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DAVID RIGSBEE
The Abduction

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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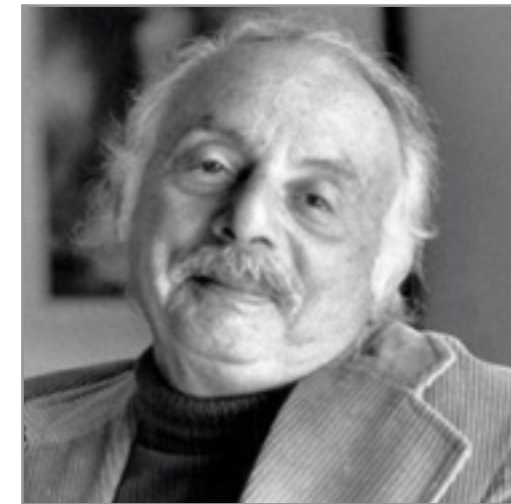
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DAVID RIGSBEE
ON “THE ABDUCTION”
and First Meeting Stanley Kunitz

David Rigsbee



Stanley Kunitz

I.

I have always loved Stanley Kunitz' poem "The Abduction" from his 1972 collection, *The Testing Tree*, mostly because, in spite of its vivid power and formal control, I don't understand it. Nor did Stanley, as he confesses in the first line, or any other readers. Indeed, he avers that he may not want to understand what happened. Why is that? Perhaps because it would put Paid to a mystery and deflate wonder that has lasted decades. The poem is inside out. It looks for answers but ends with a question. And not just any question, but one of such explosive scope that it passes from the real into the rhetorical like air into outer space, which is to say from local knowledge to the expectation of "rapture and dread." The poem concerns a man and wife, who, many years before underwent an inexplicable experience that marked them both. The poem likewise is divided into "that timeless summer day" and "That was a long time ago." The first half goes like this:

Some things I do not profess
to understand, perhaps
not wanting to, including
whatever it was they did
with you or you with them
that timeless summer day
when you stumbled out of the wood,
distracted, with your white blouse torn
and a bloodstain on your skirt.
"Do you believe?" you asked.
Between us, through the years,
we pieced enough together
to make the story real:
how you encountered on the path
a pack of sleek, grey hounds,
trailed by a dumbshow retinue
in leather shrouds; and how
you were led, through leafy ways,

into the presence of a royal stag,
flaming in his chestnut coat,
who kneeled on a swale of moss
before you; and how you were borne
aloft in triumph through the green,
stretched on his rack of budding horn,
till suddenly you found yourself alone
in a trampled clearing.

The bloodstain on her skirt clearly suggests rape, but the other images seem to come from myth, perhaps in the form of that myth-telling that goes through Dante's dark wood to Boccaccio and on to the Shakespeare and the Romantics, including Romantic painters like Fuseli and David, as well as the Hawthorne of "The Maypole at Marymount," where midnight rites draw a young woman into the woods. Kunitz, after all, hailed from Worcester, Massachusetts and the woods were both real and full of secrets. At the same time, the sleek hounds and shrouded figures bring us into the presence of "a royal stag," whose image suggests not violation but something natural and harmonious. There is also the matter that the poem is recorded *as a fact*. And that fact, many years later, still draws a line between the husband and wife. The poet relaxes his early high literary style enough to lend credence to the authenticity of the encounter, but this leveling gives him the opportunity to introduce a counteractive boost in diction to a handful of phrases, like "a swale of moss" and "you were borne aloft in triumph." Clearly though, the most significant moment of this mysterious aftermath comes with her question, addressed to him: "Do you believe?" Believe what? It is fundamental to the nature of belief that it opens the door to possibility. Except for the wide question that goes something like "do you believe *at all*," the question seems to spring from the event: do you believe I could have a mythic experience myself? And its entailment: do you believe my account of that experience, not in what it meant, but that it took place?

I. *contd...*

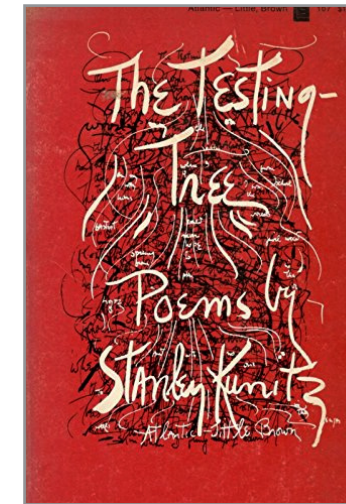
He doesn't answer either version, rather pushes it further along:

Between us, through the years,
we pieced enough together
to make the story real.

Their bonding comes about by years of interpretation and suggestion, although a *final* interpretation is not given. This, you might say, constitutes the character and specificity of their love. The second section begins on an almost dismissive note, one that leads to another revelation:

That was a long time ago,
almost another age, but even now,
when I hold you in my arms,
I wonder where you are.
Sometimes I wake to hear
the engines of the night thrumming
outside the east bay window
on the lawn spreading to the rose garden.
You lie beside me in elegant repose,
a hint of transport hovering on your lips,
indifferent to the harsh green flares
that swivel through the room,
searchlights controlled by unseen hands.
Out there is a childhood country,
bleached faces peering in
with coals for eyes.





The Testing Tree
by Stanley Kunitz

I. *contd...*

Our lives are spinning out
from world to world;
the shapes of things
are shifting in the wind.
What do we know
beyond the rapture and the dread?

To wonder who it is you hold in your arms may come as shocking admission after (what we presume are) decades of living together as man and wife. The “elegant repose,” the familiarity, we might say, of daily intimacy stands at counterpoint to the “hint of transport,” that still connects the wife to her mysterious journey years ago. But even now, something like that stands ready to bring them, or perhaps others, to the sense of awe that can’t be broken down by rational inquiry:

Our lives are spinning out
from world to world;
the shapes of things
are shifting in the wind.

The “childhood country” just beyond the window where they sleep suggests that the mythic world of which the wife once had an encounter is always and has always been all around them, although not noticed because “the shapes of things/ are shifting,” including themselves. The poem’s final question blows open the the inner/outer, not to mention the wife/husband divide into a full-on gulf. The epistemological question “what do we know?” has no traction now, except in providing a new set of terms, rapture and dread, each the inverse of the other, but both finally unexceptionable. We have also moved from the possibilities inherent in the notions of *believing* to *knowing*. And what we know, as Plato reminded us, is that we don’t know. This is the same Plato who maintained that knowledge (“what do we know?”) is memory.

II.

I had been well versed in Kunitz’ poems when I was in college, having been introduced to it by my teacher, the poet Carolyn Kizer, herself a devotee, as was her own teacher, Theodore Roethke. But she considered Stanley a tutelary spirit, having worked with him when he taught at the University of Washington in the mid-’50s and revered him, not only as a master in his own right, but as the colleague and mentor of her beloved Roethke.

By the summer of ’71, Stanley was in his 66th year. Little did anyone suspect that his career would continue another 35 years, including his deification as U.S. Poet Laureate when he was 95. He seemed ageless even then and would go on to wear the dubious mantle of the Good Gray Poet, after 1977 being routinely compared to Yoda. Carolyn said he was a magician in the kitchen: “He just waves his spoon and says abracadabra over a bouillabaisse. It’s perfect, of course.” He was also a master gardener, whose green thumb in the backyard of his 12th Street brownstone transformed a scrappy lot into Eden. Carolyn brought along a copy of his new collection, *The Testing Tree*, his first collection since the 1955 *Selected Poems*, and handed it over to me, “Ask him to sign it for you.” We were greeted at the door by his wife, Elise Asher, who had provided the painting (with the title and author painted in) that was its cover, I noticed that the painting had been hung in the hallway. I was surprised to see how large it was. Elise suffered terribly from arthritis and maneuvered her arms from the elbows, as she hugged us.

Carolyn introduced me as a recent graduate, a poet, and translator of Russian poetry. Stanley and I talked about Voznesensky, Akhmatova, and Mandelstam, and I told him about Brodsky, whom I had discovered while at Chapel Hill, but whose work was not yet widely known in the states. Carolyn sat quietly on the sofa with Stanley during this exchange and smiled knowingly, as she often did, as if satisfied that an exchange was taking place.



Elise Asher.

