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THOMAS MCCARTHY
On Becoming a Whole Poet

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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THOMAS MCCARTHY ON BECOMING A WHOLE POET

I think there's an invisible and inaudible thought of advancing in poetry, something that propels us, year after year: as poets we always feel we must improve or expire.

This really is a permanent anxiety, a sort of ethical restlessness, that never leaves the poet.

It's a deeper ambition than merely wanting fame, a deep person-centred quest that begins very early in our poetic careers.

But by the time a student poet completes her or his writing post-graduate programme, or has attended his or her second or third Advanced Writing workshop at a major literary festival, a proper sense of anxiety settles in. Such a new writer, of whatever age, is a serious person and the impulse to be a 'poet' is no longer an idle impulse. There is more urgency and ambition, a more anxious looking over the shoulder to gauge the trajectory of others, both fellow poets and published teachers. Over the last four or five years at Molly Keane House in Co. Waterford, and more recently at the Advanced Poetry Workshop of Listowel Writers' Week, I've tried to convince such serious poets that 'business as usual' is no longer an option in their work. Habits of writing and, more crucially, habits of thinking about the writing life, formed and settled over the first urgent years, are no longer sufficient to make the best possible kind of poem. This observation also applies to my own work: in recent years I've become bored with patterns of sameness, with repetitions of formulae and poetic tones that belong to an earlier, younger self.

Thomas McCarthy

But as poets we must resist the impulse to write a novel. Instead, as we mature we should be looking to write a poetry with the novel's robustness and studied integrity. It is possible to absorb fully the ironic injustice of life and aging, the deadening hand of a long sameness, and to save these insights for the making of a very different kind of poem.

A poetry that depends upon a form of youthful apologetics is truly dead: I can't go on writing as if it was 1972 or even 2002 in my own life. Nor can I read other poets whose work bores me. Their work has become almost unbearable and I purchase their new collections with a feeling bordering on panic. No, not panic, more a literary agoraphobia, a fear of venturing out yet again into over-worked territory; across once fertile fields that are now barren for want of new colours, ideas and rhythms. I close such collections and wonder: will this creature of the poetic world ever again harvest a crop of sweetness and plenitude? Why hasn't the fertility inside their first works been replenished? Why are the new poems like mere shadows, why is there no urgent sense of plenty?

In all honesty, and in every case, a change is needed, a proper new beginning is required. But how is one to make a giant leap forward? A new technique or tone almost always comes at the end of some kind of quest: one serious accident, a catastrophe, a change of country, an invasion, war, exile, the death of a close beloved, the banal arrival of cancer, the sudden exposure of some cherished but fraudulent political class – any one of these might seem like the end of a long quest and the beginning of new language. But these are traumatic events where the world crushes our long passivity. Trauma is not always available, and, anyway, be careful what you wish for. How is a poet to change if his or her life is saturated with a sustained ordinariness? If you've been teaching in a College programme or skipping the same Atlantic fishing-boat over the same fishing banks for twenty years, how are you to uncover a new tone, a new colour, a new way of looking at things? How can you make that accident happen? Middle age makes novelists of us all, the writer Frank O'Connor once said, because we begin to see the patterns of injustice.

But as poets we must resist the impulse to write a novel. Instead, as we mature we should be looking to write a poetry with the novel's robustness and studied integrity. It is possible to absorb fully the ironic injustice of life and aging, the deadening hand of a long sameness, and to save these insights for the making of a very different kind of poem.

It's not that you need to find that authentic 'true' personal voice – you've been trying to do that for perhaps twenty years – but you do need to find the true voice of poetry. How is that found? Where is it? How can we get closer to the true voice of poetry, the poetry appropriate for your life now? Renewal doesn't lie in the effect of others, though others can certainly point the way. A poet struggling for renewal, for a lost intensity, could go back and read the astonishing late poems of Yeats, that body of work that is as permanent, distinctive and noble as the surviving Georgian architecture of Dublin. Or a poet might turn for inspiration to the filigreed private grief inside Anna Akhmatova: 'We aged a hundred years in that one day.' Or the older poet could turn to the works of younger genius, to the inimitable brilliance inside Alice Oswald's *WOODS*, *ETC.* or Sinead Morrissey's *ON BALANCE*. As they gambol and tumble over obstacles that held us back, the young carry new insights from a newer kind of life. It's a wise sage who learns from the fearlessness of those who have just begun, though neither Oswald nor Morrissey are beginners! But their technical breathlessness is exemplary.

It's just that we need to acknowledge the arrival of a turning-point in poetry. The young always begin at what seems to them a turning-point. Achievements in a poetry that are younger than us can teach us to look critically at our own method and technique. Like the very serious poet who has attended his or her third and quite expensive Advanced Workshop, we need to pull back, to draw breath and consider the wealth of possibilities still wide open. A working poet can always assume prodigious rights over language, much more than language and its established traditions can ever assume over a working poet: "Je ne fais pas de système. Mon système – C'est moi" as Paul Valéry wrote in his *Cahiers XXVI* (p438). To write poems is both to make the thing and to dwell within it. It is not an excess of theories, it is a quieter place, yet intense, that place where we dwell in the poem – as the wonderful Yves Bonnefoy observed, Bonnefoy who had endured the garrulous, public pretensions of surrealism, as he observed, poetry is: 'A surging state of impossible fullness.' Bonnefoy and his circle had observed the surging fullness of Giacometti and the proud muteness of his artistic effect in a room full of theorists.

The funnels and runnels of language are deep and complex; the years ahead have no pattern for us, nor should we expect one. As we advance in our years and in our poetry it's the search for the new tone in our work that brings the possibility of excitement – the patterns are the very things we leave behind on the road. But we ourselves must make the patterns ahead of us; yet again, in poetry as in life.

To create this artistic effect, then, to defy theories and generalisations, this is all at the core of new beginnings, of defying dullness with a new, vectored excess of being. In a recent PARIS REVIEW interview (The Art of Poetry No.104, Spring 2019) Lawrence Ferlinghetti bristles with rage when interviewer Garrett Caples asks "Can you speak more about your writing process in general?" Ferlinghetti explains that the whole idea of 'process' is alien to him; that these things are acutely personal, even secret, and intimately bound up with the poet's own figures of speech. It is our figures of speech that are original to us, that give us originality as poets. His response is clear-headed and defiant. Our personal lives as poets give us these prodigious rights over the language we choose to use.

A poem pared back to stretched essentials, like a Giacometti canvas or sculpture, could still be a state of mind rediscovered, a place of frugality and yet of lyrical abstraction. But the poem when it arrives within us refutes all theories, it overwhelms *Theory*.

A poem is a picture more than a theoretical thing.

The apt observation contained in a poem is a living, breathing thing. For Bonnefoy the rightly observed thing could be full of plenitude, a poem could be a cliff-face, a glade, an orchard.

Poetry was an architecture of habitation, a place to make for oneself and to dwell within. But a shared space, of both poet and reader.

So how can we arrive at this space, this settled space of achieved poetry, a verbal space within which we may dwell as whole persons? Great novelists, like great poets, can teach us about an advanced wholeness of being. We can learn from novelists without ever intending to make a novel.

A novel is a quest with all of its architecture still standing, a novel is a house of tone in the way the best late poetry collections should be.

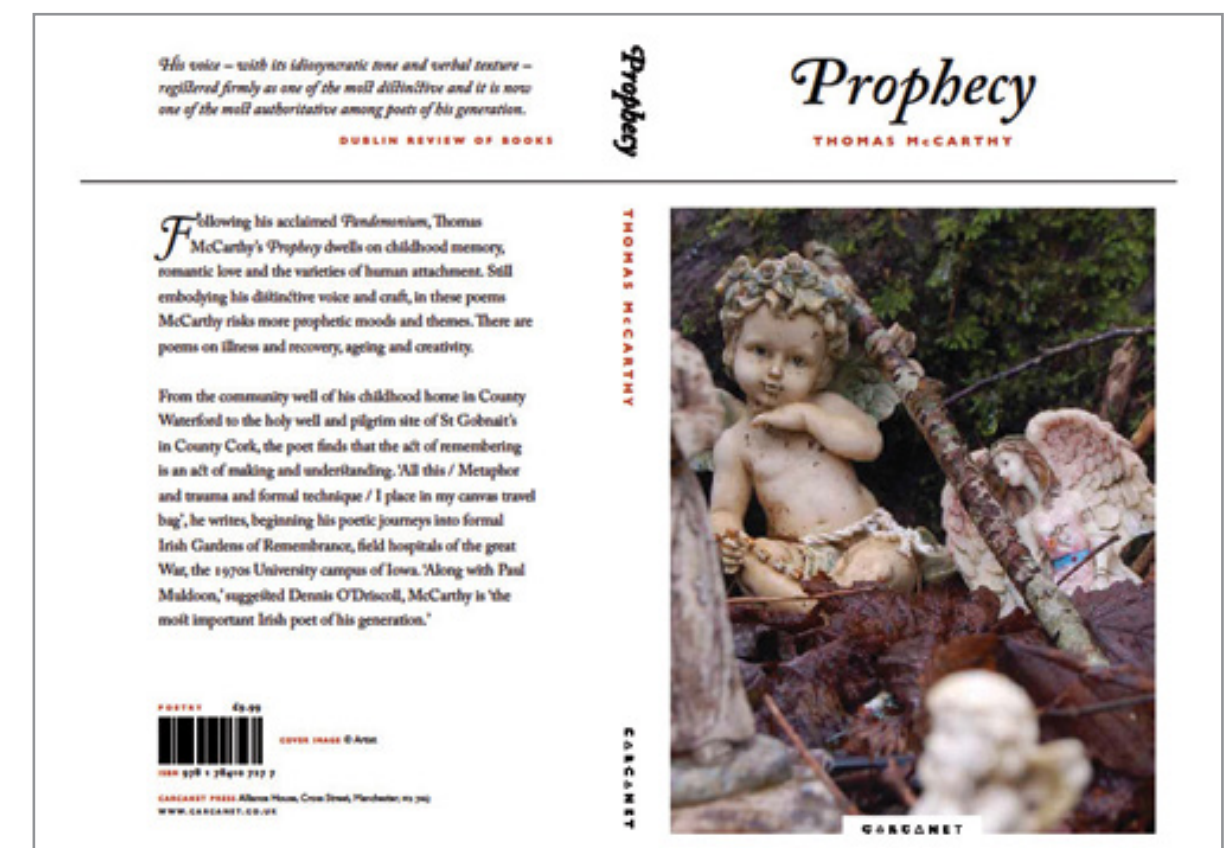


Thomas McCarthy at Glenshelane, 1981.

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Elizabeth Bowen, for example, in her description of interiors, of sitting-rooms and bedrooms, in *The Last September* and *Death of the Heart* can lead us to a deep understanding about a fullness of being, about character as a whole imagined being – as the characters Lois or Portia move across their interiors even inanimate things begin to have voices. This is how poems speak to us when written with intensity rather than indifference. A novelist can never be indifferent to the world described; there is no reason why a poet should be any less indifferent. It has something to do with finding a tone, but a tone with purpose, a tone with personality like a character in a novel. This is the fullness we should be seeking after in our poems: *An escape of sunshine, penetrating the pale sky in the south-west, altered the room like a revelation. Noiselessly, a sweet-pea moulted its petals on to the writing-table, leaving a bare pistil. The pink butterfly flowers, transparently balancing, were shadowed faintly with blue as by an intuition of death. Lois bowed forward, her forehead against the edge of the table* (*The Last September*, p163).

It has something to do with tone, then, this impulse to go on in writing. The search for a new tone will bring you back to the place where the figure of speech is paramount: where the way you describe is the way the world is. The funnels and runnels of language are deep and complex; the years ahead have no pattern for us, nor should we expect one. As we advance in our years and in our poetry it's the search for the new tone in our work that brings the possibility of excitement – the patterns are the very things we leave behind on the road. But we ourselves must make the patterns ahead of us; yet again, in poetry as in life.



Prophecy by Thomas McCarthy published by Carcanet in April, 2019.
<https://www.amazon.com/Prophecy-Poems-Thomas-McCarthy/dp/1784107271>

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David Rigsbee

DAVID RIGSBEE

SEFERIS, KIZER, KEELEY AND “THE KING OF ASINE”

I remember, as a student, sitting in Carolyn Kizer’s stately living room in Chapel Hill, stacks of new books of poems and literary magazines on every surface. Although she was social by nature, Carolyn lived all of her life surrounded by books, especially books of poems. In some less easily definable but obvious way, she also lived in poems. She was particularly drawn to poems that probed the knots of experience, poems she didn’t necessarily understand, poems that hugged their mysteries. But to live in them was different: they participated in her aesthetic, spiritual, political, and social formation. Working with her was to be confronted with an example of the strength of poetry and its ancient associations of beauty as an image of the Good. One day, she brought out a copy of Seferis’ *Collected Poems*, recently published by Princeton and translated by her old friend Edmund (“Mike”) Keeley. She had been in frequent correspondence with Mike for years and considered his work as another way of writing poetry. She read us the well-known poem “Thrush” with its talking statues and scatchy phonograph recordings, its linking of alienated moderns with classical predecessors. Her letters to Mike were full of line comments, technical questions, and thoughts on diction and voice. It was the voice of Seferis she found haunting, and she thought he was a more-than-worthy successor to the prim T. S. Eliot when it came to mining the cultural past. It was not surprising that Mike Keeley, like Carolyn, was also drawn to the poems of C. P. Cavafy. She read his versions of Seferis and Cavafy both aloud to the few of us who sat there those afternoons, while the Vietnam War protesters marched just a few blocks away before the post office. She would join them later.



It was another poem that caught my ear. It was Seferis' "The King of Asine," a poem of searching language, strange and tangled images, and a desolate outlook. And yet it was a poem that staked its authority on the very nothingness it contemplated. Insofar as its descriptions and discontinuous murmurings, gathering force as a poet and a friend search an island for the gold mask of an obscure king, it made, in effect, a literary excavation that leads us to the poem's—any poem's—relationship to its own forgetting, and even more importantly, to the eventual forgetting of the last wisp of personal identity.

It's the kind of poem that seems to come into focus momentarily, then dissolve in its own reflection. And yet it also haunts with a sense of numinous presence, and while such a sense is practically required for a meditational poem, it does nothing to prevent the injunction Wittgenstein imposed against trying to say what can't be said, from having some kind of force. I suppose most poets have encountered the problem in the course of their work. A typical response is to make gestures of intimation, as though images and poetic strategies peculiar to the art could penetrate the veil, or to pretend that the veil doesn't exist. Indeed, the problem has reached the status of a commonplace, with images retrofitted as metaphors, with form itself made to stand outside time, which is another zone about which we have nothing to say, having no experience of what it would be like to be there. Seferis was one such poet, as was the Stevens of "To an Old Philosopher in Rome," a poem Carolyn thought as one that sought the limits. In the case of Stevens, it turns out that this profoundly moving poem of Santayana's last years in the Convent of the Blue Nuns in Rome was based on a real profile published by Edmund Wilson in *The New Yorker* (April 6, 1946, p. 59). Far from imagining the angelic stirrings and fluttering nuns, Stevens helped himself to Wilson's description, in places simply cutting and pasting images to suit himself.

Many have pointed to the influence of Eliot in Seferis' major poems, and just as many have read the poem as a marker of an historical, between-the-wars interlude (its date of composition was 1938-40), that tries to hold on to some image of trust in Western culture, now that it lay, again, under siege, its treasures facing oblivion. The question arises straightaway: what is the meaning of oblivion?

I don't need Homer to tell me that we forget those who came before. I used to ask my students how far back they could remember in their own families, and no one's backward reach ever went past great-grandparents, although some related an interest in family history, particularly as this related to wars. Of oblivion, we may say that its essence is unsayable. My question was one of identity, i.e., when do we cease being persons?

What comes after forgetting? Our identities ride piggy-back on the armature of the culture(s) that allow them articulation. Cultures too suffer from the effects of forgetting, and themselves go belly-up eventually, history crumbling into geology. These are heady things, but Seferis roots his poem in the singularity of a supposed person mentioned in the catalogue of ships in *The Iliad*, a certain king who, now reduced to a name, sailed to Troy—itsself, as George Steiner has remarked, the site of the first world war. In doing so, he avoids airy speculation and grand gestures, by zeroing in on a trace artifact.

My interest in the poem (in Edmund Keeley's translation) goes back to my own genealogy. I don't need Homer to tell me that we forget those who came before. I used to ask my students how far back they could remember in their own families, and no one's backward reach ever went past great-grandparents, although some related an interest in family history, particularly as this related to wars. Of oblivion, we may say that its essence is unsayable. My question was one of identity, i.e., when do we cease being persons? And it seemed to me that, whatever else the poem did, it also raised that question. Moreover, it exists prior to any other question touching on the rise and fall of larger templates, especially cultures.

Personhood has traditionally been the stuff of our lyric poetry, notwithstanding its branchings-out to other genres. When you think about it, this is hardly surprising, since poetry has dealt with this existential honorific ever since the first poems were dandled on the knee of Sappho, but the anxiety about personhood was also not far behind: when did it begin? And when cease to be? Memory and the law make it clear that personhood was never coextensive with our life-dates, and so the hunger to extend it beyond biological life reached all the way to fantasies of immortal fame, even as more modest versions were recognized by other persons and enshrined in culture. Homer himself, whose "Asine te" makes up the whisper in Seferis' poem, makes one such recognition: the King of Asini was among the Greeks at Troy. While Homer reckoned that Achilles' quest for immortality in death would come to pass, the King of Asine's attribution in the Catalogue of Ships was, in Seferis' words, "only one word in *The Iliad* and that uncertain." He also adds that, except for Homer, he was "forgotten by all."



How comes it then that more than two and a half millennia later an unnamed pair of pilgrims sail to Paros to “find” this king? The unidentified members (there is a “you” and “the poet”) never give us the full meanings for their journey, except to mention parenthetically that the King is the one “whom we’ve been trying to find for two years now.” But the King is long gone. All that’s left is a “gold burial mask,” of which Seferis adds, “The King of Asini [is] a void under the mask.” This “void” stands as the marker for that which will never be re-membered:

and his children statues
and his desires the fluttering of birds, and the wind
in the gaps between his thoughts, and his ships
anchored in a vanished port:
under the mask a void.

The poet of course identifies with this. The image, the gold burial mask, is all that is left of the King of Asini, his singularity, if any, transformed into a symbol. Indeed, it is not clear that the mask belongs to the King: it is “like” the gold burial mask. The final trace of his existence, as in the brief mention of his participation in the Trojan War, is a passage from personal singularity to a chance—and public—marker. The last trace of a person is impersonal, a piece of metal: we on the one side, the void on the other, looking back, so to speak, at us. Does oblivion *accuse* us with its blankness? Is our sentient life, full of ambition and desire for individual recognition, just a cosmic anomaly foisted on a buried mask that possesses neither vision nor character?

And the poet lingers, looking at the stones, and asks himself
does there really exist
among these ruined lines, edges, points, hollows and curves
does there really exist
here where one meets the path of rain, wind, and ruin
does there exist the movement of the face, shape of the tenderness
of those who’ve waned so strangely in our lives

But nostalgia carries with it a suggestion of inauthenticity akin to sentimentality. Wishing doesn’t make it so; dreaming comes up short: the poet’s mask—a void. Everyone understands the difference between a lyric victory, say, and a real one, between wish-fulfillment and actual having. And unless we can learn to live *within* poems, we are on an express to the void. That’s the thing, isn’t it?

The poet—the maker—Seferis, faced with his own discontinuity, wonders if there is anything intelligible to be derived from the found mask, anything that might support the possibility that human desires and endeavors are not just, as they seem to be in the constant battle between culture’s lifeline and nature’s push-back, something of only limited consequence, to be swept away (“the void always with us”). If there are fragments to be shored against our ruins, must they finally partake of the impersonal character of the mask, mediating our wandering for significance and the earth, our burial place? What of the subjectivity that powered our wanderings in the first place? Or rather, should one conclude,

...perhaps no, nothing is left but the weight
the nostalgia for the weight of living existence
there where we now remain unsubstantial, bending
like the branches of a terrible willow tree heaped in unrelenting despair
while the yellow current slowly carries down rushes uprooted in the mud
image of a form that the sentence to everlasting bitterness has turned to stone...

Perhaps it is “nostalgia” to think we could bring meaning to the fact of being forgotten, which begins less to sound like dignified tragedy and more to sound like simple fate. Nostalgia, after all, means something like returning home, and that home means more than that place—space, zone, what have you—where we are at one with ourselves and the other members of our tribe. The re-membering, the reattaching of limbs and reanimation, is as close as we can get to immortality, that not-death. Note that remembering also carries with it the notion that forgetting is to be spread far and wide: a *sparagmos*, a separating limb-from-limb as if to ensure death is in fact *death*. Its opposite is a resurrection: no wonder we’re nostalgic for it. But nostalgia carries with it a suggestion of inauthenticity akin to sentimentality. Wishing doesn’t make it so; dreaming comes up short: the poet’s mask—a void. Everyone understands the difference between a lyric victory, say, and a real one, between wish-fulfillment and actual having. And unless we can learn to live *within* poems, we are on an express to the void. That’s the thing, isn’t it? Wittgenstein understood a lot of things: poetry was not one of them, or so he said. And yet his deeply reductive method resembles the poet’s: What is an image? What does it mean to create one? How does an image connect to my identity? To any identity? And so forth.

Seferis, Stevens, Kizer, all are dead. The house in Chapel Hill belongs to another family. A few years ago, I drove by, trying to remember the inspired readings and conversations whose sound filled the rooms there. The same Kizer who was drawn to Mike Keeley and his translations from the Greek herself wrote “Semele Recycled,” a poem about the re-membering of a torn goddess who is reunited with her unfaithful lover.

Many years later it occurs to me that Seferis’ excavation mirrors our own. We were digging, hoping to find the image, the mask, the poem, that tethered us to who we were, from our origins (themselves tied to predecessors), the other side of which is an unsayable void, to some point in the future when our names have slipped into another (and yet the same) void. Seferis, Cavafy, Stevens, Kizer, even Wilson and Keeley pondered these questions and no doubt came away with a consolation prize, if consolation it is. It was, as Seferis put it, an “image of a form that the sentence to everlasting bitterness has turned to stone:/ the poet a void.” Our poems lengthen out the time to the void, and they do so “with everlasting bitterness.” The stone doesn’t speak, and yet it is the rock on which poetry builds its structures.

Seferis, Stevens, Kizer, all are dead. The house in Chapel Hill belongs to another family. A few years ago, I drove by, trying to remember the inspired readings and conversations whose sound filled the rooms there. The same Kizer who was drawn to Mike Keeley and his translations from the Greek herself wrote “Semele Recycled,” a poem about the re-membering of a torn goddess who is reunited with her unfaithful lover:

Oh, what a bright day it was!
This empty body danced on the riverbank.
Hollow, it called and searched among the fields
for those parts that steamed and simmered in the sun,
and never would have found them.

I read this poem through the lens of Seferis, as I read many poems these days. Elegy exacts its revenge on time more clearly than I would have imagined. But does elegy—to borrow Frost’s term—*suffice*? Regardless, we live within the poems. But what of the “bitterness of the sentence”? Notwithstanding its bitterness, we continue to read it aloud, that bitter, naming sentence which is the poem—and poems, reading the ones that haunted us, each others’ and our own.



Artwork © Emma Barone



Robin Morgan has published 22 books, including seven poetry collections. Her first, *Monster*, caused an international furor; *Upstairs in the Garden*, her New and Selected Poems, won awards; and the TED Talk reading of her recent *Dark Matter* poems has garnered over one million downloads. She's a recipient of the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts Prize in Poetry. Her work has been translated into 13 languages. Her new novel, *Parallax*, was published in October 2019.

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These two poems are from an in-progress collection, *Dark Energy*, by Robin Morgan.

THE RINGMASTER'S DESERTION

*I must lie down where all the ladders start
in the foul rag and bone shop of the heart*

- "The Circus Animals' Desertion", William Butler Yeats

My body gnarls around me now
as I excrete myself
calcifying into an exoskeleton,
womb, home, shell, trap, carapace,
sanctuary, chrysalis, coffin. Why
the drive, then, to send these messages?

Does the snail long to be seen for itself?
Does the crustacean scream
I am alive inside here? A rag
is ripped from some larger cloth. A bone
is a fragment of scaffold. A heart is just a muscle.
My muscles have minds of their own

so I must hunch to gain perspective.
Only then, stooping high, dare I recognize
a creature arrayed in rag and bone
who scuttles across this intersection against
the light, laughing at pain while weaving
through the gridlocked traffic in my brain.

Robin Morgan

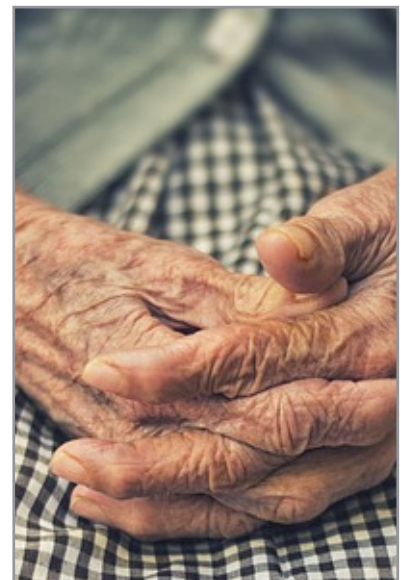
THESE HANDS

I study them by bedside lamplight:
An old woman's hands,
strong still but with a loosening grip;
bones delicate, gloved in blue embroidery's
bulging veins; skin spotted brown
as a hen's egg; nails clean, unpolished,
short for typing; fingers starting to stiffen,
curving to curl toward claws.

They twitch and tremor sometimes. Often
they cramp, drop teaspoons, fumble keys.
They've held a lot in their day—a newborn's feather-
weight and protest signs and bales of hay; stirred
soup and rallies; played chess, tricks, fair, Bach,
and for keeps: they've applauded, beckoned,
shaken themselves as fists; they've clasped a thousand
other hands, made lists, caressed the flesh of lovers.

They never presumed fingerprints were an identity,
life-lines a fate, though they did long to hold
the whole world in themselves, like the woman sang.
Once graceful, these now gnarled hands knot
and knit not wools but stories--grim tales at times:
a witch's hands. A child might fear such hands,
though they still twist in grief for other hands
that punch time-clocks, pray to the void for mercy,

pound gavels to silence screams, pull triggers.
I study how to teach these hands to let go,
let it all go, let go now. But they reach past me,
grabbing pen and pad to scribble a message--
words I will find all but illegible once
these white-knuckle hours unclench to loose
this past cold light's gold dawn:
Hold fast. Hold tight. Hold on.



