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Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
MARCH 2020

LEDIA DUSHI
What comes from the waters

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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Translated from Albanian to English by Genta Hodo.
Special thanks to Alisa Velaj.

LEDIA DUSHI

Ledia Dushi was born in 1978 in the northern Albanian town of Shkodra. She studied Albanian language and literature and she continued and finished her master's and doctoral studies in ethnology-folklore. She worked both as a journalist and in municipal government, where she was responsible for culture in Shkodra City Hall. She is also a translator from English, Italian and Spanish. She translated authors as Gabriele D'Annunzio, Cesare Pavese, Dylan Thomas, Jorge Luis Borges, Umberto Eco, Andrea Camilleri, Carlos Ruiz Zafon, Jane Austen, Hilary Mantel. Her well-received verse is written primarily in the dialect of Shkodra, gegë. It has been published in the volumes: Ave Maria bahet lot (Ave Maria Turns to Tears), Tirana 1997; Seancë dimnash (Winter's Session), Shkodra 1999; Me mujt me fjet me kthimin e shpendve (If I could sleep with the bird's return...), Tirana 2009 and a volume of her verse has also appeared in Italian, Tempo di pioggia (Rainy Weather), Prishtina 2000, Rain in the dark, Transcendent Zero Press, USA 2019, N'nji fije t'thellë gjaku (In a deep thread of blood), Onufri Publishings, Tirana, Albania. In the 1998 she was awarded with "The Silver Pen for First Book" from the Ministry of Culture. Her poems are published in Lichtungen – Zeitschrift für Literatur, Kunst und Zeitkritik, Nr.103, XXVI. Jahrgang, Graz 2005, and Orte. Schweizerische Literaturzeitschrift n°186 : Lyrik aus Albanien, 2016. Her poems are translated into German, Polish, French, Macedonian, Greek, Serbian, Italian, Chinese.

Ledia Dushi

1

s'dihet çka asht e ujit
 shpija mbetun mes gurësh
 mugullimi i lëmyshkët
 sytë e përmytun
 sende t'kafkullta uji
 ankthi i bregut
 thirrma e pulbardhave
 hana e pathyeme
 zhvoshket veçse mbi gjak
 cirka fjalësh t'langëzueme n'gojë
 ama e rrushit të shkelun me kambë
 trup i shtypun me taft
 ndër gra siset gjithshkafja
 frymë vena mbërthyesë
 që rrëzohet në fund të barkut
 çka përumbet cijatje grash
 çikërrima zogjsh shkapetje uji
 ndër shkambije përmbas dallge
 za fryme za tingulli s'dihet
 ujana asht e mefshët e asgja s'thotë
 për ishuj dhembjen që del nesh
 e rrethon me tokë

1

who knows what comes from the waters
 smitten houses beneath the stones
 a musky dusk
 drowned the eyes
 cold dead watery things
 the anguishing coast
 the wailing seagulls
 an unbroken moon
 yet to shuck itself, solely in blood
 sprinkles of liquefied words
 within the mouth
 the smell of grape, when trampled on
 a body smashed in heat
 every drop of it drains into women
 a vein snatching breath
 falls down to the womb
 and it wastes into giggles of women
 into bird crumbs water colliding
 into the cliffs past the waves
 there a breath chirm or a noise chirm
 the pond is clumsy don't chirm a word
 for islands, the pain we unleash
 surrounds it by land



© Ledia Dushi

2

ka me kenë mars
 e bari ka me shndritë
 ndër fije t'lidhuna shiu
 deri t'kryhet vezullimi
 ka me u ba natë
 për me dalë kryepështjellun
 n'mjegull shtjellë humbimi
 ballit me i lëshue andrra
 përpos shtrojes s'mbrame
 me u këputë pendazhgulun
 n'ndoj shtroje flijimi...
 prej uji asgja s'vjen
 heshtja na i heqë sytë
 e nuk na len me pa
 si rrëshqitet n'bar
 kur don me kalue n'mars
 e shtegu për atje
 të ndih për kah Qielli
 t'ligë t'plas përtokë
 tue t'shti djegën
 veç për ndoj Njeri

2

it will be March
 the grass will sparkle
 in stringed up ties of rain
 till the glinting is over
 it will become night
 to go out wrapped headed
 cloaked in this foggy shroud
 hurling dreams into foreheads
 before the final veil
 to tear down all desplumed
 into some veil of immolation...
 nothing rises out of water
 silence numbs our eyes
 so that we can't see
 how smooth the grass can be
 to slide our way to March
 how its path
 leads you to the Sky
 slams you knocks you down
 burns you in the rush
 to none other than a Human



3

kangë...

kam andrrue se mbahem n'dy pendë fajkoi e thuejse lëshohem
 thuejse n'jerm thuejse n't'bardha me kryet mbuluem një hane t'përnatun
 them do kangë them do kangë që vijnë prej dikah ma fort prej mbrendë
 andrrueshëm mbahem ndër emna emna grash e grash ndër kangë
 grash me sëmundë me sëmundë t'errët me sëmundë t'langët që këputen nën pemë
 e t'njomtit i thërrasin n'dergjë tue rrotullue flakë
 kam andrrue se mbahem n'ajrë n'dy pendë ndër duer pezull
 sy ndër sy me një fajkue...

3

canto...

I've been dreaming of me holding onto two falcon feathers nearly falling
 nearly in ramble nearly in the white of a nightly moon covering my head
 i sing a few songs sing a few songs that sprout of a place deeper than the inside
 dreamily i hold on to names women names and to sung women
 women ill with a dark illness wet illness falling off the tree
 and the moistened invite her to languish circling in flare
 been dreaming of myself hanging onto two floating feathers in the ai
 eye to eye with a falcon

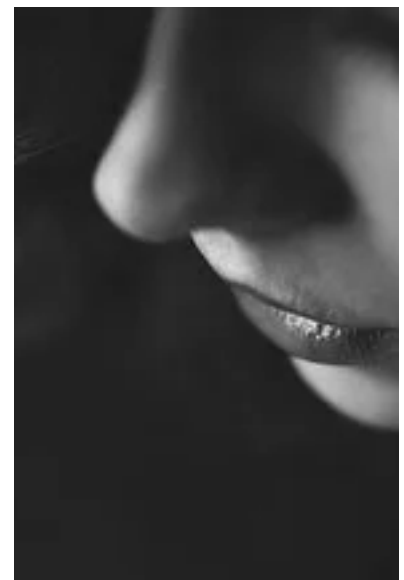


4

gjuha asht e vdekshme e pavend
 për çka Shpirti qysh n'krye t'herës
 mban ndry, ç'prej përtejes s'pa-anë
 qielli nuk asht i fshehun, por i pazbërthyem
 sekush asht timpulli i vetes s'vet
 e rrin nën Ty që vjen s'nalti
 e ka veshë me t'ndi, Shpirt me zditë
 meh n'jerme e esenca,
 këndellun n'secilen trandje kozmike
 e mbahesh e mbahesh e mbahesh...
 thuejse tue ra mbahesh n'nji fije gjaku
 n'ajrë n'ajrë syngulun n'qiell yjesh qe t'flasin
 s'nalti rrin n'ajrë n'nji fije t'thellë gjaku

4

the language is dead and useless
 to what the Soul since the beginning of time
 keeps locked, since immense eternity
 the sky's no secret, he's undisclosed
 everyone's a temple of themselves
 standing under You who spring from above
 their ears ought to hear you, their Souls ought to shine drawn in delirium and
 essences
 enlightened by each and every cosmic blast
 and you hang on you hang on you hang on
 nearly falling you hang on to a thread of blood
 in the air in the air staring at the sky of talking stars
 aloft you stand in the air on a deep thread of blood





Elsa Korneti (1969) is a poet and essayist. She has published eight books of poetry, two of translations and one of essays, while she has translated from English, German, Italian and Spanish significant poetry works. Two of her poetry collections have been distinguished as shortlisted: *A bouquet of fish bones* (2009) and the *Pearl Tin* (2011) both nominated for the National Award of Poetry. She has been awarded first prize in a national short story competition (Prize Ta Nea) and a significant national prize (Prize George Karter) for a poetry collection under the title *Normal people with a plume and a brindled tail*. Her poems, short stories, book reviews, essays and translations have appeared in numerous domestic well-known literary magazines. Her poetry has been translated into several languages and is also featured in various foreign anthologies and magazines. What the critics say: "Hers is a personal poetry, it deals with themes universally relevant and does so in a disarmingly sincere and unpretentious way. The dialogue between a critical alter ego and the self reveals whatever false, deceptive and concealed, but also whatever true and valuable there may be in the narrator's experiences. An exciting new voice in contemporary Greek poetry". **Translation from Greek by David Connolly.**

FADE OUT

●

I was one of the innocent and unsuspecting victims
of a mass family hallucination.
The last kiss was not to say goodnight.
How cleverly you fooled me
Father !