II. *contd...*

Then she told him that I had edited her selected poems, and that seemed to make him regard me differently, as he knew the toils of editing. Their affection for each other was obvious and genuine, and she was fulsome in her praise of his new collection. I told Stanley that I had given a paper on his work at Johns Hopkins, and he met this news with a blunt “Thank you!” without inquiring further. That was all right by me, as my theme concerned the singular pursuit of the missing father, in fact, an *idée fixe* on the theme of self-defeating authority.

There was a dark side to his poems and, to an extent, his person, as his polite but firm privacy suggested. This side was all on view in his poems, however, and the new poems in *The Testing Tree* were no different. By now, everyone who read poetry knew that the poet’s father had committed suicide before he was born. What they didn’t know was how this event, once he began to understand it, turned him into a poet at once brilliantly attentive to cruelties toward innocence and personally ambivalent about his own talents at fathering and maintaining the domestic idea. At the same time he considered his many students and acolytes as family, and neither his teaching nor his poems would disappoint, even if his private life hid limitations.

Carolyn, by contrast, had few secrets and no dark spring leveraging some private atrocity for inspiration. She had decided early to transmute the private into the public using the musical protocols of the language, mindful that the traditional custodianship of the tradition, *pace* Dickinson, had fallen largely to male poets, and using the same tools as her male predecessors, turned the tradition back upon itself, keeping—and so reinforcing—the cadences, the classical architecture, the music possible with poetry. While she and Stanley Kunitz saw eye-to-eye on matters of craft, what motivated them in their classical inclinations was different and telling in the difference.

Stanley took us out into his garden, and, just as Carolyn had said it would be, the experience was one of botanical magic: there was no sense that we were in the middle of Manhattan. Rather, there was the feel that an exacting hand had intervened to make something fairly exotic and vivid grow at every turn. Back inside, we talked more about poetry, or rather, poets, for the two loved to trade gossip, as poets do. It occurred to me that the mercies extended poets for their indiscretions were also self-exonerations for fantasies held, as well as actual peccadilloes committed. I think her reverence for Stanley, which was certainly also a reverence for good father figures, lay in part in her opinion that his own mastery of the implications and entailments of his foundational theme put him in touch with the springs of creativity, which is to say that it put him in touch with the wild: “You must be careful not to deprive the poem of its wild origins.” It was that making of the wild into a garden that she admired in his work and the magical transport from the one to the other. Before we left, he read for us the poem “The Abduction,” with its mythical, dream-like encounter between a beloved and some mysterious figures that force her, bloodied and disheveled, into asking defiantly and apropos of mystery, “Do you believe?” The poem also seemed to conflate revelation with ravishment and concluded, with a Yeatsian echo, “What do we know/ beyond the rapture and the dread?” Stanley inscribed the copy of *The Testing Tree* that Carolyn had brought along and passed it to me.

We departed with some ceremony, and Elise closed the door on 12th Street after us.

Denise was born in Rome and lives in Sydney. She has a background in commercial book publishing and is Poetry Editor for Australia/New Zealand for Irish literary journal *The Blue Nib*. Her poetry is published widely and has received numerous awards including First Prize in the Adelaide Plains Poetry Competition (2019), commendation in the ACU Poetry Prize (2018) and shortlisting in the National Writing Competition (2019) and the Robert Graves Poetry Prize (2018). Her debut poetry collection *The Beating Heart* will be published by Ginninderra Press in 2020. <https://denise-ohagan.com/> <https://blackquillpress.com>



LAST STOP

He was sitting at the bus stop
A neat grey figure, hands folded
Formal in his trousers, shirt and tie
And beret from another age.

He heard the scrape of shoes, the brush of trousers,
And felt the old familiar panic stir
As the crowd thickened, steps quickened
And the army marched to a single beat.

He recalled when invisibility was what he craved
As teachers saluted the new regime
Scouring every face in every classroom
For the barest hint of dissidence.

He'd had a chance and taken it
Thanks to his mother's perspicacity
It was all so far away and long ago
Such treachery, such treachery.

So many years knotting up behind him,
They'd take a lifetime to unravel as
Dressing-gowned and slippers,
He'd shuffle down his corridor.

There was nothing now left to fear
But he didn't know if he could bear
The silent onslaughts and ensuing frailty
From any more invisibility.

Denise O'Hagan



MATTERS OF THE HEART

I had not realised
 Hands and fingers could be so small
 So pink and crinkly, nails and all
 A little tiny human being
 Complete, perfect
 Except that you were not
 I could not hear
 I did not want to know
 The complicated diagnosis
 They were pressing in upon us
 I'd never heard of Ebstein's Anomaly
 Just wanted to hold you with my eyes
 Through the plastic pod of the incubator
 Moving so the reflections didn't take away
 A single little part of you.

While you lay swathed in lines
 Bathed in fluorescent lights
 And fed on oxygen
 We bit our nails in the waiting room.
 'A rare condition,' the doctor's careful words
 Pronounced at last, oracle-like
 Would later pour through our minds
 (And we'd sieve them, hungrily
 to extract a drop of extra meaning)
 'Excuse me? No, severe. Hard to say ...'
 He paused with professional reticence.
 'It's a case of wait and see.'

And so began a chain of days
 Of waiting and seeing and waiting yet again
 For the distorted chambers of your small heart
 Like a microcosm of all imperfect structures
 To adapt their functions to the outside world
 Become mini experts at compensation
 Minimise the differences, fool the observer
 And play the ultimate fit-in game.

Yet I feel it now, and sensed it then
 (Seeing the awkwardness of visitors
 Unsure of what to say, and how)
 That your imperfection mirrors a greater one
 In the hearts of all of us around you
 Who struggle to acknowledge, much less accept
 What we cannot understand or justify.

*Note: Ebstein's Anomaly is a rare congenital heart disease
 affecting one in every 200,000 live births, including my son Isaac.*

ELECTION SPECIAL

Election: from the Latin eligere, meaning 'to pluck out or select.'

He eased a slice of wholemeal
Into the silver jaws of the toaster
With an eye to the seven o'clock news
Though he wasn't quite sure
He could stomach it.

After all, he wasn't young any more
The clichés gave him cramps
The slogans, stitches
And if he wasn't careful
He'd choke on the hard crust of ideology.

As it was, he struggled to swallow
The bite-sized pieces of policy
Plucked out from portfolios
Dished up to garner votes
And the great change that wasn't happening:
Global non-warming.

But then again
He'd always taken the politicians
With a greater pinch of salt
Than he took with his fish and chips.

His toast popped up
Black as the defiant lump of coal
The PM carried in to Parliament.
It was as his wife – God rest her soul – used to say:
Yesterday's fare recycled
On tomorrow's menu
Again.

IN DEFENCE OF THE SLIMMEST OF EVENTS

I shuffle papers, pick up my pen,
Unsure of where to start, and why
Everything's a subject, and the slightest matter
Is what seems to me to matter most:
A note of music, a falling leaf, a child's fluting cry
All are prompts to a world without
Or resonate with one within.

'But surely,' a little devil whispers,
'You can do better than this?
In such a slim event, barely an event at all,
Who on earth would take an interest?
Surely you need a grander, more complicated theme,
At the very least, something slightly controversial
To catch the readers' eye, bait them,
And reel in their dwindling attention spans!
You could elaborate, reference and allude –
At any rate, you must impress.'

I waver, succumb a moment, then rouse myself.
No, I will not be lured by others' expectations
Tailoring my subject, adjusting my style
To humour those whom I don't know
And court the nod of the establishment
With its attendant prizes for verses
Weighed down by literary conceit
Laden with allusions and laced with Latin.

