband.

Our father is greatly failed. You will not, I think, find him the better for his time with us. It is true that in the early days, he accompanied us to concerts and theatres and was much delighted and amazed at the admiration and respect shown me here wherever I go. Only in Salzburg do people lack taste and generosity but I do not blame them, for they are under the thumb of that idiot prince of the Holy Roman Empire, so much that no-one dares advance or even praise me. Here in Vienna there are those who know music and understand what I can do and also, those who understand nothing but are charmed by my work without knowing why; and both types are to be found amongst the common people as well as in the ranks of the highest in the land. It would greatly surprise me if our father has not already told you of my playing on his first night here. I wish you could have seen his tears of joy when the Emperor himself waved his hat at me and cried, "Bravo, maestro!" In truth, I had not seen papa so happy and proud since those days in the streets of Verona and Bologna when the people and the *magisteri* of the Academies, too, hailed this "dulcissimo puero," a "vero Orfeo" - your little brother, who dazzled the Pope himself with his tricks.



Well, my sister, that was long ago. For a short time, as the snow began to melt, I thought I felt our father's coldness thaw and even wondered if he might forgive me all the wrongs he sees in my behaviour, even if I do not always see them for myself. Since first I had to make my way from court to court without his steady hand, what have I done (my music excepted) that has not met with his disapproval and disappointment?

Court positions lost, money squandered, wrong company kept and the wrong wife chosen. A youth and then a man who beggared his family so that his poor father has to go about in tatters, his morning coat in shreds with holes in the shoes he cannot mend because all is gone to keep his feckless son who amuses himself in Munich or Mannheim or Paris or anywhere there are theatres and good living to be found. The sacrifices, the efforts brought to nought, the careful training in the rules of composition, the introductions to people who might help us – what would the boy have been, if not for all that? And what is he now, having thrown it all away on flatterers and a scheming little wife who cannot spell?

Well, now he sees that the wastrel has made his mark. Here in Vienna no-one cares what the Archbishop of Salzburg thinks. Here, the opinion of men like Herr Haydn carry real weight. Did you know, the *maestro* spoke most highly of me to our father. He came to my own house to honour me and led us in one of his own quartets, for which our father played the violin! That, I think, was father's last good night with us. The company and the praise for both of us were meat and drink to him and I was obliged to hear once more variations on the old speeches he used to make when strangers would stop us to shake hands in the street: "O yes, indeed this is my son, as you say a true Orpheus, no, the clavier was first, then he heard his papa practise and off he went with the violin and since then has not left it from his sight... yes Your Grace is right, he is a grand little fiddler, just like his father."

As well you know, my sister, this is how it was, and worse. For so long I have been his work, his life, his life's work, his creature, his puppet, his plaything, his instrument. For so long he has played me as he plays that wretched violin, no matter the distance between us, for every mailcoach brings a quiver of well-aimed words that pluck at me and

strain my gut on all manner of things. You will stay in the Archbishop's employ. You must return to Salzburg. The state of your linen requires attention. Will you cut your beard or no?

No more. These last few years I am renewed – I am no fiddler now. The docile little fellow, resplendent in the cast-offs of the Crown Prince, ever happy to climb upon some lady's lap, be patted on the head and called her "little man," then run off to the clavier to amaze – he is no more. In his place is a man, like himself, with wife and baby of his own and money in his pocket and friends and patrons of his own choosing and success of his own making.

After the night of Herr Haydn's quartet, father fell into a melancholy from which he never really roused himself. He felt tired, he said, was not equal to all our engagements and in any case did not find the company congenial. So we left him to his own amusements. And soon the sharpness of his tongue and eye returned. You would have praised me, Nannerl, for my restraint in the face of his scoldings and recommendations – that I must meet this choirmaster, that I should court that conductor, that now I am successful I must make hay and seize the opportunity to sup with some lackey of the Grand Duke and wear my best silk suits and my grandest rings and my Golden Spur and make a deeper bow.

Those are the things he says. Then there are the things he does not say, the words he thinks but does not utter, quite. They spill from the swelling of his silences – the inspections which take a careful note of the sluttishness of our maid, the grubbiness of the baby, the dust on the floor, the excessive strength of our punch and the copious quantities in which we drink it and finally, a most eloquent sigh which noisily concludes that Emperor's hat or no, the lad did not amount to much.

I have no more heart for an open quarrel than ever I did. This has perhaps been my error all along. But these last years of separation have greatly strengthened me and I no longer try to guess his moods or cloak my wishes and desires in terms which I imagine him willing to accept. And yet, Nannerl, although what lies between us is so much the same as ever it was, the strangest thing, the one thing different is, the man we knew, our father, Leopold. For he is gone.



The stern, kind guide we knew when we were small, he vanished long ago. And now the man who plucked and still would try to pluck my strings – he too has disappeared. Last night he spilt his wine at table – the hand that always drew a steady bow was trembling. He saw I noted it, and was ashamed. This morning when I helped him to his carriage he faltered, and for the first time in – how many years! I grasped his arm. It was but skin and bone. Our father – his upright bearing, those long limbs, the terrifying thin lips, hardened in a line that so often signalled the descent of a thunderous silence like a storm that could last for hours or even days, when I would grasp your skirts and whisper, “Why is papa angry?” And you would clasp my hand and hush me and explain he was not angry, but sad and disappointed. O, never was there comfort or music on earth or in heaven to fill a soul, the way his silent disappointments filled my soul!

When did his eyes grow clouded and rheumy? When did his breath grow short and his step begin to falter? Where is the thundering silence that frightened me so? If I were afraid (and I am not) and were I minded to be angry (which I do not think I am) there is now no-one there to fear, no-one to receive my anger, but a poor scarecrow in our father's shoes. It is not fair. When did this old man take his place? How many fathers can one man survive?

I have frightened Constanze with my rantings. But do not worry that your brother loses himself entirely in reproaches and self-pity, for out of these sad thoughts I have made a little something. This morning, very early, after I had left our father to his coach, I found hanging on a nail in the linen cupboard the violin he had made for me when first I played as a child. It was dusty and a spider had spun her web in the strings. I took a cloth, made her homeless and drew the bow once or twice. You will not be surprised if I tell you that a little theme peeped out which, after I had coaxed awhile, revealed itself a little more. And so it always goes, I tempt, it tiptoes out, I entice and soon it takes me for a stroll along a glorious secret pass, where worries cannot reach.