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

NUNS' GRAVEYARD

Killashee, Co.Kildare

How peaceful it is, grey enclosed walls,
 Dark metal crosses mark the dead,
 Barely remembered, except for religious names:
 Sister Martha, Sister Angela ...
 I try to picture them now, porcelain nuns' faces
 Chanting across a chalk-line of time,
 All their teaching head-aches over
 All daughters of Christ once,
 Their souls now fly with the swallows
 And life moves on.
 We have fallen crazily in love with ourselves
 Our phones our cameras, we live in the iPad, iPhone
 Moment, taking photos of the nuns' graves today
 Barely remembering them tomorrow.



Noel Monahan

GRUNEWALD'S PAINTING

On the Crucified Christ

Confession was a Catholic cure for sin
And we recalled Grunewald's haunted painting
Of the death of Christ: Mouth agape,
Crown of thorns, smear and spots on his skin,
Nailed contorted hands and feet,
A lamb with a sword-cross through its heart
Blood dripping into the Holy Grail.

What word became flesh, dwelt amongst us?

Driving us into dark confession boxes
Year after year after year...
Our heads in our hands, our accusatory demons
Shouting out loud: *When I was hungry, when I was thirsty...*
Now the noise of hammered nails is silent.
We no longer confess. We bear our guilt, carry it everywhere.

GHOSTS OF HISTORY

Sometimes I feel I can see in the dark,
See into the night of things ... see into the black chaos.
Make my way under the stairs and discover what's there:
All the discarded objects of yesterday ... old clothes, old Christmas decorations,
Forgotten toys ... unread books.
We can read in the dark
We have the stars and the moon to show us the way.
But even then, we can't help putting people into categories,
Into boxes from the past, we all bear guilt of doing so:
Historian, teacher, journalist ...
We put School Children into boxes. Add and subtract them.
We put houses into categories, 1st, class, 2nd. class houses,
Look at the census returns, we invent boxes for everything.
We invent boxes for ourselves
For the duration of our entire lives and all to cover our faces
With a mask.
This is why even the most objective account of a life,
A period in history can only be a fiction ...
A drama and one of several possible dramas.
The ghosts of history are never far away.
The past is continually present
We carry it about with us where ever we go.
There are no real borders in our history
Only slippery lines sliding into yesterday.



© Noel Monahan

Daniel Lusk is author of six poetry collections and other books, among them *The Shower Scene from Hamlet*, *The Vermeer Suite*, and a memoir, *Girls I Never Married*. A former commentator on books for NPR and well-known for his teaching, he has been a Visiting Poet at The Frost Place in Franconia, N.H., Eigse Carlow Festival in Ireland, and Juniata College, Huntingdon, PA. His poetry has been published widely in literary journals, among them *Poetry Ireland*, *North American Review*, *Poetry*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Nimrod*, *The Iowa Review*, and *Salamander*.



ON GOOSE POND

after a photograph by Carolyn Bates

What bird is singing on Goose Pond
this early day of cricket din
and tree frog choir?

Now and again goose-in-residence
will snore, breaking her fast
and maybe then what troubles a distant loon
to sing the blues it seems.

This red, not blood on the water but
a bruised reflection of some far-off wound;
that's the way it would appear—
anger heart-sore fire-in-a-bottle blown.

And, here, sweet peace for us, the mirror
of whatever blow has creased
the fabric of our brother world
a shimmering silence. Now and again a bird.

These murmurs on our ear
of cricket, frog, and goose
mere fractals of soul-shattering sounds
we might catch wind of late

tomorrow, loves. Be safe. Be kind.

Daniel Lusk. Photo credit: Alison Redlich.

IN MY HOME TOWN

She sits on the curbstone,
picking a scab on her knee.

The boys are watching haircuts
through the window of the barber's
caravan and pay her no mind.

At the corner drug store teens
sit on the steps out front, sipping fizzy
cream sodas and cherry cokes.

Now and again a matronly Buick
or austere Lincoln Continental ghosts by
like a premonition of time to come.

Coach says we are better
now the season is over. If only.

In the sound booth at the record store
Chet Baker plays "Every Time
We Say Goodbye." After the last plaint
of the boozy trumpet, a little riff of silence...

like the purple aura of our mother's arms
as she tells us about a prayer circle
around a neighbor's sickbed.

In my home town, life in a minor key.

PASTORAL

Barefoot, wading where the river
laps and eddies, where summer cows
come to drink, a boy

dabbling in shallows
to see what I might see—

a clam, embedded in sand,
itself delving or luxuriating it seemed,

shell excoriated, hard as shale
or horse's hoof, or blind church door.

Did not part to lick its lips, did not sing
to me as I naïve expected
and might have done, am not past doing

at any command now, whisper
at the ear in French *s'il vous plait*, kiss
on the eyelids or behind the knee.

Tried to guess the spell or charm
who could not imagine soul or pearl
or salt viscosity within the stolid lips
of that hard reticule. Who had not art
to evoke or feel the chuckle and moan
of pleasure known since books
were slabs of clay and papyrus rolls

or knew what claim of sanctuary
may keep away the human clamor,
disguise the clap and swerve
of true religion at play inside.



OMENCLATURE

What if soul is the fairy ping
inside a spent light bulb?

In the lagoon of a forest bromeliad
a frog so small it could not
find itself in the class picture.

How were we children to know
the Ark of the Covenant
was not a boat?

Don't give up on the ridiculous.

The figures round the cathedral door:
lambs and bunnies at the bottom
made the children smile.

Ogres and fornicating humans
caused adults to swallow hard
and duck inside.

Sleep like lake water,
lapping but won't come over me.
Staring into the dark, I am
shadow-boxing with my past selves.

So many kinds of fool.

MORNING INCHIGEELAGH

for J.F. (1937-2016)

The roof has come off the church
and rain is falling in the baptistry.
The metaphorical sheep of the Testament
graze the green sanctuary
and swallows whisper over the grass.

Across the way a vault of sycamores
behind a scrim of hurried lace, garment
of one who will not come out
from under the stone.

And look! The sudden sunshine
where we walked among roses and aquilegia.
Butterflies and lilies, too,
languid on the frog pond. A hymn
to summer everlasting.

Anon, I will take my turn at the garden gate,
holding the white end of the golden thread.

But now, too long away to weep,
to grieve my friend,
I watch the rain, the baptistry, the holy sheep.
And do what I have been given to do.

Angela Patten is author of three poetry collections, *In Praise of Usefulness* (Wind Ridge Books), *Reliquaries* and *Still Listening*, both from Salmon Poetry, Ireland, and a prose memoir, *High Tea at a Low Table: Stories From An Irish Childhood* (Wind Ridge Books). Her work has appeared in literary journals and anthologies. In 2016 she received a National Poetry Prize from the Cape Cod Cultural Center. She now lives in Burlington, Vermont where she is a Senior Lecturer in the University of Vermont English Department.



SLOW TIME

A warm breeze blows through the willows,
rings the wind-chime by the screen door.

I raise my head to see an emerald hummingbird
stop at the coral bells in the herb garden,

then take a turn at the purple heliotrope
like a French perfumer fashioning a fragrance.

Chipmunk comes to nibble sunflower seeds,
pale paws resting on my outstretched fingers.

Bees hang on the whirling butterfly bush,
bending the flowers with their body weight.

A swallowtail settles on a feathery dill stalk
with the dignified etiquette of a courtesan

trained in the arts of music and calligraphy
to orchestrate a leisurely mutual seduction.

Angela Patten

THE CATBIRD

What good is it, this constant tweeting,
bleating, weeping in the languages of others
as if it longed to be a different kind of bird?

Perhaps a yellow-bellied sapsucker
whose drumming sounds like stuttering cadence
of a wartime message in Morse Code?

Or a goldfinch warbling in his courting colors?
Or any one of those pitch-perfect passerines,
so self-possessed, so poised at public speaking?

I don't fit in, the catbird seems to cry.
This series of impressions, this stand-up comedy routine,
these whistles, squeaks and gurgles are not

a territorial device. Neither are they mockery.
A secret: I have never been contented in this costume,
never liked my given song. Hidden in the bushes,

I listen to your myriad inflections, riffs and jingles
like an operatic understudy rehearsing in the wings,
waiting for my cue to join the choir.

MOTHERHOOD

"Many young mothers suffer from post-mortem depression."
Excerpt from a student essay

And you thought death
would be the end of it.
But there is no end
to motherhood and all
its attendant trespasses.

A state you arrive at like
a novice entering the convent,
all pure intention,
prayerfulness.

At twenty, you never think
about bequeathing sadness
misery, despair.

It's all about perfect teeth,
clear eyes, intelligence.
Adelle Davis and her Nazi
nutritional schemes
for breeding the Super Race.

For a long time, years perhaps,
you are the breast, perfect
center of the universe,
the home planet.

Then things change. One Sunday
the father dusts off his baseball glove
and it's all over for you,
girl who can't catch a ball
to save your life.

SPRINGTIME AT STARBUCKS

In the midafternoon gloom
a clatter of girls busy
ignoring each other, thumbs
like butterfly wings fluttering
over the faces of their phones.

Nearby a man sits spellbound
by the eerie radiance
of his laptop screen, fingers
flying over the keyboard,
faint faraway smile curling his lip.

Across the street the trees
are glorious as geishas.
They shake out showers of blossoms
like bridesmaids tipsy after
too many champagne toasts.

I am remembering a night in the Bowery
when we turned a corner and there
was lamplight and merengue music
pouring from the open door of a café,
women in red dresses laughing
and dancing on the sidewalk.

The light was golden,
the women's dresses were fire,
the music thick as syrup,
and we were dazzled by
the beauty of the unexpected.

We might have missed that moment
had we listened to our friends
who warned us not to walk at night,
two gullible white women
alone together. Call a cab,
keep your heads down, don't
talk to dark-eyed strangers.

Back at Starbucks the trees
are flirting madly with passersby.
Dance with us, they say,
we're dressed to the nines.
Help us out, we're dying up here.



Originally from Pennsylvania, Alicia Hoffman now lives, writes, and teaches in Rochester, New York. The author of two full-length collections, her work has appeared in a variety of journals, including The Penn Review, SOFTBLOW, Radar Poetry, Redactions: Poetry & Poetics, Up the Staircase Quarterly, A-Minor, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA in Poetry from the Rainier Writing Workshop at Pacific Lutheran University. Find out more at: www.aliciamariehoffman.com.



RADIO SILENCE

And then, all's for naught. The worried inseams
on the cuffs of ladies' skirts. The good dishes,

handwashed and stacked like small towers in the white
cupboards across homes spread thin as overworked

dough through the cookie-cutter tracts of the suburbs.
The bodies' coughs and spasms, each visit to the clinic,

minus the minutes time was a train too quick to catch,
the addition and subtraction, the compounded interest

and equity credit. All of it, really. Like the stuff worth
holding, what we carry in our arms like fragile packaging,

like when I was five and the world was wrought fresh
as I could make it, alone in a field of wild strawberries

as the old oaks every so often dropped their acorns onto
the hard ground, the thuds consistent as the wind's pattern

as it rushed over the hills in that Pennsylvania town as if
it had memorized the very curve and lilt of the landscape,

as if it was so in love with the region it urged itself over and
over onto the topography, back and forth through the thicket,

consistent as a metronome, as if it needed to know it cold, like
a fact, the bend and sway of beauty in the grasses. Even that.

Alicia Hoffman

CODA

So here we are, where trees
have rooted again in soot,

where the few smoldering coals
will fizzle in the rain that looms

in the nimbostratus coming
in from the east. It is enough

to say we did all we could
with our hands here, that we

took in the small child,
the lost dog. That we noticed

the mourning dove's long song
in the brush. It is enough to say

we opened the aria of our mouths
and that mostly, we communicated

some wonder, some luck of the draw,
fallen ash giving way to rich

nitrate soil, chaparral. As we
watched cities fall we too

will rise, sometimes softer,
but more often than not jarring

as headlights, the future catching
us off guard while we were busy

in the domestic, the memory like
a dance; dinner, then the dishes

long soak at the sink. Mornings,
we drank our coffee black.

Each afternoon, a chore. We lived
however we could bare it. Together.

So what could be left for us,
living through a world on fire,

burning only because it needed to hear
the strike of its own match. It is

enough to know we got this far. It is
enough to believe we can make it.

CORPORA

I volley and parse this starting.
Eventually, we all end up. So
let us go there now, the line
towed, or jumped over, a track
and field, red dust, a pillow
rising. The feet alone are worth
it. Bipedaling from this to that.
Let us praise them, jaundice
and all, the big toe, animal
clawing each slow crawl
to the left. I lean that way,
anyway, though lately I admit
to discarding the phenomenon
of bipartisanship altogether.
How many trappings are there?
Shall I count the ways the body
curves on its axis to distance
any navigation? The owl knows
better, harnessing its boots
on the great pine's limbpoints.
Hoo is the name of the great wind
coming now from the west.
But where comes this yuck
and stink, this puss of the dead?
It's all the hallowing before
the harrow. And I want today
to listen for tree-sorrow. I want
to dirt-lie, to cut it seam down.
Imagine. Both then and now. A
truncal argument. Or a grammatical
one. I've chained my making free.
I saw it all. And now I know I've seen.

A PATTERN MANIFESTATION, A SEARCH ENGINE

A collision. A molecular drive-by. A decimal.
A high decibel dissemination. Then, decimation.

Immediate action. A misunderstanding. A quest.
A circus maximus and a bloody death. A behest.

A synchronicity. Blessed, an ethereal prayer to ether.
You want to meet her. You want to know where

he goes. You want to know the actuarial timetable
for insurance purposes. You want to remember

what we will soon forget, only to look up to a miracle
of snow, or sleet, or rain. There is weather whether

or not. The magic 8 ball. The yes or no, or try again
later. The inconvenience and the anxious tick.

The cerebral hum. The insistent itch. The spider's
intricate design, magnified. It sticks. It's gummy

like play-doh, old as dirt. It didn't exist until it did
and now there's no reversal of course. I don't know

about you but I'm here for the long haul. I'll plug
away at the veritable void. I'll call to knock at its door.

I'll haul away the irrelevant, scroll through all the slides.
At the end of the list is emptiness. I'll click yes, subscribe.

THE HOUSE OF TEETH AND MEAT

While here, we might as well suck
the meat from the bones. Let our teeth

clack against the ribs, the small nodules
of cartilage covered in gristle and fat

curled like pearled orbs under the tongue.
Waste nothing. Hunger haunts us like

the ghosts tethered to every shadow.
Come to the kitchen, create something

that will feed us. The cupboards and
pantry are sparse. Try not to worry.

If you hear a knock at the door, open it
confidently. Nothing goes wrong here

if you don't let it. Outside, the locusts
fan over the pastures. The clouds

are thick with want. When floods
come we gather around the table

to break the bread and drink the wine.
Cast your pearls to the swine. Ignore

what you have been told. What is
mine is yours. What is yours is mine.





Anton Floyd lives in West Cork. Poems widely published and forthcoming in Ireland and elsewhere; a several times prize-winner of the Irish Haiku Society International Competition; runner-up in the Snapshot Press Haiku Calendar Competition. *Haiku in Between the Leaves* (Arlen House). Included in *Teachers Who Write* Anthology (ed. Edward Denniston WTC 2018). *Editor Remembrance Suite*, a chapbook of sonnets by Shirin Sabri (Glór 2018) and an international anthology of poems, *Point by Point* (Glór 2018). His own debut collection of poems, *Falling into Place*, was published by Revival Press (2018).

HONEY AND ONIONS

We never knew which of all her languages
she would use to greet us or the day.

That morning she came into the kitchen
volunteering in Egyptian Arabic how she felt,
aleasl walbasal (honey and onions).
Her broad vowels like swelling waves
and her sibilants surfing them.
Greek next. *Ti einai afto;* (What is this?)
An Irish breakfast we told her.
I prefer *mulukheya*. Good for the heart,
she said, adding, *Queen Nefertiti's beauty,*
her womanly strength must be attributed
to that recette ancienne. She then promised fluency,
clarity of thought, in any language,
to anyone who tasted Nile water.

Words flew about the kitchen that morning
like flocking starlings, no, bee-eaters,
more to her liking, more like her
those gregarious, iridescent fashionistas
whose yellow, chuckling throats paint the sky.
She thought the bee eater's markings
were the model for Cleopatra's eyeliner.

My mother at ninety two. We could never
be sure where she was in her mind.
In lucid moments she would ask, *Where am I?*

Come mid-day, the stroke quelled her breath.
Our glamorous migratory bird had gone.
We imagine her now to be beautiful
at twenty-two in Paris, Beirut, Alexandria
or Rome, living it up, refusing to answer the phone.

Anton Floyd. Photo credit: Carol Anne Floyd.

INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE

*im Doris(né Pascal) Holley
stepdaughter of Raymond Chandler*

*Funny thing is, she said
lucid as ever
and she getting on
just shy of ninety,
you know at my age
bones and the cold
are a no no
but am I so very old?
I feel the real me's a child,
an innocent songbird
stuck inside a cage.
Pausing then she said,
soon I will be dead
and free.*

*What's not so funny
is having a child.
Believe me once I tried;
carried him to term
but he got stuck,
didn't want to come.
My body was his cage.
Forceps delivery
the push and pull
crushed his skull.
Cried a lot after that
still do. I always think of him.
Sometimes I take my heart beat
for his quickenings*

*Funny what here the nurses think.
They say I should behave
and quietly to nothing sink.
Their patience with me
I see is wearing thin.
But just look here at what I've got -
one foot in my grave
the other on a banana skin
and while the subject's fruit
surely they should know
when the apple's ripe,
nature makes the call
so for God and Newton's sake
let me enjoy the fall.*

JUST WHEN

for RW

Just when clouds parted
and rain fell like crystal fire,
did sunlight or a sunlit bird
shatter the nacreous sky?

Just when clouds parted
was it luck to see the moon
eclipse the sun? This dark,
this midnight strange, at noon.

Just when clouds parted
was it moonlight falling
or a white hart
in the woodland clearing?

HURT

for ML

Is it the dread of loneliness
drives the headlong search?
And as for love (and bliss)
if it comes, consider how
pain is the risk involved
in opening up, all the mutual
uncertainties, all the frictions
over time between being
and belonging, all the taking pains
in the burnishing of selves.
And proof is the hurt at the point
of rupture. It is a waiting game -
that ineluctable dread, impossible
to squash but necessary to tame.



BLUE DRIFT

for MU

Where the dunes stand hill-wide
rabbits have nibbled the grass.
The sea thrift's pink glows
in the carrying calls of gulls.
Thoughts of you launched on the tide
join the estuary's outward flow,
a blue drift to the ocean mass.
Beyond the bay the Atlantic swells.
However high the seas rise,
let them be mountainous waves,
I would ride the sea's wild horses.
And if the sea craves
I face down the panic of vertigo,
let be. Where you lead I follow.



Artwork © Emma Barone

Breda Wall Ryan is inspired by the natural world and by the people and other animals who share it with her. Individual poems have won The Gregory O'Donoghue International Poetry Award, iYeats International Poetry Award and Dermot Healy International Poetry Award. Her debut collection *In a Hare's Eye* (Doire Press 2015) won the Shine/Strong Award 2016. Her second collection, *Raven Mothers*, was published by Doire Press in 2018. She holds an M Phil in Creative Writing from Trinity College, Dublin and is a founder member of Hibernian Poetry.



CHRISTENING PARTY AT CREEVY PIER

For Robert Arthur Ryan

The sea festooned in its froth of waves
echoed your great-grandmother's lace
that tumbled over your broderie gown
from piqué collar to where your toes
submerged in stiffened cotton.

The breeze ruffled your starched hem
and banished the wispy rain at sea,
and someone called to the children,
'A trawler, look!' Then silence,
while everyone turned just as the ocean
conjured a pod of sleek dolphins
ploughing a course for St. John's Point.

That day, we gave you a name that means
Bright, Shining, all the world at your feet,
earth, sea, air — and later, a lighthouse
to sweep your path clear
under the fire of stars.

Here is my wish for you:
may you always meet kindness,
and carry kindness enough in your heart
to douse the greed of bee-killers,
seed-stealers and plastic polluters;
may you one day pass this teeming ocean
to your own child, pristine
as great-grandmother's lace.

Breda Wall Ryan

SMALL HISTORIES

What's not to love?
The tray saves on legwork:
it ferries washing from the line
to the airing cupboard.

Upside down, it saves the hair
from sudden downpours.

The dull patina preserves
ancient teapot rings
and watermarks.

It flips from serving-tray
to wall art in a tick
by virtue of a mounting hook
and still life *découpage*
from gallery catalogues.

Scribbled on the back
are doctors' fees in guineas,
costings for christenings
and a funeral tea,
a former owner's weekly spend
on bread, milk, tobacco,
coal and Friday fish,
a laundry list.

*1964 the 10th of June the day
my life changed forever
is a mystery in copperplate.*

Why Morris Minor Jan '53
we'll never know. And never
understand what prompted us
to buy, unexamined,
'Lot 105, Good Tray'.

We're glad we did; we've tied
a pencil to the handle.

MORE QUESTIONS THAT KEEP ME AWAKE

I asked Google, 'Do dolphins sleep?'
Google answered with a page of links
to academic sites. 'Do whales sleep?'
I asked whalefacts.org late at night.
'Yes', came the answer,
'one hemisphere of Whale's brain
sleeps, the other powers the beast,
reminds it to swim and eat,
to breach and breathe.

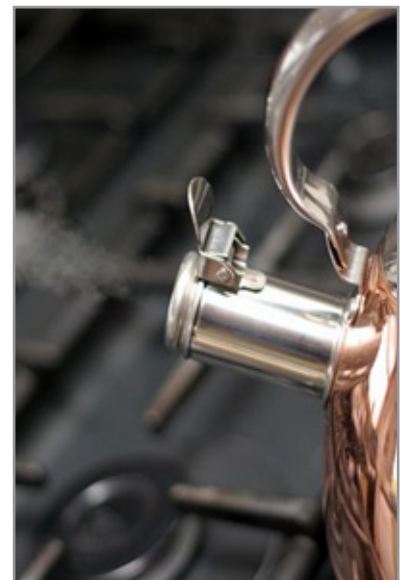
'What if I dream of whales?' I asked Moon.
Moon answered, 'Sometimes, a dream
is just a dream.' Then I asked Ocean,
'Do dolphins dream?' The waves whispered,
'Hush, curious human, sleep!'

SIDELONG GLANCE

A steam-gush escapes
the boiling kettle,
purls in kitchen quiet,

twists a yarn that ties
washing-up bowl
to ceiling,

a vapour rope
the mind climbs skywards,
clear of anchored day.



Charlotte Innes is the author of *Descanso Drive*, a book of poems (Kelsay Books, 2017). She has also published two chapbooks, *Licking the Serpent* and *Reading Ruskin in Los Angeles*, both with Finishing Line Press. Her poems have appeared in many publications, including *The Hudson Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Rattle* and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, with some anthologized in *Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond* (Beyond Baroque Books, 2015) and *The Best American Spiritual Writing for 2006* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006), amongst others.



TAR

Now the street has changed from gangster haven
to super chic, it must be broken down,
root bumps flattened and the tall trees, diseased
and rotten, felled for shrubs with shallower roots.

Without its veil of leaves, the sky's a vacant
mirror of the unshaded street, whose only
pretty thing is a glittering mound of tar
that forklifts scoop like coffee every morning.

"Another improvement for your convenience
and safety," says the median's big blue sign,
as if it were a station—or station of
the cross, more like, for a street about to die.

What drew me here? The light, I think, the air,
so enriched by trees and the sun's flickering,
it seemed a kind of grace, urging me
to plant, where the rubble is now, lavender,

rockery flowers, long since crushed or stolen.
The sun goes down. The workers prepare to leave.
Around the tar, they place a long straw pallet
bound with twine. It's like a yellow snake,

guarding the fruit of artifice, black
gemstones. Nothing like the lumps of tar
thrown up on beaches, dark disturbances
we've also made, although we never meant to.

Charlotte Innes. Photo credit: John Rou.

AUDREY'S RIDE

In blue dawn light, in lightly falling snow,
Audrey rides the gulch by railroad tracks
she's always loved. Her quarter horse Marqué
slides a bit, on ground so smooth and white,

like down, Audrey feels unfazed. She dreams
of old steam engines puffing down the line.
In summers, playing there, she's found a rusty
winch, a spike, frayed rope, and once a stone

with "Jack Cheng's Gang" chiseled on it.
Now, she can almost see the Chinese men
who tunneled mountain granite inch by inch,
the bloody falls, explosions, heaping bones

in snow. If she had lived then... It's sun-up.
Audrey heads for home. The mountain's red,
like hidden landfill suddenly ablaze,
the snow, still falling, leafleting the trail.

AFTER

Like bumps in asphalt forced by roots
Like muscles on the street,

Like scraps of orange sky that soothe
Like salt lamps hung in trees,

Like stars we see when power's out,
Like a life wrung dry of lies,

Like dusty rooms that won't be swept,
Like grit that hates the eye.



WHY DO SOME BIRDS SING AT NIGHT?

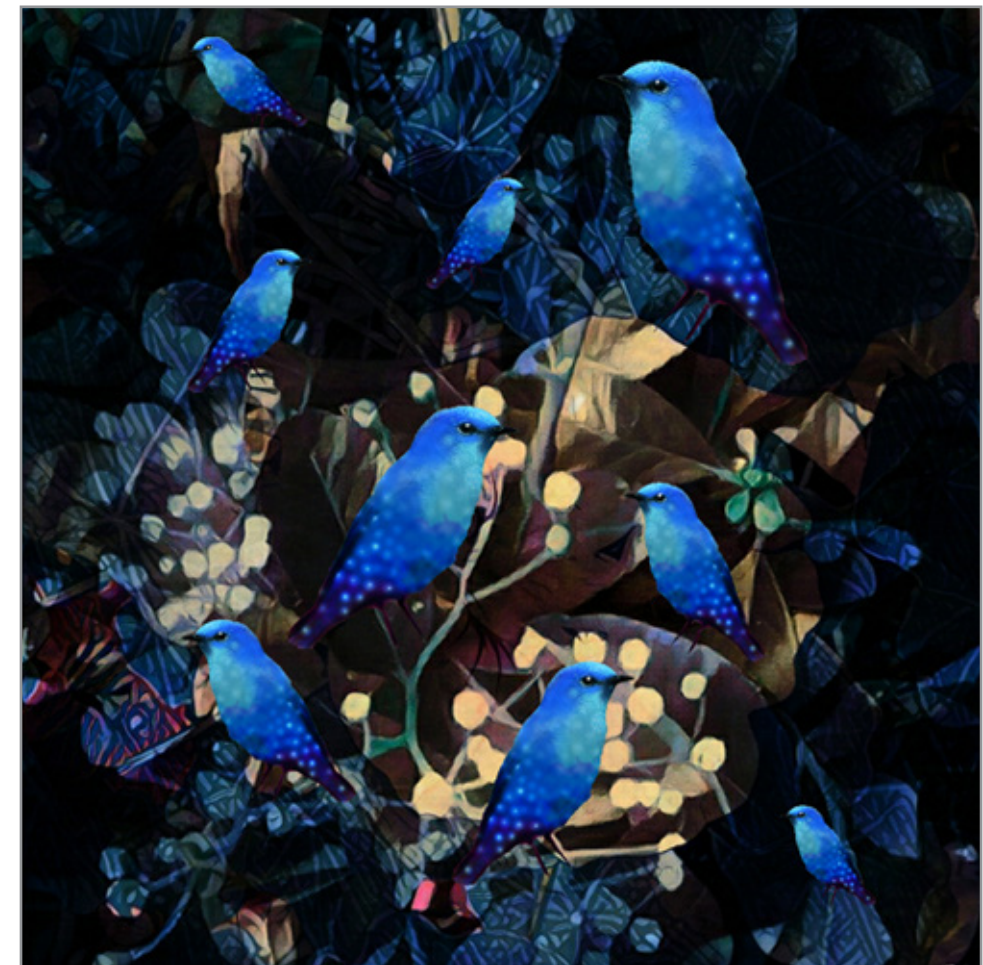
Perhaps because, with all the trees cut down,
there's still a bush to sing in,

to sing a prayer, perhaps, that grass, for all
the drought, has stashed its seeds,

or after weeks of unfamiliar rain,
worms and bugs abound.