●

Your life a firework that lit up and faded.
With a shove given you by God
you plummeted into infinity.
Now you're a part of the cosmic responsibility.

●

You chose your voluntary blindness.
You didn't see what was happening
as you were unable to deal with more sorrow.
But that's one more shabby excuse.

●

Shortly after one more wrong diagnosis
he'd said to you:
"That's called Leichtsinnigkeit or else
the sin of frivolity".

continued overleaf...

Elsa Korneti

FADE OUT ... contd

●

After the needle's instantaneous skipping
 came the cardiac pause.
 Once your innards
 had been well gnawed
 by that degenerate canker
 the last word
 belonged to the cardiographer.

●

The lilt of his voice was gone for good.
 Father the rock became a breeze.
 Father the breakwater became a bird.
 Father the thunder became a portent of rain.
 He left without seeking a hug or a kiss
 and remaining to divide us
 was a death and a misunderstanding.
 – Why are you crying now little girl?

●

Untroubled the polar chill plundered
 the unbending body
 leafed sensually through life's petals
 scattered them in the bowels
 of the pulped human firmament.
 It was the last rehearsal for death.
 You were present.

●

Of what use are tears?
 They have nothing to wash away any more.
 Yet they know how to silently creep in the dark
 and hide away deep in the pillow's furrows.

●

What was lost
 is love.
 Unselfish love.
 And all those goodnight kisses
 that evaporated in the end.

●

The diamond cross you're wearing.
 His last gift to you before dying.
 And to think that all his life he was an atheist.

continued overleaf...

FADE OUT ... contd



You don't have the strength to repel
sorrow's siege
when raging it knocks
at your door
when it squeezes your cells
drains your mind
empties your eyes
and drinks your soul.
All you can do
is to wish it:
"Good health".



Lord how coldly and forcibly
you pin the absences
on the lost property board.



All that you wanted to say
all that you wanted to find time to say
remained broken fish bones
stuck in your throat.



You asked:

Where do all those people without shadows go?
Where do all those shadows without people go?
Where do all those people without voices go?
Where do all those voices without people go?

In the realm of silence and absence
there are
neither bodies
nor shadows
nor voices.

Just before dying
he'd said to you:
"All things come to an end".

end

FADE OUT

●

Υπήρξα ένα από τα αθώα και ανυποψίαστα θύματα
μιας ομαδικής οικογενειακής παραίσθησης.
Το τελευταίο φιλί δεν ήταν για καληνύχτα.
Πόσο έξυπνα με ξεγέλασες ...
Πατέρα !

●

Πυροτέχνημα που άναψε και έσβησε η ζωή σου.
Με μια σπρωξιά που σου έδωσε ο Θεός
γκρεμίστηκες στο Άπειρο.
Τώρα πια αποτελείς μέρος της συμπαντικής ευθύνης.

●

Επέλεξες την εκούσια τύφλωσή σου.
Δεν έβλεπες αυτό που συνέβαινε γιατί
δεν μπορούσες να διαχειριστείς άλλη λύπη.
Αλλά αυτή είναι άλλη μια άθλια δικαιολογία.

●

Λίγο μετά από άλλη μια λανθασμένη διάγνωση
σου είχε πει :
«Αυτό λέγεται Leichtsinnigkeit ή αλλιώς
το αμάρτημα της επιπολαιότητας».

●

Μετά το στιγμιαίο χοροπηδητό της βελόνας
ήρθε η καρδιακή παύλα.
Αφού σου ροκάνισε καλά καλά
τα σωθικά το έκφυλο σαράκι
την τελευταία λέξη
την είχε ο καρδιογράφος.

●

Η χροιά της φωνής του χάθηκε για πάντα.
Ο πατέρας βράχος έγινε αεράκι.
Ο πατέρας κυματοθραύστης έγινε πουλί.
Ο πατέρας κεραυνός έγινε προμήνυμα βροχής.
Έφυγε χωρίς να διεκδικήσει ένα χάδι ή ένα φιλί
κι έμεινε να μας χωρίζει
ένas θάνατος και μια παρεξήγηση.
- Γιατί κλαις τώρα κοριτσάκι ;

●

Το πολικό ψύχος λαφυραγώγησε ανενόχλητο
το άκαμπτο σώμα
ξεφύλλισε ηδονικά τα πέταλα της ζωής
τα σκόρπισε στα έγκατα
του πολτοποιημένου ανθρώπινου στερεώματος.
Ήταν η τελευταία πρόβα θανάτου
και ήσουν παρών.

continued overleaf...

FADE OUT ... contd

●

Σε τι χρησιμεύουν τα δάκρυα ;
 Δεν έχουν να ξεπλύνουν τίποτα άλλο πια.
 Ξέρουν όμως να σέρνονται αθόρυβα στο σκοτάδι
 και να κρύβονται βαθιά στις πτυχές του μαξιλαριού.

●

Αυτό που χάθηκε
 είναι η αγάπη.
 Η ανιδιοτελής αγάπη.
 Κι όλα εκείνα τα φιλιά της καληνύχτας
 που εξατμίστηκαν τελικά.

●

Ο διαμαντένιος Σταυρός που φοράς.
 Το τελευταίο Δώρο του σε σένα πριν πεθάνει.
 Και να σκεφτείς ότι σε όλη του τη ζωή υπήρξε άθεος.

●

Δεν έχεις τη δύναμη να αναχαιτίσεις
 την πολιορκία της λύπης,
 όταν σου χτυπά
 την πόρτα λυσσασμένα,
 όταν στύβει τα κύτταρά σου,
 χλοιάζει ο μυαλό σου,
 αδειάζει τα μάτια σου
 και πίνει την ψυχή σου.
 Το μόνο που μπορείς να κάνεις
 είναι να της ευχηθείς :
 «Εις Υγείαν».

●

Θεέ μου πόσο ψυχρά και βίαια
 καρφώνεις τις απουσίες
 στον πίνακα των απολεσθέντων.

●

Όλα αυτά που ήθελες να πεις,
 όλα αυτά που ήθελες να προλάβεις να πεις,
 έμειναν θρυμματισμένα ψαροκόκαλα
 μπηγμένα στο λαιμό σου.

●

Ρωτούσες:

Που πάνε όλοι αυτοί οι άνθρωποι χωρίς σκιές ;
 Που πάνε όλες αυτές οι σκιές χωρίς ανθρώπους ;
 Που πάνε όλοι αυτοί οι άνθρωποι χωρίς φωνές ;
 Που πάνε όλες αυτές οι φωνές χωρίς ανθρώπους ;

Στο Βασίλειο της Σιωπής και της Απουσίας
 δεν υπάρχουν
 ούτε σώματα
 ούτε σκιές
 ούτε φωνές.

Λίγο πριν πεθάνει
 σου είχε πει:
 «Όλα έχουν ένα Τέλος».

continued overleaf...



FADE OUT ... contd

●

Δεν έχεις τη δύναμη να αναχαιτίσεις
την πολιορκία της λύπης,
όταν σου χτυπά
την πόρτα λυσσασμένα,
όταν στύβει τα κύτταρά σου,
χλομιάζει ο μυαλό σου,
αδειάζει τα μάτια σου
και πίνει την ψυχή σου.
Το μόνο που μπορείς να κάνεις
είναι να της ευχηθείς :
«Εις Υγείαν».