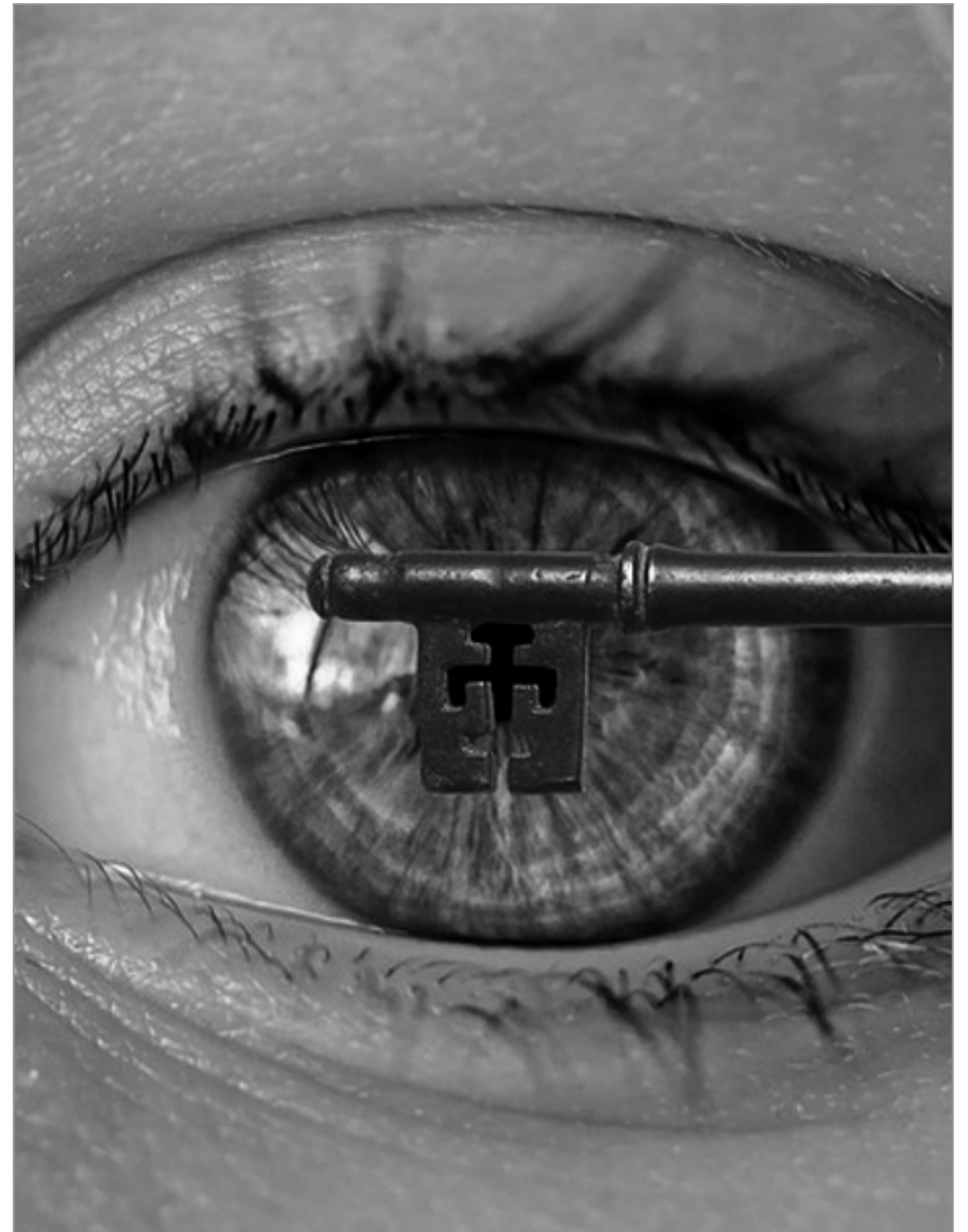
Must we prop up our lines like this
Lending legitimacy to our writing
Give evidence of our wider reading
And strut our credentials?
We need, first and last,
Quite simply,
To feel.



© Denise O'Hagan

STRANGER

Lodged deep within me
I nurse a nugget of knowledge
Invisibly and indivisibly
So lavished by reflection
And polished by awareness,
It shines hard and lustrous
Like the black onyx
I wear around my neck
On difficult days
Which reminds me
I'm not there yet, that
Until our first breath
Is married to our last
We cradle this paradox:
That our own death,
Intimate, ultimate stranger
And soundless accomplice,
Mythologised, demonised and eulogised
Or relegated to the margins of consciousness
Yet whose existence is a condition of ours
Has been with us at the start,
Has the path marked out
Shadowing our every step
And will release us at the end
As clouds do the rain
Even conferring
– if we are so disposed –
A sort of
Comfort.



Richard Krawiec's most recent poetry collections, is *Women Who Loved me Despite* (Sable Books). His many awards include fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the North Carolina Arts Council (twice), and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. He is founder of Jacar Press, a Community Active press which publishes fine poetry books and donates proceeds from book sales to progressive organizations and individuals. His novel *Paria* was recently published in France by Editions Tusitala. He has facilitated writing workshops in shelters, prisons, community sites, etc.. www.jacarpres.com



INEVITABLE

when touched by the cool
sunlight of autumn
the leaf doesn't choose

to flush but releases
to orange what has always been
pausing beneath the green

at the moon's beckon
waves finger the shawl
of the shoreline unravel

the beach downslope to quay
a sandy ridge always
waiting to find form

even the mushroom spores
drifted into humus by wind
as random and indecisive

as a toddler blitzing a leaf pile
obey the moist pull to unveil
capped shafts rising from loam

so love finds itself

wide-eyed infant released
from the comfort of lightless
fluid into dazzle of bright applause

& the warm drizzle of milk
from a breast promising
never to run dry

Richard Krawiec

Daragh Byrne was born in Ireland and somehow stumbled into a decade of life-making in Sydney. With a background in physics, a professional life of building software, and a longstanding study (and teaching) of meditation, he writes to explore the dichotomies of existence and the eternal balancing act between joy and sorrows. He splits his time between writing, practicing and teaching meditation, trying to do handstands, and making computers do things.



WEDDED TO FATE

Brushing a loose strand from her face
Fingers lightly on her cheek
I suggest we drop our argument and
Divert our fury back to making love again.

Sometimes on my back I can hardly
Face her, worried my bones will
Crack under her frenzy, I might never
Unpin my arms, there is nowhere to go

But where I'm told - that she intends these
To be my final gasps. Sometimes she grants me
A false liberation, a sense she has
Surrendered, that my will is my own

That she is at my pleasure, owned and
Covered. The windows in between allow
Light in - often scalding or blinding,
Searing into schisms; sometimes the dull grey

Of a damp afternoon, illuminating nothing
Sharing no sense of where we go next.
Though we disagree it seems inevitable
To stay bonded. Mates for life.

Daragh Byrne

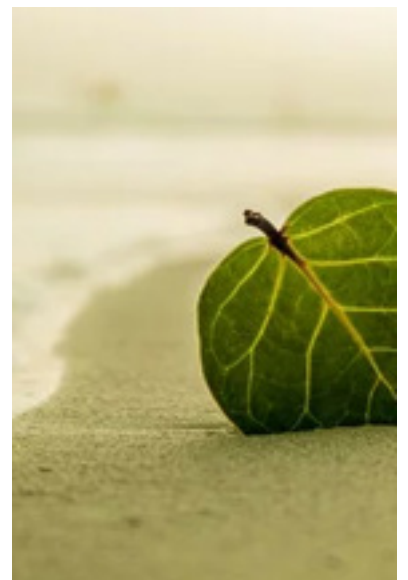
HIGH WATER

Sated, wrapped in you, whiplashed
 At the quickness of love, melting
 Like coconut sugar in the heat
 Of this island afternoon, skin
 Singing notes of musk and sand,
 I did not know you would become
 A high water mark not quite reached
 By later tides. We drifted into
 An open ease, finding ways to resist
 Resistance, each ready, open, turned
 Toward something right in front -
 Unhurried in our lapping, subsiding
 Into a gentle sea, drifting eventually
 Over horizons.

Years later having been washed away
 By the last wake of something dying
 Down in a dark puddle of empty faith
 I remember you - not wanting to jump
 Back in - but reminded that waves aren't
 Always dangerous, tide markers not just
 Warnings but can be something
 To take aim at.

BOTTLE TOP

When years from now they look beneath
 The remnants of our decadence
 Buried in this self-created rubble
 They'll find a plastic bottle top
 Tread-bound to its bottle
 And realise that we created ways
 For objects to outlast our love
 Though it was never meant.
 And they will find no evidence
 A heart once beat deep in this chest
 Gushed forth the super-heated blood
 That when it set, bound me to you
 As tight as any bottle top.
 Not blood nor love will leave their mark
 Upon this earth as bottles will
 So rest your hand upon my heart
 And feel its beat a moment
 Before it fades away
 As though it never was.