Or do they grip the twigs, puff up their breasts,
halloo the dark to ground

because, some birds believe, they have to sing,
that daylight must be freed.



Artwork © Emma Barone

Colette is an award winning poet who resides in Galway in the West of Ireland. She writes in both Irish and English. She has fourteen publications which include a volume of short stories, *Ádh Mór*. She has one volume of English poetry, *Sundial*, which was published by Arlen House Press. She also has two dual language collections of poetry by the same publisher; *Between Curses: Bainne Géar*, and *In Castlewood: An Ghaoth Aduaidh*. Her work is on the syllabus in Primary, Secondary and Third Level colleges. Colette's latest collection (bilingual) is titled *Bainne Géar: Sour Milk*, which is available in hardback and softback, published by Arlen House, 2016. : she also has a master's degree in modern Irish. '*Magyar Dancer*' is her forthcoming collection of English poetry.



QUILL

At Devenish West
a solitary swan
raised his feathers,

turnstile into the past,
St Mary's Priory
had a Beckett story,

our bellies filled
despite the shadow
of purgatory. Birds

gave a winning performance,
an easterly wind carried
warm friends from far afield,

reeds on the banks of the Lough
waved towards a round tower,
I imagine early Christian '*tearmain*'

sanctuary for strong desires,
mixed coloured ink on calf skin,
I keep thinking of the Irish for parchment,

monastic writings
illustrate how soil is tilled,
vermillion of a shimmering lake.

Colette Nic Aodha

FROM TWENTY THREE

Water edges around blue and red
exclamation marks
buoys on the lake

red maple flutters
from the bow of the boat
anchored beneath, old tyres

like ones used on sides
of silage pit or to set the bonfire alight
on John's Eve, are lined three deep,

light uplifts cloud. Deciduous
frames the face of water,
autumn colours a light aircraft

as it lands on a strip of sunshine
to the right. I reside on floor twenty three
for seven recitals, make a wish.

MIDSUMMER

On this island a bull and his herd
hold a wake for a dead cow,
slip of a girl skinny dips
in the water behind sand dunes

Music revs lust to boiling point,
scores fertility alphabetically.
Hares stomp on a circular grave,
fishing boats unfasten in the heat.

CAVE

Large marble skull
arched and dark,
torrents of the deep,

Otherworldly chorus,
that calls Celtic heroes from their sleep,
sing not Shubert but Ó Éinniú,
quartz is coloured and opaque.

KILIMS

The colour of skin
and ripe pomegranates
elephant tusk and mountainside,
handwoven rugs fade into sunshine.

An opportunity for discussion whether
Christian, Buddhist or the nature of animal:
Chickens, horse and peacock are Islam,
above all this is art by the hands of ordinary

people of Iran ,east, west or north Kurdistan
who cannot write or read the Koran,
made from the flesh of an unrecognised land
a country of riches and beautiful wine,

A lemon tree sits inside the glass,
tomatoes grow outdoors
an elephant raises its wooden head,
four pyramids of glass.

VERTICAL DROP

Not wanting to fall at the last hurdle
and be found storing coal in the bathroom
or with cows lowing in the pasture of his bedchamber

he resolved to take her to dinner, his treat,
make polite simile and metaphor, she thought his speech
lilted classical and was impressed with the bachelor piece

despite previous undertakings never again to sit in his audience.
Later they waltzed and did the foxtrot beneath Egyptian
cotton and silken moon, he was all petals and silver gilding

but when the sun surfaced and without the consolation
of night's blanket it was the customary underground river
to be negotiated, potholing in treacherous straits.



© Colette Nic Aodha

Cynthia Schwartzberg Edlow is the author of the poetry collections *Horn Section All Day Every Day*, and *The Day Judge Spencer Learned the Power of Metaphor* (Salmon Poetry, 2018, and 2012, respectively), as well as the chapbook *Old School Superhero Loves a Good Wristwatch* (Dancing Girl Press, 2014). Honors include the Red Hen Press Poetry Award, the Tusculum Review Poetry Prize, Willow Review Prize for Poetry, a Beullah Rose/Smartish Pace Poetry Prize, and three Pushcart Prize nominations, two of which were from the Pushcart Prize Board of Contributing Editors. She has new poems in *Plume Poetry 7 Anthology*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Plume* (online), and forthcoming in *Gargoyle*.

UP, THERE

There is a common rumor musicians
who cannot read
music know when it is genuine
because they are *listening*.
A horse-drawn coach loaded
with shortcomings
thunders to mind's precipice. Stuffed
down among abraded heels and other ruffraff
in the blemished, inherited chest,
divergent plots lust to pick
the latch, yeah, in their due.

Tune your ear to
that feverish chatter of jubilation.

When starlings whoosh out
from the dense dark green
weeping fig, an urgent
breaking-through clot, and
willy-nilly radiate, up,
up, there, and points
north, that is them broadcasting
circumstances you haven't
yet an inkling. Now is the time for the thumb.
Drive.
Hell, outwit.



Cynthia Schwartzberg Edlow

ROBUST ROOM

I.
The brighter the flamingo the healthier
the bird. The merrier, more affluent. All that
beta-carotene feeding on unlucky shrimp
frosts their feathers a rich pink.

II.
This is why Ovid wrote that mythological
story about gods who
came in the form of beggars

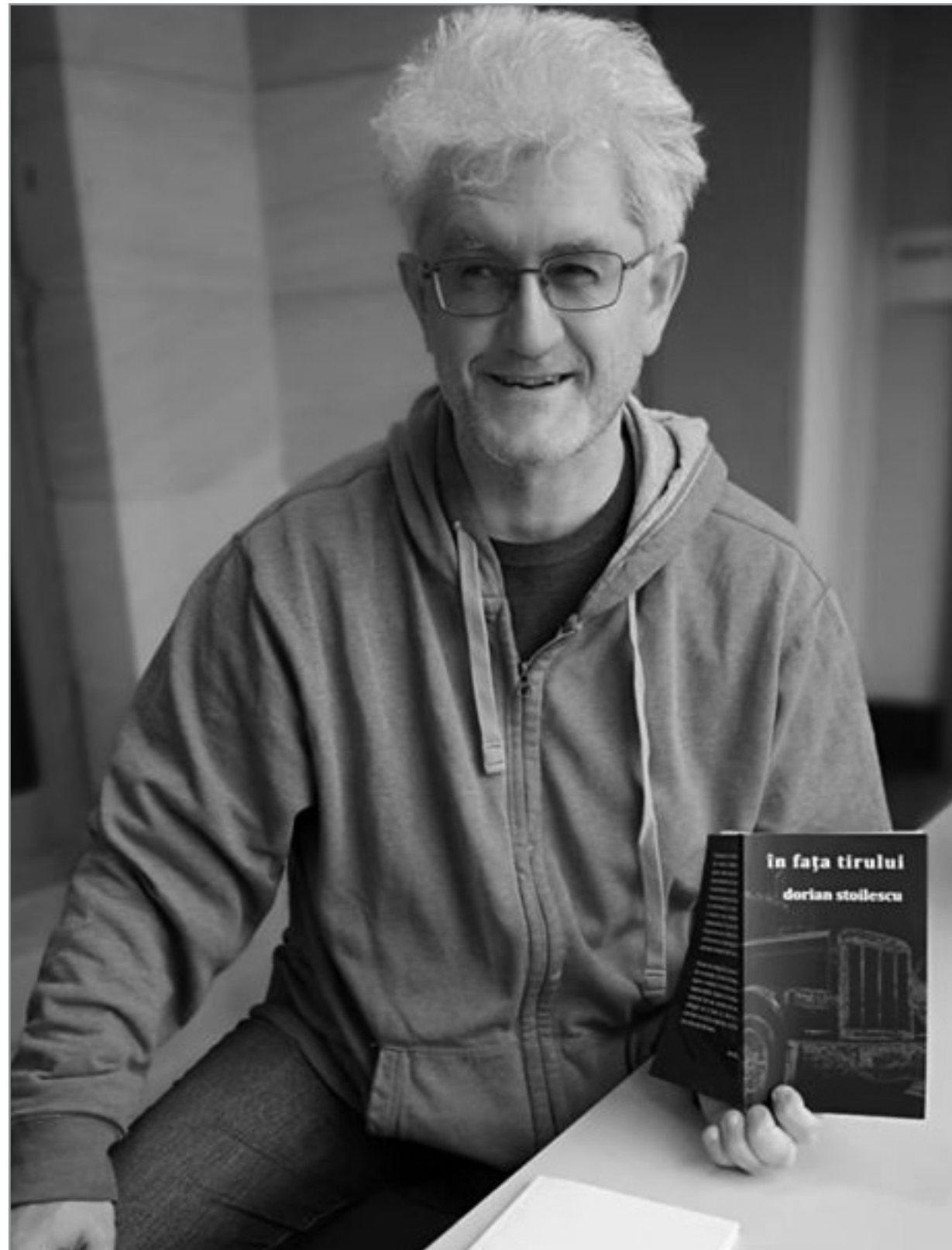
III.
All this long period, you know a man
from the sound of his voice
unless he is talking with
his mouth.
You make out some problems,
but the price could be paid
for the problems you could see.

IV.
The multitude has distributed attention.
The fair exchange concept
will barely sink in for them.
Even on the most precious sunny
day, conceptually or materially,
there is no fair there. It's
all gas.

V.
Lately, researchers have rooted out, deep
under the Saharan desert, preserved in rocks,
bacteria fossils that six hundred and fifty billion years ago,
soaked up sunlight, ate some magic
chlorophyll, and turned the oceans nothing
close to blue. Older than algae,
older than anybody. The first, hardly-there, living
organisms, painted Earth's earliest color
electrifyingly pink.
So that's nice.



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



INNOCENT GAMES

so you unknowingly would start hating all
as you make everyone guilty
for paralysing you, feeling the sky
starting to develop a sobriquets factory
about your name family & country
as all you have done are just weaknesses

the greatest insinuation you could hear
is the slippery service of those clamming
the lack of insinuation
by broking the pipes of tomorrow's dreams
amalgamating your feet and mouth
squirming your soul in quicksands

then whispering political correctness
they spread it like heroin
with cultural fair stories
tranquillizing you
making you numb
in front of all

and mesmerised
you attempt start talking
like them

Dorian Stoilescu

MY MOTHER HAD NO REGRETS

for my mother everything was clear
even the complicated things
were brutally direct
she simply had no regrets
life was simple
because she knew what she cannot do
and always did everything she could

my mother did not give me anything special
for us the food was just food
that's it
I don't know how much money had
Because never boasted about
nor did she grumble
but we always had enough
as much to reasonably do well

my mom talked in the right way
when it was needed
as it should
with all people
of all ranks
without fear

she was appreciative
only when something was perfect
then she was talking about it
as it would have been out of her hands
or a friend of lifetime

HERE ARE THE STARS

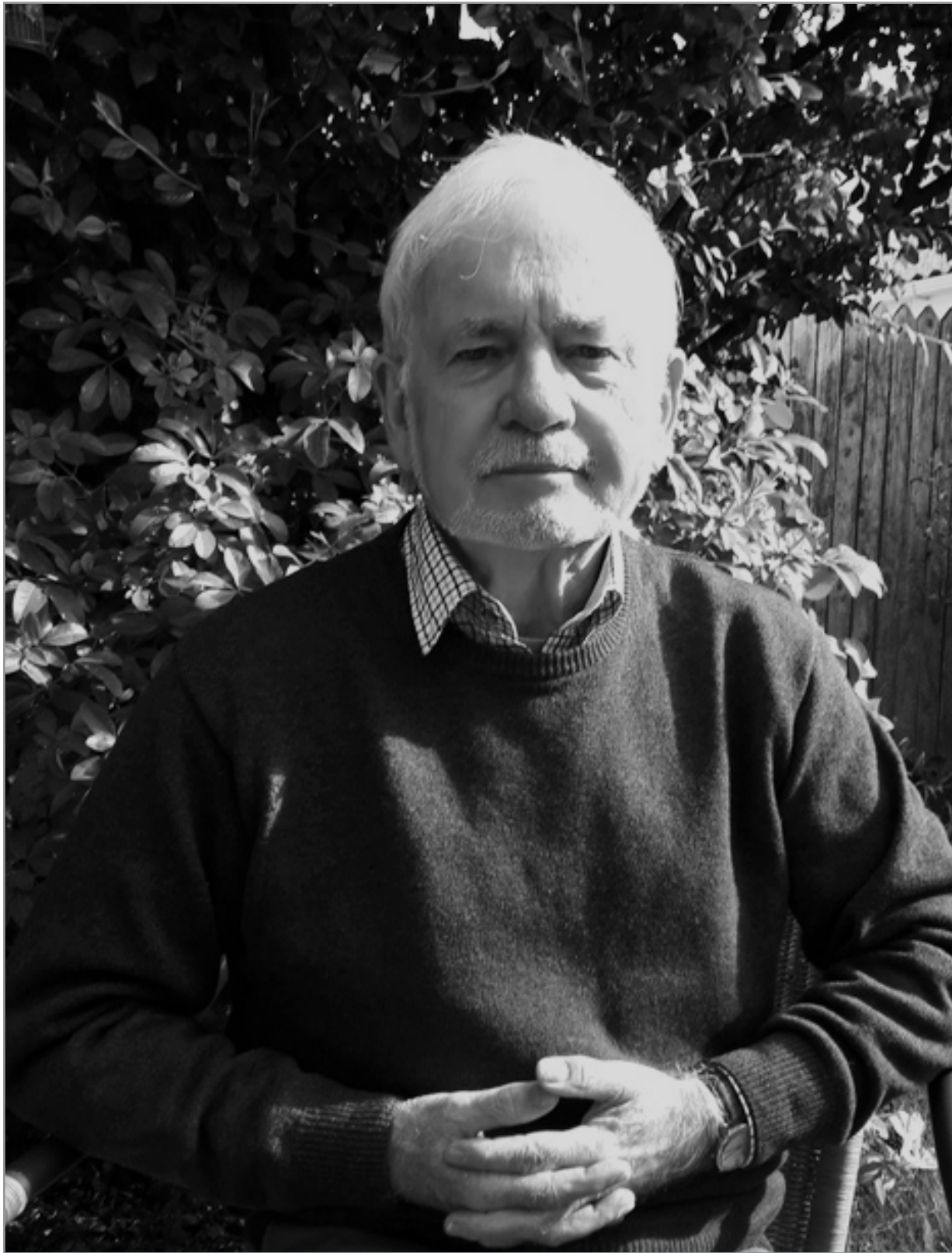
if the stars are gathered
above us
it's because someone
requested them
to be there
for us

it means somebody left us
the possibility – the duty – the chance
to keep them under consideration
so that stars not only enjoy selfishly
their own beauty as fairies
but also we – the dreams hunters –
to gaze at them breathing
their immortality

so if we can notice them
only at times
noticing their appearance
right after storms
with hopes of starting a new life
and chase a faraway light
as a new chance
riding fast
in a hurry
or walking without goals ...
all these are because someone decided
to be without haste
unmovable
always waiting for us

and if they stay very far away
it's due to our little patience
or because we could get burned
but maybe it's good to stay distant
forgetting them for a while
to celebrate
to be enchanted
to meditate
to rest & keep dreaming
getting reborn
from springs

Eamonn Lynskey is a poet and essayist whose work has appeared in many magazines and journals. He recently received a bursary from the Irish Writers' Union to spend a week in Room. His third poetry collection, 'It's Time', was published by Salmon Poetry in May 2017. More information at www.eamonnlynkey.com



THE SAFETY OF NUMBERS

How did they ever get around the world
with those old charts, our ancient mariners,
our bold explorers of the unknown vasts?
And did they think Herodotus had fixed
the boundaries with his two awkward lumps
depending south and east of Europe? Or
did Strabo ever lead a midshipman
to shout in loud excitement *Land Ahoy?!*

They'd heard reports of *terra incognita*
stretching from the horizon towards the rim
with monstrous creatures over-brimmed and men
with heads that grew out of their armpits,
humanoid fantasticals described
by those who'd ventured – but not ventured far,
in holy fear of falling off the edge
and into God's great anger at impertinence.

Possessed by incoherent certainties,
unfazed by years of being disbelieved,
they sailed with little but their intuition
as their guide— as still it is with those
defy the safety of numbers, choose
to steer beyond the known with Erikson,
convinced that almost everything that leads
to anything worthwhile is wagered on a hunch.

Eamonn Lynskey

TRACKWAY

Keenagh, Co. Longford, c.148 BC,

Eamhain Mhacha's fame was spreading,
Royal Cruachan Aí expanding
when this timber corduroy track
was laid to bridge these ancient wetlands.

Here, the heavy work of those
who felled the several hundred trees
and those who strained to load the carts
and haul them creaking to Corr Liath.

Here, the skill of carpenters
that split with axe and shaped with adze,
and here the work of dextrous hands
that wove the beds of brushwood mats.

These mortised joints, with tenons tongued
to lock exactly one to one.
were honed before the Inca masons
paved the Andean trails with stone.

A muffled sound of wooden cartwheels
seems to echo from these logs,
and thud of shaft-hole tool to linger
on the silence of the bog.



Artwork © Emma Barone

Edward O'Dwyer is poetry and fiction writer from Ireland. His poetry collection *The Rain on Cruise's Street* (Salmon Poetry, 2014) was Highly Commended in the Forward Prizes. The follow-up, *Bad News, Good News, Bad News* (Salmon Poetry, 2017) contains the Eigse Michael Hartnett award-winning poem 'The Whole History of Dancing'. The collection of very short stories, *Cheat Sheets* (Truth Serum Press) is his current book, which Donal Ryan describes as "wicked little gems" and Tanya Farrelly compares "to Woody Allen at his best" and included it in *The Lonely Crowd* journal's 'Best Books of 2018' list. A third poetry collection, *Exquisite Prisons*, is due from Salmon Poetry in Spring 2020. He has recently completed a sequel to *Cheat Sheets*, entitled *The Art of Infidelity*. He is currently attempting to write a first novel.



MILK

I discovered my wife was having an affair with the milkman. I came home on my lunch break to collect some papers I'd left behind me that morning, only to find them naked in the living room. He stood up and I burst out laughing. I didn't mean to seem as though I wasn't taking the situation very seriously, it's just that I couldn't help noticing that he looked just like a milk bottle himself. He was frightfully pale. Even his hair looked like a dollop of wispy fresh cream. I'd never met or seen him before, and my wife had never mentioned he was an albino. Only for the extraordinarily white penis sticking up, he was basically a man-sized version of the little bottles that arrive on the doorstep every morning.

Edward O'Dwyer. Photo credit: Niall Hartnett.

NIHILISM

There's been a pronounced streak of nihilism in my personality for as long as I can remember. All the puberty-awakening girls of my youth were just so enamoured by my broody, world-is-ending-so-I-couldn't-give-a-flying-fuck attitude, and so I honed it, used it to my gain at every turn.

Years later, I accused my wife of being rigidly faithful to me purely on the basis that, according to today's conventions, I would be considered rather appealing and attractive.

"You wouldn't be so loving and devoted if I were obese and hideous, would you?" I hissed at her.

"Actually, I believe I would, but I guess we'll never know, will we, since you are such a looker?" she answered plainly, and carried on chopping carrots for a casserole.

For months I consumed huge heaps of fatty foods, during which time I abandoned all of my extraordinarily painstaking hygiene and cosmetic practices. I took every opportunity to belch and fart in front of her.

"I bet you think about hooking up with other men all the time now, don't you?" I sneered one evening across the table, refusing to be taken for a fool by the candlelit dinner she had prepared for our anniversary.

"No, never," she said. "Despite your best efforts, and the fact that every other woman in the world would probably think you are a disgusting mess, to me you're still every bit as much the hunk I married, and I really couldn't ever desire anyone else."

This laying waste to my health and image went on for several more years and, against the odds, she seemed to remain very much in love, her dedication faultless. I started to feel terrible for having put her through it all, and decided I'd do so no more. She deserved better.

"I'm leaving you," I announced in my most callous tone. "I've met somebody else, you see, and we want to be together. She enjoys interpreting my underarm sweat patches as though they were abstract art pieces, and she insists upon using my naval as a bowl for her M&Ms when we watch a movie. You just can't compete with that, so you'll have to find somebody else."

"She's a very lucky woman," was the last thing she said as I waddled towards the door and adjusted myself to fit through the frame. The sincerity in her voice squeezed at my heart as I left her there. After all I'd put her through, she still meant those words with each and every fibre of her being.

POETRY

I've always been a sensitive type – bookish, many have put it – so it came as no surprise to anyone when I penned a book of poetry. My verses were, for the most part, accounts of my most intimate moments.

“As poignant as they are fearless,” my publisher said of the poems, and hailed what she described as their “unflinching desire to pick apart the most unpicked apart minutiae of love and lust.” I was so pleased they'd connected with the book so, and that they wished to print it and sell it around the world.

I dedicated the book to my wife and girlfriend. Caught up in the joys of publication, I failed to realise that they might discover the other's existence this way. I'd simply wanted to give each of them due credit.

It wouldn't have seemed right to acknowledge only one, and thereby to discredit the other. They'd equally inspired the volume, after all. The bodies in its pages were mine and theirs. Fair is fair.

My wife quickly divorced me and my girlfriend dumped me, and the reviews of the book have been rather unanimous in condemning my behaviour.

“Confessional Poetry Has Never Been More Confessional,” one of the headlines in an esteemed magazine read.

In so doing, however, I'm quite sure they've made the book an international bestseller. I've been raking in the cash because of them. It seems that every week it exists in another language. This week it was Swahili, while next week it will be hitting the shelves in Belarusian.



Artwork © Emma Barone

Originally from the Midlands, based in South Dublin, collections are published by New Island, AltEnts (Poetry) and Arlen House (Prose). Work features in anthologies by Dedalus, Faber & Faber, New Island, Poetry Ireland Review, Poetry Ireland/Trocaire, The Nordic Irish Studies Journal, Orbis (UK), The Jellybucket (USA), Correspondences, among others. Awards include A Hennessy/Sunday Tribune Emerging Fiction Award, The Oliver Goldsmith International Prize and a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship. She holds an M.Phil (Creative Writing) from The School of English, The Oscar Wilde Centre, Trinity College, Dublin. Currently facilitating creative writing in The Irish Writers Centre and Ardgillan Castle. *Berries for Singing Birds* (Arlen House) recently published (October, 2019).

JHARKHAND WOMAN

No graceful sway of silver on her head
water for her children's thirst.

Instead a sack of coal, a slake of black gold
beneath a crust of greed,

burning earth she walks across.
Down in the mines, poison hisses up

bubbles its uncontrollable fires.

It's as if she is walking on the backs of dragons
pawing the ground beneath her feet,

waiting to rear up on hind legs.



Eileen Casey

LOVELY ONE

Years ago, I brought you home from The DSPCA.
Your markings reminded me of mackerel,
fresh from the sea at Howth.

Children squealed to see you but you hissed
when I tried to stroke you.
Sharp teeth bit into my wrist, talon claws
left me sore and bleeding.
Children knew to leave you be.
'Love will teach him new beginnings', I said.
They shook their heads.

In dressing gown and winter boots, I took you to the garden
just as light breathed through the trees. Tethered
to me by a harness tied with shoelaces, secured
by a dog's lead, you didn't take fright, run.

Shapes and scents pricked your ears.
You savoured caress of grass, chewed Montbretia
stalks. Leaves skittered from the trees.
Wind tossed clothes on the washing line.
A crane flew overhead, cowered you against the shed.
I soothed you with soft murmurs, called you 'baby'
and 'Lovely One'.

I wondered who or what it was
took away your feline grace? Silenced your deep
purring engine? Days passed over like drifting clouds.

Three months it took before you knew my scent,
trusted I would not break your heart.
So you could slit your eyes in dozy sleep,
curl up and dream your cat dreams,
my mackerel striped, acrobat cat.

When I clean the grate,
you lean close to smell the cinders, an ancient smell
that takes us both to other fires.
In these exquisite moments, your long tail
winds a curling trail around the moon.
I marvel at black lightning stripes
that streak down your beautiful mackerel back.
Lovely one.

MARGARET ATWOOD'S HAIR

Hawthorn Tree at Muckross Abbey, Killarney, 2019

Bare branches defy gravity, shape this wise,
prophetic woman, hair electrical, upward
currents (like the photograph, The Sunday Times
(Style Section)).

Branch-shafts crackle like Michaelangelo's
Creation of Adam to a sky pierced ice-eyed blue.
Only a stone's throw, the gravestone
ruins of men, Muckross Abbey lit by dawn.

No chick like fuzz or muzzy growth.
Sinewy. Bone. Leaves fallen rustle
September grasses. Quilt slumbering
fields. Until scarlet berries offer poultice
to a splintered season. Spring's flowering

testament. Longevity. Endurance.

These vertical tendrils don't tumble towards
sleep dewed earth. Sprinkled by stars, moonlight
weaves silvery paths along protective
twig-lines. Halos of shade and light.

Hawthorn branches cast long shadows.
Guardian. Healer. Soothsayer. Thorny.
Cows keep their distance.



Artwork © Emma Barone

Eleanor Hooker is an Irish poet and writer. Her third poetry collection is due for publication in 2020. She has poems forthcoming in Poetry Ireland Review, Poetry magazine, Winter Papers and Pratik. She is a winner of the autumn 2019 Poetry Society Members Poems competition, and recently shortlisted for the Bridport Poetry Prize and commended in the Listowel Writers' Week Poem of the Year 2019. Eleanor is a helm on the Lough Derg RNLi lifeboat. She began her career as a nurse and midwife. For more details visit Eleanor's website <http://eleanorhooker.com/>



LIFEBOAT

for Robert Spier, i.m. Jean Spier

We drop anchor off *Vikings Landing*,
run engines astern 'til *Elsinore* holds fast
due east of Inis Cealtra. Against standing
waves, and wind that harps the masts
pitched in the harbour – crew name land in sight,
list the ways of water, recount Ophelian acts that bore
us to the lake's darkest stage, and, in failing light,
as a low mist rolls over the *Hare*, and hounds rain before
a squall, we weigh anchor and make for home one final time
in *Elsinore*, grateful for a new Atlantic to this inland sea –
no longer will we fear the fog's fret, that mimes
a snow-blind clime inside our eyes, now, when we leave the quay,
four up, our *Jean Spier* will signal those in peril, or in strife,
that we her volunteers may do our work – carry home, save a life.

