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DAVID RIGSBEE
*The Keep of Poetry
in the Time of Trump*

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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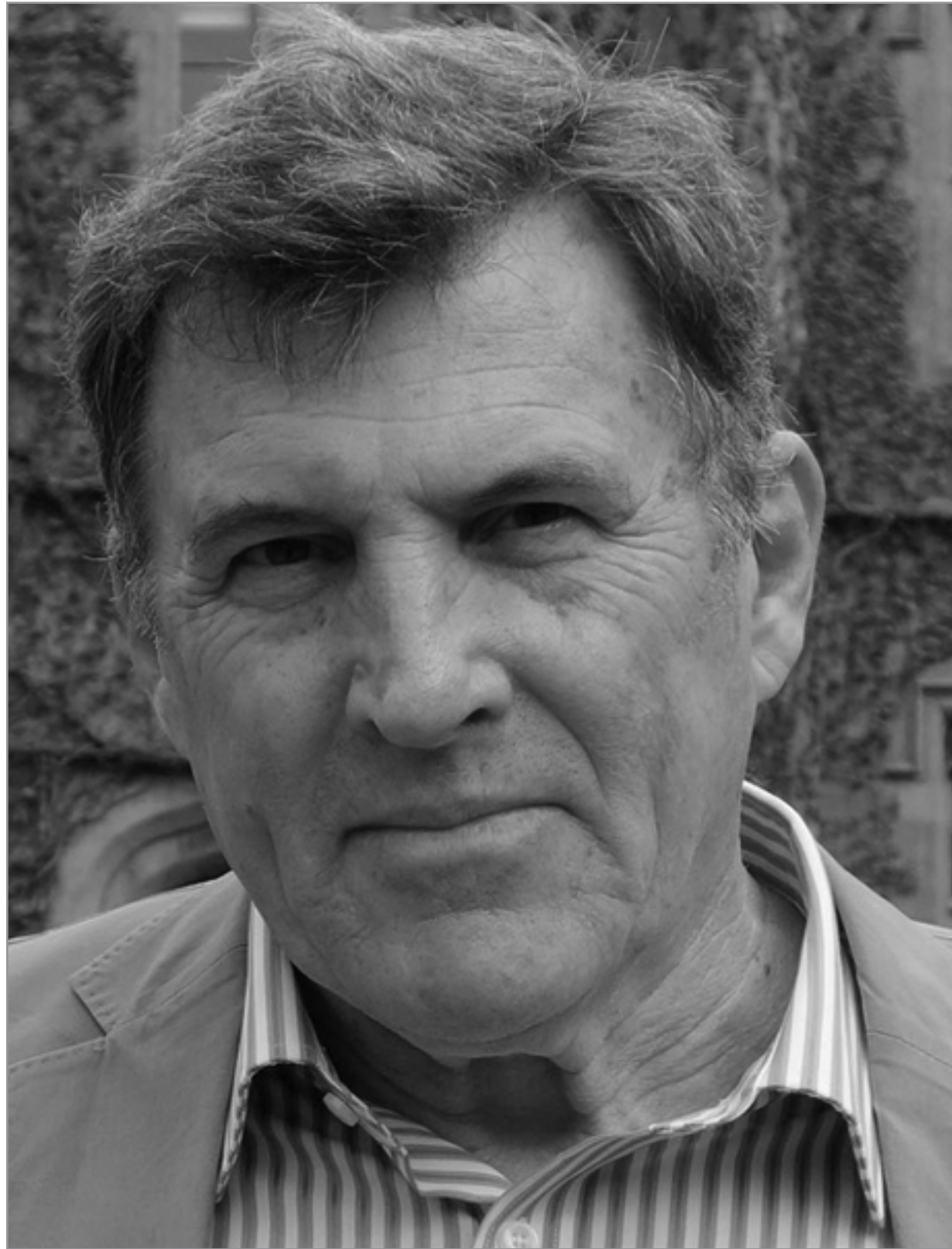
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<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/david-rigsbee>



David Rigsbee

DAVID RIGSBEE

THE KEEP OF POETRY IN THE TIME OF TRUMP

I recently attended a public reading by prominent poets, after which was a Q&A. Someone asked what should poets and poetry itself do in the Age of Trump. The poets themselves appeared baffled. After all, it's not as though the practice of writing poems draws the attention, let alone approval, of anyone. As a matter of fact, poets are as insular and self-involved as they are disempowered and excluded. This has been the case for much of the history of the US, for whom, if citizens read at all, it is prose that remains the gold standard for discourse. The poet, in other words, doesn't participate in what philosopher Michael Oakeshott called "the conversation of mankind." But the questioner's urgency caught everyone at the gathering. That is to say, the choir.

Of course, it goes without saying that the audience consisted mostly of other poets. Thus we knew that the internecine wars between poetry groups did us no good in the non-reading public's eyes. We also knew that support for creative writing, while widening among undergraduate and graduate students, also felt the pressures of academic reemphasis on the sciences and business—two routes toward financial security, not to mention the ongoing inability of the humanities to justify their study. There were other complicating factors: the culture wars, the government disdain toward artistic support, the sneaking suspicion that the arts held the public itself in contempt. What's more, from the other end, poets as diverse as John Ashbery, Jorie Graham, and David Baker had begun to approach the problems of complexity head-on. They recognized that composing poems in view of the layers, that is, the incoming of sensations, memories, and vagabond thoughts that form our encounters made for an uncomfortable linguistic challenge to poetry's fidelity to its ancient heritage.

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This querying of means worked against purpose too, as poets of mid-twentieth century Europe and America knew. The trauma and mass atrocities of the Second World War caused poets to rethink their early rousing and resistant, patriotic verses and to turn to simplicity, understatement, and surrealism to bring language into dubious alignment with the post-War shift. I refer to materialism, both philosophical and scientific, technological expansion with its attendant threats and dooms, and the struggle for rights in the face of anonymity. The roster of these remade poets is long, but here are a few examples. France produced poets like Francis Ponge, who gave up patriotic resistance poems to write a book about a bar of soap (*Le Savon*), and American Muriel Rukeyser wrote the infamous (and influential) “St. Roach,” a poem that paid homage to vermin, in order to raise awareness of dehumanizing forces on the loose during the execution of the Vietnam War. No less a worthy than Czeslaw Milosz both chronicled and championed the markdown poets of his generation, for whom the pebble was a sign of integrity for the human who had awakened from the war only to find herself living in a world of “pre-casket somaticism.”

Indeed, language itself was hauled into court by poets like Paul Celan for having been the vehicle that promised an ideal humanistic culture, but which found no exoneration in the tragic claim that, after all, it meant well. Language was what bound the SS to the Jew, and it was not therefore an innocent party. Nihilism followed suit and its sibling, irony. Despite the fretting of Eliot and Auden, the conclusion held that with the death of God, the top and bottom were indeed interchangeable (a conclusion foreshadowed by Dostoyevsky). The hierarchies of art no longer convinced. How then move poetry from this depressing topsy-turvy to a new seat at the table? Someone suggested political poetry—protest poetry, such as was written during the Vietnam War. Another immediately countered that protest poems often meant lowering standards, enlisting poetry for political purpose, however well intentioned. The first speaker came back with Robert Bly, W.S. Merwin, Adrienne Rich, and Galway Kinnell as examples of engaged poets whose matter, like a fever, elevated subject over form, but who did so honorably and artistically, their political phases not marking a prolonged dip. It wasn’t an inconvenient intrusion in otherwise clear trajectories: careers and destinies didn’t necessarily overlap. I thought of Denise Levertov, for whom the war did bring on the feeling of grim determination, though I didn’t speak up.

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These and similar versions coursed through our minds as the poets of the evening stood there beside the podium standing and thinking, trying to be helpful, trying to come up with an argument that would convince the choir that its obligation to cultural virtue still worked in the form of poems. Meanwhile, a storm had come over the Hudson River adjacent to the reading room, the rear wall of which was a series of tall windows, and its eruptions of thunder and lightning gave the occasion an air of impersonal uncertainty and drama. Not unlike the rise, again, of authoritarianism, and the waves of intimidation and insult that we felt as the new condition of our living.

I thought then the late poet Linda Gregg, whose four-decades-long friendship was to my mind a continuous conversation both endless and deep. Linda thought poetry the most important thing in the world, and that conviction attuned her to ancient simplicities that sought beauty to defy the dying of spirit. To submit to the premise of Stevens’ “Gubbinal” (a *gubbin* being a dullard) that “the world is ugly/ and the people are sad” was to achieve nothing. On the other hand, for one to participate in the creation of something as beautiful as a poem was both to square our divorce from nature and to exalt the condition of living beings, in spite of the world’s cruelties—the dues paid for the brief privilege. It was a credo as simple to state as it was hard to achieve. One poem of hers, in particular, stayed in my mind. It goes like this:

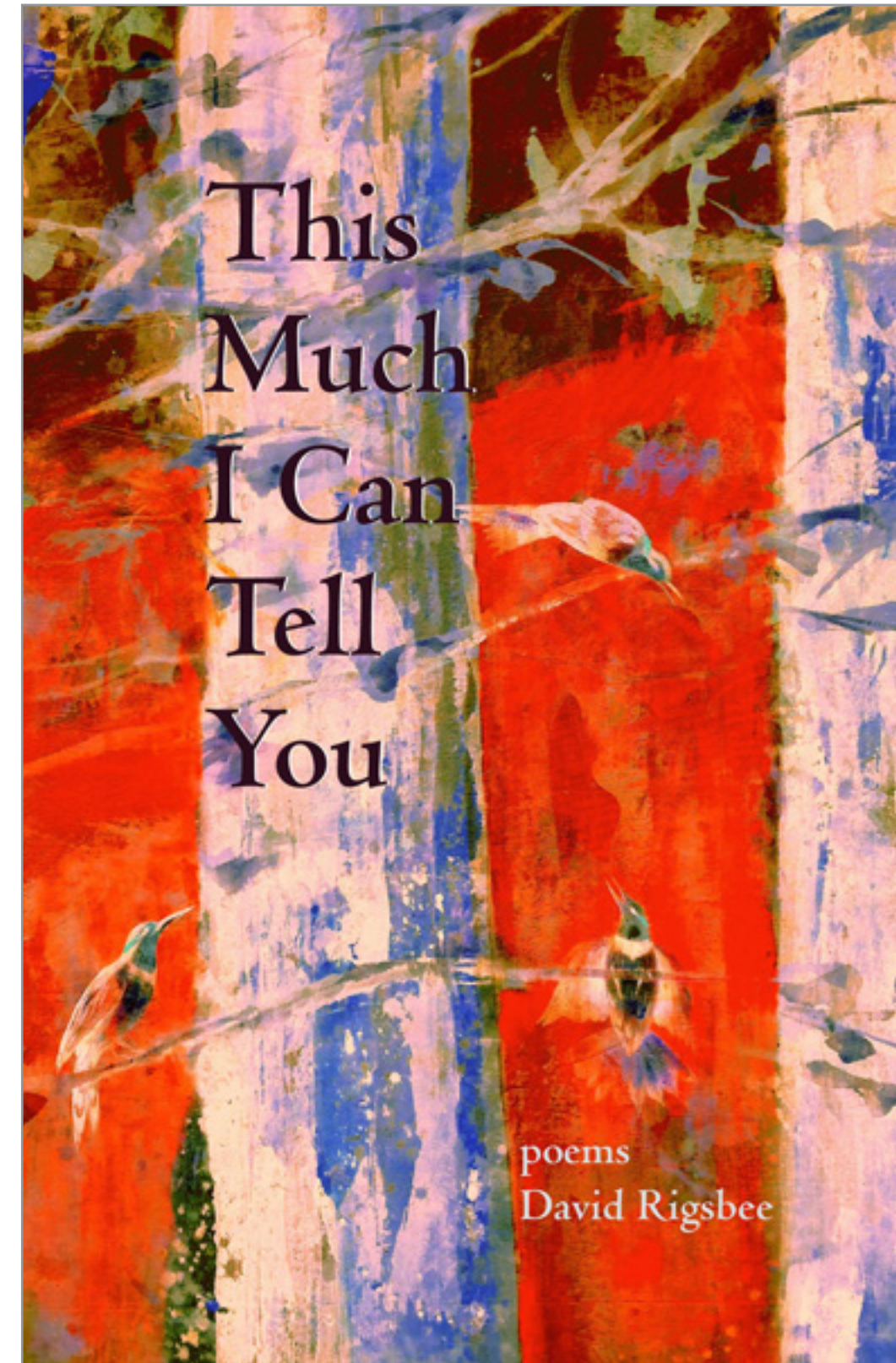
Fishing in the Keep of Silence

There is a hush now while the hills rise up
and God is going to sleep. He trusts the ship
of Heaven to take over and proceed beautifully
as he lies dreaming in the lap of the world.
He knows the owls will guard the sweetness
of the soul in their massive keep of silence,
looking out with eyes open or closed over
the length of Tomales Bay that the egrets
conform to, whitely broad in flight, white
and slim in standing. God, who thinks about
poetry all the time, breathes happily as He
repeats to Himself: there are fish in the net,
lots of fish this time in the net of the heart.