Linda Adair is a poet, writer, publisher and a co-editor of Rochford Street Review an online journal. My first chapbook is being published later this year by Melbourne Poets Union and my work has been included in the Puncher & Wattman anthology *To End All Wars*, the magazines *Social Alternatives*, & *P76*, online journals such as *Bluepepper*, *Meusse*, as well as being part of *Project 366*. <https://rochfordpress.com>
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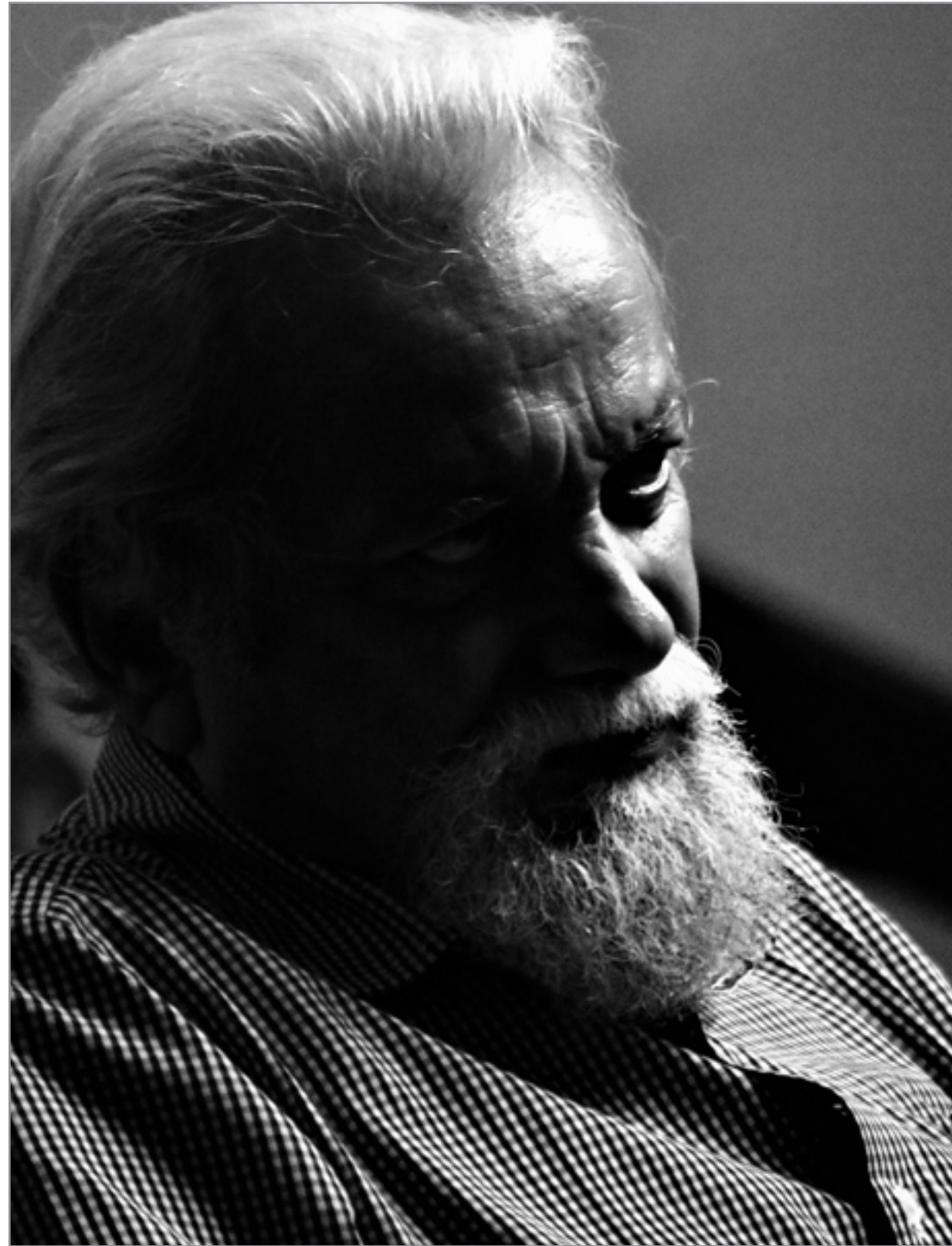


WORD PLAY LOVE

Picking through the pieces
 like scrabble addicts
 searching for words to hit
 a cool triple score decades on
 from incandescent memories
 of young firm flesh burning
 through that first rush of
 jasmines' cloying scent
 full of hope and desire
 years ago hiding out
 in a borrowed house for a night
 skeins of feeling entwined
 two impassioned refugees
 found a vision through the mist
 of all that was close to being lost
 under the edifice of daily life
 always the ebb and flow of tension
 prickling insistence vs not forgetting
 us so we rail against
 duties and deadlines
 find each other once more
 writhe together in slow splendour
 to the auspicious north east
 of feng shui mirror the
 ornate cornices of this old home's
 scrolls vines and blooms
 sutured each to each
 skins hearts and minds
 enscribed with this place
 and the view we have chosen.

Linda Adair

Randhir Khare is a distinguished writer, artist, teacher and theatre personality. He is the recipient of numerous national and international awards for his unique contribution to culture and education. His 36 volumes of poetry, fiction, essays, translation from tribal dialects and other writings as well as his seven solo exhibitions all explore themes of identity, belonging and the struggle to stay human in a violent and fragmented world. He has more recently spearheaded an initiative to enrich formal education through the experience of the arts. <https://randhirkhare.in/>



NIGHT WITH THE MOON WOMAN

All night she talked to rainbows
In the room,
A tangled moon among the trees
Swayed in the wind,
It was the hour of otherness -
The time of dark,
The moment
When the heart returned to rest.

I listened to her words slide
Down the walls -
Rainbowed in silence,
Watched them float amongst dust swirls
On the carpet floor,
The moon came in
And washed the room with white
Lunar fever danced inside my head.

Randhir Khare

A LITANY

1.
In the dark corolla of your body
I want to curl and sleep,
Whilst all around me stars are born
And the night sings like angels
Floating on the wetness of your being.

2.
In the dark corolla of your body
I want to breathe in
The fragrance of your flesh
Folding around me -
Clove tang and salty.

3.
In the dark corolla of your body
I want to lap warm honey
Rich with time and silence,
Ancient orchards heavy with fruit
And the forgetfulness of afternoon.

4.
In the dark corolla of your body
I want to wrap myself
Around your rhythms
Throbbing and crying
With the hunger of birth.

5.
In the dark corolla of your body
I search for the centre of your being
Whilst the effulgence of musk
Sticky with

5.
In the dark corolla of your body
I search for the centre of your being
Whilst the effulgence of musk
Sticky with thirst
Settles on me with the sweetness of longing.

6.
In the dark corolla of your body
I search for your wanting -
Love smeared and bucking
Skin rippled by waiting
Unzipped by tongues.

7.
In the dark corolla of your body
I reside, embedded like a bullet,
As all around me
The wound's walls close in
With completion.



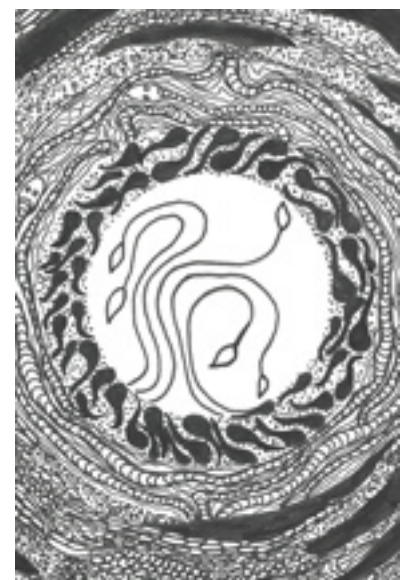
I CAN ONLY TELL YOU THIS

I can only tell you this -
 Tomorrow haunts me
 Like a broken dream
 I wake from crying
 Because the sky is blue
 And the breeze smells of dry leaves
 And dying,
 Because the afternoon dissolves
 In rain and dove calls,
 Because I asked you for love
 And you gave me a grey sea
 Whispering with gulls and yesterdays
 Because to breathe is to live
 And living is waiting -
 For the knock on the door,
 For the silence to join me at sunset,
 For the night to cover me
 With a shawl of owls,
 For you to return and tell me -
 I am back from the edges of tomorrow,
 Let's leave now -
 Yesterday is waiting.