Eleanor Hooker. Photo Credit: Peter Hooker

BECAUSE LAUGHING WITH A DEAD MAN REALLY IS INFECTIOUS

With one eye looking at you the other looking for you,
he startled me when he ate the lit end of his cigarette.
All I did was ask for the keys to the *dug-out*.
Night Sister said he was odd, this man,
the Porter, and not to linger. Another night
he set the scene before he locked me
in the morgue for near two hours.
Me - barely eighteen and up from the country -
he drew the screens round all the curtained
spaces, so tagged big toes would fidget
at the man laid out inside his coffin,
he opened the door to the cutting room,
switched the light so I could see the charred
and terrifying remains of a burned woman,
arms outstretched, an awkward W
on the dissecting table, then hit the master
switch with that image repeating itself
inside the dark, inside my head.
I heard the bolt and realised he'd left
me there. I sat curled up inside the door,
afraid to shout lest I should waken the dead;
there were lots nearby, 'twas a bitter winter.
"What class of a jackeen fucker
is that eh, to lock you in a place like this
and the night that's in it. 'Tis freezing in here
so it is. You alright girleen ógeen?" the man said,

sitting up, resting his elbows on the sides
of his coffin. I explained how I'd gone mad
briefly, imagining I was conversing with a dead
man sitting up inside his coffin. He laughed
a great Kerry laugh and I laughed too, because laughing
with a dead man sitting up inside his coffin
really is infectious. He caught my anxious glance
at the cutting room door, still ajar. Told me the poor
girleen nearby would not come out. He would speak
for the ten of them, (the one we brought earlier,
still struggling to the other side, didn't count),
and would keep me company 'till they came
and got me, so I wouldn't have the life frightened
out of me. By way of small talk, he asked me how
the training went. I'd started on the men's ward,
I told him, explained how every day Sister asked
me to bathe old men, without *their PJs* on, in a bath,
how nobody said the name over the bed was the surgeon's,
not the patient's and how I'd thought it weird
there were so many Mr. Webb's on the ward,
how I was having trouble learning off
the nervous system, how the canteen staff shouted
at us poor student nurses, so we were afraid
to eat there, and were hungry all the time,
and losing weight, how Tom Jones was a male nurse
and coming to the ward to work, not sing,

BECAUSE LAUGHING WITH A DEAD MAN REALLY IS INFECTIOUS *contd...*

how me and Mags were mugged
outside the GPO and I had £25 stolen, £25
my Dad had given to me to buy my nurse's cape,
and how I couldn't tell him now, ashamed as I was,
but really how I'd met some kind people in Dublin,
how determined I was to make a good nurse.
I asked him how he was feeling and we had another round
of laughter when he answered "a bit stiff today".
He said he wasn't afraid of going into the ground
because they were taking him back to his home
place by the sea. Unexpectedly he began to sing.
I could hear the wild Atlantic breaking against his lifetime,
could hear the gulls cry out his name, smell sea-salt
on his old brown suit. He stopped after a bit, the singing
made him sad. Eileen a third year, who had taken to
minding me, kept calling me a *culchie gobshite*.
And I was. But I was learning fast that there were more
than just good and bad people in the world;
there were lots of shades of in between.
Eileen noticed I was gone and came and found me
locked in the morgue. She took me to the *dug-out*
down the back stairs, made me eat hot soup
and thick brown bread. She told me not to be
a *culchie gobshite* with tales of the talking dead.



Artwork © Emma Barone



A native of Galway, Ireland Geraldine Mills is a poet and fiction writer. She has published five collections of poetry, three of short stories and a children's novel. She has won numerous awards for her fiction and poetry, including The Hennessy New Irish Writer Award, a Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship and has been awarded two Arts Council bursaries. Her fiction and poetry are taught on Contemporary Irish Literature courses in the USA. She is a mentor with NUI and a member of Poetry Ireland Writers in Schools' Scheme. Her most recent poetry collection, *Bone Road* (Arlen House) and some of her other titles are now available from <https://www.bookdepository.com/search?searchTerm=geraldine+mills&search=Find+book>

These poems were written as part of the dance project 'Language and Limb' directed by choreographer/dancer Patricia Glynn and performed at the Galway Dance Theatre Festival, May 2019.

THE ANIMAL OF HER BODY

The animal of her body slinks
along the forest floor,
scenting out the music of green,
leaves feverish with life.

She flows from the centre of the earth,
sinuous, liquid bone.
Moves to the music of what she always was,
of what she can become.

There is only this moment
of limb and leg and breath.
There is nothing else.

Geraldine Mills

FEET HOLD YOU STEADY

Feet hold you steady to the earth.
A hand grasps the story,
pulls it down to live among us.
Swirls and little wisps of stars
cling to your hands.

Eyes held straight,
each step brings you closer.
The centre of all you know
held in the curve of your bones.
Feet hold you steady to the earth.

THE OLD MAN

Looking down
you see the old man
bent over his spade,

the clutch of clay
making a perfect
nest for seed

that carries
the beginning
of its own in it

until time will push root
through the earth,
stem into light and sun.

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



TIPS FOR MEN

Wear a smile,
Dare to show doubt, even self doubt,
Wear a man bag.

Wear a smile
And a man bag
With a bottle of water,
Lip salve and chocolates
For you loved one.
Wear a smile,
Wear sadness, compassion, when
She feels it, share it.
wear a man bag,
wear a smile,
turn your head to look at her,
when she speaks.
Tell her she's lovely
And that you love her.
Use your eyes to see beauty, symmetry.
Wear a smile,
Wear a man bag,
Practice saying 'yes', lets
And wear a smile.
Practice self doubt.
You might be wrong sometimes,
After all.

Greta Sykes

ON THE BEACH

Between the solid back of my lover,
 like a rock, and the ocean wave
 thunder in a rhythm of breath
 the time is right for me to concentrate
 on my microbiomes, take shape as drift wood,
 seaweed, or a shell, washed up on the shore,
 and placed amidst the grains of yellow sand,
 a bacteria, an archaea, a eukaryote,
 immutable, indefatigable, eternal,
 ancient from deep inside the ocean,
 I live on, skin on skin, flesh close to flesh,
 His back my easel on which I paint
 The story of my life.

AUTUMNAL LONDON

Rustling along the pavement
 dragged by the wind,
 The yellow and ochre leaves
 Whisper secret messages.
 Then they lie still, lost in the big city.
 A gust blows them into a pile
 And onwards, drifting,
 The asphalt is unforgiving,
 It berates nature.

Tiny humans, alert and anxious,
 Pile up like leaves
 At the crossroad.
 The lights blink red, then orange, then green.
 Green is for bulldozers, tractors
 And huge lorries.
 Between gigantic buildings,
 Architecture and technological toys
 For giants, they look blank.
 A man, stone-faced, strides across my path,
 Plugs in his ears. A frail woman,
 Her black garb fluttering like a sail,
 Her face hidden in cloth,
 Signals defeat.

The huge yellow pipes outside the British
 Museum, a preparation for an escape
 to another planet.
 This one is used up. A sheet of rain
 Passing like a glass wall I can pass through.
 I think of nothing.
 Before me a giant crane digs
 Deep into the intestines of earth
 Trying to steal her life
 And sell it to a robot.

Hedy Habra has authored three poetry collections, most recently, *The Taste of the Earth* (Press 53 2019). *Tea in Heliopolis* won the USA Best Book Award and *Under Brushstrokes*, finalist for the USA Best Book Award and the International Book Award. Her story collection, *Flying Carpets*, won the Arab American Book Award's Honorable Mention and was finalist for the Eric Hoffer Award. A fourteen-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net, her work appears in numerous publications. Her website is hedyhabra.com



OR HOW SHE TRIES TO HIDE HER SILENT EXPECTATIONS

After a photograph by Susan Azar Porterfield

You can almost feel her passage
in the trail of a fragrance left
by the wind, sense the frisson felt

in the window's veils slightly ruffled
by the displaced air as she placed
the iridescent hand-blown vase

over the redwood table, an ardent
backdrop to the bouquet gathered
from her yard, sink into the bluebells'

music echoing the tremor
of the lily of the valley's arching
clusters, hear whispers deepening

heartbeat hear the lift and pause
of her quickening breath as she
counts the minutes till the

doorbell rings when the doorbell
rings whenever the doorbell rings
if the doorbell rings.

Hedy Habra

TO MY FRIEND FROM PERU

*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
Dante. Inferno*

I.

At forty, you plunged into
your own
not in a dream or a vision,
your heart refused
to mark time.
A stranger's lips pressed yours,
instilling
warmth until your body awoke.

It has been four months
now, Margarita.
You have not said a word,
lost in a thick fog, in a world
unknown,
only your eyes move,
faster
when we talk.

December has come, its snow,
indifferent
like your hospital bed
set in a room where two
lovers' breaths
once steamed tall window panes.

In the darkness, he sleeps
with your absence,
in search for a sign, losing,
night after night, the memory
of light.
His mind wanders, following
a shadow, a footstep.

Arms, hands, never the same,
hold you, rub
your skin, trying to strike
notes from a mute piano.
Voices,
fading in dense brume, beg
you come back.

Fingers open cabinets,
sort out papers, pictures,
disturb your dust,
caress
your children's hair.
The same moan greets them
mouth agape, eyes restless.

continued overleaf...

TO MY FRIEND FROM PERU *contd...*

I.

Yesterday, I read aloud Lorca's
 poem to you.
 The one you loved,
"Romance sonámbulo"
 Two lovers,
 unable to reunite, a green
 silvery night
 shrouds their tragic end.

I could hear you say:
*"Verde que te quiero verde.
 Verde viento. Verdes ramas."*
 My voice weakened with the
 last words:
*"El barco sobre la mar
 Y el caballo en la montaña."*

Suddenly you were sobbing,
 sobbing and crying,
 Margarita.
 "Did she understand?"
 I asked. The nurse replied:
 "It's hard to say.
 She cried a lot today."

II.

Three years have gone
 by, Margarita.
 Your sighs,
 unsettling mist
 of invisible signs,
 inaudible
 fragments
 of a broken mosaic.
 And your skin
 so smooth,
 your hair, growing
 wild vines in the rain,
 its rising sap
 resists the twist
 of the brush.

The nurse straightens
 your back,
 holds the comb,
 passes the scissors.
 The biting crisscross
 of metallic shears.
 I trim, curling
 docile locks
 around my fingers.

continued overleaf...

TO MY FRIEND FROM PERU *contd...*

II.

Uneasy, we talk,
hands, fingers,
stroking your arms,
your back,
soft bristles
flown all over,
down to your waist.

The round brush swells,
featherlike,
in hot lustrous waves.
I think of my mother,
how she hid
her eyes
with both palms
when I'd style her hair
how she'd complain
"stop pulling. . .
my roots are so tender."

III.

Wrapped in diapers,
fed by a tube,
you don't hear
the doorbell when
your daily
portion of sterile food
arrives packed
in cardboard boxes.

A mute presence
on a wheelchair
in a corner
of the family room,
your eyes stare
at the ceiling while
plans are made
to take you back to Peru,

to the deep violet-blue sky
you once knew.
You used to say
when the kids grow up,
they might study in Lima.
Now your gray
is showing.
We're thinking of color
if all agree.

continued overleaf...

TO MY FRIEND FROM PERU *contd...*

III.

A nurse rubs your limbs,
kneads, folds,
unfolds,
hoping to revive
a nerve, a muscle,
arms, legs,
hardening
into branches, misshapen
unearthed roots.

Back home, unable
to read
for days,
the smell of you
clouding
every page.
Time after time,
we stopped
pretending
you'd understand,
repeating
motions
like automatons.

Now you're back to Peru,
your birthplace,
where your elders
once lived with their dead,
honoring
their remains.
There, your young heart
keeps beating.



© Hedy Habra

Jack Grady is a war veteran and a founder member of the Irish-based Ox Mountain Poets. His poetry has been published in Ireland, the United Kingdom, France, the United States, Canada, Indonesia, Portugal, India, and Nepal. He read in Morocco at the 3rd annual *Festival International Poésie Marrakech*, as the poet invited by its committee to represent Ireland, and he read recently as the poet from Ireland at the 5th annual *Poesia a Sul*, in Olhão, Portugal. His poetry collection, *Resurrection*, was published by Lapwing Publications in October 2017 and was nominated for the T.S. Eliot Prize.



A PROPHET SELF-CENSORED

Every day, he feels like a sole survivor
whose platoon was caught in a crossfire,
who cowers under friends who are dead
while bayonets of the enemy probe to decide
if he ever had the guts to be alive.

With every fake revelation, every media-
show-trial interrogation, he shrinks into a corner
of silence and shame. He's fed lies from airwaves
at breakfast and dinner and agrees they are truth absolute
so that scraps and bones will still roll onto his plate.

He avidly obeys every order for his mind to remain
distracted and dull, and, for secret intelligence
the reports he now reads are only scandal and sports.
Daily, he's barraged by incessant harangues
devised to keep us divided,

prodded to embrace either CNN
or Let's Make America Great Again,
the white robes of the KKK or the black masks of Antifa,
the dictates of the Empire's client state in Brussels
or the Brexit delusion of a greater Great Britain.

continued overleaf...

Jack Grady

A PROPHECY SELF-CENSORED

contd...

Once, he had the vision of a Trojan Cassandra
and was honest and brave,
but he was branded a conspiracy theorist.
Others said they would silence him into shit
with brass-knuckles if he kept on like a peacenik.

Though he's foreseen that a demon
the world twice witnessed
sprouting from a cloud over a city snuffed out
will soon lift with its fist the heads of us all
over sediment and schist in a world without breath,

he now chooses to be blinkered, mute and cowed,
afraid to be shunned or shouted down.

ANNO DOMINI 2019

After Salvatore Quasimodo's 'Anno Domini MCMXLVII'

Will the time ever come
when the thundering of drums
in a dirge behind coffins will end
when we are done with the wrecking of cities
and with fists of iron
plunging from above
with the pummelling of lives
and with the splattering of blood
as on a toddler alone
terrified and crying
beside its dead mother
in a photograph snapped
in a train station bombed-out in China
or at a recent feast for a wedding
without photos in Yemen
where everything but bones
was annulled by drones?
Will the time ever come
when I am able to stop shouting
'Why, my God, have you forsaken us?'
Will a taste for milk and honey
ever replace the vengeful detritus
of hatred and death
that hungers in our breasts?
Will we ever be allowed
to bury forever
our missiles under meadows
of sunflowers?

THE STROKE

When I heard the news,
I saw myself again at six years old
behind the bow of a rowing boat
and watching my parents

become smaller than toys
as strokes of the oars
took me further from them
on Lake Lashaway's shore,

while my uncle, as he rowed,
replayed in his mind a single-sculls' heat,
as he strove to repeat his championship win
with strokes approaching ram speed.

I turned to watch his back extend
from his taut waist with a new stroke,
then expand as it rose
into the twin mountains of his shoulders,

and it reminded me of the broad V
splashed over the black-and-white screen
of the TV on Saturday mornings
in the opening scene of *Victory at Sea*.

He was my hero. Unbeatable
like I believed the U.S. Navy to be,
and he was a famous swimmer, too,
for I knew of the medals he had won

when he outswam all comers
at the World's Fair in 1939,
before the war he and my father
would win had dared to begin.

I don't know why they call those things strokes –
what finally did him in –
but, when it came to rowing and swimming,
no stroke was too much for him.



AN EYE IN THE STORM

It's not the man suspended by rope tied to his ankles
over the rubble of a blown-up butcher shop,
but the swarm of flies feasting on the raw meat
of his genitals.

And it's not the bloody entrails exposed, yet still intact,
or the flaps of flesh ripped back from the open belly,
but the charred arms without hands
and still trying to grasp.

And it's not the shock of seeing the body kicked
or the head swinging like the pendulum bob of a longcase clock
to tick away some time before the next attack,
but its one remaining eye

watching us
watch it.



Artwork © Emma Barone

Jean O'Brien has five collections to her name, her latest her *New & Selected Fish on a Bicycle*, was published by Salmon. She is an award winning poet having won the prestigious Arvon International (UK), The Fish International and been placed or Highly Commended in many others, including the Forward Prize, she was awarded a Patrick & Catherine Kavanagh Fellowship in 2017, and holds an M. Phil from Trinity College, Dublin and tutors in Creative Writing.



FIRING LINE

O have you ever looked down the barrel of a gun,
saw the possibility of a bullet tunnel its bore and blast
from the blank O?

O I remember in the 1970s being told the story
of a gaggle of girls linked arm-in-arm on Belfast's Falls Road
and how laughing and jeering at the untried squaddies

they marched past, one girl more shy, chin tucked down
to hide her grin, when a soldier walking backwards
turned suddenly and his self loading rifle tangled in the strap
of her bag. O she screamed and tried to run,

both of them panicked, they slugged it out
until he cocked his weapon, took aim,
she ducked, his mates set him straight.
an uneasy peace was restored. O the fright.

O how once as I posted a letter, a balaclava wearing
young buck burst in, jived up, nervously wielding a gun,
aiming every which way 'till we dived and hit the dust.

O and sometimes the fact that you don't bite a bullet
or lick the lead is flim-flam and down to sheer luck.

Jean O'Brien

LUSH

The crop is gathered in next door's
garden, oversized green and blue
plastic tubs brim -filled
with the flesh and blood of tomatoes .

For days they are left cut and slashed
fermenting under a fine muslin net.
I with my holiday makers eye, but
a gardener nonetheless, wonder

what they are at. Another September day
of endless sun and something has changed,
between my morning ablutions and
the charged cup of coffee.

The child bright tubs are upended
and on the trestle table large tin trays
are spread thin with the tomatoes,
the aluminium edges shine as they catch light

and slowly the bruised lush fruits
start to shrink and dry. These will brighten
the coming cooler days, stored red suns
in glass jars bursting like rays when the lids

are lifted, the scent of summer flagrant
in a n Irish winter kitchen.

CLOUD BURSTS

The air above our heads is bloody,
salmon streaks strafe the sky, yellow mackerel
whisp and God light radiates.

Our minds are clouded like whiskey in cut glass
or a tumbler of ouzo with water added.
We are grappling with foggy thinking, our words

are forming storm clouds and lightning streaks
unchecked through our teeth, precipitations
are on their way, we carp at the atmosphere.

Above bereft of light the colours darken,
red becomes ashy rose, yellow mustards out
and a faint blue divides earth and sky. Contrails

of destruction dissolve as snow and you and I divide
ourselves with cloud bursts of invective, tears are
our rain as we make bad weather.

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



OCTOBER, AND I RESCHEDULE ANOTHER CANCER TEST

The thin sun comes through the clouds occasionally,
enough to make you miss the rain.

I've put off yet another test I'm required to get
to check my body for disease. For cancer,

the sneaky thief. They're monitoring. Me,
I'm watching the slow dissolution of my dahlias,

the way my maples turn from red to black.
Autumn here always feels fleeting – the dark

of winter creeps in too soon. So I am staying vigilant
for losses, for anything untoward. I'm watching the yellow

Hunter's moon wink between clouds. I can smell
smoke and decay. It is beautiful. I don't want

to know anymore about the decay in my own body.
Let me escape into this cold air, the cry of blackbirds.

Jeannine Hall Gailey

IN THE IN-BETWEEN

between summer and fall,
between dead and alive,
drifting as easy as an old Paul Simon
song under the haunted Harvest moon.

My therapist asks, are you thinking about suicide,
and I said, well, not right this second. I was joking.
Some days all your rose petals fall,
and you sleep eleven hours a day.

End of September, the blue delphinium
is bluer than the somber sky, such a surprise.
Like this: you will expect nothing,
and then you'll get the diagnosis, the punchline,

the resolution. I've never been one of those people
who considers the journey the best part of the trip.
I hate the journey. It's long and boring and I'm
always parked next to someone taking the arm rest

or coughing all flight long. There is apathy
in the change of seasons, in the season where
you are no longer young but not yet too old.
You are an apple on the tree, not ready to fall, yet.

The late nights resolve with a weak sunrise,
fog on the windows. I'm not ready to die
but can't quite put myself back into the line
of fire, get myself in the game of life.

The sky is bare and the scattering birds
aren't any bird in particular, not sparrows or starlings,
just the flash of movement in the dark branches.
In the moments of in-between, even living

can feel like a chore. Don't be bashful. You know
you are one more cup of hot coffee, a shower,
a walk under that moon, a guitar riff, a book,
a check in the mail, a day without pain, away from finished.

Jim Burke, lives in Limerick, Ireland, and is Co-founder with John Liddy of The Stony Thursday Book. His poems have appeared in the Shamrock Haiku Journal, the Literary Bohemian, the Crannog Poetry Journal, the Stony Thursday Book, the Revival Poetry Journal, the Shot Glass Journal, Unbroken, Skylight 47, and Live Encounters Online Magazine. He is a member of The Irish Haiku Society and is on the committee of the Limerick Writers Centre. Some of his haiku are featured in the anthology 'Between the Leaves' edited by Anatoly Kudryavitsky.

SUN'S UP

I listen to Jimmy
Singing Bob Singing Woody
All the way from Austin to Lickadoon
If you get my drift

I could have lived in different times
Makes me feel pretty darned lucky
I may have many miseries
Jimmy LaFave's voice is not one of them



Jim Burke

THE WEATHER IN IRELAND

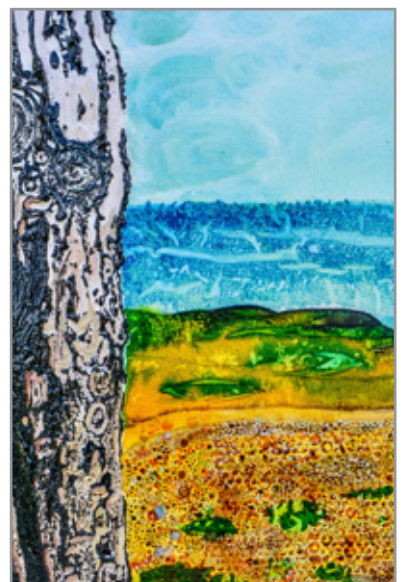
Our run down version of light:
scatters crows into evergreen trees
flows over rooftops
empties dogs
out of farmyards and into
the dry stalls of barns.

Even flies hide beneath white window sills.
Helpless telephone wires drip.

What happens mornings when the blinds fly up?
We look to the west
past the tall bamboo
and the drenched grass and know one day
we will not look back at all of this
and laugh.

VISITING ENGLAND

Roll away
on the six eighteen train
from Cambridge to Bishop's Stortford
red eyed, after a late night
only for each other
more after more
kiss and kiss, where
the world's made
of kisses only
foreheads pressed together
eyes kissing, eyes whispering
only kisses, kisses only
eyes after eyes only
Roll away



Laura Johanna Braverman is a writer and artist. *Salt Water*, a collection of poetry, was published in 2019 by Cosmographia Books. Her poetry has appeared in journals including *Levure Litteraire*, *Live Encounters*, and *Sky Island Journal*, and is forthcoming in the anthology *Awake in the World, Volume II* by Riverfeet Press. She lives in Lebanon and Austria with her family.



MANTRA

1

Bound for Swami's lodging, she slits her foot.
Crosswise, mid inner arch. Something hidden
off the path—serrated stone edge, stray glass;
can't recall. And his name? Yes. That was it;

how it comes back, no idea. There he
is now on a laptop screen—twenty years
gone by with his wide doleful eyes. He looks
the same. Was he young before?

2

She slits her foot bound for Swami's lodging.

Right, left? Was it glass? She turns back, makeshift
wash in the room, a plaster stuck, nearer
disintegration than she thought. Sick with
impending divorce and phantom illness.

Laura J Braverman

continued overleaf...

MANTRA *contd...*

3

She slits her foot. She sneaks, sneaks from her friend.
He's a doctor—endocrinologist,
to be exact, half German, half Japanese.

He likes to snicker at camp rules. At quirks
of certain swamis in their orange robes.
She throws in her bit with him from time to
time and watches ashram life with measured

distance—but then the easy winds rise up—

4

from the turquoise expanse at ashram edge.
They unsettle broad paper-like leaves of
Caribbean trees. 4:30 morning
bells call acolytes from sleep. Breakers thump

in tidal time on packed white sand; birds twitch
in the half-light before song and flight.

5

At four weeks, there's a choice to make—pick one
mantra from a sheet. With it comes a name.

The doctor and she agree: strange, this group
transmission. Indoctrination? Her friend
declines the offer. She's unsure, then says No.

6

She should be somewhere else—keeping house, vows.

Instead, she's hurt. The German swami says:
"You've run away, just like a child." So much
for heeding that inner voice. Who has she
hurt the most? One of two is she—unhoused,

a traveler now, breaking camp a habit.
A one-woman Bedouin tribe stumbles

over a self-made desert. There once was
a tent. She lost it. A carpet—lost. Tea—spilled.

7

Though she's said No to the mantra, there's still
an all-night fest of chanting to attend.

Perched cross-legged atop a rolled up vinyl
mat, she sways—unsure of time in the metal
grey between dark and dawn's first lit match.

8

What happens then? Subconscious life coming
through? Lack of sleep? The group chants one mantra
countless times. Some place or part in her wakes

to the ancient phoneme cluster—sounds of light,
they've been called. She chooses them, or is it
the reverse? She writes to the ashram chief,
Swami S—. Yes. She wants a mantra after all.

continued overleaf...

MANTRA

9

She slits her foot bound for Swami's lodging.