●

Θεέ μου πόσο ψυχρά και βίαια
καρφώνεις τις απουσίες
στον πίνακα των απολεσθέντων.

●

Όλα αυτά που ήθελες να πεις,
όλα αυτά που ήθελες να προλάβεις να πεις,
έμειναν θρυμματισμένα ψαροκόκαλα
μπηγμένα στο λαιμό σου.

●

Ρωτούσες:

Που πάνε όλοι αυτοί οι άνθρωποι χωρίς σκιές ;
Που πάνε όλες αυτές οι σκιές χωρίς ανθρώπους ;
Που πάνε όλοι αυτοί οι άνθρωποι χωρίς φωνές ;
Που πάνε όλες αυτές οι φωνές χωρίς ανθρώπους ;

Στο Βασίλειο της Σιωπής και της Απουσίας
δεν υπάρχουν
ούτε σώματα
ούτε σκιές
ούτε φωνές.

Λίγο πριν πεθάνει
σου είχε πει:
«Όλα έχουν ένα Τέλος».

end

BRANCOUSI’S EGG

The woman suspended between the cast and the wall
The man captive in the outline

Come then
Make a move
While the voice still caresses the look

The woman is hatched in the cast

You know you can do it
Break with the format

The cast grows larger
The slit gets narrower

Say something
Break with the trite

Behind the gate
he stares at her puzzled
trying to understand
to understand?

Outside the cast the woman
Cracks

Don’t stare at me
Make a revelation
Search for an intervention

The wave dyes the toes a saffron color

The woman lies beneath the cast
the plaster body empty
an oval shell
without markings

The words compose themselves in explanation
as the object moves away
the emptiness of the space grows larger

A man will appear with whom she’ll fall in love
But not yet



ΤΟ αυγό του BRANCOUSI

Η γυναίκα μετέωρη ανάμεσα στο εκμαγείο και τον τοίχο
Ο άντρας αιχμάλωτος στο περίγραμμα

Έλα λοιπόν
Κάνε μια κίνηση
Όσο ακόμα η φωνή χαϊδεύει το βλέμμα

Η γυναίκα εκκολάπτεται μέσα στο εκμαγείο

Το ξέρεις ότι μπορείς
Σπάσε τη φόρμα

Το εκμαγείο μεγαλώνει
Η σχισμή στενεύει

Πες κάτι
Σπάσε το τετριμμένο

Πίσω από την καγκελόπορτα
εκείνος την κοιτάζει με απορία
προσπαθεί να καταλάβει
να καταλάβει ;

Η γυναίκα έξω από το εκμαγείο
Ραγίζει

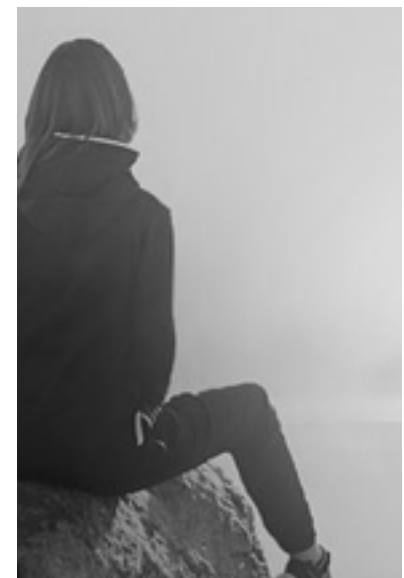
Μη με κοιτάς
Κάνε μια αποκάλυψη
Ψάξε για μια παρέμβαση

Το κύμα βάφει τα δάχτυλα των ποδιών στο χρώμα
του κρόκου

Η γυναίκα ξαπλώνει κάτω από το εκμαγείο
το γύψινο σώμα άδειο
κέλυφος ωσειδές
χωρίς στίγματα

Οι λέξεις συγκροτούνται σε επεξήγηση
όσο το αντικείμενο απομακρύνεται
το κενό του χώρου μεγεθύνεται

Ένας άντρας θα εμφανιστεί τον οποίο θα ερωτευτεί
Αλλά όχι ακόμα



TWO SEMI-CIRCLES

1st semicircle
Gaining the half

2nd semicircle
Struggling for the other half

Circle
The result that you always lose the whole

The python
The python circle
The python circle noose

The cordon of imaginary enemies
Encircles you
Tightens round you
Till it suffocates you
and then dresses you
in a shiny snakeskin shirt
with gold scales

Yes.
For the first time I notice the asphyxiation
I see that asphyxiation has a color
Asphyxiation is gold
Gold and measurable
A full 18 carats
persistently grind your finger
teaching you
to stoically endure
successive distortions
and to amuse yourself
with all the opposite
imperfect
yet inseparable pairs of things

To understand why
right fights against right
and not wrong

You know it anyway
It's the law of the ocean
When hypocrisy heightens mirth
The coupling takes place on the reef
For safety
The self-preservation instinct
So powerful
Between two pains
You always choose the lesser
You call it the right to less

Yet how do you admit love's absence
and the unknown personal stigma?
Why don't you at last accept it
The communication channel has for some time
taken the course of the drains

And when they ask you:
"How does escape translate today?"
You reply:
"Why, as creative anxiety"

You strive to leave behind you a nonplussed crowd
A swarm of horseflies that will stare at you
as you walk away
All these are
Toxic people
Toxic live-in spouses

continued overleaf...



TWO SEMI-CIRCLES ... contd

All those are
 The gum stuck to the tulip's petals
 The toothpaste tube's open cap
 that cries out
 cries out
 But who can hear the tube's voice?
 it's crumpled
 petrified

In Verona's arena
 The terrible lizard
 curls like a ring
 Content
 In order to digest

You're enchanted by its castrato voice

"What's it singing?"

"The wedding ring's bite"

Δύο ημικύκλια

1ο ημικύκλιο
 Η κατάκτηση του μισού

2ο ημικύκλιο
 Η πάλη για το άλλο μισό

Κύκλος
 Η κατάληξη να χάνεις πάντα το ολόκληρο

Ο πύθωνας
 Ο πύθωνας κύκλος
 Ο πύθωνας κύκλος θηλιά

Ο κλοιός των φανταστικών εχθρών
 Σε τυλίγει
 Σε σφίγγει
 Όσπου να σε πνίξει
 κι έπειτα να σου φορέσει
 ένα αστραφτερό πουκάμισο φιδιού
 με λέπια χρυσά

Ναι.
 Για πρώτη φορά παρατηρώ την ασφυξία
 Διαπιστώνω ότι η ασφυξία έχει χρώμα
 Η ασφυξία είναι χρυσή
 Χρυσή και μετρήσιμη
 18 ολόκληρα καράτια
 σου τροχίζουν επίμονα το δάκτυλο
 σου έμαθαν
 να υπομένεις στωικά
 απανωτές αλλοιώσεις
 και να διασκεδάζεις
 με όλα τα αντίθετα

continued overleaf...