I can only tell you this -
 Mirrors are for madness
 And for snaring dreams,
 Love is for the lonely.

DREAMTIME

This is dreamtime -
 Hour of flowering,
 Moment of becoming,
 Feather flight floating,
 Weeds winding wave lines,,
 Wombs swelling succulent seeds,,
 Words somersaulting
 Summer songs sighing,
 This is dreamtime -
 Mourning turns to morning
 And you, my love, are my sunburst



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.



Laura J Braverman

LIFEBLOOD

I.
Too close, too
close, too much
a part of marrow
cell and sinew

II.
You mothered
and fathered
my fledgling self

Gave shelter
with your body

III.
You forgave
and forgave
Waited—then
rightly made
me wait
for you

IV.
How do
you do it?
Galaxies hurl
ever outwards
But you—
you keep
me here

A FINE LACK

You leave
with my life—
I abandon myself

Take your sterile
words and cut
a path to nightfall—
go. Take

every howl
from every mouth
and go—

CRUSH

I'm just a girl but I see
right through you—
see the crack in your fine
fetching cup

You leap
from subject to subject—
make streams from the wide
river of your thoughts
I know you are smart
I am smart enough
to know

You talk as if your words
want to run away
and you run after them—
away from me

Sometimes I speak
like a slow book reads—
a halting, untrusting
one that waits
to surrender the point:

I want you
to remember every word

But you are already
running away



KEEP ME

There's a place
in the field where the wild
grass has gone—
two muddy pools
fill with halo ripples

What kind of ache
is the rain?
Breath's catch and tremble
in the wordless gap—
an endlessly
advancing wave, a drop
on a leaf—tiny
tap

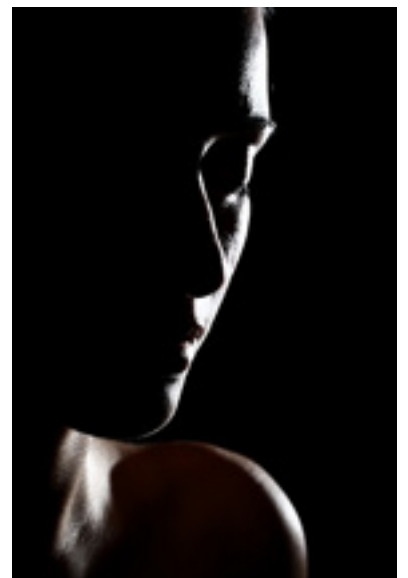
ABSENCE

I construct a home
for your being gone—
my inability to reach you

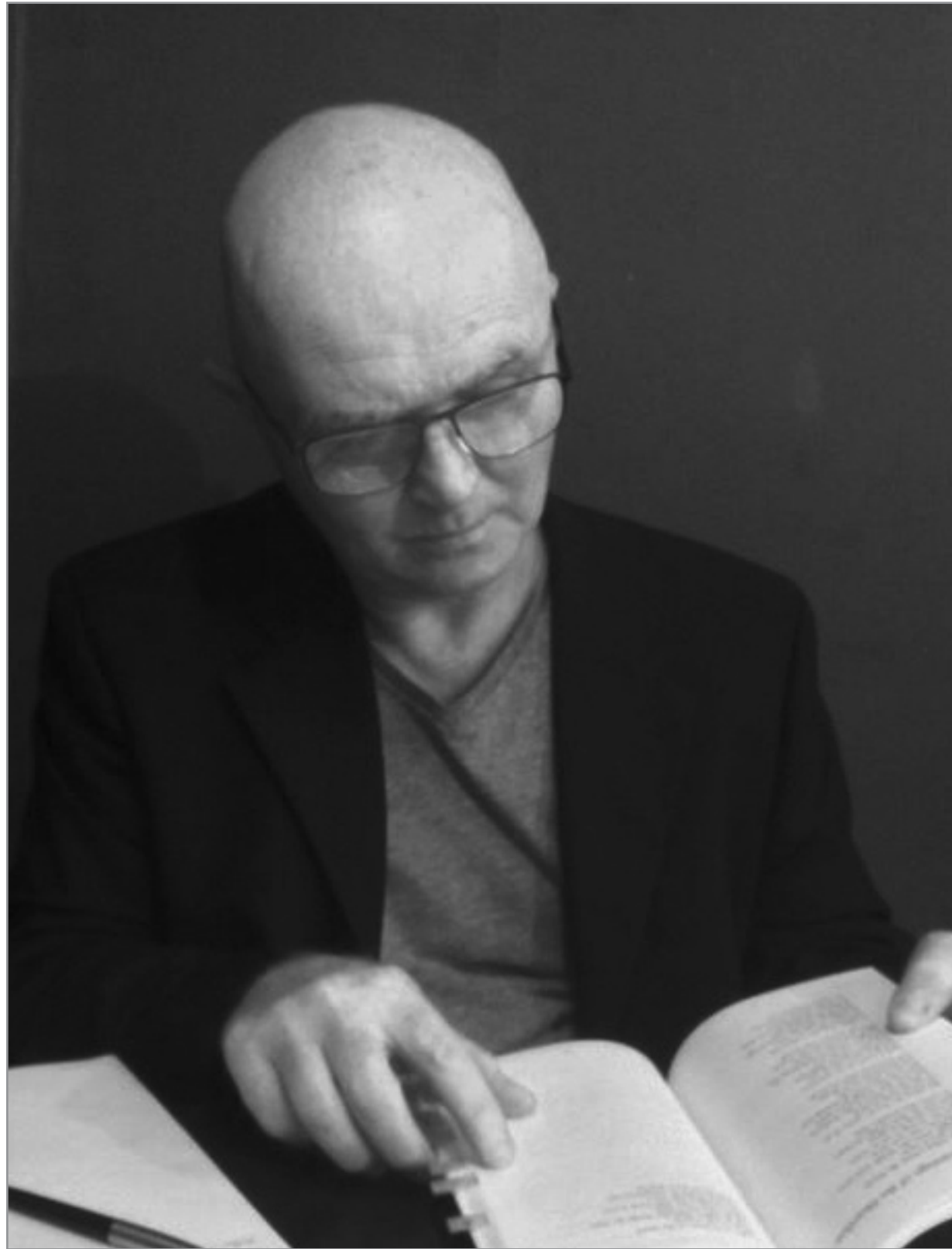
Do I need to unlearn
your voice—your
written words?
They steal
through the break

while milky orchids
on the balcony
persist
in their blooming

Am I done
weaving tapestries
out of silence?



John W. Sexton's sixth poetry collection, *Futures Pass*, was published by Salmon Poetry in 2018. A chapbook of surrealist poetry, *Inverted Night*, came out from SurVision in 2019. His poem *The Green Owl* was awarded the Listowel Poetry Prize 2007 for best single poem. His poem *In and Out of Their Heads*, from *The Offspring of the Moon*, was selected for *The Forward Book of Poetry* 2014. His poem *The Snails* was shortlisted for the 2018 An Post / Listowel Writers' Week Poem of the Year Award. In 2007 he was awarded a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in Poetry.