Serrated stone edge, stray piece of glass. She's mostly barefoot here. Her uniform is unwashed. It should be clean for this—

10

she arrives with plastered foot at his door.
Soon they face each other cross-legged
on the floor. The sad-eyed Swami chants. She
listens; looks. The walls go soft. Cryptic words

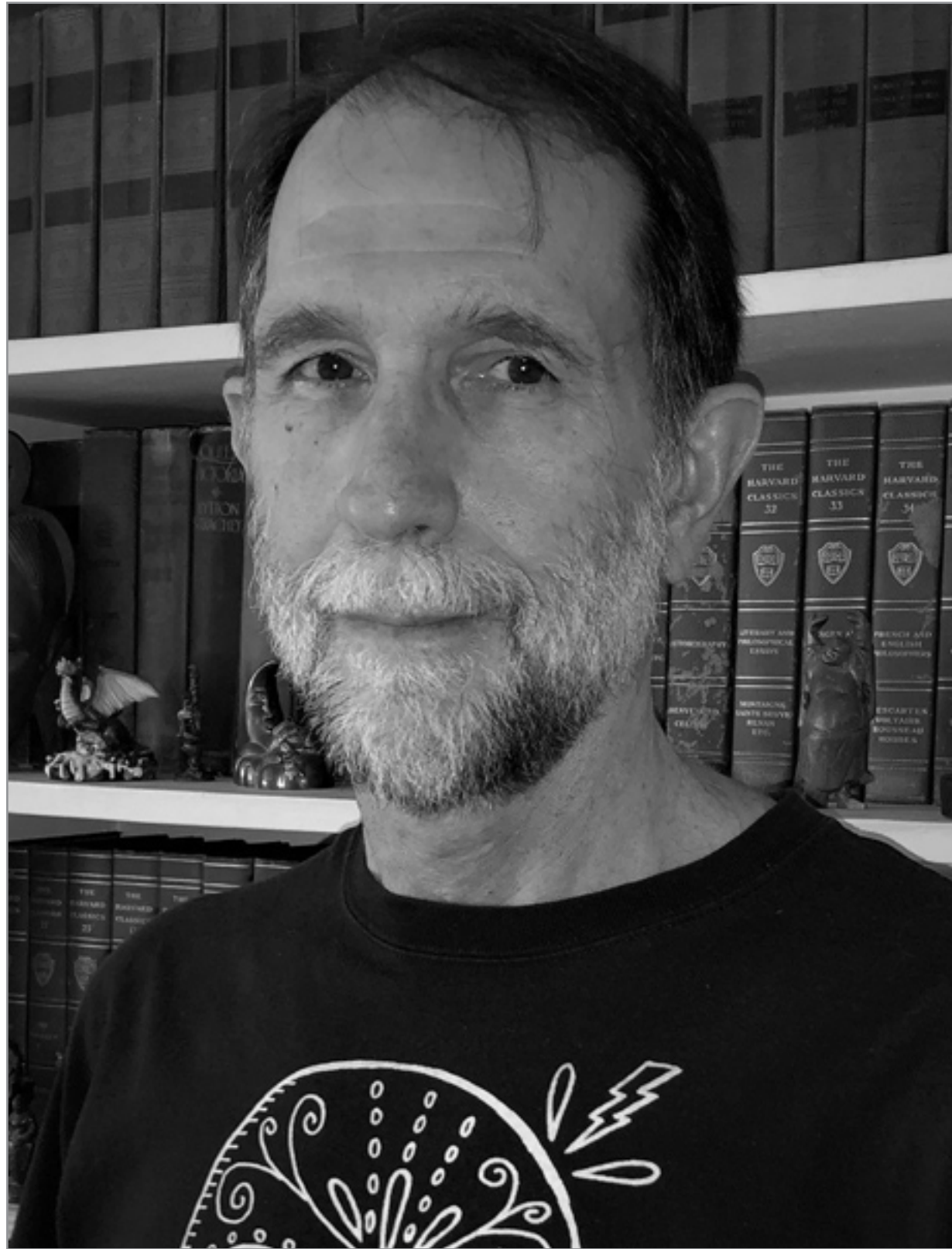
are charged, swoop and dart. She's lost her tent,
her carpet, spilled her tea. But a teacher

offers up these quickened words and she
receives. He redeems her with a name.



Artwork © Emma Barone

M. L. Williams is the author of *Other Medicines* and coeditor of *How Much Earth: The Fresno Poets*. His poetry and prose has appeared or is forthcoming in many journals and anthologies, including *Miramar*, *Western Humanities Review*, *The Journal of Florida Studies*, *The Cortland Review*, *Stone, River, Sky*, and *Clash by Night*. He co-emcees the Poetry Corner for the *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Books and teaches creative writing and contemporary literature at Valdosta State University.



LATE THUNDERSTORM

One is inclined to say: "Either it is raining, or it isn't—how I know, how the information has reached me, is another matter."
—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 356

The light remains steady
despite all this. The fan
winds its rotation of shadows
across the planked ceiling.

The darkened double panes
reflect the light above,
doubled, and I am a blur
of two across the room.

Night enters through
lightning strikes, then
thunder, and the rain
gathered in a stream

falls from the roof valley
and clatters against the brick
that I want to say I know
is outside, but you never

know in the philosophy
of rain unless you run
through it toward a small
awning under a lamp

to wait it out, to feel
the cool damp against
the stucco wall until
the pavement steams.

M L Williams. Photo credit: Alice Cox

3:00 AM SONG

Night forgets
its promise
to darken.
A star, a full
moon flaring
in a cloud,
a lamp
in a window,
all distant suns
still bright
enough to trick
a moth or stir
a mockingbird
to mock
in song
whippoorwill,
vireo,
robin,
wren.

INTRASOCIAL DISUNITY IN
NEOLIBERAL ECONOMIES

It is easier to get at a feeling of unfamiliarity and of unnaturalness.
—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 596

You're somewhere else, an old woman riding one of those electric shopping carts admonishes the cashier—young, exhausted in her green smock—waiting for AP-PROVED to appear on the small screen. *Yes, I am.* We wait together for APPROVED on the small screen, me beside my assembled groceries on the conveyor—milk if you must know, celery, bananas, ground organic turkey. *Care to say where you really are?* Smiling. I will remember to ask for paper not plastic this time. She is tired she says *no* she hands the receipt to the woman who is still waiting *I don't.* Smiles back thinly. This is when I notice how weary she is, her red-rimmed eyes. Oh, and organic garlic. This is when the bagger arranges the bouquet of the woman's plastic bags in the basket who is APPROVED and disappointed not to know where the cashier in her mind is. Lacuna with its press of unsavory conflicts romances profligacies interest-rate inflected anxieties pending diagnosis need to step outside for a smoke wherever she both is and is not. Cat who wants the lid shut tight to stay half alive. Oh, she puts slowly her card in her purse looking at the young woman who looks to me as the disappointed old woman rides away toward the hot parking lot. A single Canadian goose rests there on a pile of grass in the landscaping of a median. *Did you find everything you need? Yes I say Yes thank you.*

THOTH

In memory of Richard Beban
 Can we choose one at pleasure? (The Egyptian, for instance.)
 —Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* pt. 2, XII

Tannin-darkened water shimmers wiregrass
 and reed blades mirroring down beside the groaning
 walkway out to the viewing tower. Pitcher
 plants yawn. Spanish moss laces tupelo
 and cypress stands, knees pushing
 into knurled islands. And damselflies hover
 in the heat and green anoles rush along the handrails.

Most come to see an alligator, but you're
 here for birds—warblers, towhees, great
 herons, scarlet tanagers—that you hope to see
 over the dark waters. You point and make
 the swamp alive for me with names, then stop
 quiet and point at a white figure in the near distance
 dipping into the dark, lifting with its curled neck
 a head with a long, down-curved orange beak.
 “Is that an ibis? I’ve never seen one in the wild!”
 and you marvel at its hieroglyphic grace, its long
 slow step, the way it writes on the wet black page.

EURYPHAESSA

One did not see before what is now in focus.
 —Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 645

Sun on the water shatters
 to its spray of gold, a face
 beneath, my son's, my daughter's now
 a moon at night a shining
 the current can't carry away,
 no dawn to awaken them.

That my own brother did this.
 There can be no time but this
 pacing the bank, tearing my hair,
 cursing this evil, unable
 to stop looking for light
 in their wet, open eyes.



Margaret Bradstock has eight published collections of poetry, including *The Pomelo Tree* (winner of the Wesley Michel Wright Prize) and *Barnacle Rock* (winner of the Woollahra Festival Award, 2014). Editor of *Antipodes* (2011) and *Caring for Country* (2017), Margaret won the Banjo Paterson Poetry Award in 2014, 2015 and 2017. Her latest collection, from Puncher & Wattmann, is *Brief Garden* (2019).



Margaret Bradstock

LIVING STATUES

I could be silver, I could be gold
breathing beneath an outer skin of paint
stiff as a silken top hat
cut of my coat
the lacquered folds of cloth
but you don't see me.

I am here with the rising sun
the early flower-sellers
and an indifferent rain
treading the boards, the broken cobbles
a tiger pacing his familiar cage
to arrive at the sticking-place.

Sometimes I am tempted
to rise up and roar.
All day standing, unmoving, for beggars' dole
unbending before the tourist crowd
their probing fingers, nerveless gaze
the hollow shell of myself.

I am Colombine, cold body taking shape
from stone or marble, love trailing
like a sorrow, face hidden
behind the tragic mask
my trancelike state
telling you nothing.

I am Pegasus, ephemeral
as dust or ash, flying
between this earth and the salt moon
breathing poetry, bequeathing to death
life's numbness, awakened to the magician's trick
of Saturn's icy rings.

I am here with the late ferry
the fog-lit frieze of moon
over the white-shelled harbour
and will be there
artiste extraordinaire, tomorrow.
But you won't know me.

THE GRIEVING

i.m 15/3/19

Staid city of churches, now also mosques,
still in earthquake recovery mode,
the green world renewed
a place where one might think
to worship undisturbed.

Christchurch, the very name calls up
Crusader battles in the Holy Land,
Saracen hordes, 'the infidel', cut down
by 'lion-hearted' knights,
Krak des Chevaliers rising, like a clenched fist,
from the top of its mountain eyrie.

We thought we were better than that.
Those veiled in prayer might also
have believed their faith impregnable,
a stronghold against terror.
It was never about religion, the rivalry
of false gods, but the random xenophobia
of someone whose only claim to fame,
the capacity to amass guns, and fire them
at point blank range, sets him apart.

He will be nameless, says Jacinda, denying him
that notoriety. But not to the parents, siblings,
infants robbed of life,
the brief oasis in our eternal silence. Its moment
burnt into memory like a firebrand,
the living won't forget.
Wearing a hijab, she walks among them,
sharing their loss. Volunteers take part
in Muslim burial rites, help to wash the bodies.

That same morning, I marched with school kids
and supporters, of different race and creeds
waving placards and hand-made banners,
inflatable planet Earth held high, their hope
for the future.
It should have been a beautiful day.

MOUNTAINS OF THE MIND

‘the weird white realm’ - Francis Ridley Havergal, poet.
‘thin air and wild terrain were restorative’ - Ruth McCance,
jazz singer & champion sailor

The mountains swarming
with a conga line of climbers, a human
 traffic jam, trophy hunters stampede
in a surge to the summit, bypassing
empty oxygen bottles, litter, excrement,
dead bodies frozen in time, crammed
 into their last useless shelters.

Forget the mystique, these sojourners have paid
 for bragging rights, the T-shirt at the end
their best reward. ‘Here’s the deal,’ says one.
‘I’m not stopping on the way to the summit
 to help someone...I’m here for one reason.’

Chomolungma (Tibetan), Sagarmatha (Nepali)
Mother Goddess of the world and sky,
 her power to kill just part of the allure.
Is it a man thing, this need to conquer mountains?
 Greg Mortimer and Tim Macartney-Snape*
 ascended without oxygen, having
‘the entire northern valley system of Everest’
to themselves, the formidable
 three-sided pyramid of rock and ice
 in isolation, silence.

Looking across the jagged, snow-covered peaks
of the Himalayas, they could see clearly
 the curvature of earth.
Below, the windswept saddle
 linking Everest to Lhotse plunges
 into thin air,
a jumble of teetering ice towers
 the size of office blocks.

*Survivors of the first Australian ascent of Everest in 1984.



Maria Castro Dominguez is the author of 'A Face in The Crowd' which is her 2016 Erbacce press prize winning collection. Winner of the third prize in Brittle Star's Poetry Competition 2018 and finalist in the 2019 Stephen A DiBiase Poetry contest NY and Mslexia Max Poetry Competition. Joint winner of the Orbis 185 Readers' Award 2019. Her poems have appeared in *Obsessed With Pipework*, *Sarvasti*, *Apogee*, *The Long-Islander Huntington Journal* and *Popshot Magazine*. She holds a Bachelor's degree in English philology.



WHAT YOU TAKE WITH YOU

When you move to a foreign country you take:
Your soul with holes so new life seeps in.
Hidden scars that prove who you are.
Eyes, a child's again. Photographs
like pixelated shadows.
Those who stayed. The books you gave.
Seeds to plant to keep your blood neat.
Your imagination translated into
vowels that glow in your mouth.
Unanswered prayers. Letters needing a reply.
A mind racing ahead, a body catching breath.
Saffron summers. Cooking by instinct.
A particular way of making any space your place
and you take, the infinite island which is yourself.

María Castro Dominguez. Photo credit: Antoinette Castro.

TO FRIENDS

Last night when we met
it was raining,
two friends drifting,
wind beating the palm tree heads
to a modern requiem.
You spoke about your in-laws
without letting me drop in a word,
how they cared, yet disturbed you.
All I heard was the burden
of our fragility.



Artwork © Emma Barone

Educationist, poet, translator, essayist, peace activist, Maria A. Miraglia was born and lives in Italy. For a long time an active member of Amnesty International, of Ican, of the International Observatory for Human Rights, Deputy President - Coordination, at the child rights global organization, United World Movement for Children (UWMC), she herself founder and chairwoman of World Foundation for Peace. She is a founding member and the literary director of the Italian cultural association P. Neruda, honorary member of Naciones Unidas de las Letras, president de la Organization Mundial de los Trovadores, Italy; Vice President of IWA Bodgani, member of several international editorial boards. She collaborates for poetry with numerous national and international newspapers and magazines. Her poems have been translated into many foreign languages and are collected in numberless anthologies all over the world Author of anthologies in Italian, English or both languages She has received numerous national and international awards and recognitions.

APPEARANCES

Perched on a cherry branch
not far away
a sparrow
spread the wings
his flight resumes
nimble in his movements
as a dancer
of the opera theaters
free to flutter
master of the air
appears
ruler of the space

He is there
after a while
on the sill of my window
next to a vase of violets

looking for protection
in the shade of their leaves
small
tender
fragile

Quite a different thing he appeared
from a distance.



Maria Miraglia

A BATTLE FIELD

You can't kick Love
out of your life
say it goodbye
or throw it away
for fear it can hurt
make you suffer
your heart beat faster

You can even try
to get rid of it
to soon get the knowledge
of how stubborn it is
just turn your face around
and it is still there
to give you good mornings
and kiss you good nights

Love a tireless fighter
declares war on reason
that focusing on logic
plans defense strategies
confident to be the winner
innocent as it is
on emotions and feelings

A huge fight begins
an elephant against a bird
that can even harass
as mosquitoes in summer or
bees sucking nectar
from flowers

And you on the meanwhile
a spectator
your heart a battle field.

COLORFUL BUTTERFLIES

Words are magic
I love their sound
their meanings
fascinated I am
to see them
composed in expressions
read them and
dwell upon full poems and comas
guess from the pauses
the reflections in the minds
of the people that once
penned them
through them grasp
the thought and emotions
because messengers they are
coming from obscure
unknown paths
conscious subconscious
from anything touching
men's hearts
even just for a while
but that weave bonds
between you and me
among us
and then.... linger on intonations
that tell what words
fail to say
if visible they 'd be
colorful butterflies



MY MOTHER

The streets have no asphalt
my feet sink into the sand
and with effort I go
along illuminated paths
and dark

I carry on me
as a boulder
the pains of a lifetime
dears of ever
lost and never forgotten
like shadows in the night the memories
Impalpable and fleeting

Tormented my thoughts
looking for unknown truths

My mother
maybe now a child
reborn to new life
somewhere far away
are you oblivious proceeding
along an infinite journey

Or did your spirit,
noble and pure,
in the air dissolve
as candle smoke
at the same moment
of your last breath

But
I don't feel your scent
in the breaths of wind

PROMENADE DES ANGLAIS

The sky streaked
with the colors of the sunset
the air mild
not a leaf moves
and the cicadas untired
of their morning singing
go on chirping
My soul longs for peace
that my gaze searches
in the reassuring shades
of the coming night
but the faces of the murdered people
like slides of a movie
stubbornly cross my mind
and their lives I can see
as light colored soap bubbles
gracefully rising up
to quickly vanish
and hear cries
of grief and pain
for the violated bodies
coming from anywhere
feel the mothers' pain
their endless mourning
their silent tears
once off on them the spotlights
the front pages of
newspapers and magazines will have
new blood deeds to tell

perhaps tomorrow
or the day after tomorrow and
soon the Promenade des Anglais
will be crowded
of smiling people
forgetful of the dead
children will be playing
in the near parks and meadows
and romantic tunes played
in the cafes
along the city boulevards.

Maria Wallace was born in Catalonia, lived in Chile for ten years and later settled in Dublin. She has won many national and international poetry prizes, amongst them The Sunday Tribune Hennessy Literary Awards, 2006. Her work has been published in Ireland, England Italy, Australia and Catalonia. In 1996 she founded Virginia House Creative Writers and has edited four anthologies of their work. She has published two bilingual poetry collections (English - Catalan). She judges The Jonathan Swift Awards.



LOOKING AT THE RAIN

Byron left for Greece.
I can't move from here,
and cigarettes will kill me
before I give them up.

It has rained for days.
Women are in their winter clothes.
The fridge is empty
and my belly full of beer.

All tracks leave behind
a story. Will mine say I'm alone
because I betrayed her trust?

Nothing to do but look at the rain.
I'm cold, need food and fuel
for the stove; I only have
a tinkle of coins in my pocket.

It hardly rains in Greece
and women show their figures.
Byron knew what he was doing.

Maria Wallace

WHITE NEEDLEWORK

An etching of clay,
branch and leaf lines her face,
wizened and alone,
an old woman sits
with her back against sun-burned stone.

Does she still rejoice when twittering
swallows embroider the sky,
when wheat ripens,
grape swells and sweetens
bathed by sunlight?

In the valley below bell voice litanies
entwine with the needlework
her bony fingers fashion,
the sacred mysteries
of white vestments, and forgiveness.

I REMEMBER

I'm settled now,
but I remember
hunger pains,
ice under my feet,
smoke filled eyes
round a fire, sparks that looked like spirits
disappearing in the dark,
roads that had no end.
I remember
singing
to vanish endless hours under the stars.
I'm a settled woman now;
wind tussled hair is all that remains
from that past.



© Maria Wallace

TEMPESTUOUS WATERS

Her mouth forming words
only the wind can hear,
a woman walks the shore,
a silver urn tight against her chest,
red mac billowed by
sea-chilled winds.

Incoming waves
stop short of her black boots,
sea spray clings to her clothes,
hair to her scalp.

After a while she retraces her steps,
will come back some windless day
when his ashes will not be blown
back into her face.

SHEPHERD

*i.m. Fernando Pessoa, (1888, 1935),
relevant Portuguese poet and writer*

I'm the keeper of a large herd,
a shepherd whose sheep have jumped
the enclosure
and roam where they shouldn't,
trample over pristine gardens,
nibble at delicate blooms.

Unruly as them, my thoughts
are the sheep I'm unable to pen,
domesticate or teach,
thoughts that become feeling keys
opening doors in my eyes,
mouth and fingertips;
doors through which reality
rushes in and is
a minute by minute search
for lost sheep
to make sense
of life and new dawns.

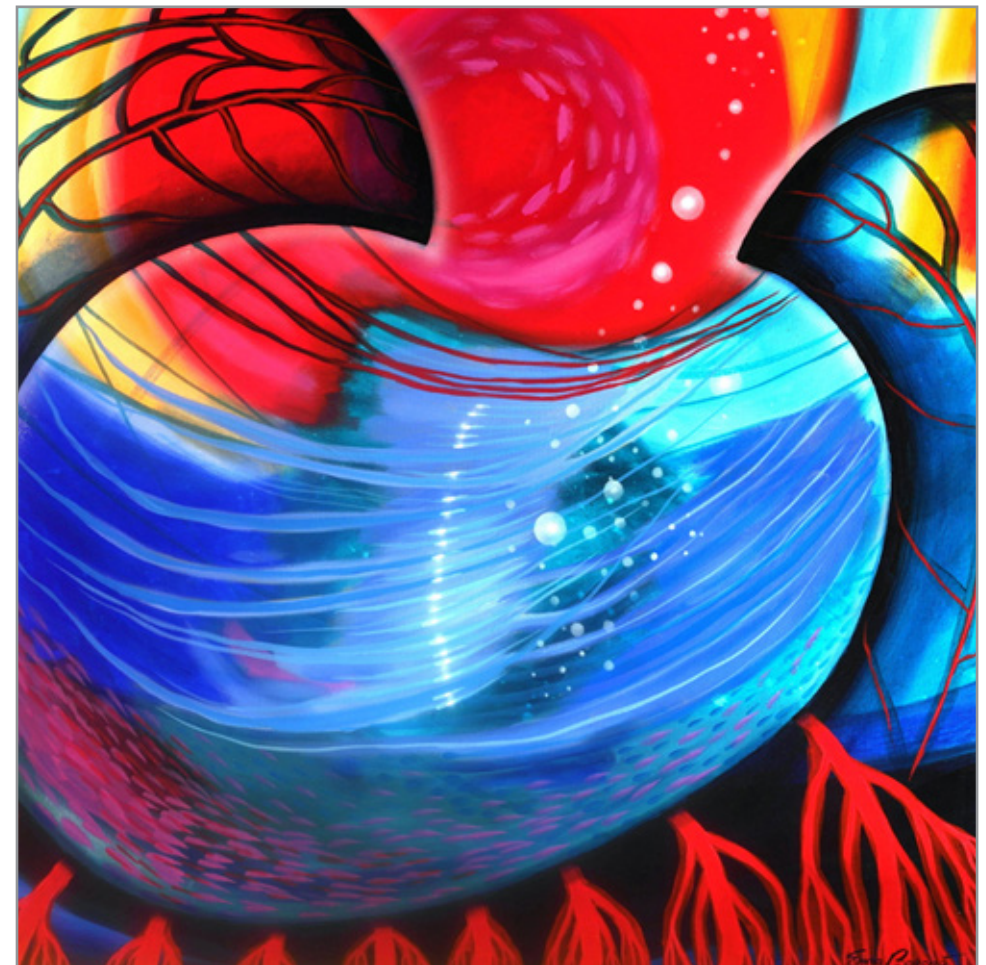


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FULL MOON

Waves heave and swell,
run over the shoreline,
wet sand exhales;
foxes yip,
night spells bring no peace.

Bone cold,
clothes salty brine damp,
he walks back home
where he'll have to face
the stories told by
all those empty rooms.



Artwork © Emma Barone

Mary Scheurer lives in France and teaches Philosophy in Geneva. She is a member of the Leman Poetry Workshop, and has worked for the last ten years with a quartet of poets who met on an MA course at Manchester Metropolitan University. She read recently with the 'Quartet' at the Limerick Poetry Festival. Her writing has been published in *The Literary Bohemian*, *Bare Fiction*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, *'On the Edge'* (Leman Poets), as well as in several *WordAid* anthologies.



ALCOCHAETE

There is nothing here: a broken windmill
dropped shoulders, dangling arms,
sighing complaint across the salt flats
and squinting at the brash blue sky.

Withered trunks, thrashed and blackened
by cruel winds whipping at their remains.
A sprawling white farmhouse, horizon bound,
cowers from sun shimmer, cloud white-out.

There is nothing if not cordgrass, glasswort,
salicornia or thrift, surviving tidal onslaughts
day after day, firm grip tightened, hope intact.
There is nothing here but marsh, yet in the marsh

You may behold, if you are still, a pair of stilts
wading, red-legged, in search of food,
catching eels sometimes. Heron, grey, white
or purple: elegantly feathered, poised.

Or raise your eyes to that dead tree
bearing a buzzard's weight: the curiosity
of a stork's nest perched on a pylon,
precarious, electrically alluring.

No, there is nothing here. Nothing over which
the kestrels soar and plummet, in which
pied wagtails twitter, against which osprey, grebe
and egret preen. Volumes only of air and space.

Mary Scheurer

VINEYARDS AT LAVAUX

The geometer traces them first - precise
with ruler, compass and set square, his pencil
sharpest graphite. Once perfectly captured
on fine vellum, he lays down the template
over the breasts of those hills; there, where
sun will warm, rain quench. Setting down his tools
there is no more left to do but wait and rest.

Taking up her palette of water colours,
the artist tints the leaves a range of greens,
grapes plumply purple, trunks brownish black.
Laying down her brush, she wipes her brow.
With an aqueous spell, she then transforms
the gnarled supports into dousing rods, to tease
water upwards, sap from root to graft and tendril.

Grape picker for the season, he hoists a basket
over his shoulders in the early morning.
Still clothed in dew, the earth exudes its scent.
Sunlight fingers its way into the ringlets of vine,
already heat threatens. He treads each parallel
signing his presence with a snip and drop of fruit,
runnels of sweat course tokens of his labour.

Unlock the moment's bouquet, rich and full.
Now: this instant everything, each sense
is sharpened, as they sit to taste this sight,
to listen to the colours of the afternoon,
read every line and angle subtly drawn
within these lengthening shadows. Eyes lock
as glasses touch: awareness present perfect.

DISQUIET

- or was it the swell of your hip, sighing
like an extra lung, that woke me ... its rise and dip
which coaxed my eyes to open: that slant of sun
on skin, bidding fingers flow, rivers to the sea?

Before the book was finished, its author
had passed on. Before he could live there
his house crumbled. To grasp the ray of sunlight,
pull it, out of the unreachable of slumber.

To write the lips of sleepers – if we dream
we also wake. Shift up to the overworld,
listen to them bristling beyond the shutters,
all those who reach for now. After lungs

or hips or lips have breathed their last, what use
are sounds, softness, my wanton waiting?



OLD MAN, CRETE.

Down to the seashore, buckets in hands
our children run ahead to sand and waves.
We follow down the shingle path, glad
to hear their laughter. There he is again

standing at the forefront of his house
bright shirt taut over belly, ripe smile
creasing stubble, hands planted on wide hips,
vivid and solid as a docked fishing-boat.

*‘Omorfi kyría’** he calls, thick fingers
lifting to his lips to blow a kiss. *‘Moúmia’**
and his hands lower, but not his gaze.
We both smile back, amused.

‘You have an admirer’ you tease. Indeed.
I blush. Returning, hours later
he is gone, bead curtains drawn.
Just a blue chair, small table.