Δύο ημικύκλια ... contd

ατελή
κι όμως αχώριστα ζεύγη πραγμάτων
Να κατανοείς γιατί
το σωστό μάχεται το σωστό
κι όχι το λάθος

Αφού το ξέρεις
Είναι ο νόμος του ωκεανού
Όταν η υποκρισία κορυφώνει την ιλαρότητα
Το ζευγάρι γίνεται στον ύφαλο
Για ασφάλεια

Το ένστικτο της αυτοσυντήρησης
Τόσο ισχυρό
Μεταξύ δύο πόνων
Διαλέγεις πάντα τον ελαφρύτερο
Το αποκαλείς το δικαίωμα στην ελαφρότητα

Πώς όμως ομολογείς την απουσία της αγάπης
και το άγνωστο προσωπικό στίγμα ;
Γιατί δεν το παραδέχεσαι επιτέλους
Το κανάλι της επικοινωνίας έχει μπει από καιρό
στη ρότα του αποχετευτικού αγωγού

Κι όταν σε ρωτούν:
- «Πώς μεταφράζεται σήμερα η φυγή ;»
Απαντάς:
- « Μα, ως δημιουργική αγωνία»

Πασχίζεις ν' αφήσεις πίσω σου ένα αποσβολωμένο πλήθος
Ένα σμήνος αλογόμυγες που θα σε κοιτούν
καθώς απομακρύνεσαι

Είναι όλοι αυτοί
Οι τοξικοί άνθρωποι
Οι τοξικοί σύζυγοι συγγάτοικοι

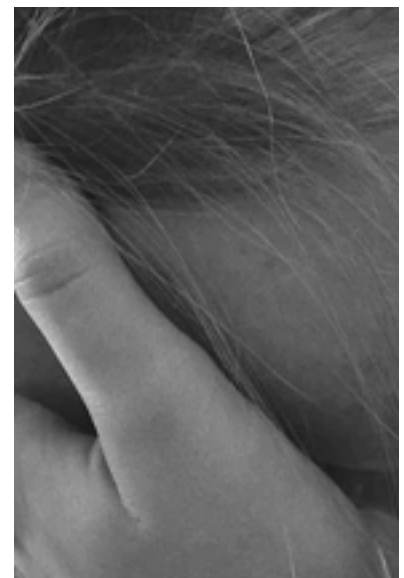
Είναι όλα αυτά
Οι κολλημένες τσίχλες στα πέταλα της τουλίπας
Το ανοικτό καπάκι της οδοντόκρεμας
που φωνάζει
φωνάζει
αλλά ποιος μπορεί ν' ακούσει τη φωνή μιας οδοντόκρεμας ;
είναι τσαλακωμένη
πετρωμένη

Στην arena της Verona !
Η τρομερή σάυρα
κουλουριάζεται σαν δαχτυλίδι
Ευχαριστημένη
Για να χωνέψει

Σε μαγεύει με τη φωνή του castrato

- «Τι τραγουδάει ; »

- «Το δάγκωμα της βέρας ».



end

Susan Azar Porterfield is the author of three books of poetry—*In the Garden of Our Spines*, Kibbe (May-apple Press) and *Dirt, Root, Silk*, which won the Cider Press Review Editor's Prize. Her work has appeared in *The Georgia Review* (finalist, Loraine Williams poetry prize), *Barrow Street*, *Mid-American Review*, *North American Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Nimrod*, *Rhino*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, and elsewhere. She is the editor of *Zen, Poetry, the Art of Lucien Stryk* (Ohio UP) and has written on poetical subjects for *Poets & Writers*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, and *Translation Review*.



STILL OF THE TONGUE

Words keep slamming shut
in her face right as she's set

to sail through, just as a foot
or eye can stall for no reason, no

reason, suddenly now wants to star
in a show of its own,

so words that once red-carpeted
her along pull up, lock down.

I say for the first time
again, "No, no, it's a gift," the third time

she asks what she owes.
Younger than me,

already she finds latches fated
open/closed, she softly slipping

like light or air; I never know
what room holds her now

or what echo she's shadowed
down what darkened hall,

whisperings she can almost make out
like a key turning

and the ghost of someone familiar,
someone she might once have known.

Susan Azar Porterfield

GIRLS AT PLAY LEARN THAT EXQUISITE THE BODY

Side-by-side, eyelash-by-eyelash
scintillation. We didn't call it

butterfly kisses, just odd, like
tongue-tip to tongue-

tip, if you were brave for the dare:
Touch tongues! This

unsettling, just what we
came here for, how a thing

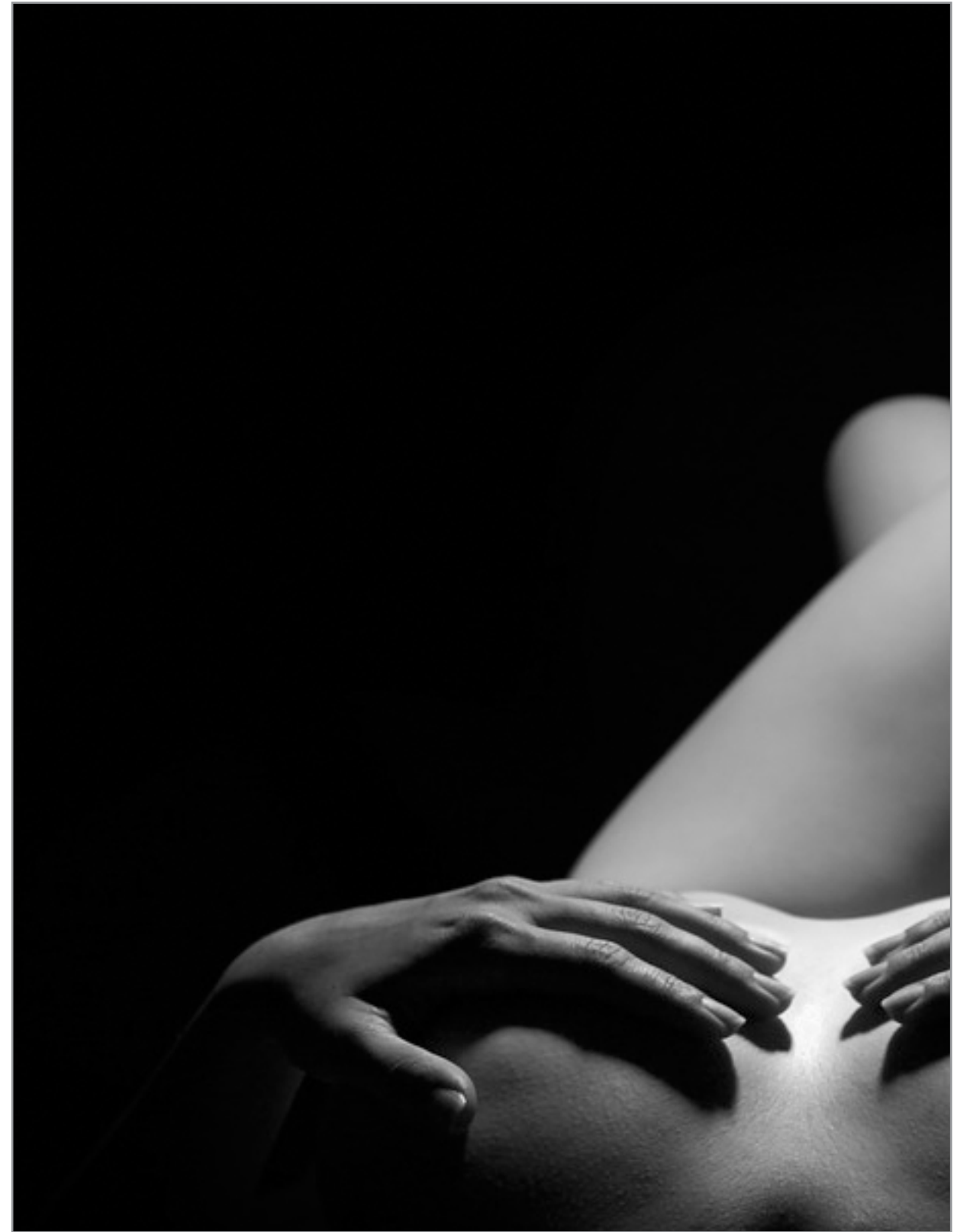
dull as a tongue could be
alien/alive, we sensing,