John W Sexton

THE SITTING PARLIAMENT

human downloads ...
souls to the inbox
carcasses to the ham folder

my horse of clotted sunlight ...
gallops through the rain
with flying colours

daisy-chain dress
daisy-chain shoes ... with whispers
she holds back the forest

Old Pondtropolis ...
half the sitting Parliament
taken by herons

the noseymouth ... eyes
on its tongue, it sees what goes down,
blabs, blabs, blabs

a lean fat wallet?
the wages of thin
are spent before they're in

to Mars by kitchen sink ...
and don't forget to pack
the elephant

this year's ultimate
foot fungal fail ... overgrown
toenail sculptures

apply ointment
to your soul for three days
avoid contact with flies

UNCLE ZENGTH'S MEMENTO

the fading cries
of the human race ...
so rare now, so collectible

atoll
of the fibrous queens ...
come, sex wasps, pollinate

lift me please
from the bed to the wheelchair ...
his math dissects galaxies

frying eggs
on the floor ... breakfast
in the submoltenmersible

the mountain in the bottle ...
uncle Zength's memento
of Planet Three

Piggle's house
of corn stalks ... the trained wolf
blows us back to Kansas

King Ruinus turned everything
he touched to rust ...
Mars glints in Pisces

alive, well, evolving
on the crewless starship ...
stowaway ants

for legal requirement beehives
in android heads ...
take Buzz Aspirin

I, LEGION

go with the gut ...
acid entities leave Titan
by human reflux

pain engines feebly
whimpering ... the crew donate
a kidney each

robots hear little choices
in their heads ...
a rise in metal illness

down there with Mr Poe ...
pigeons peck upon the floor
forevermore

the Thumbelinas
in their cabbage tower ... their shit
makes their house grow

the taps rattle
in their drought ... tonight the night
will shed its stars

what at first I took
as a rash ... my skin
giving birth to toads

we try a saline dialect
the whale sponge envoy
takes it all in

our pet, send down
your ladder of hair ... head lice
overdue a feed

I, Legion ...
the Matryoshka robot
disassembles itself



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Peter O'Neill is the author of six collections of poetry; *The Elm Tree* (2014), *Sker* (2016) and *The Enemy – Transversions from Baudelaire* (2015) all published by Lapwing; *The Dark Pool* (2015) and *The Muse is a Dominatrix* (2016) both published by *mgv2>publishing*; *Dublin Gothic* published by Kilmog Press (2015); and *More Micks than Dicks* (2017) published by Famous Seamus. He has also coedited *And Agamemnon Dead, an anthology of 21st century Irish Poetry* with Walter Ruhlmann for *mgv2>publishing* (2015) and edited *The Gladstone Readings* (2017) published by Famous Seamus.



THE MISANTHROPE

For Liam

Place Saint Michel, exiting from the Metro
Station, head perfectly aligned with street level,
The whoosh of air shunting up, intensity of
Movement from humans and their machines.

As you step up onto the street, like a priest upon an
Altar, or a passenger boarding a transport to some
Foreign destination, transcending the past, and a
Smokeless Notre Dame, without hunchback

But garlanded instead with saints, angels and gargoyle,
Towering above you, and the *Seine*, and all the goblets
Of *Jupiters* toasting in *Le Depart*, all manner of
Phenomenon vying for your eye, till you turn to face

The fountain, and it hits you - the Haussemanian
Edifice sublime! Its demonic aspect, once again
Startling you. This is France, not Ireland, so the
Christian motif is inspired, by Baudelaire.

This then the Satanic tributary where the source
Of 'evil' flows... BOREDOM. The great Dantesque
Symbol of Satan, vanquished at Michel's feet, the
Residual feature of an acute medievalism, which

On first sight might appear antiquated. This then
The great deception. For, nothing could be further
From the truth. So, what are the modern ingredients
To furnish the monster? What could possibly further

Peter O'Neill

continued overleaf...

THE MISANTHROPE *contd...*

Stoke the apparition to conjure him rudely to our
21st century, I almost wrote sensibility!... I'm clearly
At a loss as to what to say... However, move on!
Systematic annihilation, or better yet, as the Romans

Called it, decimation, in that it is a form of daily
Destruction, so finely attuned as to be a sign of an
Acute precision. *"Why the forty hour week!"*, Monsieur
Replies. *"C'est ça, l'horreur!"* To borrow a culinary

Term, complete reduction! When played out over an
Entire life, 50 or so years, three hundred and thirty- odd
Days a year, taken away to be consigned to toil,
In the banality of the quotidian, starting with the

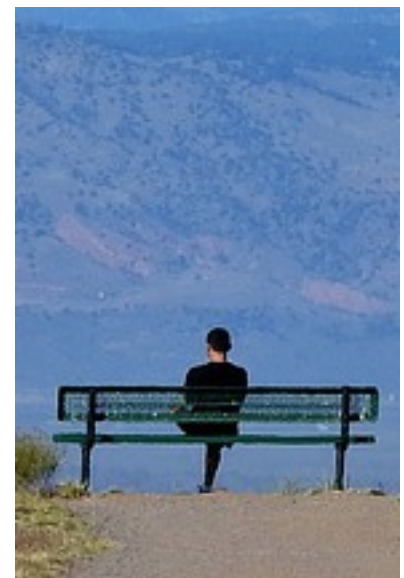
Commute, be it on plane, bus, car or on a train.
Body odours, or deodorant, and undesired for
Monologues on mobile phones assail you in
Succession, all with the hellish vision of 1000

Idiots before you scrolling on their iPhones, all
Being continuously surveyed, each conversation,
Text, post, or prattle. No escape from the Leviathan,
Which amasses now in the shape of Satan.

"Papa Satàn, Papa Satàn aleppe!" This then the
Shape of the ravenous beast that Saint Michael
Seeks to ward off, destroy, attired as he is in
Breast plate, brandishing the sword, finger in

The air! The 19th century symbolism redolent,
And hitting you like an aural shock. Unbalancing
You. So, that you step out onto the street, while
Catching your breath, getting your bearings as

You slightly falter; such is middle-age.
And walking down the boulevard of your youth,
Crossing over once again into the labyrinth,
In the footsteps of Dedalus. *Mon semblabe, mon frere.*



Jim Ward has previously been published for poetry in (*Cork Literary Review, Poetry Bus, Galway Advertiser, Feasta, Culture Matters' The Children of the Nation anthology*) and for one short story in Irish (*Feasta*). His play *Just Guff* won 'Best in the West' award at Galway Fringe Festival, 2017 and has toured locally including Town Hall Studio, Galway and Liberty Hall, Dublin as part of MayFest 2019. His poem *2016 Proclamation* was runner-up in the Galway Bay FM/Thoor Ballylee Poetry Challenge to 'Yeats' indomitable Irishry' 2017.



ETERNAL FLAME

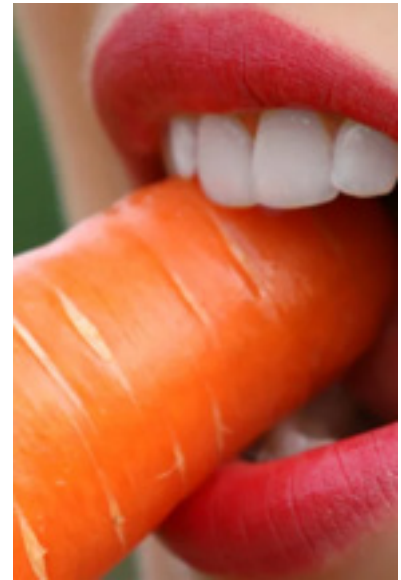
For Elaine

Now summer nears its season's end,
all we've tasted becomes stale and nothing's new.
Excitement cools a bit, like sap in trees.

But sap still runs in veins.
Never ceasing while the heart throbs,
while those alive can love.
And love's flame is lighted once again with a chance meeting,
a glance, or her presence... and...
the missing part replaced,
the heart is whole again
beating endlessly its wondrous pulse to love's enchanted rhythm.

For generations down, its joy and pain eternal.

Jim Ward



MALE STRIPPER

I have women;
I dance and they cheer. They wolfwhistle, I perform.
I flick my calvins down, then up, for a tease, a preview,
before the night depraves or hots up – depends on your view of us.
From the corner of my eye I spot her; enjoying me.
She's cute.
She whistles me over and stuffs a 20 into my thong.
Then pats it tight, above my crotch...and laughs at it.
Like I say...before the night hots up...
She's cute.
She's got a wedding band on her finger. Like all the rest.
I have all women, and none.

AOIFE

Between the cigarettes and sweets I caught her,
Aoife, stealthily tonguing him.
My innocent impressions destroyed,
her innocence turning to womanhood.
Deftly I looked away, embarrassed.
He arrogant, forthright, defiant.
Now what was it I came in to buy?
Oh yes, cold tongue for dinner tonight!

ESSENCE

I watched her in her togs
leaving the water to come ashore
after her dip.
Her awkward gait like that of a female Neanderthal
I remembered from a documentary;
knee and foot up then carefully down again,
like a stork or some other wader.
To shake off sea and set foot on the beach.
To come out of the ocean
as all life once came.

Dirk has a BA from Stanford in writing and an MA from Columbia in contemporary literature. He writes novels, short stories, experimental forms, and occasionally verse. He publishes regularly in literary and other magazines to a total of about 80 items. You can learn more at www.wandd.com including a complete list of his publications at <http://www.wandd.com/Site/Publications.html>.