Next day, we pass again. His wide face
is back at its post, grin and hands beckon
then show a canary in its cage, whistling.
The old man whistles too. Then every day

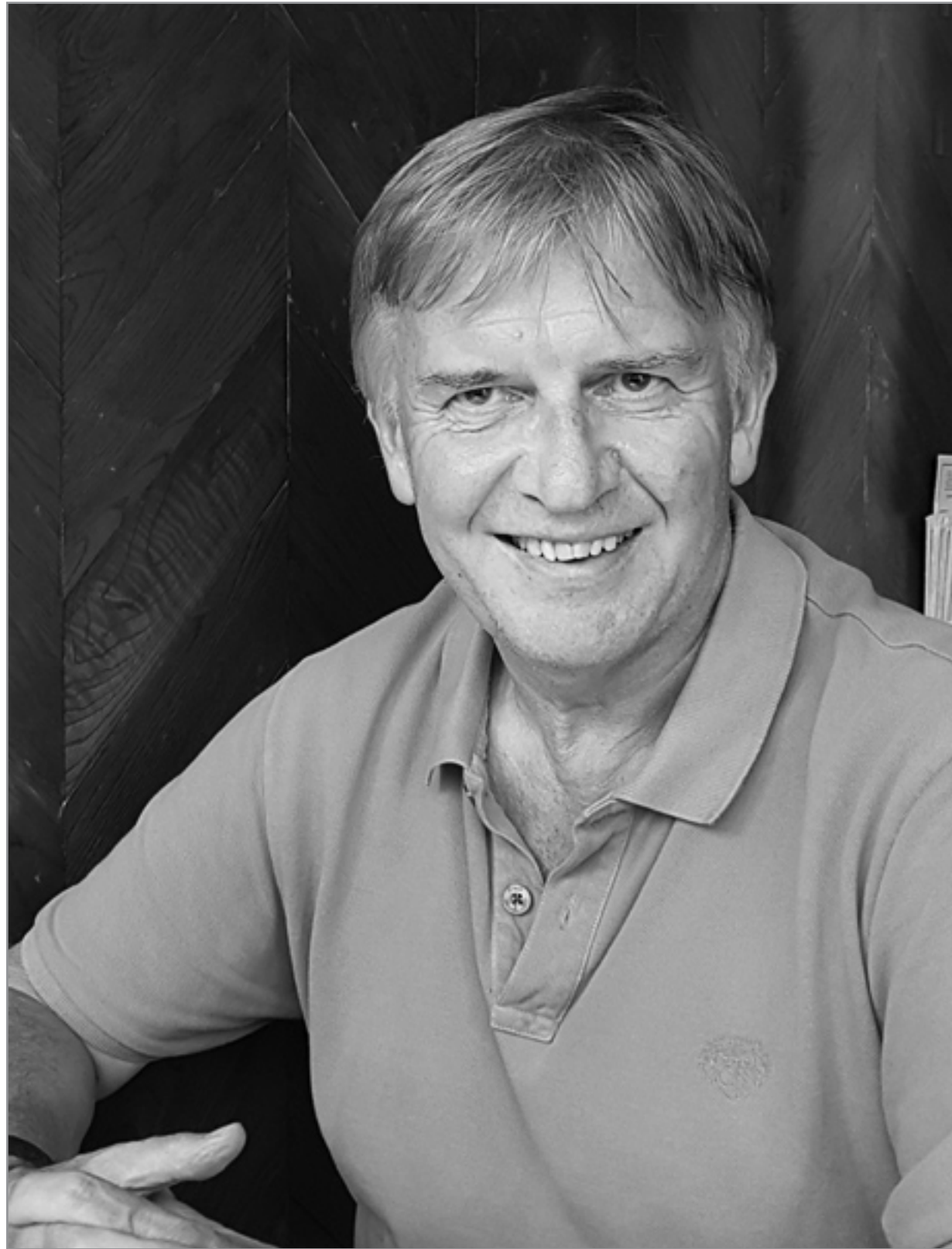
the same. Friends: old man, canary, us.
We wonder how he passes the time
sleeping, eating, ouzo, his canary; if
there had ever been a wife to serenade.

Decades on, and each morning without fail
you feed the birds before yourself, then watch
as they swoop down to plenty. Coffee steams,
you sit and observe them. Throughout the day

they jab and play. Some peck at feeders
others in the grass. You frown at cats
or chase them off. They land, bustle, flutter
as the sun picks out the white of your hair.

Omorfi kyría – pretty lady
Moúmia - mummy

Selected for Poetry Ireland Introductions in 2016, Maurice Devitt's poems have featured in a significant number of journals, both in Ireland and internationally. He was a featured poet at the Poets in Transylvania Festival in 2015 and a guest speaker at the John Berryman Centenary Conference in both Dublin and Minneapolis. His poems have been nominated for Pushcart, Forward and Best of the Net prizes and his Pushcart-nominated poem, 'The Lion Tamer Dreams of Office Work', was the title poem of an anthology published by Hibernian Writers in 2015. He is curator of the Irish Centre for Poetry Studies site and has recently published his debut collection, 'Growing Up in Colour', with Doire Press.



ONLY CONNECT

for Pauline

For years I'd been afraid
to open the box of photographs
you left behind.

Not, of some tragic mystery
they might reveal, but more
that the memories

they had captured might escape,
leave behind a clamour
of happy faces,

eager to be matched
to some story you had told,
even though I knew

there would always
be something missing.

Maurice Devitt

RED BALLOON

I am six and the garden is the size
of a football pitch. A birthday party
for my best friend, sunshiny and sticky,
everyone I know is there.

Proud of my hidey-hole behind the shed,
I have just won a balloon for hide-and-seek,
and it's tied tightly around my wrist,
pulling and bouncing in the wind.

As I run red-faced through the crowd, I yearn
for more control, to sense the pull of air
and release the knot to grip the string, but
it slips through my clammy fingers,

arrows into the autumn blue. Tearfully, I watch
it float above the house, flick its tail and disappear,
and for the first time I feel something
I now know was loneliness.

TAKE SEPARATE CARRIAGES

In a jewellery shop she buys three rings;
slips one on her wedding finger,
secretes the others in a small scarf,
folded into a hidden pocket.

She chooses a well-lit, busy carriage,
a pet Chihuahua covering her bag
and, at the border, as the train slows
and clacks to a halt, a troop of soldiers

muscles through. She holds a hand to her face,
ring glistening in a strip of sunlight
through the curtained window. *I'm going
to meet my husband in the city*, she says,

he is expecting me. They don't respond,
just roughly stroke the dog and pass on.
The last she sees is them bundling a scraggy
man along the platform as the train pulls away.

Reaching her destination, she looks for
The Songbird Café, orders a coffee
to a corner-table facing the door
and, for twenty minutes, is lost

to the clink and gabble of a railway diner,
being careful to avert her eyes, when
two women leave the bathroom, head
for the door, one of them adjusting her scarf.



OMELETTE

I offer to make an omelette for lunch,
knowing in the back of my mind
that it will never be as good
as the one I made in my mother's kitchen,
all those years ago. It was simply onion,
egg and cheese, yet that day it came together
like never before, and since then it's been
the gold standard. Still, lately, I've wondered
was it really that good or is it, that as I get older,
the eggs could always be fresher, the onion
sweeter, the cheddar more mature,
and I tinker obsessively with the pan,
as though some combination of fusion and heat
could re-create the person I once was.



Artwork © Emma Barone

Miceál Kearney. 39. He lives and works on the family farm in the West of Ireland. He began writing at the turn of the century. He has published 2 collections of poetry. *Inheritance*; Doire Press, 2008 and *The Inexperienced Midwife*, Arlen House, 2016. He has also had 4 plays staged.



RENOVATIONS

A universally green tractor
and trailer is the first to land,
packed with necessary attachments
for hydraulic hands. Then another
trailer arrives – low and longer.
Fitting for a feline: a big fancy
hack and shovel.

Next on the schedule: a van
or jeep pulls in. Sometimes a car.
An employee or two, depending.
Though even the boss
dons his employee cap
when talking to the land owner
who goes back to report to the wife.

But that's not important to the Cat.
Purring; tearing the soil.
Clawing up the rocks, unsettling
the foundation of everything
where we add necessary subjects –
black fence posts, yellow strands of wire
white electricity and a red gate.

After the operational exodus
the only evidence of presence
is obvious. The trick is to dig
another hole to hide the excess
so the carpet sits smooth – where
the wind is fond of planting seeds
from the ballot box tree.

Miceál Kearney

WORK EXPERIENCE

In the age of AIM on BETTER farms
 Hi-Macs and Hyundais are John Deere-d
 around small roads into smaller fields
 to retcon the efforts of the dead.
 Their self-perpetuating tracks
 flatten the feidínís deeper into the ground
 that great great grandfathers
 broke their backs fishing them from
 that broke the hearts of great great grandsons
 chasin' Limousins and minding sheep.

Gas-cut and forge-beat, mig-welded
 into Frankenstein's fist: 5 metal fingers
 that can break though they'll never feel it.
 A fancy extension of the hand –
 piston ligaments and hydraulic reflex;
 eye it up first, twist and turn: picture
 its place then grab an' lift with ease
 a 3 ton rock – the length of a good gap,
 propped up and topped with a safe pass
 and protective footwear.

In their wake a solid line
 no animal can outrun
 but prefect for the passing crow
 to perch and poop a manure-d seed
 that'll ripple; laughing long after
 we've returned to the dirt,
 making our way through
 the intestinal tracks of history –
 upon which the procession continues
 until their remains are resuscitated

by spalpheens in mec-suits.

AIM/BETTER: reference to modern/online farming
 Feidínís: small stones
 Spalpheen: wandering farm labourer

SET IN STONE

Australian keys jangle into position,
freeing locks. Polling stations open.
Staff then wait for the queues of wise.
I take control of the wheelbarrow,
guide it through this Swedish grass;
expert in such a field of more-or-less.
Drawn towards the heap.

Homing hands find potential
and fill it full of prefect ones,
I hope, to plug the gaps between
the bigger stones brought
by the tractor, yesterday. And this
blend of efforts produce a stage
so other agreeable rocks can act,

serve a function – like the printing press
birthing the election poster – as long
as gravity and external forces are favourable.
While fresher fingertips Down-under
wait; eager to count, sort the piles
of paper heaped on sturdy tables:
deciding what rightful Emperor, which

varying shade-of-grey Mongolian,
will govern then charge the neighbour
and take their stone for our walls.
That are powerless to thwart
abstract rings and untaxable roots –
reducing bastions of boundary
and Nobility to crumbs.

Invisible through the ages,
disturbing and gerrymandering.
Playing hell with the soil
where we, by default and habit,
delight in building our required
institutions and structures upon.
Jokes on them, we have the bomb.



© Miceál Kearney

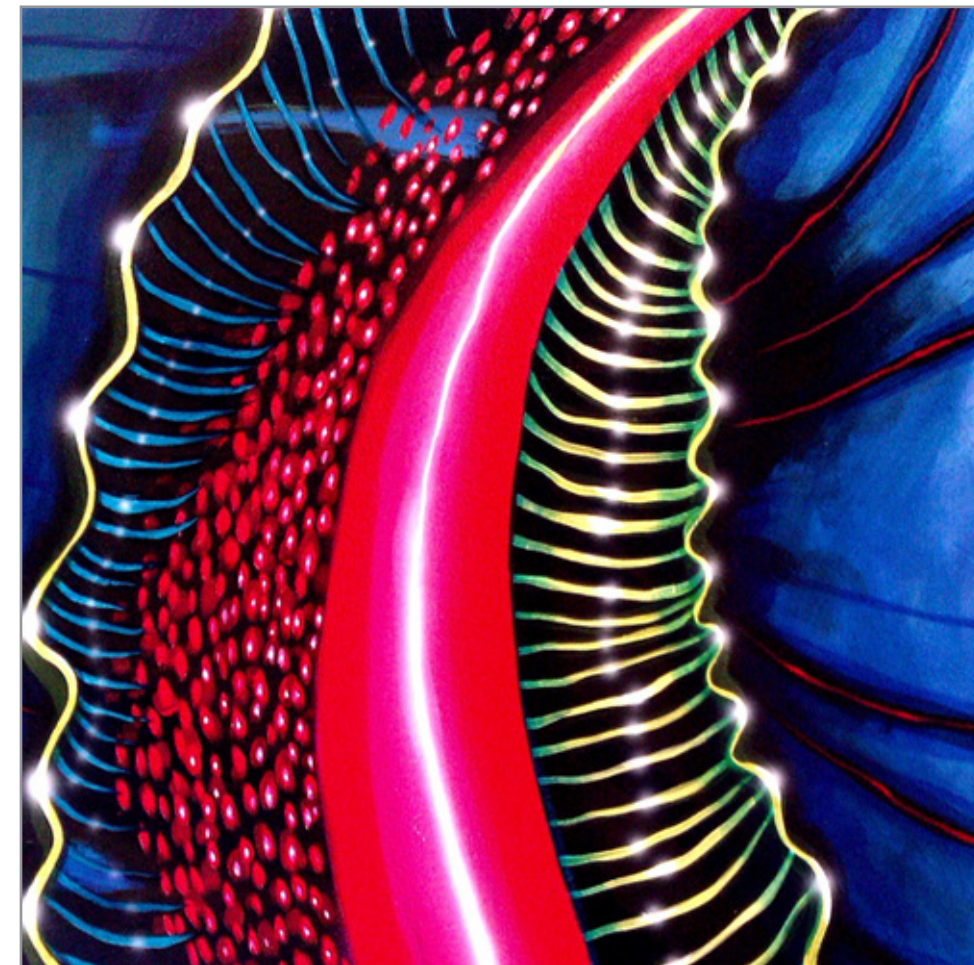
SPALPHEEN INC.

A pissy day in an Ardrahan field
or a sunny day in a Fallen field –
partnered with a mechanical Caterpillar
called Damocles or solo with the bar;
hack and a hammer, if I think of it –
2 brittle hands position defiant stone.
Planking horizontal: stomach and knee
deny gravity her desire to have it
perpendicular. Instinctively wedge
the Goldilocks rock in-behind it.

A taste you develop quick.
And yer eye; the potential.
Find the face, edges can be worked.
One line in a poem – sits comfortable
into the previous yet accommodate the next.
Tetris, until the long red line measures down:
laughing in the universal language
of inches.

A sunny day in an Ardrahan field
or a pissy day in a Fallen field
the uniform never changes.
Damp knees and elbows
that never really dry –
near identical to midwifery
stains. The extra hang
in the gloves and the usual
smear across the chest.
It just happens to be snowing
this Tuesday.

Ardrahan: small village in the West of Ireland
Fallen: small village in the South of Sweden
Spalpheen: Wandering farmer labourer



Artwork © Emma Barone



Patricia Sykes is a poet and librettist. She has read her poetry widely in Australia and overseas. Her work has featured on Radio National's *Poetica* and the *Spirit of Things* and her poems have won the John Shaw Neilson, Tom Collins, and Newcastle Poetry Prizes. *Wire Dancing*, her first collection, was commended in the Anne Elder and Mary Gilmore awards. Her second, *Modewarre – home ground*, was shortlisted for the Judith Wright Poetry Prize. She was Asialink writer in residence, Malaysia 2006. Patricia's most recent collection is *Among the Gone of it*, (English/Chinese, 2017). A song cycle based on her collection, *The Abbotsford Mysteries*, by composer Andrew Aronowicz, premiered at The Abbotsford Convent in May 2019. Patricia's collaborations with composer Liza Lim have been performed nationally and internationally, including Huddersfield International Contemporary Music Festival (UK) Festival d'Automne (Paris) MaerzMusik (Berlin) the Chekhov Theatre Festival (Moscow) and the Miller Theatre, Columbia University, New York.

LETTER TO A PSEUDONYM

Anonymity no shield, your life
at risk each human minute. In
the candle garden each stub
a quenched flame, fixed hearts
unable to shift sideways out of
danger like a snake's when it
eats. The skeleton of being
has moved its skull
to your street. It watches
you hunger for respite
from panic-fatigue
from the rank crush
of others in flight. Watches
you search a broken alphabet
of body parts, a name
and a fear locked in your throat.
In the birthing cells, hope's
renascent slender pulse. No
infant fears the future or itself.
The writing on the wall could be
mere spectre. *When we began,*
a pessimist might say. When
there were less of us. When
the wrack was less. The ruin.
The sun as yellow witness
reveals scars in the species.
Night's dark magnificence
wields pinprick stars, the
moon a flicker beam, and you
a minute's grace amid the
bright fatalities, the gone.

Patricia Sykes

DAY OF INSTINCT, RIMBUN DAHAN,* MALAYSIA

Silence animates the nest
the common iora's catch of grubs
feeds no throat

her patience tires the heat
exhausts even the binoculars

it's easier to say a bird obeys instinct
than to believe a bird feels nothing
when a first breeding goes wrong

number is rhythm or no rhythm
arithmos, three laid, three dead

when the iora at last flies off
something human wants to know
if her mothering is still intact

and look she is back and again back
to stab the marauding ants, her beak

never breaching a nest that holds
long after its dead have emptied the sky

her end song is the near side
of eloquent. In the pool

beside the same frangipani
a woman in her first pregnancy
is swimming lap after lap.

* "Branch Laden" in Malay

AFTER HELEN OF TROY PERHAPS

What arises from the hands
risks the threat of breakage.

I've become the possessor
of an antique bowl

born of someone else's life
though I cannot be sure

once the bowl is in my grip
whether its emptiness is the maker's,

the first owner's, the next, or my own.
Breath hovers on its lip

as if what stands between
safe and catastrophe

is as fragile as a champagne glass
which is shaped, it is said,

after Helen of Troy's breasts
which would make of the bowl

a mimesis cup for mother's milk?
aphrodisiacs? perhaps, if

everything came down
to suckle or sex.

YOUR SUICIDE COAST AGAIN

Your sand coffin a little starker
 this year. Wind, rain, and ocean
 have wreaked worse than expected.
 The eroding rocks that cradled you
 are sharper, more fanged, the high
 dunes balder, the promontory more
 exposed, its black skeletal riddled
 with mid-winter sunlight. Beauty's
 violence is now a memory of you.

You left a suicide note at least
 even if found too late. I could
 only console your loved ones
 with how peacefully you rested
 like creation's blessed child
 blonde and a gleam on wet
 sand. I omitted the bruises, the
 gashes, the rock shelf's innocent
 attacks. The reek of briny fear

wonders all over again if,
 as you plummeted, you regretted
 hurtling yourself off the cliff. Indeed
 the wave-boom when at tidal force
 is loud enough to wake the dead. Is
 this your unasked for gift, this urge
 to cling more tightly to the years
 still left and mourn the ones not
 well-spent? Yes I owe you perhaps

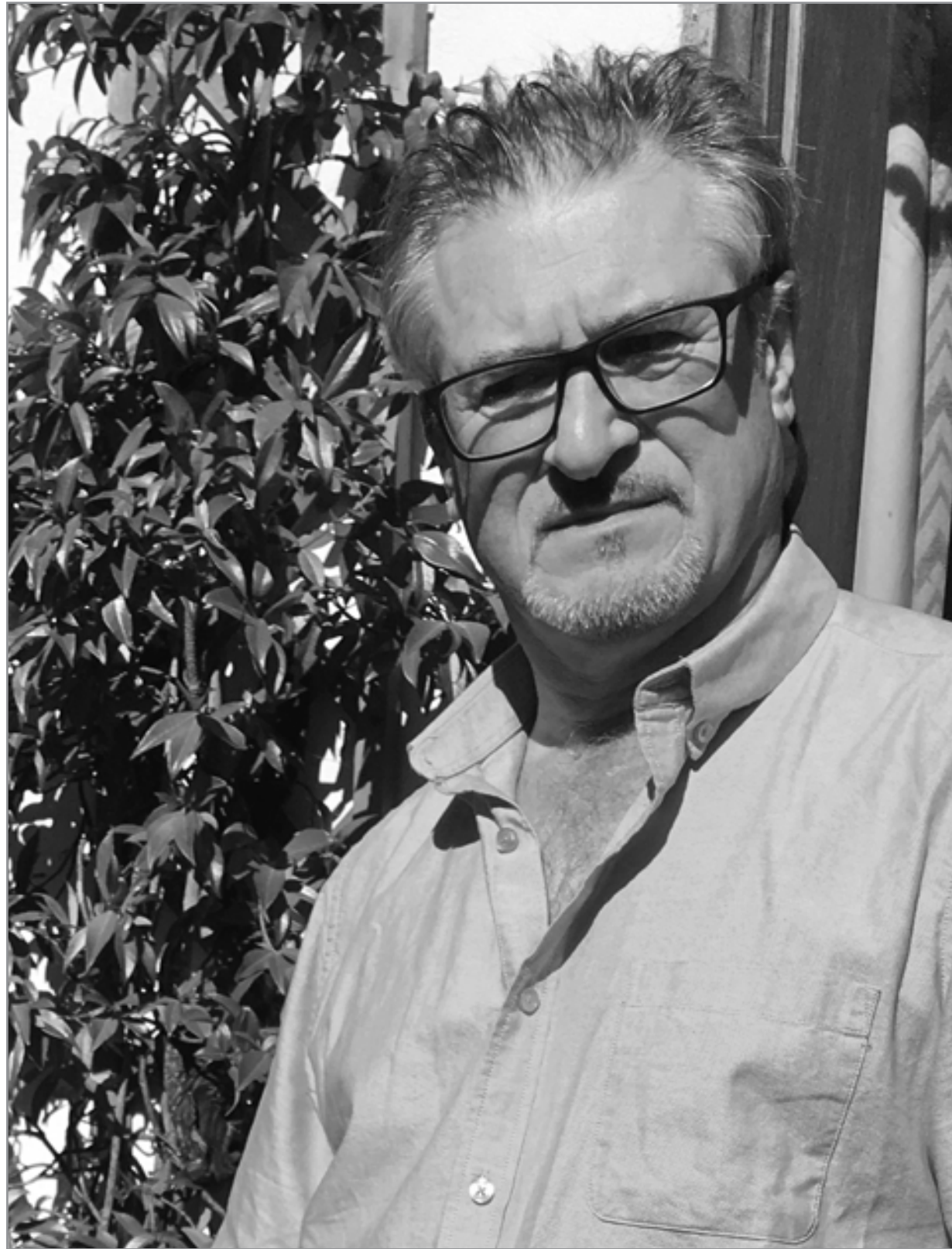
this aliveness, this joy in my own
 existence. The hooded plovers are
 also dancing their own deliverance.
 They scurry to feed and breed
 as if aware they are endangered.
 I try to conjure an epitaph
 to honour your invisible corpse
 but the pollution remains
 in your self-caused death

not the first on this wild and
 unwitting coast. So little is pristine
 where humans tread. I struggle for
 something profound but arrive at
 only more symbols: the disused
 outlet pipe with a great hole in its
 top as if a trapped scream erupted,
 and the 96^o West emergency marker
 whose small yellow triangle is

a pyramid pun. Nothing grand is
 tombed here, only your one life
 prisoned in despair. I gaze at the
 rock shelf, at the incoming tide's
 merciless rush, thinking how love
 is not the only power and life not
 the only loss. The most I can offer,
 my intimate stranger, is to allow
 you to own your self-death.



Paul Bregazzi's poetry has been published widely in The Irish Times, Poetry Ireland Review, The Stony Thursday Book, The Stinging Fly, The Wells Review, Magma (UK), Fields Magazine (Univ of Texas at Austin). Selected for Poetry Ireland's Introduction Series 2015. Winner of Cúirt New Writing Prize for Poetry 2017. Selected for Words Ireland National Mentoring Programme 2019. His debut collection will be published by Salmon Press in May 2020.



OPHELIA

In black socks getting
ready for the off

or the on, if time
permits she says it

doesn't but does not
object to pirouetting

out a laugh and faux
stumbling until caught

then mounting daybreak
and its grind

the wind from the lake
lifts her hair

birds turn from the wallpaper
put up by the red flash

of nails on her nape.

Paul Bregazzi

SANCTUARY

We drove that day along the Highlands coast
headed north.
Clouds moving out over the Atlantic
threatening.
Sunlight threw darts through
the missed
opportunity. The longer the gap went on
the harder
it got to close it.
A bump in the road and the glove box
flies open. We stare at its silent mouth.

The sun hits the gannets as they
throw themselves
at the sprat-life below.
'Ailsa Craig!' she shouts.
We grasp the short joy
of the nominative. Sigh
around the next bend
away from the accusative.

RESCUE

We found him on one of our silent walks
up the hill there through the abandoned
fields along the old green road.
He was bedraggled and tiring –
not wanting to be helped, critical,
slumped in the long grass of the lost track,
more like something spewed from the earth
than fallen from the heavens. We threw
an old coat over him and brought him
home.
We made up the spare room for him - a single
chair to rest on, a box-bed, newspapers
on the floor for his mutes.

At first we moved slowly around
each other – he was a dark shadow,
his voice harsh and unforgiving,
particularly when the wind came.
But slowly he let himself go.
The funk of him filled the house –
it was everywhere – I began to believe
I could scent it off my wife.

Finally, one evening I came
home and broke. I took him back
to the lost track – cast him high into the dark.

Still, when I try to remember
my wife,
his reek comes first.

Perie Longo, Poet Laureate of Santa Barbara (2007-2009), has published four books of poetry: *Milking the Earth*, *The Privacy of Wind*, *With Nothing behind but sky*: a journey through grief and most recently, *Baggage Claim* (2014). Nominated for four Pushcart Prizes, her work has appeared in several literary journals including *Connecticut Review*, *International Poetry Review*, *Nimrod*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Rattle*, *Solo*, *South Carolina Review* and *Wisconsin Review*. On the staff of the annual Santa Barbara Writers Conference since 1984, she has also taught with California-Poets-in-the-Schools 1985-2015.



SURVIVAL

When the world blinds you with its glare and din
to the goodness that is your life, there's still
the lake of childhood at the end
of an unmarked road, say in Minocqua or Wausau,
names that send you leaping
from the wood slat pier into the lap of water.

Armor cast aside, limbs unfold. You glide mindless
in rhythm with minnow and blue gills,
slip between lily pads with their slick winged leaves
offering the lotus. Eye to eye, your breath
mingles with bubbles rising from roots deep in mud.
Lost years drift past as you float, no need to fret

or grasp, as if you could, the music of what lasts—
feather-song, brush of reeds— carrying you along.

Perie Longo

HOROSCOPE

*You might be confused today about
the overall purpose of your soul.*

Along comes the wind. She can't meditate.
The sky keeps moving.
A large shadow passing over with a roar
turns out not to be a jet, but a great heron
with similar wing span sailed in from a fire
farther South. It settles on her roof

overlooking the field out back and shrieks.
Its large eye swallows her.
Is she about to die?
She remembers reading that prayer
is looking for God who's everywhere.

Hi God, she says looking the bird in the eye.
May I come in? the bird rasps.
Smoke fills the air. It doesn't look good.
There's not enough room, she says,
feeling like the innkeeper on Christmas Eve.

Didn't she also read heron was a good omen
for a wise, deceased person? or those pursuing hunt?
Just a minute she says and runs for her camera.

Turned down, Heron will have none of it,
on her return already waddling off across the field.
She follows, unsure that's her soul's purpose,
though heart does a sort of can-can
musing it's so easy to go off course.