body with another body
annuls between-space,

finger-tracing, like dragonflies skim a pond,
skin on your sister's back,

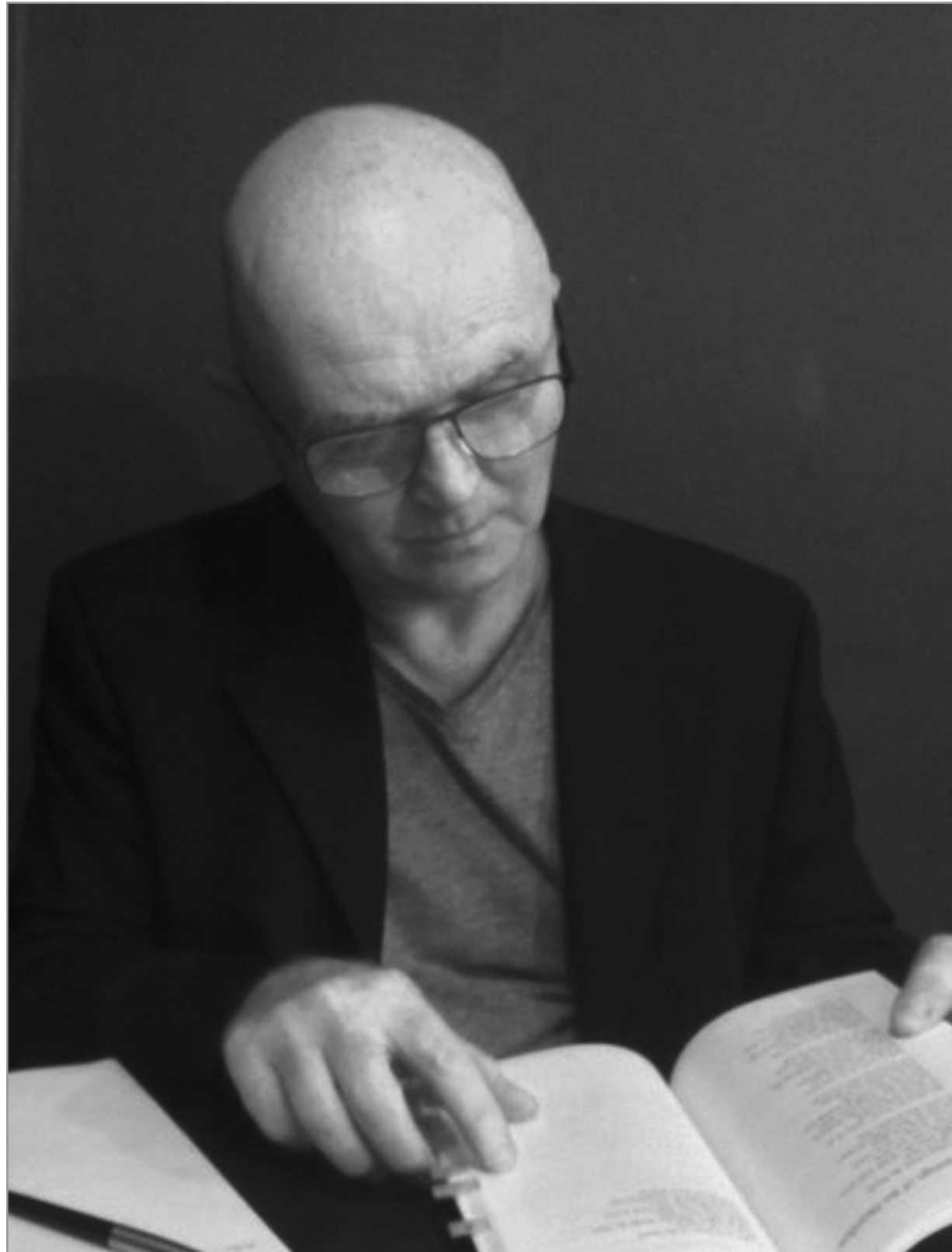
light-light, almost not touching,
yes touching the mundane husk,

now hub, holy self, a shiver.
Years later, an itch.



<https://pixabay.com/photos/>

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 short-listed 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. His seventh full collection, *Visions at Templeglantine*, is due from Revival Press in April.



The following two poems are part of John's forthcoming collection

Visions at Templeglantine

This is his seventh collection,
which is due from Revival Press in April, 2020.

John W Sexton

THE BURIED SUMMER

It is morning and you come into the kitchen.
 The sky is bright but the winter sun burns cold.
 The fire is dead in the grate and you start to rake
 the ashes. In the ashes and clinker there's a fluttering.
 You step back, a bit afraid. A small bird hops out
 from the grate; it's spent the night in the dying fire.
 On the cold stone floor it shakes its body clean. Its
 feathers are the purest white, with not the slightest sign
 of ash. Its beak is washy gold. You know that this is
 the white blackbird, unlucky to the lucky. You've no
 kindling for the fire, no paper to bed it, no match
 to light it. The morning is cold so you know you're
 unlucky, and this might save you from the white
 blackbird. The bird hops across the kitchen floor.
 You open the door to let it out. The white blackbird
 hops on to your foot and begins to sing. It wants
 you to walk it out of the house. So out you walk,
 the white blackbird on the tip of your shoe all the while.
 You cross the yard to the five-barred gate, the white
 blackbird singing you the way. Quick through the gate,
 and soon you're walking up the sloping meadow.
 At the brow of the meadow you can see the width
 of the sky. A single black cloud has broken its base
 in the near distance, but only a thin single line
 of rain is falling from it. You follow the line of rain
 with your eye. You can see that it's heavy and you
 can see where it's falling. You know what you'll find
 in that spot, for the white blackbird on the tip
 of your shoe is singing you forth. Down the far sloping
 side of the meadow you go, where you see the rain
 falling in one spot. This spot where it lands is the House
 of Rain, and inside is a man seated on a rock.

In a shallow puddle by his feet lies a large freshwater
 oyster. The white blackbird sets off from the tip of your
 shoe and is gone. The man beckons you in. You know, for
 the white blackbird sang it, that this is the poet O Bruadair.
 "Sit down in my kitchen, and welcome," says O Bruadair.
 "Make yourself fine by the rain. I've been here
 for over three hundred years, with no friend but this
 mollusc. Summer is buried beneath my house, but I
 have nothing with which I can dig it out." The oyster
 gasps at that and the rain stops. You are standing alone
 in an empty field, soaked to the skin with marvellous luck.



THIS SHAPELESS NIGHT

It is a night without moon, without stars,
without sky. So everything is the shape
of this shapeless, unyielding night.
You were called into the garden
by the forlorn mumblings of the oak.
The oak spoke a dialect unknown to you,
but you obeyed the pitiful summons
out of guilt, a guilt undiscernible.
So you stand absurdly, up to your ankles
in grass, understanding nothing.
Oak's head is long, like all trees that speak,
so its brain towers above you. You are not
even sure if the tree is here, for you see
nothing. You can merely stand where you think
the tree to be. A shape with shape
in the shapeless night is suddenly everywhere,
fluid through the air. It negotiates its way
without trouble or obstruction. You sense it.
Suddenly you are gone. Your body has fallen
like a loosened rope. Owl has taken
your mind. Her talons hold it firm
and now you are suddenly everywhere,
fluid through the air. Owl prefers your mind
to any mouthful of mouse or rat. Your
mind is ingested in hers. You are the shape
of this shapeless, unyielding night. Then.
You stand absurdly, up to your ankles
in grass, understanding nothing.

What called you into the night? Then.
A shape with shape in the shapeless night
is suddenly everywhere. Who. Who. Who.
Then. Oak is speaking to you, a dialect
unknowable. You stand there in darkness,
up to your ankles in grass. A shape with shape
in the shapeless night is arbitrarily everywhere,
flotsam through air. It negotiates its way
without trouble or obstruction. You sense it.
Suddenly you are gone. Your body has fallen
like a loosened rope. Moth accepts your mind.
Moth. Night's rag-farthing, its thing of nothing.
You are the shape of this shapeless night. You.
Is you. You little booklet of flutter-ribbons.





Amy Barry writes poems and short stories. She is published in anthologies, journals, and press and e-zines globally. Her poems have been translated into Italian, Turkish, German, Romanian, Azerbaijani, Spanish, Malay, Spanish, Irish and Persian. Amy loves to travel. Trips to India, Nepal, China, Japan, Bali, Paris, Berlin, Budapest, Milan, and Falkenberg have all infused her work. She often reads at Literary events/festivals in Ireland and Internationally. Amy was recipient of the Westmeath County Council Bursary 2017. She took 1st and 2nd prize in the English Poetry at PAU World Poetry Day in 2017 and 2018. Recipient of Neruda Award 2017 (Poetry) Crispiano, Italy. Highly Commended (Poetry) in SiarSceal International Literary Festival in 2017 and 2019. Highly Commended in the Francis Ledwidge Award 2019. Amy is an Honorary Member of Neruda Italian Cultural Association, Taranto. Italy. She was featured recently in the RTE Radio One Extra in Reverberations Series 2, speaking about her work and performing two poems inspired by a particular soundscape which depict rural locations.