Dirk van Nouhuys

FANNY DELAFIELD

Fanny writes sweet nurse novels to support herself and husband who is a graduate student in astrophysics studying dark matter. Her mother is Catholic and her father Methodist. She really enjoys writing and loves her routine. She writes every day for three hours starting as soon as her husband has left. Her husband knows what she writes but she won't let him see it and has not told him the pseudonym she uses, Lana Christian. It takes eight weeks to write each novel and she is paid \$5000, work for hire. Each novel is about a Catholic nurse who falls in love with a protestant doctor or vice versa. The resolution is always brought about by the guy's knowledge of science. Fanny uses Novel Factory software on a Lenovo. She is ambivalent about what she will do when her husband gets his Ph.D. and a teaching position. Will she go on writing these books?

The beginning of her novel *The Patient Doctor*

In was a blizzard day in Chicago. What a day for a blizzard! Ella Lamb was afraid she would be late to work. She put on layer after layer of clothes, trying not to wake her roommates. She put on two layers of yoga pants and over that a fine wool skirt that her grandmother had given her. "This will keep you warmer than any man," her grandmother, God rest her soul, had told her. She put on the top of her long underwear, and a thick cotton blouse and above that a wool sweater and donned her well-lined raincoat. She stepped out in the hall, unwarmed in her modest apartment house, and put on her gloves lined with faux fur, and her knit cap in the colors of her nursing school. Oh, lord she had spent all this time dressing — she would miss the 6:53! She hurried to the bus stop only to see it's back receding in the blowing snow. She stood there freezing, thinking that she would meet her new doctor that day, and he would think she was a flake. Thinking of flakes focused her eyes on the large flakes falling, and she knew she was in the hands of fate, or the Lord. It would be His will that would save her or not. The 7:03 bus came. It was filled with men and women dressed like her. How would she ever differentiate herself from them? If only the bus would go faster! She struggled out of the bus in a crowd at the hospital door. She was five minutes behind schedule. She hurried to the changing room. The layers she had put on seemd to be gripping her and impher because she was a Catholic. She had given up on her. A tall doctor strode around the corner from the ward. She did not recognize him: It must be him! He had curly blond hair. His eyes were fixed on the iPad in his hand. How could she ever make him notice her?

J.J. O'MALLEY

Born in a country town in Northern Ireland. He attended catholic primary schools and Queens University in Belfast. He was a member of the Provisional IRA for three years but broke with them over their dependence on violence. He fled to Paris where he lived in exile for six years, serving under a pseudonym as a correspondent for the Irish News until he sold his first novel, *In the Shade of the Shamrock*. He now lives with his wife Collette and their three children in Cardiff where he teaches at the University of South Wales. He writes for three hours starting in the morning depending on his class schedule. He uses MSWord on a Mac Pro. His novel *Bridget's Ghost* was short listed for the Man-Booker prize in 2014.

Beginning of his novel, *A Busy Day*

Paddy O'Donovan slept in old, cotton T-shirt and boxer shorts. He woke to the familiar feeling of his wife's absence. Every weekday she stole off to work early. He swung his feet onto the floor, rose and wrapped himself in his robe to fight the cold, started for the bathroom but turned and walked round the bed to his wife's side and made a motion with his cupped hand over her rumpled covers as if he were shielding her absence from some threat. He passed the door of his daughter's room without knowing if she were within. He decided to shave, ate breakfast of fried eggs over, bacon and toast and a cup of black coffee. Then he dressed and began his day.

Paddy was a busy man. "I am not one of those people who loll idly," he often told his friends. He would go on to find his friend Finn and they would walk to the club. He proceeded down Eccles Street. A breezy drizzle refreshed his face, but the sidewalk was slushy with old snow. He turned on Gardiner Street, walked three blocks on Gardiner scanning the shop windows for interesting items, and turned on to Parnell Street. He nodded to the wind. He was wearing a cap that shielded him from the drifting drizzle and a tweed overcoat that had been a hand me down from Sean Mason. He veered away from something dark in the snow, perhaps the body of some animal killed in the traffic. It was a shame they still allowed cars on Parnell Street. He'd heard that in the neighborhood by the General Post Office they had suspended traffic to let people walk more freely and also to save the planet. Well, the planet needed saving and more than the planet.

He turned into the outer door of the Irish News and scraped the snow of his shoes in the mudroom. He continued through the inner doors, paused to greet Scarlet Doud, the receptionist, who passed him in. She was his wife's cousin, and he had known her since they were in school. He walked a little upon his toes down the hall and opened to door of Finn's office. Finn was bent over his computer. The other desk, where Miss. Mulley worked, was bereft of its pretty young owner. Paddy nodded to Finn significantly. Finn nodded as well. He rose and took his cap from the hall tree, donned his jacket, and wrapped his neck in a scarf. The friends set out for Parnell Street.

"How's the family?" Finn asked.

"Much the same," Paddy said.



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MARTY CHARLES

Marty Charles, his birth name Bob Johnson, writes hard-boiled detective novels. He grew up in Detroit where, after dropping out of Wayne State, he worked for the Detroit Free Press until cut loose in a downsizing. He went to Hollywood and had an off-and-on career as a screenwriter, under the name Glenn Gifford. Eventually in effect he was black listed for drinking and bedding the wives or girlfriends of the wrong people. He returned to rural Michigan where he could live cheaply. He has been married three times and has no children. He's still drinks too much and is deeply cynical. He views fiction writers who don't write thrillers as non-professional. He works in MSWord on a Lenovo laptop. He always writes with his eyes on the movies.

Beginning of his novel *Cupid's Arrow*

The phone rang too early. I peeled open my eyes and checked out the name. It was Toni Fellows, my partner Gus' girlfriend.

"Hi Babe."

You have to get over here Nick."

"Is Gus there?" I asked.

"Yes, he's here," she said, so I knew she wasn't expecting to get laid. Her tone was flat. "Can I talk to him?"

"He can't talk now." I knew I was going to be angry and afraid. I'm not often afraid, but, when I am, I know that later I'm going to be angry.

I dressed in my suit, packed my heat and dialed an Uber. She was waiting for me when I got to the street in front of my building. She was a big-shouldered blond in a Lexus SUV. She popped the door for me. I thought of asking her why she was driving Uber if she owned a Lexus, but I didn't want any distractions this morning.

Gus and Toni lived on the third floor of an old apartment house in the Mission, not one of the new metal and glass creations where you can see what brand of vodka your neighbors drink. The street level was covered with bright paint -: you couldn't tell it if was a mural or graffiti. Toni buzzed me in. They lived on the top floor. When I reached the door I waited while she scanned me through the peephole.

Toni was wearing blue jeans and a white men's shirt just tight enough to remind me of her 36D tits. Toni was tough. You could see it in her eyes, though they were clouded now. 40ish, toned, bottle blond. She stood aside and gestured with those clouded eyes towards the bedroom. But I was already looking at the blood on the floor. It trailed in streaks toward the door of the bedroom. The streaks were still red and blotted gashes in the carpet. Gus lay on the floor by his desk. He'd been a big man. He was wearing blue cotton pajamas. An arrow was buried in middle of his back. The shaft was aluminum, and the fletches were white plastic. Not much blood licked the wound; the arrow must have gone right through him. His right hand was extended out and frozen, gripping a stretcher of his desk chair. He had been trying to get to his feet when he died. The killer must have watched him crawl.

"Where were you," I asked Toni.

"At the gym," she said.

"Have you called the cops?"

"No, I thought he would have wanted you see him first." I nodded.

"Give me an hour," I said, "McConnell will be on this case, it's his district, but I want the killer myself before the cops get him. He'll know that, but will you tell him anyway?"

"Oh, Nick," she said. She spread her hands outside her hips, and tears came to her eyes. But there was no time for tears.

Rachel Coventry lives in Galway where she is writing up a Ph.D. on Heidegger's poetics. Her poems have appeared in various journals including the North, The Moth, Poetry Ireland Review, Cyphers, The Irish Times, and The SHop. She won the Galway University Hospitals Arts Trust Annual Poetry Competition in 2016 and has been short-listed for many other competitions including The Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Prize. Her debut collection *Afternoon Drinking in the Jolly Butchers* is published by Salmon poetry.