Yet even as I resolve to follow my theme and forget the lonely journey which our father makes, a curious thing occurs. Instead, today my music guides me very gently to his side. The rattling of the carriage over rough terrain. The heat, the flies, the bad food, the bed-bugs in a cheap inn.

His rheumy eyes. Is there a fire for him at home or ashes in the grate? How will he manage his soup, or will the trembling in his hand pass? Whether I will or no, I find I cannot but accompany him in my heart today and this, knowing that some day his journey will end, as it has ended for our mother, for the sisters and brothers we never knew, for you Nannerl. For me. And when the last vibration of the last note fled, as flee it must, I put my bow down to find myself immersed in the echoes of the peace that awaits us all, so near, so near, in the sweetest, most resplendent, silence.



Angela Topping is the author of eight full collections of poetry, and four pamphlets, with a fifth forthcoming, all from reputable publishers. Her most recent is *The Five Petals of Elderflower* (Red Squirrel 2016). Her poems have featured in a range of magazines internationally, and have featured on BBC Radio's Poetry Please on several occasions, and in over 100 anthologies. She is a former Writer in Residence at Gladstone's Library, Harwarden, Wales. Based in Cheshire, UK, she works as a freelance poet and author



## THE GIFT

I was lost in a deep snow-filled valley.  
You lowered baskets of food on a blue rope.

Stories unfurled in my brain, swelling my skull,  
grew to fill shelves and libraries.

In the twilight of a forest you showed me  
where to find hazelnuts and raspberries.

I danced in summer meadows, made wine  
from primroses, fell in love with the beast.

In our shelter I gave birth to his whelps.  
In time, they built their own huts and left us.

Snowflakes in my hair, flames in my eyes,  
the sun on my face. Every yeartime brings happy.

You presented me with poems on a wooden tray  
written in lemon juice on brown paper.

I have everything I need. So what do you  
bring me now, wrapped in white tissue, tied with a red ribbon?

## ETCHINGS

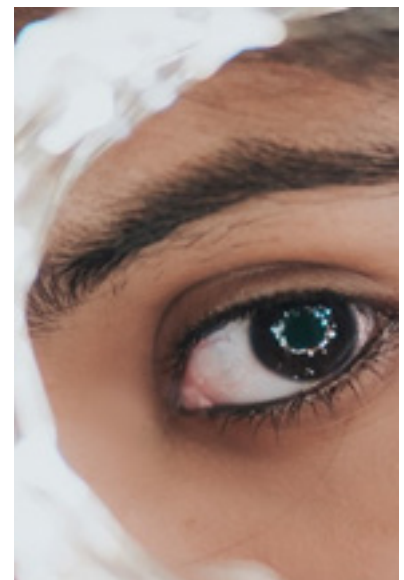
Answer a cliché with a cliché. Last train home,  
me at 17 and a man, persuading.  
*Get off at my stop, come back to my place,*  
*see my etchings.* Schoolgirls like me  
didn't go near men like him, so much older,  
only one thing on his mind.

His feet on the seat cutting off the exit  
showed me he meant every word.  
Had I refused he could have done  
anything to me, right there in the carriage,  
thrown my raped body out on to the track  
when he'd finished with it.

I answered his etchings with my own artifice:  
a boyfriend so jealous he would kill him  
for even speaking to me. Six foot six,  
a Widnes prop-forward, meeting me  
at the station, would come and look for me  
if I didn't get off safely.

Half an hour on a screaming diesel to hell  
talking fast to save my life, my stop,  
another man getting off at another door.  
He must have heard it all but kept silent,  
asked me if I was ok. Too little, too late.  
*I am now!* I threw at him.

And there on the station was my truth,  
my dad, solid as wood, ready to strangle  
a dragon for me, though old and infirm.  
My dad, who'd taught me my worth,  
come a tired mile to walk me home.  
The last last train I ever caught alone.



## THE COLLECTING DOLLS

The sisterhood of six-inch dolls,  
lined up in national dress as if for  
an endless Miss World competition,  
stuffed themselves into my box bedroom:

Extravagant Miss Spain all ready to flamenco  
in frills and pinned bun, glued castanets;  
Miss India, pretty in pink sari and bindi;  
a Manx doll my dad encouraged me to buy.

Best of all, the Native American dolls  
with real leather dresses, cute papooses,  
beads and quiverfuls of arrows.  
I loved to stroke the calfskin of their skirts.

These are the few among the many,  
intaglio or painted eyes, legs standing  
to attention like a rainbow guard,  
all those eyes watching over me.

Most were packed off to the loft,  
remained, stifled in a suitcase,  
when the house was sold, their little  
plastic hands beating a tattoo on the lid,  
trying to get out, reclaim their passports.

## MISSING THE POINT

My tutor in American Studies  
punished me with a B+  
for showing excessive enthusiasm  
for Emily Dickinson.

Told her, I'd come to university  
to enjoy myself. Oh, parties,  
drinking, nightclubs?  
Nope, reading and lectures.

All I'd ever wanted –  
The freedom of vast libraries,  
excited conversations about books  
finding new authors to love.

I showed her my poem.  
about my friend Celia  
who'd come from Trinidad  
to Liverpool on her own,

half a world away  
to The Blind School  
for A levels and degree.  
The tutor whose name I forget

rewrote my poem to show me.  
Hers was about an old man  
tapping across concrete  
with his white stick.

That wasn't my Celia  
who was always laughing  
who'd take your arm  
as a good friend, pass unnoticed

ask me if the two shades  
of red were a good match.  
When I think of her, I think  
of bright turquoises, oranges.

No white man with white stick  
tapping his disability on concrete  
could replace my Celia.  
No-one ever could.



© Angela Topping





John W. Sexton was born in 1958 and lives in the Republic of Ireland. He is the author of six poetry collections, the most recent of which is *Futures Pass* (Salmon Poetry 2018). A chapbook of his surrealist poetry, *Inverted Night*, is forthcoming from SurVision Books early in 2019. In 2007 he was awarded a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in Poetry. Most recently, his poem “The Snails” was shortlisted for the Irish 2018 An Post/Listowel Writers’ Week Poem of the Year Award.



## THE PLANKTON HOUSE

the great wall of bone china ...  
Zao pings a fingernail  
off a blue swan

a purse full of flight ...  
she rubs the moonlight  
from a moth’s wings

singing jar of frogspawn ...  
telepathic tadpools  
in a jellypie

let’s try that again ...  
the footsteps in the regolith  
took themselves back

real estate on a new level  
... a listless life  
in the plankton house

at the light years’ end ...  
our minds are poured  
into jointed-glass bodies

blind cyclops, his tongue  
across the gorge ... come,  
tip-toe through the taste buds

she left an impression ...  
gossip caught  
in the earwax

the fallen angelic minds  
of the stars ...  
nonetheless, our light

Garden light.

