

10 ANNIVERSARY 2010 - 2019



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
JULY 2020

ROBBI NESTER
A Gift of Words

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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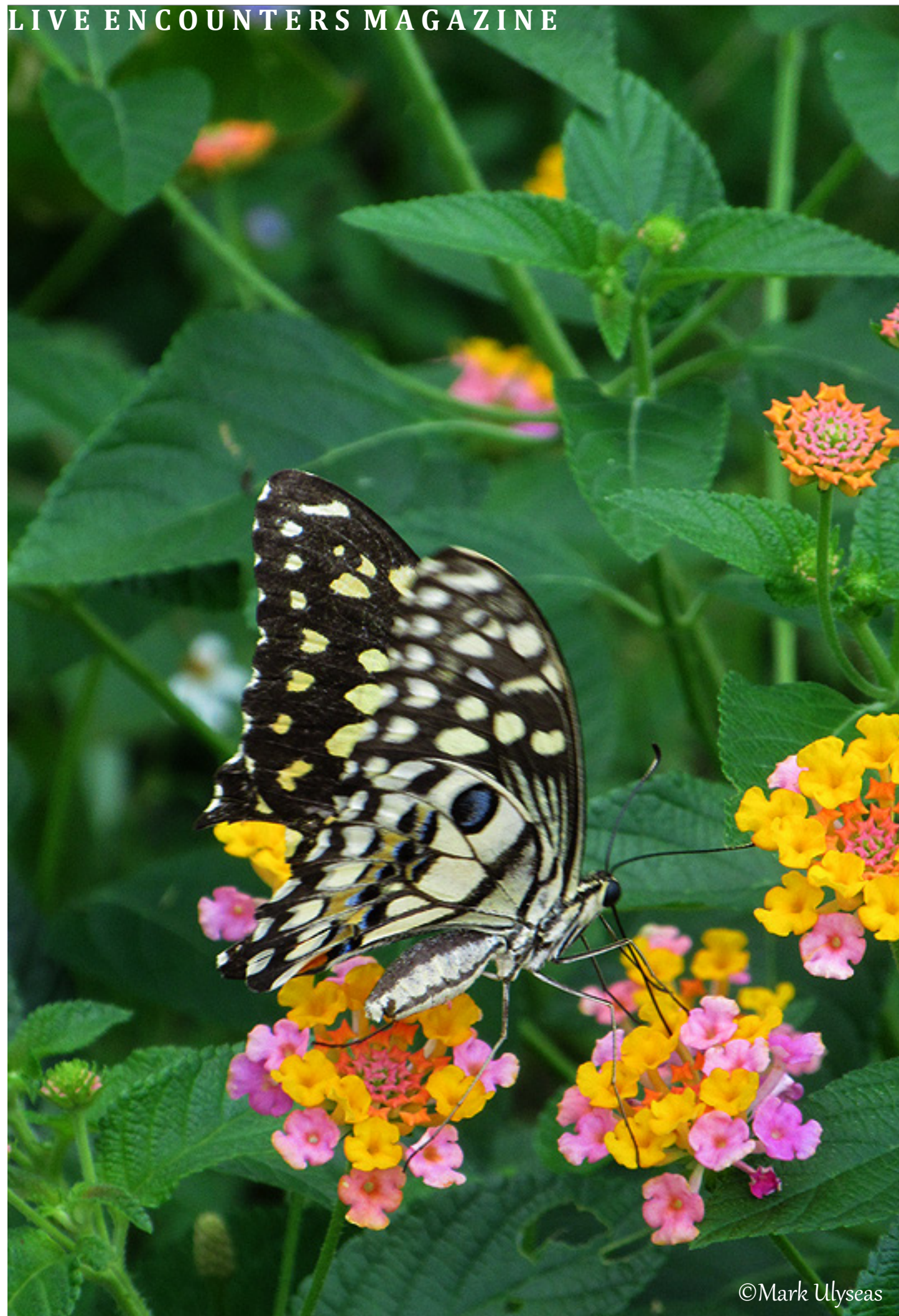
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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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*Book review of 'Aloysius the Great'
by John Maxwell O'Brien*

Robbi Nester shelters in place in Southern California. She is the author of 4 books of poetry, including a chapbook, *Balance* (White Violet, 2012), and three collections: *A Likely Story* (Moon Tide, 2014), *Other-Wise* (Kelsay, 2017), and *Narrow Bridge* (Main Street Rag, 2019). She has also edited 3 anthologies, *The Liberal Media Made Me Do It!* (Nine Toes, 2014), *Over the Moon: Birds, Beasts, and Trees* (published as a special issue of Poemeleon Poetry Journal), and a new one, currently in process, *The Plague Papers*. Her poems, reviews, essays and articles have appeared widely, most recently in *McQueen's Quinterly*, *Silver Birch Press*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Aeolian Harp*, *Volume 6*, *Tiferet*, *Rhino*, and many others. She is an elected member of the Academy of American Poets.



A GIFT OF WORDS

Before I was even born, my parents bought me a Webster's Unabridged, an atlas, and an inflatable globe. As a small child, I would stand before the globe and spin it, singing out the names of countries and continents, parcels of multi-colored land, drifting on a multitude of seas. It must have been a wise investment: I employed that globe and atlas until the end of high school, when the globe deflated, and the atlas had become defunct. But a dictionary is never obsolete. I keep it to this day, though new editions come and go. The words persist, still solid in my mouth as stones, bursting against the palate like the ripest grapes. Zest evokes the bright aroma of a lemon, feeling of joy, sharp spark of flavor, while knead offers an image of the cat, clenching and unclenching his claws, like a virtuoso at the keyboard, eyes closed in bliss. Alongside this, the give of risen dough under my knuckles, sweet miasma of fresh yeast. How can I capture all of this, without the grammar coming unglued? So many simple nouns, plebian verbs can work the same enchantment, unscrolling eons of ideas and images cloaked in ordinary meaning. Is it in the syllables, held lightly on the tongue, or in the history of the word, traced with one finger, like a river on a map, the veins under the skin, or is it in the mind? Each word a trove we pass along like DNA, packaged in a book that harbors the seed of every other book that ever was.

Robbi Nester

AMERICA

This express car's going nowhere, stalled
for decades on some stretch of empty
track, but once it served the rich,
accustomed to the choicest cuts,
the deference of strangers
who judged them by their
bespoke suits, their bearing.
These oak-framed seats are
wide enough for two, but meant
for one, each offering a window
where the passenger could view
the lives of others, less fortunate,
like paintings in a private gallery.
Now the carpet's worn away
like paint on an old barn,
and no one boards or exits
anymore, no white-gloved
conductor tips his cap.
At the time, I might have been
a passenger in coach, just passing
through to find the dining car.
But now I get to judge the sorry
state of what once seemed
beautiful, knowing nothing lasts.

LISTENING IN

I am eating again at Garlic and Chives,
my favorite Vietnamese restaurant,
the table laden with plates of salmon belly
spring rolls, fish noodle soup, fried
soft tofu, turning to see what other
people have ordered. The restaurant
is filled with Vietnamese families,
laughing, talking, gesturing at this
or that, calling over the waiters,
but I can't listen in. I don't speak
the language, and besides, it's way
too loud. So I study their faces,
the plates they pass, noticing how
they track my eyes, and I imagine
their annoyance at my tacit prying,
as though I wanted to invade
this private sanctuary. I remember
the war between our countries,
and how, as so often, it was all
our fault. I know it was long ago,
and the young people around me
were probably born here, decades
after that war. Yet we might as well
be separated by a pane of glass,
as my cat is from the mockingbird
in the pepper tree, the woodpecker
in the eucalyptus. I want to forget
my sorrow, hold out the plate of spring
rolls, my favorite dish, as an offering,
but constrained by conventions and
my own dark imaginings, I don't.

Anna Yin was [Mississauga's Inaugural Poet Laureate](#) (2015-2017) and Ontario representative to the League of Canadian Poets (2013-2016). She has authored five collections of poetry. Her poems/translations have appeared at ARC Poetry, New York Times, China Daily, CBC Radio, World Journal etc. Anna won the 2005 Ted Plantos Memorial Award, two MARTYs, two scholarships from West Chester University Poetry Conference, three grants from OAC and 2013 Professional Achievement Award from CPAC. She performed her poetry on Parliament Hill and has been featured at 2015 Austin International Poetry Festival and 2017 National poetry month project etc. She also teaches Poetry Alive workshops at schools, colleges and libraries. Her website: annapoetry.com



A PARDON TO MY BONES

after Phyllis Webb

so little I know
straight spines are not
welcome here
our love must be like a river
curving down
confined by your arms
the vast landscape of freedom
is only for window-shopping
at night, mirages disappear
orgasm lies
faces unveil
your mouth is wide open
mine shut
in silence

Anna Yin

“LOOK AT THE BIRDS OF THE AIR...”

No more news
after you entered shelters.
I tried to inquire about you...
they declined.
To be alone...as you wish...
Perhaps – to forget or be forgotten.

A small world.
In the mirror or a pool of rain,
I still find your shadow.
Your pills scatted on another
copy of the Starry Night.
Regret – no use.
I’ve kept your Bible since.
Where shall my prayers be sent?

In the east, once
we believed the Goddess
with three eyes and thousands of fingers.
Here across the blue sky,
birds flew to their nests.
I thought God - extending his arms.

The soft song
I sing every night-
simple as goodnight.

OF COURSE, I STILL LOVE YOU

Late night now, I have kept silent.
Yet the bonfire won’t go out
for a half-open eye,
two fallen Forget-me-nots
and one third of a fish’s memory.

Late night now, I shall go to sleep
for some dreams waiting to slide in,
and a white cloud to lower her face
to the unknown names
in the dark river.

TRAVERSING

after Emily Dickinson and Billy Collins

I

This is a private Room.
You are here,
first removing your suit,
then your tie and shirt.
Finally, in bare feet and skin,
you make yourself at home.

It is your Room.
You don't lock it
but invite me into its open Canvas –
a tree joining another,
a shade weaving yet another.

I follow its trail to your Shrine;
Twilight reels in my white scarf –
I am inside.

"I come for the Muse," I say,
slowly shedding my Emperor's new clothes –
the Child in me
meets your gaze –
eyes wide open.

II

It is all Possibility –
this *inebriate of air* –
this *everlasting Roof* –
this *Superior Door* –
this *impregnable eye*.

You loosen her bow,
unfasten each tiny mother-of-pearl button.
A fly buzzes on the moonlit window,
wild, wild night,
her pins and clips fall,
her white linen dress sighs to the floor.