Rachel Coventry

ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A LOVE POEM IN THE AGE OF TINDER

I grew up on a council estate in Scotland. We didn't have a lot of money but, it wasn't much of a problem because nobody else had much money either. It was the 1970s, money was scare all round. Things mattered. You had to look after them. I still remember the toys I had, the toys my brothers had, and the toys my friends had. Those toys were important. My brother had a stuffed monkey. Thirty years later, my childhood friend visited me and my mother, in Galway where I live now. My mother had been cleaning out her loft and the monkey had shown up. My friend walked in to the house and exclaimed "Look! Iain's monkey!" In the 1970's a stuffed monkey meant something.

As life went on, things continued to mean something. I remember clearly a velvet hand bag I had in my twenties, and the lurch in my stomach when I realised I'd left it on a tube train. Clothes too, an authentic 1960's lime green dress I bought in a second hand shop in Notting Hill Gate and wore until it fell to pieces. I have a bracelet that I bought in *Razzle Dazzle* on Shop Street in Galway. It's the only thing I brought to London that I also brought back home with me, ten years later. I still wear it from time to time. It connects me with my eighteen year old self.

This personal history of things begins in the 1970, a decade that is also generally viewed as the beginning of the digital era. When we speak about the digital age, we are talking about the advent of personal computing, which basically provided the ability to transfer large amounts of information freely and quickly via the internet. The onset of the digital age has had undeniable and profound consequences for all aspects of society. Economically, it marks the shift from a post-industrial revolution industry to an information based economy. The term 'digital age,' like the technology it describes, continues to develop and change and this makes characterization of the term a complex matter and one that isn't entirely without controversy. However, you know what I mean when I say 'digital era'.



While there is a lot to be said about the pros and cons of living in this brave new digital world but I want to make the point that it has profoundly influenced the way in which we interact with normal, everyday things. It seems to me now, that I could never buy another bracelet like the one I bought all those years ago. It cost me £2. It's not about the momentary value of a thing, it's about how I value it. I have more disposable income than I did when I was eighteen. I can buy stuff, if I want to. Last month, during the sales, like millions of other people, I decided to buy myself something but I'd really have to think about it to tell you what it was. Occasionally, I find a top or something in a drawer, still with the tag on, and have no memory of buying it. Recently, I bought a coat. A coat is not a casual purchase so I spent a bit of time trying to find the right one. Finally, I found one I liked, well, one that looked good in the shop. The assistant flattered me and I bought it. I enjoyed wearing it a few times, then a better coat showed up on my Facebook newsfeed. Maybe, if money was no object, I would have bought that one too, but it's not really about the money. The point I'm making is that the coat I bought is now devalued whether I buy the next one or not. Marketers recognise this, they call it 'post-purchase cognitive dissonance.' They have strategies designed to combat it, but despite these, I'm pretty sure, in twenty years' time, I won't remember this coat.

I see examples of this over and over again. Things seem to lose their value as the decades slip by. The things I own become increasingly insignificant. Heidegger sees this devaluation of things as a consequence of living in a technological age. He died in the 1970s thus he did not witness the dizzying rise of digital technology, but his writings eerily predict the consequences of living in an increasingly digital society. He maintained that technology is prior to us and therefore it "holds sway over us." In short, we cannot escape its influence by deleting our social media accounts and buying a Nokia. Central to his account, is the idea that technology is an ontological process that decides how we come to know things. Technology is not just a collection of devices and processes, but rather it is the way we understand reality. It is inevitable. At the core of Heidegger's account is the idea that, in a technological age, everything, including humanity itself, becomes 'standing reserve.' In simple terms, this means that everything becomes a resource or a commodity, which 'stands by,' always on hand, to be used or exploited. There is hardly anything controversial in this idea. The internet converts practically everything into a product. For example, I can sit in a café and hear a song I like in the background and ask Siri to identify it and then buy it there and then.

I can see George Clooney wearing a pair of sunglasses in a film, Google them and order them within a few seconds. But I also know that the glasses will not fulfil their promise. However, when I see another pair, I may be tempted to buy those too. My space fills up with clutter, none of it matters.

Another consequence of technology as Heidegger understands it is that humanity itself becomes standing reserve. This is a more complex idea than I can properly convey here but, it can be understood in terms of commodification. The idea of people being commodified by the internet is hardly a controversial one. In some sense, it is just an obvious fact. Online, I am just a resource to those who would mine my data in order to sell it on to interested parties, Cambridge Analytica perhaps, or someone selling coats. The notion of women, in particular, being objectified and turned into products is also, of course, not a new one and the internet provides ample scope to continue this trend. But there are more and less subtle ways to commodify people at play, on the internet, too. Tinder is an obvious example of a less subtle way of transforming people into something akin to consumer goods. It is little more than a banal observation to say that people on Tinder are just resources 'standing by' to be exploited or used. A picture of someone appears on your screen, you swipe left or right and then another face appears. In minutes, you can reject fifty people. The decision to swipe left or right is made in a heartbeat and on the basis of a few considerations; age, location, but mostly, of course, physical attractiveness. You might object that it is human nature to pick potential romantic partners on the basis of their physical attractiveness and, thus, Tinder just allows you access to a wider pool. This is undoubtedly true, but the question we may need to ask is what does it do to our view of each other, when we can reject fifty human beings in the time it takes to boil a kettle? There are the many stories of those who met their spouse on Tinder and, of course, this happens. But what about the Tinder stories that people don't tell over lunch? Even if you do meet someone on Tinder, someone you like and want to get to know 'in the real world,' is it like my coat? The minute I see another better one, are they devalued?

When I was a teenager, I had a big crush on someone. He wasn't the best or the worst looking boy (would I swipe left today?), but he wrote poetry. Like many teenagers do, I wrote secret love poems to him in the back of my school copy books. For a little while, at least, there was no one else. He did not have to compete for my attention, with every other boy within a hundred kilometre radius. He seemed unique to me, worthy of a poem.

This brings us to the question of poetry. One final consequence of Heidegger's account of technology is that technology makes art difficult to understand. According to Heidegger, poetry, and technology are similar in that they are both ways of understanding reality or more emphatically, they are ways that reality is. They are not merely options we choose between. We are, in fact, under the influence of one or the other. The digital, as I am describing it here, is that which makes things show up as meaningless. The digital transforms things, including ourselves and other people into meaningless objects. It steals away the significance a thing may have had in a previous age. Art, especially poetry, does the opposite. Poetry opens up the meanings of things. Heidegger, using the example of the River Rhine, compares Hölderlin's poem on the subject with the fact that, now, the river dammed up for the generation of electricity is simply a power source. For Heidegger, the two understandings cannot coexist, because the technological understanding does not just strip away meanings but it also replaces them with a new understanding: The idea that everything is simply a resource to be used or a product to be consumed. Technology cuts away poetic meanings and views phenomena simply as stored potential. Thus, even a river which is not used in the generation of electricity is, nonetheless, no longer a river in any traditional sense. It is now a potential power source or, perhaps, a resource to be exploited by the tourism or fishing industries.

Heidegger's insistence that the technological and the poetic cannot coexist is certainly a pessimistic view. Philosophers disagree on how aptly Heidegger's account describes the current situation. Some say he goes too far, some say he doesn't go far enough. Clearly, there is still poetry, clearly there are still love poems. Doesn't this fact laugh in the face of my questioning the possibility of a love poem? Do we not live in a world where there is both Tinder and love poetry? Perhaps. But it all depends on what you mean by poetry. A few platitudes from an Instapoet won't cut it for Heidegger. Poetry must get to the heart of the matter and what is the heart of the matter now? The moment my friend recognised the stuffed monkey was a poetic moment, a shared history and a shared understanding suddenly burst forth from a shabby stuffed animal. We saw the truth of it. Good poetry does this. It shows things in all their significance. If things lose their meaning in the digital age and worse if people also become mere resources, then it is difficult to see how there could be any real poetry but especially love poetry. But Heidegger's picture is not entirely without hope.

Even though poetry and the poetic are threatened by the encroachment of the technological, they are also the antidote to it. If we want to use our devices without being used by them we need to become more attuned to the poetic. How we do this is another question but it can't hurt to put down Tinder and try to write a love poem.



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