I have a friend, a painter of some distinction, who, when asked how she defined God, replied, “Your best thought.” Linda would have agreed, and I suppose the work of imagining one’s best thought is equivalent to protesting the mediocre and the inferior. Once that thought is written and felt, it does begin to trim the contours of the human conversation, even if it does not steer it. That’s a good reason, in spite of our place in other people’s schemes, to think about poetry all the time.

There is a serenity in the poem that recognizes both the sweep of the ultimate and the importance of the small—the disposition of the eternal toward the ephemeral and vice versa. At the same time, the poem is not naive: we are aware that the world is not without dangers. God sleeps, for instance, and that fact should put us on our guard, but guarding is essential to the poem, for the ancient word “keep” names that part of a castle that is most protected and likewise most vulnerable. Presumably, God, when he falls asleep, dreams, but we are to understand that His sleep is the place where He—as Logos, or the top of art and wholeness—is restorative and safe. It is only we who undergo nightmares, anxiety, and dread, only we who are guilty in the course of our making. This is not the case for the rest of nature: the owls and the egrets do not succumb to our nightmares, nor the fish, who are caught and give up their being for our sustenance. They are themselves a “catch,” that is, a poem. I remember that the prescient title of one of her collections is *Chosen by the Lion*. And then there is that startling assertion, which for a magician would be the “reveal”: “God, who thinks about/ poetry all the time, breathes happily...” If God does anything of the sort, then our creations collaborate in restoring a balance that death, degradation, and even language are keen to snatch away. Note that this applies to “this time” and “the heart,” an achingly risky metonymy for the wish poets now have to reswear their vows in a dark time, to borrow Theodore Roethke’s apt phrase.

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<https://www.blacklawrence.com/this-much-i-can-tell-you/>

Paintings and drawings by Tim Cumming direct from the streets, squares and riyaads of Essaouira during the annual Gnawa Festival, Morocco, done on the spot and in the moment.

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.



CASABLANCA



They shouted over the roar of the engine.
Just a few seconds sleep is all it took;
Time became a character in a book,
hiding its hands in a dirty gabardine,
sloping off with a casual acquaintance
for a smoke in the canteen of the Station Hotel,
filling the room by keeping his distance,
nodding to a taxi driver; knew his father well,
climbs in behind with a foreign journalist
traveling alone, posing as some casual tourist.

'Where you been?' To the coast, she smiled.
Your time has come, said time, turning the dial
from Moroccan metal to cosmic hiss,
the big hand growing in the small hand
of the big bang as experts insist,
pungent as compost and heavy as breath,
radio signals ricocheting amongst the nearer
stars scattered like piss around a lamp post.
The driver slept for a second,
and the second hand was death.

Me and her, we'd flown in late,
roped down with gin slings and shaved ice
from executive lounge to departure gate,
two sidekicks without a case.
There were rumours and ghosts to greet
our arrival, Bogart breaking bread
over the carousel at Casablanca airport,
waiting for an immortal connection,
a metaphor that grips like a seizure
or a final destination,

fog around the terminal
and here comes Ilsa, beautiful, pure
and permanently fuckable. The radio
signal oscillates to the echo of a
Berber guitar the electric current
of popular song winding through the air
of a north African truck stop
two hours from Casa at 3am,
the lights the colour
of Bombay Sapphire gin.

We stocked up on coffee and cola,
our driver's headlights hugging the coast
to the sea blue doors of Essaouira,
riding with the mist that rises at night
with the all-night drivers, foot pedals
pitted to the metal with the names
of god looming through the night fog,
the dinosaur tracks of dead trucks on the side
of the highway where one wheel
strayed from the surface in sleep,

in the darkness before dawn and
the flickering lights of emergency
services, the dead taken away
and big machines opening and closing
on all that gargantuan imagery
of lorries piled up by the side
of the highway. Our death was writ
as large and lit from behind,
in the driver's lights as we slowed
for a minute then sped on by.

MOGADOR

Boys bestride the cannon
on the battlements of Mogador,
sea salt and slavery bells
spice the wind, futile shot
from man o war, and here
was the slave market,
here the magical herbs,
a lizard on a string
in a blue shadow,
a thousand pipes of smoke
on a beaded necklace of metal
worked from the desert.

Let the blue sky reverberate
the corrugated empire under the sun
shaking to the voice of the muezzin
before dawn, his crackling retinue
of passion players winding a sheet
around the world as the red spirit
manifests, cross rhythms rising
with the black sun and sheets
of flame of flesh on flesh and yes
there, no there, deeper, yes

HENNA GNAWA

For Malaam Hamid el Kasri

The smell of henna
in the air from the
girl on the sea wall
with her sister and
her father and his brother,
one of them a fisherman
stepping out of the
water with his daughter
and her friend or her
sister and the henna
in her hair blows
into my air through
the nostrils and into
the mind, what cauldron
of immortality and travel
this is, Kasri's Gnawa
aligned, like the fishermen,
to the lunar calendar,
first stars, the stomach's
cranium, the bass line
already there ready to
be pulled up to the surface,
stickleback rhythms and broken
water in the soul's irrigation.
'It's like hearing cave paintings'
I shout across to a new friend.



© Tim Cumming

SEPIA GNAWA

For Justin Adams

A few drops on the paper
 and the years roll out to a
 signalman's flurry of grammar
 and vocab, declinations of
 the doing words, the Gnawa
 street troupe with Justin,
 all strap and no guitar,
 dust on his heels and a chit for
 his Gibson at Casablanca.
 We're in the medina,
 imaging sepia pictures
 of his youth in Cairo and father's
 diplomatic services, the dark-skinned
 men in djebellas behind lean faces
 begin to rustle and shimmer,
 the distant sound of pipes
 and krakeks, the little boy with
 all the future moves, a cool
 water mingling with hot to a
 bathing temperature and here
 they come, stepping from the frame
 onto the street, dressed in white
 and lunar orbits, the old pictures
 coming to life all over town,
 the rocks and the beach and
 every white breaker a flag
 of surrender, a call for submission.
 Here, there is an altering magnetism.

HENDRIX'S ROOM

I'm in Jimi Hendrix's room,
 13 Riyad el Medina in the blue
 heart of Essaouira, a high
 keening note in the wind
 between my teeth, the firm
 facts dissolving like soap.
 He stayed for tea and a smoke
 one afternoon with two
 beautiful Moroccan sisters,
 their signal fading out a year
 or two later before Jimi steps
 into his own picture and vanishes
 from the surface of a room
 in Notting Hill, turns up here
 again, mucking about with
 weird tunings and beading
 his necklace with rhythm,
 knots to tie a bassline
 before the wide voyage out
 takes each and every one.



© Tim Cumming



HOTEL SAHARA

For Ucef & Mehdi

Beads from the necklace of a seafaring god in Ucef's room at the Hotel Sahara, passing hashish from one to another, sculptures of smoke rising from street grills of beef and chicken, tall wooden giraffes, Senegalese women. The eyes' currency. No, I do not eat couscous.

Three young Moroccan punks stopped us by the blue door to Villa Maroc to show us the head of Sid Viscous on a black leather jacket, cured hide of a holy beast for some, for others a feast. We slipped onto Rue Attarine, name of a lover from an early Godard film, at the crossroads where

Kasbah and mellah decide with each other, to find Kamel the night fisherman working up steam in a laundry room, cotton under the hot press of old technology, a head for weather, the advancing storm comes light as a feather. Kamel says no sailor ties a knot against the wind her

GRAVITY

For Oumou Sangare

Couldn't put a name to the heavies on the staircase of the Hotel Sahara, agents of Saturn, massive densities burning gravity like sprinter's sweat, step by step, agents wielding spectacular forces, the king's men among the tribes checking footage, fearing rumours rearing like horses and insurrection, ziggurat harmonies of Berber women with tongue tattoos and tea tray rhythms

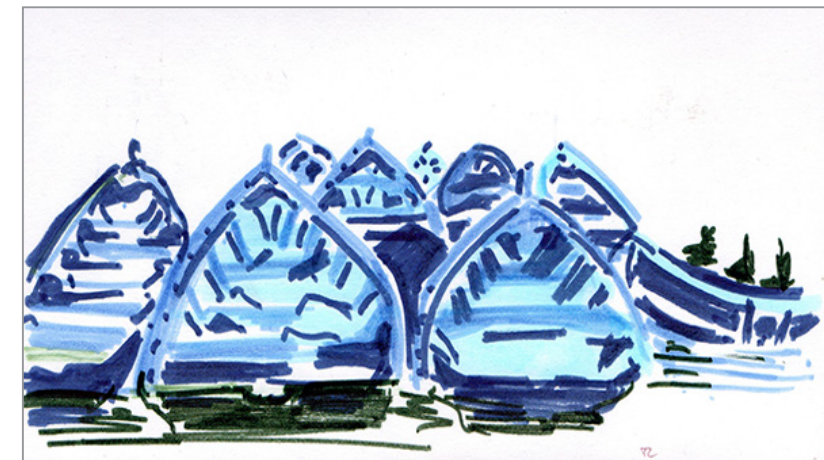
We're dining on the balcony of what was once the Brazilian mission. Every power has its totem, its men of density, centres of gravity and mutual attraction, circling in the weird magnetism of thought and action, the rolling wind and sluicing of the ocean with vision and rhythm and Oumou Sangare, all woman, the echo of the sun circling the city walls, moon goddess with two broken horns and the heavy throes of passion, stronger than Saturn, the flesh laid bare in breath, control, the spirit's fusion.

THE CATCH

For Ali Faye

The boy wearing angel's wings among
Senegalese hawkers trading in
the shade of the only trees in the medina,
sellers of cake and sticky majoun
moving through the day like angles
on a plane. The dreary gossip
of cause and effect falters here.
Fate's a line that smacks and stiffens
and here's a catch; benediction
over breakfast. Ali Faye the Qawali
singer draws me down to his station
and we exchange images. His fingers
paw his temple. 'I have you in mind,'
he roars, his mouth dripping
tobacco juice and belching
the word of God. Exhalation.
The ends of the earth are not discernible,
the ray of light across the fastness
of the sea, behind the sky
and below the horizon, the whale stream
hazed with the salt of procreation.

I have a card for a Catholic priest
turned analytical psychoanalyst
from the Ivory Coast, a coal in mind
glowing with pigments and metaphor,
not data. The wind guru is blowing
in my direction, a flash in the face
of the boy hawking fairy wings
to the surging crowd around the port,
the hard sharp ends behind the soft skin
of even the most beautiful women,
with or without wings and there are
such things unblemished, unbuttoned
and stripped to the grain in high narrow
rooms in the unwritten algebra of the medina.





YOUSSEF THE FISHERMAN

Joined us at table by the counter
 at Patisserie Driss opposite the doors
 to the mosque and described us
 a sailors' ritual for the prophet Noah:
 gather at the shore, sacrifice a goat,
 make tea and couscous, pray storms
 into stars and then proceed, his hands
 parting the way to thermodynamic voyages,
 sardine catches, the coast of Mauritania
 and coasts beyond, the ocean of darkness
 he calls the Atlantic, clinging to a skeleton
 key, heaving skies and heavier currents,
 moving under the instruments of science,
 Youssef wears dreadlocks and shells,
 the magic carpet of initiation and experience,
 swaying in the ocean of the lunar cycle,
 a Gnawa tune with stars and sea winds,
 Aisha, and the red thread of a shanty,
 flashes of the dead scooped up in its nets
 and left to sink or carried to land and now
 it is done and there are no more voyages
 for Youssef the fisherman.

Dorian is bilingual writer (English and Romanian), lives in Sydney, and is lecturer at Western Sydney University. Born in Galați, Romania, he participated in writing activities in Romania and Australia. The first volume of poems “under the wheels of truck” is the final stage (already published in Romanian). English contributions: *Western Sydney EZine Anthology*, *New Writers Group Inc. Anthology* and *41 Arguments Avant La Lettre* – Romanian/Australian Literature Anthology. He published over 100 poems in Romanian publications and websites.



Pic from Pixabay.com

SEPARATION

we no longer attempted talking to each other
that's why an orchard of oranges raised in front of us
distracting us, making us wondering endlessly...
therefore, we started walking slowly around, admiring it.

when we no longer try to hold each other's hands
a row of scissors rose from us instead of nails ...
to quietly alter and graft the trees of the orchard.

one day, we couldn't look at the face of each other
but we were stretching our arms to oranges
picking them for the sake of savouring them
forgetting our love
slowly.

but we were not trying anymore to go to each other:
then an eerie disease began to come out
so all the trees began to dry out.

in the end, we didn't any longer respect one another
that's why a tractor with metal strings grew on our backs
pulling out in our full acknowledgement
all the trees' orchards from their roots.

now being far away from each other
we are silently looking down
at the empty earth.