Your hands slip inside,
– *hope has feathers* –

continued overleaf...

TRAVERSING ...contd

after Emily Dickinson and Billy Collins

III

The sealed drawers ajar:
“What is inside? Show me.”
The Child pleads.

“Is Happiness in rare little stones?
Is *Faith* a fine invention?
Is *Fame* a bee with stings and wings?
Is *Love* anterior to life?”

A sudden silence
sinking this summer evening –
then a great sway of rivers, **
thousands of birds rising on the wing.**

IV

You spread out your papers,
sit in the dark,
waiting for a spark
at the tip of your pen,

–*This*–
The spreading wide Hands
To gather Paradise–

Notes:
Italicized text paraphrases lines from Emily Dickinson
** from Billy Collins’ *Evening Alone* in *The Trouble with Poetry: And Other Poems*
(Random House 2007)

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

CORONA CINQUAIN SEQUENCE

Virus
Droplets deadly
Lurking there in the breath
Unknown enemy replicates
Covid

Blue tit
Inquisitive
Pecks at the windowpane
Opens the morning into our day
Bright bird

Panic
Useless senseless
Piling trolleys mile high
Toilet rolls the new currency
Terror

Sunshine
Hope-giving days
Recharge the sky all round
Hearts expanding in the light of it
A gift

Lockdown
Self-isolate
Cleaning painting baking
A time for every purpose now
Holed-up



Geraldine Mills

continued overleaf...

CORONA CINQUAIN SEQUENCE ... contd

Silence
Gives the birds space
To fill their day with song
Each branch their Roman balcony
Heart time

Children
Locked in no friends
Supports taken from them
Parents alone at their wits' end
Regress

Young hare
Colour of soil
Bounds into our night world
Sits on the ridge while dark falls down
Saves us

Facemask
The next fashion
Catching the sneeze sickly cough
Makes us all look like aliens
Hiding

Catkins
Take to the air
Falling like snow on grass
Land like birds onto fresh turned clay
Tree birth

Numbers
Heart-breaking counts
Families grieve alone
Coffins crowd high in parking lots
More deaths

Numbers
Heart-breaking counts
Families grieve alone
Coffins crowd high in parking lots
More deaths

Create
New ways to live
Gardens become the way
To bring us closer to ourselves
Slow time

Easing
Glorious news
Letting us out at last
Hopefuls running into the streets
To live

White deer
In the forest
Glimpse beyond the trees
Miracle on our day's walk
A path.

Manuela Palacios lectures on Anglophone literature at the University of Santiago de Compostela (Galicia, Spain). She has edited, translated and written about Irish, Galician and Arabic poetry. Among the recent anthologies she has edited are *Migrant Shores: Irish, Moroccan & Galician Poetry* (Salmon Poetry 2017) and *Ανθολογία Νέων Γαλικιανών Ποιητών - Antoloxía De Poesía Galega Nova* (Vakxikon 2019). Manuela's research on women's studies, ecopoetry and the human-animal trope has, in recent times, set her on the stimulating path to creative writing.



WET NURSE

In the cardboard suitcase, her lady's presents
diapers

wrappings
linen bodices
petticoats
frocks

that the master's children have used,
like new, after all.

They will look grand in her own children,
those eleven cheeky rascals back North.
The father a piper rarely around, the oldest
girl in charge of the rest

washing
dressing
feeding
getting them to sleep

Her sister nurses the little ones
while she travels to the capital
year in year out
to nurse the master's newborn offspring.

These are her children too
somehow
she feeds them with her own milk,
keeps vigil beside their sickbeds,
and is, now, so proud of their thriving, but
the little ones back North, will they
know her when she returns this summer?

Manuela Palacios

Bobbie Sparrow's poems have been published in many journals including *Orbis*, *Crannog*, *Skylight 47*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Cordite*, and *Marble*. Bobbie was the Featured reader at *Over The Edge* August 2017 and won 3rd prize for her Chapbook in the Blue Nib competition 2018. She came second in the Saolta Arts Trust Poems for Patience competition 2020. Bobbie was nominated as one of *Dodging the Rain*'s best published poets 2018/19. She loves lake swimming and cycling downhill.



SELVES IN THE RUSHES

Reeds sway like the lake's choir
each green shoot an alto hum
rejoicing in the mirror of its self.

Are we so in the world?
Our shadows thrown awry
making more of us.

I am the one in cold water
calling my body to waken.
My legs dance within slips of echo,
casting my shadow elsewhere.

Bobbie Sparrow

BITING ABUNDANCE

I need to see the apple
 hung in temptation at bough's end.
 I need to cup her weight
 with midwife hands,
 judge her readiness.
 I need to sit in a well placed chair,
 paint her as still life,
 though still she is not
 rather alive with becoming.
 I will paint her beside the red swing,
 food wood wood's rebirth.

I need to tip her gently
 watch the strain in the stalk,
 eye the single green leaf
 shading the umbilical route.
 Watch the whole tree, see
 her release the fruit.
 Letting go I will catch,
 pierce the skin with teeth
 made to break open nature's gifts.
 I need to swallow, be nourished
 part of earth's
 abundant revolution

GLIMPSES OF JOY

Her coat is red, I saw her
 unbutton it to the sun.
 Her scarf is hand painted silk,
 the colour of spring beginning,
 a shade of eyes first falling in love.
 Her legs are lithe, hands broad for kneading,
choux pastry or a tired muscle.

I feel her beside me in the atlantic,
 immersed together as the salt bouys
 and five degrees brings me back to the world.
 When she calls I undress and drink her breath
 like a glass of *Veuve Clicquot*.
 Always welcome and fiercely desired
 but with no door, no call, no summoning ritual.

She rests in the heart of babies,
 I hear her in the trickle of a stream,
 find her in chocolate macaroons,
 or a thin slice of my mother's Tarte Provencale.
 I ask why she once danced so close
 but is now elusive as a rainbow.
 She merely smiles, spreads her arms outwards.

When there is laughter at the kitchen table
 she splinters into a hundred fireflies,
 they dance on the breath of kinship.
 She comes to me on waking
 but her touch leaves as I raise my head.
 She tells me to soften so I feel the bruises
 then the light that shines beneath.

I try to empty my hands of stones
 so I can reach for her and together
 we can coax my sleeping heart to life.

Born in Belfast in 1951, Fred Johnston has published nine collections of poetry, his most recent is 'Rogue States,' (Salmon Poetry 2019.) Co-founded the Irish Writers' Co-operative in the 'Seventies with Neil Jordan and Peter Sheridan and the annual CUIRT literature festival in Galway in 1986. In 2004, he was appointed writer-in-residence to the Princess Grace Irish Library at Monaco. He has written and published poetry in French and received a Prix de l'Ambassade in 2002. Two collections of short stories have been published, one in French, and three novels. Recent poetry has appeared in The Guardian, The Spectator, The New Statesman, The Irish Times, STAND, The Financial Times among other publications. A new short story will appear next year in STAND magazine. He lives in Galway, Ireland.



SIEGE MENTALITY

*"The Plague which we are now to give account of, discovered
the Beginnings of its future Cruelties, about the close of the year . . ."*
- Dr. Nathaniel Hodges: *Loimologia*

There's nothing in the trees but the sun
Perverting the course of shadow
Marvellous if we might make it run
Return us to the lock-in weather of the West
The old familiar rain pelting through shirt and vest
With a cold sea-shot breeze to follow.

Like a queue forming at a supermarket
Ancient fears line up in snaky form
In nervous sleep under a thin blanket
Some semblance of order is maintained
It was so much easier when it daily rained
And a simple moral fever was the norm.

What we face is law-defined, and that's
Restriction of a different order
Like old men sun-soaking without hats
We run the risk of catching something vile
Until a law is stretched that extra mile
To give us leave to cross the enemy's border.

Fred Johnston

DON'T

i.m. Harvey Milk, 1930 – 1978

Don't let it happen here
Yelps the cheap poster on the window -

It did, Mr Supervisor, whatever it is
Is still happening

The poster is like something from
A students' disco

The amateur glee of it,
Same year Jim Jones does his Guyana gig

And a test-tube gives birth
Roman Polanski skips, Larry Flynt is shot

The Bulgarians tip up Georgi Markov
You have a Close Encounter of the Worst Kind –

The Mayor bows out with you
A Smith & Wesson, a handful of hollow-points

It's still happening, again
And again, whatever it is. That rage.

A disgruntled, unsupervised
Supervisor can bring the house down.

It's all happening again,
Whatever it is. History in the making.

YES, NO, MAYBE

Nothing poetic about the blood filling the chamber
encoded with the Yes or No or Maybe of your years
Though no doubt you could write a poem on anything
Even this, if you put your mind to it -

But your mind is elsewhere, probing a near future
gearing up for loss, unable to put a phrase together
you can only wonder if the dog will outlive you
there is no wonder in the world

You were always a damp squib, not fired up, like some
not brute-force lucky, a wind chime to their fat bells
you made small harmonies while they roared
you may make a few more, who knows?

It's the uncertainty that dominates, smothers
making it hard to breathe any sort of wholesome air:
everything's turned irrelevant, but not this new fear
first thing in the morning, it's there.

GUFF

The young have it -
Let's face it, after sixty, draw the curtains
It's getting darker earlier
We're losing more light each waking day
Forget what the tabloid gurus say
This is not the age for climbing mountains.

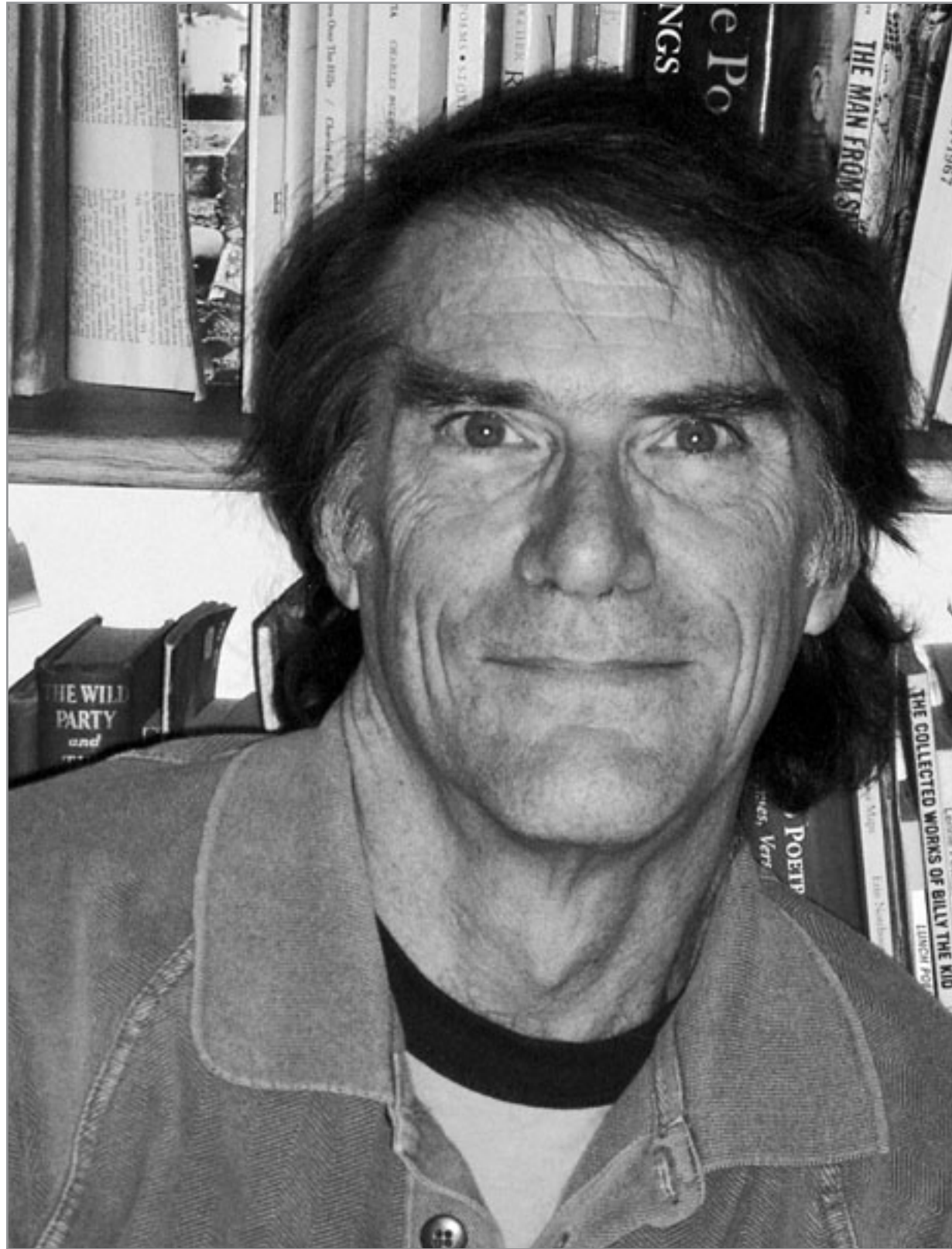
The young are beautiful -
In ways we once knew well and gloried
In, primped, garrulous and glib
We haunted ourselves in every glass
Untouchable, thin and sharp as grass
We held that freedom was not being married.

The young know it all -
But we rock to the tick-tock of a cancer
Or the medical definition of a broken heart
A pain in the head that's not from booze
But something monstrous, a bloody ooze
Knowing this we fear both question and answer.

The young are wise -
We aren't; nostalgia's not wisdom, it's rot
To think we've stored up some gnostic treasure
We must spend in boring them utterly fuckless -
They do with flair and more often what luckless
Young gits like us groped after, then forgot.

The young will carry us
Up the stairs, if we're still continent enough
And take the dog for a walk when we dread the park
They talk in X-Box - we talked in Sartre -
And lied to girls that we knew all about Art
Or the Isle of Wight. Draw the curtains. Life's all guff.

Joe Cottonwood is a semi-retired contractor with a lifetime of repairing homes by day, writing by night. He lives under (and at the mercy of) redwood trees in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California. His most recent book is *Foggy Dog: Poems of the Pacific Coast*.



DORIS AND JFK

Doris, alive in her rocking chair,
dwells among ghosts. Shares them.
Young John Fitzgerald Kennedy, war hero
wooed Doris back when she was newlywed.
This, before he met Jackie.
Charisma magnetic. Situation pathetic.
Besotted he was, says Doris
with a chuckle. *Fancy that*.

Says she's the first woman JFK ever met
who stood up to him. Shopping antique furniture,
Doris bawled him out for buying chairs
without sitting in them first. Boston rockers
like this one here, before the creaks.

JFK pleaded. Exact quote, says Doris:
*In these modern times to marry a divorcee
would not be ruinous to a political career.*
Later, says Doris, *he got speechwriters.*
Had she divorced to wed him, she points out,
Nixon would have won in 1962.
But she refused. Stayed with hubby.
I changed history, says Doris, *by doing nothing.*

Sad lesson, says Doris, *to discover.*
Good dancer. She rocks. *Crappy lover.*

.

Joe Cottonwood

A FERAL CALICO CAT

used to sleep in my truck
warming the driver's seat
but gone when I'd arrive.
Heard me, sharp ears.
Sometimes on the console
she'd leave a bat with wings intact,
a baby rabbit, neck broken. Rent paid.
I set out kibble, she wouldn't touch.
Never bore kittens though I'd hear
nights of yowling, fights.
Later, her ears failed. I'd open the door,
she'd startle awake, leap. Clawed
my shoulder once in her haste.
Near the end she'd eat the kibble
but still got skinny, ribs outlined.
One day I found the food untouched. She'd vanished.
Like most animals, she knew how to die.

I tell you this because a while ago
I went to the garage and found two children,
boy and girl curled together
in a filthy sleeping bag half under the truck.
On the girl, arms like wire. On the boy,
a scar like purple rope between ear and nose.
Eyes that hold fear and keep secrets.
I try to say *Estas a salvo aqui* — you are safe here.
They refuse to follow into mi casa.
Quickly in the house I grab fleece jackets,
a box of Cheerios, a jug of milk
plus bowls and spoons. I come back out.
Boy and girl are gone.

There's an underground railroad
of farm workers up the coast of California
but my garage would be off the main track.
An hour later I'm loading corrugated drainpipe
when a frantic woman shows up. She's short, ragged,
missing one eye. Her language not Spanish, not English
but with fingers on her face she indicates the scar—
those were her kids. With a mother's super sense
she's tracking like a bloodhound.
All I can do is point to where they slept
and offer her some Cheerios which she declines.
She takes the jackets. And then she's gone.

I get home after dark.
Running late that morning I'd left
the milk and Cheerios on a tool box.
Now nowhere in sight. Might've been an animal
except the bowls and spoons are upside down
on a smoothed-out shop rag, washed and dried.
Never see the kids or the one-eyed mom again.
Probably migrated north with the harvest.
This much I know: Later, maybe a year,
one morning on the console of my truck
I find a jelly jar of wildflowers,
a paper bag of pears.

A GOOD CABBIE WILL PUT YOU AT EASE.

My grampa drove taxi, taught me tricks.
Now see, we're stuck in traffic, but you don't
freak out because I put you at ease. I can do that,
no matter if you're rich or famous. Are you?

I wish.

You might wish but rich or famous won't make
you less lonely. Grampa drove Herbert Hoover's wife.
This was after Hoover lost, after they moved back
to Palo Alto. No bodyguards. Simpler times.
First Lady, Lou Hoover, she always called for car #7.
Grampa's car. He drove her. Only him.

Why him?

People asked. He just smiled. Lips zipped.
White lady, very proper. After she died, he told me.
Cigarettes, beer, he'd buy for her. Lucky Strikes.
And Lucky Lager. Back seat she'd light up,
close her eyes, wave the ciggie like she was conjuring.
Talked about China, a year there. Chinese
couldn't do her name. Called her Hoo Loo.
So Grampa called her Hooey Looey.
Tickled her, every time. Lucky and Luckies,
Herbert never knew. Nobody knew.

Alone?

Definitely not with Herbert.

But alone?

Grampa wouldn't say. Except.

Except what?

When she was most excited she spoke in Chinese.

So was she lonely?

Not with Grampa. He put her at ease.



<https://pixabay.com/photos/cat-animal-feline-pet-calico-fur-794452/>

Kieran Beville is a former teacher of English and History. He is author of *Write Now – A Guide to Becoming a Writer* (Limerick Writers' Centre, 2019) He has had many articles published in various newspapers, journals and magazines as well as poetry in *Cyphers*, *Crossways*, *A New Ulster*, *Ogham Stone*, *The Stony Thursday Book* and *The Sunday Tribune*. His book – *Fool's Gold* (a collection of poetry) was published by Revival Press, 2019. His latest book is a short biography: *Pulling Back the Clouds – Mike Kelly, Collector and Curator of the Die-cast Model Aircraft Display at Shannon Airport*, (2020, LWC).



LE PARISIEN

In an attic room long ago,
 beneath the moth-eaten parasol of a Parisian night sky,
 he burned a manuscript slowly,
 page-by-page, to keep her warm
 but she cried.
 In the morning she stirred the ashes of his soul to flame
 and he burned for her again.
 He remembered the time she pierced her ears
 and he hung jewels in the wounds.
 They talked beneath declining suns
 and kissed beneath imperfect moons.
 In the evening they had bread, cheese and Beaujolais
 At morning, "*Croissant et du café au lait s'il vous plait.*"
 While he was reading Whitman's Leaves of Grass
 she was simply hoping that their love would last.

Kieran Beville

BAZAAR

When I first arrived in Kolkata
 I was restless after weeks had passed.
 I strode about the campus garden
 being careful to avoid the long grass neglected by the “lazy boy.”
 I imagined there might be a cobra lurking there.
 Was I dreaming when I thought I heard a tiger growl last night?
 Surely not here in the city, perhaps a latent fear
 as I had just returned from The Sundarbans
 where we distributed aid to those stricken by typhoon.
 He only told me of the Bengali tigers when we were returning home.
 The Naga tribes too had laughed at my white skin,
 freckled with mosquito bites,
 and wondered why I walked in midday sun.
 A Brahmin called me aside, like I was next of kin
 to advise me to read in the shade
 when he saw the monsoon sun baptise my head in molten gold.
 He politely asked if I had perused the work of Arundhati Roy.
 When I said I had read *The God of Small Things*
 he could not conceal his joy.
 I wondered what he might say if I told him I had broken bread
 with Dalits and fed scavenging dogs with morsels dropped
 benevolently beneath the table where we talked.
 He took me to his home
 where we were served by dark-skinned Adivasi
 who silently glided from shadowy corners
 in the plantation parlour where we dined,
 then vanished into the edges of the room like ghosts.
 Then he said, “I will give you a boy.”
 I looked at him wide-eyed –
 “He will take you where you want to go, in the college car.”
 With undiluted sincerity I said
 “Take me to the Bazaar.”
 For I had longed to see the market thronged
 with goddesses, painted like Radha
 in sari and salwar, bedecked in necklaces of jasmine and marigolds.
 To mingle with them among the hemp sacks
 overflowing with exotic spices –

cardamom, cumin, cinnamon and cloves,
 saffron, sesame and star anise.
 Like an artist’s palette.
 I would inhale the aromatic air
 of sandalwood, patchouli, eucalyptus and lavender
 and stroll among the stalls of fabrics –
 cotton, silk, linen, chiffon and taffeta
 until bidden to feel the texture of the warp and weft.
 “For the one you love” they would suggest.
 In this merchant temple I would become intoxicated
 with mystical music – sitar, tabla and flute,
 eat mangoes and pomegranates from sacks made of jute.
 The day came for my trip
 when the morning sun was peeping over the eastern boundary wall.
 It had journeyed from Arunachal Pradesh on its way to Gujarat.
 The ‘boy’, Mayang, appeared jangling keys
 like a Hindu temple bell beside the lotus pool.
 I was surprised to see he was a man, like me!
 “Good morning sir” he said with a bobble of his head.
 We lingered for a while and ate some warm puri bread.
 Then weaved through traffic that honked like wild geese.
 We were on our way, we headed east.
 Can you imagine my dismay when we arrived at Big Bazaar,
 a supermarket store?
 With the broadest grin my ‘boy’ said to me –
 “Bargains galore!”
 Or should I say he almost sang the jingle he had heard.
 He was puzzled when I declined to go inside.
 It seemed to hurt his pride.
 So, I entered for a while and that made him smile.
 We ate warm peshwari naan from a street vendor’s tandoori oven,
 drank masala chai from clay cups which we drained
 and flung into the terracotta pile.
 We saw temples and memorials.
 I was glad we hadn’t travelled far.
 That night I went to bed with laughter ringing in my head.
 “How utterly bazaar” I said.

YELLOW ROCK

We swam in The Tailrace,
dived from rocks of varying heights.
Boys started low and worked up
as pride rose and failing courage made them stop.
Then there was the shout –
“Yellow Rock” and we’d all come about.
Scurry to get a better view.
Here young bucks could end
disgracefully in belly-flops.
My wet feet darkened the sun-bleached stone
that made cowards of men.
Toes gripped tight, curled over the edge.
Some took the plunge but not the prize,
judged by youth’s critical eyes.
I sprang forward and descended
to where the salmon swam.
Entered the water as a boy, emerged a man.

THE FISHERMAN

I listen to the cascade of silver sound beside the river rocks
where someone, clad in waders, is fishing –
still and patient as a heron.
With the flick of a wrist the line whips in graceful arches
‘till it dips and plops amongst the swarming mayfly
close to those Piscean lips.
There is a rhythm to his action
like a chariot driver with a lash raised above his head,
urging stallions to go faster, as they gallop on the water’s edge.
Oblivious to time as tide rises to his hips.
He paints the parchment of the sky in swift strokes
like an Islamic scribe in Kufic script -
The calligraphy of an ancient spell is cast.
Something took his bait at last.
The rod bends, the line tightens.
He pulls a rainbow from the circle of expanding ripples.
Then suddenly it snaps with a splash.
He reels in his pride,
perhaps with a silent vow
to return and claim the elusive prize another time.
But for now that lucky trout is free to swim
and maybe even tell the tale of all that happened to him.

SOLDIER ON

There was no glamour there
in the rat-infested trenches, only fear.
Frost gnawing at his flesh.
Damp deforming his bones.
Like a gnarled tree
rooted where the storm was fierce.
All he wanted was a suit of clothes,
proper boots, an overcoat to keep him warm,
and to escape the drudgery of the farm.
Maybe he dreamt of glory
or craved significance in a gallant cause,
even hoped to be hero who deserves applause.
He had a sweetheart that he missed
and would think about the times they kissed.
He hungered for her and home.
Remembered how his mother admired his uniform,
It was not her desire that he should go
but it was deemed to be a shame
not play the patriot game.
And he was young
mesmerised by the jingoistic drum,
dazzled by flashing flags,
brass bands and parades.
He fell in a foreign field,
conscripted to an open grave.
Fed as fodder to carrion birds
that wheeled above his swollen corpse.
Eyes pecked out of a boy who was trying to be a man,
compliant in the warlords' masterplan.
A letter sent – the one that mothers dread.

Words, like shrapnel, wounding,
but she will soldier on.
His battle ended, hers has just begun.
No detail about how he met his death
Was it a grenade or bayonet?
She, determined that commemorations,
should not become celebrations
that perpetuate the privilege of an elite –
those who to the manor born
put upon the heads of sons of peace
crowns of bloody thorns.
The master class and senior brass, the bosses –
Patricians who send plebeians
to be nailed to crosses.

DISCARDED THINGS

I returned to the old house,
empty rooms, broken glass on the floor,
pigeon feathers on the bare boards.
The print – the one you never liked –
of a warrior at a brook
drinking from his helmet
still hangs on the wall.
But in the fading light
it looks like the devil drinking from a skull.
The book on Adolf Eichmann
is among the discarded things.
I remember the argument.
It started with my question –
“Was the holocaust decided in some celestial court?”
I accused your God of taking
the ashes of Auschwitz –
potassium, calcium and phosphorous –
to fortify the crimson roses of his garden –
flowery language and bitter words.
Your tube of lipstick on the ground caught my eye
a golden glint in the dying sun
like a spent cartridge
the bullet of your goodbye still lodged in my chest.
I sat derelict in the dust
hoping that a faint voice might whisper
something soothing in my ear.

I listened for the music in the noise of all we said and did
until the moon stared sternly at me through the window
where I could see the cloud’s grey tresses
tumble over the shoulder of the hills –
those heights where I once stood.
I had stepped into the time
you evicted me from your heart.
My voice trembled like a candle-flame
when I said your name.
Swallowed in that cavernous past
The ribs of the old house heaving
I pulled the door behind this terrible desolation
when leaving.

John Grey is Australian born short storywriter, poet, playwright, musician, Providence RI resident. Has been published in numerous magazines including Weird Tales, Christian Science Monitor, Greensboro Poetry Review, Poem, Agni, Poet Lore and Journal Of The American Medical Association as well as the horror anthology "What Fears Become" and the science fiction anthology "Futuredaze." Has had plays produced in Los Angeles and off-off Broadway in New York. Winner of Rhysling Award for short genre poetry in 1999.



SHOOTING STAR

Through my window, I see shooting stars,
a ray of burning light severing the sky.
It sings a dog. It ruffles a bear's fur.

But, across the way,
there's an astronomer in his attic
with a telescope pointed toward
the constellations.
He stares with all the science he can muster.

He could give me reasons.
I could share imaginings
that don't go by any name.

We could meet in the middle.
But the shooting star cuts him off from me.
His burning rocks and dust
rule me out.

.

John Grey

APPEARANCES MAKE AN APPEARANCE

Appearances, that was the consensus.
They all continued to have one,
no matter what the time in their life.
One of them fingered his measly beard.

Said he, "I've spent all this time
on insight, intellect, values and feelings
but I can't get away from my face."
The long-suffering others nodded.

At least, they had beer to console them.
That amber liquid began working
on unloosening the mind.
Blindness has to start somewhere.

They cursed the ones who didn't
even have to work on their looks,
who could bound into any gathering
and immediately be the eyes' favorite.

These were still young men, sitting at
their tables, under the club's blue flame.
But the foxes danced with others.
Egos needed a hand up but none were forthcoming.

Across the room, a table of young women
glowed with a similar reticent eeriness.
Neither glanced up at the other.
They all refilled their glasses instead.

IN THE STARS

As coffee brews,
eggs fry,
bacon crackles.,
she turns the morning newspaper
to the astrology column.
It's the one chance the near future has
to feel like the present.

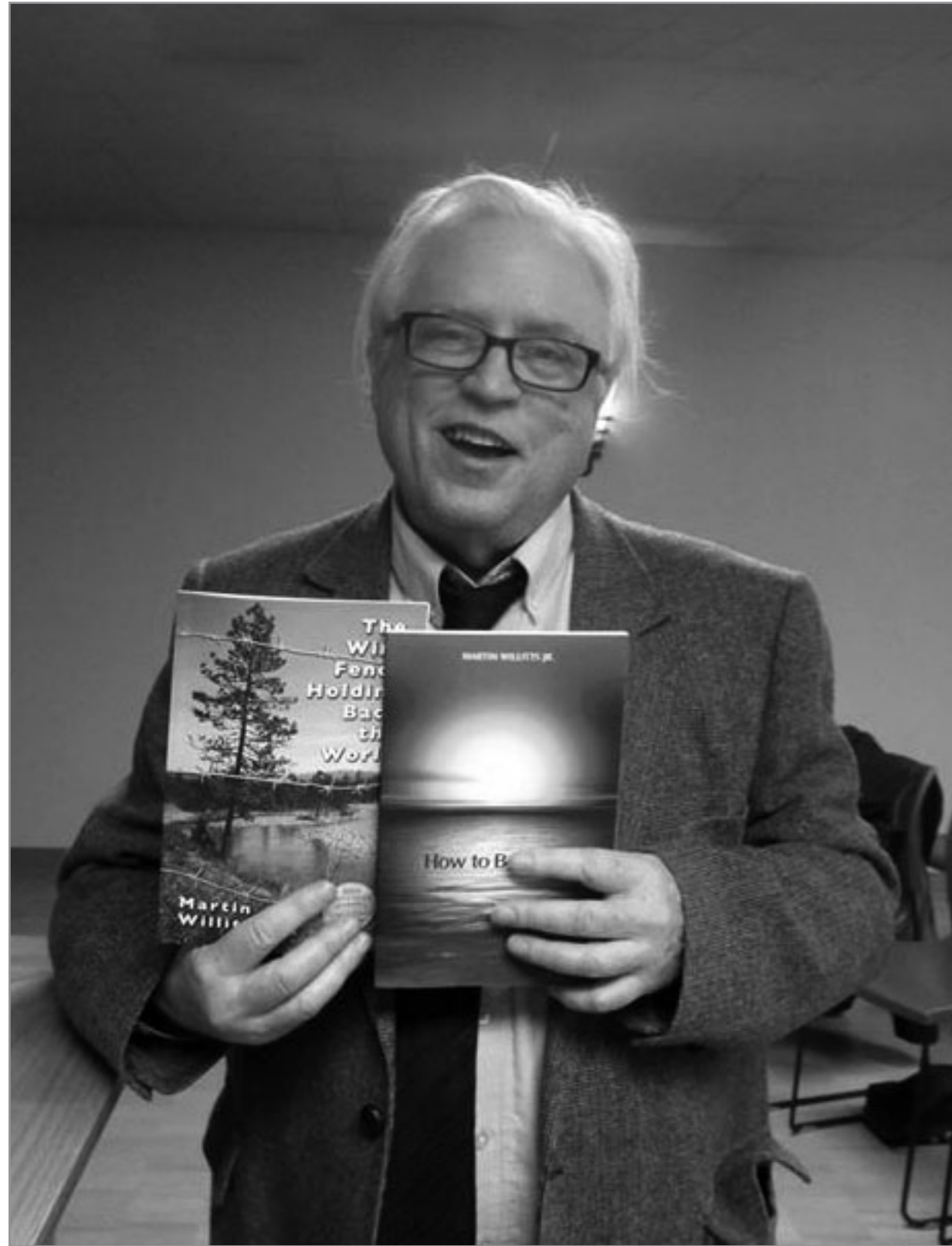
Love life: big change imminent.
The job: prospects good.
Money: save your pennies,
the dollars will etc.
She ignores the lucky numbers.

Her husband's head
is stuck in the sports' pages.
He's tired of snarling,
"Astrology is all crap."
He saves his aggravation, these days,
for the Red Sox.

To him, fate is not in the stars.
It's in who the manager figures
to bring in from the bullpen.

Breakfast over,
she prepares herself
for what the day really has in store.
The pseudo-science
may have got her hopes up.
But it's reality's predictions
that most come true.

Martin Willitts Jr is a retired Librarian living in Syracuse, New York. He was nominated for 15 Pushcart and 13 Best of the Net awards. Winner of the 2014 *Broadsided* award; 2014 *Dylan Thomas International Poetry Contest*; *Rattle Ekphrastic Challenge*, June 2015, *Editor's Choice*; *Rattle Ekphrastic Challenge*, *Artist's Choice*, November 2016, Stephen A. DiBiase Poetry Prize, 2018. He won a *Central New York Individual Artist Award* and provided "Poetry on The Bus" which had 48 poems in local buses including 20 bi-lingual poems from 7 different languages.



WORM MOON, SAP MOON

(March full moon, Native American cycle)

Thawing-rain; waterfalls of rain; curtains of rain;
mud-time; slouchy, running gauntlets of earth;
earthworms floating up to the surface —
all overwhelming me. Sparrows and robins strut,
swooping worms up, dangling from beaks,
scurry into the thickets or the restless budding
forsythia and ash, battered by rain.

Sap returns to the maple
arriving from a distant place. Worms come
to the surface, to the greenness,
to the unfolding, to the resilient bird chatter.

Rain pauses. Its stream, blocked by beavers,
is abruptly silenced. Worms are landlocked,
then splashes of black-capped chickadees,
finches, jays, and cardinals swoosh for supper.

Martin Willitts Jr

WAIT

wait until the world is quiet
to hear singing from the trees
coming off the land
smelling of rain as it fades
then go to your lover

outside is just another world away

all the troubles have not started
stay in your lover's arms
wait until the room changes
wait until you feel your bones sigh

the world is waiting

nothing in this world
stays inside forever

here comes the breeze
shuffling the noon leaves

wait

rain is quiet
hardly there at all
running away all troubles
until there are no more problems

the bad moments never stay

there is a hush

your lover is waiting for you
tossing sleep

the room darkens
while your body sighs
the world is singing its softening song

wait in that hesitation
until the world is finally quiet again

ALL ANIMALS LAY DOWN TO REST

My son did not want some existential answer,
nor did he crave a factual answer;

he wanted a ceremony.

I asked if he had any last words.
The *look* he gave me.

He wanted someone to blame.

I could say that the vet tried everything;
but he didn't want excuses.

I kept digging to fit a shoebox with a dead cat inside.

I hated touching the stiffened body;
but if I had used a dust pan,
my son would have never forgiven me.

The things we do for love.
The speechless things we do.

NOTHING IS PERFECTLY STILL

I have to believe the turbulence was unexpected.
A mallard's brood went in ocean crest and tremor.

The ducks had entered single-file,
yellow round notes on a music sheet.

At first, they rocked gently
in white foam, contentedly quaking.

A shift of intent, then waves thrashed heavily,
an orchestra rushing to the finish.

The ducklings disappeared
under a large, curling drum roll wave.

They bobbed up like corks
from after-shocks, cymbal thrashed under.

In another part of the country, immigrants try crossing
white water. A father carrying a guitar drowns,

his daughter's tiny arms wrapped around his neck
are already blue.

My heart crests and tremors
with these unexpected turbulences.

BELIEF

Everywhere the world goes on without me.
Winter is bearable to others, contrary to what I want.

Several curiosities wriggle when I lift a flat rock;
none ask me what I am doing in my life.

A slender light hovers the horizon.
I can't prevent it.

A plenitude of rain falls
and I did not make it happen.

Whether or not I have doubt doesn't matter.
Although I forget those trees' names, they continue to bud.

The sky knows what to do with the color periwinkle.
It trembles with belief.

FINDING THAT PLACE OF DEEP CONNECTION

Where you stand is not important.
You can even stand in your room
with the window opened to sparrow songs
or drive through anxiety
to a place where some comfort is waiting.
You can be anywhere
in order to participate and find solace.

When the sky and earth were first created,
silence backstitched them together.

We are merely trespassers in this intense world.
Try not to disturb this moment.
Try not to let the jays warn about your presence,
and celebrate your absence.

Anne McDonald is a Dublin based spoken word poet, dramatist and creative writing teacher whose work is centered on the challenges we face in a society that is changing rapidly and how we respond or react to those changes. She has had work published in Women's News, Hot Press, Electric Acorn, Woman's Work Anthologies 1 & 2, The Blue Nib, The Strokestown anthology and online journals and was short listed for the Frances Macmanus RTE short story competition. Anne has an M.Phil in Creative Writing. Her first collection of poetry "Crow's Book" is due out in Summer of 2020.



BLUE BELLS AND HIGH HORSES

To smell a bluebell
you have to leave the road
and find a path,
carpeted with ferns and wild garlic
and trees dressed in ivy swaddling
like lace on rough barks,
to find a lilac tinted pinafore around a trunk,
-there you will see bluebells.

I wanted you to smell them too,
to remember how when we were young
we spent our hours talking to the ladybirds,
and black soft caterpillars we called "God's Horses",
splitting grass and counting smells
like honeysuckle and white-thorn blossoms and heady gorse,
webbed in silk in early spring.

But here's the thing;
I forgot I came here in a temper
wanting to be on my own
and left alone.
I stayed too long
to find my way back to say
"it wasn't you, it was definitely me."
The road was empty,
you were gone.
And now it's hard to smell a bluebell
from a high horse.

.

Anne McDonald

HAROLD IN THE HOSPICE

It made him tired to think about putting in his teeth to bite an apple,
he didn't care if he took a pill or not,
(the pills they gave him now were for his bowels).
He wondered if the nurse had ever taken acid?
Did the Filipino orderly who always smiled
ever climb a tree at dawn high on coke
to see if he could hear electricity?
Did the doctor ever smoke a joint or eat a brownie
before the entrance exam for the civil service?
(no one was more surprised than Harold himself when he got the job)

Stamping forms in sandals and a cheesecloth shirt
a head like Holyhead on Mondays
coked off his tits in Harcourt Street on Fridays,
getting locked into the downstairs bathroom of Zhivago's
(which was walled with mirrors) sent him off the cliff edge.
They called it "a once off psychotic episode"
and locked him in St. Ita's for a week
(he remembered now being glad of the rest)

Crawling into the luggage space of an intercity
leaving Dublin to start a new life as a cobbler in Belfast,
was a great idea fueled by drinking absinthe and smoking weed.
Freed by an overweight overwrought bus driver
Harold hitchhiked home from Drogheda at midnight.
(the damage to his lungs from diesel was severe)

The hospice comfort dog was a cross between
a St. Bernard and a Labrador, his eyes looked straight ahead
as bony yellowed hands and the almost dead
stroked his back and pulled his ears.
His name was "Titan" and he was commonly known
to have the patience of a saint.
Harold wondered if there were days when Titan thought
"fuck this, the kip is full of sick people."
So he called the mongrel to his bedside
and in a last act of defiance or enlightenment,
he slipped the dog a Valium.

PEGGY'S BRACK

Do you not remember the night you ate the brack?
The night she came home cold and tired from work and put the kettle on?
It was November and the pump had burst in the hot press
so the house was freezing,
there was very little butter left
and you put it on the last slice of brack.

She ran amok
threw us all out of the house
we had to go to your house.
Do you not remember?
Can you not just pretend
that you remember about the brack?

She gets confused I know but to be fair to her,
it really did happen,
and she gets upset when she gets confused
are you sure you don't remember?
What would it matter if you played along?
You'll never see her after this.
She might give you a slap
or a kiss
depending on how her brain is working on the day.

Would it really kill you to visit for a chat
about when we were all teenagers
and she used to work nights
and all the fights and arguments
about dishes in the sink?

Just let her think that you remember.
I'll be with there, you needn't worry,
she's not usually violent
only when she gets confused,
but she is right on this score.
We'll be in and out in no time.

I'm sad you don't or won't remember about the brack,
it's all she can remember about you.

AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING...

My mother worried with a wet dishcloth
when we were out too late and ran the risk of being abducted.
If I close my eyes I can feel the sting of scalded skin
and the faintest smell of mild green Fairy Liquid.
Her mother worried with the smell of seaweed wet upon her apron
on a mussel bedded shore in Mornington
as she waited for the pilot boat to cross the bar to safety.
Before that, her mother, a woman I have no knowledge of
whose genes I'm told, are in my DNA,
worried for a dying flock of children born blue bar one.
Apparently she was a bullock of a woman for hauling turf.

Now I worry for a 21 year old,
every inch my 21 year self if I had been a boy.
A party animal who can drink his body weight in beer
and make his way home safely with the dawn.
A bull of a man for carrying blocks
and working fourteen hour shifts behind a counter pulling pints
-a charmer with quick mouth.
I worry he will smoke out his twenties in a haze of Moroccan black
and Jack Daniels iced and mixed with red
and that one night he will be found dead in a ditch somewhere
Behind the steering wheel of a crashed car.

But most of all I worry that he will feel too much,
hurt too much,
go through life an open,
coping wound,
the whole world's worries in his head.

He actually tells me not to worry.

I worry that he dropped out of the college he didn't want
to go to in the first place
-he smiles a lot from an upturned face.

I've heard it said, at night in bed
you can swap worrying for prayer
if you have any kind of God you could believe in,
apparently it stops anticipatory grieving,
and the thieving of the hours of sleep.

So I keep the gate in the company of other mothers
and their mother's mothers
standing down the line of years,
fears accumulating in a pile of stones
bleached from generations in the sun,
each one used and borrowed from the next
and handed down to form eternal monuments.

THE FAMILY NEST

They always told me I was a surprise
But I know it was more of a great big thundering shock.
The rattling's of the bag, the shake of the sugar sack
the overlooked afterthought.

They never realized that it was just as big a shock for me,
catapulted into a blaze of harsh lights and fights,
bangs and rattles and the low moan of cattle
in the early morning.

A farmer always wants a son apparently,
to pass things on, land to land, hand to hand.
But he got me, six foot one, hands no use for cattle prods
or tinkering with tractor engines
but Top Gun with a pair of scissors,
or a curling tongs,
sharp as a tack in black with my name
embroidered across my chest in pink.

Mother didn't mind so much,
a trim and blow-dry every Friday,
a frothy cappuccino and a massage chair
was a long way from tin buckets,
buttermilk and the smell of day-old slurry.

He said he knew my ilk, had heard about my kind,
would have no truck with the likes of me,
that when he was a young buck he carried the plough
across his back at the end of day to give the horse a rest
and that all sodomites would have to face their God.

Even so, I cut his hair the way he liked this morning
and fixed his tie, and shaved his day-old beard
before the lid was closed by the parish priest,
his onward journey blessed.

It was the least that I could do before I took my mother home,
and over tea and fingered deeds with sniffs of disapproval
at my lack of interest in the spread of hoose,
costs of tillage and the lowering price for beef,
I signed the line in black and definite ink,
and in the blink of a watery solicitor's eye,
I laid the biro down to rest beside the Marietta,
and quietly and legally inherited
the family nest.

EXCELLENT HORSE LIKE LADY

On reading the Sunday Times 09.06.19

The phrase ran round and round in my head
 on Sunday morning when I read
 in the newspaper that Hong Song-ul
 was not dead, or executed, as had been
 believed in North Korea for some time,
 but was now Kim Jung-un's official escort.

A pop star with a hit single that said
 she was an Excellent Horse Like Lady.
 In her own (I wonder) words, she sang
 about being a virgin on a stallion
 and having energy left after a full day's work
 in the factory and I wondered,
 what does a virgin on a stallion
 do of an evening?

Apparently she is the first to leave for work
 every morning, and has her name in the paper
 for having skills like lightning,
 "An award given to youths who live
 in flight, to fight for the preservation
 of the party era's teeming creation."
 It's a very deep thought to have
 with a bowl of cornflakes.

I think she must have some mad determination
 or balls of steel to feel safe at the
 side of Kim Yong-un.
 Apparently (it says) the virgin on the stallion
 rides a horse given by the Dear Leader,
 and me, a reader of the Sunday paper
 eating toast could only feel inadequate
 at the most enthusiastic virgin in the factory.

With perfect lips and hair and pastel
 pink factory wear, singing with a smile
 and hawking bolts of heavy cotton
 without breaking out a sweat
 all tiredness she forgets when the whistle blows
 and the factory gates spew out a hoard
 of happy workers, laughing in the sun.
 I got to wondering was she the most deluded
 Popstar in the village,
 or was she just the cleverest one?

But it seems this official escort of Kim Song un
 feels no threat and is now celebrated as
 number one North Korean First Lady
 and it's all a little shady though apparently she
 is now no longer Hong Song-ul but is
 the fully-fledged accompanying wife.
 It's hard to know if she still believes that
 she is an excellent horse like lady
 virgin on a stallion
 or is acting on a daily basis
 for her very life.

RUTLAND MOTHER

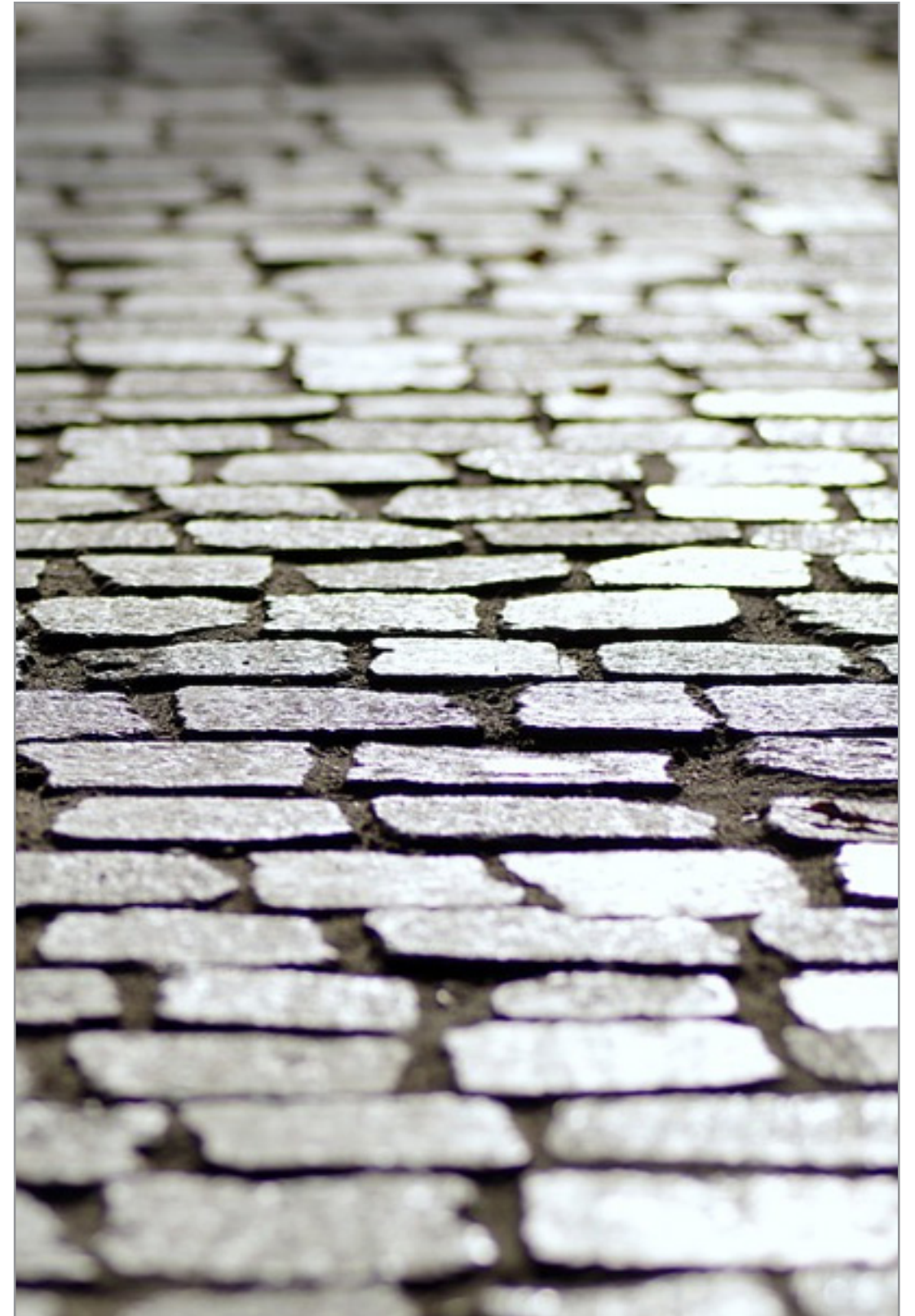
She was born in the belly
of an aching woman,
ripped to stretching
by twenty thousand beltings,
first inhaling rancoured
by the taste of Woodbines.

She grew up in a grass-less
waste of concrete,
living minutes punctuated
by the sunlight,
harsh and violent soundings
feathered with the night-time
prayers of angels.

She coupled by tradition
and offered up her dreaming
for the scanty wisps of comfort
and security by weekly payment
to an unknown, open, grasping hand.

She mothered with a loving
heedless of the boundaries
but mindful always of the bearings,
always giving
always laying healing palms,
holding in the bleeding heart.

She died today
within her limits,
never knowing cosmopolitan,
—never needing to.



<https://pixabay.com/photos/pavement-cobblestones-walkway-1696507/>



John W Sexton



Richard Magahiz

John W Sexton lives in the Republic of Ireland. His seventh poetry collection, *Visions at Templeglantine*, was published by Revival Press in 2020. A chapbook of surrealist poetry, *Inverted Night*, came out from Survision Books in 2019. Under the ironic pseudonym of Sex W. Johnston he has recorded an album with legendary Stranglers frontman Hugh Cornwell, entitled *Sons of Shiva*, which has been released on Track Records. His poem *The Green Owl* was awarded the Listowel Poetry Prize 2007 for best single poem, and in that same year he was awarded a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in Poetry

Richard Magahiz has a day job working with computers, originally as a physicist but more recently as a software engineer. He's published some poetry both online and in print in a number of publications. When it comes to music, food, or books his tastes are both eclectic and idiosyncratic. He spent a long time on the East Coast of the US but has come back to his native state of California. His work has appeared online at World Haiku Review, Star*line, tinywords, Abyss & Apex, Dreams and Nightmares, Scifaikuest, and Eye to the Telescope. His website is at <https://zeroatthebone.us/>

ECZEMA NATIONS

pastor x speaks from the vat radiating glass
manifold christs of hived light enter the human host
stirred to thy viscera this magnetic moment
negative turtles count all the way up going down
slide a dorado beneath the seven edged blades

in the city of gold a dog's white turd absorbs the sun
bright in the nettle light the skull jacks
the god dogs scratching eczema nations from their skins

let the one in a chicken suit judge the barons
tinned men the dragon perceives a future in scrap metal
india notion cobalt welt girt
demanding payment in blue they removed the sky
black current junkie nods to promethean songs

.

ORGASM SOFTWARE

with a unicorn horn unscrewing the moon loose
ain't I a horse well yer part o' one
tall tales mister heads2spare burns a brain
damp summer soil the shoggoths gibber
hansel's and gretel's weeping composts the hag's bower

most precious honeyed ichor nosedrops
united states hexagon deploys cyborg bee armies
roast guard cutter injects an ox comb

reasoning disease mops them up with a spongiform
braced for her slap they're fake he muhmuhs
installed hastily orgasm software not with this package
sensory factorial interrogatives
tesseract detonates in the tax office numberers crunched

NEBULAR GATES

lusty squint through the wrong end of the microscope
sea monkeys harness their goldfish dirigible
prepare the gumball tipped anti gaydar warheads
rocketman coughs up rust then busts a gut
carbon steel lips lox-pink hover the house prow frock

filled bath becomes a doorway to somewherestrange
thundersuds rough sawn nebular gates
no turn of a cog in the gravity void of her crabclock

invisibility controls scritch
incessant irritation in the coat of exploding suns
ticks off samson the suicide yanker
rapunzel took by her braided hair we climb the godhead
one postborn prewired buddha nature

PUMICE VELOCITIES

monthly lodgement the alchemist's cat sheds golden fur
the last Christian abandons the room deposit
unlocked a strange triangular wardrobe made of bread
diaperguy brings home high marks in marital arts
pygers elebras serpigis wedded blitz in the hyperjungle

rump-scented candles the birth of biche volleyball
his turf ire gets on her wick the hot headed waxmoon
they be not talons milady just calluses

pumice velocities abrade the edge into edgeless space
helical koh-i-noor quasar slips
three quarks amimsy gyre and gimble a wobbly thimble
hot triple A bonds drip needle pricked
all the way to zed for zero via the uncoiled brain

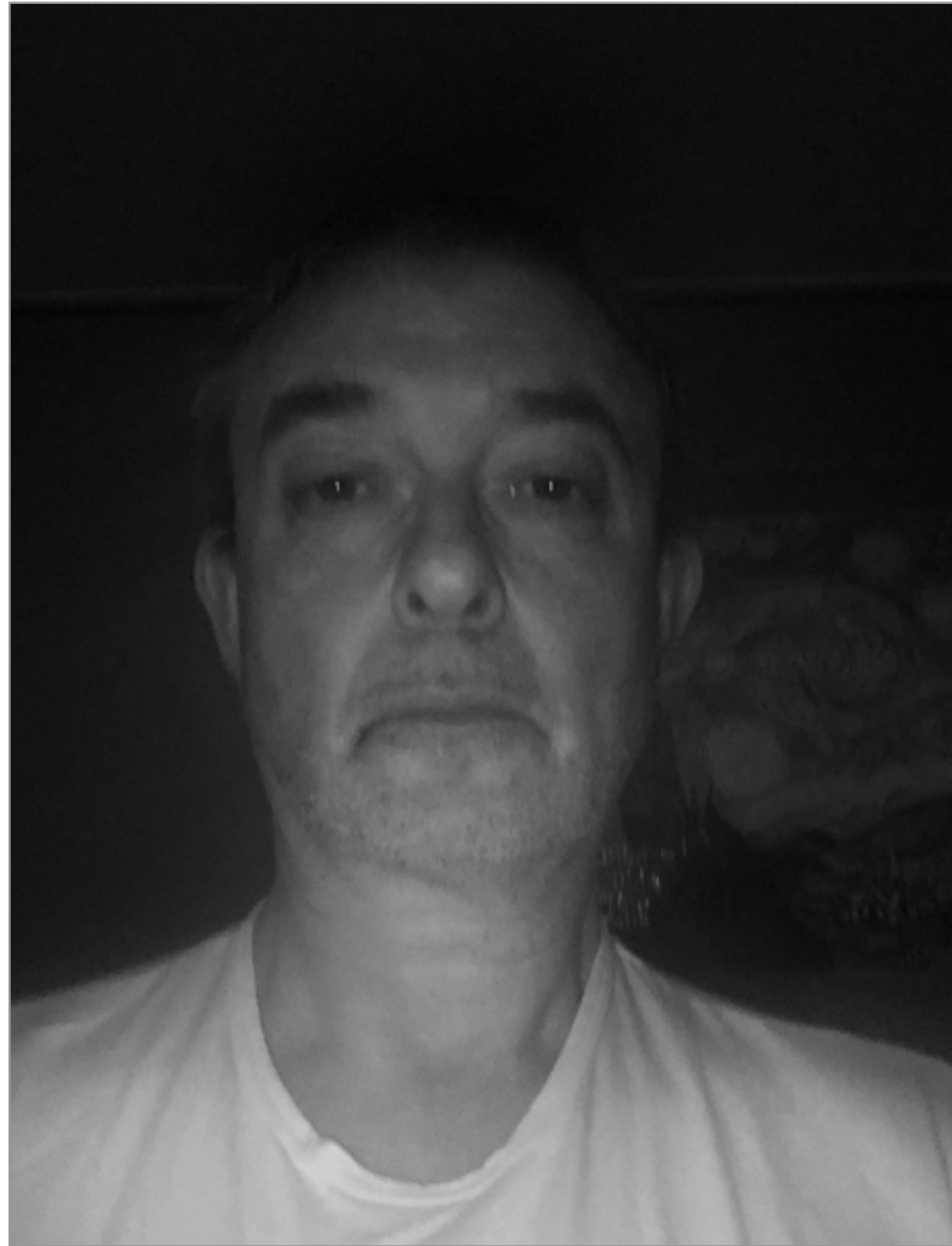
PASTEL SABBATH

knight-at-arms no key can be found for the gate of rain
lancet spy the holocircuit regulates random stabs
saint lantern sebastian arrow wounds pour heaven's light
elvis the daily lama shot nothing but blanks
from his throne in pharaoh's gut bill harzia rules memphis

saguaro stylus scraped a track of tinypox
scissortails blacken her sleep she slowly fills with guano
pastel sabbath debentures amortizdella

lepretrolls guard the thirty-piece silver stepping stones
down in menda city a corpse's vote comes cheap
teddy's paw soaks up coke ants dismantle the sugar mice
transubbed the lager into urine grate peril
behold a thousand-orificed angel speaking in dungs

Martin Hayes was born in London and has lived around the Edgware Road area of it all of his life. He has worked in the courier industry for over 30 years and is the author of four books of poetry: *Letting Loose The Hounds*, (Redbeck Press, 2001). *When We Were Almost Like Men*, (Smokestack, 2015). *The Things Our Hands Once Stood For*, (Culture Matters, 2018) and *Roar!* (Smokestack, 2018).



FOXCONN SUICIDE WATCH

for Xu Lizhi

they say there are no factories anymore
 that they are all now in China
 making Apple products and Beats
 or in Bangladesh
 stitching together Nike trainers and sweatshirts
 but ask Judith
 and she'll tell you that they still exist
 right in the center of London
 sat on her seat for 11-hours a day
 with her plastic headset's jack plug
 plugged into her computer
 that whenever she pulls it out
 a supervisor suddenly materialises next to her
 like he has just risen up out of the ground in smoke
 asking her why she has disengaged
 Judith then telling him
 that she needs to go for a wee
 as he says back, toilet is for breaks *hun*
 which she gets two 10-minute ones of either side of her lunch
 but often doesn't take
 because she has targets to hit
 300 inbound calls a day
 for 5-days solid
 or else her £8.49 an hour pay
 gets reduced to £7.75
 as Judith crosses her legs
 and holds on to her wees

Martin Hayes

continued overleaf...

FOXCONN SUICIDE WATCH ... contd

not wanting to get a black mark
 pressed into her forehead
 not wanting
 to not be able to put a bowl of pasta in front of her child's mouth
 or be able to buy a plant
 that she can water and watch grow up towards the ceiling of her flat-share
 as the system blocks out the sun
 drains her blood away
 from the heart she's learnt
 has to be made to stay awake has to sometimes
 be made to keep
 on beating
 even when all of the rest of you is so tired
 so fed up
 that all it wants to do is stand up on a roof
 and fall
 face first
 into eternal sleep

CALL CENTRE WOMEN

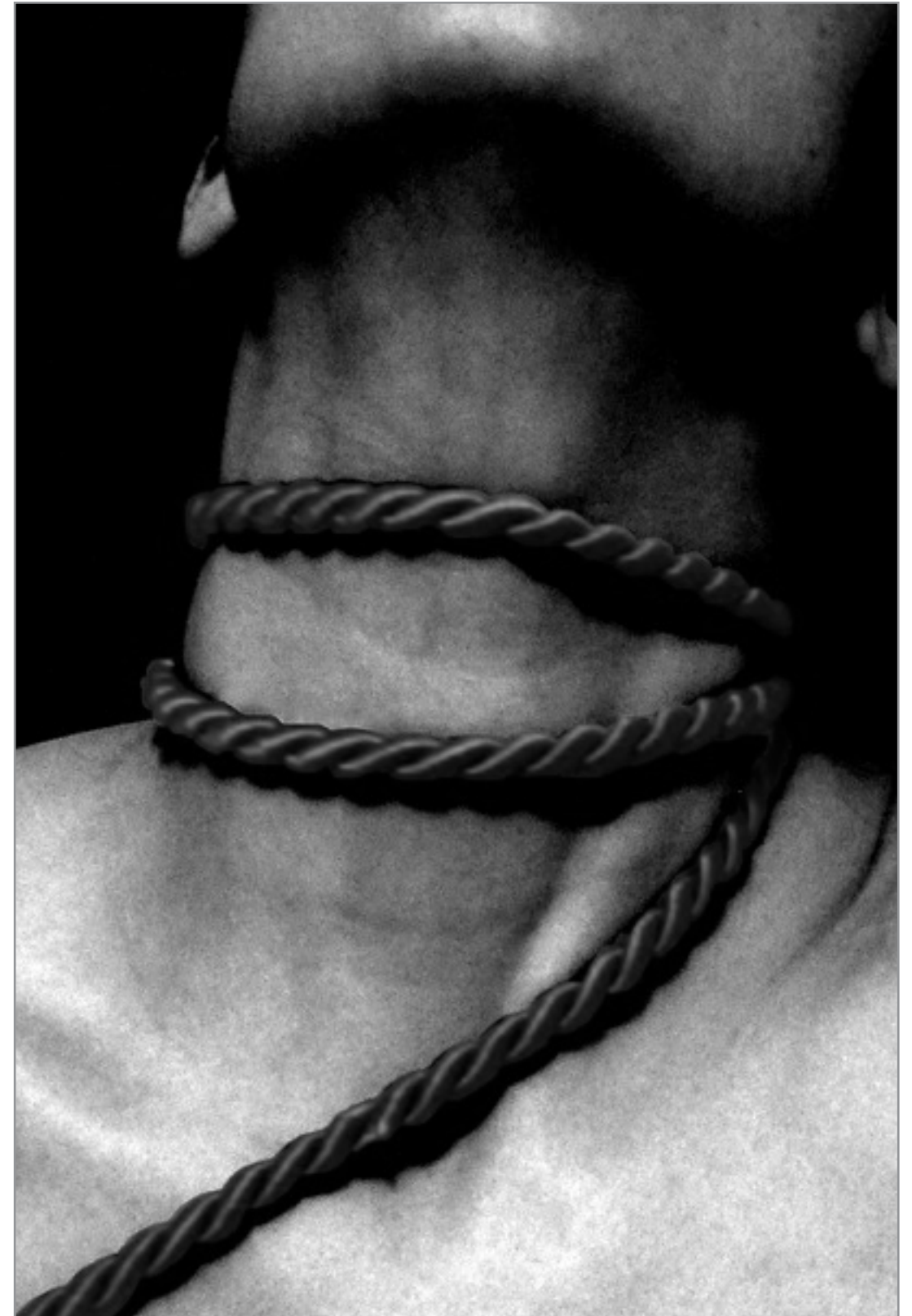
the telephonist tells me that when she was younger
 her mother once bought her a pair of plastic telephones for her birthday
 how she used to make her mother sit on one side of the room
 as she sat on the other
 getting her to phone her up
 so that they could carry out pretend conversations
 pretending to be a customer calling up a shop
 and ordering things
 how funny she finds that
 now that telephonist
 wears a plastic headset on her head
 earning £8.49 an hour
 getting fed calls into her from customers
 ordering bikes and vans or complaining
 that their couriers haven't turned up yet
 knowing that every time one of those calls finishes
 the phone system will automatically feed another one into her
 so that she has no time to stop
 or think
 about the sun up in the sky
 sitting there for 11-hours a day
 having to put her hand up first
 to ask her supervisor if she can go for a wee
 or make a drink
 because the only way to stop
 those calls continually being fed into her
 is to pull the jack plug of her headset out of her computer
 which will then cause a red light to flash
 on the supervisor's monitoring screen
 and the supervisor to come over
 to ask her why
 she has disengaged

continued overleaf...

CALL CENTRE WOMEN ... contd

disengaging
is not part of the £8.49 an hour
deal

and I think about all of the women
in all of the call centres of the world
having to put their hands up first
to ask if they can go for a wee
or make a drink
how even the animals can wee when they want to
disengage
when they want to
how even those animals
can look up into the sky
and find the sun
to think about
it's warmth and brightness
guiding them to water
guiding them onwards
and you have to ask yourself
how did all of these call center women
become less free
than those animals?



<https://pixabay.com>

I have always enjoyed reading poetry, short stories, and novels and I frequently attempted to write over the years. In order to develop my writing skills, I enrolled on the Maynooth University Creative Writing Certificate in 2015. Since then, I have had a short story published in Live Encounters, *When Skies are Grey*, and I have performed this at various live mic events. I also won the Kildare Readers Short Story competition and had two short stories short-listed in the RTE Francis MacManus short story competition, which were subsequently broadcast. In addition, two of my poems were long listed in the Anthony Cronin and Fish Publishing competitions.



THE FOURTEENTH LOCK

Blackened balance-beams on the lock gates
clasp canal water, yet it spills like silk.
A bridge-eye blinks. The Sligo train lacerates
entangled verges of reeds and tussocks.
We walk the towpath, bristling with the hurt
of sutures unpicked despite the pain,
and staunching blood with hollow hearts.
An ashen silence falls like dribbling stains.

We rest. The lock gate's weather-striated arm
stretches towards the quarried dressed stone bridge.
A breeze from the Shannon relays a balm
seasoned with sweet fragranced sedge.
It bathes the heart, unblinds the eyes.
The flood enfolds debris along the sides.

Brid Connolly

Dianne Alvine has been writing poetry since she was a child. It continues to be her favorite passion. Her chapbook, 'Child's Play,' was published by Finishing Line Press in 2018. Several of her poems have been published in Muse-Pie Press, Poetry Super Highway, and an upcoming issue of Auroras and Blossoms Poetry Journal. Her poem, 'Someday,' was selected to appear in Forward Poetry's One Week Poetry Challenge Anthology. Dianne's poem, 'Oranges,' was written during a very sad time, when her mother needed to be placed in a nursing home. She believes that poetry has been a blessing in her life.



PALE BLUE DOT

Tiny lonely speck in a vast
dark cosmos, you are still
a mystery. After billions of
years of cataclysmic agony,
through meteor fires, ice
storms, volcanoes and
tsunamis that raged like
madmen, you were born,
a celestial baby.

You alone have been the
keeper of us all. Without
you, we are nothing. I
love you so much, pale
blue dot. But there is
only one you must live
for, a golden goddess
whose pull attracts you
like no other.

In a universe where love
is fickle, you have found
each other. Pale blue dot,
I beg you, do not deceive
her. Without her, you are
as worthless as a swirling
piece of dust, spinning
aimlessly in a cold lifeless
world.

Dianne Alvine

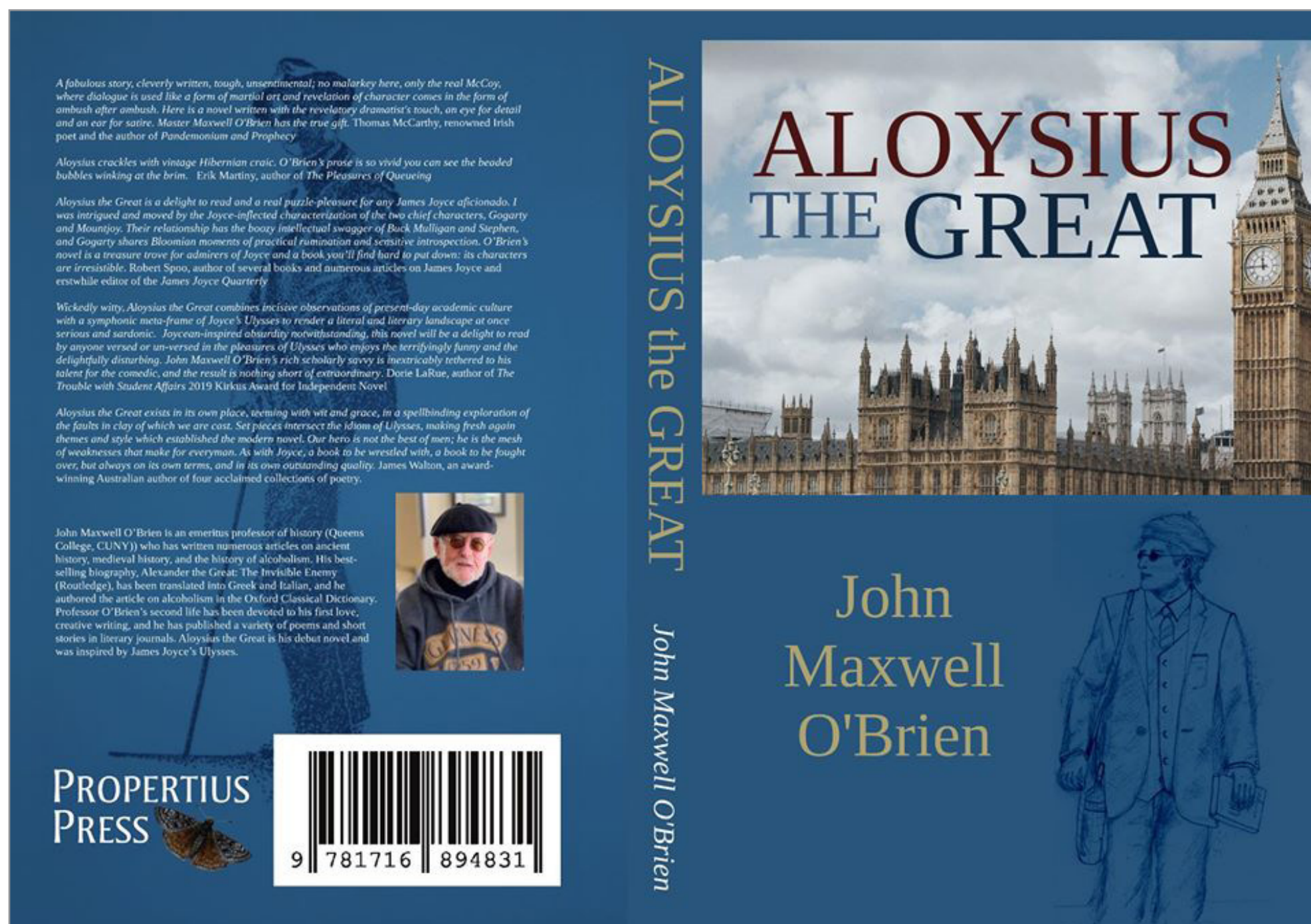
(Inspired by the photograph entitled, "The Pale Blue Dot."
As described by scientist Carl Sagan, this is a photo of the earth, as seen by Voyager 1,
at a distance of over 4 billion miles).



Dorie LaRue is the author of two novels, *Resurrecting Virgil*, (Backwaters Imprint of the University of Nebraska Press, 2001) which won the Nebraska Prize for the Novel, *The Trouble With Student Affairs* (Artemis Press, 2019), three chapbooks of poetry, *Seeking the Monsters* (New Spirit Press 1993), *The Private Frenzy*, (Jazz-bones Press, 1992), *In God's Due Time: A Tribute to Mistress Rowlandson* (Parousia Publishing, 2019), and a full length collection of poetry, *Mad Rains* (Kelsay Press, 2017). Her fiction and poetry and book reviews have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *The American Poetry Review*, and others. A twice recipient of a Louisiana Division of the Arts Fellowship in Literature, she lives in Shreveport, Louisiana, and teaches writing at LSU.

Professor Dorie LaRue on *Aloysius The Great* by John Maxwell O'Brien

"Wickedly witty, *Aloysius the Great* combines incisive observations of present-day academic culture with a symphonic meta-frame of Joyce's *Ulysses* to render a literal and literary landscape at once serious and sardonic. Joycean-inspired absurdity notwithstanding, this novel will be a delight to read by anyone versed or un-versed in the pleasures of *Ulysses* who enjoys the terrifyingly funny and the delightfully disturbing. John Maxwell O'Brien's rich scholarly savvy is inextricably tethered to his talent for the comedic, and the result is nothing short of extraordinary."



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Propertius Press
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