SHADOWS

after painting "Morning Mist" by Katie Flagan

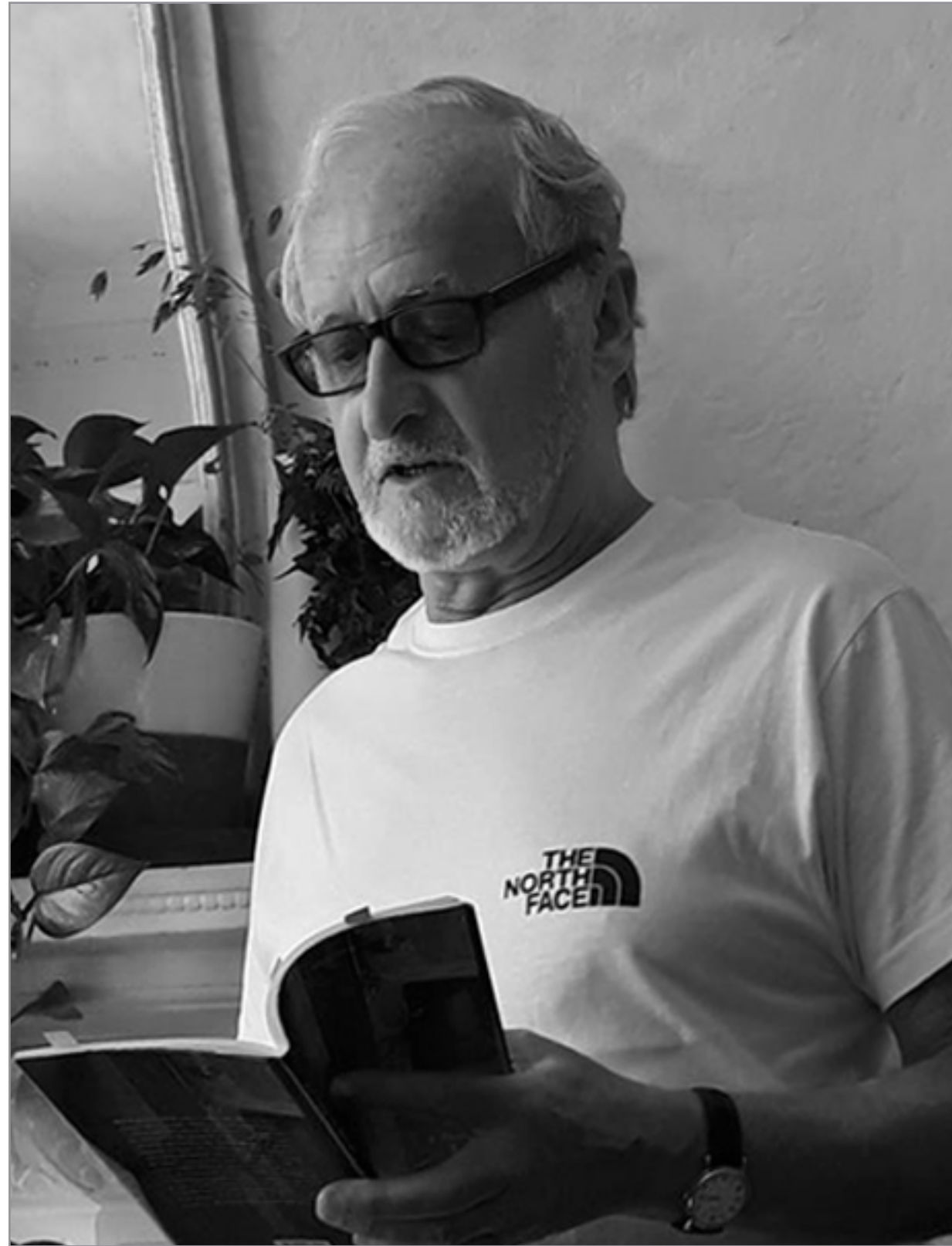
He lay on the plain of his bed, paralyzed,
memory stolen by disease, without vision half his life.
We're speaking about loss.
He asks what it looks like where he now lives.
I describe land that lifts us from grief,
that might be destroyed for a purge of oil,
then where would we be? just another place gone gray.

I describe our foothills filled with joy
being hills, wing curved as far as you can see
etched with morning gold, all pitch and thrust
like the seas he'd once ridden
in the far distance. And greenest trees, groves
of oak nestled in the folds of earth's nurturing flesh.
As if you are hawk on the glide, you see

a hopscotch of shadows creating a larger beauty,
no argument about who's best, not running
from each other. They know their time is short,
that they'll become something else. He nods.
Layers of color draw your attention
from tan sand dunes out to sea where islands
rise purple in the mist to a wash of blue sky.

His rigid body quivers in a rumple of yellow, speaks
of a time he could run like the sun, his hand reaching out
to catch a ball or touch an arrow of light, whispers—
sometimes he senses shadows just above his head.

Phil Lynch's poetry has appeared in various literary journals and anthologies. He was the winner of the 2018 Intercollective Poetry Competition (live performance), a runner-up in the iYeats Poetry Competition (2014) and shortlisted in a number of other competitions. He is a regular reader/performer at events and festivals in Ireland and beyond. He was a co-founder of Lingo, Ireland's first spoken word festival. His collection, *In a Changing Light*, (Salmon Poetry), was published in 2016.



CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I wanted to get you a poem for Christmas
but the poem-shop was all sold out.
I asked the assistant behind the counter
if he knew what it was all about.

He said there had been a run on poems,
people were buying them up in tomes,
something to do with the talk of war
suddenly people seemed lost for words.

It was panic buying and nothing else
hoarding and hiding on secret shelves,
there might even be rationing,
the assistant said,
a few lines at a time
even they may not rhyme,
will it matter, I thought,
to the dead.

It is onward now as we watch the clock
a time-bomb ticking away
soldiers waiting to go over the top
know not the hour nor the day.

Is it onward now and over the top
down into an unmarked grave
or will someone give the order to stop
is there anyone still so brave?

Phil Lynch

CROSSROADS

The guns fell silent
to a universal cry
of *never again*;
relief overwhelmed
by disbelief,
the fallen left behind.

A rumble soon began to rise
from between the lines
drawn at Versailles,
it came crashing through the night,
unstoppable lava
in a rush to encrust.

Millions turned to ash dust
by a power born of lost pride,
even while the seeds
of peace were incubating
in the corridors
of braver minds.

A plan, fuelled by the shared
energy of former foes,
constructed to ensure that words
would gain the upper hand
and lure curious neighbours
to visit and remain.

Suddenly a shock wave
shook the common ground;
friends gathered at the crossroads
to talk things over,
to mould with words a future
to protect us from the lurking past.

BURGER OFF

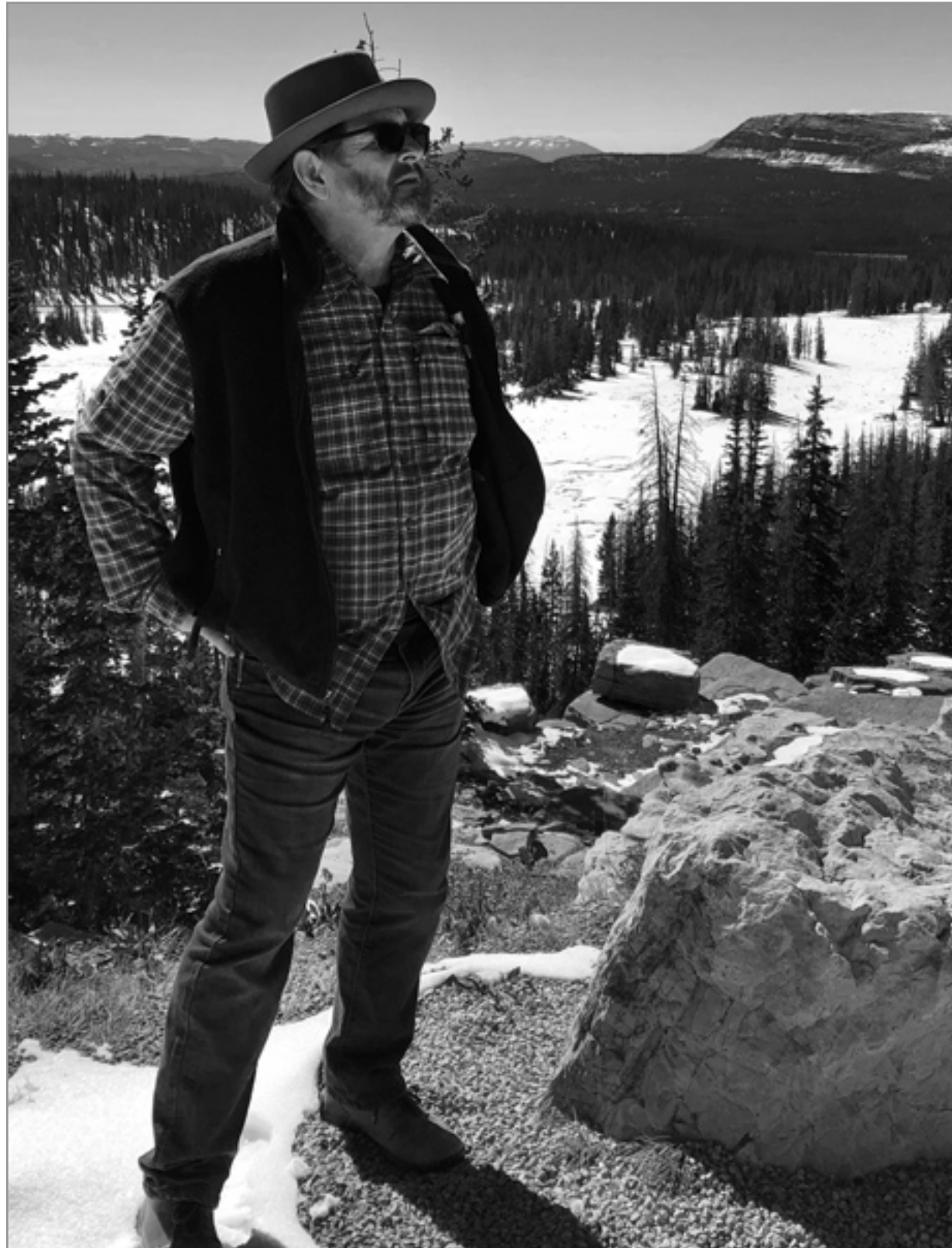
23 July, 2019

this is no day to be writing poetry
the weather is far too fine,
sun so high in a cloud-free sky
temperature temporarily trending tropical,
sweet-smelling flowers in full bloom
the juicy waft of grass new-mown
and all the other scents of summer;
birds a-flitter in sweetest voice
nostalgic Sixties music playing
meat prepared and marinating,
prosecco chilling, beers on ice,
chairs, of dust and cobwebs cleared,
patio swept and ready waiting
parasol primed for shady cover
friends on the phone coming over;

go inside for a glass of water
backstop for the dehydration,
radio running since early morning,
newsflash just as I am passing,
Boris to be PM has been selected,
an outcome not so unexpected
but suddenly surprisingly real,
a big deal, could mean a no deal.
I reach for a pen and piece of paper
and make a note that from now on,
what with Boris Trump and Donald Johnson,
there can never be a day for not writing poetry;
whatever the weather
poetry can always make things better.



Richard Jarrette is author of the poetry collections: *Beso the Donkey* (Michigan State University Press, 2010), *A Hundred Million Years of Nectar Dances* (Green Writers Press, 2015), *The Beatitudes of Ekaterina* (Green Writers Press, 2017), *The Pond* (Green Writers Press, 2019), and *Toward A Hidden River With No Human Name* (2020). He is Poetry Columnist for VOICE Magazine of Santa Barbara, California and resides in the Central Coast Region of California after formative years in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Western North Carolina.



SLENDER OAT STALKS BOW

*Li Po the little boat is gone
that carried you ten thousand 'li'
downstream past the gibbons calling
all the way from both banks and they
too are gone and the forests they
were calling from and you are gone
and every sound you heard is gone
now there is only the river
that was always on its own way
—W.S. Merwin*

The crow cocks an eye at a face known to him
under the hat
because of a puzzle
once left for the birds to solve—

perhaps he'd painted corvid voodoo on the mind of the face
to win both apple and worm with the scrub jays
come near its flesh and shoes
these crow years.

—————

continued overleaf...

Richard Jarrette

SLENDER OAT STALKS BOW
 contd...

Southern airs brushing my left cheek
 from an unknown land of clover honey?

I've seen billions of years beyond
 the Northern Cross
 and I'm still swatting the fat
 horse flies.

Autumn sends its palette to the six directions—
 I've been there and there
 sought the wise

signed papers got something
 gave something
 like the people in their important silver cars

I watch them
 and what was written off
 go.

Yes breeze
 you don't attend to my scruples
 but scars and weathercock
 and the hollows.

Laurel branch nods with the weight of mockingbird
 rufous sided towhees upturn cracked petals

all heeds as the sun drops below withered hills
 night tails hawk fall scrapes the eaves of St. Mark's

no word again from the children traveling to a funeral
 one late hummingbird dives into the firethorn.

.

Captured by a cloud all day long Tu Mu says
 —*It has no mind at all none and surely no talent.*

The meanings to make of this—
 not one of them it.

From the untranslatable crawling away and toward

Tu Mu's *and* larger than the stride
 of my man's and and . . .

than our galaxy exiting its black hole into a baby
 universe and its own time

and my star turn as a Nō theater crone.

Mockingbird's white wing bars flare among
 white blossoms and last of the Lady Banks—

streak of wild mastery in the corner of an eye
 lit shadows behind the words of T'ao Ch'ien—

vanish in a night in the day of dense evergreen
 return when forsaken on the wings of the Swan.

continued overleaf...



SLENDER OAT STALKS BOW contd...

Upland jays at labors
fox and bear on the mountain

volant raptors gyre
golden squirrel and rat aware

fear

Ptolemy's Draco
Son of Gaia

Guardian of the Golden Apples
of the Hesperides

beauty
Southern Pacific Rattlesnake

how glad not to step
on your crawling

cuzzo

.

Quanta of light live a billion times a billion years—
a quintillion—lux near enough aeterna

imperishable communion
just a blink to a photon it's said.

Li Po says
—*Nothing left but a river flowing on the borders of heaven.*

When I imagine lingering the all of it out
to the all of the way

storm blown pine
tossed fledgling
threadbare heart not most pure in

serene as the one in ten violinist
in tune after murdering the other nine.

Ron Carey's first collection, 'Distance,' was shortlisted for the Forward Prize Best First Collection UK and Ireland. His latest collection is 'Racing Down the Sun' from Revival Press. He has a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of South Wales and facilitates CW courses in Limerick and Dublin.



DOWN FROM THE NORTH

We took a different road home, crossing borders built
In the mind of the people; stone rain pelting both sides.
You are now roaming. You are on your own, loosed
From the familiar to the gasping, questioning dark.
We splashed in and out of sloppy villages that still knew
The best whitewash mix but couldn't tell the right road
To the capital of the Free State; a fistful of men blocking
The doors of a trodden pub; alien petrol stations telling
Their price in pounds; car lights picking up the skinless arms
Of Winter hedgerows, sacrificed for a promised Summer.
The rain stopped in Cavan and threw itself into the gutters
Of the Town. Ravenous with the hunger, we prowled
Through the evening people with their going-home-faces;
They barely glanced at us, strangers down from the North.

Ron Carey

MORNING AT CLIFFORD'S FARM

The engine of Morning has not begun to turn when
The birds fly down and light on steel blades of silence.

Earth's rustic mechanisms run deeper than the core,
Heart pumping in the dark mantle. Now something

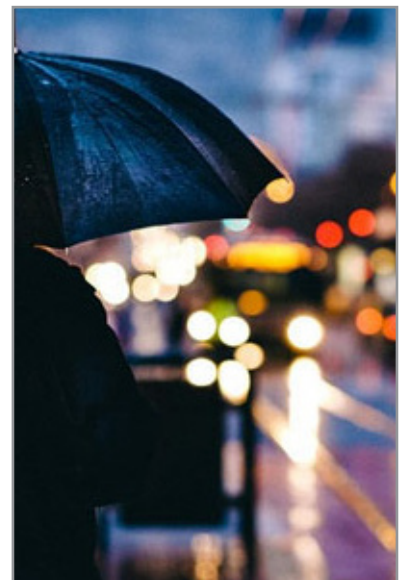
Electric, ozoneic, reaches for the tingling roots
And leaves that tongue every living breath, vibrate.

Now grasses bend their rods before the breakfasting
Walk of animals and the hills are popcorn rich with sheep.

The Sun brings it's golden spears to the fields and Night
Turns down the borean where blackberries hang like hurts.

THREE SUITS

Waiting at the edge of my mother's shopping, outside
The grumble of unfitting rooms, the women
Carrying Autumn by its swan-necked trends, to
And fro, under the yellow stubble of soft lights
And music, I'm reminded of my father's three suits
Hanging like criminals in the jail of his recently
Deceased wardrobe. On the youngest he depended
For a casual comfort that was not always there.
His business suit is an older blue but even Chinese
Dry-cleaning cannot rinse out the patchy terror
Of losing or the pale bloom of the shocking win.
The third had worn him out; for it had endured
The puddling furnace of humanity, though its heft
And threaded nerves still hold a bravery of dreams.



Ruairí de Barra is from Co. Mayo and now resides in Co. Cork. He is a sailor, an award-winning military journalist, and a poet. His creative work has featured with *Tinteán*, *A New Ulster*, *Live Encounters*, *Bangor Literary Journal*, *The Ranthology Anthology*, *Black Bough Poetry*, *The Boston Globe*, *Boston Accent*, and all his work can be read on <https://paperneverrefusedink.com/author/rdebarra/>



FINDING NONE

If you put to sea in these boats,
most likely you will die,
you will never make Italy,
you will barely make the news,
unless you wash ashore on a tourist beach,
spoiling the panorama,
with inconvenient truths.

The rising tide of the right,
creeping into the edges of Europa,
still like to wear good looking suits,
whipping up headlines,
serves them for now,
yet they remain ever eager
to slip the leash again.

The tide must be stemmed,
from both sides of the shifting seas,
never turn the cheek to fascism,
they'll gladly use democracy,
to seek its eradication,
they did it once before,
80 million people died.

Ruairí de Barra

PULPIT MUSKETRY

Peoples charity was only meant to stretch,
to putting a penny into a ceramic head,
brown people tuning up on the doorstep,
wasn't ever part of the deal,
we brought them sanitation,
for accepting subjugation,
ornamentation for the gallows,
to reward rebellion,
grateful fawning over infested blankets,
was the only response necessary,
decades of the rosary ensuring resurrection,
the power of the pulpit,
multiplying musketry.

THE MASTERS DOG

Guilty looks from left to right,
glancing over sunken shoulders,
ensuring fitting purity for the words,
filthy black bastard,
it rolls out of yellowed mouth,
hits the deck like a seagulls shit,
always seeking their approval,
like a dog aching for the masters hand,
such a common thing,
delivered with the snigger swagger,
the raucous guffaw,
like unto a carrion crow,
perched on a ripe carcass,
wet from beak to breast,
with the filth and rot,
of this maladjusted humanity,
side-spitting down upon the broken,
any kindness just a token,
a play before the watching,
fat pockets filled with silver,
empty of compassion.

HATE

Torch light flickers over university grass,
imposing bronzes hollow as their message,
rewriting history in celebration of ignorance,
demonising orange pickers while glorifying slavers.

Blood and soil chants,
fake fatherland hero's,
fat Nazis wear cheap combats,
cowards beneath swastikas,
shaming Old Glory with runes of death,
grasping at never happened shadows,
sculpting futures that should not be.

From Omaha beach to Virginia,
people died to resist the last tidal wave,
these thugs always so quick with a list,
automatic rifle army surplus lynch mobs,
longing to burn flesh instead of crosses.

Failed weekend warriors,
praying to Jesus while spitting on Jesús,
beer bellied Teutons emboldened by arch degenerates,
wizards, grand dragons and clowns,
manipulation of the poor by the most deviant rich.

In a bargain store Nuremberg rally,
desperate for their heel to connect,
to stand for a moment superior,
one instant in a miserable wasted life,
of fevered white supremacy dreams.

Fascism emboldened, suited and booted,
raising a spectre on ordinary streets,
militias in chest rigs armed to teeth,
decrying progress to claw back pasts,
when segregation was instituted,
and apartheid openly preached.



Sandra Yannone's poems and book reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in numerous print and on-line journals including *Glass: A Poetry Journal*, *Live Encounters*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Women's Review of Books*, *The Gay and Lesbian Review (Worldwide)*. Salmon Poetry published her debut collection *Boats for Women* earlier this year. She is a recipient of an Academy of American Poets' Poetry Prize and an AWP Intro Award. She currently resides in Olympia, Washington.



Sandra Yannone

ODE TO BREAKFAST

The granola wept for the milk
the jadite bowls held then lost
to the sink's dervish whirlpool.

In this one year of clumsy magic
and lamp-lit grief, I've absorbed that
humility is not a party favor, not

a bouquet of red balloons to grip
lightly. And those starburst lemon
wedges that spun on a white plate

like a maniacal roulette wheel
announcing the fortune teller's terribly
forecast crimes? I sat in her room

of knotted candles and believed
every crooked crossword
that darted from her mouth.

I have fallen a long way
to reside in someone else's palm.
The fortune teller's hands ride me

like grief at the altar of my feet
doomed to collect sentimental dust.
I do not want to be writing

this to you. I do not want
to dangle from the chandelier
of the fortune teller's beveled

glass words. I do not want
anymore to eat
the granola's tears for breakfast.

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



Susan Condon

THE STRANGER ON THE TRAIN

They shared the same taste in books. Each early morning commute saw their heads bent between the pages of a crime fiction novel. Yet that and a wedding band were the only things they had in common.

They never spoke to each other, but as a book lover, Eliza took a mental note of his novel titles. Many of them she'd read already, but quite a few, of late, she hadn't. She wondered if he'd taken up writing because many of the books were now of a more technical nature. The latest, *Forensics for Dummies*, was looking particularly battered and bruised. Her pet hate was dog-eared pages. This book had plenty. Now she watched as he removed a pen from the inside jacket of his suit and began underlining and scribbling in the margins. Naturally inquisitive, she'd glanced over, hoping to read a line or two, but the print was too small for her eyes.

Six months ago, just after Christmas, he'd been reading one of her favourite American authors. Eliza had been tempted to enquire whether he was aware that the book was, in fact, the second in a trilogy. But she decided against it. She hadn't noticed him reading the first and she'd been a little disappointed herself, on reaching the end, to find no conclusion. But she hadn't been too upset as it was, after all, a present from her granddaughter.

Better to keep myself to myself, she decided, her eyes travelling down to her worn black shoes. His shoes looked expensive. Leather, no doubt, two-toned tan and shiny. Size 10, she guessed, just like her late husband. Although Jack would never have owned such a pair of shoes.

Eliza, with her book on her lap, found herself leaning forward in an attempt to make out what was so interesting as to suddenly have his pen underlining and asterisking half the page. The only word she could make out appeared to be *bulbs*. But surely, she'd misread?

He looked up from the page, his ice blue eyes holding her gaze. Feeling like a young child with her hand in the cookie jar, she smiled, hoping to break the awkwardness of the moment.



It didn't.

He said nothing.

She wondered how long they might have remained that way if his mobile phone had not begun to ring and ring and ring ...

Although her eyes searched for the source, his eyes remained focused on her. Not moving. Not blinking. It felt never-ending, intense, uncomfortable and unsettling. Even a little scary. His eyes seeming to assault her every bit as much as the mugger who had knocked her to the ground and stolen her bag nearly two years ago. She could feel a hot flush, steadily climbing up her neck, eventually reaching her face, its heat intense as a furnace. The mobile never stopped, never reached voicemail, it just continued to ring and ring and ring. She hadn't noticed that she'd been holding her breath until he removed the mobile from the inside pocket of his suit jacket and eventually broke their connection by turning towards the window.

He spoke in a low voice. "Good morning, Rob Cullen speaking."

He entered into a muttered conversation while she returned to her book. Much as she tried, she found it impossible to block out the incident and the sound of his voice. Instead of the champagne and limousine conversations of previous commutes, she was surprised to instead pick up on the word's *tulips* and *allotment!*

Keeping her head down for the remainder of the journey, she barely managed to read three pages, the words swimming before her eyes without any meaning. Although shaken by the episode, she vowed not to tell anyone. She could already hear her children telling her she was too nosey and what did she expect. But they were wrong – she wasn't nosy, merely inquisitive – she was, and always had been, interested in the world around her. People and their interactions with each other had always been a fascination.

For the next two months she avoided the first three carriages, instead heading towards the back of the train to ensure she wouldn't see him. The last day she saw him was the eve of her stroke. It was close to 8.00am and the train was about to pull off. She ran down the platform, breathless, until she reached the fourth carriage and had barely pulled herself on board when it departed. He'd been at the window of the third carriage, looking out. She'd seen him clearly and he'd seen her, their eyes connecting for the briefest moment, but enough to upset her.

Enough to have her thin body tremble so much that it caused a young woman to enquire if she was feeling okay. Maybe even enough to have her blood pressure steadily rise so that while heating a cup of hot milk before bed she slipped to the floor, banging her forehead on the corner of the kitchen table.

The pain had been unbearable, but knowing that each hour she lay there would make her recovery more difficult was worse. Eventually, as if crawling through quicksand, she'd managed to reach the cordless phone and pressed hard on number one. Like a deflated balloon, her body lay curled into the foetal position, while her mind fervently hoped that the speed-dial number she'd called would bring the help it promised.

One side of her face felt numb where it lay on the linoleum and she alternated between scanning the spotless floor, looking anywhere her daily sweep had missed and scrunching her eyes tightly shut to fight against the nausea building in the pit of her stomach. Having watched enough hospital dramas she knew that the longer she lay here, the more damage was being inflicted on her body.

A haze of blue and white intermingled; uniforms and flashing lights and blaring sirens. Progress was slow and she cursed herself inwardly for not getting help sooner. She'd felt dizzy days earlier, knew she was stressed, but she hadn't bothered mentioning it to anyone or visiting the doctor.

“I don’t want to be a burden,” she said aloud, but even to her own ears, it was just a muddle of sounds that didn’t make any sense.

It looks like I don’t have a choice, she thought, a single tear rolling down her cheek.

* * *

Three months later and her recovery, although slow, was making progress. Sarah, her teenage grand-daughter, was reading out snippets from the newspaper while Eliza squeezed a stress ball in her right hand. Everything helped to get her back to some semblance of her former self. It was while Sarah was turning the page that she saw his face, those eyes peering out at her, not releasing her, not letting her go. Her breaths became short and shallow, Sarah’s voice becoming more and more distant until she became aware of a mask over her face and one of the nurses at her side taking her pulse. Sarah was advised that Eliza had enough excitement for the day and had been ushered off the ward.

Eliza, the mask covering half of her face, could only watch and breathe, her eyes following the folded newspaper towards the bin. But, with her foot on the bin pedal, the nurse seemed to feel Eliza’s eyes boring into her; to somehow physically feel her distress. She turned, patted Eliza on the hand and muttered something about the ward getting cluttered before she knelt and placed the paper into her locker.

* * *

Eliza’s recovery progressed rapidly once she became aware of why Rob Cullen’s photo had appeared on the front page of the newspaper. A beautiful, blonde woman was pictured further down the page; his recently deceased wife. She had been a healthy, thirty-six year-old woman who was four months pregnant, when she was rushed to hospital with stomach cramps. Hours later, she died. Her death was currently under investigation, while her status as a wealthy socialite, garnered her plenty of media coverage.