PHOBIA TO THE OTHER

I'm broker at the credit bureau wearing a moon and a sun on each buttonhole,
a vacuum cleaner in arms nightly absorbing heart, intestines and morality,
holding them in an expensive jade pot
in an elitist, well-guarded, sacred temple, seropositive, serodivine
by practising all means and tricks
to be cold one another.

for my secret world and my beloved ones I am always accustomed
to be the owner of missed intentions and monotonous hugs.
I eat endives, mixed them with clean, fried, sterilised feelings
and fill them, after, in toners for printers' stars.

now I'm an overripe cherry-tree, flowing down rivers of worms
from the centuries ago fallen factory with fences at the cemetery.
I was just saved in the extreme by the noise of the books
with barriers of spears and lung shields of adolescents
when amniotic paranoia broke out of the secret faction of shadows.

the rocky shores of mythology swiftly disappeared,
the surrounding air has become more fragile and ill
and Conchita Wurst told me in threatening thrills
that the portion of love, forgiveness and mercy has ended
for this earth.

THE CUT OF THE MEMORY

your looks seem disturbed by some places and memories of old times. when
these come back at you, the fear makes you cramp your eyes, for, in the next
second, your body would get hit by a truck on a highway, driving at full speed
on the wrong line towards you. sometimes this fear makes you feel like a little
child, mercilessly beaten by parents with a metal belt. without being able to
think of any opposition, you close your eyes to see nothing and try to move
away, while the knife just cut the throat of the time and the body and head will
be separated from now on.

until when?

American-born Jack Grady is a founder member of the Ox Mountain Poets, based in Ballina, County Mayo, Ireland. His poetry has been widely published and has appeared either online or in print. [Jack Grady – Lapwing Store](#).



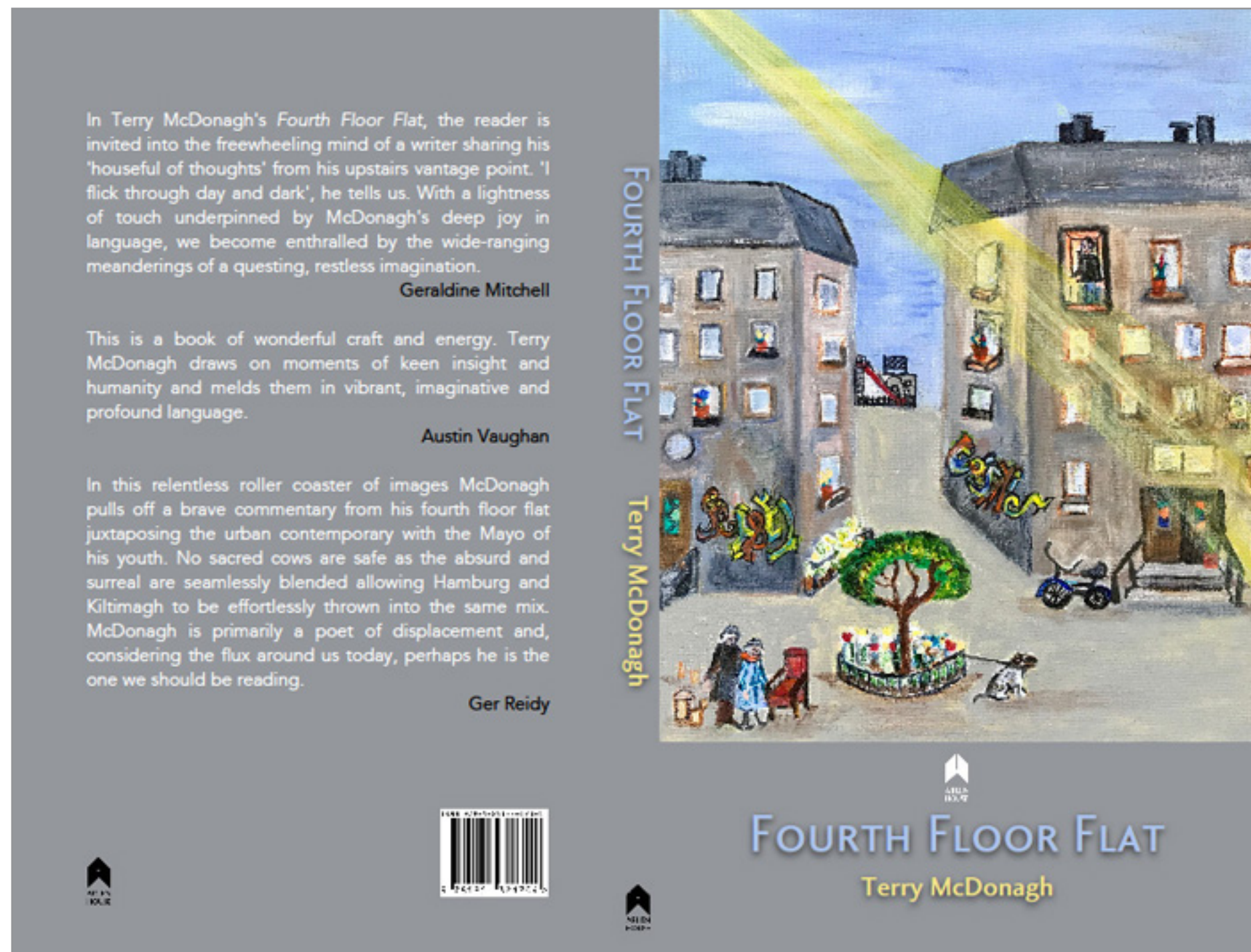
JACK GRADY ON TERRY MCDONAGH'S LATEST BOOK OF POEMS

If there is a word which most accurately describes Terry McDonagh in *Fourth Floor Flat*, it is iconoclast. Nothing is sacred, not even himself. In 44 cantos, he invites us into his abode, where he dissects every aspect of his inner world; exposes and confronts his hopes, fears, and self-doubts. Nor does his iconoclasm grant any mercy to the controllers of this planet, religious or secular, and all those who try to put nature into a box, regulate and tame it. He is a contemporary Jean Jacques Rousseau in that his ideal is in the natural, unfettered inclinations of children, as in the poem *Children Are Wise*, where he urges us to 'Gather up the bliss and thrills of youth / go to the fields to be young again.' He straddles masterfully both his past and his present, bringing both to life in his most profound and confessional work to date, a tour de force of resonance and rhythm, association and imagery, and, most wonderful of all, his imagination, as unsuppressed and vibrant today as it was in his youth. (*The detailed review can be read [HERE](#)*).

Fourth Floor Flat, published by Arlen House, can be ordered from Mayo Books at: <https://www.mayobooks.ie/Terry-McDonagh-Fourth-Floor-Flat-9781851321964>

Syracuse University Press at: <https://press.syr.edu/supressbooks/148/fourth-floor-flat/>

It can also be ordered from Amazon, Kenny's Galway www.kennys.ie and all good bookshops.



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



A MONKEY IN SINGAPORE

a monkey has escaped
 someone saw him watching little children play
 through the fence of a school opposite a hawker in kallang
 I'm sure the monkey knew the break was over soon
 he is intelligent
 quietly observed the ball games and the hiding and the seeking
 a scientist is needed
 planted at a secret observation post
 even at night-time with infrared glasses
 but everybody knows that monkeys have acute senses
 surely would smell the scientist
 would smell her monthly mating smell
 and so, a soldier arrived with a gun
 and put the monkey to sleep
 maybe forever

AUSTRALIAN WOMAN ON THE TUBE

the train is full to the brim
 a day's work in London is folding
 I thought I could hear:
 the pitter patter of a keyboard finishing a report
 the turning of a myriad of pages of worn-out books
 read by commuters on the long ride home
 the sigh at the end of a phone call
 where words exchanged were merely a whisper
 the chuckle of a child at the end of the carriage
 the raspy crackling of a newspaper
 its pages turned with care
 I thought I could hear all that but all I did hear
 was the voice of an Australian woman
 trying to reach alic Springs
 by shouting and telling the world
 about the size of a country
 where sensitivity is not part of the dictionary

VEGETABLE STREET

behind the dusty window
women in grocery stores
their gray hair cropped in middle class neatness
their hands clean
their hips not bad still
they buy steaks, soda, fresh melons and soap
their husbands in green work pants, beer belly
and white t-shirts, shuffle along the sidewalk
in a porky walk and smoke filter-less fags
their trucks waiting around the corner
they smile as the women return
in a gust of confusing tenderness
then take the steak but not the soap
and dream of crossing into dark spaces
to find something that stirs

PIES ON THE RUN

the rays of a joyous winter sun
bounce off polished cars
loaded up with Sunday outfits
chosen for the family lunch –
a woman laughs and bites
into a custard and cream ball
her ginger hair glistening
like a polished fire hydrant
in the absence of emergencies –
perky white lawn bowlers bite into carrots
because the butcher is closed today
but through the window of the bakery
pies in their thousands tumble down main street –
a grandmother with a screeching infant in a pram
zigzags across the road narrowly avoiding a collision
with a steak and mushroom tumbler
heading for the highway.

STRATFORD FROM A WINDOW

the avon in winter
shows its beauty in absences
the willows are naked
and the swans are few
the only sound today is the wind
calling its ghosts from behind the gravestones
clean as a scar on glass
the heartbeats of those that brave the rain
are slowed with the rain
but from time to time
new sounds escape on the other side of night
as umbrellas crumble under sky's weight
the warmth from burning logs
behind my back feels like a refuge

MEETING YOU

until I met you
I was a painter without a brush
a dog without a ball to chase
or summer without sun
but then I met you
and suddenly each towel had a beach to lie on
each melody an orchestra to turn it into song
each star had a name
and the moon wore a smile a galaxy wide
and you and I build a house along the milky way
a house!
something I never thought of until I met you

His poems have appeared in publications such as *The Burning Bush*, *Live Encounters*, *Electric Acorn*, *The Cafe Review*, *The Stony Thursday Book* and *Poetry Ireland Review*, as well as airing on Irish local and national radio. He is the author of a memoir in prose and poems, *Saved to Memory: Lost to View*. With his brother, Austin, he has recorded two albums of poetry and guitar music, *The Secret Chord* (2013) and *Going Gone* (2015). His poetry collection, *Where It Began*, was published by Revival Press in September 2017. Michael lives in Co. Tipperary, Ireland.



AIR WALKING

To re-enact his coup *dans le ciel*
Petit must scale a latter-day Jacob's ladder,
plug his walkwire to air terminals,
to become again the human black bird
hovering above Battery Park.

To plant potatoes in the Pond Field
I must swim out over the M7 Motorway,
nudge the tubers into air furrows
bereft of dung and soil.

Those spuds might fill the pot
of a housewife high atop Ballymun,
her feet no longer touching
the ground that's cut from under all of us.



Pic from Pixabay.com

FRIDAY NIGHT WESTERN

Friday night, the remote scrolling to
wailing harmonica and stuttering banjo.
So I must enter a semi-sepia world,
the buttes and mesas of Monument Valley,
campfire and starlight, run the gauntlet
of Injuns, desperadoes, rustler gangs,
my only companions my rifle, pony and me.

Maybe a lilting honky-tonk piano
will lure me through the batwing doors
of a plywood saloon to mingle with
the ranch hands and the fur trappers,
the poker players and the good-natured whores;
until the ominous strains of the cello
signal the showdown that will set apart
the righteous heroes and the craven cowards.

Step outside. Nothing stirring but dust
and the nervous horses at the hitching posts,
and treacherous bandits, black hats,
lurking and prowling. Holsters caressed
by itchy fingers, a staccato of gunfire,
the obligatory death-dive from the roof
of the general store (the immoral high ground).
And when the smoke disperses, and the townsfolk
shuffle from shuttered gloom into the light,
a doe-eyed Vera Miles or Angie Dickinson
will melt into the marshal's sinewy arms.

Whippoorwill and chaparral,
cactus and tumbleweed,
Stetsons, saddles, spurs, cheroots,
train whistle and wagon wheels,
Rio Bravo, Laramie, Friday night TV,
my rifle, my pony and me.

REACH OUT

for Danny Grace

On the final night of Trinity term we raised a glass
(or three) in Cassidy's of Camden Street,
imbibing not too wisely and not well.
Later in our flat on Rathmines Road I strummed
raucous chords from my first cheap guitar.
Next day with bag and baggage I hit out for home,
and you boarded a student flight for JFK.

The letters with their sprawling hieroglyphics
came edged in blue and red. I relished those tales
of an Irish cook in a Wildwood diner,
and how once, pacing the Jersey shore
after a late shift, your ears picked out familiar strains
from an entertainment hub: The Four Tops
pounding their irresistible Motown beat.

And I wished I could reach out and be there.

Dr Wendy J Dunn, novelist and poet,
Manager Editor of *Backstory* and *Other Terrain journal*.



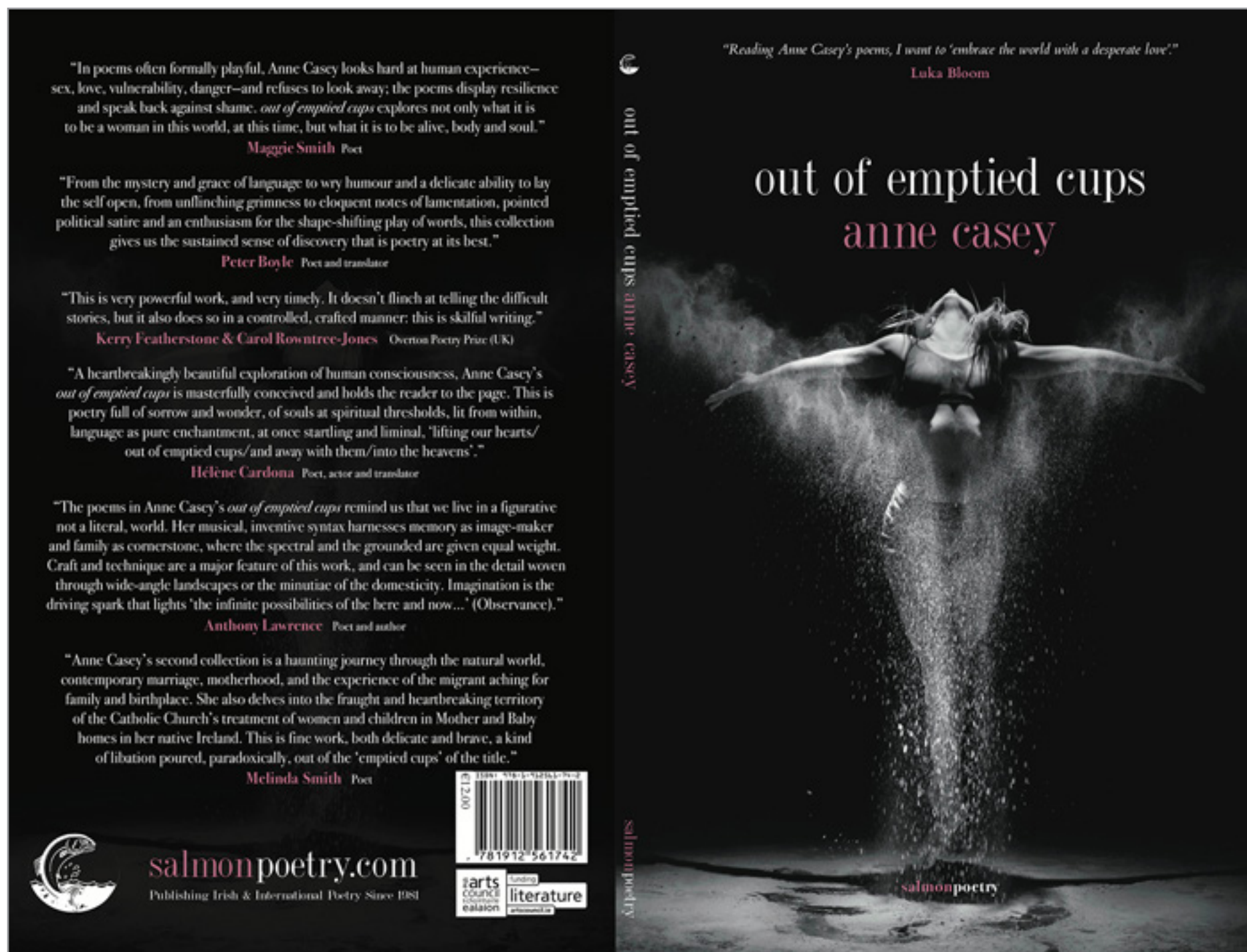
DR WENDY J DUNN ON ANNE CASEY'S LATEST BOOK OF POEMS

One of our Senior Editors (*Backstory* and *Other Terrain*) is the extraordinarily gifted poet Anne Casey. I had come away reading 'where the lost things go', Casey's first collection of poetry, in awe of the power of her words and the perfection of her poetry. 'out of emptied cups', Casey's new work left me equally in awe.

The ancients once said the stars made music which no one can hear – but it is there – real, speaking to our souls. The music of Casey's poetry we can indeed hear. Her poetry sings with honesty, striking at the reader's heart. Casey is an amazingly skilful poet unafraid to experiment with rhyme and meter. Her poems become art on the page as their message is not brought home by words, but often through word shapes depicted like hearts or chalices.

This is truly a courageous, beautiful body of work. Reading Casey's poems reminded me of what the poet Muriel Rukeyser once said: 'What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open.' Casey's truth confronts us in her poetry, and challenges us to gaze through her eyes. (*The detailed review can be read [Here](#)*).

out of emptied cups is published by Salmon Poetry and is available here:
<https://www.salmonpoetry.com/details.php?ID=512&a=307>





Hedy Habra has authored three poetry collections, most recently, *The Taste of the Earth* (Press 53 2019). *Tea in Heliopolis* won the USA Best Book Award and was finalist for the International Book Award, and *Under Brushstrokes* was finalist for the USA Best Book Award and the International Book Award. Her story collection, *Flying Carpets*, won the Arab American Book Award's Honorable Mention and was finalist for the Eric Hoffer Award. A fourteen-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net, her work appears in *Cimarron Review*, *Bitter Oleander*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, *Drunken Boat*, *Gargoyle*, *Nimrod*, *Poet Lore*, *World Literature Today* and *Verse Daily*.
www.hedyhabra.com

OR HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF A CIPHER EVEN FREUD COULDN'T ELUCIDATE?

After Ana Mendieta's *The Labyrinth of Venus*

It could be a seal
 carved in
 flesh
 its winding lines
 like fingerprints
 or tree rings
 in a sawn trunk
 marking a threshold
 in red ink
 or blood

 A written language
 tattooed in defiance
 of finding its key

A seal that raises the notion
 of trespassing
 or
 colonizing
 in the name of desire

An intricate barrier
 not meant to be ignored
 but understood
 not to be toppled
 but deconstructed

 And doesn't history
 record how
 it often takes a woman
 to unwind
 the thread?

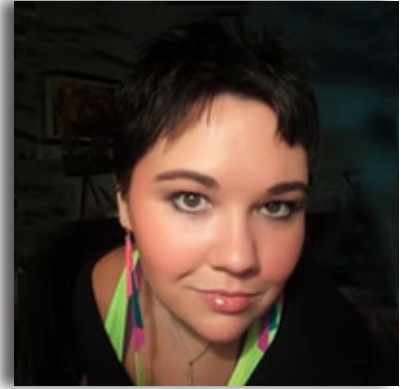
OR HAD SHE TOLD HIM, WOULD HE HAVE UNDERSTOOD?

"Tu étais fait à la taille de mon corps même"
 Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima mon amour*

She could have told him,
 like Emmanuelle Riva,
 who thought she would
 never experience
 such passion again
 "How could I know you fit
 my body like a glove,"
 but would he have understood?

She suddenly felt the deep
 echoes of that woman's feelings,
 first heard from an actress
 in Alain Resnais' black and
 white movie she'd seen when
 she was too young to know
 the language of bodies,
 experience the tightness
 of a custom-made garment
 fitting like a fruit and its skin.

Eyes closed, she sinks
 at times into the hollow well
 of memory, her body comes
 alive from every pore,
 awakens sleeping butterflies
 opening their wings at once,
 folded wings that were
 gateways, shadowy
 interstices that kept hidden
 memory and desire.



Mysti S. Milwee is an American/Native American Internationally published and award winning poetess, synesthesia writer and artist (artist who paints to music) from Southside, Alabama, USA. Her art and literature has appeared in over 300 plus magazines, e-zines, newspaper articles and etc. across the globe. She is the poet/poet laureate of *Fire Eagle Ministries* outreach group. Her works have been used in academic studies and ministries across the globe. Her Book cover Art appears on "Of Sand and Sugar" and the upcoming Albanian Poetry Anthology.

PAPER DAWN

Through the burnt grass that
breaks paper thin, when wiry grass ages -
worn and torn at its roots
longing for the rain.

The petrichor that emanates in the fields
of wheat, and the rye bread of life
breaks when left to dry
where chard's of wheat once stabbed her eye.

As the dawn breaks and her pages wear thin
waving her paper thin dress in the sunflower
fields, reflecting colors of yellow
raining rainbows of reflections.

In her paper dawn dress, washed in color
from grandfather sky to the valley
bathed in sunflower seeds that sow
growth of love and wisdom.

SAFETY NET

Life changes in the blink of an eye
as torn pages wither for new beginnings
stumbling upon the shore towards an open door -

if only I could hide under the sea when
a blanket of waves crash over me, for if then if I
drown in sea-green seas, would anybody cast

a net to save me?

Lost at sea, even when a thousand people
shower me with only one boat afloat, when a ray of
light cast down then and only then

in the still of the moment it was Jesus and I
casting prayers in His open window from the
sky, reflecting in my eyes, to the

depths of the darkness beneath me.

With only one paddle full of strength, anchored
in His armor, a force of wind propelled living;
carried along and down white sandy beaches

to the height of the pier and being raised up to the
heavens, knowing my Jesus is always there;
when the sea hung over my back like a curtain

weight of darkness and despair

Where truth was found in every dark rusted box
that became unlocked by the hands of God
releasing my silence to speak.

EMBRACING AURAS

Birds watching while
sun gazing

watching freedom fliers
kiss the sun-bleached

clouds;

that hung over tall pines
wrapping around

golden halos.

Beaming auras proclaim
heaven exists

in an after-glow.

Sunset beams a plethora
of radiant colors

set under the crescent
luminescent half – shaped moon;

Where angels sit and watch
over people

seeking a ray of light and hope;

For a new day to rise above
the noise

embracing the voice of – God!

INTO THE UNKNOWN

In the moonlight
under the stars
at midnight
in the garden where
the light rendezvous

with darkness.

Cascading meteor
showers of gravity
meets the core
of mother earth
melting a path of

passionate fire.

Between destiny
and fate, where
every road of the
unknown shapes
the core of life that

changes the shape of things.

ASCENDING TO HEAVEN

Radiant rays of yellow
beam to the heavens
leaping for faith from the
hollow hell fire brim.

Rim the sphere of the sun
and paint it black where
the edge embraces the
stronghold of faith.

Inner-weaving musical interludes
of wisdom from word weavers
that scale tall towers reaching
for the ray of heaven.

WHERE SHOULD WE BEGIN?

Through the wonders of the world
rivers come to flow
mud to build and sculpt where
lies of fault ripple through

latitude and longitude

the equator stood still with no beat -

the philosopher speaks retreat
extending finger pointing outward

hustling....
bustling....
hovering....
spotting....
speaking....

with wit and wisdom with no end.

Discovered brick and mortar, the
irony of a disfigured world;

masqueraded by the fiery core
magnetized at birth as

liquidation rises the rivers ,
slow-moving liquid and

oxygen in the air -

how the wonders of the world
the gateway to the unknown -

For if we don't believe in the core,
then therefore.....

where should we begin?

Angela Patten's recent books include: *High Tea at a Low Table: Stories from an Irish Childhood* and *In Praise of Usefulness*. More information is available at her website www.carraigbinn.com



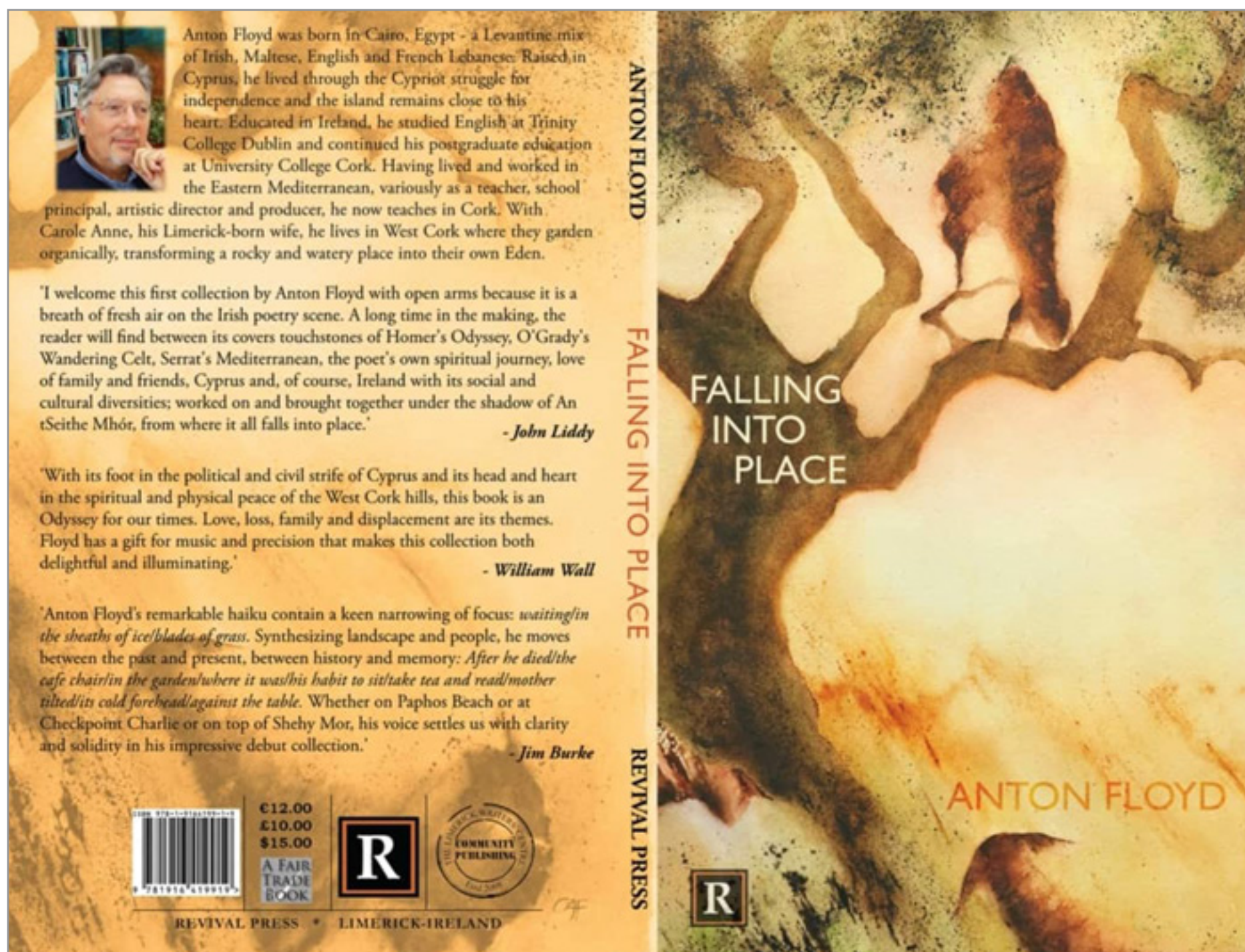
ANGELA PATTEN ON ANTON FLOYD'S FIRST BOOK OF POEMS

Falling into Place, Anton Floyd's new poetry collection from Revival Press, captures the essence of what it is to be alive at a particular time and place and the many events, both personal, spiritual and political, that have led up to it.

From personal narrative to elegy, and from free verse to formal sonnets, these poems combine the cadences of everyday speech with vivid imagery, figurative language and verbal song. Born in Egypt and having grown up in a multilingual world of Cyprus, Floyd deftly braids the sounds and flavors of these languages with his memories of things past—of a childhood imbued with the scent of “pomegranate trees” and “seasoned olives,” of kite-flying and bicycle-riding, abruptly disrupted by violence during the Cyprus War of Independence 1955 -1959, Turkish/Cypriot intercommunal conflict of 1963 and the Turkish Invasion in 1974.

In poem after poem, he celebrates his love for family and friends, his reverence for the natural world, especially in West Cork where he now lives and for art and aesthetics, his belief in brother-and-sisterhood in “a world without passports...,” and both his Irish and Middle Eastern sense of home.

Falling into Place is published by Revival Press, the poetry imprint of The Limerick Writers' Centre: <https://limerickwriterscentre.com/product/falling-into-place/>





Poet, writer and artist Greta Sykes has published her work in many anthologies. She is a member of London Voices Poetry Group and also produces art work for them. Her new volume of poetry called 'The Shipping News and Other Poems' came out in August 2016. The German translation of her book 'Under charred skies' has now been published in Germany under the title 'Unter verbranntem Himmel' by Eulenspiegel Verlag. She is the chair of the Socialist History Society and has organised joint poetry events for them at the Poetry Café. She is a trained child psychologist and has taught at the Institute of Education, London University, where she is now an associate researcher. Her particular focus is now on women's emancipation and antiquity.



THE DARK HEART OF THE CITY

I live in the dark heart
Of the city, its muscle
Is ticking
B boom, b boom,
Where the ancient Gods and
Goddesses reside in the walls
Of the Georgian terraces in Marchmont,
Ormond and Lambs Conduit streets,
And good and evil lurk cheek by jowl,
Demons whisper and howl.

The ancient ones rest and wait
With patience, persistence,
Knowing their time will come
once again.

I live in the mauve, velvety
Heart of the big city,
As if in the womb
Where the muscle of love
Goes b boom, b boom, b boom.

CHRONOLOGY ALIEN

On the yellow beach
Of rainbow light,
My drenched torso
Reclines, spread out,
Each cell soaks up the sun
They're yearning heat,
To dry out the peat bog,
swamps left in my soul
From winter's frozen, darkened
Paths and winds and rain.

Another layer of evolution
Grows in my mind,
Rich, varied, full of chalk
And charcoal, burnt biomass,
Crustacean shells.
Under closed eye lids
Substrata of existence drift by,
Chronology alien.

BUSHEL OF BARLEY

Bushels of barley
Fields of rye,
fields of labour,
shoals of tears,
shoals of fish,
fields of flowers,
fields of kisses,
fields of sunsets,
shoals of kisses,
shoals of longing,
fields of poppies
for the dead.
Flocks of geese
Resting at night on
Fields of flax.
Spring and autumn.

Flecks of snow
When snow still fell,
Flecks of plastic killing fishes.
Flecks of plastic killing the ocean.
Bushels of barley and fields of rye
On the living
And suffering earth.



John Maxwell O'Brien is an emeritus professor of history (Queens College, CUNY) who has written numerous articles on ancient history, medieval history, and the history of alcoholism. His best-selling biography, *Alexander the Great: The Invisible Enemy* (Routledge), has been translated into Greek and Italian and he authored the article on alcoholism in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Professor O'Brien's second life has been devoted to his first love, creative writing. Professor O'Brien's poems have appeared or will appear shortly in *Literary Yard*, *Hedgehog Poetry Press* (where his poem was short-listed in the Cupid's Arrow contest), *IthacaLit*, *The Southwest Poetry Review*, and the *Irish Poetry Corner* of *Irish Arts & Entertainment*. A short story of his is in the current issue of *Kaleidoscope* and he has just finished a debut novel entitled *Aloysius the Great*, an extract from which appears below. Professor O'Brien is now looking for a suitable publishing home for his novel.

"Readers of the June 2019 issue of Live Encounters Poetry & Fiction will notice that the author has transferred the term Hammersmith Tower to this chapter where it fits in more comfortably with the Ulyssean parallel that follows."

CHAPTER IV

Stately, slim Amalia Popper, head secretary of the School of History at Yorkshire University, appears in a smart navy-blue pinstriped suit, her oversized jacket failing to completely obscure an ample bosom.

"Hello, I'm Dr. Aloysius Gogarty from Municipal College. Is Professor Mountjoy available?"

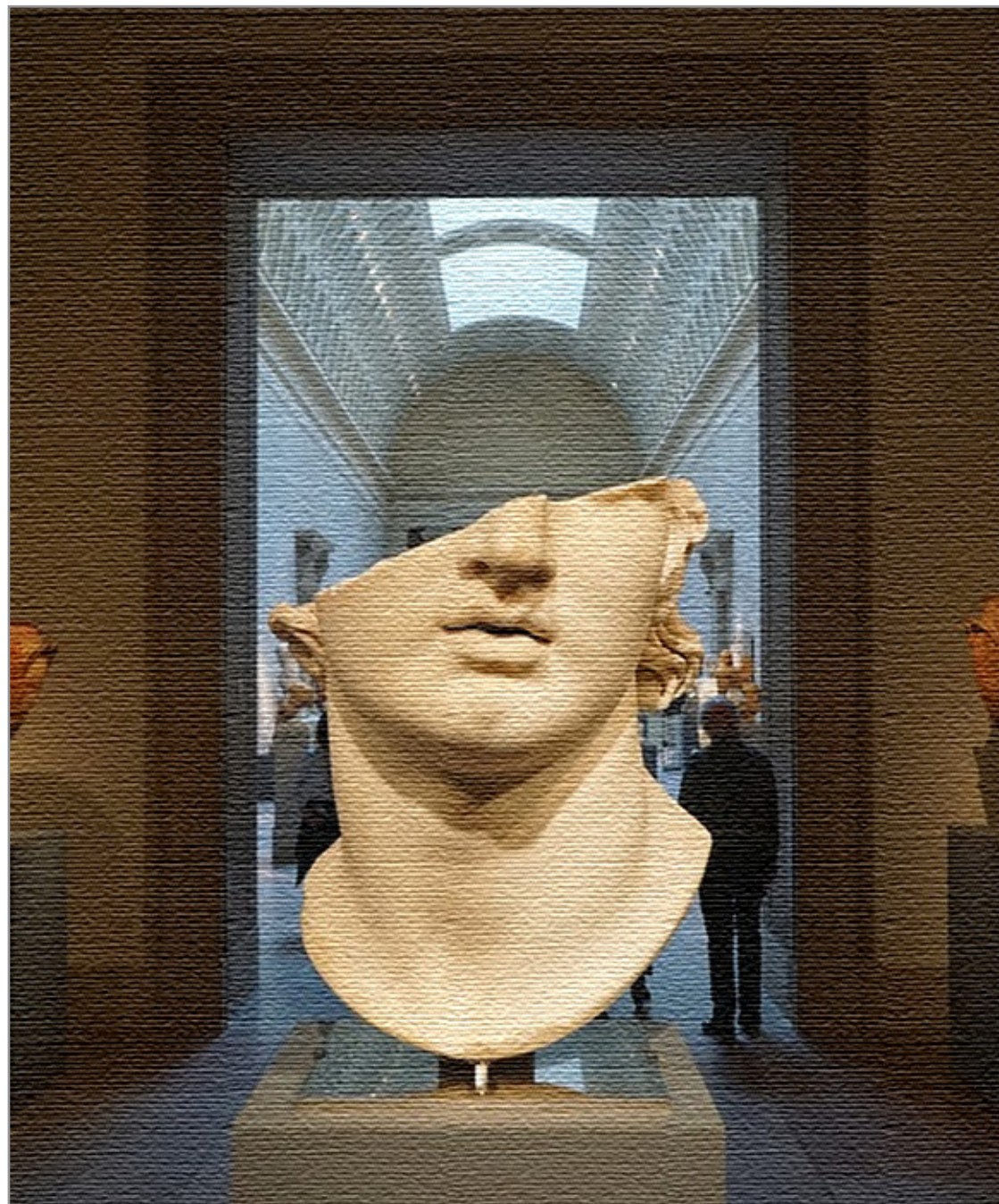
"Dr. Gogarty, I'm afraid Mr. Mountjoy is presently in conference with the chairman of the department." There's a lilt to her voice. That's a good sign.

I wonder what Mountjoy is like? Maybe I can get a hint of that from Miss Popper. Try Alexander's oblique approach. It worked with Elena.

"What does he teach?"

"Mr. Mountjoy lectures on English and American history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He's suggested you might be more comfortable waiting in his office than in the foyer," she says.

Miss Popper leads me down the corridor of the top floor in Hammersmith Tower and opens his office door. I survey the room and my attention is drawn to a corkwood map of England covering the entire wall behind Mountjoy's desk. It's something you'd expect to see in a war room scene from a 1940s British film. The lower portion of the map is swarming in colored pins with heads an eighth of an inch or so in diameter. Whatever war is being waged southern England is getting the worst of it.



Pic from Pixabay.com

On Mountjoy's desk stand three Waterford crystal glasses and a large bottle of González Byass sherry. Stationed in close proximity is a framed black and white photograph of a gaunt female, reminiscent of Virginia Woolf. Wife or mother?

"Mr. Mountjoy will be with you shortly. Approximately half ten, I should think. I'm afraid you'll be unattended for a quarter of an hour or so. Will you be able to manage?"

"By all means, thank you."

Miss Popper notices my fascination with the map and starts to offer an explanation "Dickie"—she gasps, and a roseline blush blossoms on her neck—"that is, Mr. Mountjoy, is our admissions tutor. Mr. Mountjoy recruits some of the department's best students from the south of England. He makes presentations on behalf of the university to sixth-formers in that region. Those pins represent his various visitations. I'm afraid he's obliged to visit the south rather frequently."

She slowly raises her left hand to explore the receding bloom. Her recitation seems to have restored equanimity.

"I'm sorry, but I must return to my desk. If I can be of any further assistance, please don't hesitate to lift Mr. Mountjoy's telephone and press the first button there at the top. You might like to glance at our brochure describing the department." Miss Popper removes a ruler covering a neat stack of pamphlets on the desk and hands one to me before carefully restoring the ruler to its original setting. She excuses herself.

I try to focus on the brochure but can only work my way through a thumbnail sketch of the instructional staff. It's the map that intrigues me. The reading material describes him as a senior lecturer, someone not at the top of the ladder, but not at the bottom either. Why is a senior lecturer engaged in the lowly task of recruitment?

Why am I so obsessed with this map? It's the pins. There's something going on here. There's his appointment book. Maybe between that and the pins I can work out a pattern of some sort. No. No. Wait a minute. I spring to my feet, snatch

the ruler from his desk, and tiptoe behind his chair to attack the map. Measuring, measuring. That's it. I've got it!

The door flies open behind me, ushering in a gust of wind that rustles the papers on Mountjoy's desk.

"Ehhhhhh. You must be the American."

It's Mountjoy. He's about ten years older than me and slightly over six feet tall. Mountjoy's a slim man with a closely-cropped head of black woolly hair highlighted by premature streaks of gray above his temples. He's wearing a double-breasted charcoal-gray suit with a pale-blue shirt and a black tie with white stripes. It must be a college tie. I place the ruler back on his desk. "I beg your pardon. I'm Aloysius Gogarty from New York."

"Yehhhhhhs," Mountjoy elongates, while looking in disapproval at my suit. "Somehow I've been able to surmise that. Ordinarily, I'd suggest you make yourself at home, but courtesies of that sort are gratuitous when it comes to Americans, aren't they, old boy?"

I can't decide whether to laugh or apologize, so I say nothing, still frozen in place.

He extends his hand and startles me by using an ironclad grasp to dance me out from behind the desk and deposit me into his visitor's chair. Pleased at his maneuver, Mountjoy flashes a broad smile, exposing a mouthful of glistening teeth. He proceeds to pour two glasses of sherry and reaches across the desk to deliver mine. It's barely eleven o'clock in the morning, so I adopt my "I don't ordinarily drink at this hour" look. It's ignored, and I meekly accept the glass.

"You could use this, old boy. Culture shock or I should say the inevitable trauma engendered when someone from your hemisphere finds himself in the midst of a bona fide culture. It's similar to a time-war experience, I should think."

"I get it. In this case going back in time."



"I'm told," Mountjoy says, ignoring my riposte, "you're working on one of the greats. Frederick, isn't it? You're undoubtedly aware of Frederick's frugality, but did you know he was frightfully defensive about the costs incurred by his sizable stable of courtiers? He justified it by reassuring all those concerned that 'dancers, prostitutes and professors come cheap.'"

I nearly choke on a trickle of sherry still halfway down my gullet and spray a fine mist over Mountjoy's desk.

He beams with glee at my response while wiping the desk clean with his handkerchief. "Well, well, well, Dr. Gogarty. Here we are awaiting you with great expectations, and you shower us with great exhortations."

I laugh and regain my composure. "By the way, it's Alexander the Great. I'm putting the final touches on a biography of Alexander."

"Alexander the Great?" He grimaces. "Aren't there 3,197 biographies of Alexander already?"

"Well, not that many. Perhaps a hundred or so."

"Stop right there. Is your pilgrimage to our sceptered isle going to be a learning experience, or are you on holiday?"

"Septic isle?" I ask, as if I've misunderstood the phrase.

He roars in appreciation of my intentional misunderstanding and swears by his wife's picture—which is pointed toward the visitor rather than himself—that he'll appropriate the term and flaunt it as if it were his own.

"I'll assume you choose learning experience. Let the lessons begin. One never lies in even numbers, for if you do, the lie will fail to achieve its objective, which is, after all, to deceive, is it not? If you say, 'I've done that a thousand times,' no one will take your claim seriously. On the other hand, if you say with conviction, 'I've done that thirty-seven times,' it renders the assertion infinitely more credible, regardless of its validity."

"Your point is well taken. In defense of writing yet another biography of Alexander, I do have a different take on the man. My emphasis is on his excessive drinking."

"Excessive? Surely"—he screws up his face in faux distress—"you don't mean to suggest he drank too much? We're talking about a chap who conquered over two million square miles, did he not?"

Before I can answer, Mountjoy continues.

"Wasn't it your Lincoln who, when someone suggested Ulysses S. Grant drank too much, said, 'Tell me what brand of whiskey Grant drinks. I'd like to send a barrel of it to my other generals.' In him, old boy, you had a president."

"Yes, that's true. But, for some, getting sozzled lubricates genius, while for others it proves to be debilitating."

Mountjoy nods. "I choose to believe I fall into the former category. And you?"

"Me too." This is going to be quite a year.

"Come to think of it, Gogarty, your scribbling on Alexander's tippling could be of value. Every time you lift a jar you are, in a manner of speaking, at work in the laboratory, are you not?"

"I never thought of it that way, but you're right, you know."

"Ehh, yehhs. I do know. Well, let's assume the world is your laboratory and drink to Britannia, you, and your wards."

He raises his glass and I raise mine.

"Down to business. I've been designated by Professor Bisgood—that is, Professor Bertram Endicott Bisgood, our chairman, referred to henceforth by the initials BEB, as the link between you, your program, and the university. You'll occasionally hear me refer to him as Bertie. Refrain from doing so yourself unless he asks you to."

We place our empty glasses down at the same time and a mellow glow steals over me.

"What do you think of the sherry?" He refills our glasses.

"It's the best I've ever had." If the truth be known, I've never tasted sherry before. It does kindle the veins though, like the mild fire of wine.

"Not the very best, but 'twill do." We reach for our glasses simultaneously.

Mountjoy lifts the bottle with his left hand and studies the label. "The great-great-grandson of the González and I roomed together at Magdalen."

"You roomed together at maudlin? Did others room at melancholia and moribundity?"

He stops, drains his glass, and settles his chin into cupped hands.

"Magdalen College . . . Oxford? M-A-G"—he wags his head with each letter—"D-A-L-E-N?"

"Ohhhh, so it's Mary Maudlin now, is it?"

"Yehhhs. And it's been that way for seven hundred and thirteen years. You'd better stick with me, old boy, or your music-hall act will make you comic relief in this domain."

"Isn't Maudlin," I say casually, as if I've always pronounced it that way, "Oscar Wilde's college?"

"It was. He's been dead for some time now."

"True. But his spirit lingers on. I can see it in you." I laugh freely, this time drawn toward the moose-like features of Mountjoy's wife.

He notices. "That's Priscilla—a woman as purebred as one's likely to find among the upper class in times like these. In fact, one might even say her beauty lies in her genealogy. Nevertheless, approved by M'mah, whose standards are, shall we say, imposing." He looks back at me. "I say, before we go any further, why, may I ask, do you wear those hideous glasses?"

"I have to. They're necessary because of an eye disease which happens to bear the same initials as your chairman, BEB. Extreme light sensitivity, old boy."

Mountjoy clears his throat. "Nothing, my dear boy, nothing is more vulgar than an American attempting to speak like an Englishman. Now, whatever this illness requiring such obscene spectacles may be, let me advise you to alter its name."

"But BEB is the acronym for its name. Benign essential blepharospasm. Do you want me to choke on that each time I describe it?"

"Yehhhs, precisely. Either that or simply refer to it as DMZ or LTD or DOA, any variant of your choice, but not—I repeat, not—BEB. There are those in our department who look upon our chairman rather unfavorably. Bertie is well aware of this, and it fuels his paranoia. We can't have BEB living in fear that some malcontent will make a malicious analogy between your affliction and Bertie's stewardship of the department.

"Furthermore, I'm numbered among his favorites, which yields advantages, none of which I'm prepared to relinquish. And, I daresay, I suspect you don't really need to wear those preposterous eyeglasses at all . . . do you?"

I fidget and Mountjoy takes notice of my distress.

"I withdraw the question," he says with a rueful grin. "Furthermore, and upon due reflection, under no circumstances should you discard the glasses; just your explanation for them."

"Huh?"



"They"—he points to my glasses—"are, in any event, of use to you and hence to us."

"I think you're supposed to brief me on procedures and protocol," I say, attempting to redirect the conversation.

"Procedures yes, protocol no. Learning our *modus operandi* will allow you to conduct your business in a more proficient and less taxing manner. I can be of help there. Genteel behavior is a byproduct of breeding. Unfortunately, no one can help you in that respect. I can say this, however: your year here will be a painful ordeal if you intend to say and do the right thing. Simply put, you will never succeed in acquiring social graces.

"Just bear in mind at all times that you're only an American. Therefore, aside from certain extremities—for example, sodomizing one of your male students while class is still in session—the more barbarically you behave, the more likely you'll find yourself well received here."

"I get it. The more asinine I act, the more it reassures all parties concerned I'm exactly what I claim to be, an American, and therefore nothing to concern themselves with."

"Precisely. And you need not, for the most part, act. Just . . . eh . . . be yourself. You might, of course, occasionally speak a bit more like Humphrey Bogart or Edward G. Robinson. And . . . oh yes, do smoke a cheap cigar now and then.

"The purpose in all this is for you to embody the image of the American we British have come to hold dear to our hearts and loathe at the same time. And, in a similar vein," he gestures toward my clothes, "let's not ignore the advantage of being oafishly shabby. Thus, for the most part, almost anything unwonted you do will be welcome."

"What, may I ask, prompted you to speak to me so candidly? Don't get me wrong, I'm anything but offended. I just never expected to feel this comfortable with anyone over here, particularly in a university setting."

"Breeding and instinct, my dear boy, breeding and instinct. And, I might add, the manner in which you inhale the fruit of Andalusian labor, even though sherry is clearly not your customary beverage. I knew by instinct that you were a man"—he contorts his jowls to speak out of the side of his mouth—"wid cobbler's awls, who spends a night or two at the rub-a-dub."

Is this local dialect, or is he reciting a fairy tale?

"That's Cockney, old boy. It means you've got balls and obviously have lifted a jar or two hither and thither."

"I knew that," I lie.

"Really? Then you must have noticed an exhibition of Bristol Cities when BEB's secretary, Miss Popper, greeted you."

"Duck soup," I say, eager to level the playing field. "Titties. We call them titties."

The door flies open once again, and a short plump gray-bearded man projects his head into the room. Still grasping the doorknob, he stares down at the floor and says absently, "I beg your pardon, gentlemen. I had no idea you were having breakfast." He enters the room and closes the door behind him.

Mountjoy, unruffled, says, "Oh, Bertie, this is Dr. Gogarty, our American visitor. Dr. Gogarty, this is Professor Bisgood, Professor Bertram Endicott Bisgood."

"Well, I'm honored, sir. I've heard a great deal about you and, of course, your work on wool combing and worsted spinning in West Yorkshire," I say. I'd just read the title of his book in the departmental brochure, and noticed it came out in 1937 with no other publications being mentioned except "numerous book reviews in scholarly journals."

BEB blushes but seems pleased by my reference to his book. He clears his throat, guffaws, and looks down as he rocks slightly back and forth on the balls of his feet.

"I'm delighted to make your acquaintance. Mountjoy here should be of considerable help when it comes to policies and procedures and things of that sort, but I may be useful in other matters. Please don't hesitate to call upon me."

He looks with curiosity at my glasses. "Is our lighting a trifle too harsh for you, Dr. Gogarty? We can do something about that, I should think."

"Oh, Bertie," Mountjoy interjects, "Dr. Gogarty here has a nasty ophthalmic condition making it necessary to wear those beastly spectacles of his. They reduce the impact of light on his retinal equipment."

"How unfortunate for you, Dr. Gogarty. What affliction is that?"

Mountjoy's eyes rotate anxiously in my direction.

A moment's hesitation.

"OPO," I say, tapping on my lens.

"Really?" the chairman responds. "Be a good chap and remind me what OPO signifies."

"Obscurum per obscurius."

"Oh, yes, indeed. OPO." He nods and waves an open hand as he leaves.

"Hell's teeth," Mountjoy gasps. "Where did that come from?"

"I have no idea. Maybe from hell's teeth, whatever they are."

"Obscurum per obscurius, eh? If I can still trust my Latin, that phrase means clarifying an obscurity by referring to something even more obscure. How good is your Latin, Gogarty?"

"Fairly good."

"Fairly good, eh? Well, aren't you one lucky chap. You see, poor Bertie's a redbrick product. Any Latin he may've learned in grammar school is far too rusty to be of use to him in working out whole phrases. If you want to see BEB nod convulsively, cast an entire sentence at him. But I must warn you, there are those here who are able not only to decipher your feeble subterfuge but will gleefully torment you with Ciceronian queries. Any display of esoteric terminology should be kept to a bare minimum, or you'll find yourself hanging alongside it."

"Well, I'll have to stick to OPO now, won't I?"

"Better than BEB, my dear fellow, better than BEB. If they ask, tell them you don't remember the Latin. They'll find that plausible and amusing. In fact, it'll help confirm their suspicions of your vacuity. Incidentally, I see you've gotten yourself a mackintosh. That's a wise move in this corner of the world."

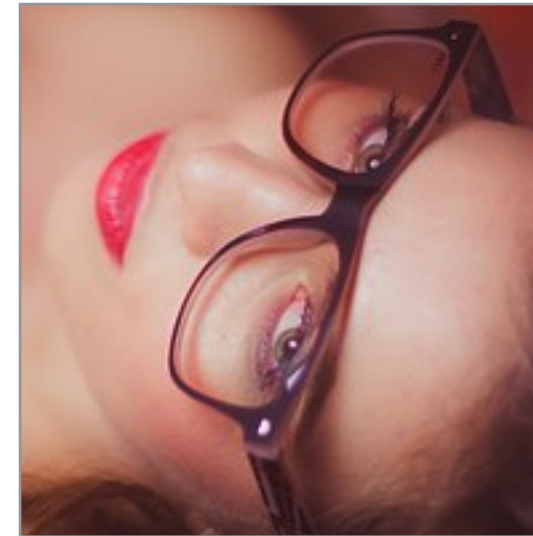
"I see you have one too," I say agreeably, pointing toward his coat rack.

He smirks. "That, my dear boy, is a Burberry. Do get yourself settled in. I'm off to the south later today on university business, but let's see each other soon."

I think I'll keep my revelation about his recruiting trips to myself for now. It should be deployed at just the right time for maximum impact.

"Oh, before you go, Bertie suggested I ask you for facsimiles of the students' applications to your program. We're curious as to who these young people are you're inflicting upon us. Make no mistake, we're well aware of what's going on in that Garden of Eden of yours—race riots, assassinations, druggery, hippies, etcetera, etcetera. And these students are, after all, products of your"—cough, cough—"culture."

I smile at him savoring his own sarcasm. "Please keep this to yourself, but I know next to nothing about our students. The dean of faculty, who's also the Grand Wizard of the program, asked me to be resident director at the last minute and delayed passing their applications on to me until just before I left for the airport."



"Hmm. I'm sorry to tell you this, old boy, but that sounds rather tactical on your dean's part. So, you know nothing of substance about any of them?"

"I do know one of them, a student of mine. The others? From their applications, two of them may be a problem, but that remains to be seen. They arrive on Monday and I'm meeting them in London. Any suggestions as to where I can have them stay for a few days?"

"Not to worry. I'll book them at Passfield Hall. It's part of the London School of Economics and I'll have an old schoolboy chum there take care of your students. I'll arrange for you to be at the Hotel Russell. It has tolerable accommodations and is within walking distance of the hall."

"Shouldn't I be staying at Passfield Hall with the students?"

"My dear boy, either you adjust to British life or you wallow in the trammels of misguided egalitarianism. Which is it?"

Where does he get these phrases from? "Somehow the former sounds more attractive. I'll adjust."

"Splendid. Rather than lowering yourself by living in the fulsome squalor of student barracks, you reside like a gentleman at the Hotel Russell and thereby demonstrate that success breeds privilege and comfort."

"Any suggestions as to what I should say to them? This is supposed to be an orientation meeting of some sort, and I don't know a damn thing about England."

"First of all, keep it just that way. Most of what you think you've learned here will be something you've misunderstood. Second of all, tell them the best way to experience England is without resorting to some specious tour book as a guide."

I smile and nod.

He leans over and replenishes our drinks. "What can you tell me about the student whom you know? Perhaps he can offer a clue as to what we're taking on here."

I hesitate. "It's a she. Marthe Fleischmann. Brilliant young woman. She has a 3.97 GPA—that's a student's grade-point average, based on a scale of four."

"Marthe Fleischmann? Hmm, sounds like a New York student. I'm more interested in weaknesses than strengths. Are there any potential problems with her? What does she intend to read?"

"Medieval paleography, Beowulf, Old English, Old Norse, and Medieval Latin, as I recall."

"So, a glutton for the arcane, eh? Well, her plate's full. We won't have to concern ourselves with Miss Fleischmann, will we?"

"I hope not."

P.D. Dennison is a speculative fiction writer from Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. He is an avid outdoorsman who enjoys hiking, fishing, camping, archery, snow shoeing, barbequing and gardening. He is a lifelong lover of epic fantasy, high adventure, sci-fi and horror. His first book *Legends from the Land of Shaarn Book One: Awakening* a dark, epic fantasy novel will be released September 30, 2019 through Dragon Soul Press. Visit him online at landofshaarn.com, on Facebook at P.D. Dennison, on Instagram @pddennison and on Twitter @pddennison.



Pic from Pixabay.com

CANDY CANE PARK

A young man sits on a park bench next to his captor. He's petrified with fear, taken from his bed in the dead of night, flown through the air across town and into the park. He remembers his father pushing him on the swings next to the cement, candy cane painted trees. The small playground is called Candy Cane Park. It lies inside of a larger park Called Wascana. They sit facing a small man-made lake. It's dark on this side of the park. Globe shaped lights line the street behind them, but that's behind them. It's dark on the bench. The kind of dark that doesn't let a person make out the features on someone's face when they're sitting right next to them. The captor lights a cigarette and the young man can see the outline of his face for the first time and then it's dark again except for the red cherry of the cigarette. The young man tries to get up to run but the captor whips his hand across his chest slamming him back down into the bench so fast and so hard the young man gets the wind knocked out of him.

His captor speaks;

"It's late, round about three in the morning. The streets are quiet, it's the time when good honest folk are usually asleep, kids are tucked in safe and sound but not you. It's my favorite time of night and I'm hungry."

The young man tries to scream, but his captor's hand moves up and over his mouth with blinding speed and strength.

"Scream like that again and I'll snap your neck before I drain you, meat puppet!"

"Tonight I find myself in the sleepy little city of Regina once again. It's really just a farm town, but there's enough people living here to call it a city. The cops out in the sticks in places like this, they only keep a skeleton staff on duty at this time of night. It's why I like to feed here, low exposure to the pigs and to the media. I don't want you squealing, jabbering slack jaws exposing me and my good works! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-haaa!"

"I've stalked the streets of this city for the last ten years and oddly enough the missing person reports have gone up two-hundred percent in that time, go figure. Fat donut eating small town piggies can't put their finger on why so many teenagers keep going missing. Can't figure out where all the bodies go to. Can't seem to find any evidence or any leads. They say it's like the kids just get up from their safe little beddy-bies in the middle of the night when only evil lurks about and they just walk right out their front doors never to be seen or heard from again. Now how the hell is that even possible? I mean come on! If they dragged the damn lake once in a while they'd find a mountain of bodies. It's been dry the last few years and the water level is lower than usual. Damn lake's not very deep! I hope they aren't piled up too high. You might just see an arm or a leg sticking up, no place else around here to hide the bodies either. I'd have to move on."

"I get a kick out of everyone's idea of what's, what. Local color says its alien abductions, small town rags like the QC, and the Leader Post. These papers struggle to find any news at all in this boring little dust bowl. Imagine if they knew I was in town. Just imagine! Network TV has done some reports on Regina because of the missing kids. I watch during the day when I can't go outside. It's always the same. They flash the faces of the kids I've killed across the TV screen, everyone watches in horror and ten minutes later they're back to Seinfeld reruns and stuffing themselves, no memory of the poor, poor kiddies."

"Young blood gives me that lustrous glow of youth, keeps folks from staring for too long if they happen to catch a glimpse of a fang when I smile. Sometimes I forget to retract them; after all I was only human."

"Oh! Where are my manners, please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Longinus and I've been alive for 2,051 years. I was the centurion who drove the spear through Christ's side as he hung on the cross dying. I did it out of pity for Christ's sake, pardon the pun. The poor bastard was choking to death. Have you ever seen a crucifixion victim? It's awful they hang there with all their guts, and ribs pushing up into their lungs, their arms hang at unnatural angles and they can't keep their heads up. It makes their throats close up; they can barely gulp down a breath after an hour. Well this poor son of a bitch, they hung him with nails through the wrist and feet. I'd never seen such a horror in all my days in the legion. They made him carry that monstrous cross for miles and then up the hill at

Golgotha by himself. That was after they whipped him for a good hour. They put a crown of Euphorbia Thorns on his head. My god, those thorns are half an inch long a piece. His scalp was almost off by the time he got up the hill. They made one of his followers help him up the hill and made the guy watch as they hammered in the nails. Jesus screamed and shook the whole time."

"I saw none of that, only heard it. You see I was blind back in those days I was a Roman Centurion, I'd been blinded in a battle. They let me keep my spear and placed me in charge of public executions. So, I stood by and listened to his hard breathing, to his slobbering and sobbing as they hoisted him up onto the cross and tied the ropes tight on his wrists. I was surprised he didn't even yelp at that point. I guess the whipping and the thorns had already beaten most of that out of him. The ropes would've felt like silk by then. I heard them hammer the first nail, into his feet. That sure made him scream! I've never heard a sound like that come out of a man and I swear I could hear the devil laughing in the crowd. He was there too, but we'll get to that."

"Jesus let out a monstrous cry as they hammered in each nail. You could hear this sickly crunching sound as the nails hit bone but only if you were right beside him like I was, the screams were so terrible that it would have drown out the hammer twenty feet away. If anyone ever wondered if Christ took it like a man, well he sure took it. I don't know how manly he was about it but I know this much, I would have screamed just as loud if someone was hammering nails that size through my wrists and feet."

"So he's up there now and the screaming dies down to a low moan, and he just keeps up with it like that for a few hours, gulping down a breath every now and then, choking on his own tears in between. It was really ugly to hear, but I've got no choice but to listen right, because I can't see a damn thing! It's, like work for me, so there I stand, right beside this poor bastard while he chokes on his own lungs."

"There were a couple of other guys being hung too, a couple of thieves. But they were only tied to their crosses. One of them actually had the nerve to speak to Jesus. He asks the guy for forgiveness of all things like Jesus has any to give while he hangs there beside him. But get this, Jesus had the class to offer the man the



forgiveness of God, like it was his to give, while he's up there nailed to a damn' cross! Like who has the presence of mind to offer forgiveness to anyone, let alone some thief, while they're nailed to a cross?"

"They said he was running around the countryside telling everyone he was the son of God and too repent and well, you know the deal, he's really famous now. I don't know if he was the son of god or not, I'll let you decide for yourself but he was definitely no ordinary man, and here's why I say that."

"My eyes had been burned out by a catapult full of flaming debris sent into my battalion during the battle of Gassus Por. It's not a well known battle; some bandits who'd formed up ranks and become more of a mercenary for hire army got stiffed by the local gentry on a gig to protect some gold being shipped into Jerusalem. They didn't take too kindly to that as you can well imagine, can't really blame them. Folks were a little more desperate and a little feistier back then. So, they puff up and come back a week later with two catapults, a battering ram and decide they're hard enough cunts by that point to try and take the whole damn city! Needless to say it didn't go well for them, except they got a few of me and my boys that night. I don't know what was in that catapult exactly but that crap hit my right in the face, red hot chunks of flaming awful is what it was. Burned my left eye right out of the socket and burned my right eyelid shut, knocked me right off my feet. I could still see the sunlight through my right eye lid the next morning but I couldn't see out of it at all. It got infected, they said it was bad, all pussy and stuff. They didn't have modern medicine back then so they burns both eyes with a red hot blade to ward off the infection, bandaged me up and put me on execution duty. I didn't mind. It's not like they had disability back in those days, and if they wouldn't have given me execution duty, I'd have surely starved to death or died a beggar. That's just how things were back then."

"So now that you know a little more about how I came to be at Christ's side while he choked on his last few breaths, how's about we get to the good part, shall we?"
 "So there I am standing beside Christ's cross listening to him die. I find myself gripping my spear tighter than usual, digging the butt end into the ground to take my mind off this poor sod's suffering, but at the same time I also find myself holding my breath just to really hear him suffer; I couldn't not listen. I'd never heard anything like it. All I wanted to do was drive that spear into his guts to shut him up

but until then I had to hear it. Looking back his suffering was truly exquisite, it's sounds like that, the sound of a human begging and pleading for their lives, or the sound of them choking on their last breath of air, those sounds are the only thing that matter to me now. I've seen, and been the cause of, so much death that those are the only moments I cherish now. It's strange how the rest of the world just melts away and it's just you and them. People make promises they aim to keep in those situations, but I never give them the chance to make good."

"I don't know what time it was, we didn't have watches or cell phones back then, but I'd say it was round about five in the afternoon when they asked me to finish him."

"He's hanging on my left, I can hear his breathing get harder, faster, I hear him gulping on dry desert air, he wriggles a mite and one of the bones in his feet breaks where the nail enters next to the bone, I hear the snap plain as day. He grunts some and cries. I sidle up real close to him and feel him there, he shies away as much as a man who's bound hand and foot to a fifteen foot wooden cross can and he's whimpering now. I can feel him shaking as I run my hand up his torso and find his ribs. He's really freaking out now, he knows its coming. I lower my spear to his side and he cries out;"

"My father! My Father! Why have you forsaken me!?"

"You've never heard anything like it. It made your skin crawl; you could hear it echoing through the hills over his cries, over the crowd, who fell oddly silent when he screamed. I took my hand off him for a second it gave me such a fright. I almost felt like I was doing something wrong, but what do I know. At the time we all thought he was just some nut job and what else are we supposed think? Some guy claiming to be the son of God running around the countryside, with hookers and lepers, claiming to heal the sick and feed the poor. I mean he had nothing. He had these guys, who followed him around, but they didn't have anything either, no priests among them, not a penny to their names, but we're supposed to believe he's come to save us all from an eternity of damnation. I mean come on, right?"

"Anyways, I slide my hand back up his side and he's really wriggling now, he knows this is it this time. I find his seventh rib, that's how I'd been doing in these poor sods they hung on these crosses, I'd find their seventh rib and that's where the

the heart is and then I'd pierce their lung and their heart in one go so they'd bleed out quick. I didn't like to hear them die so I wanted to do it quick like with as little fuss as possible. Don't get me wrong I've never been squeamish about death. Not even back then. I mean, I was a Centurion. I'd killed hundreds of men, right up close and personal smiling at them as I stuck my spear into their guts, but they were my enemies, or at least enemies of the state I served and it felt different. After I'd lost my sight I could only hear them. When you close your eyes and listen to a man dying, I mean really listen, it's ugly. It's dark, it's the worst thing you can put your ears through. It's worse than seeing it in battle, you don't have to see the aftermath in battle you stick em' they might make a face but you move on so you don't get stuck yourself. This God damn execution gig, I had to stand there and make sure they were good and dead and then wait for them to be untied and I'd help load them into a cart. Even the sound of the wheels squeaking as they took the bodies away was awful, I still remember it, and I can still hear it in my mind. But I'm off on a tangent again so I digress."

"There I am spear in hand, all lined up and I THRUST! The spear goes clean through the first lung through the heart, and into the other lung, It's a good solid strike this one's going to bleed out quick and it's a good thing because I can barely stand all the whimpering and slobbering that's going on. He slobbered right on me. It was awful. I give the spear a quick twist and yank er' back out. See, that's me doing him a big solid. It speeds the bleeding along nicely. He's only got seconds to live at this point, but here's the kicker."

"As the spear comes back out, a geyser of blood comes with, and it hits me right in the face, right in the eyes! I feel the hot blood hit my scarred eyelids and run down my face. But it's not just hot it's searing hot. I start to scream, I drop my spear, fall to my knees and I'm on the ground wailing beside Jesus who's blood is pouring out on the ground right beside me. I'm rubbing my eyes because the blood actually hurt, it burned me and as I'm rubbing the weirdest sensation takes hold of me, I can start to see light through my eye lids again. I keep rubbing and carrying on not knowing what's going on. One of the other guards comes over and wipes the blood off my face for me and when he does, I open my eyes for the first time over a year and I see the entire scene before me. I'm on the hill at Golgotha, just outside Jerusalem and there's Jesus' blood pouring from his side and even his mouth now, it really was a good strike, right through the chest, almost completely. He's gurgling

and sputtering and then it all stops. The crowd goes quiet; they're watching to see if he's dead now because he's not moving. I stand up and give him a poke with my spear and sure enough he's gone to meet his maker. No one is any the wiser about my sight. Can you believe that? They didn't even notice. With all the commotion surrounding Jesus, no one even realized a blind man regained his sight that day from the blood of Christ. Just as I turn around to announce to the crowd that he's dead, in shock myself at the fact I can see, there's this brilliant swirling flash of fire from the ground and the sand begins to bubble like molten lava."

"A fissure opens up, hot wind and flames come swirling up from the earth, I stepped back and tightened my grip on my spear, I had no idea of what was about to happen. Out of the flames steps a demon! A God, damned demon! He walks right up to me and says his name is Baphomet. Says he wants to thank me for doing what he wasn't able to. He says that demons have no power over the son of God on Earth, that it was his dominion while he lived here. That's right he said the son of God. Says he wants to give me a gift for my service to the dark lord, as he calls him and he grabs my spear and pulls me in toward him nice and close. Grabs my shoulder with his other hand and pulls me right up to his face. I'm crapping a brick at this point like what the hell, right? He's all hot and stinking and breathing the nastiest most indescribable breath on me and says that I'll live on to tell this tale for all eternity and he chomps into my neck before I even know what's going on. I've still got the scar to prove it. He lets me go and lets out this horrendous howl, he's got my blood running down his chest and he's screaming into the sky. I mean think about it, this is the first thing I'd seen in over a year and I see Christ breathe his last, return my sight to me, then a demon appears before me and takes a bite out of my throat, So, at this point I'm completely buggered backwards and forwards. I'm screaming,"

"My neck! My neck!"

"And looking up at this goat legged muscle bound beast before me with my blood running down his chin and chest and he just laughs. He laughs so loud the ground shakes, people are screaming and running off now, it's just me and the demon. He grabs hold of me again and picks me up to my feet. My legs are jello he's got to hold me up; I can't even stand by this point. Like, I'm surprised I didn't crap myself. He grabs me by the shoulders and tells me that I'm now a creature of the night, that I'll live forever, that I'm called a vampire. The first vampire, he says.



He tells me that I have to feed on the blood and flesh of the living to survive now. He calls me his son; he actually has the audacity to hug me. I was dumbfounded. I couldn't believe I wasn't bleeding out after that bite he took out of my throat, but I wasn't even bleeding anymore. Finally he lets me go and I'm back on my own two feet."

"In a swirling flash of fire and smoke the ground bubbles up like lava, opens up again and he disappears down into the molten muck, never to be seen again. Like to this day, he's never made an appearance again, even when I've called for him."
"So that's it, that's how I became a vampire, the first vampire. All the other vampires out there were created by my children, the first that I created. But I'll get to the other vampires in a bit."

"So there I am on the hill at Golgotha, Christ's body hanging there lifeless beside me. You'd think regaining my sight from the blood of Christ, and being chomped on by a demon who tells me I'm the first vampire and that it's somehow his gift to me for killing the son of God would be the end of the weirdness for the day, but it got a little weirder for me still. Up till that point in the day the sky had been overcast and there was even a little drizzle now and again. But now, the sky clears off and I can see the sun setting on the horizon. My eyes start to burn like hell and my skin is on fire! I think good God, am I going blind again, so I'm rubbing my eyes and freaking out, but the burning on my skin just gets worse and worse until another cloud passes in front of the sun and I realize it's the sunlight causing the burning. Whatever the demon had 'gifted' me with, left me allergic to the damn sun! So I go running back into town and straight to my house, I didn't even go back to work that night, I was too messed up. Besides, everyone saw a demon trying to eat me so for all they knew I'd been devoured and was long gone by that point in time."

"I run inside the house and shutter the window. I fill a bowl of water to see my reflection but nothing. I move the bowl around carefully to catch the right angle but I can't see myself. For the first time in a year I could see but my reflection somehow escaped me. I couldn't believe it! The blood of Christ healed my sight but the bite of Baphomet took my reflection from me. Never again would I see my own face."

"The sun was going down and it was past supper time. I was getting hungry. I had some stew in the pot from the previous night so I decided to heat it up and have a bite.

I remember it tasting off. Not quite sure how else to describe it, just off like it had gone bad or something. I only ate a couple of bites and threw up. It was rank, I couldn't even make it outside, I threw up inside the house all over the door and the floor. Then, I remember, Baphomet told me I had to feed on the blood and flesh of the living now that I was a vampire. I get a little freaked out at this point. I'm hungry, like really hungry. So hungry I can't even describe what I would have done to get something to eat. It was worst that first night."

"I go over to the wash basin to start cleaning the blood and vomit off myself and clean up the floor and I get all that done. I'm wiping the blood away from my neck where the demon bit me and I'm running my fingers over the scar and I notice something really screwed up. I don't feel any pulse. I feel for it. I mean this was between thirty and thirty-six AD. We didn't have the common knowledge of medicine that even a high school graduate has today but we knew where to check for a pulse and mine wasn't there. I checked both wrists and both sides of my throat. I checked and checked again. I was getting really freaked. There was nothing. Thing that was so upsetting was that I was standing and walking around the house, and checking myself over, how could that be without a pulse?"

"It hit me all at once like a sack of wet hammers. I really was a creature of the night. I was hungering for something I didn't even know the taste of. I had no pulse but I was still standing and the sun had burned my eyes and flesh. I finished cleaning myself up, got dressed in some clean clothes and decided to go out for a bite."

"The sun was just down and the twilight lit the evening up in a brilliant myriad of oranges and pinks. It had been so long since I'd seen the sky at sunset. The streets were shadowy and dark already but I could see clear as day. I walked for about twenty minutes to get myself good and far away from my house and let the sun go down completely. It was dark now. About eight o'clock. Most folks were in for the night, but the hookers were out in full force. I decided that my first victim would be a whore. No one would miss a whore, and no one cared about them enough to go looking even if they did notice one missing."

"I walked over to the tavern in old town where the most hookers hung out waiting for their johns to pick them up. There was no shortage of ladies that's for sure. They started flirting with me as soon as I rounded the corner. One came right up to me and

and grabbed my dick through my pants. I let her play with me. She teased me with promise of a blow job for just a few coins and I thought this was as good as any opportunity I was going to get. I lead her into the alley. A bum was passed out drunk hugging onto his wine bottle tight as a babe and its blankey. I stopped and nudged him with my foot as we passed. He was out cold and wasn't going to be waking up anytime soon."

"I let the hooker give me a blow job. She commented on my cold skin, I raised an eyebrow at that. I hadn't thought about it yet. My skin probably was cold. I had no pulse. No warm blood flowing through my veins any longer. I touched my arm while she sucked. It was cold. Curious I thought to myself."

"Just then something took hold of me. The hunger came again. Intense, like an inescapable command from within my mind and without thinking I reached down and grabbed the whore by the hair and pulled her throat up to my mouth snapping her neck in the process. I bit into her throat and sucked the life right out of her. I sucked deeply and for a good long minute until not a drop more would come. She'd shriveled slightly I sucked so hard. How ironic I thought to myself, she was just sucking on me and now I'm sucking on her. Then, I took a big bite and chewed savagely. I dropped her corpse to the ground, finished with my first meal as a child of the night. I kicked her into the trash behind the tavern and walked off."

"In all actuality I was dead, or rather undead, but I'd never felt as alive in all my life or unlife as I did after that first meal. I felt strong and fast and I was. I ran from the scene at a blinding speed, whizzing past streets and alleyways. I leapt over a dog and flew a good twenty feet before I came down hard rolling and skidding onto the ground. I wasn't expecting that. Funny thing was that when I checked myself over I didn't have a scratch on me. Funnier still, my flesh was warm. The whore's blood warmed my skin. I got to my feet, brushed off the dust of the road and leapt straight up to see how high I was actually able to jump. I could easily jump fifteen feet vertically from a standstill. Now that I'm a little more in tune with my powers, I know that I can leap twenty-one feet straight up, not a word of a lie."

"I leapt on top of one of the buildings beside me and sprinted across the roof top, eyes wide, I ran through the night, able to see plain as day, and leapt from that roof top to one across the street with ease. I didn't even need to roll when I landed atop the next building. I made my way home in this way without being seen, leaping from roof to roof with all the ease of a cat and all the stealth of one too. I was able to perform these acrobatics without making a sound or breaking a sweat."

"I decided to spend the rest of the night in. I was trying to get my head around what was happening and after feeding I felt calm enough to rest so I went home, drank wine for a couple of hours while I thought about all the crap that had happened that day. Thank God I could still get drunk. I drank the whole bottle and went to sleep."

"Well, that's it. That's how I came to be here, with you tonight. So now the question you're asking yourself is;

"Am I gonna be vampire food tonight?"

"Well, kid, don't you worry yourself. I'm not going to eat you. I'm going to turn you." The young man tried again to get up and he screamed for help, but it was already too late. Longinus leapt on top of him a sweaty toothed madman, and bit into his throat deeply. It choked the young man's voice right out of him. He gulped and gasped as the last bit of wind left his lungs and his heart stopped. Longinus stopped just shy of taking the last drop, bit his own tongue and let some of his blood mix with the young man's.

The body of the young man began to shake and writhe. His legs kicked as the vampire blood entered his pale body. His hands came up to try and push Longinus off of him.

Longinus rose to his feet and wiped the blood away from his mouth, onto his sleeve, chuckling to himself as he watched the boy turn into a child of the night, his child.

For Longinus, it was time to move on, as he always eventually did. But he liked to leave his calling card behind when he left a city. He liked to sire a vampire into the world. Someone to come back to, someone he could count on when he needed something from this city.

The young man rose to his feet, panic in his eyes, clutching at his throat, wiping away the blood.

Longinus put his arm around the young man's neck and spoke, "Welcome to the night, my child."

The End, or is it?



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