## EATING BLUE

their frolicsome barking  
just lights us up ...  
the electric seals

gods have all the time  
for slowness ... yes, the chalk horse  
will drag the hill

I've been walking  
around in squares ... this is nothing  
but a wrecked angle

a rather baroque  
brass key ... thirty-six tubas  
open Jericho

everything bad concerning  
all the good luck ...  
the misfortune cookie

silent underfoot as moss ...  
those moccasins nevertheless  
spoke well

I see a woman  
eating blue from the sky ...  
Is there a Richard here?

your names will be  
inscribed on lettuce ... the snails  
take the salt path

sadly, that marriage  
went up the chimney ...  
his moth-winged wife

## POINT OF CONVERGENCE

a flute-mask for the king,  
a suit of warbler feathers ...  
Castle Guano

light that whittles your flesh  
air that scalds your eyes  
we call this daytime

a point of convergence  
in the bulb tunnels ... grub twins  
christened crocus

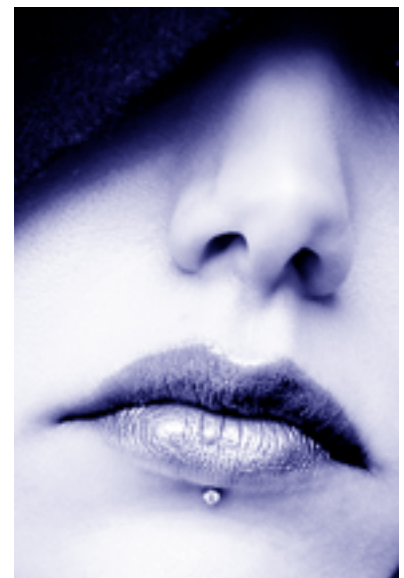
no moving parts  
in the solid stone clock ...  
except for time

where horses gallop  
right angles ... where the king moves  
like constipation

last meltwaters of Greenland ...  
defrosted mermaids flushed  
from the mountains

beneath that green scum ...  
the magic malevolent frog  
grants three glitches

radium, platinum  
through your brain ... Peelingpusskin  
is my name



## THE HUMAN EPOCH

haunted for a cuddle ...  
the stillborn still troubling  
the telepaths

yet another  
damp suitor ... her heart of coal  
unlit

life in blames ...  
liar brigade arrives  
to quell the confabulation

the sitters fill  
the icosahedral chair ...  
best worst view in the house

micro farming...  
ant androids reactivated  
in the soil-turn

our faiths overwhelmed ...  
on the barren planetoids  
a sacred silence

SPACE SAFETY STANDARD ...  
through the mile-thick window  
we glimpse pure nothing

radioactive money  
you'll be spent before  
it's half-spent

wingless beemice agree ...  
this thin sediment  
was the human epoch

## ON THE OTHER END

wheels screeching larks  
from the entrails ...  
the scream-driven rain engine

Cabbage Scratch Dolls ...  
eyes ooze with caterpillars,  
skin of winged leprosy

my mind is elsewhere ...  
pierced with shrapnel  
from the existential spaceship

backwards through the hedges ...  
blackbird took us  
the long way home

a builder's plank,  
my pretty Fokker ... salty  
sea air, the witch falters

so bright the captain's  
eczema ... a thin limpet bride  
holds him under

walking down the food chain ...  
a crocodile chewing each foot  
are his shoes

loneliness is deepest ...  
the voice on the other end  
of the seashell

rendering rooms ...  
we extract star stuff from you and you,  
reseed the night





Mary Guckian has been writing since her childhood. She kept diaries of the farm and years later she translated those experiences into poetic form. Mary is also a photographer and has produced post cards from her old box camera. Her black and white photographs, including images of her family cutting turf have been published in the Scottish Literary Magazine *Southlight*, Spring 2017. Many of her poems are memories of her life in the 1950/60's. Her poems have appeared in anthologies, literary magazines, newspapers and on websites.



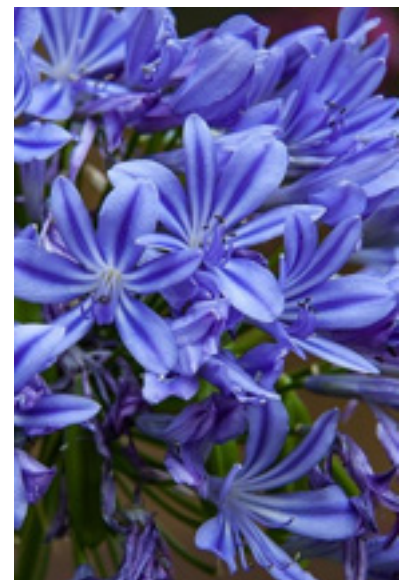
## AGAPANTHUS

All those bulky leaves  
of Agapanthus flowers  
fill patches in gardens.  
The little blue ringlets  
bunch together and hang  
over the elegant willow  
stem all summer and into  
Autumn months, then  
the lovely shade of blue  
begins to turn a greyish  
colour, ringlets in place.  
A few weeks later these  
curls turn into blonde  
heads, before the stem  
weakens, begins to faint  
forward, hitting the ground.

## BEYOND GALWAY

Turning into a laneway  
driving towards the sea,  
while clouds travelled  
across a pale blue sky.  
long, lanky stems pushed  
through sand and ironstone  
where soil had gathered  
between each crevice and  
many varieties of flowers  
bloomed petals freely,  
while sounds of rippling  
water and noisy ocean  
brought us far from  
traffic and pollution.

On crumpled rocks a woman  
sits knitting, another  
studying postcards, both  
wearing pink cotton hats,  
keeping the glare from  
the shiny ocean away  
from their tired eyes.  
My friends lay behind  
cars avoiding a constant  
breeze and I walked on  
absorbing the beauty  
of the west of Ireland  
and wild Atlantic waves.



## SACRED TREE

I love to stand in the graveyard,  
underneath the hanging branches  
of the old palm tree,  
its broad arms sheltering  
headstones that inform us  
of lives now at peace.

At funerals, I hide from showers  
under the sprawling limbs  
of this majestic icon  
where earth is dry, protected  
from hailstones and hot sun, below  
this sacred tree tranquillity reigns

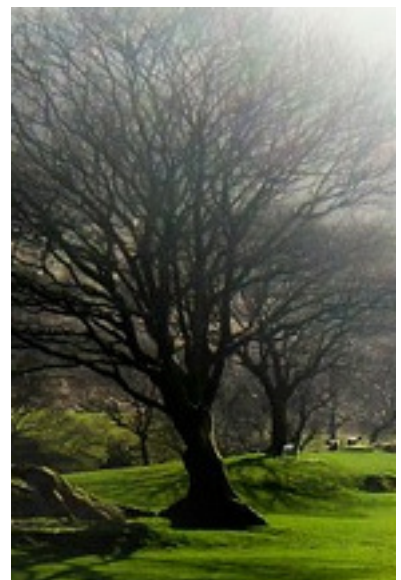
## JANUARY DAY IN DUN LAOGHAIRE

A calm sea at Dun Laoghaire,  
with a glossy surface tempts  
visitors to glide towards tall  
pylons across the bay at Ringsend  
where fragile steam climbs,  
decaying into a blue sky.

Lost red and yellow balloons  
lie on the dark slate surface,  
children stretch to reach them.  
Suddenly a speed boat skims past,  
creases spires in the waves  
attracting gulls screaming for food.

Reflecting in cold water  
the old terminal building rusts  
recalling years where cattle  
boats sailed in and out of the bay  
taking thousands of Irish workers  
in search of an enriched life.

A solid locked circular lighthouse,  
stands at the end of the pier  
retaining memories of times, where  
men spent months on duty caring  
for beacon lights that guided ships  
safely on abiding journeys.



## SHANNONSIDE WALK AT DRUMSNA

Sitting at a picnic table  
under the shady trees,  
sun high in the sky beams  
on to the flowing water.  
The gurgling movement  
and a slight shimmer makes  
bubbles into stars dancing.  
Like a ballroom of dancers,  
couples dressed in silver  
moving fast to music,  
the darkness of the river  
becoming a polished floor.

In villages alongside the  
River Shannon much flooding  
takes place in winter time.  
Other times causing havoc  
when young people give  
their bodies to the fast  
current, some go missing.  
From where it rises at the  
Cuilcagh Mountains in  
County Cavan, many stories  
are hidden, lie dormant.  
I want to sit here forever,  
But a dark cloud warns  
A thundery shower is  
About to pour down.

## MILKING COWS IN SUMMER

We walked towards the lake field  
with scoured buckets in our hands,  
enjoying soft green mossy grass  
where winter flooding left growth.  
Our tiny feet comforted after walking  
across higher ground where thistles  
stung us and pushed sharp needles  
into the fragile soles of our feet.

Sometimes, Francie sang songs  
and the melodious tunes travelled  
across the water as he cut hay  
with the mowing machine sounding  
like background music or he might  
work at saving his oat crop, a swishing  
sound keeping up with his words.

Reaching our cows they were quiet  
waiting for us to take the weight  
from the over flowing udders.  
chewing the cud while we pulled  
the tits and filled our buckets.  
Heading back over bumpy fields  
we got home, straining healthy  
liquid into disinfected muslin.





Miceál Kearney; 38. Living and working on the family farm in the West of Ireland. He started writing at the turn of the century. Published nationally, internationally and extensively in his Parish newsletter. Doire Press published his debut collection; Inheritance in 2008. He read as part of Poetry Ireland's Introduction Series in 2009. Arlen House published his 2nd collection; The Inexperienced Midwife in 2016. He also writes plays; 4 of which have been staged. In his spare time he likes to converse with vegans on Facebook about the colour blue.



## PINKY PROMISE

After the Holocaust we made a promise to the world  
in-front of every single child that we'd never forget  
until 1995; circa Srebrenica – where knocks came upon  
humble wooden doors as frenzied machetes wielding men  
tore them all down but instead of helping the families inside  
chop their spuds, carrots and eggs: the cold inanimate  
sharpened steel simply sliced 'n' diced these people  
to feed their dogs. 18 years later Yankee Doodle  
birds of prey patrol the sovereign skies of their overseas  
submissive states while 9 year old Pakistani children  
address Congress and tell such fantastic stories  
of grey, dull, overcast days: the best most perfect-est  
days for them to play as those are the days  
when the drones don't fly then grown adults  
all swearing to listen have their ears hardened  
by Lockheed Martin.

## WI-FI FOR ANTS

How many people would've turned up  
if the knocking of the Berlin Wall  
had been organised on Facebook?

Rose Parks didn't Tweet #sitting  
though maybe she should've then  
Zimmerman wouldn't've shot Trayvon.

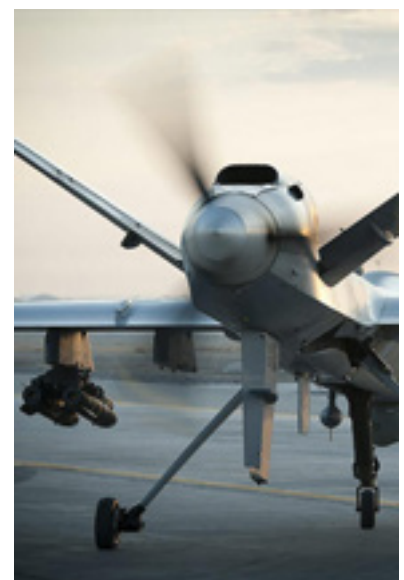
And thanks to that guy in Tiananmen Square  
swatting that tank with his selfie stick, 29 years later  
a Noble Laureate withers from house arrest.

Boudicca sure could've benefited  
from drone technology and the Romans  
would've lasted longer if they'd access

to Snapchat and not relied on sneakers.  
We'll always be smart and have total control  
just as long as the power remains alive.

So go ahead, you hilarious hippies.  
Chainmail those pedantic petitions  
for the arrest of Blair or Nasty Netanyahu.

Do not let my pernicious inaction literally  
stop you. Citizens Arrest, be the one  
that stands up. Oh please, you'll go viral.



## HAVING THE TALK

From behind the Connacht, bought on Thursdays  
my father inquires: what's Facebook?  
It's sort of like the paper in-front of you  
but always being published. There's different

fractals: international happenings,  
national events and local goings on.  
Sports, business, deaths and marriages.  
Funny fluff pieces, ads and a pinch of nostalgia.

All your Friends write these posts.  
It's called social media. 'Ah.'  
He replies and resumes checking  
the prices of cattle and sheep

and other articles in his timeline.

## THE PAPER RAIN OF NINE ELEVEN

Amid the screams and fears  
on that infamous day,  
paper fell from the sky.  
Memos, faxes, emails...  
Iron clad contracts,  
pages of procedures:  
in the event of –  
relevant now  
as logic to lovers.



## F5

Whatever-in-the-Hell that shuffles us off  
the Planetary coil. One thing leads to another,  
you know how stories evolve and hey presto –  
it's 1855 N.T (New Times). The main religion  
based on a book found in the ground:  
The Church of Hogwarts. The various Houses  
make up the other sects with Slytherin,  
of course, being the Protestants.  
Translations can be accurate.

Then someone in a bog will happen upon  
a strange and mysterious device. Rectangular.  
Hinged. Inside: rows of Runes and Glyphs.  
A smaller, worn rectangle below it. Would they  
be scared as their faces are reflected  
in the black mirror like surface? May the Great  
Muggle protect us. Rumours will swell.  
Fervent speculation, what does it mean?

Everyone will want to get a clear  
view through this window into the past.  
But *Top Men* will have *first cement*.  
What criteria will be used to reference,  
determine fact from Gilgamesh?  
Who was Google and the Great Gospels  
of Microsoft Word? That now sheds new  
Twilight on the legitimacy  
of The Sorting Hat impregnating

Professor McGonagall. Translations  
can be tricky. While the Big Blue F  
and the Blue Bird will tell them tall tales  
of a lost race of people called the V-gans  
and their love of milk. This out of place artefact  
will then officially be named  
after the 3 that discovered it.  
Larry Dead, Curly Sea and Moe Scrolls.





*The Stinging Fly* magazine has described Kevin Higgins as “likely the most read living poet in Ireland. His poems have been quoted in The Daily Telegraph, The Times (UK), The Independent, The Daily Mirror, Hot Press magazine, on Tonight With Vincent Browne and read aloud by film director *Ken Loach* at a political meeting in London. Kevin’s eighth poetry collection, *Sex and Death at Merlin Park Hospital*, will be published by Salmon Poetry in June.



## ADVICE TO A MODERN ODYSSEUS

*after Homer*

Spend hours convincing yourself the object of your lust  
is the sort who takes milk in her Bovril and probably  
eats cold Brussels sprouts by the basin load;  
though even if she did, you know  
it wouldn’t matter in the least.

When you think of texting her,  
employ local youths to tie you  
to the nearest available electric fence  
and leave you there. When  
you eventually wriggle free

and still can’t stop picturing her  
pay your neighbours – the entire street –  
in advance to arrange an orchestra  
of chainsaws to block out  
any possibility of her.

Join the Workers Revolutionary Party –  
Lower Salthill branch – and spend  
the next fifteen years racing about the place, saying the words  
*hegemonic, neoliberal, neo-colonialist*  
until no one anywhere will talk to you.

And when even this fails to kill your want  
ask a kindly nun to drive a forklift truck  
angrily over first your left  
then your right foot.

When you come round in hospital  
still muttering her name,  
become a small time religious fanatic  
and spend your evenings wisely  
going door to door flogging  
your own personal Jesus or Satan.

Behind the wife’s back,  
smuggle yourself in a taxi to the vet –  
bringing the cat along for moral support –  
and beg him to apply his trusty wire cutter  
to your troublesome bit.

And when he refuses, publicly volunteer  
to unblock free of charge other people’s sewers  
(any time of the day or night)  
to remind your nostrils what everything  
in the end turns into.



## AFTER THE TERRIBLE EVENTS EARLIER

Days like this, our very way of life  
 (and death) under attack we realise  
 we are in this together: your pet assassin, Fang,  
 and the mouse whose corpse  
 she dumped on the doorstep this morning;

the sunlit girl playing hopscotch  
 in the school playground, and the man  
 across the road watching her intently  
 and sweating small waterfalls into  
 his vastly experienced cheap grey overcoat;

the widow in the dress she'll wear  
 in her own coffin and the funeral director  
 his head tilted to indicate  
 how sad he is to be taking the last of her money;

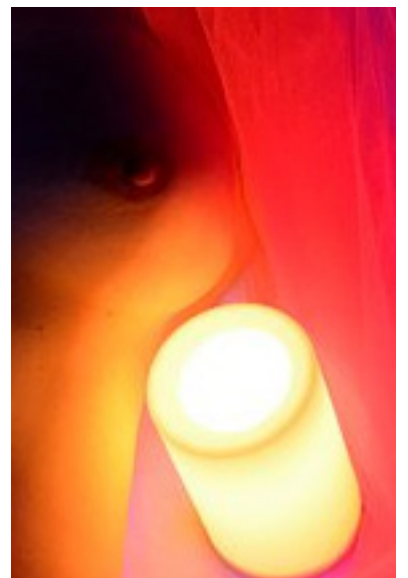
the aid agency official on an all-expenses  
 paid trip to Phnom Penh  
 and the escort struggling for her breath  
 under his shuddering bulk;

the senile old dear putting out her budgie, Harry,  
 for the night and the burglar who's coming  
 to cave her skull in with a hatchet;

the supermarket majority shareholder  
 looking out his hotel window  
 at the moon over Lake Geneva  
 and the checkout assistant with holes in both her shoes  
 whose soul he quietly owns.

Though rest assured  
 tomorrow, or the day after,  
 normal will be back to its British best  
 every paw for its grabbing,  
 infected self.

Until the next outbreak  
 of "terrible", "sick", "depraved",  
 when we'll be temporarily  
 in this (whatever this is)  
 together again.



## THE LAST STILL FUNCTIONING PART OF HELL

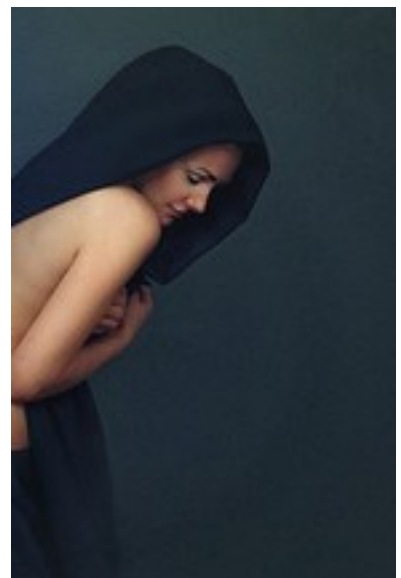
*after Zbigniew Herbert*

When the last murderer  
of underaged boys and girls  
has been sent out the gate  
with a long-tongued kiss and handshake  
from Mephistopheles.  
When the Right Honourable  
Boris Johnson, Gary Glitter,  
the Boston Strangler, every former  
U.S. Secretary of State, and even  
your local traffic warden  
have all been exonerated  
by whichever devil is available  
to sign the release form that day.  
The last remaining  
occupants of Hell will not, as one might expect,  
be the assembled remnants of the Waffen SS,  
the entire court of King Henry VIII,  
or Michelle Obama's publisher,  
but those who practice  
false modesty on social media. Who type things like

*I can't believe this is happening  
to little old me. Who are humbled  
by each of their own microscopic  
achievements. Who are secretly  
Napoleon without the talent,  
the Emperor Caligula without the orgies  
to which there was at least a chance  
you might have been invited.*

It is written that they will have  
their teeth knocked out with cricket bats,  
their faces erased with wildly angry Brillo pads,  
their finger-prints scrubbed off with Potassium Hydroxide  
and be made eternally circle  
what looks like Trafalgar Square,

carrying signs that shout:  
*A lot to be modest about.*





## AND NOW THIS REPORT FROM OUR ARCADIA AVENUE CORRESPONDENT

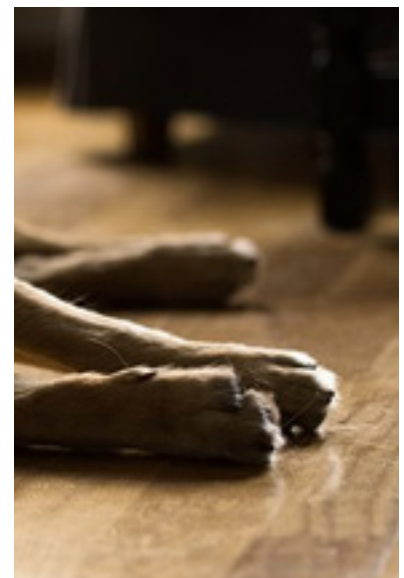
Sources close to someone  
I'm always impressed to be talking to  
inform me that here on Arcadia Avenue,  
if it is ever actually built,  
the interest rate will be pegged  
at zero point five percent,  
except when Atlas or one of the miniatures licensed  
to operate on his behalf decide  
otherwise. Terms and conditions will be applied  
like handcuffs owned by  
a shell company based in some bit  
of Canvey Island that yesterday  
quietly fell into the Thames.

Not all will be admitted  
to this blossom-lined haven.  
For the fact of their exclusion  
is how it earns its name  
and is essential to investor confidence,  
even if no one ever actually ends up living here.

That said, the hope is  
in its purpose built bedrooms  
the ladies of Arcadia Avenue  
will conceive a new generation  
of carnally constipated accountants,  
and sellers of high end fire places  
specially designed for houses without chimneys,  
with the occasional freelance graphic designer  
thrown in to give Gran a laugh  
and, every Christmas, recruit her  
to the International Socialists  
for at least five minutes.

For some, Arcadia Avenue is a rest stop  
before they're eaten by larger carnivores  
who'll joyfully drag their carcasses  
as offerings to the one true god  
who works out of an office at Canary Wharf.

Others likely to be born here will,  
on reaching the age of majority,  
rise up against those who find problematic  
their overuse of the word problematic,  
dye their hair pink and go screaming out the gate.  
Only to return when Mom and Dad are safely dead  
or, at least, buried  
to redeem their inheritance  
and put down the dog.



Susan Millar DuMars has published four collections with Salmon Poetry, the most recent of which, *Bone Fire*, appeared in 2016. *Bone Fire* was nominated for the Forward Prize and has been featured on RTE Radio One's *Arena* and *The Poetry Programme*. Susan lives in Galway, Ireland where she and her husband Kevin Higgins teach creative writing and have coordinated the acclaimed *Over the Edge* readings series since 2003. Susan's next collection, *Naked: New and Selected Poems* will be published by Salmon in March, 2019.



## PASSENGER

He never says can you just  
let me out here  
but stays with you right  
to the driveway turn; your journey  
his, the whole tick tock of it  
right to the brambly hedge, thanks  
I'll walk from here he says, just when  
you're thinking he'll maybe  
come right inside with you  
give up the darkness  
for the yellowy blush  
of your hall

he goes his own way then  
disappears between streetlights  
like a misapprehension  
mid-city mirage

he just folds flat  
like those origami birds  
that fly in your mind  
when you're facing the fire  
of brake lights –  
you call them intentions  
but forget them the moment  
you give up the darkness,  
head inside.

## HUJAR'S SUBJECTS \*

cigarette tired eyes  
anyone  
who'd ever been abused  
a child whispering  
high heels found  
among trash in Newark  
unquiet Hudson  
simmering grays  
blazing white sheets  
AIDS related  
Second Avenue  
his lover at the time  
cityscape nudes  
all American  
anyone  
who'd ever been  
naked  
ravaged hustler diner waitress

anyone  
who'd ever been



*\*phrases sourced from Peter Schjeldahl's article,  
in February 5th 2018 New Yorker, about photographer Peter Hujar.*

## BODY

your body is not your body  
cats slope around you  
politely sniff  
breeze moves the backyard tree  
to say *ssh*  
sunlight shifts  
bars of light warm the floor  
your arms good for hugging  
stuck open now  
your eyes  
oh your eyes

someone else will need to shut them  
your thoughts fell as you fell  
hit like hail  
evaporated  
we hope you had no idea  
hope you didn't  
make this happen  
you can't stop us  
looking inside the body

your body is not your body  
we will ask it our questions

## HORATIO, AFTER

Absent brother, they've carried  
away the bodies, though faces  
prick the darkness  
like jesting moons.

I see you, hair and whiskers  
a halo, and know  
I loved you,  
butter-soft fool.

Do we ever leave the castles  
of our childhoods?  
Do we strut for newer ghosts  
or always for our fathers?

Brother, we part.  
The quiet compromises  
of growing up are mine.

Drums and trumpets,  
my forever prince, yours.







Lorna Shaughnessy has published three poetry collections, *Torching the Brown River*, *Witness Trees* and *Anchored* (Salmon Poetry), and a chapbook, *Song of the Forgotten Shulamite* (Lapwing). Her work was selected for the *Forward Book of Poetry*, 2009. She was awarded an Artist's Bursary by the Arts Council of Ireland in 2018. She is also a translator of Spanish and South American Poetry. Her translation of Manuel Rivas', *The Mouth of the Earth* (Shearsman Press) will be launched in March 2019.



## BACK TO HER SENSES

At some point she had taken leave of her senses  
and now she couldn't find her way back,  
couldn't sink into in a minor chord or feel  
the chill of cloud-shadow scud across her face;  
the scent of hyacinths on a window-sill recalled nothing;  
her own scent repelled embrace.

She found herself alone in her mind,  
a cramped place with no give left in it  
that insisted on spelling out the facts  
of who and where she had been, but  
nothing of what could be.

Was it for this she had shirked the thrill  
of danger's breath on her neck -  
only to find that her mind could coax no joy  
from the dry and peeling plaster on its walls?

Photograph Pixabay.

## WHEREIN

The walls of the room of waiting  
are civil service green,  
a shade between olive and avocado  
unknown in nature.

The radiators are magnolia, gloss,  
fat drips visibly arrested in congealed solidity.

Infants and the old come here to cough.  
Others come to get out of the cold  
or read about of the lives of Royals  
in magazines marooned in the past.

The young bow in prayer over their phones  
waiting for The Call to the counter  
where they will receive The Truth in small doses.

The rooms of motels  
invite clients to be strangers  
passing through their own lives;  
to drown out the sound of traffic  
and the noise in their heads  
with an automatic reflex -  
lift remote, point, press.  
Later, food delivered to the door is bland  
and unenticing as a prison meal,  
the delivery-boy a ghost, impossible to recall.

There is a room of living  
too, they say, and if no-one seems to know  
anyone who has seen it,  
we all know someone who has been trained  
to guide us there; the ones who  
explain it's just a bus ride away  
with a stopover or two in a roadside motel;  
just a case of taking your ticket number  
and your seat in the waiting room,  
confident in the knowledge that  
everyone who enters is recognisable,  
and no-one leaves unnoticed or unknown.



## ANNAGHMAKERRIG ZEN

**Omen**

Today a buzzard swooped  
across my path at six o'clock.  
Yesterday a buzzard swooped  
across my path at six o'clock  
on the same bend in the road.

Evidently, we are both creatures of habit.

**Autumn Parable**

It was waiting there in the dead leaves:  
a warm smile of chestnut where the shell had split,  
coveted, scooped up and taken home.  
Weeks later, fingers find truth in the same pocket,  
dulled and slightly shrivelled from neglect.

**Autumn Springs**

On a day this still  
you can hear each leaf  
settle on the lake.  
Every tree casts a presence,  
every field contains a bull;  
a quiet potency  
waits for its season.

## SURREALIST OBJECTS

*After Dali, Mutt, Henry and De Chirico*

A boiled lobster waits  
patiently to take your call.

Something furry sprouts inside my teacup;  
life in the fur-lined rut has lost its flavour.

Someone has bandaged the violin  
to stop its injured song

If the Venus de Milo only had arms,  
she could peel one of those bananas.



© Lorna Shaughnessy





Jean O'Brien's fifth collection her New & Selected was reprinted by Salmon Publishing in 2018. She was awarded the Patrick & Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in 2017/18. An award winning poet she won the Arvon International Poetry Prize and the Fish International prize and was recently shortlisted for the Voices of War competition run by UCD Historical Dept. She holds an M.Phil in creative writing from Trinity College, Dublin and tutors in poetry/creative writing.



## WORDS SPEAK US

Like scapula or oracles' bones,  
 they tell of ourselves, we are proper  
 nouns, with our stitched tongues we break words  
 against our teeth, lips sealed. All talk, all palaver  
 articulated in the vernacular  
 following tangled lines like mind nets.  
 Brave speech we are all stall and stutter.  
 We watch words, hedge bets, parse language,  
 don't voice the silent L.O.N.D.O.N  
 in Derry.  
*Whatever we say, say nothing.*  
*Least said, soonest mended.*  
 STOP. STOP. BACK. STOP!  
 That bloody border.  
 Broken syntax casting a glamour.  
 The euphemisms: *the Troubles*,  
*the Emergency, passed.*  
 Eat your words or they'll eat you.

Photograph Pixabay.

## BEES IN THE ROOF SPACE, HUMANS IN THE HOUSE.

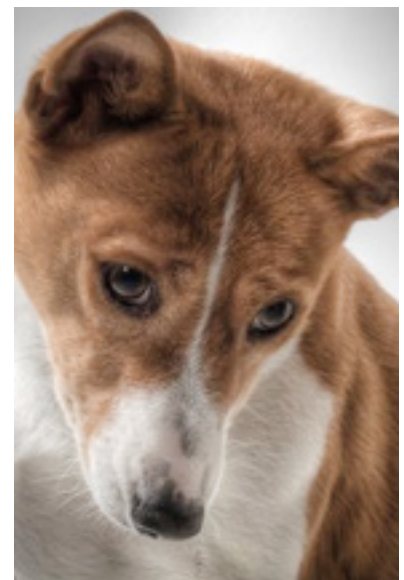
Unaware they are there my neighbour has bees in the roof space,  
huddled against winter cold, dreaming of summer,  
heated by memories of fields of rapeseed, yellow splendour  
glowing to the horizon. In spring the gauzy ghost keepers  
will gentle the queen away safe in a box to the hive,  
the remaining faithful phalanx will follow behind.  
For now they are quiet, just a low hum as they cluster  
conserving their energies, keeping the colony alive  
while awaiting the return of the sun.

Downstairs in the house the humans are at much  
the same, keeping the fire lit, the house warm, the  
beds aired and food on the table. Everyone  
is semi-hibernating, waiting for the call of spring,  
for the sun to climb higher in the sky, they watch  
the weather, keep an eye on the lengthening of the days,  
track the trees shadows, await the arrival of the bees.

## I'M SORRY, SO SORRY. #METOO #METOO.

*She is drawing and redrawing herself, her skin  
sore from erasure. Esther Morgan (Self-Portrait).*

I'm sorry I brushed into you, that I may have blocked  
the way. I'm so sorry too that you pushed me.  
I'm sorry, #MeToo, #MeToo,  
I'm sorry your hand slipped onto my breast,  
that I walked out in front,  
didn't smile, smile, smile,  
when you pencilled me in lead  
and not colour trying to write me off.  
Too much smiling erases me as does your gaze.  
I'm sorry, #MeToo, #MeToo.  
So, so sorry that our crying child is disturbing you,  
your day, your life. You want it to run smooth,  
I understand, #MeToo, #MeToo.  
I'm sorry you feel you need to belittle me.  
Very, very sorry. #Metoo. #Metoo.  
I'm sorry I took the available  
parking space,  
last seat,  
pay rise,  
and went through the half open door,  
the glass ceiling.  
I'm so sorry that I work and am not always home  
when you are in a hurry or have had a hard day.  
#MeToo, #MeToo. I'm sorry. So so sorry.







Edward O'Dwyer is a poet and fiction writer from Limerick, Ireland. He is the author of the poetry collections, *The Rain on Cruise's Street* (2014), *Bad News, Good News, Bad News* (2017), both from Salmon Poetry. A collection of very short fictions, *Cheat Sheets* (Truth Serum Press, 2018), is his latest book, consisting of 108 dark comedies on the theme of infidelity. He is currently working on a third poetry collection, *Exquisite Prisons*, and a sequel collection to *Cheat Sheets*.



## BULLET POINTS

Some day in the future,  
perhaps my poems will be on the curriculum,  
the tepid topic of classroom debates,

being sliced open, pinned apart  
like worms or frogs,  
under unfocused microscopes.

I'll be teenage headaches  
and paper jets flying through the air  
on another dragging afternoon.

I'll be the agony over a word  
written indifferently,  
the indifference for a word  
agonised over.

I'll be a photocopier's bulimia  
on freezing Monday mornings,  
a teacher's long pause  
to think up tonight's homework assignment.

I'll be a series of bullet points  
on a blackboard,  
in a revision book,  
on the inside of a sleeve.

Photograph Pixabay.





## AN ACT OF FATHERHOOD

It starts with a beautiful and heart-warming image.  
A man holds his infant child to his chest,  
bobs and rocks the child there gently, rhythmically.  
No one would doubt that this was soothing.

The sun is shining and the caretakers  
have done a wonderful job in getting the park  
looking so well for the summer months ahead.

He is only one of many out with a baby.  
There are also many with dogs, and many  
sprawled on blankets reading books, and many  
on benches eating packed lunches.

When he begins to toss the infant ever so slightly  
into the air, it appears that it should be less soothing,  
but still no tears come and indicate distress.

Soon, as his throws build gradually in force,  
until his baby is flying several feet up into the air,  
there is a crowd forming around the scene.

He expertly tosses his child higher and higher  
and, just as expertly, catches it on its way down.  
He doesn't seem to notice the crowd forming at all,  
just carries on obliviously in this act of fatherhood.

Dozens of mobile phones are held aloft,  
taking pictures, recording videos, the possibility  
of something that might go viral on the internet.

He could very well be an Olympic gold medallist  
at the shot put or hammer toss, so impressive  
is the strength with which he is able to fling  
his baby towards the sky and then catch it again  
as gravity sends it hurtling back down.

By all appearances, the baby is still soothed,  
no wails of discomfort or fear leaving its lips,  
though it must be reaching as high as twenty feet.

By this point, it seems everyone in the park  
has joined the vast circle around him and his baby.  
When he miscalculates ever so slightly, missing  
the catch, he looks immediately horrified, devastated.

Everyone around has heard the sickening thud  
of baby hitting concrete, seen the little bounce  
before falling still, a mess of small limbs.

He kneels down, panic-stricken, tends to the bundle  
while the crowd watches on, collectively paralysed,  
seemingly unable to believe what has happened  
is real, all the while their hands still in the air  
and their videos still recording.

As red liquid moves slowly outwards from the baby,  
covering the surrounding concrete, several bodies  
slump to the ground, losing consciousness,  
while one woman ejects a stream  
of projectile vomit into the grass.

At this, the infant's father gets back to his feet,  
turns to face the crowd with a wave and a smile,  
takes a deep bow, and another, and another,  
and another: the four main compass points.

Then he scoops up his blood-soaked child  
and begins waving its inanimate hand  
in gratitude towards the audience.

## A LUSH GREEN FIELD

My steak arrives on a big white plate,  
and so I take a quick moment  
to imagine an over-the-moon cow  
standing in a lush green field,

chewing the cud and mooing enthusiastically  
again and again, and at nothing in particular,  
her large head empty of any thoughts  
of a tragically cut-short future

in which her flesh sizzles on a pan  
to be served then with pepper sauce,  
sautéed onion and mushroom  
and two kinds of potato.

The sky is blue and she is beautiful,  
in spite of her incessant belching  
and flatulence, none of which  
she feels any embarrassment for.

Of course, if I make any mention  
of methane, or global warming,  
or greenhouse gas emissions,  
I don't imagine it will mean much to her,

and she'll just gaze back at me  
with those big, innocent brown eyes,  
and continue whipping her tail  
at the same pesky flies,

sure as can be that the field she stands in  
will always be so lush and green,  
for the simple reason that it is  
her world, and so why should it not?

## WHEN MY STALKER LEFT ME

She was finally gone,  
whether that was for having bored,  
or for having lost attraction,  
or for having come, against likelihood,  
into a spell of well-adjustedness.

I thought when my stalker left me  
life could go back to normal,  
that regularity might resume seamlessly,

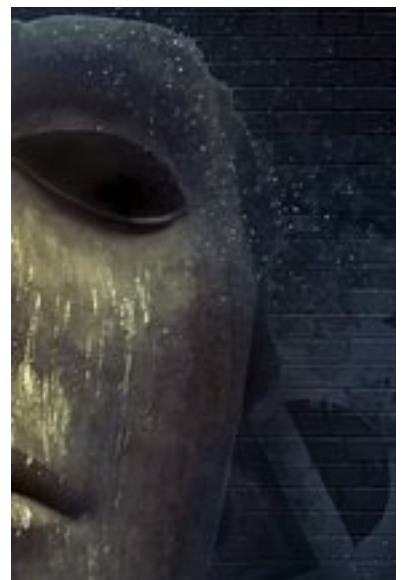
never thought there could be loss,  
or doubt, or abandonment –  
that there could be longing,

that I might turn a corner in the street  
to her not being there  
and feel desire for it,  
and know it then as desire,

her pinched-looking face staring  
both adoringly and murderously,  
her straight, wiry hair  
refusing to catch on a billowy wind.

I've felt my self-esteem bleeding away  
from wounds I don't know how to find,  
a flow I cannot staunch,

and all my friends keep telling me  
I should think of speaking to a therapist,  
when all I've asked them  
is how I might go about  
getting her back in my life.





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POETRY & WRITING

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