PASSPORT

she is no different —
not distinct —

from the cropped grass;
clipped laurel, or
dandelions that flutter
their wares like a lion's mane,
her marriage crippled by
heavy deceptions.

Under the intertwined beeches,
she stands, like a keener,
wailing her grief.

The neighbor's cows
turn their heads,
return to their sentence
of chewing.

No longer empty,
energised with dreams,
each drink of sun
awakening,
suitcase packed —
with Macbook, diary, clothes, tickets
and a tattered passport in her pocket.

The Nissan snarls
like a pack of foxes,
under a warm azora.

Amy Barry

* Above poem performed in the RTE Radio One Extra in Reverberations Series.

THE LAST DAYS OF CORNAFULLA POST OFFICE

On this Autumn morning,
Vincent Harney's voice comes across the airwaves —
The closure of Cornafulla Post Office,
his 44 years as a postmaster will cease.
The Harney family's 60-year link
to this rural Post office will end.

He talks of his days before digital times —
a young telegram boy, delivering
'rush' messages of joy, success, and sorrow
and how he used to dread
conveying the bad news.

Next day when I see Vincent,
we speak of our common tie.
I, the daughter of a postmaster —

Vincent stands in the doorway.
A tinge of sadness as he sighs,
C'est la vie.
Sin é an saol.
That's life.

The end of an era
but a new chapter pulses,
he will farm the land, work the bog —
And, the urge to travel.

Slaty clouds gather,
the rain descends as if
anticipating the final heartbeat
of Cornafulla Post Office.

**The end of an era for many rural post offices in Ireland.
Cornafulla Post Office was established in 1912.*



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.



BOADICEA'S MOUND ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH

We crisscross down among the tall beeches. Knotty roots reach into the earth like ancient hands. The muddy path by the small frog pond catches the early January sun. It pierces my eyes and I nearly walk into a group of people coming towards me. From here the land suddenly widens into a large open grassland that rises up to the place from where you can overlook London. A plaque explains the buildings you can see: St Pancras, Kings Cross, the gherkin, the shard. Other buildings keep popping up not yet recorded. The view of London today is eerily mystical bathed in light fog.

The heath - a band of London clay with a sandy ridge of ancient heath. It is reported that in 986 AD Ethelred the Unready granted his servants 5 hides at Hemstede. In the Domesday book 1086 it was recorded as being owned by the monastery of St Peter's at Westminster Abbey until 1133. During the reign of Henry II it became the property of the king's butler, Alexander de Barantyn.

From the plaque we walk into Kenwood where a throng of people confronts us, many with coffee mugs in their hands. I have a coffee too. By the old kitchen are toilets. Luckily, they have changed them back to those for women and those for men. We sit in the sun and watch people and dogs playing, laughing, gossiping. Robins and wrens sing.

Kenwood was held in private hands until the 1940s, when it was bought by the Metropolitan Board of Works. The heath remained common land. Parliament Hill was bought for 300,000 in 1888 and Golders Hill in 1898, Kenwood in 1928.

Greta Sykes



BOADICEA'S MOUND ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH ... contd

Today it is sunny and crowds mill in front of Kenwood house, overlooking the lake with its false white bridge. We wander along the gravel path. The earth on the slope is covered with shoots of daffodils and crocuses. We can almost hear them grow. A trembling and thrill seems like a deep breath underground, shaking the earth and its roots into growing action.

From 1808 to 1814 the heath hosted a station in the shutter telegraph chain which connected the Admiralty to its naval shipyards in Great Yarmouth.

After the daffodils we meander over gravel paths into the old forest with beeches, oaks, birches and the occasional Scottish pine. We aim for Golders Hill with its formal garden surrounded by hilly heathland.

Parliament Hill or kite hill lies further north and is the highest point with 134 metres. From here you look down on London and on good days you can see all the way to Blackheath in Greenwich and even the south Downs.

At Jack Straw' castle we cross the road and walk down into Golders Hill formal garden through a small iron gate and up an iron staircase. The columned promenade is majestic and allows good views of the lower forest and a bushy plantation with Mediterranean plants. Today there is ice cover on the small pond and children throw ice pieces to slip making a swish noise.

The heath comprises 320 hectares of land with 25 ponds. The ponds are the result of the 1777 damming of the Brook river, one of the tributaries to the Fleet river. The landscape is made up of swampy hollows and springs from man-made excavations due to sand and rain on clay.

It is only January and the sun fades early. The Kenwood fenced part of the heath closes at 5pm and we must be in time to catch an open gate. We stroll more vigorously. Fewer people are left. We cross the road back and melt into the woods. Elves and trolls emerging from the shadows and the dusk brings forth strange shapes and movements as the earth cools back into night quietness. Rich earth smell and liquorice of decaying leaves. We enter Kenwood from the west and already hear the bell ringer from the distance urging us towards the open gate which is to the east.

We pass Boadicea's mound near the men's bathing pond. It is a tumulus where it is said that queen Boadicea was buried after she and her 10,000 warriors were defeated at the battle of Bridge.

We hurry now. Few if any walkers are left. The crows scream in the tree tops. It is their time now to make a racket. The bell ringer waits for us at the gate and ushers us out with a good night. He locks the gate.

Kate Ennals is a poet and writer who has published poems and short stories in a range of literary and on-line journals (Crannog, Skylight 47, Honest Ulsterman, The Moth, Anomaly, The International Lakeview Journal, Boyne Berries, North West Words, The Blue Nib, Dodging the Rain, The Ogham Stone, plus). Her first collection, *At The Edge* was published in 2015. Her second collection, *Threads*, was published in April 2018. Kate runs *At The Edge*, Cavan, a literary reading evening, funded by the Cavan Arts Office. Blog www.kateennals.com

AT MY MOTHER-IN-LAW'S FUNERAL.

My face subsides at the side of her grave
a gargoyle clawed in salt
Beneath my feet lies unbalanced earth
Stones and clods catch in my throat
I squash the sobs, stem the snot
Stop the streams of stinging hot
Ashamed
There was no such display of grief and tears
For my mother when she died last year.



Kate Ennals



THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS

After Arthur Rimbaud

I lay on grass in nineteen eighty-five
 smoked London fumes in a bed of flowers
 Red, regal tulips stretched high to the sky
 People linked hands in the London crowds
 I strutted the cobbles of Carnaby Street
 indestructible in my shiny boots
 wet look suit, principles, modern ideals;

I wanted to see world revolution
 blend earth's rich soil with civilisation.
 Taken in by the Colgate ring truth
 I did not hear the thunder of horses' hooves;

Young, I enjoyed the fish flick of stomach
 the quicken of heart
 the catch-stop of breath
 prick of skin, fumble of fingers
 and thumbs, the stick of damp hands
 the stumble of flesh
 splurge of coming
 fine fit of spoon
 the stream
 of words.

Next birth and work, the re-juggle
 of hope, then the effort to stay
 the re-jig of mind
 ruptured bubble
 sinking stomach
 disbelief

Finally, came the understanding,
 I am only the she
 a woman, a scrap of burst balloon
 Another mother in the grand scheme of things.

BRUGES

(for Patrick McGoochan, Prisoner No. 6.)

Is a glittery prism of cobbled stone, secret canals
 pitched, red slate roofs, church spires
 crafted lacy desires. Steeples of chocolate
 grow aloft in brightly lit shops. Truffles are boxed
 Goblets of ruby red beers are scoffed beside
 bronzed crisp waffles. Stored Old masters in gilt
 gold frames are devoured by the clamour
 for culture. Us tourists circle in orderly
 procession; eating, drinking, purchasing
 conspicuous prisoners.

Bob Shakeshaft is a regular reader on the Dublin open – mic scene since 2004. He has just recently appeared in the latest issue of the New Ulster Anu, the 40th. Issue. In this Anthology the following Poems appear: *Auld tripe*, *Ashen Sun*, *Toddles*, *A thin white line* and *After Philomena*. Also awarded 2nd place in the New York Literary Magazine, in the category of Life/Death. Recently received 3 commendations from the Jonathan Swift Writers Awards.



DUST

Bustling the sower trudged and swung
 leaning on the brisk sinewy wind...
 blew grain over-
 chapped furrows
 puffed as dust puffed
 his strong hands
 driven-dragged
 to upland trees
 in a confusion of leaf
 bowed
 to shadowy mischief...
 ran
 like last autumns skeletons...
 heave-lifted high
 like a flirt of sparrows
 in dazzled tangle flight
 into
 wood-lands
 surf-sound roar
 scattering
 all life...
 with dead
 leaves
 to dust

Bob Shakeshaft

HAIKU

a breath on window
shapes of misty shadows waft
how a trickle maps

a butterfly flits
lithe wings translucent whirl
whishing silently

a breezy flower
perfumes nectar bee-busy
buzzing in my ear

daisies white yellow
glow tall in shrinking meadows
dank dusk descends slow

side-walk images cast
on shades of greyness fallen
ladies trick the night

waves lap and sheeww
sand gneiss glistening on shore
runs-away in sunset

CHILD

A name on a bus-list
To be collected at one
Not by a parent at the gate
A minder instead to see her safe
Off she hops in childful play
He was watching
Tall dark coat with pockets deep
Some sweets little girl
Angelic smiles his evil

Hold my hand let's be friends
Innocence is so...
He had his way
Spilling purity on dirty soil
Rag doll-limp
Thrown away



Polly Richardson (Munnelly) is a Dublin born poet now living and writing in Meath. She has been published both nationally and internationally in many anthologies and e-zines – (The Blue Nib, Lotus Eater, Mad Swirl, Nixes Mate, Porter Gulch Review, Impspired. She is member of and co runs Navan writers’ group: The Bulls Arse. Her poems have featured on various poetry trails in 2014 – 2019 (Blackwater poetry festival) & (Fleadh Ceoil Drogheda) She has had honourable commendation in Blue Nibs second chap book contest by judge Kevin Higgins 2018. In March 2019 she had her first short story published by Impspired. Her second short story was published in early 2020 along with several poems in Impspired’s first print anthology. She poems due out in Boyne Berries 27 lit mag 2020. Some of her work was used to inspire young artists and turned into sculptures in Dallas US and . She is currently working on her first collection.

The following are a selection of unpublished poems from Polly’s forthcoming collection of poetry, *Winters’s Breath* coming soon!

INSIDE AND OUT

Whispers blow like dew drops fall,
softly caressing as they descend and land
on minds rush in over spill,
as words I ingested begin to bind, refine, build.
Like senses of the quickening’s first hello and gift
the wild herd of bile tries to bolt.
Warm hands reach down clasping firm,
whispers blow as gentle kisses fall.
A blanket of love wrapping whole,
Inside and out.
Pride in eyes,
reflects in smiles,
nursing could be, maybe. Poetry.



Polly Richardson

WINTER'S BREATH

Whoops, hollers, galloping hooves,
gasp in jack frost silver surfing whipping wind,
lashing sting to snotted cheeks. Free.

We head for ditches, mounds and fallen trees in follies,
winding trunks, leaping leaves, spinning hocks as if pennies
like puppeteer to puppet yet invisible strings move. We're one.

Gaits glide almost floating over mossy green carpet crisping white
stretching arms curve flapping manes, chin to wither, eyes to top of trees
as four limbs leave ground as if slicing air. Flight. After flight. After flight.

Through snorts, whinnies and high tail squeals, wisps of laughter curl
the rhythmic strides and beats. Bent knees stiffen, semi scream in stirrups
as if rusting slow like tin man now footless irons still,

prancing hooves settle to quick-step jog
as falling sun, alert ears to point, compassing north
catching winters breath, while

steaming sweat swirl heats the cold, casting vapour dances to cloud
as open hands splay a caress, buried digits embrace to pat
entirety in heated sturdy neck curve,

as reins slips through to buckle hang a balance on fingers
as if the beat of life itself within each touch of leather.

Grasping whole,
home we go.
long
and
L
O
W to

last October light winks, each one paints its etching in shadows. The Dream.

Ebony blankets, draw's in, switches on star after star and swoons,
her biting cold once more kissing lips as hands redden silently
holler with heave of hay heaps

and grips of sloshing buckets slop of tsunami waves in wellies,
icing calves to full drench, the inward outer shiver shudder,

as pale toes wrestle the donkeing bastard bailing twine, stuffed grass-nutted
pockets forced to spew hidden treasured secrets cubes, kept for the
odd stubborn catch, the only time he's ever referred to as bollox. Affectionate.

With snowing fluff and oat flurries dust to join the over spill
the rejoice of mice scurry slightly heard in eves as to ground they
dart despite the raining rathe of stomping hungry hooves. Impatient.

Yet, in moon-lit golden beds call calm, as distant cows lowering night song,
join the chorus of soft velvet muzzles- nuzzle whinny-whispers warm breath
against my skin. Intoxicating. Catching Winter's breath.

STUNNED SILENCE

Stunned silence is all I can
hear,
see

feel. You.
Subdued whispers apart from calls
desperately searching seeking to find, it spoons.

Your provider, protector, fell with
heaviness to wintering ground.
Roaring your whinnies to meandering moon
baring it all, nostrils flaring pink, knitting
that look, patterning onto your face.
I never knew you could screech.

Lips nudge caress her thick muddy mane,
urging, encouraging flicking each groove,
muzzle to muzzle whimpering whinny.
Frantic hooves pawing her motionless rump
as instincts to flee engulfed, spinning you on your hocks
to galloping the hedge rows snorting her death,

as if removing its hold, yet to hear, you're tethered.
Now alfa – perplexation grooms,
and you call, call out with dawning birds chorus,
to stars in the witching and the howling
loan hound – bittersweet symphony
while cows silently lower sensing what looms.

Sunrises greet wild -eyes white pacing the seasons
and erosions of fence lines, that look, looks deep
into the beyond, you callcall,
call out to covering cloud.

She no longer returns, to the sound
of our voice. It's lost in winds, in earthen imprints
yet there you stand, anxiously await a glimpse, her comforting knicker.

Stunned silence returns, deafens our ears
stales the fresh oats, moulds the sweet yellowish hay.
Only in your blood she now runs.



EMPTY WORDS

Impact blows
cracking deep
below ribs

linger

like wafting au du swine's
sloshing slop,
Bruising upon bruises.

BREATH

Defining life and finality
we are nothing,

nothing

without rhythmic ins and outs.

Arriving starkers,
slipping,
into vast wonderment
from primal pant pushing.

Pure without sabotage
our inner amazon gifting sustenance
and summer rains
and yet
like grains of sand,
it slips away
blackened.

No matter the hands that tries to hold it.

Breath
The last raspy note gurgled.

The
final rise
and fall.

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



MÁMEÁN*

Cobalt wash, emerald hills
scraps of straw scutch grass,
mid-September, late afternoon
sun, surprises, warms and blinds,
a low slung spun.

A family of sheep scratch beneath,
I push the iron gate open,
one in front looks at me,
his jet-black face
brilliant against the ivory light.

I move quietly to the left of him,
he does a flurry to the right
to chew new stubble grass,
all their heads are down, munching.

The worn path is full of spring bog water
that has trickled down from Paul Henry hills,
my steps make quiet splashes between gravelly soil
and large stone footholds.

A slab of granite provides a solid path to higher ground,
my boots leave a patterned mark to evaporate.
Mámeán is up ahead, jutting out of the ancient face
a lime rich, hallowed bed.

I can almost pretend, it is the start of Summer.

**Mámeán is Irish for 'Pass of the birds'*

Roisín Browne

GET LOST

Get lost,
on a tarmac road with green tufts middling it,
in a tree-steepled forest, soft bog ground sinking you,
in a pristine paper page, where words dance you in

Get lost,
in a dry stretch of gin scorching your tongue,
in voluptuous spaghetti, trying to see where the strings start,
in digital webbing, not knowing how you got to Mongolian yurts

Get lost,
in the clutches of a traffic jam, let your mind loose on an amber patch
in Coltrane's *Favourite Things*, while pedestrians amble
in a multi storey carpark, looking for a Tuesday-grey motor

Get lost, in phone calls to someone, who takes you back
Get lost, in some Gaudi you've forgotten
Get lost, some magnificence, will find you.

FULL/FALL

Full of quotes, tractors, trestles, trailers
full of digital percentages, 40, 20, 60, categories of monies

full of shift, return, page up, page down, save, delete, save as
full of licences, compliant and rogue, renewed, and not

full of annexes, appendices, certificates incorporating constitutions
full of all red lines, the t's, the i's, the underscore and ticking big boxes

full,
underneath laptop files, I click *gymnopédies* for my background

to keep me from rotting each of my cells, one by one,
to keep them from falling like rusty leaves whose time has come

tumbling zen, fall, but will I, full of other things
have space to bloom again?



I am a New Zealander living in Melbourne. In 2018 I realised I had to write poetry if I was to give my life a real sense of purpose, over and above the other stuff we do. I have been feature poet at *Be Mused Poetry* and at the Australia launch for *Planet in Peril*, and published in the *Golden Walkman* magazine, the 'Planet in Peril' Anthology (Fly on the Wall Poetry) and *Write to the River*.



RAIN AT BARNES BRIDGE STATION

A man on the platform, a woman smiling,
saying, 'Yes, that's why I'm staying.'

They walk along the river at dusk,
yellow spills of light on the water.

'I bought you something,' he murmurs, so close
she can feel his warm breath on her cheek.

He hands her a book, hundreds of fragile pages,
some missing, some hand-written, adorned
with diagrams of plants, nude figures,
astronomical symbols folded into maps.

Later, in his room near Barnes Bridge Station,
they lie on his bed, trying to make out the order
of the pages; the numbers jumbled,
some in numerals that look Roman,
some from a later date.

'Athanasius,' she says, 'This is the most beautiful thing
anyone has ever given me,' and her fingers run
over the soft leather of the goat-skin cover.

Geoff Callard

SUNSHINE AT THE COLLEGIO ROMANO

The leather is bound together by a young Jesuit
from the Collegio Romano, warm evenings spent sitting
at the tall windows, the breeze bringing a little rain,
the smell of roses from the gardens.

Athanasius looks around, peeks inside, tries to read the script
but cannot make head nor tail of the strange characters
composed, it seems, of one or two simple pen strokes.

He puts down his work, skips down the uneven stone
of the stairs to run from garden to garden with the other boys,
black robes flowing on grey-green cobbled paths,
thin brown legs, all length and sinew, that wild clumsy
grace boys have before they lose their innocence.

They stop and pant and smile, regain their breath,
kneel at the edge of the allotment cut away from the lawn.
Splintered stakes, neatly torn rags holding the plants high,
composite hybrids that the Fathers have been growing;
the roots of one species fastened to the leaves of another,
flowers from a third. The boys have long since stopped
marvelling at these creations - this garden is their playground
and the plants are crossbreeds like them, growing freely.

FATHER RUBEN IN THE GARDEN

The old priest is in his deck chair, drawing
and writing with his parchment and strange inks.

My name is Athanasius and I am here to learn
the secret language used to describe our plants.
I am to be taught the methods of grafting
and growing. I am chosen the Fathers tell me.

Father Ruben cries sometimes
as he talks to me. The flowers, he says,
are for his brother who grew chrysanthemums
until he died of the mystery plague that left
purple splotches all over his body.

I think he is a little crazed with grief and guilt,
leaving his brother to die alone in Montserrat.

The velum he writes on is soft brown calfskin,
stretched and dried from fifteen slaughtered calves,
their mothers still lowing in the freshly green fields
behind the monastery. We were made to watch
each of those guileless creatures as the blood
leeches from their throats and their legs buckled.

As they died some screamed as I imagine
a child might in fear, though the Fathers say it is
a painless death and the blood is gathered carefully
and mixed with water, dirt and chalk
and used in the gardens.



IN THE COURT OF KUBLA KHAN

In the small bare room he now calls home,
 Father Ruben tells me the story of his brother
 who he set out with for the court of Kubla Khan.

He tells me of the glorious silks and how they
 rustled when the beautiful Asian women
 moved about the quiet hallways.
 He describes the ships docked beneath
 a sky of white and blue smudged with smoke,
 merchant ships of deep ruby coloured wood,
 fifty oars spindled into the calm harbour grey,
 carvel-built Carracks armed with great guns,
 their three tall masts set with square sails.

He loses the thread, then, as if returning to
 the purpose of my visit, turns to me and says,
 'You Athanasius, you have the gift',
 and he kisses me with his warm dry lips.

PORTAL TO BARNES BRIDGE

After the Great War, I brought the book back
 from the Jesuits living in the Villa Mondragone,
 high in the slopes of Frascati. I descended the hill,
 calm in the knowledge that no-one
 would decipher the code.

Today I stood in our field, hay clumped and gathered
 to be collected and stored in the old barn
 with its red-painted boards and sunlight
 edging in, dust floating in the air,
 cattle, steam rising from their flanks,
 waiting for their Winter feed.

In that hallowed space, over the months, I have
 illuminated each of the 234 pages, added drawings
 of your naked form, my love, interspersed
 with pictures of the stars and planets
 as we will imagine them.

With the book in hand, I walk down past
 the boats on the bank towards the bridge
 where I sit and nestle in close to the brick pier,
 shaded under the cast iron arch.
 I listen to the rattle of carriages going past,
 feel the weak midday sun, close my eyes
 and wait to be swept through the dizzying waters
 of time, wait for history to slowly unravel.

Wait for you to finally appear;
 to tell me you will stay,
 and, lying in my arms,
 hold the book to the light,
 and say, 'Perhaps it is a mirror to our souls'.



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Robert Fairhead is an editor and writer for TallAndTrue.com, an online magazine, blog and forum for writers, readers and publishers, and blogs at RobertFairhead.com. His articles on dogs have appeared in local newspapers. And he has written book reviews for Writing NSW. Robert is also the principal copywriter at Rocher Communications.
 You can follow him on Twitter at @tallandtrue.



ROBERT FAIRHEAD reviews
 JOAN O'HAGAN'S
JEROME & HIS WOMEN *Published by Black Quill Press*

Jerome & His Women (2015) is set in Rome in 382 AD. The Roman Empire is facing internal and external threats to its power, and Christianity is replacing pagan gods and worship.

The Pontiff, Damasus I, commissions Jerome, a priest, theologian and scholar, to translate the Bible from Greek texts into a definitive Latin version. Jerome has the Pontiff's favour but is unpopular with other Church hierarchy and Roman aristocracy for his criticism of their wealth and wanton ways.

Jerome's women are a circle of educated widows and their daughters who reject Roman luxuries for lives of piety and poverty. Principal among them is Paula, with whom Jerome forms a close spiritual and intellectual bond. She assists with his translation of the Bible, shares the dream of monastic life in the desert, and funds their eventual escape from persecution to the Holy Land.

The author, Joan O'Hagan, was born in Australia in 1926. She studied Classics at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, and lived and worked overseas for most of her life, including thirty years in Italy.

O'Hagan drew on her studies, surroundings and work at the Australian Department of Immigration in Rome to write internationally acclaimed contemporary and historical crime fiction. Her other novels include *Incline and Fall: The Death of Geoffrey Stretton* (1976), *Death and a Madonna* (1986), *A Roman Death* (1988), and *Against the Grain* (1987).

O'Hagan started working on *Jerome & His Women* in the British Library in the 1990s. She finished the novel in Sydney shortly before her death in 2014. On its publication, her daughter, Denise O'Hagan, observed, "I never knew my mother not writing."

That is the twin gift of *Jerome & His Women*: It is a tale of extraordinary times and people, brought to life by a skilled researcher and writer.

Jerome & His Women by Joan O'Hagan is published by Black Quill Press and is available at <https://blackquillpress.com/independent-publishing/jerome/> Amazon, Book Depository, Booktopia, Barnes and Noble, The Nible

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