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Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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Live Encounters Ten Years On

Terry McDonagh

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

We are appealing for donations to pay for the administrative and technical aspects of the publication. Please help spread the free distribution of knowledge with any amount for this just cause.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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Terry is a founding contributor of Live Encounters Magazine.

Terry McDonagh

Live Encounters Ten Years On

There is a special symmetry and circularity in this current, bumper edition of Live Encounters that incorporates Live Encounters Magazine, Live Encounters Poetry & Writing and Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers. This issue is the result of the hard work of ten valuable and productive years.

The growth and success of LE is a tribute to the vision and persistence of founder and Editor in Chief, Mark Ulyseas. It all began in 2010 when Mark reached out to the international community to produce a bimonthly international journal by citizens of planet earth. Now, a decade later, LE has become a much bigger story connecting with artists, young and old; to people of diverse religious, political and business backgrounds and persuasions. LE offers well-known writers, journalists, reviewers and critical thinkers from all corners of the globe an opportunity to access a wider audience.

LE provides a platform for national and international contemporary writing by people from various geographical regions and social backgrounds. Reading through issue after issue from 2010 up to 2019 has helped me realise that the earth is, indeed, a village, populated by millions of village earth people. These ‘villagers’ might, at first glance, appear somewhat different to ‘US’. But we become increasingly aware that although they wear their own particular colours, we share myriad basic needs and aspirations. We can all unite through our poems, songs, stories, images and dreams. We can perhaps find solace and comfort.

Poems are not words, after all, but fires for the cold.
LE grants us glimpses into the concerns of real people – their troubles, cares and special moments in picture, prose and poetry. It grants us some time out and allows us access to the experiences of others. In the words of American poet, Mary Oliver, it *gives us ropes let down to the lost* – time to contemplate universal real life issues – fear, joy, loneliness, and relationships. We attain insight into life in cities and cultures we may never have the opportunity to visit. This wide geographical spread challenges our cultural and moral certitudes and prejudices. It rattles us with differing vibrations to make us laugh, believe and, sometimes, cry.

I was honoured to have been included in the inaugural issue of LE in 2010 with two of my poems: ‘A Gypsy Woman in Ireland’ and ‘Writer’s Festival on Bali’. Thanks to the great Indonesian poet and publisher, Rosa Herliany, I took part in The International Festival of Bali in 2004. It seems like a long time ago but the memory is vivid and alive and it inspired my poem, ‘A Writers Festival on Bali’. The further we reach out the greater the reward. Reaching out has become an LE anthem.

Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers is a very positive and exciting new development. An authentic and professional forum for writing by children and teenagers is so important. They learn about the process of writing, editing and publication. They gain in self-confidence as writers and citizens whose ideas and beliefs are taken seriously. This is an exciting and demanding time for young people. Traditional values and systems are being challenged and issues such as climate change, gender roles and mental health are major concerns. We live in a world of social media, images and pictures – hence the opportunity for young people to write and publish their opinions is invaluable. And LE gives us a master class in how to produce a magazine. Mark always gets it right. He has a happy ability of enhancing text with his choice of image and picture.

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I often ask myself why write at all? I don’t have answers but I suspect it has to do with need – a desire to tell a story as yet untold. *Poetry is a life-cherishing force* – Mary Oliver. Then there is the fear of rejection; the countless hours when we could be doing something sensible. And if we begin to take our writing seriously there is the question of publication. Thankfully Mark Ulyseas offers us an enduring and creditable outlet and platform for our work. When I meet poets we talk about Live Encounters!

During the last decade Live Encounters has developed, matured and found its feet. The circle is closed that began with the publication of the Inaugural Issue of January 2010. In that first issue, Oscar Wilde appears to Mark Ulyseas to discuss *The Importance of Being Oscar Wilde* at The Late Writers & Readers Festival. Little could Mark have realised that we would be heaping praise on the importance of Live Encounters in 2019. To quote Oscar Wilde, ‘Success is a science; if you have the conditions, you get the result.’

Here’s to the next ten years of Live Encounters!
LIGHT DANCE - AFTER RUMI

I.

When you love, there is no me, no we
says Rumi

You are my freedom,
The moment of morning before the first bird song
When dark and light entwine and our blood sings halleluiah
And skin-pores fuse, lips dissolving;
Beloved moment of breath-dance, in the birthing sobs of the day,
I celebrate this meeting...

With touch, with sound, with word, with whirling bodies,
With lips that speak the language of ecstasy,
With thoughts that swirl one with the other,
With the harmony of feelings,
With love space-dancing,
With life and death in the dance of creation,
Meeting, merging, resurrecting.

Randhir Khare

Randhir Khare is a distinguished writer, artist, teacher and theatre personality. He is the recipient of numerous national and international awards for his unique contribution to culture and education. His 36 volumes of poetry, fiction, essays, translation from tribal dialects and other writings as well as his 7 solo exhibitions all explore themes of identity, belonging and the struggle to stay human in a violent and fragmented world. He has more recently spearheaded an initiative to enrich formal education through the experience of the arts. https://randhirkhare.in/ This poem sequence has been inspired by Rumi. It was first performed by the poet Randhir Khare with the Indo-Iranian band AFTER RUMI that he recently founded. The band consists of a Duff player, a Sarangi player and a Tamba player. It was first performed at The Studio and later at French Window.

 Randhir is a founding contributor of Live Encounters Magazine.
2.  

_Lovers never meet, they are always one,  
says Rumi_

I celebrate this meeting of journeys, of languages, beliefs, 
Customs, attitudes, feelings, sharings, tastes,  
Ways of loving, hoping, remembering, the sacredness of spaces,  
Path touching path in the green woods of afternoon,  
Skies airbrushed with cloud wisps,  
Rivers flowing into each other’s arms, coming home as one.  
In the great world of forgetfulness my darling we are just stardust,  
Floating, scattering, colliding, struggling, shattering,  
Within, we are one and only one …  
Veins, muscles, sinews, my breath fills your lungs,  
We savour the union of distances in the beat of one heart,  
We call each other’s names in a moment of becoming  
In one voice, one voice, one voice.

3.  

_I give you a mirror, look at your reflection and you will remember me,  
says Rumi_

In you I see who I am, what I am, how I am, why I am,  
I see myself flesh, mind, spirit, heart,  
I accept my hurt, loss, my inconsistencies, my homelessness,  
I embrace my blue sky crowded with dream swallows,  
I die, dig my own grave, bury myself, resurrect myself,  
Give myself wings that catch the winds of becoming  
And fly to you…only you….my mirror;  
I stand before you stripped to my soul, my nothingness,  
And say to myself standing in the windows of your irises -  
_You are free, finally free…  
Free to be, beautiful one, glowing one,  
For I am you and you are me…  
And we dissolve into each other;  
Crying with voices of forever…_
4.

The lover whirls like the birthing universe, in joy, says Rumi

I rise as a child-kite lofted on skirt-hems of the wind
Rising and dipping, swinging and gliding,
Your joy in me, my joy in you,
Juices of morning light trickling on day’s skin, navel-singing,
Wet tongue and lips on throats,
Fingertips glowing in the soft fire of sacredness.
We are flame, pure flame,
Blue and red and soft and flowing in the winds of our breathing,
Whirling and whirling, swallow spirals, reborn comets,
Love light of the divine dissolving …
Our bodies in an effulgence of belonging,
Revolving revolving,
This is the beginning, this is the end,
This is forever, my love.

5.

When we make love, it is like God is with us, says Rumi

We breathe into each other’s lungs, speak in each other’s voices,
See through each other’s eyes,
Palm on palm sharing destinies,
Sharing moments of morning before first bird songs,
Sharing tongues, sharing destinies,
You bathe me with the pure light of your moon-body
Singing of the Tree of Life,
Roots thrusting into the earth, deep and searching
For the spring waters of time,
Earth holding, clasping, throbbing.
We merge, we separate, drift, meet, fly,
Turning and turning, each in our own galaxy,
And yet as one…
Deep, so deep and drown in pure moon light,
Singing like angels.
6.

Dance, when you are perfectly free,
says Rumi

We dance the dance of love, within, without,
Inside each other and yet so different, we remain, become, entwined,
Vines climbing to the light above the canopy of trees,
Above the mud and bones and death and roots,
Above the work of worms and butterflies,
Above the busy-ness of maggots, above the fireflies of longing,
We dance entwined, with all our pain and bitterness resolved,
We dance the dance of light, rising and rising,
Rising to crystal rooftops to complete ourselves.
Emma Barone is a contemporary visual artist. She makes still life and landscape paintings in acrylic on canvas. She studied animation and has an eclectic design background that ranges from interior design to architectural ceramics, and from stained glass to jewellery design. Barone’s work has been featured in various publications including Live Encounters Magazine, The Irish Arts Review, Senior Times, House and Home, and the Sunday Independent; and she has published two books in collaboration with the Hennessy Award-winning writer, Eileen Casey. Emma has exhibited extensively throughout Ireland, with 23 solo exhibitions under her belt, her work is in private and public collections including the Amsterdam World Trade Centre, Midlands Regional Hospital, Offaly County Council and Tullamore DEW Visitors Centre, Ireland. https://www.emmabarone.com/

We thank Irish Artist Emma for her fabulous cover artworks for Live Encounters Poetry & Writing and Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers, which she has generously contributed since March 2017.

EMMA BARONE is a contemporary visual artist.

She makes still life and landscape paintings in acrylic on canvas.

All Emma’s work is connected. People know her for her unique style of painting. Strong colours, imagery and the way that they amalgamate are consistent in all her work, past and present. Elements of trees, water, space, sky, geometry and the microcosm of nature weren’t intentional, they just appeared in the paintings as if there was a higher power at work.

Her inspiration comes from actually doing the work not to mention the magic bits and the colour combinations and the way it all works together in creative harmony.
Dangerous Pursuits

The morning discloses a phoenix
in the garden.
You mean a pheasant? No, a phoenix,
each feather burning, the eyes burning.
Such brightness consumes itself.
I scramble through the bushes looking
for the phoenix.
I cannot hope to find her;
but should I stumble
upon her, the air will ignite, the garden
blaze, and I will achieve happiness.

Suniti Namjoshi was born in Mumbai, India and at present lives in the southwest of England. Her books include Feminist Fables, Building Babel, Saint Suniti and the Dragon, Goja, Sycorax, The Fabulous Feminist, Suki and Foxy Aesop (also published as Aesop the Fox). Her books are published by Spinifex Press and Zubaan. Her children's books, including the Aditi series, The Boy and Dragon Stories and Blue and Other Stories are published by Tulika Books and Spinifex Press. For Blue Nilima Sheikh did the art work. Suniti's papers are in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suniti_Namjoshi
A Speculative Bent

As she looked at the rows and rows of cabbages stretching out before her, she wondered what would happen if cabbages were like human beings. ‘Or the other way about,’ she corrected herself. She had been told she had a speculative bent and encouraged to feel that this was a good thing. She pursued the thought:

‘We wouldn’t have any arms and legs, but we could roll, I suppose. Rolling downhill would be fun, but rolling uphill wouldn’t be easy. It would probably be impossible. Still, as cabbages, we would have to sit still all day. We would then be able to develop the power of our minds. We would acquire telepathy and telekinesis. Any cabbage could speak to any other. And we would be able to move objects at will – rocks, trees, even mountains. We could re-shape the earth to make it a pleasant place for cabbages to live on. As cabbages, we could even move ourselves. We could roll uphill!’

She felt pleased. Life as cabbages was beginning to look utopian. It was worth thinking about. She looked at the rows of cabbages again. Each cabbage looked very like any other cabbage.

‘We would all be the same!’ she exclaimed to herself. ‘There would be no jealousy, no inequality, no racism, no factions, no wars. No cabbage would say that its shade of green was lighter or darker.’

She peered at the cabbages anxiously. Perhaps there were differences among cabbages? Perhaps some were greener, some lighter, some sweeter, some less sweet, some larger, some smaller, some more capable of deep thought and telekinesis? It was worrying. She scrutinised the cabbages again. They all looked the same. If there were any differences, they were negligible. They would live in an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity!

As she continued to contemplate the serenity of the cabbages, a rabbit came along and began to nibble at a cabbage leaf. She watched horrified. But the cabbage didn’t move, it didn’t even squeak. ‘Herbivores were clearly a problem. Cows, kangaroos, elephants, horses... Herbivores would have to be abolished - or transformed. That’s it! They could be turned into other vegetables. This would make for a somewhat static landscape. Ah, but carnivores could be allowed to flourish. Lions and tigers would gambol on the green and adorn the scenery. But what would they eat? No herbivores and so no carnivores. A pity, but there was no help for it.’ ‘And no insects,’ she added as an afterthought.

It then occurred to her that the rabbits and the rest weren’t the main problem. All the cabbages would soon be harvested – by human beings! From her green utopia human beings would have to be banned. No, that was all right. Human beings were cabbages! It was a superb plan.

She began to consider where she might publish it.
DANGEROUS PURSUITS

MADAM MUTABILITY

Aspects of Mu

Madam Mutability has come to tea. Her stale scent clogs the air: She is someone I don’t want to be. I’m ten years old. I turn my face away. She takes no notice, she says to my mother:

I am the one who puts fuzz on the peach, dew on the grass, rust on the cheek. I’m probably the one who finally kills. Without me, nothing would grow, nothing would live. No baby born would ever squall. All would be silent, all would be still. The flick of a finger and everything moves. The cock crows, the dove coos. The whole of creation is swinging along on mother’s milk.

I look at my mother, who looks away, and says nothing Ten years later it’s Mu again, gobbling cakes, guzzling cream.

CONFIDENTIAL, my dear, between you and me, the sun will rise and the earth will spin and a stray asteroid might wander in. Does she know what she’s saying? And she, grinning down her nose, smiling through her teeth, Oh you babbling buttercup, I don’t need to know anything!

Next she’s a friend. Someone I knew long ago. We used to play games. And which games are those? It doesn’t really matter. That ball – thundering down – that is destiny. You are the ninepins. She shrugs, absolving herself. I’m not a player. I’m just watching. She has set me up, sent the ball rolling.

One day she says: Let’s play catch. Catch as catch can. If I touch you, you’ll shrivel up and die. And if you touch me, you’ll shrivel up and die. And if I refuse? You’ll still shrivel up and later you’ll die.

continued overleaf...
**MADAM MUTABILITY**

**Aspects of Mu**

She sits like a cat with her tail curled, watching me age. But she says,

*That’s not interesting.*

Fluffy Madam Mu is a makeup artiste, with a degree in beauty. She can cut hair. She can go ‘snip, snip.’

She is staring at my face, and at the whole of my body. Suddenly, she reaches across and scores my cheek.

I don’t even know whether she hates me.

**My Charge Against Her**

What did you do with the dead worlds? Where did you hide the bodies? And the thoughts of each body? Where are they archived?

Those who walked slowly downhill, or rose from the table, and excused themselves - you made them go!

You said something! She just raises guiltless hands. *You know they couldn’t help themselves.*

What did you say to the gosling, to the small child?

I didn’t say anything. They learn as they go.

What do they learn? That everything they love is fading and fragile, and like themselves susceptible to death.

**She Tries to Explain**

Madam Mu is grave and gracious:

*I mean you no harm.*

What you suffer are your own limitations. If you could step into time, dally with creation for just a little while, then step out again, you would be fine.

*I’m not Old Mother Hubbard eating up everything – I transmute everything – light into leaves, and leaves into earth – what you call alchemy, chemistry.*

Look, you climb on a time belt and trundle along, with your eyes in the back of your head. You can’t see a thing coming at you.

It’s the way you’re born.
MADAM MUTABILITY  
contd...

She Tries to Explain

And you? I collude in everything, am part of everything. Without me your blood wouldn’t flow. Even your maudlin, much vaunted memory is subject to me. You are barely a shadow on grass! So then are you God? Never said I was! God is somebody quite different. Though because of me you might turn to a god. Mu, are you never gentle, comforting, kind? I am your mother, you stupid child.

THE SWANS REMAIN

For Avril Henry (5 April 1935 – 20 April 2016)

Before your death I sent you a picture of swans in a meadow, an untidy picture: some of the swans had just arrived, some were leaving. It’s a picture of transience you told me nicely. I know you were saying I should not grieve. It’s not the swans I mourn. When I can, I see with your seeing. The swans remain. It’s the meadow. Without you this landscape is empty.
**CYBORG**

When I am old and grey and gracious

I shall pay
to become a cyborg, lace my blood

with spidery nanobots,

and replace my teeth with cellulite, granite,

or something more precious.

As for my jaws, I'll have them fortified

with stainless steel,

add a bionic motor, a miniature battery,

whatever's suitable.

In fact, while I'm about it, I'll have

my bones replaced

with something light, plastic, elastic, and not

in the least frangible.

Perhaps I'll dispense with some of my parts,

add new ones -
a prehensile tail, multiple limbs,

at least twenty heads,

and like Ravana

be marvellous, monstrous, mythical.

---

[Ravana – King of Sri Lanka in *The Ramayan*]
A MINOR HOUSE

The great structure has become a minor house.
—Wallace Stevens

The furnishings? Ice from Antarctica,
Older than algae, which contains the whole
Of history in a bubble of air
Trapped on the final morning of Creation.

An arrowhead, from North America,
Lodged in the petrifying groin of a hunter
Cut down along a river disappearing
Into a cave no one will ever find.

And adders from North Africa. And guides
For all the soldiers taken prisoner
And blinded on the Continent. And names
Lifted from a South Asian orphanage.

The neutral colors of a minor house
(Grey sky, a path in winter, the roiling sea)
Suited the princess and the melancholy
Priest chanting in the last unfinished room,

Blessing her new petition to the king
To open the park, and stock the aquarium
With angelfish (Leopards and Veils and Golds),
And brighten up her sessions with her tutor;

Lugubrious Alphonse, who spoke to her
Only in Latin or Old French. For who
Could guess what his intentions really were?
No doubt another royal scandal loomed.

Christopher Merrill has published six collections of poetry, including Watch Fire, for which he received the Lavan Younger Poets Award from the Academy of American Poets, and Boat; many edited volumes and translations; and six books of nonfiction, among them, Only the Nails Remain: Scenes from the Balkan Wars, Things of the Hidden God: Journey to the Holy Mountain, and Self-Portrait with Dogwood. He directs the University of Iowa’s International Writing Program.
The death of God led to the resurrection
Of spiteful gods and martyrs in white linen
Recording prayers and summons for the faithful
Before they blew themselves up in the market.

*Recite a verse from the Quran, or die—*
These orders for the hostages inside
A restaurant in the diplomatic quarter
Were followed to the letter by the men

In balaclavas who did not survive
The shootout with the soldiers from abroad—
Whose presence in the country magnified
The grievances of young and old alike.

They sang in minor keys of love and loss,
Detailing all the ways in which their dreams
Dissolved in the harsh light of day. Farewell,
They whispered to the churches dynamited

To satisfy the shadow caliphate
Located near a river in the desert,
Which nomads had controlled since the beginning
Of history, according to the records

Compiled by a German geologist
Assigned to look for oil and natural gas.
And if they had regrets about the mayhem
Caused in their name? They did not sing of that.

A French adventurer hid in a cave
Above the Dead Sea, plotting his revenge
On the nomads sleeping in the tents arranged
In a half moon around the muddy shore.

They had betrayed him to the authorities
After his latest unsuccessful attempt
To find the first oasis—the origin
Of life and death, he promised them; also

Riches and an explanation for the story,
Essential to their faith and identity,
That incantations could dry up the river
Separating them from Paradise.

Shall we redecorate the living room
With the orangutan insignia
Devised by special forces in Sumatra
And marketed throughout the Middle East?

And shall we turn the hall into a shrine
To the explorers of the Amazon
Who failed to document the languages,
Beliefs, and customs of the tribes they encountered?

The kitchen cannot be the centerpiece
Of a containment strategy designed
To slow the rise of both our friends and foes.
Use the mud room, the cellar, or the garage.

*A Minor House* contd...
A Minor House

Alphonse’s silence charmed the royal guard,
Who was investigating the priest’s role
In fencing off the park, exiling the princess,
And cracking the glass in the aquarium,

While the king issued hourly decrees:
Better to poison minds than air or water!
Prepare the royal fleet to sail through ice!
Restore the gallows and the guillotine!

The tutor understood that martial law
Would rule until the princess could return.
Hard to imagine for the architects
Of this new order, in their minor house.

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

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

* From ‘Chipped Brick and Old Mortar’ by Alex Skovron
Stubborn Streak

Rummaging in the dark web of his attic, he resurrects a secret envelope flush with erotic drawings—his adolescent artistry of discovery and want. In a Brillo carton, the red firetruck, its extension-ladder thread still intact; a Coca-Cola yoyo; the silver magician’s-box with its cram of vivid silks crumpled within; a low-rise keep of college lecture-notes under the dormer window; and on a shelf of the tall secretary-desk, graduation token from his parents, a stack of albums. He lifts the topmost, blows away the dust, opens at random. Monochrome snapshot—the two stand close together by the water’s edge, terrytowel swimshorts, a trim bikini, his arm claims her, they smile. Twenty-two, they’d met at a youth convention in Miami, hit it off. He liked her well enough, he liked her shape, she was smart and sweet, and sentimental. Within a month she’d migrated all the way to Boston to be near him, preceded by a presuming call from her Denver dad to check him out, and to warn that his daughter had a stubborn streak. Nothing came of it, he couldn’t find the heart to commit, learnt later that she’d stayed and married, a jeweller from Montevideo. Probing a drawer, he digs out a wad of letters, its rubber-band in bits tracking the bundle with their brittle Morse. His first love—callow, captivating, studiously unconsummated. Both nineteen, they weathered stern parental disapproval in the Verona of ’60s New England. A year it lasted, he couldn’t find the heart to commit, till she wrote to tell him she’d met someone, an older man, a teacher from Grand Junction, really sorry. She hoped he would one day find what he was seeking, signed off with a row of exes trailing into the margin. He refolds the letter, scrapes at the dead elastic, shuts the drawer. His iPhone pings: he’s late for that wretched anniversary.
THE STUDEBAKER

A generation taller than his father, he delighted in belittling the man’s ‘red-hot neck’ with jibes from left of centre. Born and bled on the blocks behind the family garage, his adolescence no less provisional than the next experimental aesthete’s, for some reason, abruptly, he started meditating the carnality of time, concluded with Kierkegaard that life, hitherto lived forwards, could clarify only backwards. This annunciation proved tricky, as by now the ladies were falling all under him, a veritable polyverse of possibilities, so he played the latter-day Ulysses whose endless diversions more and more distanced any putative Penelope who might have taken it on herself to weave him into her future, while he just twiddled, dismissing all claims as unsuited. Indeed, it was really only once he glimpsed his evasions as a sterile odyssey that a spark jumped: he resolved to kaleidoscope his life for one last time with an almighty wrench and found, in the way jazz can reconstruct a tune, that suddenly the cylinders of the 1957 Studebaker he’d once hunched over with his laconic Pa rang sweeter than he cared to recall. By then his parents had driven on, and the garage he inherited, its walls pasted still with callisthenic robusty calendar gals, became his shed. He never took a bride, preferred to consult from rooms overlooking the old pumps (dry for decades now) maybe once, twice a quarter, but struggled to stay aesthetical, until his paunch and his purse, tugging in two directions, made him proclaim a truce with himself. He sold up, booked a one-way pass to Managua or Montevideo (I can’t remember which), and was last spotted as a nurse in a bush clinic while campaigning for some tinpot politico turned guerrilla turned politico, penning the odd op-ed polemic for the Guardian, slouched over the Times cryptic and reminiscing over those gilded years behind the garage, their intimate music smothered by the revs and recoils of the old Hawk.
THE TREE CHILD

Between East and West, 
the tree child has every day 
sucked in the sun.

Drifting over deserts, his gaze 
has sung every night 
a farewell psalm.

The tree child is so close a friend to thirst 
that his roots stretch everywhere 
where my brilliance and yours cannot reach.

The tree child shocks the amazement 
conceived every instant 
as stars nose-dive...

Alisa Velaj was born in 1982 in Albania. She has been shortlisted for the Erbacce-Press Poetry Award in 2014. Her poetry have been published or are forthcoming in Erbacce, The Curlew, CultureCult Magazine, Stag Hill Literary Journal, The Quarterly Review, Orbis, The Linnet’s Wings, The Stockholm Review of Literature, Poetry Space Showcase, The Seventh Quarry, among ninety other publications. Her poetry collection, With No Sweat At All, will be published by Cervana Barva Press in 2019, and the other poetry collection “Dreams” is just published by Cyberwit Press in India.

Poems translated from Albanian by Arben P. Latifi

Alesa Velaj
THE TREE CHILD

They no longer come through prayers

They don’t come through prayers as they once used to.
Green fields, endless and endless...
Beyond every field, yet another one -
an obvious liberation from tyrannies.

They come in sight same as light is conceived,
just like that, all of a sudden -
beings without an origin or a limit.

“Till the greenery part us”, the widow mutters through her teeth,
with her body bent over the white lilies in the garden,
at the freshest daybreak.

“All while the lilies won’t forget of you”,
chimes in the youngest lily,
with a baby’s chirp, sweet and full of mysteries...

Scramental

Ancient humans consecrated the mountains
with horizons and light,
without ever abandoning the mountains.

Nowadays, we consecrate a sea of light –
light in the sea
and sea in the light...

We are dwarfed agape in front of horizons,
now boundless more than ever,
and feel like mightier gods than our forefathers
in their grand amazement
with infant horizons...

Valbona, July 2016
OBLIVION

I was told that ghosts go insane at night,
getting drunk and mingling in Dionysian rites...
Among them enters Macbeth with a somnolent corpse,
while ghosts dance and chant around him
in the sweetest voices on earth.

In the morning, Orpheus, totally speechless,
can't even recall who stole his voice...
He Comes to Me

He comes to me here, whenever he can,
finds me waiting, writing in my notebooks,
wearing his old dressing gown.

He’ll spin the black turntable with a latest buy
or swing the guitar into his arms to play me.
The music articulates things we never say.

Something tells me, maybe it’s the way
the evening light insinuates itself
between the lace flowers on my curtains,

that we cannot always be this way, that one day
he will walk away for the last time without warning.
He will not mean to, and it will take us both aback.
**BLACKBIRD, SHOPPING**

Hop under the hedge  
out of the cold  
not much left in the feeder  
but rummage these beech leaves  
lifting each with my yellow beak  
there’s a feast of bugs,  
delicious crawly things.  
No tidy gardeners here  
raking up autumn’s loss.  
I toss each leaf, gobble  
what’s underneath.  
Fill my hollows with  
their little lives,  
quick to peck  
my head dots and dashes.  
Then fly up to preen  
on these chimney tops,  
catch the updraft  
from their coal fires,  
fluff up my feathers.  
It might be winter  
but life’s pretty good.

**BREAD**

*Alexander Fleming Discovers Penicillin*

In mum’s farmhouse kitchen, I’d lavish  
home-made jam on doorstops of bread,  
chew my piece in the fields as I played.  
We moved to London. Their soft bread  
was different to mum’s bannocks  
kneaded into submission with her own hands.  
In hot weather, it bloomed blue with mould,  
not fit for ducks in local parks.  
I studied hard, trained as a doctor;  
went away to war. Bread was not plentiful.  
The Spanish flu killed so many. I did my best  
in the field hospital, needed all my skill.  
Back in my hospital lab, I saw blue spread  
on culture dishes, thought my experiments  
ruined, until I saw the wall of mould  
keeping back germs like a barricade.  
It was war, but this time on infection.  
And I won, I won. And I keep on winning  
though I’m long gone now. Think of me  
when you take your medicine, forget me  
when you’re well. Enjoy your life.
Sisters Three

Despite what you might think we don’t like hurly burly. We love our pets and our sisters. Our spells are to preserve the right order of things. Macbeth was always going to murder his king. We saw it in the Tarot, read it in the tea leaves, watched the film on the crystal. We spin the fates, when we are not knitting socks. The world of men is not always our concern but sometimes, we have to set the balance straight.

Under the Bunting

Paintings by Jack Vettriano

Two suited men survey the passing scene. They smoke, glamorously, nonchalant. Nothing to choose between except their ties. Left hands tucked in pockets, faces in shadow.

Two other men stand either side of a woman. She sits on the railings. She gazes at one, her body angled towards him, but her hand strays close to the hand of the other.

One man sits on the arm of a bench, one foot stamps the ground, one on the bench. The woman at the other end wears a pink dress. They speak earnestly. She keeps her guard, legs crossed.

A couple dances. He holds her ballroom-close, numbers on their backs. Her face is set against him. A series of failed love stories, shown by detail, a certain fall of light, sombre shadows.
BLOW WIND BLOW

Anne Casey

BLOW WIND BLOW

over this low stone wall
where the moss holds close

though it may
screech and wail
and the rain comes down
oftentimes soft and
warm

séad gaoth séad

sharp corners have long come round
bracing against the storm

breeze in some old slow hand
to raise you back up from a fall

places that may give way
on those wildest of days

séad gaoth séad

face to the pounding shore
stood in this seasoned field

bloomings of life thrive here
while ever the wind blows free

over this low stone wall
where the light slips through

séad gaoth séad

(Note: “séad gaoth séad” is the Irish for “blow wind blow.”)

Originally from the west of Ireland, Anne Casey is a Sydney-based writer/editor and author of two poetry collections—*where the lost things go* (Salmon Poetry 2017) and *out of emptied cups* (Salmon Poetry 2019). Anne has worked for 30 years as a journalist, magazine editor, media communications director and legal author. Her writing and poetry rank in *The Irish Times* newspaper’s ‘Most-Read’ and are widely published internationally—*The Irish Times*, *Entropy*, *apt*, *Murmur House*, *Quiddity*, *Barzakh*, *DASH*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, *Live Encounters*, *The Poetry Jukebox*, *FourXFour* (Poetry Northern Ireland), *HCE Magazine*, *Poets’ Republic*, *Cordite*, *The Canberra Times*, *The Irish Echo*, *Verity La* and *Plumwood Mountain* among others. Anne’s poetry has won/shortlisted for awards in Ireland, Northern Ireland, the USA, the UK, Hong Kong, Canada and Australia. She is Senior Poetry Editor of *Other Terrain Journal* and *Backstory Journal* (Swinburne University, Melbourne), and a member of several literary advisory boards.
SHOT IN THE DARK

I: At a bar in Charleville

They found him shot still in his swag right
next to his bike folks say that bloke would’ve never woke.
Seven hundred kays of red dust a dead ‘roo round every bend
barely holding on to the Holden one tonner’s tanned wheel.

Once I held it level at seventy never moving chewing up
flat dirt over an hour till we saw a better way—flash
tarred stretch right next riding high out of sight into deep blue sky
when it came to a sharp tight dead end like the guy in his bed
- roll right next to his bike. Asleep at the wheel.

II: Just out of Charleville

Scrubbling in the dirt not far after dark stumbling
over stumps scratching for sticks bent on a fire
to boil the billy, roll out the swag sip and slip
away a rare prayer tripping into limp lamplight
— gagging at the sight gathered two arm
fuls of forearms—bundles of ‘roo-bones
bleached white piled high in the loose red soil.
No stir of a breeze, chill breath in my ear:

Nighty-night, sleep tight, no nightcap tonight.

III: After midnight just out of Charleville

Sharp scrape of tyres, no warning shots fired—
fast awake—heart starts harsh flash—quick dash
— scramble in the dark ditch that swag, eat dirt, play dead:
rocks in the head; bed-time stories churning with warning.

Up stumps, see the morning. Pick up sticks—
seven kinds of snakes, the most dangerous ones
poison with tongues. Pennies dropping scales from eyes:
leave no fare for the ferryman tonight. Still dark nights
come stir that voice: Just pray them bones was ‘roos all right…

Note:
The following Australian slang terms are used in this poem: “swag” meaning a temporary, all-weather bedroll
for sleeping outdoors; “kays” meaning kilometres; “roo”/“roos” meaning kangaroo(s); “one tonner” meaning a
utility vehicle similar to a pick-up truck; “billy” meaning a metal pot or kettle used to boil water over a camp-fire;
and “up stumps” meaning to decamp.
Art Appreciation 101: Earthly Delights

I am fourteen; I feel naked, exposed. I close the book, look up, flushed. Suddenly shy. She has been watching me, her face a wry smile. *Finished already?* I am a small, limp creature held in a leopard’s clenched jaws. I open it again. Furtive as a bird testing the edges of a pond filled with glimpsed promises glistening beneath the surface, leaping with strange shapes poised to hook you and drag you down. But a Christ-like god, composed, reaches out of the page to calm my shaking hand. If he can look unabashed at the moon-bright beauty of Eve—her nakedness transfixing a prone Adam; a giraffe stretch fascinated; trees stand unbowed; an elephant uncowed; a murmuration of birds fly blithely by in a distant sky, weaving in and out of orbital orifices beneath the towering spire of a twisted temple of flesh, *why can’t I cast an innocent, exploring eye?* I am fourteen. Immersed for the first time in the translucent beauty of unwrapped skin. The perfect indifference of this sundry array—*until*—I turn the page.


I earned an *A minus*, having chosen to largely ignore the third panel. I honestly felt Bosch had done the same. Casting a dark cloak over shame, obscuring the hellish claims of moral punishment in a sliver of lip service observance—Hieronymus and my high school art teacher standing side by side to cast aside my white veil, a miniature replica of the scallop-edged mantilla my grandmother wore each weekday morning, to join midstream the murmuration of women weaving up the main street to eight o’clock mass under the vast spire that overlooked our tiny seaside town.

(An ekphrastic poem responding to *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, a triptych painting by Hieronymus Bosch.)
Snow Day

Waking to the wonder
in my brother’s voice—
his shrill delight
shaking him for once
from his teenage retreat—

I arose to a new world,
without colour:
all crystal-white,
magically softened and
glowing at the edges

drawing us out
with its silent allure
to explore
familiar places
rendered strange.

Past the edge of town,
undisturbed by a soul,
caught by the urge
to jump a wall and run
full-tilt into its empty embrace:

whump! I had sunk,
softly held
in all that whiteness;
cushioned from the world,
I could be there still.

We dragged home
without a word,
mirth stolen by the cold;
the sudden warmth at the door,
my mother’s voice
reluctantly returning me to
all the colour and clamour
of humanity—
and a pang
at the loss of all that
peace.

Anne Casey

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Anne Fitzgerald’s Poetry collections include, *Vacant Possession* (Salmon Poetry, 2017), *Beyond the Sea* (Salmon Poetry, 2012), *The Map of Everything* (Forty Foot Press, 2006) and *Swimming Lessons* (Stonebridge, 2001). She teaches Creative Writing in Ireland and North America. Anne is a recipient of the Ireland Fund of Monaco residential bursary at the Princess Grace Irish library in Monaco and lives in Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, Ireland.

**NOTES MY BROTHER LEFT IN BLOCK CAPITALS**

*Aged 8*
Hey little fatso, stupid little Annie.
From your brilliant brainy brother.

*Aged 10*
I've taken your Laurel and Hardy Forty-five, *Trail of the Lonesome Pine*
to help play poker better. I lost it.

*Aged 14*
I am throwing you into Boarding School
down the country. No one will know you.
I will make sure you will be forgotten.

*Aged 23*
Your green Cannon camera brought back
from New York broke in my hand somehow.
Chattel Devotee

He was on the back foot
after I found his fingers
curled between the heads
of Douglas Hyde and Charles
Stewart Parnell. His true
affection for others hard
earned dosh realised. Less
devotion not to be seen
from a priest or a brother
as bells ring at benediction.
Cocoons spun from dreams

Chroicocephalus (Larus) novaehollandiae and Australonuphis parateres

Silver gulls loiter at water’s edge, lost in opal shades of morning, pale hues of contemplation. Food is a matter of guile and diligence, pursued in insouciance.

With backward-stepping, twig-thin orange legs, they stamp tattoos onto the sand.

Some say vibrations from their footfall travel beneath, causing miniature sound waves – invisible, persuasive.

In blind safety below, white sand worms coil and curl in cocoons spun from mucous and dreams.

Multiply segmented bodies – each a locus of muscular receptivity, kinesthetic know-how. They are alert filaments, alive to the smallest displacement.

They wriggle to the surface, eager to drink perhaps harkening to a telltale pitter patter; thinking rain has come.

Only to encounter beak’s sharp blade of hunger. Guiltless, the gulls feast.

Anne M Carson is a writer and visual artist, whose poetry is published internationally and widely in Australia. Two Green Parrots was published in June 2019. She has won and been commended in numerous poetry prizes including being shortlisted in the NSW Women’s Writers Competition 2019. As a Creative Writing Therapist she has edited and facilitated the group process which resulted in the publication of three books. She teaches Poetry Writing and Appreciation to adults and serves as Director Arts on the board of Ondru – a social-change-through-the-creative-arts organisation. She is researching her next creative project as a PhD Candidate at RMIT. Massaging Himmler: A poetic biography of Dr Felix Kersten was published in October 2019 by Hybrid Publishers. http://www.annemcarson.com/
FROM “THE DETECTIVE’S CHAIR”

(4) Detective Chief Inspector (DCI), Jane Tennison
Area Major Incident Team (AMIT), Southampton Row police station, UK

Eighteen long cigarette-filled months at AMIT without a single case more significant
than tax evasion or fraud. Chafing at the sexism, Jane hardly holds her sharpened
tongue sheathed. Finally in charge of a murder investigation and the boys aren’t
happy. It’s 1990s; no one in the force likes a ball-breaker. She earns respect by not
pulling punches, being a punishing perfectionist, grasping complex strands intuitively.
She’s married to the job, fiercely ambitious; hard to find and keep a guy. Even her
family don’t get her. Despite training to be objective, she bleeds for victims, calls their
kin my love, darlin’, holds them when they sob. For perpetrators she has only
determination. A whisky or two tossed down at the end of long days, but no time to
kick back in a favourite chair, let music unleash her mind. Every ounce of her energy
spent on solving crimes, proving fitness daily to every man – and to herself.

ORDINARY

Even over these ordinary factories
this concrete conveyor belt of vehicles
the sun maintains a daily duty.
The metal doesn’t stop it
the concrete doesn’t hinder
its passage through the sky.

It is diligent, regardless.

No matter what we have seen
of ugliness, how we have been ripped
from the tissue of common
courtesy, of human trust and connectedness

there is still this sun which broadcasts diurnal blessing.

It is not always this bright.
These crayon colours do not
always paint the sky so incandescently.

But every day, however burdened we are, the sun conducts

its regular commute,
sometimes streaking the sky
in celebrations colours.
A POEM ABOUT AN APPLE

A dark underground corner. His car door and mine awkwardly proximate. I pause, let him proceed. Cautious carpark twostep. He smiles, lopes off crunching a red apple – loose dangle of limbs, easy stride. I step into the space he has just left. Only a few seconds of his presence douse it in scent profile. His apple-laden breath is the air my mouth opens to. Unexpected delight. Usually this tang only on loved ones close enough to kiss. I don't register face – breath delectable. How did apple’s innocence get sullied? We need to know more about good and evil, not less. Breath blesses me.
How Did You Know?

*Mam, don’t die on me while I’m gone,*
your words a hook in octopus tentacles
that twist around my neural pathways.
Your father revs his van in the driveway.

I wave goodbye, shut the front door
slump, to the hall floor. Octopus
releases its ink-black cloud,
blinds and chokes. Dark waters beckon.

I finger the note in my pocket
dream of days I could swim with eels
lounge on a lake’s bed
gaze up at earth’s ever-changing sky
no longer susceptible to its moods.

More of your words surface
*Mam, my life would be screwed if you died.*
I haul myself to the bathroom

shower my body, cry myself dry,
watch fire flames curl my note.
How did you know?
I loved you too much
to screw up your life again.

Anne Walsh Donnelly lives in the west of Ireland. Her work has appeared in many publications including *Hennessy New Irish Writing in The Irish Times.* She was nominated for the Hennessy Literary Award for emerging poetry and selected for Poetry Ireland Introductions in 2019. Her poetry chapbook, “The Woman With An Owl Tattoo” was published in May 2019 by Fly On The Wall Poetry Press. Her debut short story collection, “Denise of the Undertaker’s Wife” was published by Blue Nib in September 2019. To find out more about Anne and to order her books go to her website: http://annewalshdonnelly.com/
HOW DID YOU KNOW?

H O W  D I D  Y O U  K N O W ?

TRUST IS A KNIFE THROWER’S WIFE

She sharpens his blades
before each act, let’s him strap
her to a plank of wood
buckled by wrist and ankle.

Safe in the knowledge, she’ll survive
his onslaught, she tells him,
to do what he has to do,
no matter how bloody that might be.

He holds each knife by its steel blade
and with a flick of wrist
let’s it fly in a half-spin towards her,
(with much less skill than Sylvester Baum*).

Trust doesn’t flinch when a knife lands
millimeters from the tip of her right ear
or another grazes her left thumbnail.
“More,” she says,

until there’s nothing left to throw.
After the applause, she pulls each knife
from the plank, locks them in a steel case
until they’re needed again.

* Sylvester & Barbara Baum were a German couple and professional knife throwing act who began their career
in the early 1940s. Sixty years later they were honoured by the International Knife throwers Hall of Fame with
the "Knife Throwing Pioneer Award" and the title "Wild West Duo of the 20th Century".

TALK TO ME LIKE LOVERS DO

I slip my legs into red silk knickers.
Put on your control panel pants.

I clasp my transparent lace bra.
Your breasts are going to sag in that rag.

I gaze into the tallboy mirror.
Have you nothing better to look at?

I button up my new frost-blue blouse.
That does nothing for your complexion.

I pull my faux leather skirt over my hips.
You can’t go to shopping in that get-up.

I squeeze into my new turquoise shoes.
No wonder you have bunions.

I spike my hair with some L’Oréal gel.
What happened to your lovely permanent wave?

I lick seeds from passion fruit for breakfast.
It’s a bowl of porridge you should be eating.

I renew my dating app subscription.
Have you nothing better to spend your money on?

I flick through the latest copy of Diva magazine.
Since when did you stop reading Good Housekeeping?

I write a poem about having sex at sixty.
You should be knitting scarfs for grandchildren.
The case of two handbags

It dawned on Ark Angle Gabriel Rubberboots at that precise moment, or the moment that followed it or perhaps the one that preceded it. His servant, Devilish Compound, had been loading compost into the boot of his 1956 Rolls Royce.

‘Hand me out some newspaper, like an indecent chap’ crooned Devilish, to the air of ‘Four green Fields’.

Ark Angle was in the process of gathering from the plentiful supply of ‘Daily Sports’ that insulated the Rolls’ interior from the ravages of summer sun and winter nightingales when a thought struck him, rather like a rancid onion landing on a lemon cheesecake.

‘And what might you be wanting with precious extracts from the Bodleian library, my dear man?’

‘I want to make sure no residual content from the compost, especially that tainted by fermented or otherwise putrescent, dry or otherwise matter becomes dispersed among the food and clothing washed, laundered or falling into categories as yet unspecified, that may cause injury to themselves, or in a possibility, rare alas, but worthy of consideration, to said food and garments’.

‘That’s it, that’s it you scoundrel. You apricot and mangold stew, you of all the beings to contaminate heaven, and the waters under the earth, you’ve opened the gates of the cattle crush, you’ve released Beellze the bull into the pastures of mushrooms and dandelions!’

‘I, in all modesty, acknowledge complicity in this happy outcome but only if my partner, the puce moon, can share credit with me.’

‘Return my copies of the ‘Daily Sport’ un tarnished, forthwith and ensure that copious quantities of odious compost enhance the contents of the boot, organic and otherwise, with the expressed purpose of enriching the odour that emanates therefrom.’

Anne Walsh Donnelly lives in the west of Ireland. Her work has appeared in many publications including Hennessy New Irish Writing in The Irish Times. She was nominated for the Hennessy Literary Award for emerging poetry and selected for Poetry Ireland Introductions in 2019. Her poetry chapbook, “The Woman With An Owl Tattoo” was published in May 2019 by Fly On The Wall Poetry Press. Her debut short story collection, “Demise of the Undertaker’s Wife” was published by Blue Nib in September 2019. To find out more about Anne and to order her books go to her website: http://annewalshdonnelly.com/
‘My lord doth speak in divers tongues, he weareth thistledown in his lapel and shites in his soup. What might be the Aristotelian reasoning for such a penalty shootout?’

Unknown to Devilish, in what will go down as the worst kept secret since the robbery of gold rings from the elder MacEdlems corpse at the bewitching hour in Ballylakies Church of Ireland cemetery, by a church sexton, anonymous and the chairman of a town commission, anonymous, Ark Angle had been in Geyser, Arctic, Baltic and Killeshin Hotel sauna pursuit of the celebrated [by the 1965 county junior hurling champions] purloined cucumber cream pie.

‘The pie, you visitator; the pie! I’ll catch the pie!’

‘You may catch a cold, or even a crab, or catch hold, but a pie, if I may bore you with the cliché, can be, if not in the sky, in the eye of the elephant’.

‘Desist from your tower of Timahoe babbling. We must move, as a victim of the most loathsome form of diarrhoea to afflict the human species would move through a crowded shopping mall, before Satanic Sam, who may even now be in lustful pursuit of our beloved pie, driven, as we know him to be, by the power of a 2.5 litre ride on mower hacking the heather on Rossleighan bog to pulp and eternity.’

Devileish knew all that was needed to be known from many previous theses delivered on the subject through the lens of the apple green pupil in Ark Angle’s eye. He had endured many a late night’s misery of home and away performances, dancing at the crossroads to the sweet music of the fiddler of Dooney in the fields of Athenry and the lark ascending in this and sundry places. So much so that Satanic, at times, appeared to him over his breakfast of burnt toast, cabbage stalks and mug of calves gruel, as the word made foul of the maggot infested genre. Ark Angle had described him as a repulsive, God like creature, who had wormed his way through mendacity and fornication to the pythonic position on the board of governesses of The Times in Ireland as we Pronounce Them to be.

Develish had learned to lighten the tedium of the discourse with questions related to Satanic’s character like ‘and has he a tattooed map of Ballyroan on his eyebrow’ or ‘does he sing hymns off the encrusted sheets of his four poster’?

‘For the sake of all the chaste reprobates that cohabitate in the foothills of Saint David’s quarry and all the anointed pigsties of the Kremlin, what has this got to do with the real or alleged baseball cap or the cape he wears that trips him up when he’s lighting the pipe that’s as crooked as his conscience?’

‘Don’t be losing your snotrag with me, my revered lord and master in whom the Ark of the convent may reside… So, he’s a private Dick is he, I had been of the impression that he spends his nights catching moonbeams in jam jars and dancing with the saints of the Black Sepulchre?’

Ark Angle, bored by these few general comments – they were too suggestive of common sense for his liking - lapsed into an exciting explanation of Satanic’s suspected interest in the cucumber pie. ‘It’s a dark secret, so you must tell it to everyone you meet,’ he cautioned Devileish.

‘I’ll put it on The Times in Ireland as we Pronounce Them to be, my Lord, no one will read it there.’

-------

Satanic Sam sat hunched on his crimson and gold milking stool. The walls of the crypt beneath Adams and Co’s textile and computer services - ‘for the good of miserable mankind’ - that was his lodgings, oozed letters and numbers undecipherable to all but Sam.

‘Come here you creep’ he summoned his trusty aid, Father Followmeuptocarlow, the recently unfrocked priest of the eleventh day and night church of the circumcised dishwasher, in his gushy, overindulgent tones.

‘Coming honey, c o o m i n g… I hope this won’t be productive.’

Satanic stared at a row of seven carved marble representations of the dark side of the moon.

© Arthur Broomfield
'Do you see what’s on that wall, Einstein,’ he asked, his eyes transfixed on the carvings?

‘Well, it’s not all that funny, honey?’

Satanic twisted his crushed mustard baseball cap round his head, took it off and absentmindedly perused the embroidered blue inscription ‘Love Satan make hate great’ that adorned it.

‘Those letters and numbers are the lock and locksmith to our future. They spell, if not world domination, vulgarisation of the black and white minstrel choir. But before we can achieve that mood of moon in June we must first find and catch the notorious cucumber cream pie. We will then place it in general proximity to these symbols [Satanic nodded towards the engraved moons] of goodness and retire from the scene for precisely two and a half days or so.’

Satanic glared lovingly towards Followme.

Followme nodded as he murmured the words that have now become an indispensable part of everyday speech;

‘It will unravel the Aran jumper and put spurs on our bicycle wheels. After that I don’t have a clue.’

--------

Ark Angle’s face was knitted in an Aran jumper, his teeth ground like the badly lubricated workings of a Lidl or Aldi watch. He kicked the bag of fairy toadstools Develish had collected by the light of a Tilley lantern the previous, or some other night, across the vast expanse of space that separated him from the fathomless abyss over which, right now, Develish was sharpening his seven-blade penknife.

‘With what overwhelming concept is my Lord locked in conflict, may I be so thoughtless to ask?’ Develish yelled across the dark and sinister divide.

‘Thoughtless, you confounded fool! If only such a profound disposition were to afflict the cerebral region of your ponderous cranium.’

‘Indeed. I lack the will to be sordid, my overloaded Noah’s Ark. Pray what floating debris may we expect to hurdle our way in the coming years?’

‘You malignant verruca on the face of venereal reason, if only it were within my powers to visit the Bubonic plague on your thatched and merciless keep… I am cursed… my rat-infested gene pool is contaminated by your senseless waterfalls.’

‘Your erudition causes many leaks in my hull, my Lord Noah. Shall we proceed in silence?’

‘We will proceed through diligent attention to your instructions, my devilish Develish, until we apprehend the cucumber pie, lost in deliberations in space as yet undefined, or not.’

It had yet again dawned on Ark Angle that his faithless servant had uncovered a menacing protocol that would not only finance the apprehension of the eminent pie but would continue to provide it with safe lodgings. Nothing to be done until the pie is spotted on its trajectory in a north – south direction. Why a north – south, surely an east – west, or an up down could be as likely, or even a down up, both of them argued among themselves, agreeing it would be north – south because they had said so. They had not to wait long, three or four hundred years, or was it minutes, to experience the realisation of their hallucinations. But as in all dramatic conflicts their supposed inalienable right to a seat at the Olympic games would be contested by a foe of equal honesty, Satanic Sam and his diabolically reconstructed Igor, Followmeuptocarlow. They too lay on their memory foam mattresses, they too pondered the route of the terrestrial pie and its inevitable destination – the perfume counter in Brown Thomas – if it were not found wanting asap.
And so, the minutes ticked by, minute by minute by more minutes. Tension mounted on piebald ponies in both camps, sweat poured from the rivals open sewers. Bells and whistles created background music of indescribable beauty.

‘There it goes’ the roar of triumph rose simultaneously from both camps as the ball crashed into the back of the Railway end goal.

‘It’s heading for the Church of the Confused Chicken screamed Develish. What will we do, what will we do?’

It’s heading for the Church of the Confused Chicken screamed Followme. What will we do, what will we do?’

‘Let it go fuck itself,’ Ark Angle yawned.

‘Let it go fuck itself,’ Satanic Sam yawned
KOMOREBI

I have been falling in love with mysterious gods,
long as I can recall, the enigmatic you-
you see in the pupilla of another’s eye,
that moment you know all gods at once,
ineffable host, yellowing sun.

An artist painting rays
streaming through cloud,
crimson outlines earth,
leaves radiate in wind.

Whatever alchemist, god, genius, you are,
I pray to you, worship the curve of your
smile, shadows that beam over your skin,
my hands longing to touch your veil.

I find you in raindrops, their touch
on my lips. We are blackbirds singing,
the Om of divinity. I hold you
to this deep ravine, yin in my veins.
I nest you in rivers, grooves
of my body. For I am clay.

But we are all archangels, born of this sun,
bringers of dawn, scattering
through fronds, our grace, in hope of love.
We are life, and death, and the waves, and still,
I can’t find words to write you.

*Komorebi – a Japanese word to describe a phenomenon, like
the light that filters –when sunlight shines through trees.

Attracta Fahy’s background is Nursing/Social Care. She works as a Psychotherapist, lives in Co.Galway, and has three children. She completed her MA in Writing NUIG in 2017, and participates in Over The Edge poetry workshops. Her poems have been published in Banshee, Poetry Ireland Review, Poethead, Orbis, Impspired, Honest Ulsterman, The Cormorant, and several other magazines. She has been included in The Blue Nib Anthology, shortlisted for 2018 Over The Edge New Writer of The Year, and a Blue Nib nominee for Pushcart. She is presently working towards her first collection.
KOMOREBI

IF I HAD THE POWER

You would not live in separation, one sided male image, split from earth, womb, root.

You would hear, feel, touch, scent the intimate call to belong; would love, honour your feminine, understand her secrets, as white throat swifts to wire.

You would take for comfort, purple haze aubrietia, rocks, live equally in sun, shade, dark of winter; pure white, lily of the valley.

If I were leader, your eyes would not gaze only to Zeus, but down to earth, where woman who claimed our ground, domain of Ériu, knew the healing power of herbs, milkwort, thistle, thyme, cures of kelp.

You would take your other self on moon paths into valleys, forests, and to work, find the ‘she’ within woods, trees revered, rags, talismans at her feet.

If I was magic, you would understand all colour, no need for social class, blankets strewn on shop fronts to warm our homeless, or stolen children dispersed.

But, I have little say, except to act, live my own conviction.

The grail, not a straight line, nor' easily understood, it’s an iridescent thread that guards our mysterious wound, love, betrayal.

Ariadne holds one end, while we face monsters in our labyrinth.

And if I could swing it, we would all be god, goddess, with no need to rape, destroy earth, pillage womb, or wound our children.
I SAW YOU IN A DREAM

Walking towards you
I was speaking three lines of beauty,
Sheer beauty to you,
Until the inner voice, my critic
From the hilltop, decried
My lines to you.
And then for nights
For all the nights and during the days,
Among the crowded noisy streets,
I search for the lines;

I will never be a wife again,
I want me back, and I want your warmth,
I found you first, 'cos you found me.
AUSTRALIA

Red, ochre, vibrant soil
which like notes penetrate
not only the eyes but the soul.
Vast land that swallows water
where ant hills appear to be
silent penitents in prayer.
Here and there pink flowers
break the monotony. Sad.
Sad lament of crows in flight,
they descend onto their meal—
a dead kangaroo victim
of speeding drivers or perhaps thirst.
No chisel-sculpted rocks
which during dawn
seem to metamorphose
into scaring beings to chase
defilers of sacred places.
Dreamland of dreams to be,
where gums dress in many forms
and the earth bewitches us.
Solitude of waterholes
Which, like a caring mother,
gives of herself and sustains
the ebullient and vibrant life
that flourishes under the sky,
a cloudless blue, bright blue,
... and then slowly
grey shapes opaque
nature’s colourful narrative.
How many thousands years
has this silver studded shawl
cover this bejewelled land?
BY THE WAY

she sat at the end of a dream
holding in her hands the stem
of a plastic flower
solemn
sad
simple trajectory of an angel

bathed in fury
encounter of the souls
who don’t ask permission

to live
to beg
to adore

the ones who hold the power
the ones who control
the ones who dominate

the rulers

they do determine
the length of the life of the poor
the unemployed
the sick
and ...

plants die without water

the miserable shed tears
mothers pray
and politicians give speeches

solace
sublime
silence of the dead

only the dead have hope

QUARTER POUNDER

Faulty china dolls,
fiend from dust and a spark of sapience
we reign in a decaying world.

A brook sings a monotonous song
obscure chanting of pebbles rattling and
at the bottom-fool’s gold wait.

A trail of dreams all the way to heaven
a maiden weaves with nylon threads
a giant net to catch an eagle.

Soldiers march blindfolded and mute
to defend a future of heat and floods.
The streets are deserted, at the dinner table
families sit to a meal of images
imprisoned in a wooden box.

The powerful play chess with nature
ticks bursting with blood,
fungus growing with lust.

Earthly concerns: war, guns,
cars, trips, gadgets,
and the pill to stop aging
while they devour McDonald’s.

Humans suffocated
by plastic, rubbish,
and the need to consume,
while the creator
cries at the failures
of the china dolls.

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REFLEXIONS ON A DEAD MAN

I

As in a scene from Dante
where fire and heat
consume all passions
a man has entered
a place for lost souls
where the dead rest
till judgement day.

II

Truth covered
by a white linen sheet.
Truth of the stigmata
on a man put to rest.
Undeniable truth,
of a now silent sinner.
Truth about the price,
paid for the life he wore,
like a silk handkerchief,
in the right pocket
of his tailored suit.

III

The Witch in the cauldron boils
a pinch of pain, two tears and
the shadow of a man.
Dyeing the widows weeds
she stirs with a spoon
the black liquid
that holds,
her love.

IV

Do the dead feel cold?
Do they suffer?
Does hunger rumble in their bellies?
Do the dead want to live?
FEAR AND TREMBLING

Brian Kirk is a poet and short story writer from Dublin. His first poetry collection After The Fall was published by Salmon Poetry in 2017. His poem “Birthday” won the Listowel Writers’ Week Irish Poem of the Year at the An Post Irish Book Awards 2018. His short fiction chapbook It’s Not Me, It’s You won the inaugural Southword Fiction Chapbook Competition and was published by Southword Editions in September 2019. He blogs at http://www.briankirkwriter.com/

FEAR AND TREMBLING

I remember a warm hand on the small of my back, the skittering of hooves across loose stones, the energy of tensed haunches as we climbed to the site. A river of worry stealing its way through my veins, the old man leading the mule in a stupor of silence under a sun where no tree gave shade. The kindling pricking my side; the knife blade’s blinding, tiny sun dancing beside us. No clouds in the sky.

What could I do but obey? I told no one, not even my wife; made up a story about an old friend in trouble as I loaded the mule, then lifted the boy onto its back. For three days I fought myself in silence among snakes, sand and rocks, stopping at night to build fires and eat bread under the stars. When we came to the place, I restrained him though I knew he would not resist. The dry wood drank the spark, spat back flame as I drew the blade from my belt.

I was afraid, I remember, there is no doubting that, but not afraid of my father, the old man with the knife in his hand. I was a child – I knew nothing of duty or faith; I let him bind me with the old rope that he’d used for the wood. Splinters pricked at my flesh, but I didn’t complain though my body convulsed as black smoke rose from the flames. The knife licked the sun as he bent to his task, eyes searching holes in a mask till he saw me, his son. Some say God stayed his hand – all I know is love won.

Brian Kirk
FAITH

I wish that there was something in the notion
that someone would provide for us, no matter what.
In rain we’d find a shelter near at hand, in sun
a dappled shade. Without labour we might reap
where others sowed and fill our bellies with the fruit
of work we never did. Is that not what was promised
in the book? Were we not the chosen few, the free
birds of the air? The simple fact of our existence
was supposed to be enough, but we can’t credit that.
We agitate the water so we might stay afloat...once, twice,
maybe for a third time rise and break the surface before
our natures coalesce and drag us underneath.

HORIZON

What do students of theology learn at school to help
them through the night sweats and insomnia?

What hope is there for us who dwell on our mortality
throughout the unending night? The priest will do his best
to shepherd his flock avoiding the pitfalls of bereavement,
but what about the faithless, the unsure, forlorn?

Think of death as a journey, he says, the deceased
as a traveller taking a coffin-shaped boat from a grave-shaped
harbour, waved off by a weeping congregation who secretly
wish their time had come. We are sad at their leaving –
and that’s only natural – but consider the family and friends
who have gone on ahead; imagine them waiting, expectant,
at a pristine and wonderful quay side, tears of welcoming joy
in their eyes as they scan the horizon for a bright sail.
**Train Dreams**

When Denis Johnson died I went to my local library – built with money donated by the philanthropist Carnegie – borrowed a copy of *Train Dreams* and read it in his memory. All week I’d been reading his stories on my phone on the tram; gems buried in the archives of the New Yorker and the Paris Review. They explode in your mind when you read them, infect your thoughts and spread like a disease to the imagination. The future offers itself in a peculiar light at a precarious slant, the past disturbed re-settles in a surprising form. Your memories get re-written, borrowed, read, returned, stranger but truer than they’d ever been before.
CROCHET AND CRYING

The soft soughing, 
the moon an aching breast, half-breathing half-broken. Out in the back paddock, where they take her tongue skittering, taste of pebbles in her mouth, where they teach her (more than a bullet would) what she is, how like a wrung-out flannel she is wrong, and the silt in her throat is a funnel, milling dark grains, each unspeakable ending – until the night explodes in sound and story, like crochet and crying, which travel past all the barriers back to the start.

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

I miss
so many in my life,
the People.

People,
who are my family,
my world-wide family,

who are
supposed to be
close family members,

the members
I think about,
I worry about.

So when the door opens,
(the border, perhaps),
the door to my part,
my place, I know

I am home, and those
I miss are never gone,
those who also welcome

the Syrians, the Americans,
all of the Everyones,
all of those who long to stay,
all of those who long to say,
“i too am home, Canada.”
A Nationwide Plea, or a Request for Fewer Misled Borders

What I see cannot be disputed--
I am poet
in this mess called 2019--
I am poet
regardless of your boredom
or strange lack of support.

I don't come from Ireland or Italy,
I don't long to be from any other country
other than this one.

Remember, we are Canadians!
Remember, I see!
Remember, I am a Canadian!

Immigrants, migrants, refugees, People,
hold onto your longing...
the music in the mouth,
the words of an anthem.

Hold on! Hold on! Grab it,
the history gives you it--
listen to your poets,
let them have some respect,
let them in, hear their words.

The Flagless Flagpole

Today I can't care about
the intrusive news of the world,
and I can't care about
the life of a younger man seated
beside a bench I enjoy as the finches
share songs with a sun I can't care about,
only use as a hope to warm the back
of my neck where the wind
remains cold under the collar
I leave open in order to not care about
the stranger walking by, asking
himself, along with the wind and sun,
"Do you really think I am stupid?"

At this point in the bike-ride home
I can't care about the chem-trail
left in the blue sky above us, an
us I want to care about
only if we begin to take the time
seated out in the open where
we can be seen, bald-heads, ball-caps
on backwards and forwards,
burkas, nqabs, hijabs, turbans, etc.,
all we use to adorn or admit to
ourselves this is who I must be,
this is what I follow, what I believe in
if you will, what I wear allows a
tiny look into the self I am trying
to keep sacred, but what I wear
is meant to hide nothing other than
what we all were told to keep hidden,
boy and girl, man and woman.

Today I want to care about one thing,
a longing to be a Canadian...
being born here, or having had the courage to choose this country
and somehow find the way,
to eventually stay on some land,
some perfect selected property.
You will soon own, soon call
a piece of the planet your new home.
A Raven’s Sermon

An urbane couple united in more than marriage wanders the weekend streets of Charlottetown with many kinds of roofs partly wet and dry enough to lift their exploring heads & eyes, both open to not only the shocking nest in a tree ready for the return of leaves they could see as the shade soon to be, how the stunning old church will stay cool long after he & she return to lives in Truro, the town known as the hub of Nova Scotia. But it was the walk under that wild-tied nest the way it sat so perfectly in the waking tree like an unpacked family photo placed on the corner of an old undusted night-table, yes, the walk to locate a venue where poems join the coffee and wine to entertain the minds of a special gathering kind of feeling at home, takes them back to the sight of the church, tree, another home they now know the nest to be. And, now, when they think about all they can, and those thoughts are about the homes they can say have been homes, kind of where they began knowing others are alive too, breath allowing a life, those able to be part of how their homes seem so far away, high up in the memory, what may be a tree there with a nest in it, a time when a season could be compared to a town, city, province, may even be a country, homes at one time or another, inside or outside the memory.

Briefly, down below, both of them begin to hear what in the moment sounds like advice, sounds like a sermon they said went over well when the church was in their lives, down below a choice they hadn’t made or found at that time, when the nest seemed to be speaking to them or the occupant covered in feathers unlike the colour of the lone vocal gull, passing through like some photo-bomb they both found hilarious.

In time their walk left them back in the hotel room full of the sounds of the day and evening spoke, enough to begin their own speaking, a conversation made up of a quick need to reveal, to ask just once, “Did you hear it? You know, when we were under the nest in that tree beside the church we found old and so mysterious. You know, it was like a voice but not a human voice, more like what would be heard when, perhaps, someone who was new to the Maritimes, a Canada to share, speaking in such a happy and relieved, almost unusual way about how it had been finding a home. A new home, far from the one home others somehow had to agree they must leave, try to attempt another life, one they hoped would one day simply sound and seem as beautiful as two, better yet, four wings flapping, a rhythm, a beat some people have heard at least once, or in time, like the smiling couple, believe to be a gift their travels have brought, travels unlike the people they will stand beside, the people for the future, waiting, like unborn children, or even unhatched eggs.
Claudine Nash is a psychologist and award-winning poet whose collections include The Wild Essential (Kelsay Books, 2017), Parts per Trillion (Aldrich Press, 2016) and the chapbooks Things for Which You Thirst (Weasel Press, forthcoming) and The Problem with Loving Ghosts (Finishing Line Press, 2014). She has also edited three anthologies of poetry, most recently Epiphanies and Late Realizations of Love (Transcendent Zero Press, 2019). Widely published, her poetry has earned numerous literary distinctions including nominations for the Pulitzer, Best of Net and Pushcart Prizes as well as awards from such publications and artistic organizations as Artists Embassy International, Thirty West Publishing House, The Song Is... and Eye on Life Magazine among others. Website: https://www.claudinenashpoetry.com/
To Do List for The Work in Progress

1. Stop luring myself back to silence despite the warm noise of a new season that rises within

2. Bake bread

3. Make something. Make summer from a swallow

4. Slip back into the fields of myself and swallow all the noise

5. Phone vet

6. Weave myself into this brightly colored landscape and toss tree seeds into the wind until nightfall

7. Dye grey

8. Vacuum

9. Look into my own eyes and feel the notes of a mislaid song start to stir

10. Stand by the open window

11. Sing

12. Sing

When I Come to the Mountains

I hoard the universe.

I slip wind into pockets and let it leak through the lining,

I lift cloud cover,

pack rowdy coyotes into the fields that I carry, swipe the flight of fireflies that swarms near the barn.

(Did you know I once hid a patch of fog beneath a misshapen pumpkin?)

Here is the messy horse who drips when he chews my bruised apples.

I fill myself with cattail and moss, my daughter's bare feet.

Nothing is safe.

Today I am grabbing the light as it shifts between seasons, I am stashing the last of the dandelion seeds.

The rising moon sees me and hides, the rat snake scurries.

(They leave those fat groundhog at risk).
The music is on: the start of your paradise weekend, turned up to hurricane levels to blow through dusty minds, cobwebs of the working week.

You believe in a heaven behind drugs, a realism away from nine to five cubicles, with death waiting each morning on top of steel countertops.

Reincarnation comes in pill form for the kids: the up-tempo distraction ate like rats on placebos, yielding to crazed coma/soma states,

scooping up the heavy beats with both hands, laughing at those broken flies who do not know how to turn on their wings,

sucking at hearts with spider teeth and eyes unknotting the tangles in their kidult webs until the speakers blow.

No one admits to being casualties of the club scene, breaking up the dance, disposable minds chaperoned by what you cannot run from.

Gather those ugly druggies crucified on the dance floor in the name of amusement. Heaven has become clouded, weeping for all the infant fallen

so quick to mature and yet so premature in dying.

Colin Dardis

Colin Dardis is a poet, editor, sound artist and arts coordinator from Northern Ireland. His collections include 'The Dogs of Humanity' (Fly on the Wall Press, 2019), 'the x of y' (Eyewear, 2018), 'Post-Truth Blues' (Locofo Chaps, 2017) and 'Dōji: A Blunder' (Lapwing, 2013). His work has been published widely throughout Ireland, the UK and USA.
GREATER THAN ZERO

Automatic Writing IV

a vision
of a semi-automatic
and Yeats standing over Maud Gonne
Lady Gregory
and all his other poetry whores
while scribing lines onto his cock
for the ladies to bury into the dirt grave
the dirt pauper grave of a poet
with fistfuls of clenched earth
thrown over his tragic member
dead to sexuality forever
they shot the discarded appendage dead
and Yeats whimsies over
the superfluous nature of his manhood
while throwing himself to the wolves' claws
tearing his heart in three,
for Gonne, for Gregory, for George
for anyone but himself
for the sake of poetry
which much be continued in dictums
ad nauseam
forever
no matter
what

Greater Than Zero

The only perfect thing in this world
is a zero, for it holds no flaws
in which to compromise itself.

Every orbit, a zero,
moving the universe along,
mouths kissing a star:

Space, only a mock abyss,
every square mile holding a galleon
of beautiful imperfection.
IN THE SONG CALLED HOME

Donna Prinzmetal is a poet, psychotherapist and teacher. She has taught poetry and creative writing for more than 30 years to adults and children. Donna often uses writing to facilitate restoration and healing in her psychotherapy practice. Her poems have appeared in many magazines including Prairie Schooner, The Comstock Review, and The Journal. Her first book, Snow White, When No One Was Looking, was published with CW Books in May of 2014.

I am a young girl with a red bow around my neck. 
ringing the doorbell next to the black door 
by the Chinese elm. 
Nobody answers.

In the song called Nobody, 
a whistle blows its long exhale one night. 
I am a stowaway on that train 
with no known origin or destination.

In Travelling, 
I spit a cherry pit at midnight 
and sift fingers through hot sand at noon. 

I trill a garden tune and call it Loam. 
My dirty hands hold yellow tomatoes 
the shape of eggs.

In the one called Birth, 
my children's feet are roots in my small garden. 
Their fingers reach high enough 
to pluck cherries from the tree.

In Wings, 
I miss my son's bristly beard, 
my daughter's earth-smelling hair.

In the tune called Alone, 
the owl is wooing me home. 
I know each vowel of her song, 
what each hooo means 
the way a mother knows her baby's distinct cry.

In the song called Marriage, 
he says my secret name. 
Today, I answer.
LETTING GO

STAR CHILD

I like the way
the sunset renews
my human face,
steals some peace
allows my emotions
the breath they need
to escape.
silently,
slowly
makes space
chalk a
moon
on a blue black
brushed sky,
while clouds sweep
across
a luminous
cluster of stars
a kaleidoscope
of shine.
This lunar magnet
shares this velvet night
poised above a world
asleep
in black and white.

Doreen Duffy

Doreen Duffy studied creative writing at Oxford University online, at University College Dublin & has a first class honours certificate in creative writing from National University of Ireland. She’s a member of Platform One Writers and Tutors on Creative Writing Ink. Doreen has been published in Live Encounters, The Lea Green Down, Fiery Arrow Press, Orbis, Woman’s Way, Irish Times, Circle and Square Anthology. Winner of Carousel Aware Prize 2017, Ireland’s Own Anthology, South of the County, New Myths and Tales. She was broadcast on Podcast.ie. Doreen was longlisted in the RTE Guide/Penguin Competition and The Over the Edge New Writer of the Year. She won the Jonathan Swift Award and was awarded the Deirdre Purcell Cup by Maria Edgeworth Literary Festival. She was shortlisted for The Francis MacManus competition and was broadcast on RTE Radio. http://doreenduffy.blogspot.com/
**The Sun is floating**

The sun is floating
over my house
I saw it this morning
as it started out,
over the children at play
on the road,
until they got tired
and wandered home.
I am alone inside this
cold house
but I can see the light
shine outside
over my house,
lays warmth on the roof
as it passes by,
while the hands on the clock
make their slow climb,
the sound is loud
in this silent house
tick tock to the dark
while I look out
the shadow on the yard
lifts the sun inside
scatters the dust
in a golden fire,
bathes the floor at my feet
brings warmth at last
and sleep,
in the evening of my life

**Letting Go**

It is evening
I can tell,
the hairs on my arms
start to lift against the air,
my summer dress
not enough anymore
to keep me warm

The road is white,
cement dust
like powder, like clouds
between the scaffolding
across the sky,
My dad in his work boots
finds his way down,
the sound of the bars
like bells between sleepers
on houses not built yet
at the top of our road

He fixes the folds
on his shirt sleeves
holds the handle bars steady,
I can hear his breath
while he runs
feel his grip,
almost to the top of our road
then I hear him,
‘That’s it,
now just keep pedalling’
Faye Boland was highly commended for the Desmond O’Grady Prize 2019. She won the Robert Leslie Boland Prize 2018 and the Hanna Greally International Literary Award 2017. She was shortlisted in 2013 for the Poetry on the Lake XII International Poetry Competition. Her first poetry collection *Peripheral* was published in September 2018 by The Manuscript Publisher. She is a member of Clann na Farraige writers group in Kenmare, Co.Kerry, Ireland.

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**YOU ARE NOT GINGER**

Their insults  
are not meant for you.

Your hair is auburn  
the colour of Autumn leaves,  
glossy as the squirrel’s coat  
a shade darker than fox.

You are not a foreign spice  
but *rua* like egg yolk,  
your hair warm as sunset, flames,  
radiating the sheen of copper pans.

The colour worn by film stars —  
O’ Hara, Hepburn, Kidman  
who made men’s hearts beat faster,  
as you will soon.

And your freckled creamy skin:  
constellations of brown dots  
exploding like fireworks  
in the sun’s heat.

Think of them as kisses - scores  
speckling your face, torso, limbs  
one from each person  
who knows you’re beautiful.
FOX

I have talked up
this adventure:

A famine road to
God knows where

but you are not enticed
by its mystery.

I am enchanted by sun
playing with umbrageous trees,

but you drag your heels,
throw yourselves down.

A fox cub steps out in front,
stares us down,

slips into the forest.
We still talk of that moment,

when we were blessed, caught
in the pupil of fox’s eye.

ii

Hear her bark.

Already, the taste
of blood in her throat,
flesh in her maw.

A flash of vixen
brushing the edge
of your dreams.

When they scalp her,
sell her pelt,
her cubs will perish,

her spirit quenched.
The sun still rusting
in her fur.

iii

I have promised you heaven on earth,
dug deep to find it:

birdsong, wildflowers —
heather and gorse —
russet sunsets.
Tucked up in our feathered den

under star-sequinned skies
I tell you stories

of foxes and hounds.
You are richer

for the brush
of my vulpine touch.

Follow my scent.

Hear my yap
sparking the night sky.

Robert Leslie Boland Prize Winning Poem 2018
**DISCORDANCE**

Pádraig toils the land,  
plucks stones from the soil,  
tills, sows, reaps,  
his spine curving  
over the boulder of his shoulder,  
eyes alight with rainbows,  
the sun rising and setting  
behind soft green hills.  
When the earth digs deep  
under his nails  
his soil-crusted hands  
feel its bone and marrow.  

He crafts a home  
from stone he breaks  
with a sledge, choked  
with bare-knuckled hands.  
The wife he places in its heart  
warms it with her light,  
breathes life into it.  
So too will  
successive generations.  

*  

Patrick's world is a cubicle,  
cornered in by colleagues.  
His vista a silver sliver,  
table weighted with a pyramid of papers,  
technology, grey as his sun-starved face.  
He sees banknotes grow like leaves,  
a paler shade of green,  
their rustle discordant  
with the pulse of earth,  
the cadence of his forefathers' green hills.

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**PIAZZA EUROPA**

My shutters open onto a balcony garlanded with red geraniums and the Piazza Europa where a fountain plumes.  

Now, mid-day sun closed out,  
I hear a scooter strafe,  
a dog's cough echoing in a skinny street.  

When I rise, I will feel the cobbles under my feet, the sun tightening my burned skin.  

And everywhere I walk, the scent of oregano.
**Hungry for Love**

In Manhattan, I longed for
Ma’s brown bread, creamery butter
Tayto crisps, salt ‘n vinegar
Bisto gravy, black pudding
digestive biscuits for dunking.
In Manhattan, I hungered for home.

Back in Dublin, I dreamt of pizza slices
bagels ‘n cream cheese; Reese’s
peanut butter cups, Hershey’s kisses.
Sixty cent coffee from a Wall Street vendor
who knew I liked it dark, sweet, regular.
Home at last, I hungered for love.

In the Bronx, construction workers
stood in line outside the Irish butcher.
Dyin’ for bacon ‘n cabbage, fish ‘n chips
shepherd’s pie and spotted dick Washed
down with pints of porter in Rory Dolan’s.
Hunger satisfied, still home-sick.

Dubliners now dine on take-out Mango Tree
Jasmine House curry, chop suey, chow mein.
Sip Prosecco instead of Barry’s tea
Merlot, sauvignon and champagne.
In Direct Provision shelters or out on the streets
to roam, others hunger for a house to call home.

Frances Browner is a creative writing and history tutor living in County Wicklow, Ireland. Her poetry has appeared in *The Irish Examiner, Ogham Stone, Skylight 47, Poems on the Edge, Tales from the Forest, Ink Sweat & Tears, A New Ulster, Bray Arts Journal, Boyne Berries* and on *Limerick’s Poetry Trail*. A Micro-Chap of fifteen poems was launched online by Ghost City Press, Syracuse, NY, as part of their summer series, 2019. She facilitates Poets Parlour open-mic in Greystones, Wicklow.
Little Women

You saw the gift under the tree
Four girls in Victorian dress on the front
Old-fashioned, maroon hardcover
Yellow grain paper, no pictures
Happy Christmas from Mammy, inside.

Years later, you came upon a copy
In a school in the South Bronx where
Your students had never heard of it.
You tried to open their minds like pages
To the possibilities the world had to offer.

You taught them that bold was not bad
But, brave and rebellious
Being willing to stand out.
Stories don’t all have fairy-tale endings
That words, as well as sticks and stones
Could break their bones.

You learnt that Jo, Beth, Amy and Meg
Were mere ‘white girls’ to these girls
That privilege was a book
Closed in their underclass faces.
An American classic had made more
Sense to a nine-year-old Irish girl, after all.

Mythical Creatures

Janus had two faces
One looking forward
One looking back

My face had two sides
One round, eye wide open
One tilted, eyelid drooping

By a brook, the banshee keens
Her features craggy
White hair in reams

Tears snail my crooked cheek
Nerves palsied, now decease

Do school friends notice?
They do, but don’t say it to my face

In between electric shock waves
A thirteen-year-old dreams of Camelot
While, Jackie O sunglasses hide
Her weeping eye, slanted smile

Auntie Frances, what’s history?
Things that happened a long time ago
Like dinosaurs?
Yeah, Mae, like dinosaurs
Tables Turned

All the girls in my class have a record player
fourteen-year-old me used to wail.
If everyone jumped in the Liffey
would you want to jump in as well?

Da cracked a shy smile when I gasped
at the shiny brand new turn table.
Cream lid, with a handle like a suitcase
Phillips, high fidelity, transportable.

I lugged it from Busáras down the country
so my cousins and I could learn to jive
quick step around the kitchen floorboards
'Suddenly you love me' our only forty-five.

Jaysus, but you're a swinger! A lad all the
girls wanted to dance with was surprised.
Did ya take them lessons up in Dublin?
I taught myself, I timidly replied.

LPs too turned on that table - Abbey Road
Sergeant Pepper, Ziggy Stardust, Fleetwood
Mac - until I bought a new cassette deck
and Carly Simon’s ‘No Secrets’ tape cassette.

All tossed into a skip the day Da’s house
was emptied and I wasn’t there to supervise.
Now, the beech wood stand is used to store
Encyclopedias that did manage to survive.

And nephews pay a small fortune
for vinyl from seventy-five.
Two Women

She publishes Portrait excerpts in the Egoist, anonymously sends Jim an allowance. Worshipping at Literature’s pulse, she ignores her lawyer’s warning about fraying capital. Agog with curiosity, Jim identifies her. She apologises for her initial secrecy, responds to requests for increased help.

Jim and Nora splurge, courtesy of Miss Weaver who aloofly resists the flak she cops, a maiden English lady accused of funding the writing of unintelligible filth. Savings wither but not her love for Jim. Visiting him in Paris she catches the bus while he, drinking and tipping, does taxis.

Jim whines about expenses so she pays: hotels, fine clothes, family illnesses. Friends rage about her vanishing money. He posts explanatory letters with extracts. Unsurprisingly, Finnegans baffles her. Eventually he repays her by cutting her dead, leaving her as one of literature’s footnotes.

Jim’s father’s death releases sobs withheld when his mother died and ever since. Finnegans triggers a critics’ free-for-all. Lucia reveres this father some say is mad. Spoilt in several languages but at times neglected by parents obsessed with each other, her eyes are startling blue, bright as paint.

Poverty, extravagance, praise, vilification: her father’s fame excites and unsettles. Tutors come and go, none wearing a halo. Lucia’s need is to be brilliant, or to marry, but she can’t marry Jim. Her bizarre bursts of temper tweezer him, mindful of brothel infections in his youth.

She hursts herself at young Sam Beckett but Jim’s genius attracts the poet, not her. Sam thinks her mind is Jim’s run amok, careering from one topic to another. Blamed for wooing her, he sees she is lost but her blinded father can’t. When told of Jim’s death she says: That idiot!

Jim discourses in bars, cadges money, buoyed by an innate sense of superiority. That intellect, the prodigious reading, cocky belief in his destiny and genius, makes admirers, and enemies, of his peers. Chastity divides women into camps. Decent means thighs closed and clothed.

Brothel life fascinates, sexual reek, the wanton, knickers easily downed, whips him into scatological ecstasy. Not of his class but carnally shrewd, Nora spins tales of her peasant childhood. When she reaches into his trousers does she think of biographical text?

Booting convention up the arse they elope unwed, into exile, to Zurich, Trieste, where their haphazard hand-to-mouth ways would make a bankable movie script now. She sticks by her man, forever imprinted. Dubliners crowd his mosaics of the past, recorded forever in an intaglio of words.

To solve the damned problem of money Jim finds backers for his grand idea, bringing movies to the Irish public. In Dublin he fits seats in vacant premises. This time his meteoric imagination fails. His choice of movies abysmal for a genius, the venture collapses, backers scarper.

In private, the failed cinema entrepreneur does his best to prove his critics correct, writing of barbaric degrading debauchery, but so does his wife, and they gorge on it. This intercity precursor to phone sex, their inky couplings, satiates them. Jim dreams post-coital dreams of Molly Bloom.

His stories offend in different ways, scaring the bejeezus out of publishers. The scandalous stripping of sacred taboos, raw pasquinades, scald even the printers. He banjaxes Ireland, insults the English king, suffers fits, ulcers, and eye problems, and complains to the newspapers.

His plan to canvass Dublin’s publicans, a literary pub-crawl with a publisher to sweet talk them so they won’t sue, stirs pettifoggery, and, in turn, his paranoia. Envious fellows, back-stabbers like him, spread stories of Nora’s liberties, crazing him cruelly with sexual jealousy.

Using a suitcase lid on his knees as a desk he composes his gallimaufry of those streets into Ulysses in their Swiss bedroom. By night he carouses with cronies, vexing Nora who is bored by artists, neglect, exile. When Sylvia Beach finally publishes the epic, Nora, who never finishes it, sells her signed copy.
That Untravelled World, Gleaming

I read Laurie Lee’s *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning*, rapt, hooked, yearning to walk out, too, needing some best years of my life to remember. Minimal skills, even less education, bank balance a posh phrase for zero, in the grip of the gap between family obligation and imagination, I studied. The first writer, T.S. Eliot, a challenging beginning to what I have now wrought, smote my heart. I sensed those claws scuttling across ancient ocean floors while days flipped over.

Finding a way to burst clear of factories, blast furnaces, I reached Tahiti’s voluptuous volcanic skyline, *Adventures in Paradise*’s cinematography on TV, Gauguin’s concupiscent coloration in art biographies, research of every book on the Bounty mutiny I could find, plus its movie magic, albeit skewed, in mind. Then I fell ill. In Papeete a charming French doctor’s antibiotics rescued me following comical multilingual communication, she amused, switching languages, me ham acting.

Paul Theroux jiggled my wanderlust, place ever more vital in books squished into those outside pockets of backpacks snugly treasured during times of delay. Travellers read. On the N.Y.C. subway in a train dubbed The Beast for its dangers, I counted five languages being read heads down avoiding eye contact in one carriage, recalled V.S. Naipaul’s first stop there after leaving Trinidad as a teenager, lacking money to tip a cabbie. On that first flight peering down at the sea prompted his memory of a poem by Tennyson whose monument I later reached high above the scudding drift on the Isle of Wight.

Seeing Dover’s cliffs I thought of Matthew Arnold. Thomas Hardy’s writing desk and D.H. Lawrence’s narrow house of childhood among literary shrines visited, I also tarried in verdant Vermont near Solzhenitsyn’s hideaway in exile after his triumph over gulag confinement, swear I met characters from Annie Proulx’s *The Shipping News* when my ferry reached fog-enshrouded Newfoundland Island. I trawl movie credits for acknowledgements of writers whose accounting beguiles, for their cinematic kick-starters, going back so far as Virgil and Homer; those diarists of epic nomadic adventurers, sniff hoarded superseded maps for free return trips.

No Joke

*All along the cell block sang the lawyer to the cop.* The old lag’s mimicry echoes in here, voice flat, adenoidal like Dylan’s, threat loaded with false jocularity disturbing my reverie of A-list dealing days, that lush intellectual glamour, my domain high above Market Street, leaning on my balcony wearing a crisp white shirt, sleeves rolled just so, listening to distant sirens, ambulances, cop cars prowling the night canyons of the glittering city, looking down on poor sods whose lives run into dead-ends.

*Fuckfuckfuck* I mutter, sweat sour, reflection in stainless steel blurred, a fallen star, boring months, years, stretched ahead as good, or bad, as finished. Over. My erratic schooldays, the ballooning differential between brainpower and behaviour, kindled my father’s favourite cark and care comment re fees; *Flushing cash down the lavatory,* remembered now, pissing, desultory, alone yet not alone. I blew bigger sums, actually, I tell the swirling water, *than you dreamed of.*

My neighbour, this tone-deaf troubadour of trouble, warbles *There must be some way outta here*; me, brainwave bankrupt to find this way, inflexible hierarchies being such, my last, dumbest, deal is done. Passion, ignorance, concupiscence. They bludgeoned Fat Carl, another high-profile snitch, brained him with a barbell.
And the earth said
Now you may go
You have finished now
Finished putting down words
Impressions

And the earth said
I am rising
Up, stretching out my arms
Pushing you away
I do not respond to your curses
Or your hopes

Do not draw breath, the air is mine
You landed on me
Without permission to land
a warplane

You borrowed, but stole
Consolation against consolation
Your consolation

And the earth asks
Where is my freedom
Do I have a choice
Other than to make you quake with earthquake
become anaemic with pandemic

continued overleaf...
New Earth contd...

2

Like a planet, like the head
of a girl, all of you, who dig in the sand, sift, stroke, till, burn
Mill, no less, mite, embers of remembrance which collide

You say I am called Gaia
But I am not, nor am I home
or planet, Tellus, cosmos
You take pictures of me
Of the embryo inside the belly
Of the tumour inside the abdomen
Believing you see the one who is looking when the satellite looks at us

Lightbearer, may I suggest
the possibilities
no, rather
expectations!

Catch catch
catch me
in your lap
In the blue

And there (in the blue)
is the noise from a kindergarten in autumn light
the trees have caught fever, for ever?
Young insects leap from flower to floor to bed to blood
Life goes on, just goes on
Is it an insult, a twist of fate, bashfulness or disarming
Humour or ill-humour?

3

It is so easy for you, all of you, you simply hold out a We
wave it in the wind, tempting

Must we become We?
In the end?
What have We to say
Who do We say it to
Are you there? Are you
On the wildlife camera, on the carcass, in the trap or in the field
In We-shapes, figures, built or discovered
As unlike we we are We in

Who decides you, We
Subject object rape
Who decides on
The hand that writes
In the sky

said the earth
UNCAGED ANIMALS

James Walton

James Walton is published in many anthologies, magazines, and newspapers. He was a librarian, a farm labourer, and mostly a public sector union official. He resigned from an elected position in 2014 to write. His books include 'The Leviathan's Apprentice' 2015, 'Walking Through Fences' 2018, and 'Unstill Mosaics' 2019. He has been shortlisted for a number of awards, and is a winner of the Raw Art Review Chapbook Prize for "Abandoned Soliloquies" to be published shortly. He lives in Wonthaggi.

UNCAGED ANIMALS

They speak
but then they don’t
these handlers of truth
their baton tongues rattle
along loose evaporating bars
we see through a decline
without any nurture
the promise withering within
still
I’ll hold your hand
step out Fred and Ginger
fall and rise
hand on cuff less wrist
over this diapason rescue
but then again
the sideshow ennui
calls us back
one last performance
we will grow tired
of the ringmaster’s whip
stand up with the big cat
nine tails or lives
if you slip
I will slip too
one for one
this is how a number grows.

© James Walton
THREE HUNDRED AND SIXTY SECONDS
IS ALL IT TOOK

fewer than a ghost town
where the currawongs
scrawl their names

the half tail feral cat
hicups the last budgie’s feathers

the post office doors
open outward
once a river dawdled
many places to go

environmental flows
lapsed in occupation
big trees rolled
throughout the compass

six-minute people
scratch out lives
the win beneath the crinkle

hesitates for bearing

set and dawn
the twenty-four hours persist
faith swings
out of the pendulum chime

calls out the broken testament
see what time it really is
against the oldest occupation*

THEY DON’T KNOW ABOUT HORSES

those who talk of standing sleep
how they curl like cats
snuffle ground as wingless dragons

or idle attent in the full sun

because there are not enough days
to feel earth undulate in the tease of burlap

pose rump into the weather
always alert for the summons
the startled flap of plovers
as unshod hooves cherish gallop

then call across fences
their voices tuned for a herd
whickering out the lost posse

rubbing morse on iron gates
the criss cross code of a sudden lick
a scrape of brisket colour
to mark the strain in barbed wire

and always their eyes of finest glaze
seeking truth in the most human places

*Indigenous leaders point out that white occupancy of the Australian continent if measured against the timescale of indigenous settlement, would amount to only six minutes against 24 hours.
As always it begins with an idea and because I still write by hand in the first instance I reach into my bag only to find what's missing. Without the tool of my trade I am less myself; a ballerina off point, a sniffer dog with anosmia.

I scan the laminate tabletop willing my predecessor to gift me from the pages of an abandoned crossword but I am just the first absent-minded doodler of the day. The newspaper before me mechanically folded, woefully pristine. The Planes Trains and Cars coloring book merely a tease of motion. What to do but beg?

Looking up from the salad bar as if it is a question he has never been asked, ponytailed and tie-dyed the waiter offers hope in the form of a barely concealed caveat - this pen he undertones is my one and only.

And this serves to divert me even further, duty bound now to expedite whatever it is I simply must write. Already the original kernel is dissipating, shape-shifting into what else but a study of the implement itself. The way the faded hotel name begins in a golden C and ends in the breaking bite of someone else’s eureka moment. There is a disconcerting wobble and a vague stickiness I cannot think on. Overall too thick for comfort but an optimistic super-hero-green (think Ninja Turtles ...).

Now and then its rightful owner looks over as if to make sure I haven’t left the country or found the secret imbedded button which if pressed with just the right lightness of touch could send me rocketing to a time and place where everything revels in its element: the sauerkraut, tabouli, writers and their pens – the next great work just a few more short orders away.

Jane Williams is an award-winning Australian writer based in Tasmania. Her poems have been published widely since the early 1990s. Her most recent book of poems is Parts of the Main. While best known for her poetry, Jane Williams has written in a variety of forms and genres for both adults and children. She has been a featured reader at venues in several countries including the USA, Canada, Ireland, Malaysia, Czech Republic and Slovakia where she held a three month artist residency in 2016. She coedits the online literary and arts journal Communion with her partner Ralph Wessman.
Suspension of disbelief

At sixty-five my bachelor uncle gave up smoking six months before his bypass and wonders tongue in cheek if there’s a link.

He tells me this over the phone. We haven’t spoken in 14 years because life happens we tell ourselves.

I tell him I remember how he introduced me to Harry Chapin when I was still in my teens and cats in the cradle were all the metaphor I needed for the world’s sorrows.

How he once took his girl on a double date after the car accident but before her face had been fully reconstructed and his mate wanted to know what happened and he told him in detail then casually asked So...what’s your date’s excuse?

What I don’t mention is that Christmas he walked out, disappeared, reemerging well into the new year as if he’d just been to the corner shop for cigarettes.

How as time rumoured on through affairs of the heart, one loan shark too many I crafted my own version of events -

Some kindly alien abduction, no invasive probing just a few randomised questions about life as he/we knew it.

Aussie Rules, TV dinners, what it means to outlive your brother then your sister. The countless ways we’ve come up with to enhance and numb the senses.

Then before we even noticed his absence, he’d be returned to us absentmindedly stroking his beard, heart in a state of permanent ceasefire, memory and his slate wiped clean.
Pancake theorem

When I find myself in doubt
a wise friend advises
Lie back and think of pancakes.

Once upon a stone age...
cattails and ferns were mixed
with water and baked on hot rocks.

Epochs on the Elizabethans enhanced
the palate with sherry and rose water.

Twentieth century Catholicism favored
lemon and a liberal sprinkling of sugar.

By the time I reach the parlours floating
buttery stacks through the caramelised air

I am returned to my senses and the gift
of accepting each day as it arrives;
flat-packed, some assemblage required,
choosing to believe whatever is left
over or missing ensures the continuum.

Sometimes the only way to neutralize
the mind’s trickery is to hole up awhile
in a corner of the knowable world -
surrender to the elemental
comfort of its thingness...

This isn’t a poem about eggs

but growing up we learned to walk
on their shells.
If our family was a circus
then my father was the ringmaster.
We slipped our knots while he slept,
became limbo dancers and funambulists
clowning around the borderlines.

This isn’t a poem about eggs but with six
kids, a house cow and a surplus of pancakes
it seemed we were always racing for the first
or reaching for the last of anything.

This isn’t a poem about eggs though the line
I recall the most often from Angela’s Ashes
is Malachy McCourt asking what a man
would be doing with a whole one to himself.

This isn’t a poem about eggs but if it was
it might simply describe the way they are shaped
for safe landing, the joy of watching one crack
from the inside.
CAFE DIVERSIONS

ONE THING LEADING TO ANOTHER

If at just that moment you
(daddy longlegs) had veered
some other way and not the way
of my keyboard where nothing
was happening
but where my fingers rested
anyway out of habit,
I might not have wondered...

All my life I have been naming you
wrongly: star of phobias,
Halloween décor, superhero.
You are more closely related
to the scorpion, the mite even.
No silk-glanded webspinner then.
Eight legs yes, but fragile as time.
And just the two eyes — like me.

At last count your kind was
four hundred million years old.
Give or take.

Oh ancient one! What do I know?

This -
You crawled the alphabet to disappear
inside a man’s dressing gown.
The man rose slowly from the table
carefully undressing though it was
a cool enough autumn morning
and just yesterday there had been
a sprinkle of mountain snow.

And this -
When the man sat back down
in his singlet and shorts and waited
to see if you would reemerge,
whole, it was then, one thing leading
to another, that I was reminded
of his kindness –

vowed to love it more fiercely.
THREE POEMS

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

STILL LIFE: WOMAN WITH RAT

something moved under the young woman’s
curly black hair held in place by a white headband
a tiny rat had snuggled into the little valley
behind the woman’s collarbone
red tail, piercing eyes
a tiny rat with a loving heart
she trusts her more than her family
left home at sixteen, five years ago
her step-father’s fist drove her away
and the needles in her mother’s veins
the rat looks up, alert, ready to face life
its nose like the top of a pencil
sometimes its owner struggles to take care of her
this fierce, fiery, ratty little battler
seems to smile at me
knowing that her place near the collarbone
surely isn’t threatened by someone
who’s writing words into a black notebook.

Joachim Matschoss
Verena

I have never met you
but just last week learnt with surprise
you vowed never to have a baby
and now I started reading ‘kinderfrei’
in which you praise those that like you
chose to be child-free for the sake of the planet
you trust data that states that a child
adds 58 tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere
a year over its lifetime

but
you fly to your book talks
you drive to work
teaching children in regensburg
birth rates are one thing
but to condemn those that are parents is another
especially if you drink coffee from take away cups
and use straws for your shakes

Bangkok Ladyboy

don’t you like what you see?
I’m different, different and free
I don’t hide the sparkle, no don’t turn away
my mum had to face me, me, her boy
some days I howl, and I cry
other days I lie, yes, I lie
don’t they say the best people come in pairs
I am who I am, who cares
ALOYSIUS THE GREAT—EXCERPT IV

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 shortlisted 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.

CHAPTER XXVI

Doomsday has arrived. Budgen drops me off at the train station and I purchase a first-class ticket to London and, perhaps, Hades. Go there in style.

On this trip Aloysius Magnus will drift into a majestic state of mind and devise a masterful strategy for the battle of Cockfosters Station. First, wash down five magic tablets with royal coffee, thereby banishing headaches from the realm.

Aha! Here’s an empty car where the great one can doze off on his voyage south. But, alas, His Highness is a serial dreamer, and the most outré of nightmares come in the wake of lifting one jar too many. For a while it was those outlandish newspaper stories, but lately, it seems, the play’s the thing . . .

ALOYSIUS
Where am I? A brothel? What did you say . . . I mean, who did you say you were? Zoe? Life? You are life? Jesus. Life is a whore. Why are you smoking a Cuban cigar, and where’s your twin sister, Thanatos? You don’t know her? Your own sister, Death? Oh, Jesus, what are you doing? I must warn you. I won’t pay. I never pay. Hey, you’re giving me money. Yeah, that’s okay. Who’s that? Bella? She’s the boss? Where’d she go? There you are. Elena, it’s you, isn’t it?

BELLAELENA
I am whoever you want me to be, but before you do anything else, I want you to look through this.

(She points Aloysius toward a zoetrope, which he peers into.)

ALOYSIUS
That’s you Elena. Who’s that slimy-looking character with you?

BELLAELENA
That’s my husband, Dr. Delagracia. Let Zoe assist you while you watch. Zoe, throw that cigarillo away. Your mouth can be better engaged than with a cylinder of rank weed.
(Zoe undoes Aloysius's belt, easing him down into a leather chair while kneeling in front of him—not, it seems, to pray. Dr. Delagracia takes out his black bag, opens Elena's blouse, and places his stethoscope on her left breast. He listens and nods, then has her lie supine while he lifts up her skirt. He takes a tiny brush out of his bag and strokes her red pubic hair with his left hand, while placing his stethoscope on her vaginal labia with his right hand. He listens intently, nods his head in approval, and proceeds to expose his black priapic member.)

ALOYSIUS
What are you doing to me? I don't want to see this. Let me out of here.

(Aloysius squirms to liberate himself but thickened leather straps project from the chair's arms and lock him in. Zoe gets up wiping her mouth, but Aloysius realizes it's not Zoe. It's Marthe Fleischmann.)

ALOYSIUS
Marthe, what are you doing here?

KITTY
What's wrong with you, sir? Had a little too much to drink today? I'm not Marthe. I'm Kitty Higgins, and, good sir, may I ask, what in blazes are you doing here?

ALOYSIUS
Well . . .

(ALOYSIUS pushes her out of the way and sees a young woman in her early twenties pressing her face up against the window of the zoetrope.)

ALOYSIUS
Deborah... is that you?

DEBORAH
It's me all right. Do you want proof?

(She backs up and reveals a transparent rectangle in her abdomen. The window acts as a camera lens and zooms in on Deborah, who's now standing in front of a painting of a young boy in an Eton suit carrying a book called *Aloysius's Wake*.)

ALOYSIUS
Who's that?

DEBORAH
That's your son. Or, I should say, that's what he'd look like today if you'd let me have him. Would you like to see what he really looks like today?

ALOYSIUS
No! Let me go.

(ALOYSIUS pulls in vain at the chair to release himself, only to realize his shoes have been nailed to the floor.)

DEBORAH
Well, you will, whether you like it or not.

(ALOYSIUS tries to shut his eyes, but maggots have a restraining grip on his eyelids. Deborah picks up a large jar with a male fetus immersed in formaldehyde. It's a dwarf's face, mauve and wrinkled.)

ALOYSIUS
I was drinking heavily at the time.

DEBORAH
You always drink heavily. Tell your son that and see what he says.

(She rushes toward him with the jar and pushes it up against the zoetrope's window. The image blurs, and the young woman and her jar disintegrate. The blurry face of a woman with anomalous eyes and auburn hair approaches Aloysius through the zoetrope.)
ALOYSIUS
Ma?

WOMAN
Yes, Tabeel, it’s your Mameleh. Don’t listen to those who would bring you down with them. You are going to become a great man one day who helps others find themselves. Therein dwells your greatness. But to do this you must take control of your cup, your wallet, and your temperament. You must learn what the heart is and what it feels, and discover the power of the word known to all men . . . l-o-

(She disappears without finishing the spelling.)

ALOYSIUS
Mameleh!

PRIEST
Why have you forsaken your son, my son?

RABBI
And why have you forsaken the God of your forefathers—the God of Abraham and Isaac and Rosenbach?

PRIEST
Why have you forsaken your son, my son?

RABBI
And why have you forsaken the God of your forefathers—the God of Abraham and Isaac and Rosenbach?

PRIEST
Why have you forsaken your son, my son?

RABBI
And why have you forsaken the God of your forefathers—the God of Abraham and Isaac and Rosenbach?

PRIEST
Why have you forsaken your son, my son?

RABBI
And why have you forsaken the God of your forefathers—the God of Abraham and Isaac and Rosenbach?

PRIEST
Why have you forsaken your son, my son?

RABBI
And why have you forsaken the God of your forefathers—the God of Abraham and Isaac and Rosenbach?

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And why have you forsaken the God of your forefathers—the God of Abraham and Isaac and Rosenbach?
It’s always a problem. What will you do if the locals try to mug you? . . . Ha! My money is on them. I’d better get going. Good luck at Waterloo. I’m on my way to Cockfosters. Bye.”

Nothing unusual about the station, except its above ground. I like that. It’s less nerve-wracking than that buried-alive feeling you get from the subway. There’s a large clock I can see from the platform. Twenty after nine. Wait. Here’s somebody. This could be de la Flora. Get close enough to be sure without letting him recognize you. Take off your beret and glasses and stroll casually in his direction.

It’s not him. Uniform back on.

I pace up and down the platform endlessly and then check the time. The clock says ten twenty-five. No sign of Torquemada. Dammit. I wish something would happen this clock-watching is torture. What did Mountjoy say? Give it another half-hour and then fold up your tent. Finally, the clock strikes eleven. Well, I stood ready to serve, like Malachi wearing the collar of gold. Alas, to no avail.

Take the Tube back to the hotel and maybe get a good night’s sleep this time. Mountjoy said we’d compare notes tomorrow. Probably didn’t expect anything to happen. What’s this? Oh yeah. I told them to leave an iced bottle of Dom Perignon in my room. There’ll be no victory to celebrate tonight. So, what? They’re all Pyrrhic victories, anyway. One thing’s for sure: I can’t waste this bottle of champagne. That would be criminal.

What’s that noise? Where am I? Jesus, it’s the chambermaid. I shout out I need a few minutes. It’s eleven o’clock already? No nightmares. If I dress quickly, I can grab a cab and still catch an express train to Yorkshire.

There’s a taxi right outside the hotel. “King’s Cross Station, please.” Mountjoy’s going to ridicule me for wasting his time. I thought he’d call this morning, but he must have left at daybreak to get back to the university. Well, if Torquemada was nowhere to be seen, he’s probably still breathing, and that’s Elena’s main concern. Maybe it is a victory. That is, unless Mountjoy encountered something. Jesus. I hope not. If anything happens to him, it’s going to be me bearing the blame.

Here we are. Grab a stack of newspapers. I’m not sleepy and I don’t have a headache. Maybe vintage champagne is the answer to my problem. At least it would be an elegant way to go.

“Sir, they just dropped off the latest edition of the Daily Mail. Would you like that one as well?”

“Yes. Please.” I slip it under the pile and hustle to catch the train.

Boring. Boring. Bored. Let’s see what the Daily Mail has to offer.

“Oh, my God!”

BIZARRE INCIDENT AT WATERLOO STATION
Severa travelers on the Bakerloo Line reported a most peculiar incident occurring at Waterloo Station between ten and eleven o’clock, on Saturday night, as they exited from their carriages. While reports differ, there appears to be general agreement that four men were involved in a dispute that resulted in one of them discharging a firearm.

Oh no.

The incident took place at the opposite end of the station from which the travelers exited from their carriages. Witnesses at the scene all agreed they heard shouting in a foreign language from that direction, which one bystander identified it as Italian, and the others as Spanish. Some pushing was observed among three of the gentlemen, two shots were fired in the air, and then something most extraordinary occurred. When the three men separated, a fourth man was seen stark naked in their midst, with both hands clasped over his head, slowly and methodically pirouetting.

Two of the men suddenly started running at a furious pace past the bystanders. One witness reportedly looked towards the end of the station and saw the naked man scram all his discarded clothes and push the other man, an elderly gentleman, into the carriage of a newly arrived train. The naked man’s momentum carried him and the older man into the carriage just as the doors were closing.
As the train passed by, several witnesses observed the naked man, thought to be in his thirties, dressing hastily while the elderly gentleman sat bewildered. Witnesses agreed they saw only one person, a woman perhaps in her late fifties, in the car the two men entered. She is said to have been staring at the naked man with what appeared to be a smile on her face.

The local constabulary was contacted, and the station was shut down while police officials attempted to locate the bullets allegedly discharged into the roof of the station.

Anyone who has information concerning what transpired at Waterloo Station last night is asked to contact Scotland Yard.

“This has to be Mountjoy. Nobody else is crazy enough to do something like that.”

I can imagine the headlines in tomorrow’s tabloid:

MAYHEM IN THE BOWELS OF THE LONDINIUM METROPOLIS
PIROUETTING PEDANT’S PENIS PARRIES PERNICIOUS PLOT
DANGLING DINGUS DERAIRS DESPICABLE DEED
WAYWARD WILLY WAGGER WOOS WATERLOO WATCHERS
FRISKY FRUMP FINDS FLASHER’S FLUTE FASCINATING
STUNTED GENERATIONS

John Sibley Williams is the author of As One Fire Consumes Another (Orison Poetry Prize, 2019), Skin Memory (Backwaters Prize, University of Nebraska Press, 2019), Summon (JuxtaProse Chapbook Prize, 2019), Disinheritance, and Controlled Hallucinations. A nineteen-time Pushcart nominee, John is the winner of numerous awards, including the Wabash Prize for Poetry, Philip Booth Award, and Laux/Millar Prize. He serves as editor of The Inflectionist Review and works as a poetry editor and literary agent.

STUNTED GENERATIONS

The moon tonight is a nightlight casting tiny shadows across the bars of the cribs we never grew out of. & that stuffed bear with one eye wet from our constant sucking stands in for our absent mothers. Like hangnails we can’t stop ourselves from picking into infection, the stars splinter off from that greater body of sky: acute, abrasive, alluringly dangerous. & even summer’s swell just drives home the cold. So we’ve learned to press ice cubes to our chests so they won’t melt as they do in whiskey, incorporate myths into our histories so they seem more real, fill a priest’s ears with sins we never considered committing but sound so good rolling off the tongue. A stained glass symbol hands itself over to truth the way a father slips bills under a table when the bartender tries to cut him off. There’s always room for one more tall tale before heading home, one more reason to put off repatriation, one more key missing its cylinder before finally catching & opening us up to our great & future empire.
LORE

It’s not that the nails keep growing but that skin recedes & can no longer hold them; I know his blood-lined lips aren’t evidence of resurrection but that everything inside is beginning to soften & simmer. Still I like to believe curtains dancing over an open window imply a returning; that these are demons working my hands, & when I eventually atone: gods; that the things keeping us bound to each other refuse to untangle when our breath becomes air & the air sours. I tell myself all sorts of stories to justify this wooden stake, this shovel & torch & doubt, this cross so weightless even the dead can bear it.

IN THEORY

A different night maybe the streetlight cutting the paper-thin curtains would strike your face less like an open palm. The moths wouldn’t be beating themselves senseless against the jar we keep them in. The bruised eyes we see through when trying to see the world as it is wouldn’t sting under ice. Like a language we understand but can no longer speak, on such a night the facts & our memories would carry the same truth. Within winter’s parched & broken skin maybe a balm of roots, unfed roots hungering for spring. The bed creaking beneath us just might sound like penitence; make-up sex feel like grace, like coming up for air when the river is at its least forgiving. Falling exhausted into forgive me, stay & at dawn staying.
Hard to know if this is the right ritual.

Darkened room & candle. Hands that have no idea what it means to steeple, or atone. The truth is it’s no easier comparing ourselves to the dead.

How my great-great grandfather tamed his tiny corner of a wild country without killing qualifies as a minor miracle. How I’ve hurt so many without carving my name into a single tree is equally wondrous. Maybe this ache is just one body defining itself by another, my mouth only filled with the usual promises. Forever & the forever beyond that. Heaven, flame, etc.

If I’m doing this right, there’ll be nothing true left in us but song, & when the singing’s done—

WHATSOEVER MATTERED BEFORE IS MATTERING AGAIN

—Each time, certain. Though more & more belief replaces the thing itself. Calling the lightning down to strike us so our children can start us up anew is a ritual without flash or ruin. Or change. We say *some boats are just made for sinking* over the grave of a suicided friend & feel better about our own untouched bodies for a moment.

Sometimes we just need the needing.

& it’s less His presence or absence, cruelty, long-awaited mercy, that writhes these strange singing men & women’s arms like unheld hoses going wild all over the lawn. They’re reaching, madly; can feel their own reaching. Maybe that’s enough; perfected, unattained. There’s something, we’re told, more meaningful in a metaphor without object. How what we lose ends up a memory. *Hallelujah.* How what we love, another word for exit wound. 

Would that I too save, be saved, take comfort that there is only *me* as far as the saying it goes. Death only in our grieving. *These are not snakes,* they tell us through snake-heavy arms, *but our taming of an untamable world.* Though I wouldn’t call any of this song, I envy their singing it; the lightningless burn, boatless sinking. Now touch me, love; uncertainly, ruinous, as evidence. Tonight, let’s try to make of us a material gospel again.

© John Sibley Williams
You snip the string on the brown parcel. As you begin to peel back the brittle brown covering, you realise from its veined surface that this isn’t parcel paper. It’s a single insect wing. You carefully spread the wing across the floor. It’s as big as the sail from a small boat. You return to the table where a large box sits with a loose lid. Inside the box is a bundle of brittle wing; the matching wing you reasonably guess. Carefully once more you spread this wing across the floor, next to its other half. Wrapped inside this wing - a pair of shoes. The shoes are made of red wax. You place the shoes upon your feet. They are wonderfully flexible and squeak at every step. A red spot is left after each footfall. The wings lie expectantly, awaiting the moment when you will ask your mother to sew them to your naked back. Your back awaits.
A noise of violet has been in your head all morning. Your neighbour has sent you out to the meadow, to capture the golden horse. He has given you a halter made of twisted straw. You do not believe in the golden horse. You believe the halter to be useless. The noise in your head stops. Violet is no longer colouring your mind. In the meadow a golden horse is standing in the sunlight. You believe. On seeing you the horse steps away, away into the shadow of the trees. It is no longer golden, you see now, but covered all over in mud. The horse evades you continually, trotting away at each approach. You throw the halter at it in exasperation. The noise in your head starts up. Violet is mind. The horse bends down and eats the straw halter. Violet wells up, overflowing. The horse's whinny sounds sarcastic, sounds triumphant as it trots away. In exasperation this time you shout. *Stop!* The word is violet. The horse stops. You realise that the halter is in the horse now, because violet is certain in all matters. The horse must obey. *Come,* you say to the horse. Once upon the horse you take hold of its mane, take hold of its mane as fierce as you can. *Carry me to the Sky Woman,* you say to the horse, for *I wish to present you to her.* The horse gallops with certainty, for violet commands it. At great speed it crosses the meadow, at great speed its hooves gain purchase in the air. You are astride it amongst the clouds. The noise in your head stops. You lose your sense of certainty, you falter. Your grip becomes faithless and the horse senses it and shakes you. You fall through the sky. Another certainty becomes manifest.
Weeks pass before you enter those fields again.
In the distance the river is solid metal, a necklace.
As you descend, the ground is yielding, sodden.
Yellow irises are in flower, their ragged petals vulnerable in the sunlight. But you understand at last that you cannot own colour. Colour is a thing outside of you. You know now that the irises and their yellow are owned by water.

At the riverbank a kingfisher is electric in the momentary sighting of it. You do not own it nor wish to. You barely look. Just as you barely looked at the irises or the grass, or the sky or now the river. A woman of liquid metal looks up out at you, her flesh like mercury. You do not covet her. You are beginning to understand not to desire her. The she is beyond you. You must love her, but without condition.

You turn your back and walk away to your house. The river leaves itself and sits up on the sodden grass. The river combs its hair of river, then shakes itself back fully into itself. You did not see this. Not seeing this is a test you have just passed.

In the wood you pass an old woman going the opposite way. You stop and look back at her. Blackthorn is growing through the top of her head. White blossom crowns her. A small bird, a wren, enters through the thicket of the blackthorn. You decide to follow her. You can see the wren flitting in and out of her skull. You can hear chicks cheeping in there. The wren has brought maggots in its craw. The chicks are the old woman’s mind, born again from the wren. A chick falls out and to the ground. The old woman seems oblivious. You stop and gently gather the chick into the joined cup of your hands. You are filled with bird thought; of the multiples that crowd the skies, that crowd the hedges.
What happened was this:--

four years, four years they kept me
away from my wife, my children, my family
they take me first to Egypt
for torture
it’s a mafia business
the US give them money
how much information you want for how much money
it’s a business, I tell you
a mafia business
they are criminals, criminals

they hold me in Egypt
they torture me for days
months

I can’t tell you torture
you can’t explain torture
you have to feel it, it’s a feeling
it’s psychological

every day they torture me
with beating, electricity, water
tell us tell us
they inject me with drugs
sign this, sign this
before my God
before Allah
I can say nothing
because I know nothing
nothing
what I can say?
what I can sign?
nothing, nothing

Kathleen Mary Fallon most recent work is a three-part project exploring her experiences as the white foster mother of a Torres Strait Islander foster son with disabilities. The project consisted of a feature film, Call Me Mum, which was short-listed for the NSW Premier’s Prize, an AWGIE and was nominated for four AFI Awards winning Best Female Support Actress Award. The three-part project also includes a novel Paydirt (UWAPress, 2007) and a play, Buyback, which she directed at the Carlton Courthouse in 2006. Her novel, Working Hot, (Sybylla 1989, Vintage/Random House, 2000) won a Victoria Premier’s Prize and her opera, Matricide – the Musical, which she wrote with the composer Elena Kats-Chernin, was produced by Chamber Made Opera in 1998. She wrote the text for the concert piece, Laquiem, for the composer Andrée Greenwell. Laquiem was performed at The Studio at the Sydney Opera House. She holds a PhD (UniSA).
Mamdouh Habib

and I tell you this, I tell you this
this I know
they are happy with 9/11
they say to me many times
in the interrogation rooms
in the interrogation room in Egypt
in the interrogation room at Guantanamo
we are happy with 9/11
because now we can do anything to you
anything

but I say nothing, nothing
I sign nothing, nothing
because I know nothing
what I know?
nothing
in Egypt or in Guantanamo Bay

and in Guantanamo
they give me a lawyer
a criminal from the military
he won’t tell me his name
he comes to me and says
I’m your lawyer. I’ll be representing you at your trial.

I say what is your name?
he says I cannot tell you.
I say where do you come from?
he says I cannot tell you
I say how do I get in contact with you?
he says you can’t. I’ll come to you

I say no!
I don’t want you
you’re not my lawyer
I will not speak

but they come
and they drag me
they drag me on my back
through gravel
500 metres to the trial
but I will not speak to those judges
those criminals
criminals from the US military
criminals from the navy
criminals from the army
criminals from the marines
but I say nothing, nothing
I have nothing to say
before my God
before Allah
I cannot lie

but I tell you this
I tell you those
criminals from the US military are better
than these criminals here
Alexander Downer and John Howard
they wouldn’t even let me into my trial
to get my passport back
they didn’t even drag me

they wouldn’t let my lawyer into the trial
they wouldn’t even let him see the evidence
against me getting my passport back
I tell you they are more criminal
Mamdouh Habib

and I have had my house broken into
I have been stabbed
my children are abused
and what I do?
what I do to deserve all this?
nothing, nothing
I tell you my house is a toilet
now
a public toilet
they come in
those criminals from ASIO come in
whenever they want to
nothing is taken
but they let me know they have been there
I just leave the door and windows
open
now
why not?
it is a public toilet
I speak to you ASIO people here
In the audience
I tell you this
you are dishonourable people
I accuse you
why are you following me?
breaking in to my house?
why you are not following the criminal
kidnappers and torturers?
the people who pay for the kidnapping the torture?
the people who pay the money for the information?

I am Australian citizen
I have been kidnapped
and tortured
and held illegally for four year
and now
my taxes pay for you to follow me and
break in to my house
and I object
and I accuse you
of being dishonourable people
of being criminals

What happened was this:-

I was travelling in a bus in Pakistan when it was stopped and a couple of Pakistan men with guns jumped on. They grabbed two young men saying, “the Americans are kidnapping tourists, you must come with us it is for your own protection” They kept saying, “Come with us it is for your safety, for your own protection.” This seemed very strange to me and I said, “Who are you? Why are you doing this? What is going on here?” And so they grabbed me as well and said, ‘OK! you can come with us too.’ And that is how it started. And they took me off the bus too and put me in handcuffs at gunpoint and took me away and that is how it started. Australian government knew, US government knew, Egyptian government knew. All criminals, criminals. I am an Australian citizen and I have been kidnapped and tortured and held illegally for four years and the government has my passport and will not give it back and will not tell why and ASIO men come into my house whenever they want and my children are abused and why? What I do?

nothing, nothing
before my God
before Allah
I cannot lie
I cannot sign anything
because I know nothing

continued overleaf...
Mamdouh Habib contd...

And Ruddock say now, ‘I am a person of interest.’ Why I am a person of interest?
And Beazley says, ‘We don’t want to hear from people like this.’
What sort of people am I? I want to ask you all here, now, ‘Tell me, please!
What sort of person am I?’

That is the story of Mambouh Habib and that is what happened to him.

And I, Kathleen Mary Fallon, URGE DISAFFECTION WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

Get ready for:-
No more Freedom of Thought
No more Freedom of Speech
No more Freedom of the Press
No more Freedom to Strike
No more Rule of Law
No more Innocent Until Proven Guilty
No more Habeas Corpus

Get ready for people to disappear
Get ready for Control Orders
Get ready for Sedition Laws
Get ready for Preventive Detention

Get ready for people to disappear

END

Excerpt from ‘The Etcetera Prayer’

from the all-night putt-putt range on the outskirts to the mammas dream instant pavlova drive-in take-away beside the old highway to the iguana reptile park
JUST THREE KILOMETRES DOWN THE ROAD FROM THE TURN-OFF

all dead and dying dreams receive the Light

each family who live their volvos, their saabs, their audis through these deprivations, these sub-urbs, of a sunday arvo and can’t help themselves saying look at the state of the cars, look at the amount of bottles, look at the number of under-nourished and neglected little kiddies who say the homes could be cosy, the gardens could be attractive and productive (they’ve got the same dirt as we have after all) if only someone had the nous, the good sense, the welfare of the children at heart, been brought up better themselves wind down the windows of your air-conditioned, side-impact protection volvos, your every-safety-feature, crumple-zone front and rear optional saabs, your drivers impact safety device audis and receive the pink and golden Light
e etcetera etcetera etcetera

for the tenants in dreary red brick high-rise who illicitly bluetack postcards of europe to the stuccoed lounge room walls and conversely and in the same god-given breath the landlords, the landladies who therefore retain a substantial part of the rental bonds for the spots on the wall, for the stains on the carpet, the dust on the venetians, the filth under the hotplate, the mouse nest at the back of the oven, the syringes, meds and condoms blocking the toilet...
Excerpt from ‘The Etcetera Prayer’ contd...

for the parts, each and everyone, of the south american babies and derelicts

kidnapped and sold for their organs for the salesmen and saleswomen and the
go-betweens and for the recipients of the organ donations for the full bodies or only
the heads being kept cryogenically frozen keep the refrigeration agents active

etcetera etcetera etcetera

and let us now pray lip-service to the unemployed bodgie-jobber the do-gooder
social worker weaving and warping the social fabric of lies to the wet-dreams of
night-soil men to the computer hackers flying down the information superhighways to
the pilgrims in sturdy plimsolls still walking the Commons and the trade routes stout
staff in hand for the boxer in search of his killer instinct for the hubcap thief in search
of his boxfullofsmarts to the sexkittens and fleshpots and their pure self-destruction so clean, so determined their will −
some dark medusalike apparition

let us pray lip-service to all those hellbent on a perfect obliteration a perfect
contrition to all those who totally exclude themselves as if they were infectious
always on the outside looking in let us pray the lord’s prayer when nobody had yet spoken
the golden rule and let us pray an extreme prayer for those who in these latter days have
forgotten as if they never knew the words

let us pray for the self-funded retirees suffering relevance deprivation and echo-
chamber effect confirmation bias, the mumanddad investors with bill-shock in the
grip of tax-bracket creep

etcetera etcetera etcetera

and let us pray for the ramraiders, the homeinvaders for the whitecollarcriminals and
the spreekillers for the spin doctors and the nailsculptors for the corporate-merger-logo-
graphic-redesigners for the televangilists in their megatemples the for all the inspira-
tional speakers and their networkers who fill so many yappyyappy rooms full with that
clapclaphahaha happy feelgood factor

for all those ascending to a prozac heaven and all those crashing from a seratonin sky
let us pray for all the abrasives those who go against the grain cross counter to the
current who have cut themselves on the bias pray for all those lovely skirts that flair
and let us pray also for all those who go with the flow all the go-alongs-to-get-alongs
for those ingesting unknown substance, old ladies who sit perfectly dressed in the arm-
chair in front of their open doors waiting in case a visitor might come calling, watching
for the postie, the neighbour’s wave, the man reading the water or gas metre, for the
feral animal shooter strategizing the serious smarts he needs to kill that smarter-than-
smart big old granddaddy of a granddaddy feral pig, for those displaying weaponised
victimhood, for those who poke their sleeping-dog ex-lovers and watch them go from
dog to wolf, for those who let their ex-lovers lie fallow-floating in their seagrass beds, for
those caught out cheating via pocket-phone mishaps, for the scammer psychics spruiking
their Barnum Statements and Rainbow Ruses,

and let us pray finally and most fervently and ferociously for the unredeemable

when the bells peal at the sacred heart for another dead junkie pray for all those
whose lives are a meditation on the dark hopeless days between the crucifixion and
the resurrection when nobody had yet prayed the lord’s prayer when nobody had yet spoken
the golden rule and let us pray an extreme prayer for those who in these latter days have
forgotten as if they never knew the words

let us pray for the self-funded retirees suffering relevance deprivation and echo-
chamber effect confirmation bias, the mumanddad investors with bill-shock in the
grip of tax-bracket creep

etcetera etcetera etcetera

and let us pray for the ramraiders, the homeinvaders for the whitecollarcriminals and
the spreekillers for the spin doctors and the nailsculptors for the corporate-merger-logo-
graphic-redesigners for the televangilists in their megatemples the for all the inspira-
tional speakers and their networkers who fill so many yappyyappy rooms full with that
clapclaphahaha happy feelgood factor

for all those ascending to a prozac heaven and all those crashing from a seratonin sky
let us pray for all the abrasives those who go against the grain cross counter to the
current who have cut themselves on the bias pray for all those lovely skirts that flair
and let us pray also for all those who go with the flow all the go-alongs-to-get-alongs
for those ingesting unknown substance, old ladies who sit perfectly dressed in the arm-
chair in front of their open doors waiting in case a visitor might come calling, watching
for the postie, the neighbour’s wave, the man reading the water or gas metre, for the
feral animal shooter strategizing the serious smarts he needs to kill that smarter-than-
smart big old granddaddy of a granddaddy feral pig, for those displaying weaponised
victimhood, for those who poke their sleeping-dog ex-lovers and watch them go from
dog to wolf, for those who let their ex-lovers lie fallow-floating in their seagrass beds, for
those caught out cheating via pocket-phone mishaps, for the scammer psychics spruiking
their Barnum Statements and Rainbow Ruses,
TRANSFORMATION SONNET

The smile of a treacherous beauty queen
Clips the wings of twenty-two turtle doves
Returned letter from unrequited love'
Makes her titter, the salacious old queen
A shock to the world, a bad Captain Kirk
Clarity to vagueness future concern
Bovine depression – the milk's on the turn
Sketches, of an empty modern artwork

Strength shows through mercy, vision from the blind
Lethargy dissolves, leaders show courage
Winter to summer darkness becomes bright
Birds in song, a positive state of mind
False prophet banished, all the calves flourish
Jezebel requites, afternoon delight

KENNETH NOLAN

Kenneth Nolan is an award winning playwright and poet from Blanchardstown in Dublin. He is one of the successful playwrights selected for Scripts Playwriting Festival 2019. He is the Founder/Director of 'The Merg Sessions', a popular poetry and prose showcase event. Kenneth's poetry has been shortlisted for the 'Bailieborough Poetry Prize'; he has been shortlisted twice for the 'Jonathan Swift Award'. In 2012 he won first prize for poetry in the 'CDVEC Cultural Awards'. He is a regular contributor of prose to 'Scum Gentry Alternative Arts Magazine'. His work has also featured in: Van Gogh's Ear, Flare, Brilliant Flash Fiction, Headspace, A New Ulster and Creative Talents Unleashed. Currently Kenneth is studying philosophy as a mature student at Maynooth University.
TRANSFORMATION SONNET

KENNETH NOLAN

THIRTEEN

Golden-red leaves covered the street like an autumnal
Welcoming mat. Tom and Ruth trundled through the doors, past
The stone pillars of the court house. The jolt, from the galled
Mob turned the atmosphere sharp-wintery cold. The van
Accelerated through the gate, chased by angry men
And women thrashing wildly at it. Raging faces,
Hitting out with fist, foot, malediction, and any
Available debris. Ruth stood rigid; repulsed at
The sight of a pensioner spitting towards hell, the
Contents of the old woman’s throat, there for all to see

The man being driven away with haste to spend the
Next twenty years of his life in prison is called Dave
He is a sixty year old property consultant,
His friend’s describe him as: “quiet and unassuming”
He was well-liked in his community; unknown to
The law just one year before. Now he was convicted
On seven counts of child molestation. Ruth had known
This despicable degenerate her entire life

When the crowd eventually dispersed, replaced by
Onrushing silence; Ruth lost the feeling in her legs
Tom clasped her arm before she hit the ground, manoeuvring
Her down a side-street and into the first café on
The next unfolding street. ‘Two coffees please’. Tom bought a
Double-chocolate brownie, he urged Ruth to eat it
‘Sugar intake will help replenish your energy’
She refused; too enraged to think, her stomach churning

‘Why were all those idiots chasing and walloping
The prison van. What’s the point? I didn’t recognise one
Single-face, and none of them ever knew my father’
‘It’s just what people do, don’t let it get under your
Skin. Your father got what he deserved, he’s out of our
Lives for good now. We must stay strong for Clara. She has
Been through a terrible ordeal. Far more than any
Thirteen year old child should ever have to deal with. She’s
Going to need her Mum and Dad, now more than ever’
Lessons

Mrs. Gordon was nearly crying and she wasn’t even a catholic. Mam was doing the ironing when the news-flash came on and she burned a big hole in daddy’s blue shirt. And it wasn’t even his work shirt, it was one he wore on Sundays but mam still didn’t notice until there was a bit of smoke and a burny smell and she just went on looking at the television and she didn’t even sit down.

Emergency Ward Ten wasn’t coming on tonight. It wasn’t fair. She was just starting to greet when somebody knocked on the door.

“Get that.”
And mam didn’t even say to stop crying, she just switched off the iron but she still had it in her hand and she kept on standing there, watching the telly.

It was Mrs. Gordon from three up. Mrs. Gordon and mam were sort of friends. Mam said she would be forever grateful until the end of her days for everything that Mrs. Gordon had done for her when the baby died whatever baby that was and Mrs. Gordon said she could never repay mam for getting St. Anthony to find her wages that time she lost her purse when she came into mam roaring and crying and mam said, how much is it and Mrs. Gordon said two pound ten, it’s all we’ve got for the week and mam said, if you promise St. Anthony a half a crown I think you’ll find your purse will turn up. So Mrs. Gordon did and she found her purse and she gave mam the half crown and mam put it in the right box in the chapel because if you don’t pay your debts to St. Anthony he’ll make you lose the thing he found for you. And mam had to do it, not Mrs. Gordon because protestants haven’t got St. Anthony so if they lose their keys, too bad.

So they were sort of friends but sometimes they weren’t. Sometimes Mrs. Gordon didn’t take her turn at washing the close. Mrs. Gordon had two big boys and a wee girl and a wee boy and sometimes the big boys and Mr. Gordon all got a fish supper on their way home from their work and quite often they dropped the newspapers all greasy from the chips right at the bottom of the stairs.

“For me to clean up,”
Then mam would boil up a bucket of hot soapy water and take it out to the close and get down on her knees with the scrubbing brush. And when she was finished she’d slap the floor cloth against the wall as if she’d quite like it to be somebody’s head.

“She’s got enough on her plate keeping them weans out of his road.”

Daddy had went around to the Black Cat café to phone for the polis one night when Mrs. Gordon came to the door with a bruise on her cheek. So mam brought her in and gave her a cup of tea but by the time the polis came Mrs. Gordon had changed her mind and went back up to her place three up.

“What else can she do, in the long run?”

And mam said, right enough. And it was a good while before Mrs. Gordon spoke to mam after that.

Mrs. Gordon said he was the best thing that had happened for the catholics ever.

“It wasn’t only the catholics that voted for him.”

Mrs. Gordon said that was right, he was a man of the people.

“He saved the world. Remember how he made them submarines turn back?”

Mam did. The Russians were coming and all the mams and some of the daddies as well were waiting at the school gates one playtime waiting for the boys and girls to come out so as they could take them home. There was going to be a Third World War. But he made the submarines turn back so there wasn’t.

“Mam?”

“Yes pet.”

“Did they shoot him because he was a catholic?”

Mrs. Gordon laughed. Mam went red.

“Don’t be daft.”

But a lot of things happened to you for being a catholic. You couldn’t go to the wee school on Burghead Road, you had to go to St. Constantine’s miles away through the Elder Park. Some people called you a catty-cat and then you shouted back proddy-dog. When you did that sometimes the big boys chased you. One time she got found out calling Andrew Gordon a proddy-dog when they were playing in the back close. She got into a big row for that.

“He called me a catty-cat first but.”

“Doesn’t matter.”

“He started it.”

“Don’t answer back.”

“He was going to hit me.”

“You’re not to hit people either.”

“If he hits me first but.”

“You’re not getting into fights. It’s common as ditchwater, girls fighting.”

And daddy said you should simply turn the other cheek like gentle Jesus meek and mild. But look at what happened to him.

“And what was that?”

Father De Cecco had a long black coat and he wore thick glasses with black rims. He looked like Fearless Fly. Sometimes at playtime he waited behind the green railings where the chapel was and asked the boys and girls their catechism.
“He got crucified. And scourged. He got a crown of thorns put on his head. All because he turned the other cheek.”

That’s what Mrs. Maguire told them in their First Holy Communion class.

“Isn’t that right?”

“Sort of.”

“So how come I have to turn the other cheek?”

Father De Cecco coughed a bit.

“Do you know your Commandments? Number Five?”

She had to think for a minute.

“Honour thy father and thy mother?”

“Very good.”

Then Father De Cecco dipped into the big pockets in his cassock and dug out a penny carmel and stuck his hand through the green railings and gave it to her.

Mrs. Gordon was sitting down beside mam. They were drinking tea and watching the television.

“Away out and play hen.”

Mam gave Mrs. Gordon a dirty look because it was after half seven and she was hardly ever let out to play at night.

“Put your hat and mittens on,” mam called and she ran out into the close.

It was nice being out at night. It was dark and the street-lamp beside the close made a big pool of light outside the living-room window. If you breathed hard you could make a cloud with your breath. The frost was sparkly on the pavement and the lights from the new Tunnel that went all the way under the Clyde lit up where the wood yard used to be across the road.

There were still a few wee ones sitting on the wall outside the close. Andrew Gordon was there too. Andrew Gordon was a pain in the neck and so was gentle Jesus meek and mild because it was his fault she couldn’t hit Andrew back or even call him a proddy-dog when he pinched her. So she just talked to the wee ones instead.

“Do you want to play a game?”

Nobody said no and they were all sitting in a row so the best thing was to be the teacher. She stood in front of them with one hand stretched out and the other one on her hip.

“Sing this,” she told them.

“I’m a little teapot big and stout.
Here’s my handle.”

She put one hand on her hip to make the handle.

“She put one hand on her hip to make the handle.

“Here’s my spout.”

She stuck the other arm out and pointed her hand at the ground to make the spout. They all sang it. They all knew it, even the arms. She’d learned it on her first day at school so maybe they did as well.

“I bet you don’t know this one”.

She stood up straight and put one hand on her stomach and the other one on her forehead.
“In the name of the father.”
She kept her hand on her stomach and pointed the other one at the middle of her chest.

“And of the sum.”
She put that hand on her left shoulder.

“And of the holy.”
She put the same hand on her right shoulder.

“Goat.”
She joined her two hands together in front of her stomach.

“Amen.”
Then she did it all again. The wee ones said it after her, Andrew as well.

“That’s not bad. Have yous done this before?”
The wee ones shook their heads.

“That’s because yous are still too wee. Yous’ll get it next year in the First Holy Communion class.”

“No they won’t,” Andrew said.

“Everybody gets it.”

“They won’t.”

“Are you playing or what?”
“Aye but…”

“Then stop interrupting. I’m the teacher so you have to do what I tell you. Say and of the holy goat amen.”

“And of the holy goat amen.”

“That’s ok. Now we’ll do the arms.”

They were just starting on the arms when Mr. Gordon, Andrew’s daddy, turned the corner. He had his bunnet on and he was walking slowly and his shoulders were bent. When he passed under the street light at the end of the road the shiny patches on his donkey jacket went all glittery. He lifted his head up and looked at them but he was still a wee way away. Then he came right on up to the close and he just stopped and listened for a minute.

“What’s going on here?”
He had a wee sharp face and he scrunched it up when he was talking.

“Are yous all deaf?”
Nobody said anything.

“I asked you a question.”

He was looking straight at her. He grabbed her arm. She giggled a bit. But it wasn’t because she thought something was funny.

“Nothing Mr. Gordon, I was only teaching the wee ones a song Mr. Gordon.”
Mr. Gordon’s face scrunched up some more. He took hold of her other arm and he shook her a little bit. Nobody had ever hit her or tried to shake her, well maybe Andrew but never a grown-up except for the time daddy went to give her a smack and she skipped out of the way and he missed and hit mam instead and the two of them had a big fight.

“Don’t you ever lay a hand on that child again.”

And dad said sorry, he didn’t know his own strength. So when Mr. Gordon took a hold of her she got a fright. He looked at her for a minute and then he let go of her.

“I’m going to be having a word with your father.”

He made a grab for Andrew and Andrew tried to duck but Mr. Gordon was too quick. Andrew sniggered. But he didn’t look as if he thought something was funny either.

“Get up them stairs.”

When they went away nobody said anything. Some of the wee ones looked like they might be going to greet. Andrew was in trouble with his daddy and now Mr. Gordon wanted to get her into a row for something as well. She was just thinking that it was about time to finish the game when one of the wee ones put her hand up.

“Please miss?”

“Yes chicken.”

“My daddy says there’s a man that got shot on the telly.”

“Yes pet. Emergency Ward Ten’s not on tonight.”

“Please miss, why did the bad man get shot?”

“He wasn’t a bad man pet. He was a catholic.”

“Was it a protestant that shot him, then?”

“Probably.”

Then the wee ones got called in and she waited out there for a little while looking at the sparkly frost on the pavement and the street lamps pooling light and the moon that had come out from behind a cloud and she wondered how she knew, but she did know, that it would be a long time before she’d be let out again to play in the dark.
American Red

For Anne Reilly

They hid dresses and dancing shoes in the byre, slipped out the window to cycle to dances, cheeks rouged with dye rubbed from The Catholic Messenger.
The boy who dated one paid her sister’s way too, but when a local farmer called to the house with his Sunday clothes and face, she hid in the parlour.

Instead, she followed her eldest sister to New York, forsaking nettles, wild strawberries and high nellies for a gloved life of polished mirrors and lacquered nails. Companion to an heiress on Fifth Avenue, she saw to it that drawers were filled with freshly scented linen, stockings and silk slips.

The parlour clock that came with her mother’s dowry kept time in her head. When Babs passed away she came back alone, to buy her own house in the town and fill its drawers with scented linen, stockings, silk slips.

She listened for familiar voices after morning Mass; fewer now, perhaps, than she had imagined.

Her lipstick was an unmistakable American red with a gloss that often matched her nails; cherry, like the glamorous swing coat she wore in the fifties when she stepped out, hatted, heeled and groomed, and all the doormen on Fifth Avenue saluted.

Lorna Shaughnessy

Lorna Shaughnessy was born in Belfast and lives in Co. Galway. She has published three poetry collections, Torching the Brown River, Witness Trees and Anchored (Salmon Poetry), and a chapbook, Song of the Forgotten Shulamite (Lapwing). Her work was selected for the Forward Book of Poetry, 2009. Her poem, ‘The Dual Citizen’ was joint winner of the Poems for Patience Award (UHG/Cúirt) in 2017. Her theatre-piece, The Sacrificial Wind, based on her ‘Aulis Monologues’ (Anchored), was staged in the Cúirt International Literature Festival in 2017 and the Heaney HomePlace in 2018. She was awarded an Artist’s Bursary by the Arts Council of Ireland in 2018. She lectures in Hispanic Studies in NUI Galway, and is also a translator of Spanish and South American Poetry. Her translation of Manuel Rivas’, The Mouth of the Earth (Shearsman Press) was launched in March 2019. Her fourth collection will be published in 2020.
DALLYING
For Kathleen Reilly

Some mornings she could not leave the larks but lingered in the fields after the bell sounded then walked to school past wild hyacinths, cowslips and the neighbour's gate where her sister left a stone to tell her they had gone ahead.

It was only when the high school windows were in sight that a dread of consequence crept into her bones. Having no guile, she owned up right away - she had stayed behind in the meadow to listen to the larks; there was no other way to say it, nothing else to say.

The silence that followed her confession was long, too long for her to read. The teacher removed her glasses, glanced up through a window at the breathing sky as though trying to remember what it was she had left there, then barely audible, said 'Go on now, go and sit down.'
Breast Talk

Strange, how we can speak so easily of breasts.

When he supplanted one of mine
the surgeon’s eyes were gloating satisfaction
at its matching symmetry.

I could only see that baby’s suck,
so slightly left of centre and
a puckered souvenir of what was lost.

So strange it is, how easily we speak of breasts.

Lynda Tavakoli facilitates an adult creative writing class in Lisburn, Northern Ireland. She is the author of two novels (Attachment and Of Broken Things) and a short story collection (Under a Cold White Moon). Her poetry and prose have been broadcast on the BBC and RTE. Literary successes include poetry and short story prizes at Listowel, the Mencap short story competition and the Mail on Sunday novel competition. Lynda’s poems have been published in a variety of publications including Templar Poets’ Skein, Abridged, The Incubator Journal, Panning for Poems, Circle and Square, North West Words, Four X Four, The Honest Ulsterman, A New Ulster, Corncrake magazine and Poethead. She has been selected as The Irish Times Hennessy poet of the month for her poems about dementia, a recurring theme in much of her poetry. Most recently her poems have been translated into Farsi while others have seen publication in Bahrain.
Sandwiched

Between a womb throb and a warming heart, the float of waiting in a milked cocoon

push then towards the amniotic rush of spasmed light

pulling, pulling from the dark inside towards the chilled enigma of this different life.

Inception

Earth’s tautness tinges like an acned curse, the empty stomach of her hunger rumbling on ocean tides, lapping tears on sterile shores.

She mourns her rugose beauty, the contoured history that moulded her filched by the botoxed plumpness of a promised immortality.

For this is the new world, a death-wish world wallowing in the pleasures of its own destruction and flattering itself with the poisons of an acid reflux kiss.

But underneath the surface of her skin and far below that barborygmus core, earth awaits the stirring of a sleeping seed.

For the end finds a beginning in its final breath when all that is left, all that is left, is the vagitus of a waiting world unborn.
IN OMNIA PARATUS

This is how it used to be,
the unknown still a gift,
its treasures taste-touched
upon our waiting tongues.
The sky was then
a spill of cerulean blue
and the promise of us
ignited me like a spark.

Odd for me to think of it
with everything that's
happened in between.
How life can shrug its
shoulders at the past
knowing that what matters now
is how you'd always jump for me
and me for you.

DENOUEMENT

Here is the scent of roses
on a White House lawn,
where summer sunshine
smiles upon the good
and on the bad
and on the dark souls
of the unseeing, where
truth becomes subterfuge,
spreading onto unsuspecting
streets in black or white
with nothing in between.
Here is truth renouncing itself,
to finish where it started
among the dead heads
of the roses' fading scent
upon a White House lawn.

© Lynda Tavakoli
SLEEP OF THE OLD SHE-WOLF

Throughout her work Marion has tried to challenge the politics of representation through a poetics of resistance – in poetry (third body Whitmore Press 2018; Fragments from a paper witch Salt 2008, a finalist in the 2010 Adelaide Festival Literature Awards: Innovation), novels (the most recent of five being konkretion UWAP 2013), playscripts, and memoir (The Man on the Mantelpiece UWAP 2018). Her novels have been shortlisted for major Australian awards and twice for the Canada-Australian Prize, with Not Being Miriam winning the WA Week Prize for fiction back in 1988. Her critical monograph Poetic revolutionaries (Rodopi 2014) explored intertextuality and subversion. She supervises graduate writing projects at Deakin University.

SLEEP OF THE OLD SHE-WOLF

sky’s turned to dirty ice
– she’s still out on the plank
where I drove her in the dream
of the pirate knives

the headless body I dragged
from the waves
is my own

(pall bearer / caul bearer

this need to cast off
affliction to denude
& redraft but there

is no blank sheet

(don’t mention the mustard
the anecdote so trivial
that started it all

I hear her pleas her promises now
the clothesline where it flutters –
the threadbare damask tablecloth
I rolled as ersatz pillow those nights
we’d bought wine & spent our fury
& I slept out on the camper’s mat
under the sheepskin coat from Nellie
the Pied Noir who at seventy
still mourned the loss
of l’Algérie française

continued overleaf...
SLEEP OF THE OLD SHE-WOLF  
contd...

Nellie’s Siamese cat rarely left her invalided lap their four eyes hives of life Nellie’s amber Jeannot’s blue but there were topics I knew I must not broach beyond her boast – Algeria didn’t exist before we went in there & when I contemplate the dereliction – I mouthed of course not – we know that borders are a fiction yet under Nellie’s sheepskin I still lie grey she-wolf & getting orn as they say the damask on the line is the shredded remainder of my grandma’s aspiration – a little finesse she was widow of the eleventh son of David Gordon who did time for larceny & fraud & especially for abandon of wife & kids for drunkenness the one crime Grandma avowed since that showed taste was stealing the design of a Cobb & Co coach & selling it off as his own to some dignitary in Geraldton I draw my criminal descent as leaf by leaf the Fuji apple tree sheds for winter’s slow crawl & rain tinkers the roof metal through Joni Mitchell’s far-spaced guitar notes her hopeful gestures planting eggplant planting zucchini the curved gravel paths she bordered with bentwood reproach me for this helpless determination to leave at the tram stop I see myself in the woman with tan hatchet profile the bleached hair & galactically white hose her eyes rivets against the cold under the shelter’s inverted L-glass or else I become the old guy baring his false enamels (the returns to tenderness she reproaches me with as if the current cold war rendered all kindness in rearview a lie

continued overleaf...

© Marion May Campbell

SLEEP OF THE OLD SHE-WOLF  MARION MAY CAMPBELL

I draw my criminal descent as leaf by leaf the Fuji apple tree sheds for winter’s slow crawl & rain tinkers the roof metal through Joni Mitchell’s far-spaced guitar notes

(Amelia she mourns it was just a false alarm

her hopeful gestures planting eggplant planting zucchini the curved gravel paths she bordered with bentwood reproach me for this helpless determination to leave

at the tram stop I see myself in the woman with tan hatchet profile the bleached hair & galactically white hose her eyes rivets against the cold under the shelter’s inverted L-glass or else I become the old guy baring his false enamels (the returns to tenderness she reproaches me with as if the current cold war rendered all kindness in rearview a lie

continued overleaf...
but perhaps I’d rather be this one with horizontally fanned orange frizz topped by the startling optimism of red bow & all of us tapping sticks or leaning to future frames on the chewing gum-spotted pavement

the tram has come

other riders hijack this heart as the tram brakes squeal & the driver nods as one after the other mounts the step – didn’t reckernise me did ya – lost ten kilos! – like me new tatt love? – you know that Malaysian man who served in the Portuguese restaurant on Johnson St? he bought new knickers, socks & shirt each day because – you know – cheaper than the laundry

he slept in the pantry but every few days he’d drive back to the second wife’s flat – his first marriage was to the Welsh cellist – she swung a golf club at him – that’s why I have a scar here he’d say

(is it forever the same wound intensified as Dylan Thomas wrote after the first death there is no other?)

I remember the quicksilver exclamationary being loved as a child & betrayed in a book – to have genius is to be marked by enthusiasm to be en-enthoused to have some sort of god in you or the principle of thou as beloved

(to go or to stay can an old woman

(or might I sing like Nina Simone will I find my love today)

(to have breath as Luce irigaray says to be full of vowels & liquid light the name of love irrigates is full of vowels u-i-i-a-i is the wound perhaps an aperture to host the thou & now the cry the chained animal howl all through the night suburb over the improbable emerald lawns – answering sheep or she-wolf both

continued overleaf...
SLEEP OF THE OLD SHE-WOLF

on the tram he says she's used
dumbness as subterfuge
the best disguise
for the canny witness she is
she's as dumb as walls
– I'd say she's co-dependent as
she leave him? you've got to be
joking!

SLEEP OF THE OLD SHE-WOLF contd...

as if this long she-wolf’s rumination
under sheepskin had cloaked me
somehow with abundance

beyond all borders – as if everything
were to dance wide
as the night revolving
with all those fast retreating suns
red-eyed at my back

& I taste again the mustard that
coated our tongues
split the table
blew off the roof
brought down the walls
& lets us travel
out

END
Mary Melvin Geoghegan has five collections of poetry published. Her most recent *When Moon and Mother Collide* (2018) Salmon Poetry. Her work has been published widely including Poetry Ireland Review, Hodges Figgis 250th Anthology, Poem on the DART 2018, The Sunday Times, Crannog, Skylight 47, THE SHOp, Cyphers, The Moth, The Stinging Fly, The Stony Thursday Book amongst others. In 2013 she won the Longford Festival Award, and shortlisted in 2015 for the Cuirt New Writing Award, in 2017 for the Fish Poetry Award, the Rush Poetry Award and the Padraic Colum Gathering 2018 Poetry Competition. She’s a member of the Writers’ in Schools Scheme with Poetry Ireland and has edited several anthologies of children’s poetry including the Eurochild anthology of children’s poetry and artwork. Her forthcoming collection *There Are Only a Few Things* will be published by Salmon Poetry in 2022.

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**CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION**

for Waad al-Kateab

Her daughter Sama (Arabic for sky) was born in Aleppo, in a hospital founded by her father - The paediatrician who delivered her was killed four months after the birth. Her father Hamza in just twenty days carried out 890 operations and cared for over 6,000 wounded people.

In a close-up, lingering intimacy the sadness of hospital staff barely aware of the camera rolling.
Before We Left for the Holiday

Everyone said Marseille was dangerous
but, apart from the graffiti everywhere
there was no hint.
On the train to Aix en Provence
there was a feeling before the diversion.
In the town underwhelmed
and suddenly there's a stampede
with the Gilet Jaune pouring in
and the veneer is shattered.

Away from the heat in the Musee Granet
we shelter under Cezanne's Sainte-Victore (1890).
And round the corner a tiny painting
by Fabienne Verdier genuflects to an earlier
Simon Marion’s Petit Sang du Christ (1490).

In a tomato red splash of blood
against a living background.

And Still that Life is There in Me

close to the Roscommon border.
There’s always a pull -
crossing over into the return
where four generations
have lived and are buried.
And still that life is there in me
as the kitten my grandmother gave
leaps from the page, stroking a longing
in a gentle purr -
the anticipation of recognition.
He's Upstairs Writing a Book

for Peter

with the sun blazing in
rocking on a chair
at the same desk
he studied for the leaving Cert.

Though, this time -
the subject is democracy
there's a feeling he'd rather
be wrestling with anything else.

I've slipped back into old ways
searching the freezer for dinner
banana bread in the oven
and gathering up wet towels.

The book will be published next year
he keeps thanking me
but, I've already had a reward
in his keeping the head down.

Ordinance (2018)

by Damien Hirst

Perhaps, in a manic impulse -
the artist caught the butterfly wings
with colours never mixed on a palate.
He assembled those hypnotic rings.

Iridescent, at the centre of each orbit
all the intricacies of the universe
concentrated in a solitary yellow butterfly.
Almost, as a cosmic mandala
in a staggering expression of light.

Fresh from the atlas of waiting to be celebrated
beyond all prejudice
just awe -
The ‘Cloth of Silver’ Fragment

A faded piece of fabric
was found hanging on a wall
in the tiny rural parish church
of St. Faith, Bradon, England.
Made from the finest chamblet silk
woven with strips of beaten silver
with exquisitely embroidered plants,
flowers, stags, dogs and butterflies.
Hinted at the only possible owner - Elizabeth I
who on feeling threatened
by younger women at Court ordered
the ‘cloth of silver’ - the gown
costing more than a Tudor mansion
for an aging monarch to carry
round.
NO WAY TO SAY GOODBYE

(i.m. Catherine Bailey-Holland)

It seems so long ago:
our coterie of twenty-something singles,
1973, chalk-and-blackboard novices
in a Christian Brothers school -
Marie and Donal, Mary and Sean,
Jimmy, Catherine, Danny and I.

You lived above a butcher’s shop on Market Cross,
your hi-fi spinning the ‘seventies bedsit staple
of Tea for the Tillerman and Songs From A Room.
I took down the words of Nancy from your speakers
in that flat where a careless housemate sparked a blaze
and left a trail of smouldering underwear.
When you mimicked the Kerry tones of Lyreacrumpane
the staff room lit up; you radiated joy. It seems so long ago.

So when I heard the news that brooked no hope,
of life-support no longer bolstering life,
I thought about Cat Stevens’s Wild World -
hard to get by just upon a smile - and Leonard Cohen
reminding us that that’s no way to say goodbye.
LEAVING ASIDE

For children of The Cold War the world
was black-and-white, or white-and-red.
We loved America, its White House gleaming;
Red Square all grim walls and military hardware
(leaving aside those astonishing onion domes.)
The West was won by cowboys in white hats
(leaving aside the many trails of tears);
Siberia was gulags and frozen tundra.

America stood for peace and democracy
(leaving aside Hiroshima, Bay of Pigs),
and the new Camelot (leaving aside the infidelities)
had an Irish-Catholic king and a chic queen.
Khrushchev was short and bald and lacking manners
(remember that shoe-banging at the UN?)
and had he been picked off from a grassy knoll
in Baku Onassis would not have courted Nina K.

We feared Soviet spies but approved of US surveillance.
Gary Powers had such a handsome face,
and the U2 (leaving aside Bono, The Edge & Co)
was cool, CIA (soft vowels) good, KGB bad.

Elvis and Nashville, Connie Francis and Pat Boone,
What could the USSR offer us (leaving aside
Stravinsky, Shostakovich, The Bolshoi)?
Yes, Sputnik rocked, Laika was a pretty dog
and Gagarin had charisma, but when push came to shove,
the US won the Moon race pulling up.

At The Olympic Games the USA kicked Russian ass
(if you leave aside the wrestling, weightlifting and gymnastics.)
Where was the Red Arnold Palmer, Cassius Clay
(leaving aside Brumel and Yashin)? Lev Yashin!
Even in the black-and-white, or white-and-red
world of The Cold War we envied them their Black Spider,
the goalkeeper who in Yevtushenko’s poem
comes rushing off his line, his Ballon d’Or.
ROMEO AND JULIET
AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL

Plucked from a National Guitar, the poignant opening strains of Dire Straits’ Romeo and Juliet heard for the very first time in a lime-green Datsun Cherry, traffic lights on red at the AIB, late for work but determined to hear the song through.

Half a lifetime later, in the West Choir of The Royal Albert Hall, keyboards laying down the sombre mood, the spotlights trained on a saxophonist blowing grief notes towards the dome, and hushed listeners in stall and circle, loggia, gallery, waiting for Mark Knopfler’s plaintive arpeggio to summon a lovestruck Romeo and his startled Juliet from Verona via Manhattan’s Upper West Side to Kensington Gore.

No work any more, all the time in the world to catch the story, that begins with a saucy Romeo finding a convenient street light, stepping out of the shade and saying something like: You and me, babe, how about it?
They might have thought it safe,
this final resting place
of vaults and white angels.
The padlocks were strong,
no thought of axe, of picks
or jemmys that could force
attentions upon them.

She couldn’t know the reward
for all that waiting
would be a broken latch,
a bramble scratch, a road
built to bring daytrippers
cutting the tomb off
from their castellated home.

A glimpse through the grill
shows coffins like sardine cans,
lead lids rolled back
by fortune-seekers.
Only the voyeurs look for bone.

Still, you can read the stone
the angel stands upon,
recoup all that lost love,
the faith in eternity
should you take the trouble
to climb the slope,
let nettles do their worst.
A True Departure

I followed you, beyond the days last breath
And sat in silent silhouette
You fell deep in restful mime
And as you slept, my mind grew calm
No patience required
For I would wait Silurian time
This, I find easy
As my pulse slows to yours
And when you awake, and are ready
Tomorrow, together
We will travel on
And make easy on one another
All the days, long

Niall Cahir

Niall Cahir is a photographer, artist and writer. Based in Birr Co Offaly, born in Cork in 1966. His work is honest, deep and meaningful. Snap-shots of everyday life, thought provoking, with spiritual imagery, strong yet delicate in texture, just like life itself can be.
A TRUE DEPARTURE

OXMANTOWN MALL

This morn I trail through foggy drapes
Where amber steals the stars
Highlighting dates on pressed reg plates
Of brand new shiny cars

Despite her mix of modern fix
She just can’t shake the past
Her Georgian rhyme, her silent mime
Her structures built to last

I stand alone, by hand-laid stone
Walls built, by skilled trades-man
And count the trees, ten thousand leaves
Where horse-drawn, carriage ran

John Johnson’s vaulted ceilings
Gives way to morning breeze
As though to brail-read scriptures
Inscribed on cornice frieze

And silenced teams still build his dreams
Where muted stones stand still
Bound handed beams, by plastered seams
Bore holes by hand-turned drill

A space where time is bowed to
By beveled natural slate
Where gothic relic rapture
Parades toward castle gate

Her Georgian lines, of finer times
Portrayed on trodden board
Fanned furnished panes, of coloured stains
Cast steely crimson sword

And all I need to feed my greed
To stem my hungry sense
Is plain old lines, of finer times
Stands wearing weather hence

A cat decides to walk my pace
Distance being safer choice
With fleeting glance she reads my face
And shares her silent noise

Pillared porch and fanlight
Panelled fluted void
Where Greece and Rome are well at home
Their classic styles employed

Leather square lashed with horses hair
Make soft the cold hard ground
Protect and ease the welted knees
Where bare-hand workers pound

Can’t help but feel, these ghosts still kneel
On sand-bed gritted way
And lay hand-honed, black cobbled stone
Boiled bitumen sealing clay

A pinch of craft well practiced
One ounce of learned skill
Like Master teaches Trappist
So too the Craftsman will

Compare all this to vapoured piss
Black refuse trapped in rail
Dumped by mindless merchant
Content in ignorant fail

© Niall Cahir
See how they watch you:
a neighbors’ dog
lying supine at your feet,
cats in every alley
with a hungry look,
a young woman on the ground,
with a baby in her arms,
they all watch you,
and you think you know very well what it is,
yet when you succumb,
because something in you doesn’t let you walk past them,
they ignore your giving hand,
as though to teach you a lesson:
We don’t need your paltry offerings, M’am,
because, you see, even beggars have their pride here:
this is the land of the truly free, Sister,
who value something other
than what you can give them.

Moscow born, Nina Kossman is a painter, sculptor, bilingual writer, poet, translator of Russian poetry, and playwright. She is the author of two books of poems in Russian and English as well as the translator of two volumes of Marina Tsvetaeva’s poems. Her other books include Behind the Border (a collection of stories about her Moscow childhood), Gods and Mortals: Modern Poems on Classical Myths (Oxford University Press, 2001), and a novel. She lives in New York. Her website is www.ninakossman.com.
AGAMEMNON’S SHADOW SPEAKS

Too many thoughts
mind too small
crowded there
inside
he said

Give me more brain
make me a genius
or else

I’ll steal your cow
I’ll make a war
I’ll kill your men
you kill mine

said Agamemnon
or one of the other pot-bellied kings

too many men
too little bread
what to do
let’s make war

said he of the big belly
and of the big mustache
chief of the walled city

Mycenae

maybe no worse than Troy

our women you know
they don’t run around
from city to city
like what’s her name
because of whom this war

they stay put
inside the walled city
they don’t betray you with a stranger
better with the next of kin

when they kill you
it’s straightforward
in a bathtub
with a fishnet
you come home from work--and bam!
no time to regret

no big war
no Troy
no army

it’s between you and your spouse
and maybe your concubine
Cassandra
why was she underfoot
she with her prophecies
so she goes too

not too much blood
very orderly

then your spouse rules
with her new spouse
my next of kin
we’re all blood relatives here

call my slaves
wash off my blood
until my bathtub is sparkling clean

I told this story too many times
feeling tired now

said Agamemnon’s shadow
FAUX TRANSLATION FROM THE AKKADIAN

White upon black,
black upon brown,
blood upon white,
blood upon black,
red upon brown,
red upon black.
All blood is red;
only red.

God's color is unknown
when God is the unknown.

When gods become disposable,
their color becomes known.

When gods are irrelevant,
their skin color becomes relevant.

When white god is bleeding,
the color of his blood is red;
when brown god is bleeding,
the color of his blood is red.
Only a bleeding god knows
his worth in the minds of men.

UNTITLED -1

Wait
till I mold you from clay,
(not you, of course -
only your likeness)
and transplant your soul
into this clay face.
It was your soul
that made you what you were,
not your nose,
your chin,
your cheeks,
your forehead,
but I will mold them anyway,
so your soul feels more familiar
in this unfamiliar place,
since it needs to settle somewhere
after your passing,
and what better place for it
than this clay mold,
although nothing
nothing at all,
you know,
can be as perfect for it
as your own body,
but now that you are dead
and your body is ashes,
this mold is the only home
for your homeless soul.
You know this.
UNTITLED - 2

You are a force
deep inside me
that doesn’t know my name.

(See me throw it into the fire.)

That, deaf to my entreaties,
wouldn’t rescue me
from a burning house.

(See me throw it into the sea.)

That wouldn’t save me
if I were drowning.
And if I drowned, it would drown too.

(See me throw it into a forest.)

That wouldn’t look for me
if I were lost in a forest.
(If I were lost, it would be lost with me.)

See me throw it back into me:

How you dissolve, how you melt away,
no longer a force,
just a dead man’s soul.

UNTITLED - 3

You, who are lost,
who were you then,
when time stood still
like a hollow rock,
where can you find it,
in what far-flung night?
You said it was yours,
time was your god, you said,
or did you want to say
that you were its servant?
But now it abandoned you -
you are a withered king
on a solitary throne
“She is my love, my bride, my very own...”
Ah, but where is she now,
your queen, your soul?
In the ground she lies,
in a wooden coffin,
under a heavy stone.
UNTITLED - 4

your thoughts flew like butterflies
over imagined gardens
your thoughts swayed like sunflowers
in rhythm with the wind

your thoughts shone eyes like suns
caught in unpolished copper
caught in the nets of the evening
open-mouthed like fish

your thoughts in their speechless balance
were neither life's songs nor vowels
they burned their hieroglyphic ambers
as clear as unborn suns
Wild Cherries

In Memory of Denis O’Brien

i. Prelude

You were a man I never knew
and never will – one whose life
mine depends upon, yet you are ghost
to me, grandfather, dying far away
across the sea before I was born,
fading like all others to an imagined past
that I will never understand or fully grasp.

ii. Kilsallaghan

O’Brien’s Bridge and the stony fields,
the lands your father and his brothers ploughed,
their lasting mark upon the landscape
of their birth, until the Land Commission
tempted them to leave their old life behind
with the promise of a better future
in this newly-minted Nation: a good holding
far from the wild Atlantic shore
and the winding roads of County Clare,
and a farm now in north county Dublin,
Kilsallaghan as much country back then
as the lands your father had come from, its soil
dark and rich and good, but too little of it,
in the end, for all his sons to prosper by it.

Young you left and went to the city.
Wild Cherries

iii. Uniform

My mam said you looked as smart
as a policeman in your dark navy uniform,
the JJ&S insignia on your cap marking you
employee of John Jameson & Sons,
Whiskey Makers since 1781, a good job
by any measure as you led your dray horses
down along the banks of the Liffey and on
to the docklands where the barges waited
with their cargo of amber, ready to move
this seemingly inexhaustible bounty
to the four corners of town and country.

iv. Music

I will never know your gait or manner
or how you held yourself as you walked
into a room or pub, though I heard once
that you could set the place alight with talk
or your playing on the fiddle, a Woodbine
browning your fingers at the tips as it burnt
down to a butt, a pint of Guinness and a Jemmie
on the table before you as you played reels
and jigs at the barroom or kitchen session,
these places where happiness found you, music
your one true gift to those you tried to love
though sometimes failed, you sliding then into the well
of drink and the sinking regret that fell over you,
stumbling home late below the Harvest Moon
rising above the rooftops of these regimented streets,
no crops to be gathered in this over-filled place,
just to walk and walk and never reach home,
the darkness and the dark thoughts descending again
as if the very stars had died and dimmed to silence.
Wild Cherries

v. Wild Cherries

So, I give you this memory now as passed to me by my mother: how on the first Sunday of summer months you were given the task to take the dray horses out to Kilsallaghan for pasture, a place you came now to only half-think your own, better here though than in the maze of streets of Cabra, chatting instead to farmers in hedge-lined fields discussing the high price of barley and wheat and the burden of Independence on the farming life – though at least the British had started to trade in our beef again, the war forcing them to depend on us; and all the while the farmers’ wives fussing in kitchens, giving you punnets of wild cherries and apples to take home with you as a treat for the children, so many the family could feast on for a month, grandmother making jams, sweet tarts and cakes. A time when happiness reigned in the house.

vi. Memory

I try to fill the gap with fragments, anecdotes and clues, though no concluding image comes to mind to complete my rag-tag picture of you. How we each pass with our dying breath into the foreverness of forgetfulness – like the land you once walked with your brothers so many years before, the hope you felt out there in the wide-open fields fading now to a black and white photograph of another time, a different place; and the stories that may yet still await to add again your human face to those gathered around the family fireplace: this partial and imagined portrait I try make for you – grandfather I never knew.

END
BALLYBA

“Trahissons, trahissons, la traiîre pensée.”

Beckett

...and Molloy stood there in the field looking at the shepherd with his flock, like some old bollocks. And as he did, images of transhumance flooded his mind. Sweet and gentle tales of Cain & Abel and Co. brought about a Beethovenian calm, before the storm. That is of course, before the fixed con

Moran appeared with his pitiful offspring. The pair a travesty on a bicycle, lost in a wood una selva oscura. camped innocently enough there without an apparent beast in sight, but for the sheep grazing like lambs, before the slaughter.

Peter O’Neill is the author of More Micks than Dicks, a hybrid Beckettian novella in 3 genres ( Famous Seamus, 2017), The Enemy, Transversions from Charles Baudelaire (Lapwing, 2015) and Dublin Gothic (Kilmog Press, 2015), among other works. He is currently working on a novel, a sort of homage to Raymond Chandler, while researching Comment C’est/How It Is by Samuel Beckett. His academic background is in philosophy and comparative literature. He maintains a blog which he updates fairly regularly.
As the Crow Flies

The castle and its surrounding estate
Appear below like the microcosm
Of a cell taken from a biopsy
From some human brain tissue.

In the foreground, the symmetrically
Aligned show gardens with their trimmed
Maze of hedges, a sign denoting
Chomsky’s notions of innate grammar.

All heralding the enlightenment,
With its fixations for rational inquiry,
The Cartesian body, all head and so-called mind.

While around this genteel mass, abundant
Woods also grow, deeply cavernous,
Signalling Lacan’s laughing subconscious.

Mists and Rains

_Transversion from Baudelaire_

0 end of autumns, winters, springs drenched in mists,
The seasons of hibernation which I love and inhabit
Envelope also my brain and my heart
In a vapourish shroud and a vague tomb.

In the great plains where the southerly winds play,
Or during the long nights when the weather vane grows hoarse,
My soul better than in warm times renews itself
Stretching out its crow-like wings.

Nothing is as gentle to the heart full of funerary things,
Through which for a long time descend through the wintry times,
The sickly seasons, Queens of our climates,

As the permanent aspect of your pale darkness,
If it is not, by a moonless night, two by two,
Sleeping away the pains on a hazardous bed.
Lucretius

Your silence envelopes me like a sea,
Particularly when I sit at the kitchen table.
It rushes up against me in currents,
Holding me fast to the leather chair.

Hands bound, arms tied, with duct tape on
My mouth, I try to cry out but all I can
Manage to hear is the thin sound of graphite,
Scripting its way across the sheets.

How long can I thread water like this?
I have no idea. Like stone I endure,
Weathering the oncoming waves. Erode.

Our death will be piecemeal. The slow
Almost imperceptible annihilation of memory,
Like water dripping, down through millennia, upon stone.

Sansperata

After Sciola

Rimbaud called for the systematic
Dérèglement de tous les sens – colouring
The vowels, which you read and later heard,
Echoing through the stones of the nuragi.

The sonority of granite whispers
To you with all of the tenderness
And softness of the flesh of the peaches
Of Sansperata, where I wish to hear again

The stony lament in the basalt of the pips
Embedded in the hill of stone structures
Echoing above the silence about your lips.

This rock retains walls of sound, its spectre,
Just as your hands press inwardly upon
The untraceable braille of love.
LYSSISTRATA

Power is fluid, such is Foucault.
The body being politicised;
The zones of contention are highly
Eroticised: the anus, phallus...

And the clitoris, and breasts.
Such are the hotspots, the fleshy fields
Of Armageddon. We stand together
At the frontier, guns in hand.

The tension is fraught with possibility.
Submission and domination,
Who gets to rule and in turn be ruled?

Hence our obsession with role play.
Power is fluid, the body being politicised.
Your clitoris and breasts, the keys to my deliverance.
GORSE

He plucked them. Carful lip curve around yellow head,
teeth displayed barely years - full clasp in- between nips.
This giant, delicate touch to ingest despite thorning tongue,
muzzle-pout part, curling upper lip to intoxicate senses,
revealing unblemished inner pinkness, untouched, as new-born,
    I injest.
They twitch. Creasing mouth corners like crescent moon. A smile penetrates light even into the darkest of crevices,
    that drool pools soaking chin - grove wobble.
Almost clownish.
Almost childish.
Each damp whisker; receptor, whiter than snow sense euphoria, matches

Polly Richardson (Munnelly) is a Dublin born poet who lives and writes in Meath Ireland with her children and lots of four-legged family members. She is a member of Navan writers group The Bulls Arse, co Meath Ireland. She has been published both nationally and internationally in many anthologies and e-zine under the surname of Munnelly and more recently Richardson. A contributing poet to US based poetry forum Mad Swirl. She is currently working on her first collection of poems.

continued overleaf...
that eye rarer than *painite gem fused with *taaefite catch reflections of summer, blink to flutter-flick forward mane over *forelock out of sight, yet, that sigh inhales July’s nectar. Silking nostrils, snorts out complete content, as ear rotations pause turn, tune to hums of nature’s hymn.

That hind leg shifts a rest from right to left. Feathers dance in still air; frame balancing hoof, toe tip brush- kiss to earth, dust swirls dance to swarm the dung flies.

That rump whiting, pinked under hair, glisten. Fuse. Flecking black patches as if perfect jigsaw pieces placed precisely, roasted greenish from baking grass roll despite swishing tail- swats to nagging gnats, sleep.

That neck muscle toned. Sturdy. Purer than virgins basking, holds his head precisely poised at gorse blooming.

White star on ebony forehead runs cosmic nova flare to his own signature and stance, this Apollo. Mine.

I ingested, drank him in for this consumption. Painted each hooving prance pirouette on inner canvas to still itself, not quiet masterpiece, yet for this consumption, Gorse.

I part lip to pluck. Carful curl around yellow head, sweetness bites, prefect calm whispering these whinnies to wind song - carry’s of you, this ear turns to tune, your calls, Apollo,

I lay a lean. This listening shoulder - my eyes trace, follow in shift hind to hind, hoof rests my weighted weightless far removed from fearing fear, those beatings till bursting red rivers soaked my skeleton, dragging scalded skin.

This trust eventually - my head, these ears, your lap, years and gorse.

I sit with river. Hear those distant ghosting echoes, that gallop now with wind, That consumption - his head, my lap each time gorse blooms.

I ingested, painted him on inner canvas. Almost.


*Forelock – fringe like, part of mane that grows down over horses’ forehead, in between ears.

*Feathers – thick horse hair that grows out from and down on back of horses lower legs or all over same area semi- covering hooves depending on breed.
FOR THE LOVE OF SATURDAY SOCKS
AND PONDER

To butter toast is an art form,
the enchantress luring, purrs
as it spreads it’s self,

never quiet reaches corners.
never quiet done.
Solidified solidarity lump till toast touches

or touches toast and bagel let’s not go there.
Sit in corners of sun slowly leathering
it’s weekending.

Does it wait to Mumba marmalade, quiver
at the sight of marmite moulding it’s self fuzzy?
while BS2s bang out Love shack come

Saturday’s throw back and
knife suddenly microphone - this is it - your moment.
You, sock, strut gangster style, splatter buttery

scoop matrix like, it flys, evolution!
Or does it scream excited glees when sausage
rolls in breaded blanket as much as belly dances

knowing what’s coming?
Give a slight squeal before
head-banged upside down into yellow?

as egg-yolk drips sunrises and fingers sigh glistening
it’s residue from the morning mosh.
Does it silent protest if just Blueberries preferred, consumed?

as it calls karma on Monday morning madness
testing your mindfulness,
as it refuses to budge next time you think toast?
Borrows a hole to match moon, ripping precious

as it yogas itself into swirl -clamp - holds pose
taking each baked crevice with it
while 4 non blondes belt out What’s going on

synchronizing your own mouth blasts

The art form. Buttering.
Pleading spread,
best left severed on Sunday
warming Monday’s melt
and matching socks.
BIRTH

Delicate web hang from laborious night,
catch dew-glistens,
as if that first hand-curl-grip
around index finger caress.
Birth!'s dreams burst vigorously
as primal pant produce uniquely silk.

As if knowing his
newfangled strength survived
that last dewy push,
when you arrived,
becoming something
only mothers know
Birthing your self.

For every, for each ripping
Contraction force-gripping, taunt pushes beyond
frequency's of pain no thresholds hold, surging
urge beyond, beyond this body's knowing or control
tearing to depths no man dare go for fear death.

You're split.
Woman, mother,
somebody's child still,
stitching bewildered wonder,

skin flaps sag, ribboned rugged,
as if web swatted by novel frumpy fingers
flays in wind.

Yet only
waves- warmth of suckle
eyes to eyes felt,
bursting breast dams call.
Each nipple drenches sustenance,
as that silken thread woven weaves its way
comforting infinity.

I leave sapling self amongst the fluid-soaked linen.
Lioness now, ready to defend till end of ends
as fierce to savagery.

Even when he's
swaddled or
forever sleeping,
still I clasp hand
in hand, in each breath birthed.
As if delicate web hanging
to catch dew-glistens.
As if she's chasing shadows
as if birthed.
Saoirse

Roisín Browne lives in Rush, Co Dublin and has been published in several publications including A New Ulster, The Galway Review, Flare, Mgversion2, The Stony Thursday Book, The Crossways Literary Magazine and Echoes from the Castle Anthology. She was shortlisted for her poetry in the Over the Edge New Irish Writer of the Year in 2017 and was awarded third prize in the Jonathan Swift Awards in the same year. She was commended in the Gregory O’Donoghue Awards in 2018 and shortlisted in The Seventh Annual Bangor Poetry Competition in 2019.

Saoirse*

They’re running up Suffolk Street in twos and threes
fox furs and minks draped around their necks
full feathered hats held down by blistered hands
red hot from scrubbing clothes and smashing windows,
grabbing goods long beyond their reach,
someone hits piano keys in Switzer’s window
clanging notes in mayhem

Short-trousered boys and rag dressed girls
stick their hands in glass jarred humbugs
while eyeing up the apple drops
ogling the gobstoppers,
their eyes larger than the yellow bon bons
skating across the chequered floor
determined munching of macaroons
blood red jellies smeared across chapped lips
liquorice rounds clenched in sticky hands,
the softness of pink marshmallows on tongues,
makes them stop and sigh
in the sweet carnage

In the Shelbourne they sip their tea in Gladstone china cups
silver spoons recline on floral saucers
shapely fingers poised in April Violet air
and outside,
the snipers splice the skies
and patchwork dogs dash with mottled packs
wild at the frenzy of it all.

*Irish for freedom

Roisín Browne
BEYOND MACHINES

clenched fists round over each other
taut hands never hitting hands
rise and fall of sinewed forearms
compact circles, in, out, in, out
oars kissing ocean
propelling forward
pots panning
nets filling
as you
waltz
in
water.

Orchestra

*After Michael Longley*

On this day
all the colours
will leave their brittle cages,
fly up and out
left and right
all shades, all tones, all notes
all dark will meld to sky dust,
cup eternal stars,
burn to become one
like starling murmations that soar,
shaping rainbow seas
in unfettered praise
YOU AND THE BRITBABES: 1997

The final straw comes when the dole has insisted you get reskilled and has drafted you onto an office training course, otherwise known as 'Monkeys can type too'! It is your first morning there and the woman who runs it is conducting a simulated business exercise called 'how to answer the telephone'. When it comes to your turn, you find it very disconcerting that you are sitting five metres away from her and you can see and hear her perfectly without use of the telecommunication medium. You think it's amusing to make up a company called The Girl-U-Like escort agency; she does not. A violently bitter argument ensues between you about the grammatical merits of 'may I help you' as opposed to 'can'.

You decide then and there you are not going back.

That night in your flat you formulate your new career move. You think of some of the most important women in the British economy. You look at yourself in the mirror. Fortunately it is only a small hand mirror and you are spared the full effect of your self. But you do think you have some potential.

You have been reading in recent weeks about the reported rift in the Spice Girls' ranks and you are ready to exploit it.

Now you know what you must do. The next day, you track down Posh Spice’s ex-boyfriend to a small flat in Sheffield which he shares with two shaggy, indeterminate dogs. At first he doesn’t seem interested because he is engrossed in watching the Teletubbies, but you impress on him the fact that Posh Spice, or Victoria, is desperately unhappy with her life. Her footballer hasn’t turned out the perfect match for her. You tell him you know that deep inside she wants him back because he was the only one who truly loved her for what she once was.

There are tears in his eyes. He will rescue her, he vows, as he runs to get packed.

You haven't told him that the management could be about to ditch her anyway because she is the Boring Spice and she keeps buying dresses from Harvey Nics and generally maintaining a style which is beyond the fiscal capacities of her six-year-old fans, but that doesn’t seem important.
A few days later, the tabloids and even the broadsheets (such is the Spice Girls’ fame) announce that Posh Spice is leaving the band to marry her unemployed brickie ex-boyfriend.

Phase two of the plan immediately goes into action. You get on a train down to London and go straight to the Spice Girls’ offices. I’ve come to be the new Spicer, you tell two guys. One is besuited, the other looks like he would be more at home picking cockles off a windswept beach.

‘What’s your image, then?’ they ask you, unexpectedly. You thought they, being the image-makers, would take care of all that.

‘Brainy Spice,’ you say, as it’s the first thing that comes into your head, and you waffle something you think appropriate about the patriarchal view of women in history and sisters doing it for themselves.

Mid sentence, you notice they have this look on their face like you’ve just endorsed Germaine Greer’s views on the vasectomisation of men.

‘We already have a Scary Spice,’ they say to you, perplexed, and suddenly you know you should have said Fluffy Spice, so you say it as an alternative.

‘Funky Spice,’ shouts out the suited guy, mishearing you. ‘That’s exactly what we’re looking for. Have you got any cool sayings?’

‘Shag everything in sight...steal everything that isn’t nailed to the floor...don’t take drugs, just sell them.’ You hope these are something along the right lines, but the two guys aren’t even listening any more.

‘And I see you in a white jacket with the sleeves sewn up,’ you tell him.

‘No, I see her in paisley myself,’ says the suited guy.

‘I was thinking more of L.A. myself,’ you say.

Looking out the window, it looks like you have just made it in time, because by now there is a queue of nevergonnabes who have the same idea as you stretching round the building three times.

You are sent down the corridor where you are orthodontically and epidermally analysed by a council of style consultants. Fortunately, you look quite young for age thirty. You have always attributed this to the rejuvenating effects of alcohol. One of the women scribbles this theory down onto her notepad.

So you join the monster rich pop princesses and you start travelling the world on a transatlantic tide of oestrogen. Life is an endless whirl of film sets, T.V. studios and award nights. Your persona of Funky Spice is an instant hit and you are voted number one in the popularity poll. This does cause a frisson of jealousy within the group, particularly from Sporty who is condemned to wear Adidas and always comes last in the popularity stakes, so much so that during dance practice, she directs a couple of her speciality high kicks in the direction of your head. But you milk your pazzazzy popularity to the full.

In your meeting with Prince Charles, however, you do go a bit far when you ask if you can see his crown jewels and make bad taste innuendos about Buck-King-ham Palace and the royal wee. Your management hauls you in and tells you that the mint sauce of royalty doesn’t like to be spiced up. You personally think Charles quite liked it. This is not the first time you have been warned to watch your step. It doesn’t escape your notice that laid out on your bed ever morning over the next week are sets of the tackiest, most risible clothes on the market.
Part of your new job consists of trotting off answers for those endless fanzines. You enjoy this. Years of playing at making up your own answers are now paying off (sic):

Top Tip - Never fill your hot water bottle when you are pissed.
Pet Hate - Hamster.
Hate - Hairdressers that have big windows onto the street, so that you can be spotted wearing a perm cap.
Least liked comment - If only I was twenty years younger, love...
Best answer - So what? I'd still be single and you'd still be an ugly bastard.

In fact, everything is going so well, it is a shock when you are asked if you can sing. You certainly can't dance, so you are surprised that they think you might sing. They are arranging an a cappella performance during a press conference to prove we can sing live. You are rushed to remedial singing lessons, but after five days you still sound like a bronchitic budgerigar. By the time the press conference comes round, you have been advised to mime and let the others do the singing. Straight into the song, there's this terrible drone and for a second you wonder if it is you, but to your relief it's coming from Baby Spice. It would be kind to her to say her singing voice resembles that of a spiritualist possessed by the soul of a Native American chief. The press members are so dazed, it takes minutes for them to recover themselves and ask us questions. The first question goes to Scary Spice: Any plans for you and Eric Cantona to settle down?

‘No, no,’ laughs Scary. ‘We’re just having some fun at the moment. At my age I’m not into...what’s that word that sounds like a type of wood...I forget...’

‘Mahogany,’ you say, trying to help her out. But for the life of you, you cannot remember the word she means. It worries you. For the rest of the interview you are uncustomarily quiet.

You and the girls go back to your hotel. Truth be told, you are getting rather bored with their company. Scary is sitting on the edge of the bed, thinking up dynamic slogans such as ‘reach for the top’ and ‘go do it, girls’. It’s what they call soundbites, she says. Sounds shite is more the term for it, you mutter under your breath. She is contemplating going into politics with her campaign based on ‘I’ve better hair than Tony Blair’.

You don’t think someone who thinks an ECU is a bird with a long neck would be ideally suited to run the country, but after all it is up to her.

Ginger Spice is busy body-stencilling to see if she would look good in a full body tattoo and Baby Spice is sewing gingham shelf trims for her mother. How little you have in common with them. Sporty suggests going to visit Robbie Williams in his detox centre and you decide to tag along. Because the hotel is surrounded by hundreds of iconolatrous fans, you have to slide out the window on a zipcord which leads down to a warehouse housing your private limo. You wonder what the distinction is between a groupie and an insane stalker. They all look seriously deranged to you.

One day there is a tiny piece in the paper about how Victoria Posh Adams has just had a baby girl. We are near the end of our whistle-stop live world tour and, amazingly, people now seem to like our new, punky out-of-tune style better than our bland version. Even serious artists like Neneh Cherry and Sheryl Crow are saying hi to us at award ceremonies. We’re slowly becoming more herbal resin than bubblegum.

The news about Posh Spice has an extraordinary effect. Ginger Spice phones her up and finds out how happy she is with her new life. Before you know it, Ginger starts to get maudlin and says how she wishes she could be a normal person again. Then Sporty says, ‘Do you remember playing football on a Sunday afternoon and then having a few pints and some chips afterwards?’ Nobody does, but each is suddenly lost in her rosy memories of the past. All four charter a plane to Sheffield to visit the baby spicelet. Meanwhile, you stay in America leading your noctilucent lifestyle and you go out briefly with an astronaut who’s famous for probing the stars.

The next day you discover the papers are full of the girls’ announcement that they are splitting up. You have not been consulted. Sporty, Scary, Ginger and Baby are going back to their old boyfriends to lead the simple life. They say are tired of living out of a suitcase (you think being accompanied by a travelling wardrobe of five hundred items of clothing hardly constitutes lugging a suitcase around) and they have been living a hollow sham without family and friends. They now realize they have been untrue to one of their founding maxims: Be true to yourself.
You are horrified. You insist on being hooked up to them live by satellite. ‘Are you out of your tiny gourds?’ you ask them. ‘We’ve got a good thing going here. Okay, so we’ll have a shelf-life no longer than Paul Newman’s salad dressing, but let’s cash in while we can. What do you say, Ginge?’

‘My name’s Geri, not Ginger,’ she says and her eyes seem even more vacuous than before if that’s possible. She seems inordinately happy that she can go back to her old mousy brown colour.

‘Big deal. The wages of freedom are very low,’ you remind them. ‘And what about our anthem, ‘Wannabe’? It was about how men could come and go but the group would always stick together. Did we sell that as a lie to millions of children around the world?’ You start singing the bit about ‘you gottagetwithmyfriends’ and ‘friendship never ends’. One by one, they stand up and leave. ‘You never could sing,’ says Baby.

You are left staring onto the Spiceless screen. You start shouting, hoping one of them might hear you. ‘GIRLPOWER! BE WHAT YOU WANNA BE! SHAKE IT MOVE IT MAKE IT TAKE IT SHOW THEM HOW GOOD YOU ARE! YOU HAVE GOT THE POWER!’ And as you shout, you almost believe it, but you are also thinking how long it will take you to spend what’s in your account and you figure your best move is to phone Bananarama and see if they want to make a comeback.
Vacuum

From the hindsight of a flea, this dark mastodon sniffs in one appendage the cracker crumbs of the over-stuffed couch. But it is mainly from the hovercraft of its flat head that small things begin to tremble, then ascend—the way, in some vacuous novel, alien lights might vaporize into the stratosphere of unimaginably tangled worlds. Hair ground into the soft, synthetic knit of the under life of the human foot, cartilage clipped from toe and finger tips, live arthropods and the dried husks of their dead, the flurry of molting skin, fluff devils, matted fur, wild seeds, mud the dog tracked in: all lift to the vortex of its spun, stiff brush and deep, industrial suck. Then, when a man or a woman’s touch has quieted it, the promise of a certain absence still gestates in our closets. It is, nonetheless, the action of skimming along carpets that holds its main interest: it spits back paperclips and thumb tacks. Otherwise it seems, on some diminutive level, omnivorous, its digestive track attached to the spine of its back. If we tug its umbilical cord all the way back to the point of origin (the double slit of the wall’s orifice), the spark that powers its ability to lift things absent from our lives flies to the bowels of the substrata’s black fossils, to the atom’s bulge. It holds its breath for weeks, then its ripe belly seems about to break: When we touch the button marked “easy open” or “release,” one last puff of dust exiles up.
Housesitting Houston

When the dog moved out the fleas lit in.
We were right on top of them. Before the jokes
Of how many Yankees the house might turn up, skinned,
We cracked their Lilliputian shells. They croaked

Between our fingers, uncut pincers cured
The lusty leap of a few fat stragglers
Hanging around the kitchen sink, or
We snapped them in a water glass, forever

Certain the tap alone was no solution
Without the human cinch of their pinched backs.
When we moved the touch of their ghostly volition
Jolted in a nightly-scratch. We’d ditch the sack,

Flick the switch, scour for the lone stowaway,
Your blood prick in me, gnaw of each stray city.

Black Friday

I lit the doomed colony
Of a candelabra on the altar
The black cassock of all history

The stupendous monotony of mystery
Singing on its knees
In minor thirds only

Even the hooded cross
A falcon in the dark
Through it all the light dripped in:

Bent taper, brass lip,
Lick of one flame
Wick to wick
I.
The Dreamed-House Dreams Itself

Again the house returns her to an empty room,

windows, floor to ceiling, and doors that release

to garden birdsong, bloom—
Again,

she vows, again forgets,
circling daily through her rooms enough already,

honey and tea to pass. Why, then, deep in the house’s spine,

wides this grass-green space?
II.
The House Teaches Her about Death

For Lucien Stryk

After he died, he came calling,
waiting at the basement door,
but she couldn’t reach it,
what with the party, people cocktailing,
and when she looked again,
he was gone. Breathless,
she scrambled up the stairs to see--
and yes, there, there he was,
the line of his back, his walk.
She could see him still,
waiting to cross at a light, crossing,
stooping to adjust the strap of his pack.

Tearing through the door, she thought,
I can make it just in time. I can.

III.
The House Teaches Her about Love

They seemed a stream of need flowing by her legs,
five or six of them, seven, she wasn’t sure,
children, young, vague, but the house would help her
keep them alive. It was large and light--
here, we’re safe, she sighed,
meaning absence, mainly, from vigilance
about which sounds not to fear,
the mind twisting cat-eared to clicks and creaks,
snap-deciding now again now.

She ran to secure each window and door,
all locked, all tight.
Except for one.

Fumbling with the latch
she suddenly saw a darkness outlined in greater dark--
and now she had to get them out out, quick,
out of the house that, dammit, wasn’t hers anyway
just shelter she’d found by chance, and those kids
weren’t hers either, you know.
House Poems

contd...

IV.

The House Becomes Strange

Waking as usual, she began to doubt her hands
were her hands, and certainly
these arms, which refused to reach for her glasses
on the stand where she’d left them,
did not belong to her.
To stretch and grasp took oh, so long. It annoyed her,
the slow plow of body through tides of air,
and now, standing at last,
she found the silly bathroom
was not where
it should be.

The whole structure had shaken loose . . .
lightness became her, and from its own knock,
her heart, huddled in its little lived-space,
shied away.