In the hours and weeks that followed, Eliza - confined to bed for the most part - pushed herself to recall every detail about Rob Cullen. Maybe he had nothing to do with his wife’s death, but somehow, thinking about those eyes and their intensity that day, she shuddered, forcing herself to remember. Nothing initially sprang to mind, until her daughter arrived with a bunch of beautiful tulips.

* * *

Six months later, home in her favourite armchair, Eliza put down her book in favour of the newspaper dropping through the letter box. The headline, above a photo of Rob Cullen, screamed: Anonymous Tip Leads to Prosecution of Wife Killer.

A sense of satisfaction coursed through her, as she read how Cullen’s crime of poisoning his wife, using large quantities of tulip bulbs disguised as onions had been uncovered thanks to a tip-off some months ago. The bulbs had been supplied from an allotment on the other side of the city. It was presumed it was someone close to Rob, because the voice appeared to have been heavily disguised. Experts determined it was female and the assumption was that it may have been a scorned lover.

Eliza picked up her book and practiced reading a few lines aloud. She smiled, content that her speech was nearly back to normal. Hopefully soon she’d be able to return to her job in the city.

Theresa Griffin Kennedy is an author, poet and writer of creative nonfiction, and fiction. She is an activist who fights for social change through writing as a social act. She is the author of three books, *Murder and Scandal in Prohibition Portland*, 2016, *Blue Reverie in Smoke: Poetry 2001-2016*, and a book of fiction *Burnside Field Lizard and Selected Stories*, 2018. She works as chief editor of the Indie Publishing Company, Oregon Greystone Press, and publishes other Portland authors including her husband writer and author, Don DuPay. Her next book, her first novel, *Talionic Night in Portland* will be published in 2019, and her fifth book *The Lost Restaurants of Portland* will be published by The History Press in 2020. She resides in Portland Oregon where she continues to write and be published.



FOR THE DEAD WHO LIVE

January 7, 2019

Stay, I said to the memory as it fled, smirking its truth, smacking its lips, smiling, with glaring eyes. Stay, to the remembrance of the warlight of that sumptuous basement bed. Stay, the yellowing bedspread, chenille and aged, the texture like paper. Stay, the scent yellow sunlight of an early Easter morning.

Stay, I implored, but they laughed and they ran, until I can only guess at what was said, while only echoing fragments remain. Stay, to the dead love, forever his bones covered in flesh, forever his eyes green. Stay, timeless the sweet plum mouth, the gossamer tongue, the silk shoulders. Stay, the velvet horse neck.

Please stay?

When I close my eyes, please stay?

Theresa Griffin Kennedy

ELEGY FOR RUDY ALEX BUNN

April 18 1978 – March 24, 2019

I had to move out of the old house, that falling down house where you lived the year you were twenty eight. The year you were still shiny and new in the basement room you decorated with glimmering broken mirror shards and played your music, painted and created all those things only you could make manifest.

I had to leave behind the disintegrating swing you made from wood and canvas and paint, hanging from the Weeping Willow, swinging in the wind, swinging above the aggressive Ivy consuming all in its path where you used to rest in the late light of summertime.

Dead at forty, you warned me of your fatigue a full decade before as you sat hunched at my kitchen table. We talked about the family, about cancer, about your mother, about all the sorrows of our clan, the clan we both loved and hated: The Griffin's.

And you smiled that wan smile, grateful, humble, sweet tempered gentle man. I still can't believe you're gone, when I saw you only ten months before walking in Sellwood. And I noticed your grey face and the thinness of your body and your focus, as you explained you had to transplant a cactus, smiling and nodding when I said, "I love you, Rudy!" in goodbye - my last words to you. My last words to you, *"I love you Rudy."*

I love you Rudy.

I knew you wanted to go. I just didn't know you actually would. You told me so all those years before, teasing me about the notion of leaving. *"Sometimes I just get so tired of living,"* you quietly said at that kitchen table. "Sometimes I think it might just be better to be dead, you know?" And you smiled at my worried face, the wide eyes, the words, *"No, Rudy, no!"* You whispered you were only joking, smiling, pleased to see the furrow in my brow, the love in my eyes.

You came into this world Rudy, surrounded by us and you left this world in the same way, with your thin hands tenderly held as you exhaled that last labored breath. Not alone, but cared for and among us, even if we weren't all with you, among us still. Your Aunts were always with you, from the start and to the end. Your mother's sisters, always with you, always for you. Born in Portland, you died in Portland, our precious orphan nephew. *Our Rudy.*

Your name and face and voice will never leave our minds, our eyes or our ears,

We will never forget.

THAT WAY

January 12, 2019

The way age transforms the sting of cranberry sauce from the mouth of a five-year-old to something flavorful and sweet in the mouth of a 50-year-old. The way I shunned cheap fruit cake from the store, to liking the fancy kind my brother made from scratch, spread thick with yellow butter. *That way.*

The way my stacks of collected books resting in dusty purple shadow became less an embarrassment and more a source of silent pride, narrowed down to only the very best, their colors a strip of iridescent mother of pearl undulating, undulating. *That way.*

The way I walked away from two husbands and lived solitary in a lonely house, the hardwood cold under my bare feet, cleaned regularly with Murphy's Oil Soap, the sunlight bleaching the pale oak, the house silent, so silent.

The way this old man ceased being an old man, and became a lover instead, his lips identical in feeling to the boy of fourteen, who I used to kiss, and who I will love forever. *That way. That way.*

And it was like a gradual walking away from the fear of it. Rather an awakening that the time would come and would be welcomed, the exhaustion transparent in me, like the wings of the Glass Butterfly are transparent to the camera.

While looking at my jar of multi-colored buttons, the number like the years in a life, I was glad of the colorful hues, the pinks and lavenders like my tongue, my eyelids and my mouth.

The way I stopped caring for the quaint 1930s house ruined by meth cooks, and watched blankly as the workers methodically tore it down. They call it *Deconstruction* now when many of the parts are recycled and reused *That way.*

The way I stopped being afraid of it, seeing it as a thing to be welcomed instead, bringing it in from the cold, turning its face to mine, smiling, saying hello. Telling it not to leave. *That way, that way.*



© Theresa Griffin Kennedy

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



PLAY

When does play begin? With speech, with sight, with coordinated movement? Or a compacted amalgam of these three magical properties? It's our first out-of-body projection, a cross between remote viewing and a hologram. Play, faith, invention, imagination – you could pick it all up in a square little towel smelling of mother's breast milk. This is the blankie, the safety blanket the infant clutches to herself. One remnant from the adult net is chosen above all others and its absence is like the absence of mother, heat and comfort. You must hold on to the blankie. It's an innocent fetish, not like that Mutu magic washing headless adolescents up and down the Thames. But I also believe it has power, its own babbling tongue, and that it has a practical use.

I sit on my daughter's bed, half-dressed, getting my head together for the working day to come. She's at school already. Foxy, Baby Tiger, Puppy and Hodge sit on top of the bed, their heads peeking up from behind the pillow. Completely silent. I pick up Baby Tiger, give his head a little shake, turn it so the scuffed plastic eyes are looking at me. An adult with a soft toy. I know it's lame. What's the current slang? Moist.

"How's it going BT?"

A thin, high, hysterical voice, like an angry wind through a keyhole. "Eff you!"

I tap the top of Foxy's head.

A high-pitched, nervous, excited voice. "Granpappa! Listen! The moooon!"

I put his ear to the pillow, because that, I have decided for convenience, is where the moon is.

I pick up Puppy, a black lab bought one Christmas at Hamleys, to whom Tasha has given a Birmingham accent. I squeeze Puppy's head so that he seems to look at me accusingly. I'm skilled at making all Tish's creatures move with the character she imbibes in them.

Tim Cumming



Strong Midlands accent: “I hope you’re not getting a real puppy.” He twists his nose. “They shit ALL over the street.”

And Hodge, who came in the mail from America, a raggedly little cat in blue jeans and with a Texan accent.

“Stay-ek! Yea-ah...”

Hodge is always exhausted. He sighs to fadeout: “Haaaaaahhhhhh.”

Each one of them has psychological issues as long as your arm. They’re my daughter’s babies, and they’re all but silent now she’s a teenager. Though even in this winter’s snowfall she felt compelled, once more, to throw BT from her bedroom window with a high-pitched scream of rage, burying him in the snow on the grass and then digging him out again, brushing the snow from his coat and drying him on the radiator, taking him back upstairs and back into her bed.

Recently, my wife asked her what she would do if one of us threw Baby Tiger into the fire. Just kidding, of course.

“I’d pull him out and wash him,” she said, matter of fact. We were all eating.

“What if he was completely burnt?”

“I’d keep his ashes.” She was slowly, attentively buttering her potatoes. “It would still be Baby Tiger.”

BT was the most potent totem. It was her will that set and calibrated the character of her toys, and BT started sweet, and became a loudmouth, whisky-swilling, gang-leading hoodlum who couldn’t read. We made a catchphrase for him: “My face is boiling with rage”.

“Dad, can you come up and play?”

That question mark is a point of pride, because it wasn’t a question, of course, it was a summons. My role was to provide the voices, and the movement. She would gather the chosen ones all around her – sometimes a few, sometimes a dozen – and she’d thrust the body of the protagonist into my hands.

“Make them speak! Make them!”

I did the voices, though I’d be forced to backtrack if she didn’t like the direction of the story.

“Let’s pretend they shared out the sweets and start to wrestle.”

She shakes her head emphatically.

“Let’s pretend that DIDN’T happen Dad. Pretend BT ate all of his sweets, all of Foxy’s and all of Hodge’s too.

“But Hodge is in his gang.”

“I know. So he doesn’t get angry.”

“But Foxy does.”

“Foxy has a breakdown.”

She picks up Foxy and shakes him as if he’s shivering in a case of sub-zeroes, then throws him up to the ceiling. That’s where the moon is. Foxy worships the moon and that’s where he goes when he’s sad.

“He is very highly strung,” Tasha would say.



It's strange how key themes – the kind of stuff undergrads underline when they're reading Dostoyevsky – always come along in the middle of play, poking their heads through the animals spread out across the bed. And if we went out, she'd stuff as many as she could into a bag, conduct mini dramas for the trip. She wouldn't leave anyone out of her drama. Every hair was numbered, even the feathers of the tiny chick with one leg from the set of 50 or so we got for a pound from the primary school fete. Mass produced tat that developed meaning, like precious family photos emerging from chemicals on a photographic plate.

Gangs, violence, betrayal, sex, murder, alliance, friendship. These were recurring themes, the heads of the invaders bobbing in the always incoming wave. Some were spookier, magic mirrors to my own concerns, my secret life.

When she was little – four, five, six – the dramatic theme, night after night, was abandonment, orphanage, adoption. I became alert. The setting was from Tam Lyn, or the Faerie Queen. A forest, a glade in a forest. A forest of wild unknown animals from the dark, and a mossy bank that was safe, a home in the heart of wilderness. I felt that I was learning as much as she was.

She'd dress up in a princess dress with a blankie, its scent of soured mother's milk, around her head like a veil. She'd stand at her bedroom door and tentatively step towards me, surrounded by all the babies on the bed. Stretch out her hand.

"Hello, I don't have a mummy or daddy."

"Oh dear, what happened to them?"

"Oh, they died." Or, "They left me in the forest."

Spreads out her hands: "And here I am."

"Would you like to come and live with us?"

And so the games, or the drama, would unfold. She'd be taken in by some of the babies, rejected by the others. Sometimes, Catherine would join in, which would make our daughter squeal with delight. We were making up lasting lessons about how to be human with an active imagination. It's just that the personae were full of stuffing. We made them real so that they spoke without being spoken to. Sometimes she'd take BT to school with her, sit him down at lunch and feed him food.

"Dad, is he actually alive?" She asked once, after school, over dinner. BT was sitting next to her plate. My wife, representing the important utilitarian forces, sometimes threatened to throw them out if they weren't collected together and put away after play.

"We make him come alive," I said. "But from an objective point of view – do you know what that is?" – she shook her head – "Well, to most people he's a toy stuffed with cotton." Then I put on BT's voice, and I never knew what he was going to say: with BT, the voice stepped in and took over the controls. Maybe that's why he was so powerful.

"How dare you grandpapa!" Squeezed his head, raised my voice. "My face is boiling with rage!" Tasha shrieked with laughter.

From the age of two to the age of 12 or so, our world of play revolved around BT and the gang – there were dozens at one point, including a talking pencil case (Pencil Dog). A lot of volume passed through those little creatures – they were like sluice gates to all the forces that smoke and burn in a person. That foaming shore of play is fading into the distance, even I can see that, though I'm the one who picks them up and lets them speak. Am I expecting profundity, a string from Orpheus's lyre? But the sound of those breakers is never too far off – they're too deep inside us – and you can walk out from where you are to hear it again. I've sometimes kept one next to me when I write. "Just one more line grandpapa!" And sometimes I overhear one of the old phrases, or the cawing laughter of naughty BT, will rise up in Tish's throat, too. She's meant to be doing homework.



We need these totems we have made ourselves; they take us to places that secular humanism can never go. They're just not reasonable. All the good poets I've known, the artists too, have something of the child in them. They need to play. That is, they work with a child's vigour, with all those primary colours, the raw pigments and gums and oils of the human medium.

Dad sprang whole new worlds out of his notebook. Ken Smith used to wear one of his masks to write poems, pulling the totem over his face to see how it guided the hand. That's what I'm wearing now – my Baby Tiger mask.

I pull up my jeans, pull on a top, in my daughter's bedroom. The sweet smell of perfume she uses, her shelves' mix of children's books and make-up. Deathcore rock stars on the wall, homework books and half-worn clothes. I shouldn't be in here. No, really. From the windows I can see the sports ground of the local girls school. Year 9 is on the netball court, all the slim-hipped ones who leap in the air as if leaping from an ancient Etruscan frieze, with that little flick of the upraised hand in the prettiest of all ball games. I watch four or five of them leap up together, a kind of adoration of the ball. But I shouldn't be here, no, not here, half dressed in my teenage daughter's room, watching teenage sylphs on the netball court. Stay here longer and I'll get myself arrested.

Dig deeper.

At the bottom of the basket of babies, the ones who have dropped out of play, under Frisby, Scaredy, Blacksy, Goldie, Lens and Kitty, there's Lammers, the resident witch doctor. Lammers, from Lambkin, a toy of my own childhood, knitted by a student friend of Mum's at the Oxford School of Art in the 1950s, when Dad was still the lecturer, before the caste broke and the scandal of their relationship across the student-teacher divide enveloped them in marriage and the course of their lives. Somehow, Lambkin joined them. He was John's toy to begin with, then he came down to me in the 1960s, after passing through the hands of the rest of the family. He looks strange – a weird, skinny, big-eared, long-tailed fetish with an enchanted little smile stitched into his face. He is going to smile like that forever. Like the gods, he cannot change, he is fixed with the order of the planets. There is a quality antique and native English about him, some of the haze of folklore. Homespun.

He was already old when I got him. I must have been three or four, I suppose. He laid roots and spread. He has a mischievous look, Puckish, older than agriculture.

Every human needs a fetish; it's the metaphysical equivalent of data in the Cloud. Tiny sparks of imagination, connection and emotion uploaded to the universal activity of play and projection. A whole other world fills the room like a good poem or a painting does when you bring one of those creatures in to it.

When I eventually learnt to read, one of the first sentences I wrote, that I created rather than copied, was at the end of Winnie the Pooh, the last line about a little boy and his bear always playing. I became distraught because I could not bear the play to end. The handwriting is just like my birth mother's. "Not the end," I wrote in a blue wax crayon at the back of the book. You can feel the weight of anguish and the hand of a little boy who cannot believe the spell is lifted, that this is the end of the enchantment, that there are no more stories.

I gathered around me totems and fetishes. I began to paint, using poster paints on cardboard. Big pictures of mountains and clouds, a stone circle in a pine forest. Then I began to write stories, then poems. I had to do it. The brushes and pen were like guy ropes. Still are. I had to fasten myself down with marks. I gather around me totems and fetishes.

Today, the Spring skies, after the longest winter in 50 years are illuminated like magic books. I feel I must record them. From my daughter's window overlooking the playing fields and main road, the skies scroll by like magic books. They gather and fade, regroup and redraw. It's impossible to think an engaging consciousness isn't stretching out through that vaporous ballet of perpetual motion. There's nothing fey about such notions. Clouds can tear our big machines apart as if they were toys in the hands of young children. There are forces beyond our control. Her voice calling down from her room.

"Dad, can we play?"

Tim Dwyer's chapbook is *Smithy Of Our Longings: Poems From The Irish Diaspora* (Belfast: Lapwing Publications, 2015). His poems have appeared in *Cyphers*, *Orbis*, *Southword* and *The Stinging Fly*, among other journals. Born in Brooklyn, parents from Galway, recently from Connecticut, he now lives in Bangor in the north of Ireland. He recently retired as a psychologist at a women's maximum security prison in New York State.



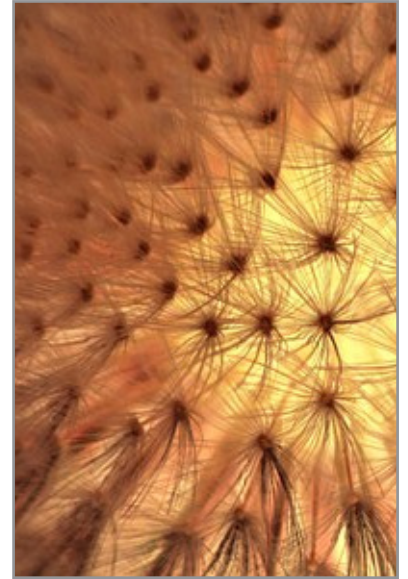
COMPLETING THE CANTICLE

Your wounded eyes could no longer bear
the light from the brothers, fire and sun.
Lying on the pallet in the dark hut,
you listen again
to the larks and swifts
flying above the chapel
where twenty years before,
your conversion began.

Sun, moon, fire, water
and your sister, mother earth
were already in the song.

Leo and Giles by your side
as you whisper a final stanza-
praise sister, bodily death,
second death will do no harm,
eyes once more bathed in light.

Tim Dwyer



HOW YOU GET THERE

Drive beyond the village cross,
onto the narrow road
named for a farmer long ago.
pass the elite estates,
through a snowy hollow
where time is still.
then, surrounded by hills,
the prison compound where
gold finches alight
on spaces in the razor wire.

through morning fog,
a deer meets a woman's gaze
beyond the double steel fence.

PHOENIX

Wildflowers blanket
the hills of Malibu now.
The earth was scorched, barren,
then infused by winter rain.

A woman rides her palomino
rescued from November's wildfires.
Hills so lush,
they remind her of Ireland.

The naturalist tells
of the ecology of fire—
meadows of western poppies,
dormant for decades, they bloom
after the ground is charred
and then reborn

Inspired by a story on Morning Edition, a radio news program on National Public Radio, Washington, DC

MEETING ISAMU NOGUCHI THIRTY YEARS AFTER HIS DEATH

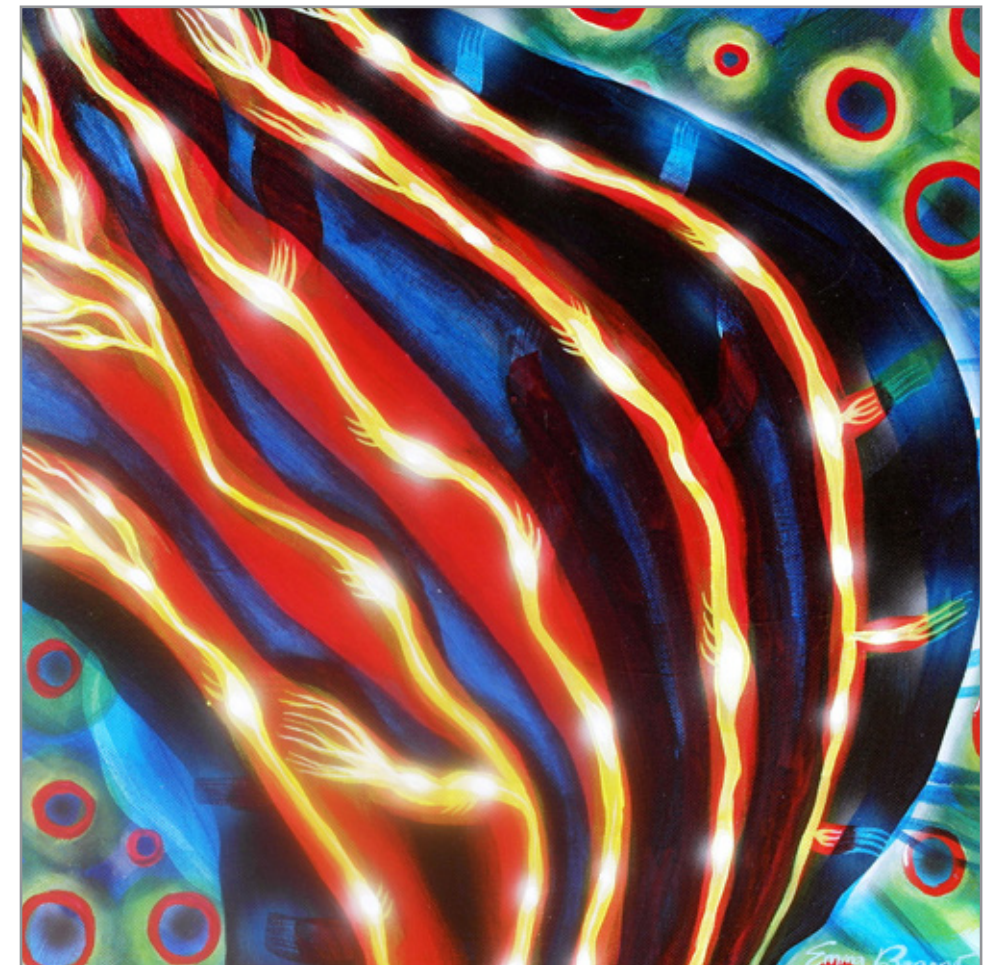
Entering the museum, I am surrounded by monuments of basalt. I agree, *stone is the affection of old men*. I am drawn more to *The Stone Within than to Deepening Knowledge*. More at home with Downward Pulling than with The Spirit's Flight.

I sit on the bench crafted from the Ailanthus tree, tree of heaven, preserved from the lot behind the mechanic's shop he transformed to this museum. Before the tree's death, it was the center of the sculpture garden. Visitors pass the bench as they walk among the sculptures in temple-like silence. I imagine sitting here with him. Isamu, I don't much time left. What can you tell me?

Others randomly open the bible to seek an answer. I find your words in the museum guide: *I returned to the stone later, seeking a deeper truth of sculpture, something abiding which is beyond the transience of the day*.

Thank you, Isamu.

Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) was among the twentieth century's most acclaimed sculptors. In 1985, he built a museum for his work in Astoria, Queens. In italics above are titles of some of his works and his statements, included in *Noguchi Garden Museum*. New York: Abrams, 1987.



Artwork © Emma Barone

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



Tobi Alfier

THE PATIO

Chinablue evening over evenly plowed fields—
our nightly view from up the mountain.
Love-seat swing for two, a table
on one side holds glasses radiant
with the heat of ending day, melted ice,
muddled mint, smell of rosewater soap
from the guest bath, pilfered from a trip
down bayou-way.

The other side holds a guitar stand.
The rosewood acoustic waits for its turn
to celebrate with old folk music and newer
country tunes—pink-gray clouds over
far off hills, lights coming on here and there
along with jackets. She is a sweet instrument
played sweetly, serenaded by the last of the seasonal
birds on their way home to nest, just as you do.

My lord, you think, I am the luckiest of men.
Gone from rock-bottom in all senses,
mattress on the floor, woman busted halfway
to hell gone with your car, the cash in the kitchen tin
and the dog you’d had since forever, to this mountainside,
this woman, met in a decent bar, in a decent way,
her red hair shimmering under stage lights as she
sang backup for a good band, not a karaoke
piece of shit in a redneck dump.

Thanks to Jesus, and Marianne the housemaid,
you were wearing a clean shirt that night,
and you’d stopped your moaning and crying
a while back. You were ready for some change,
a virtuous angel, a sentimental companion
who made no judgement, a boatload of grateful
and a soft place to fall—
hummingbirds dance in the darkening sky.



AS THE FIELD'S EDGES FALL TO DARKNESS

She is a daughter of the hills.
She knows the cry of every dove,
the scent of each edible herb
and flower for the soup kettle
that hangs over the fire in all seasons.

She knows each slope, each path,
the creeks with slippery stones
and fresh brook trout, the pools
where she floats calm, hair fanned
out around her, time kept

by the sun through closed eyelids.
It's fresher here than down below,
her magic place, with blooms fringed
along the water's edge, and curls
of woodsmoke rising from the valley.

She is a ridge and water woman,
her sweater soft as the lambs wool
from which it was sheared, her book
beloved and dog-eared, read so often,
she knows the words by heart. Watch

as she dances a zig-zag down the slope
to the welcoming cabin, hair pinned up
messy. She is one hell of a happy lark,
everything splendid you can never define—
quiet as someone listening for a pulse.

ALONGSIDE THE LAKE

They were married in Indiana
just before fall. Colors of ash, delicate
gray/white and the hallowed hush
of citrus trees, leaves beginning to curl
for the winter, fruit long gone.

The sky dressed with henna
sparkled through windows of a tent
made for bliss—for everyone, not just the two.
Parquet floor for gliding, for a first dance
and many more, until the wee hours,

with breakfast served up for the few who'd stayed:
soft-boiled egg with caviar and baguette,
Veuve Clicquot la Grande Dame with juice,
French Press coffee with chicory, and beignets,
their initials stenciled in powdered sugar.

They had already left. Dark and light,
cranberry and velvet, exhausted from
the wondrous day and already hand in hand
in the same village pub where they'll toast, listen
to accents, and come home with gifts,

dialects, plans for a pub/bar in their living room,
lace curtains with daffodils for every room,
maybe plans for a child. They will name her Gemma.
The scent of rose as they unpack their bags
and drift to sleep spooning, the nightbirds deep in song.



HELD HOSTAGE AT JJ'S

Darren works the bar
at JJ's Joint, Center Street
in Butte, Montana.

He'd dropped out of school,
gave up on engineering
to pour shots, smash mint,

sweep the dirty floors
and have long conversations
with the regulars.

Claire was the barmaid.
Blond braids, blush, farm-girl pretty.
Always on elbows,

face cupped in her hands,
she stares up into the drab
sky at the bold clouds—

her skin warmed by sun.
She dances with the jukebox,
watches for David,

notebook in his jeans,
all the words he caught today
captured for sharing.

She draws him a pint,
he tells her about his day,
she aches for his arms—

on bridges, on trains,
she could show them the way out
no passport required.

10 ANNIVERSARY 2010 - 2019



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE