10 ANNIVERSARY 2010 - 2019



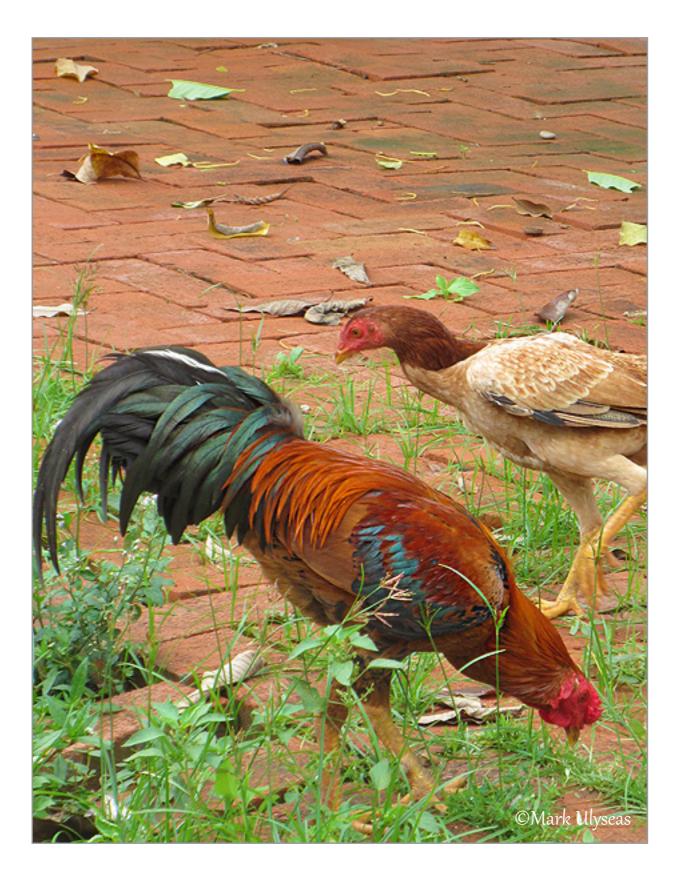
FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH October 2020



JOHN L. STANIZZI Fallen Leaves

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE

LIVE ENCOUNTERS MAGAZINE



Rooster with his mate in Luang Prabang, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



SUPPORT LIVE ENCOUNTERS. DONATE NOW AND KEEP THE MAGAZINE LIVE IN 2020!

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

Live Encounters Magazine (2010), Live Encounters Poetry & Writing (2016), Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers (2019) and now, Live Encounters Books (August 2020).

We are appealing for donations to pay for the administrative and technical aspects of the publication. Please help by donating any amount for this just cause as events this year are threatening the very future of Live Encounters.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas Publisher/Editor markulyseas@liveencounters.net

Donate

All articles and photographs are the copyright of www.liveencounters.net and its contributors. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the explicit written permission of www.liveencounters.net. Offenders will be criminally prosecuted to the full extent of the law prevailing in their home country and/or elsewhere.





CONTRIBUTORS

JOHN L STANIZZI SARAH M BROWNSBERGER MATT MOONEY INDRAN AMIRTHANAYAGAM JOHN W SEXTON JOHN LIDDY PETER O'NEILL / YAN KOUTON GORDON MEADE ANNI WILTON-JONES ROBERT SHANAHAN MARTIN WILLITS JR VIVIAN BOLOGNANI SANDRA NGUYEN



FALLEN LEAVES



John L Stanizzi

John L Stanizzi is author of the collections Ecstasy Among Ghosts, Sleepwalking, Dance Against the Wall, After the Bell, Hallelujah Time!, High Tide – Ebb Tide, Four Bits, Chants, and Sundowning. His brand new collection, POND, published by "impspired" in Ireland will be out in October. John's poems have appeared in Prairie Schooner, American Life in Poetry, The New York Quarterly, Paterson Literary Review, Blue Mountain Review, Tar River, Poetlore, Rust & Moth, Rattle, Hawk & Handsaw, and many others. His work has been translated into Italian and appeared in El Ghibli, The Journal of Italian Translations Bonafini, Poetarium, and others. His nonfiction has been published in Stone Coast Review, Ovunque Siamo, Adelaide, Scarlet Leaf, Literature and Belief, and Evening Street. A former New England Poet of the Year, John is the Flash Fiction Editor of Abstract Magazine TV, and he has read at venues all over New England, including the Mystic Arts Café, the Sunken Garden Poetry Festival, Hartford Stage, and many others. For many years, John coordinated the Fresh Voices Poetry Competition for Young Poets at Hill-Stead Museum, Farmington, CT. He is also a teaching artist for the national recitation contest, Poetry Out Loud. A former New England Poet of the Year, John teaches literature at Manchester Community College in Manchester, CT and he lives with his wife, Carol, in Coventry. https://www.johnlstanizzi.com.

THE FALLEN LEAVES - II

-for Sam and Teri Norman, and for Ben.

-The Things that never can come back, are several — Childhood — some forms of Hope — the Dead — -1741 -Emily Dickinson

We cannot blame the fog or blame the fallen leaves. You are just gone; how can we blame the fallen leaves?

There was rain that night, and fog, and then you vanished. This wasn't fog's plan, or the aim of fallen leaves.

People milled about in the yellow light of fog, dazed and sad, not seeking the plane of fallen leaves.

Mourners bundled in rain gear; I did not know them; they meant well when they came upon the fallen leaves.

In your absence, those you love will try to exist; broken, they embrace the remaining fallen leaves.

The tree will still be there, and the stones on the road; the same ruts will be there, and the same fallen leaves.

On the table are strewn a thousand photographs, as if the pile had been raked and named fallen leaves.

The Things that never can come back, are several some go, others remain after the fallen leaves.

JOHN L STANIZZI

FALLEN LEAVES

MASKED

-For John Prine

-"If you hear of an outbreak of plague in a land, do not enter it. But if the plague breaks out in a land while you are in it, do not leave that place" -The Holy Quran -The Prophet Muhammad

If I could see I'd see sputum cramming the air, God exclaiming why this *has* to be about me.

Stand in the far corner, sparks exploding from you. From a distance I'll dream circling trees about me.

On cathedral walls there are things we cannot see if I can't speak, there's too much debris about me.

You look confused clutching your rags of memory. I'll tell you – it's about you, this spree, about me.

Recall the lawn where we stood holding each other? I backstep, germs swirling all blindly about me.

From the far side of the lawn, gesture like hugging. Was it years or hours, your arms, your knees about me?

The wind is troubling the trees, crying through the woods. I am scared. I'm sure it's a decree about me.

Masked people have taken all the thermometers. Through sweat in their eyes the things see about me.

Grotesque empty shelves from here to the horizon; long flatland with nothing to foresee about me.

Corpses new to the game hijacked the trailer trucks; their journey to that sweet land, that lea about me.

That doesn't mean it can't be; it just means it's not, though for the moment the smell is sweet about me.

The world is wrapped in hoses, death on the P.A. When it calls out *John*!, what does that mean about me?

JOHN L STANIZZI

FALLEN LEAVES

T.O.P.

I'm back, back, back, back Back on the streets again... -Written by Emilio Castillo and "Doc" Kupka -Tower of Power

Moving to the tunes, shouting *shing-a-ling*, you find yourself in a sunken ballroom, flanked by slots and noisy poker machines, and lights and bells and whistles and *cha-ching*, and is that a wolf with his eyes on you?

You work your way to the front of the room, trying your best to find you a new you. You standing front row with your elbows on the stage, looking up at the massiveness of the Tower of Power's horn section.

The horns, that team of golden wild horses, has seduced you into a sick brain funk, and though you ain't exactly sure what's hip, something has grabbed the bottom of your feet, scorched your body, and blew out through your head.

In the days before masks and particles poisoning the air, we jammed body to body, chanting the lyrics with Emilio. Funk with me, I'll funk with you, body to body, no thoughts of rubbing death on you. Check the floor; that's your own face looking up. T.O.P will do that; rip your face off. No fear of the cat next to you coughing. You was here for one reason; funkafize! body cut loose full of that funky juice!

Moving to the tunes, shouting *shing-aling*, trying your best to find you a new you. although you ain't exactly sure what's hip. Funk with me, I'll funk with you, body to body, you cut loose, full of that funky juice.

JOHN L STANIZZI



Sarah M. Brownsberger's poetry has appeared in Salamander, The Scores, Verse Daily, The Hudson Review, Field, and many other journals. She works as an Icelandic-English translator of literature and art criticism. Her research on the relationship between poetic form and economic change is summarized in the essay, "Poetry, Hunger, and Electric Lights: Lessons from Iceland on Poetry and Its Audience," which appeared in *The Cambridge Quarterly* in 2015. A sampling of her work can be found at sarahbrownsberger.com.

PROPERTY IN A LAVA FIELD

This lot that offers sorrel and forget-me-nots was dozed in modern times, the Great Depression, the machines a dire debt, gasoline costly here, cigarette butts crumbled into pipe bowls, the ash used as snuff. The house was built on poured concrete, but the yard

was rubble rock. Over time, people strewed it with refuse moldy hay, dung, and slag and harrowed a lawn from that; but while decades make up lifespans solid ground requires eons. Drophammers can't break faults; intention reckons narrowly.

I can sun myself on this plot only while it bears my name in a ledger book or in characters made of light.

Sarah M. Brownsberger

SARAH M BROWNSBERGER

ON THE MORAINE

There is nothing to eat, there is nothing to say;

even lichen dies in wind that with a long sigh

snaps the ground like a sheet so sand and loose rock fly;

nothing huddles under, nothing scans from on high

rubble basalt and its scourings trickling down and

out below a churn of turquoise surf from cliff roots.

No boy was sent across to trade yeanlings for grain;

the people to the east lived and died hemmed in by

the sea and this moraine; but once by its rim, lost

between sheiling and home in spring snow, a girl felt

a tug at her leather cape and turned to see a

grinning fox; no matter how she cursed or shouted

it kept coming at her slavering, whining, snapping,

until, out of the blind storm, the farm dog bounded.

SARAH M BROWNSBERGER

© Sarah M Brownsberger 2020 October POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

LOADING SALVAGE

for Yngvi

At first it was fun, skittering like spiders over twisted scrap, gathering loads for the crane, pallets sailing through the air, the water below rough as slag.

This was in Olafsfjord, a crack in black rock where the arctic sun coils, steaming, under the dock. We had not slept, had had rough seas coming home from Arkhangelsk.

For years I've had a trick shoulder, can't trust it, and this was illlegal—the pallets, the clambering. The creak of the cables began to wear on us. Our gloves slipped,

sweat blurred our eyes and haloed everything; snow-melt roped off cliffs; the ocean roared but the gulls were silent; time felt pinched; I felt the Norn's hand

poised to grab, felt my arm give, air underfoot, saw my jacket buoy me, crushed in the rockweed—but no: As beads of mercury join, glints of silver hair, skin, eyes combined into Aunt Jódís. 'Careful!' she said, as if this were childhood and she

were alive. She braced my back with both palms and moved with me as I kept working. She said,

'We think it's better this way.' Not till over our pints that night did I confess, I had almost died. No one laughed and I heard them wonder, Who was 'we' and did 'we' decide?

SARAH M BROWNSBERGER

© Sarah M Brownsberger 2020 October POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

MIDSUMMER NIGHT

My memory has been erased by a giant sponge of light

Snipes fluttertongue, run sticks along the fence of my senses

Over deep-eaten streams no-see-ums swarm, timothy weaves lion traps

I kiss the buttercups' gold lips and fire blooms in my voice

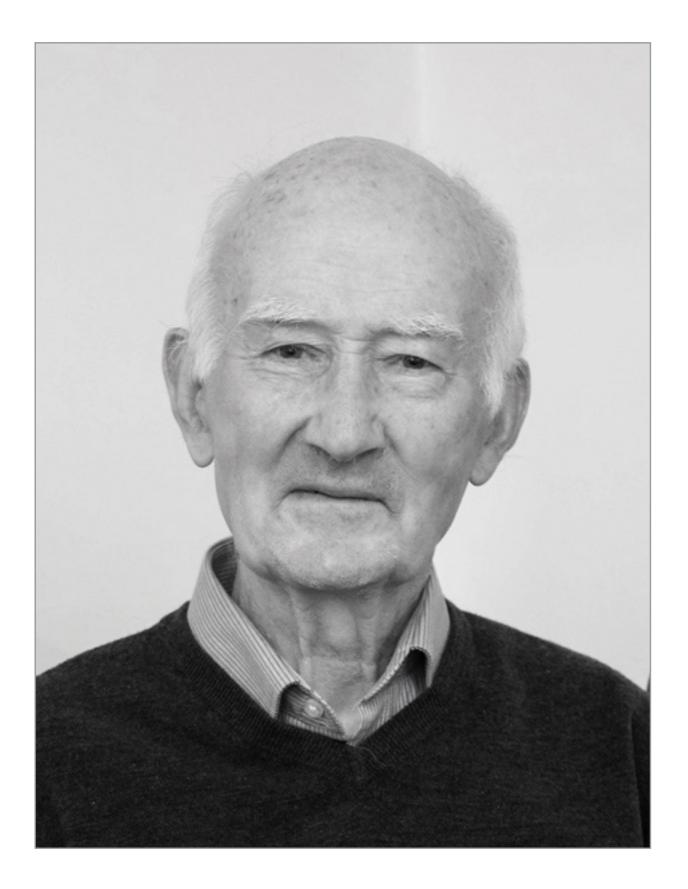
To attend these revels one must remit judgement to the Sun





© Sarah M Brownsberger 2020 October POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

L'ESPRIT DE VIE



Born in Kilchreest, Co. Galway in 1943, he has lived in Listowel since 1966. His four collections of poems are: *Droving* (2003), *Falling Apples* (2010), *Earth to Earth* (2015) and *The Singing Woods* (2017). Winner of The Pádraig Liath Ó Conchubhair Award 2019. (Filíocht/Poetry). Poems published in: The Amaravati International Poetic Prism Anthology 2018 and 2019, The Galway Review online and Anthologies, The Blue Nib, Feasta, First Cut, West 47, Striking a Cord (Anthology), The Applicant, Poetry Breakfast, The Galway Advertiser (Peann agus Pár). Poems on the Edge, the Connacht Tribune, The Kerryman and The Irish Independent. Copy Editor and Reviewer for The Galway Review literary magazine online. One of his poems appears on the syllabus of a number of UK Primary Schools . Some of his poems have been read on: RTE Radio, Wired FM, Radio Kerry.

L'ESPRIT DE VIE

The turf-fire burned away our young years Tommy, since after sunset you came over the stone wall stile between our haggards. Up in smoke, up our Santa Claus chimney, the never-dying fire on a wide open hearth, raked with ashes every night going to bed and it was late when your yarns were spun. You were a soldier of the States on the run, deserter of your post in Germany, at home, your yankee drawl enthralling us, all agog excited to have our neighbourly adventurer bringing us the world beyond our daily lives. As intriguing to us as a parcel from America opened with wide-eyed wonder on the floor in the West of Ireland in the nineteen fifties. In a photo you wore a sombrero on a stool, with pencil moustache, drooping cigarette, playing your guitar: your esprit de vie to me.

Matt Mooney

MATT MOONEY

L'ESPRIT DE VIE

HARBOUR LIGHTS

A special Sunday afternoon has gone and now we sit outside at tables supping tea and drinks together among family and friends, flanked by Comfrey Cottage facing Courtmacsherry Harbour day and night, tide in tide out. Kinsale Bay beyond Woodpoint and in between a long sandbar, raised from every ebb and flow, where two silhouettes stroll.

The keen of a curlew, echoes of distant callow sounds embedded in my head, many global spins ago, of seas and shallows, hills and hollows, turning on its axis, furrowing the future, turning its back on all that was for the sake of future generations.

Today a christening and a barbecue marked a new beginning, the advent of another heir to all the earth.

Now the eyelids of the night drop slowly while stars still shy appear from high above over the harbour lights.

RESEMBLANCE

Contentedly I shaved before the mirror on a cruise liner on the Baltic Sea and remembered how my father loved it when I did the same for him on Saturdays in his latter years with his Philishave, while he followed the scything run of his shaver, smiling satisfaction in that old mirror by the front window above the table, directing the operation with odd grimaces, making comic faces easing the razor's route; a gang of garden roses looking in to boast of their brilliance from flower passion spent by my mother; flashes of passers by arousing our curiosity on our country road, through the Leylandii;

Now I see his contours in mine from the years it's taken to be like him, cruising to Copenhagen.

MATT MOONEY

© Matt Mooney 2020 October POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

THE ARTIST'S ROLE



Indran Amirthanayagam writes in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Haitian Creole. He has 19 poetry books, including *The Migrant States* (Hanging Loose Press, 2020), *Sur l'île nostalgique* (L'Harmattan), and *Lírica a tiempo* (Mesa Redonda, 2020); in music he produced *Rankont Dout* which is available to download from music stores; edits The Beltway Poetry Quarterly; writes a poetry column for Haiti en Marche; won the Paterson Prize; is a 2020 Foundation for the Contemporary Arts fellow. www.indranmx.com

The Artist's Role

The manufacturer of bonsai takes pride in miniature houses, gardens and villages. The perfection of details. Doorknob in exact proportion to the door as in the real life model. Work of a master craftsman. Mistress of fine inlays. But while the artist labors politicians are booming in the battle of light against darkness. The Manichean satisfaction, dual, competing, warring states of the soul laid out in opposing camps. What role does the miniaturist play? Will his knobs and latches correspond to the real life models no matter who wins political power? Can we continue to make light and gladden hearts while the virus kills and one gang leader tries to steal the democracy, unmasked?

Indran Amirthanayagam

INDRAN AMIRTHANAYAGAM

THE ARTIST'S ROLE

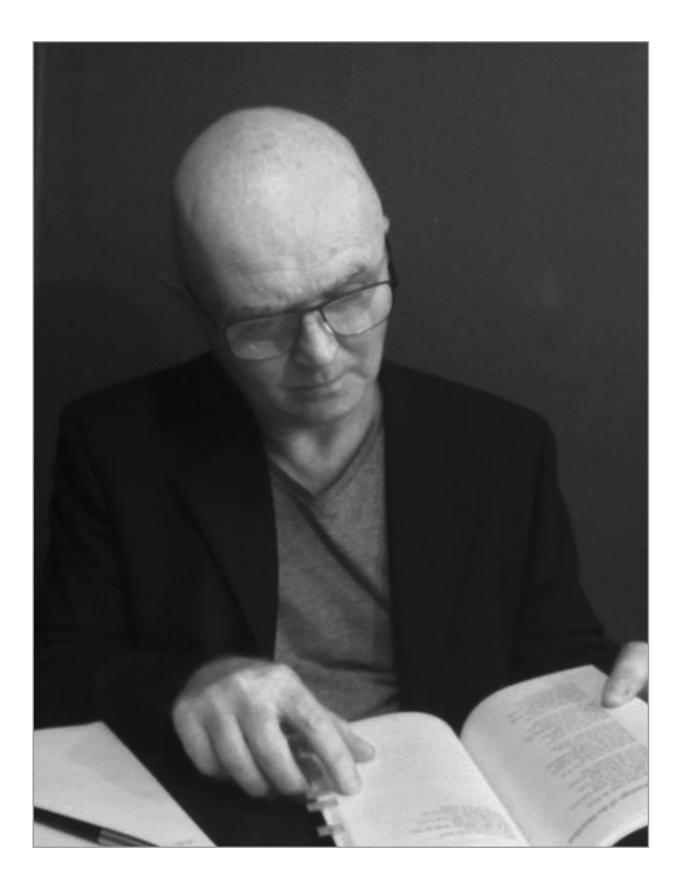
WRITTEN ON THE WALL

We are walking on water, Woman. Kamala, Lakshmi, Senator. With you and Joe we are going to go as far as the eye can see, as deep as the ear can hear. We are going to go beyond Mars, and plumb the depths of the heart. We are going to find the right step to cut down on the hot and burning air of our times. We will right the ship, rev up the silent green motor. And we will have fun as we kick the presidency of Covid back into the tower and up the gold-plated, gimcrack staircase.

PREAMBLE

We are starting to roll. We are coming to you through the internet. And when the weather is right, masked, we are coming to your door. We will ring the bell, then step back six feet and wait for you to pick up the leaflets we have left in your mailbox. And we will wait for you to open them up and look over at us and ask, why did you take so long...as you tell us that you have had your bag packed but you will not go anywhere except for the ballot box. Not now. The current occupant has gone too far, broken every rule and every dream. And we are going to post them back, on the walls, on columns, and in the official residence of our dreams, the house of the people we will rescue at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.





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

A HOUSE FOR MOTHER

For our mother we wove an osier house; before its wheezing hearth she napped all day. She ate a beetle and a roasted mouse; the windows sprouted leaf, shut the night away.

But starlight fell till stars were all undone, which nurtured in her throat a hacking cough. She woke with feathers drifting from her tongue, some were downy fine and some were rough.

Soon dark starlings gathered on the earthen floor. Come morning, we opened wide the willow door. Birds, birds, birds aflutter; our mother no more.

John W Sexton

JOHN W SEXTON

The Princess and the Moth

Once upon a time, upon a time, there was a princess, and one evening a moth came through her window. The moth had wonderful blue eyes, one on each wing.

The princess said to the moth: "I'll let you look through my eyes if you let me look through yours". And the moth said: "Yes, but let me go first".

So the princess closed her eyes and the moth fluttered up to her forehead; then the moth closed its wings and the princess opened her eyes.

And now the moth could see a lamp burning on the table; the moth could see what it really was, a smoky ribbon of flame in a glass bowl.

Then the moth looked further, through the open window. Outside in the sky was a light, a beautiful light with a face; and in its face were dark, sad eyes. The moth opened its wings and now the princess closed her eyes. Then the moth flew out through the window, out over the meadow, over the swaying ragwort not yellow in the night, up past the trees not green in the night, and the princess could see the vivid yellow face of the moon floating free beyond the sky.

Up, up went the moth; up, up went the princess. And up there looking down from its sad grey eyes was the moon, its grey mouth open in surprise.

JOHN W SEXTON

THE SEAWEED LAWNS

The bird flew out of the music box The bird flew round the room The bird sang songs of falling rice The bird sang songs of doom

You'll marry a girl from the deep grey sea In the deep grey see you'll wed The salty dark will be your light The seaweed lawns your bed

So I left my house in the city With its curtains weeping roses Went down to the ships in waiting And watched as they loaded horses

The horses were gold like goldfish Their manes were golden scales Their nostrils flared in the foggy morn Their eyes were slick as snails

Their neighing rose as a chorus It filled the iron ships And in echo after echo A song came from their lips

You'll marry a girl from the deep grey sea In the deep grey see you'll wed The salty dark will be your light The seaweed lawns your bed

I crossed the bridge aboard the ship Where we sailed the roiling waters The horses pulled us down with them And we entered the depths of daughters

Daughters of seals with fatty heads And whiskers sharp as pins A thickset tail instead of legs And hands as thin as fins

They came to me and kissed my face They kissed me in great numbers My skin turned green, my mind fell dim I entered wanton slumbers

You'll marry a girl from the deep grey sea In the deep grey see you'll wed The salty dark will be your light The seaweed lawns your bed

OHN W SEXTON

THE ENIGMATIC DEPARTURE OF MISS MARTHA SWAY AND NEIGHBOUR

Miss Martha Sway Stepped out one day When daffodils were weeping Their heads all rot And brown begot And none of them worth keeping

The sky was torn The sun was worn The stars were surely falling Their silver black Their shine all tack Their names not worth the calling

An owl all noise A dove all lies The songbirds now were screeching No linnet trilled No blackbird thrilled But End of Days beseeching

Miss Martha Sway Went by the way Of Mr Dumpling's dwelling His lawn was brown His gate was down His wooden house was swelling His dog was thin His hens done in And there he stood all trembling Behind his back Its dense coat black A palug cat was grumbling

Miss Martha Sway Leapt straight away Without a hesitation And landed hale Upon its tail And demanded transportation

Behind her sat His courage flat Her neighbour holding tightly And off they flew To no one knew But some might whisper quietly

JOHN W SEXTON

© John W Sexton 2020 October POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

THE HANGING TREE



John Liddy

John Liddy, born in County Cork but raised in Limerick, is a poet whose 11 collections include Wine and Hope/Vino y Esperanza (1999, Archione Editorial Madrid), Cast-a-Net (2003, Archione Editorial Madrid), The Well: New and Selected Poems (2007, Revival Press), Gleanings (2010, Revival Press). His most recent book is Madrid (2018, Revival Press). He co-founded The Stony Thursday Book with Jim Burke and edits occasional issues. He is on the advisory board of The Hong Kong Review. Liddy currently lives in Madrid, where he works as a teacher/librarian. Photo © Carmen Lafuente https://sites.google.com/site/revivalpress/john-liddy

TWO VIEWS FROM THE BANKS OF THE RIVER HAIHE

for Nancy and Tony

1.

On my early morning walk beside the mother river of Tianjin I noticed a man fishing with the smallest rod I had ever seen.

A home-made invention clasped to the railing, a foot long with the slick sound of the reel like the notes of a song

Releasing the line, the colourful float alerting him to every bite, his bucket already half-full to the brim

With carp and mullet, their underbellies the colour of steel, sea-white advertisements for the river's name and appeal

To those practitioners of a Confucian proverb made popular by Mao, the smallest of rods to keep hunger from the door.

2.

Idling further downstream, I sat for an age observing prosperity's skyline, a giant wheel milling the bridge, toing

And froing of men on fish business, a lone woman with a plastic bag looking at the water as though it were magic.

Then I watched her take six fish in all, one after the other, into her hand and drop them in a calm part of the river.

Her gaze held the water until she saw bubbles surface, the fish dart away with her deepest, most private wishes

And rewards for returning the fish to their habitat like the tree to its forest, the bird to its flight.

Tianjin/Madrid 5.12.2019

THE HANGING TREE

CRANN NA CROICHE

do Paddy O'Connor

Mar a imríonn an lon dubh leis an bpéist Le fuaim tráthnóna de shnoíodóireacht adhmaid Tá Paddy ag athchruthú am atá caite Ó thearmann na seide.

Snámhann am ar an urlár Ar nós scamachán ó chrann ársa An píosa críochnaithe Léiriú snoite ar an anam.

Ach tosnaíonn an scamhadh neamhfhoirfe An cuardach arís Ar thóir darach atá tite le míle bliain I bhféar ard an Iarla.

Sníonn an stair trína gráin Ón crann croiche Anois léiritear Dídean adhmaid dó rós faoi bhláth.

Seán Ó Lideadha

THE HANGING TREE

for Paddy O'Connor

Where the blackbird tosses the worm To the evening sound of wood carving, Patrick is renovating the past From the sanctuary of the shed.

Time floats to the floor Like shaving from an ancient tree. The finished piece a carved Reflection of the soul.

But those knots of imperfection Begin the search again For a thousand year old fallen oak Entwined in the high grass of the Earl.

History courses through its grains And what may well have been The Gallows Tree Now bears a blooming rose.

JOHN LIDDY

THE HANGING TREE

TRYING TO EXPLAIN THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

for Andrea and Hiki

My two young Chinese guides acceded to a whim as we entered the Church of St. Joseph to light a candle for family and friends, while wandering around Tianjin.

Shrines to Joseph and Mary flanked the main altar and on either side of the centre aisle the Stations of the Cross adorned the walls, one to fourteen, all so familiar

To me but perplexing to two young women who had never been inside a church and were anxious for my explanation of the story about the crucifixion.

There is Jesus being condemned by Pontius Pilate, a Roman Governor, and forced to carry a cross through Jerusalem, mocked and spat at, *for what*

They asked, as crowds lined the streets and there, I pointed, is where he falls for the first time, weighted down by the *sins* of the world, sins, they enquired, and his mother

Looks into his eyes and wishes to die in his stead as Simon of Cyrene helps out and Veronica offers her veil for him to wipe his face, imprinted

Like a payment for a small service, but he falls again and the soldier's lash him forward and the women weep, not for him but for themselves and their children He tells them and he falls for a third time at the foot of Calvary, where he is stripped of his garments, possessed of nothing, Skin torn from his body, *oh*, they exclaimed, *what cruelty!*

Nothing compared to his hands and feet being nailed to the cross, I offered, blood dripping from his wounds, his face full of love although he is crucified

Until taken down and mourned by his mother and then placed in a guarded tomb from where he rises out of death to join his heavenly father.

So he had two fathers and a mother who was a virgin, They quizzed, and I mentioned faith versus reason, a missioner's dilemma, Confucius and his vision.

Tianjin Nov. 20, 2019.

JOHN LIDDY

TWO SONNETS FROM HENRY STREET ARCADE



Yan Kouton



Peter O'Neill

Yan Kouton is the author of a number of novels; Le Passeur (2005), Les Oiseaux de Proie (2007) and Des Effrondements Souterrains (2011) all published by Editions Zinedi. He is also a published poet, having had a number of publications, among them Le Mots sur l'emoi (2017) and Volutes (2018). Yan is also a lyricist. He is currently based in Paris.

Born in Cork in 1967, **Peter O'Neill** is the author of six collections of poetry, a volume of translation, *The Enemy*, *Transversions from Charles Baudelaire* (Lapwing, 2015), and a work of fictional prose *More Micks than Dicks*, a hybrid Beckettian novella in 3 genres (Famous Seamus, 2017). He has also edited two anthologies, one in collaboration with the poet Walter Ruhlmann his former publisher in France, *An Agamemnon Dead* (mgv2>publishing, 2015) and *The Gladstone Readings* (Famous Seamus, 2017). He guest edited Live Encounters Poetry & Writing in a bumper edition in April 2020. A truly international writer with something of a cult following among fellow writers, as well as having appeared extensively in publications around the world, his poetry has ben translated into French, German, Arabic and Italian.

From 2016 to 2017 the Cork poet, *Peter O'Neill*, wrote a book of sonnets inspired by Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire about the old GPO Arcade on Henry Street in Dublin, and in 2019 the French poet and translator *Yan Kouton* translated the entire book into French. The following four poems are a sample from their work which remains unpublished.

TWO SONNETS FROM HENRY STREET ARCADE

Et les grands ciel qui fond réver d'éternité

And the great skies which make you dream of eternity. In September blood-soaked, with the winnowing Collapse of the palatial summer. Its rich golden tapestry of rosemary and azure

To be replaced by mothballs and spider, Their sign's of entrance litter the damp recesses Of your floor, a further sign of Autumnal decay, Its burnished brilliance illuminating through

The great Torc of light spilling drunkenly Over the dew- ridden- fields, to further butter The anonymity of my fellow passengers,

Clarifying their ordinance, radiating against The most banal backdrop of the door to the public toilets. And all hinting at the scent of urine still bottled in your head.

Les Grands Ciels Qui Font Rêver de l'Eternité

Et les grands cieux qui vous font rêver d'éternité. En ce mois de septembre ensanglanté, cheminant Dans l'effondrement du palais estival. Sa riche tapisserie dorée de romarin et d'azur

Remplacée par des boules de naphtaline et une araignée, Leurs enseignes jonchent les recoins humides De votre sol, un signe supplémentaire de la pourriture automnale, Son éclat poli éclairant à travers

Un immense flambeau de lumière répandant son ivresse Au-dessus des champs couverts de rosée, pour ajouter du beurre A l'anonymat de mes compagnons de route,

Clarifiant leur ordonnance, rayonnant contre La banale toile de fond d'une porte de toilette publique. Et le souvenir de l'odeur d'urine est encore présent à votre esprit

NOVEMBER

My doom craft in memory laced with silken Shades of both resolute dream and abiding nightmare. Yet, the detachment is subtle, a temporal recompense For keen genetic and spatial dis-repair.

At one remove from paradise is a moderate enfer. The days neither assail nor harbour, but breach The hills like the vision of those migrating birds Over the Black Hills to Africa.

Fugitive beauty, I try to find you in the evening, There above the folly on the hill, where I can observe The plough furrowing through the black sea of the sky and of the night.

Or, hidden in the look of the accompanying hound, Jettisoning its astonishing private fear and secret anguish, Through the spirit in the eyes whose trust alone is absolute

NOVEMBRE

Mon métier maudit en mémoire enlacée de soie Les ombres du rêve résolu et du cauchemar persistant. Pourtant, le détachement est subtil, une récompense temporelle Pour une délicate réparation génétique et spatiale.

À une certaine distance du paradis se trouve un enfer modéré. Les jours n'assaillent ni ne portent, mais brisent Les collines comme la vision de ces oiseaux migrateurs Des Black Hills jusqu'en Afrique.

Beauté fugitive, j'essaie de te retrouver le soir, Du haut de la folie sur la colline, où je peux observer La charrue labourant la mer noire du ciel et de la nuit.

Ou, cachée dans le regard du chien qui l'accompagne, Abandonnant son étrange peur intime et son angoisse secrète, Dans ses yeux comme une âme et sa confiance absolue.

PETER O'NEILL

TEHUANTEPEC JACKRABBIT



Gordon Meade is a Scottish poet based in the East Neuk of Fife. His tenth collection of poems, Zoospeak, a collaboration between himself and the Canadian photographer and animal activist, Jo-Anne McArthur, which uses poetry and photography to examine the experiences of animals in captivity, was published in 2020 by Enthusiastic Press in London.

TEHUANTEPEC JACKRABBIT

The Four Agreements didn't work out so well for me.

Not taking things personally, wasn't that much fun when I found myself staring down the barrel of a gun.

Not making any assumptions, was a bit of a pain when I could clearly see the marksman taking aim.

Doing my best, didn't cut much ice when what it meant was just me having to run faster than the rest.

And, *Being impeccable with my word,* was all we and good, but it never stopped anyone from wanting to shoot.

Gordon Meade

GORDON MEADE

© Gordon Meade 2020 October POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

TEHUANTEPEC JACKRABBIT

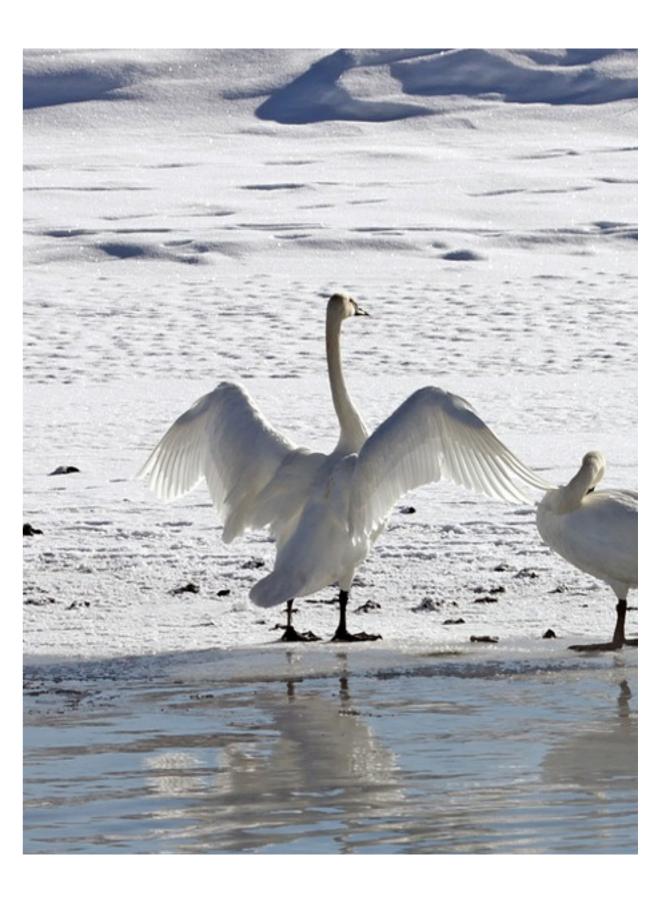
TRUMPETER SWAN

No-one ever really likes listening to my songs. They have too much of the dirge about them. They could do with being a bit more upbeat, a little

less monosyllabic. Still, I have my own way of dealing with the critics; I have come to sing, and sing is what I am going to do. After all, this could well be

my farewell performance. Let the critics write whatever they want; the chances are, I might not even be here, to read

the reviews.



GORDON MEADE

FLASH FICTION



Anni Wilton-Jones

Anni Wilton-Jones, a resident of Co Mayo, has also lived in Wales, England and Saudi Arabia. Having experienced a varied range of careers she is now retired and concentrating on her writing and her photography. A writer of poetry and, occasionally, prose, she has read in Wales, England, the USA and Ireland. Her collections include Bridges, Winter Whiting, Moth (a chapbook about abuse, written under the pen-name Victoria Tims) and Put On Your Thinking Cap (a chapbook of photographs and poems for children). She currently leads Pen & Ink, a Mayo writers group, and is one of the organisers of the SiarScéal festival, for which she has edited the 2020 anthology.

FAIR-RIDE

The cars began their threefold spin; on their own axis, on the cluster's axis, about the central axis. Maura felt fear rising from stomach to throat. Always, she felt like this. Always, she cursed herself for agreeing to hold Keri's hand.

The spinning intensified. Keri became a dead weight, her body crushing the breath from Maura's lungs, cutting off her scream. Fear, sickening fear, suffocating fear, closed Maura's throat. The whirling cars slowed, stopped.

'Let's have another go!' Keri enthused, trying to pull Maura upright.

Then, for the first time, Keri screamed.

She and Maura would share no more rides.

ANNI WILTON-JONES

FLASH FICTION

PAY-BACK

The ashen face was at the central, first floor window, as I glanced up at the dark, double-fronted house. The streetlight showed the watcher's shocked expression and I knew that they must have seen everything; my coming up behind the old man, the rock in my hand, the swift blow to his head and my hurried emptying of his inside pocket, which had bulged with the notes I'd seen him collect at the bank. In one swift move, I grabbed the fallen rock and rose to my feet but, before I could mount the steps to the front door, sirens screamed. Surrounded, I took in every detail of that watching face. The swine had 'phoned the cops and, one day, I would get my own back.

So here I am, three years later, a similar good-sized chunk of rock hidden in my capacious nicking-pocket. What I can't understand is that the roof of the house has fallen in and the front door is sagging open. 'Bin like it long as I can remember,' a passing local has just remarked. 'No-one's lived there for donkey's years.' So how come, in the central first floor window, there's that same ashen face... smiling?

GREY WATER

He hates grey water; the water that keeps its secrets. He imagines bicycle frames, shopping trolleys, old prams, festooned with entangling weeds, underlain with glassshard carpets. Caught up in that rubbish, breaststrokeonly incompetent that he is, he wouldn't have a snowball's.

And isn't it the typical Murphy's that he's spent his life around grey water – harbour, working canal, flooded wartime bunker, abandoned quarry – carting his ma's camera kit about. It's not just her perversion, either. The punters are panting for her grey-water-gloomy photos. They sell fast and for big money, keeping her in designer denims. Her sickly-sweet sunny postcard scenes merely pay for his minimum wage as her assistant.

Bored treeless by years of traipsing along with her, his stomach churning whenever he goes within sliding distance of the water to pass her some naffing lens, filter or whatever, he's sworn he'll be off the first chance he gets – like now.

It's not a great job, of course as his qualifications are crap. He's breezed the interview, though. The Management Path Starter Post offer means he's on his way up... ...and, mean cow that she is, his ma is on her way out.

She's beside the sluice, setting up the tripod, when he shoves her. Sure enough, she topples in, just as he has planned. What he hasn't reckoned on is her pulling him in with her and then saving herself by clinging to a shopping trolley stuck just below the surface – whilst he's being sucked under, into the sluice...



Robert Shanahan

Robert (Roibeard) Shanahan. I am a poet playwright and a painter. A storyteller. For me all there really is...Compassion and Expression. I describe myself as a...'Grand Lector of Apocalyptic Utterances'. I live in Tasmania. I am from the Irish diaspora. My family from Cork. My prose was published in Australia. Ireland in Outburst magazine. India in Setu poetry magazine. I was awarded high commendation. In the W.B.Yeats poetry prize with 'Violence at the Egg'. It was read out in the National Parliament of Australia. https://www.facebook.com/robert.shanahan.98

THE SHAPING OF A TURTLE SHELL

A time stained journal treasured by a poet Given to him when he was young By a near to moribund one A close neighbour a wondrous word spiller

An endless ongoing collection of letters Handed down just before pencils final fall At the end of a Poets writings

Handed on To the next explorer On and on All his and their creative existence added to

'The Shaping of a Turtle Shell'

Fatefully it Was lost to the sea He while sailing to find his Muse Just beyond every horizon Each horizon again and again He searched relentlessly Relying on the hook and rain Never seeking safe harbour in any storm

On the bleakest of nights The Moon hidden behind a hundred pitch black clouds High breaking waves came when he was higher His boat rolled over submerged Collapsing dirty once white sails his final surface view The boom cracking just now above his cranium He screams "May I be a Star sliding down a Crescent Moon"

ROBERT SHANAHAN

continued overleaf..

© Robert Shanahan 2020 October POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

THE SHAPING OF A TURTLE SHELL cont...

He dragged down the mad strength of the sea Over he went one hand holding the sea anchor He sinking draped in the anchors chains The other hand holds high above his head The flapping journal

Years have passed When some of the journal finally comes to land

Grand swells of poetics Crashing wildly in the breaker waves to shore Letters stretching out distorting on the rocks Some break apart and start a new alphabet

Faded words on inked stained sand Tided away with most implied meanings The seabirds taking the last smudges literally Yet something of it still remains for us

Just off the pounded rocks A young girl stands in an upturned lute turtle shell Motionless her vessel on the turbulently moving waves Her salted hands cusping in the shape of a Turtle Shell

With a net made from seagrass She turns into her vessel Backwashed damaged letters drifting from the shore Which she will arrange and later sing

She sings to the Turtles in the sea She sings to the terrestrial Tortoises Voicing now to the deep seas In whispering song

"You in your wonderment over two million years' "Remembering the extinct species" "Lost"

Singing this she strokes the firm rubbery skin of her vessel She sings strong

"To your motley horny plated carapaces"

Still stroking her Luth's shell Pauses then continues

"Open thou beaks and with flapping flippers Extend your necks and rise from any depths"

She then steps upon the sea Steps on dense slim trails of sodium chloride These salt trails created by the bows The bows of every passing boat since time began And every oar that went through the waters surface Collected salt rails permanently just above the seas The young girl traverses these salted risings All around the oceans

Our girl now dives from the trails into the sea Down and down Touch of passing fish and seal Into deep darkness yet she has a sight All known by feel or sight to her Further to the depths she sinks Into the grand carpets of kelp And in bubbly voice is heard to sing

"To the surface" "All to the surface"

ROBERT SHANAHAN

continued overleaf...

© Robert Shanahan 2020 October POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

THE SHAPING OF A TURTLE SHELL cont...

The sea now full of bobbling Turtles Above her head She sees a grand sky of flippers In the distant surface light And is about to join them When

As she begins to sing She sees the Poet

He had sunk down a fathom at a time At the moment he remembered A prose that he wrote A fathom more down he went For Seven miles under he has travelled

He now frozen His face is covered by colorless coral Anchor chains rusted stiff He in his deep cage holding him up

Between a deep sea Black Smoker venting black minerals And a White Smoker venting alkaline high of white He in the middle of that in greyness Moving with the tides of the Abyssal Plains In the deepest hole on Earth

His swirling head Algae mouthed He will not answer her song

Snailfish take small bites from him Then regurgitate him back Into the same form This an endless cycle Until

In tidal dangling His hands in happenstance darkness clap And as he does His hands detach Transformed to endless paper pages Full of deep underwater broodiness

They float eddying up Towards the young girl She now holds the beginnings of them in her hands And to her shock they are blank

She looks towards the poet seeing The snailfish are all over him But this time they regurgitate him Into the surrounding water This continues till nothing remains

Throwing her head back She unleashes a wild whistle It reverberates sonically Upwards to the above Turtles Who drop down from the surface Holding onto each other They create a grand staircase Going down the seven miles

She stands on the first Turtle Looks again at the blank pages And in amazement words appear on the pages

She to travel up one Turtle at a time She begins to sing The inner song that only she can hear She absorbs it She in Metamorphosis A birth of a Muse

ROBERT SHANAHAN

JACKS

This child wears an outfit A pale green smock She stands sweet in immaculate rays of light The hue of her garment singing melodies to the air Innocence floats freely from her inner self In natural abundance

We readers stand far behind her Lifetimes and realities away And what are we for that!?

For this angelic one can live somewhere in every living thought If You don't 'mind!'

An eye opens as wide as a sharks mouth Covers the light on her bare shoulder All a starring That eye raving silence

An eye that is the head Of a wooden stick figure Wearing the same outfit she wears Standing so close it entires the child's body Whispering in her ear In rasping abraded tones "You you are Mortal"

It's words only heard as the rustling leaves of trees The child does not notice does not respond

It's stick arms are as stiff wings Each poking out from the child's shoulders From the child's waist Just off her legs Wooden sticks touch Their shared astragalus covered soil

The child and the stick figure play Jacks Tali One's two's three's to five The stick figure first to play A throwing up of a knucklebone to the sky

An original sky A reflected image is seen Palamedes chasing a sheep He catches it kills it Skins it's feet breaks the knuckles free For play now Fortune telling later at the sky's edges

The stick figures jack enters this image Like a stone thrown in a pool rippling Spiraling out

The image goes even further back Zeus melting some needing day Frees Ganymede glorious mortal of Troy Giving Eros as a playmate Olive Dibs are played

The stick figure's bone does not return It now plays in a universe of dice

ROBERT SHANAHAN

continued overleaf...

© Robert Shanahan 2020 October POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

JACKS cont...

Then the child Who does not throw her jack up in the air Rather with unnatural strength She flattens the knucklebone To a arced shaped tear

Scraping in soil Granular atoms Organic matters gases Filling her pockets to overfill Then With her big toe she Makes spirals In the soil

Round and round All a whorl Her toe Coils deep to deeper Through the soil

The child's Body A corkscrew Enters the soil

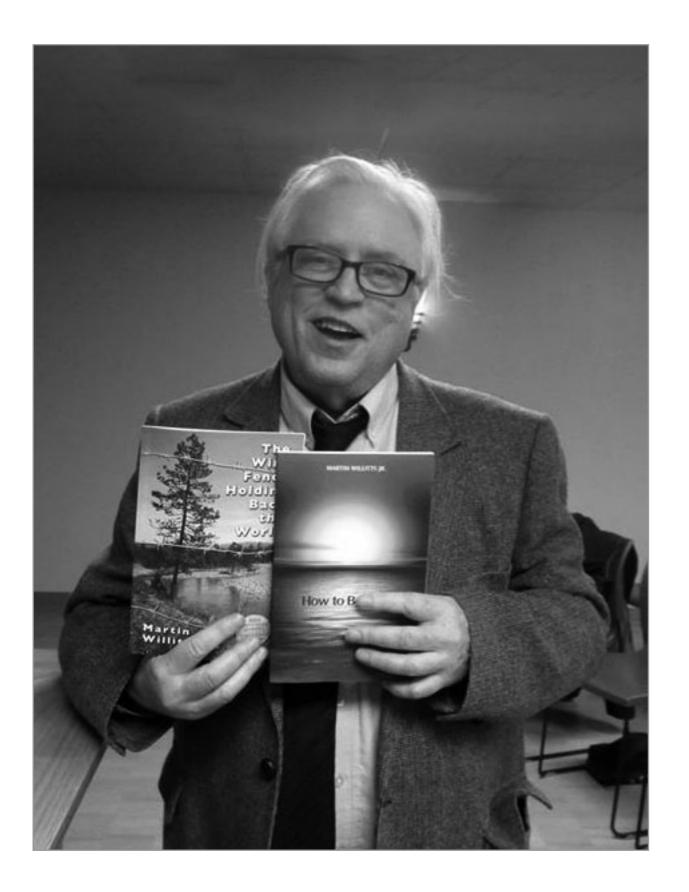
Down amongst the muffled sounds To play Jacks forever With the spirits that were left behind Or rejected life to exist just below the ground To be sweetly moved by eternal vibrations

The stick figure splinted By the circumvolution That very friction creates combustion Starts with a spark a small fire Smoke from its garment smouldering That great eye flutters ashes There is no sound Except for the crackling

Left Knucklebones Dust in that fire

ROBERT SHANAHAN

© Robert Shanahan 2020 October POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net



Martin Willitts

Martin Willitts Jr has 25 chapbooks including the Turtle Island Quarterly Editor's Choice Award, "The Wire Fence Holding Back the World" (Flowstone Press, 2017), plus 20 full-length collections including the Blue Light Award 2019, "The Temporary World". His recent book is "Unfolding Towards Love" (Wipf and Stock, 2020).

THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

I saw this parting in my father's eyes when he died. His body entered the surgical slice of air, his desperate flight was the instrument of love, the soul exiting the body.

A startle of geese needled through sky and the arc of light, splitting air so others can follow and never tire.

Tell me death does not have an agenda. Tell me life is more than a mere blink. Tell me loss and love are on the same curve of existence, merging with light and dark.

When my father died, I assume it was Fall. Geese were looping. It was dark early outside. Then in a gasp, the length of a shadow, the geese struggled, my father struggled,

light struggled to cross the street, I struggled to hold it all together — wind; geese; light; my father's breath —

the geese leapt into clouds, loud, fading.

I went home. The roads were slick. It was dark when I started home. It was light before I knew it.

GRANDMOTHER'S HANDMADE NIGHTGOWN COMES OUT OF THE CEDAR CHEST

snow fell throughout the evening from the elephant skin clouds luckily the crops were brought in the hoped-for harvest was fulfilled

grandfather saw the early warning when she opened the cedar chest potpourri undulating in air flowers and ingredients grandmother picked and dried

allspice and rosemary shavings of cedar wood for moth repellent cloves used also for curing ham purple lavender she used for medicine

green mint before it made a tasseled flower

snow was writing on the plowed field tender notes about the forthcoming days of rest

A TINGE OF CHILL IN THE AIR

The solstice brings its drenching rains, indicating it will become chilly from now until next solstice. Every plant slows down into stillness, surrendering leaves and petals, casting their good fortune aside.

It will be barren soon. Time will drag its feet. I will regret the forthcoming cold nights, forgetting how I cursed heat and humidity.

Bees head out like a congregation leaving church. Here and there, nature closes shop, blowing out trees like candles.

I dry the herbs, freeze the last zucchini, hang thick winter drapes, shake out the handmade quilt thick with goose feathers, resigned to inevitable change.

I look forward to snuggling with my wife, deep-diving into shared body heat, and I don't want to miss this for anything.

MUSIC SHIFTS THOUGH US LONG AFTER IT IS FINISHED

Songbirds live exactly within the moment, rejoicing in each split-second, spinning half-notes into dew drops heart-rendering, heart healing, bringing nesting sticks to build praises, music rippling air.

Songbirds do this without asking, without permission, whether or not we request this music.

I was looking for a familiar name among the gravestones, vandalized, cracked, disheveled. Some stones wore rubbed-away names. Some had a cross pointing accusingly. One grave had a headless angel proclaiming Beloved, readying to fly away. I was looking for ancestors I'd never met. I only held the fragment of their names. I did not know what I would find among the dandelions, overgrown weeds, savage grass. Songbirds were singing anyway.

What did I expect to find? Some trace of my past among the cobwebs stitching the smashed stones? Beloved was forgotten, long ago. No one cared.

I almost missed their names and went back three paces. There they were — whatever was left of them. I would be in the same situation in the future. I asked if they minded if no one would carry their name. I didn't hear whatever I needed to hear.

I walked back the silence, the held sacred breath, turned on the car, wipers, hesitating radio station, and drove with headlights pointing away, leaving the birds to their task of singing.

What I Wanted to Tell Her

She was blaming God for the shooting, erecting a pyramid of mementos, containing brown teddy bears with bright blue ribbons, balloons losing their helium, white crosses, votive candles. She wobbled, because her son was shot riding his bicycle while being Black.

We can say the heart labors harder before dying. We can say prayer doesn't turn bullets into flowers. We can say Black is the color always mourning. None of this eases pain.

WINTER DEEPENS

Chattering geese — winter — coldness laughing. I plod-clod through knee-high hills of softening noise. The barometer of geese falls. People surrender to the sharp collapse of darkness, brooding endlessly. Snow chuckles mischievously. The urge to sleep creeps inward, skating on thin ice. I enter, shaking off feathery snow, honking a cold.

WHERE WE WALK



Vivian Bolognani was born on 11/11/2001 in Bali, Indonesia, to an Italian father and Indonesian mother. She is an aspiring writer currently studying for a Bachelor's degree in Creative Writing at the University of Gloucestershire, England.

WHERE WE WALK

Arriving home to wind chimes, legs burning and eyes as soft as the earth's breath through the trees. Up from the swaying shore, through the savage garden, we walk. Venturing to chalk cliffs, memorising laughs and licking salt from the waves of tall grass where poppies bleed. Arriving home to wind chimes, legs burning and eyes soft. Palms chafing against the rough bark of a branch holding us aloft. The old elm's twisted torso recovering from our knees. Looking over the swaying shore and the savage garden where we walked. Bicycle wheels on well-worn paths, on our way to haunt the creaking library where we turn brown pages to find Eurydice before arriving home to wind chimes, legs burning and eyes soft. When rain lands on seldom-soaked soil and prompts a cough from your throat, the kettle screeches, I pour tea, thank the bees from the swaying shore, and the savage garden where we will walk. Though landscapes change, no memories are lost we're tied to this place, where we do as we please; arriving home to wind chimes, legs burning and eyes soft. Up from the swaying shore, through the savage garden, we walk.

Vivian Bolognani

VIVIAN BOLOGNANI

WHERE WE WALK

SUBMERGED

I watch the slivers of light dance across your face, loose hair drifting with a feeble current. Our arms spread out— a mocking embrace. Bodies still, suspended. Remnants of urgent struggles to reach the surface, where lily pads nod against ripples. The burn of death certain. Your foot tangled in eelgrass, mine lodged inside a crevice. Lovers once, now corpses in a pond. Perhaps the world is jealous the fish and I have you to ourselves, or maybe you break your promise to stay with me. Because as your body swells and the vegetation rots away, you float up— leave me by myself. A boat's belly bumps into you, here to separate us as they pull you aboard. Here I remain, Lost to all but the fish who watch me decay.

AN INCOMPLETE SENTENCE

Full Stop was stubborn. A no-nonsense type. He was a back-of-the-crowd kind of guy. That friend seldom invited. The last picked. He made things awkward. No one laughed at his jokes. One day someone did. And Full Stop was stricken; her name was Comma, and she fit in crowds well, Comma was curvy, free-running and wild. You're strange, I like it, she said to him once; they got along well, went to cafés, watched films. But Full Stop was simple and Comma wanted more; he wanted to settle: a house, some kids, she wanted to travel, see more of the world. Never a compromise- he let her go, and hoped that one day she'd slow down, return. For now Full Stop waited, alone again. Where he first started: the back of the crowd.

A SHORT STORY

The Pebble

Noel gasped, the cool night air scorching his lungs and throat. He shivered, dark hair plastered to his head, clothes a second skin. Staring up, he frowned as he recognised his mother's face: brown eyes red-rimmed and glittering alongside the stars behind her. His head was on her lap and her hands trembled as she wiped his fringe from his forehead, fingertips warm against his skin.

"Oh thank God! Thank God— Isaac! Isaac, he's awake!" she called, tears slipping past her lashes and down her cheeks.

Noel flexed his fingers, surprised at the blades of grass he caught between them. He scarcely registered his mother's hands on his shoulders, too distracted by the sudden appearance of his father. He knelt beside her, panting, thick brows furrowed and water dripping from his beard. "Son, are you alright? Christ, you almost— we almost..."

"Noel, we know you can't help it but—" his mother breathed, "I don't even know how you managed to get out the house, we saw you in the river— we thought you..."

Noel blinked, realising that he had been sleepwalking again. It never got this bad: he'd usually just wake up from stubbing his toe on furniture or running into walls, not from nearly drowning himself in the river.

"I'm sorry," he whimpered, "I didn't mean to."

His parents sighed and helped him get back on his feet. "We know, lad. It's not your fault," his father muttered as his mother wrapped her shawl around him. They made their way up the grassy slope, towards their cottage. Noel watched smoke rise from the stone chimney and shivered, eager to escape the cold. His mother went inside but his father halted by the stables, beneath the oil lamp hanging from the roof's edge, and gestured for Noel to join him.

"We must be more careful. Nobody's going to help in case something bad happens. Not this time of year."

There was a loaded pause, an unspoken grief solidifying the air between them. Noel glared at his bare feet and his father hooked an arm around his shoulders, pulling him close. "I know you miss him," he said, Noel nodding in response. "We all do."

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING October 2020 Celebrating 10th Anniversary

They shuffled back into the house and Noel trod up the stairs, pausing at the closed door of an unoccupied room. He didn't need to open it to know there was a small bed inside, a chest with a wooden sword and straw dolls beside it; belongings left untouched for two years. He reached for the door handle, but let his fingers slide off as he turned towards his own bedroom door. He changed into dry clothes, glowering at the lake through wavy glass before drawing his curtains shut against the moonlight.

The next morning Noel met his friends in a meadow by the village border, their horses tied with generous lengths of rope so they could graze freely.

"Can't believe you nearly drowned," Will chastised, flattening the grass with his pacing. "You could have been the next one!"

"Let's just be glad he didn't drown, eh?" Ellery said, ripping out handfuls of grass while Noel studied a flat pebble he'd found outside his front door that morning. The village was higher up from the lake, where only grass covered the ground. Thinking of how it got all the way up to his home made something stir in his gut.

"Why are you not concerned about this?" Will asked Ellery, then pointed at Noel, "After what happened to his little brother? And Adam?"

Noel tensed, trying to focus on the smooth surface of the stone between his thumb and index finger. He was distantly aware of Ellery barking something at Will but it was muted, as if they were underwater. He registered the sound of his breathing— too loud— and shut his eyes.

Sammy swings his wooden sword, it clacks against Noel's twice before catching him unawares by the thigh. Noel goes down, exaggerating his demise to his little brother's endless amusement.

"Will, you're being an imbecile. Adam is gone. And like everyone else that goes missing, he's not coming back."

Lightning splitting the sky, thunder shaking the windowpanes, Sammy curled up next to him, listening to Noel's jokes and giggling quietly under the covers. He always leaves fear outside Noel's bedroom door, Sammy told him.

© Vivian Bolognani 2020 October POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

A SHORT STORY

"No— he's alive! I've heard him. A few nights ago... his voice, by the lake. If he's out there and there might be others too. No bodies were found so there's a chance—"

Skipping rocks by the lake in the evening, Noel managing to replicate his father's technique while Sammy struggled and pouted when it got too late to be outside. Sammy waking Noel up once their parents had gone to bed, asking him to teach him how to skip rocks.

"You're insane, Will. Those are dangerous thoughts. You're not hearing his voice. It's just the cold and the mist over the lake playing with your head, bringing back memories. Let. It. go."

Noel telling Sammy to go back to bed...

Ellery shook Noel's shoulder gently, breaking his train of thought. "Noel, you alright?" asked Ellery, voice soft.

"You don't look too good," said Will.

A dull pain throbbed in Noel's palm, where he clutched the stone. He felt shaky, offbalance. "Yeah... Sorry, but I think I'll head back. I'm not feeling well."

Ellery nodded, "Okay. Just look after yourself, alright?"

Without another word or a backwards glance, Noel got onto his horse's back and rode home, pocketing the small stone.

He reached the stables by the cottage and dismounted, striding towards the entrance of his home and pausing for a moment. From his periphery, he saw the lake reflected in one of the windowpanes. The wind picked up, it felt heavy with moisture. Noel took a deep breath then reached into his pocket. There had to be a reason for this. What if Will was right? If those who disappeared really were alive they'd want someone to go looking for them. He'd do it for Adam. For Sammy.

Noel waited until his parents went to sleep, watching the glimmering lake from his window. He saw a blanket of white fog roll over the water's glossy surface.

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING October 2020 Celebrating 10th Anniversary

He was careful about walking over the floorboards, taking specific steps to avoid the groaning planks. He'd oiled the hinges of the front door earlier that evening to silence its creak.

Outside the moon was a crescent above him, scarcely illuminating the pebbled shore of the lake as he pushed a rowboat out into the black water.

Noel rowed out, feeling the chill of growing fog rising up and pouring into his boat. He didn't know what he was hoping to find, simply clinging onto what little hope he had. Once he'd lost sight of his village lights, he paused to rest, noticing how he could no longer hear any crickets or other insects. He must be far away from any land.

A breeze swept by, Noel balked at the unexpected scent of foul water and dead fish. He didn't think much of it. Admittedly it was odd but not unheard of to have fish die so far out into the lake, usually their bodies get washed up or eaten by bigger fish. In any case, fish dying in a lake is never a good sign. He fidgeted, feeling too cold all of a sudden.

Noel exhaled into his hands to warm them up. On the inhale he realised that the smell had thickened, condensing so much that he could taste its bitterness, shocking and unwelcome.

Something thudded against the side of his rowboat, jostling him in the water. He immediately dismissed it as some type of driftwood or debris. Noel continued to row, determined to escape the reek of decay. One oar nudged against something solid rather than slicing through the water and the boat slowed as Noel struggled to maintain balance. It was probably nothing. He carried on.

A slight sound of something small being dropped in the water caught his attention. He turned his head towards it and saw a ripple spread and bounce off his boat. Noel squinted in the direction of the sound and heard it again from further away. It was more regular this time, as if someone—

Noel froze. It sounded like someone skipping rocks, he realised as a pebble appeared out of the fog and knocked against the side of his boat. "Sammy..." he whispered, barely noticing the name that had slipped from his trembling lips. He knew it was unreasonable but he couldn't seem to stop himself from calling out again, more firmly: "Sammy?"

© Vivian Bolognani

2020 October POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

A SHORT STORY

There was no echo; the sound of his voice seemed to die before even reaching the vignette of mist surrounding him. The air was dense— silent; Noel's heart hammered against his ribcage.

Another small knock against the opposite end of his boat. He turned his head and peered over the side of it to inspect the sound but was instead greeted with the face of a corpse. He cried out, shocked to recognise Adam's features despite the flesh that had peeled from his skull. Noel pressed his lips together, willing himself not to retch at the image of someone he'd grown up with reduced to a doughy, swollen carcass—one remaining eye milky and unseeing, forearm floating by the body, still attached by a singular tendon.

Hands shaking, Noel gripped the oars and tried to manoeuvre the boat to go back to the village. He looked up, the fog had lifted to reveal that his boat was bobbing, closed in on all sides by dozens of decaying bodies floating in the water.

"Oh God—" Noel cried out, fixing his gaze to the interior of his boat, trying to forget the brief glimpses of bare ribcages with skin torn and hanging loose in the water, dissolving. He feared paying closer attention to them lest he recognise more people among the yawning faces.

Noel used the full weight of his body to push against the oars, heedless of the direction he was going so long as it was away. The water seemed viscous, bodies slowing the boat's movement. Noel felt his arms burn with effort. He stopped short when he heard what sounded like a woman sobbing.

"Hello?" he dared to ask, worried that perhaps this woman needed help. "Where are you?"

The woman's wails were unintelligible and came every few seconds from different places. "Hello?" Noel prompted again, and flinched when the next wail came from directly behind him. He whipped his head around to see a willowy woman suspended, as if hung from a noose, over the corpses. Her face was obscured by stringy black hair, the skin of her neck mangled. Her fingers, wrinkled from water and black with rot, gripped the shoulders of his little brother. The crying woman sank until the water was at her waist and something twisted violently in Noel's chest as he watched her plunge Sammy's beautiful riot of brown curls beneath the surface. His little brother thrashed desperately, clawing at the woman's hands and tearing flesh away as easily as if it were the skin of warmed milk.

"Sammy!" Noel shouted, steering his rowboat towards them. "No, Sammy!"

The woman's sobs were nearly drowned out by Sammy's flailing and Noel's panicked screams. As Noel's boat reached them, he turned and shoved the woman's ice-cold form away, leaning over the edge of the boat to pick up his brother. He struggled to get a grip on Sammy's small body, fumbling with the slippery, mushy texture of his skin so much that his body floated face up. Noel let out a gut-wrenching wail at his brother's suddenly deteriorated face: eyes gone, a hole torn through his cheek, teeth exposed, and skin barely clinging to bone.

Noel felt a pair of hands settle across his shoulders, tipping his weight even further over the side of the boat. He met the eyes of his reflection in the water, focusing on the dark irises glinting with the stars in the night sky behind him, ignoring the pale face of the woman whimpering in his ear.

A singular tear fell into the lake, rippling out before Noel's head was pushed down into the water.

THE LONE WOLF



Sandra Nguyen

Sandra Nguyen was born in Vietnam and raised in Sweden. She found her passion for writing when she lived in the United States. She writers short stories and poetry. Her work has been featured in anthologies as well as in online publications. She lives and writes in Sweden. You can follow her writing journey here: https://www.thetopazjournal.com/

The Lone Wolf

A thin deposit of small white ice crystals formed on the ground. The frost had found its way up to the tree branches. Everything seemed quieter, almost muffled, against the pure white landscape that spread as far as my eyes could see. Every step I took left a fresh, crisp footprint in the snow. I hunched my back and pulled the scarf tighter to prevent the biting wind from seeping under my skin, as I fought my way through the cloud of white dust the wind had stirred up. I was cold, lost, and alone, and it was too easy to just cave in and give up.

A desperate howl of the wild made me squint. Past the dusty illusions of light, I saw a faint silvery shadow approaching me. The shadow grew larger and soon it took the shape of a great silver wolf. An overwhelming fear washed over me as the distance between us cut shorter. It was too late to hide. The wolf had seen me. My breath was strained in the numbing air. If I could cry, my eyes would have produced tiny drops of frozen crystals. But I did cry, on the inside. I wanted to live. I wanted to be surrounded by people. This could not be the end of my life, to die alone, in the wilderness.

Unmoved by my petty plea, the wolf trod the frozen landscape with pride. Its eyes were locked into mine. Another howl of the wild sent shivers down my spine and made my bones tremble. The pack was calling. I held my breath as the wolf stopped in front of me. The distance between us was about three leaps.

"Go ahead, call your pack. Let's get it over and done with," I said with a shaky voice. I knew wolves live and hunt in packs. The wolf let out a low growl and strode past me. When it saw I had not moved from my spot, it turned around and nuzzled me to keep moving forward.

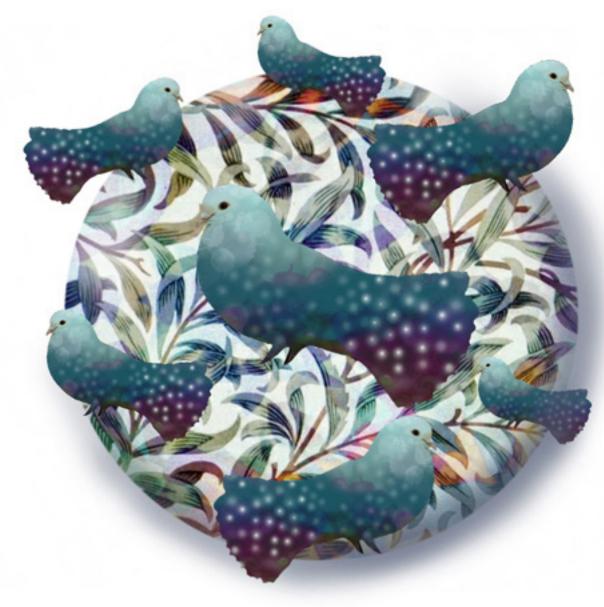
I realized that no one is ever coming to rescue me. At the end of the day, the lone wolf was my only companion, and if I want to survive the wilderness I have to accept the change. In silence, side by side, we explored uncharted territories. As we strode through the frozen landscape and clouds of dusty white, I glanced at the great silver wolf and came to think of what people used to say: every cloud has a silver lining. It had never occurred to me that embracing the company of a lone wolf would make me feel at home. A smile escaped me. I was not cold, lost or alone anymore.

SANDRA NGUYEN

10 ANNIVERSARY 2010 - 2019



FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH October 2020



COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE