

2010 - 2020

11  
YEARS

# Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH  
VOLUME ONE DECEMBER 2020

TERRY MCDONAGH

*Live Encounters*

*Celebrates its Eleventh Anniversary*

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE





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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).

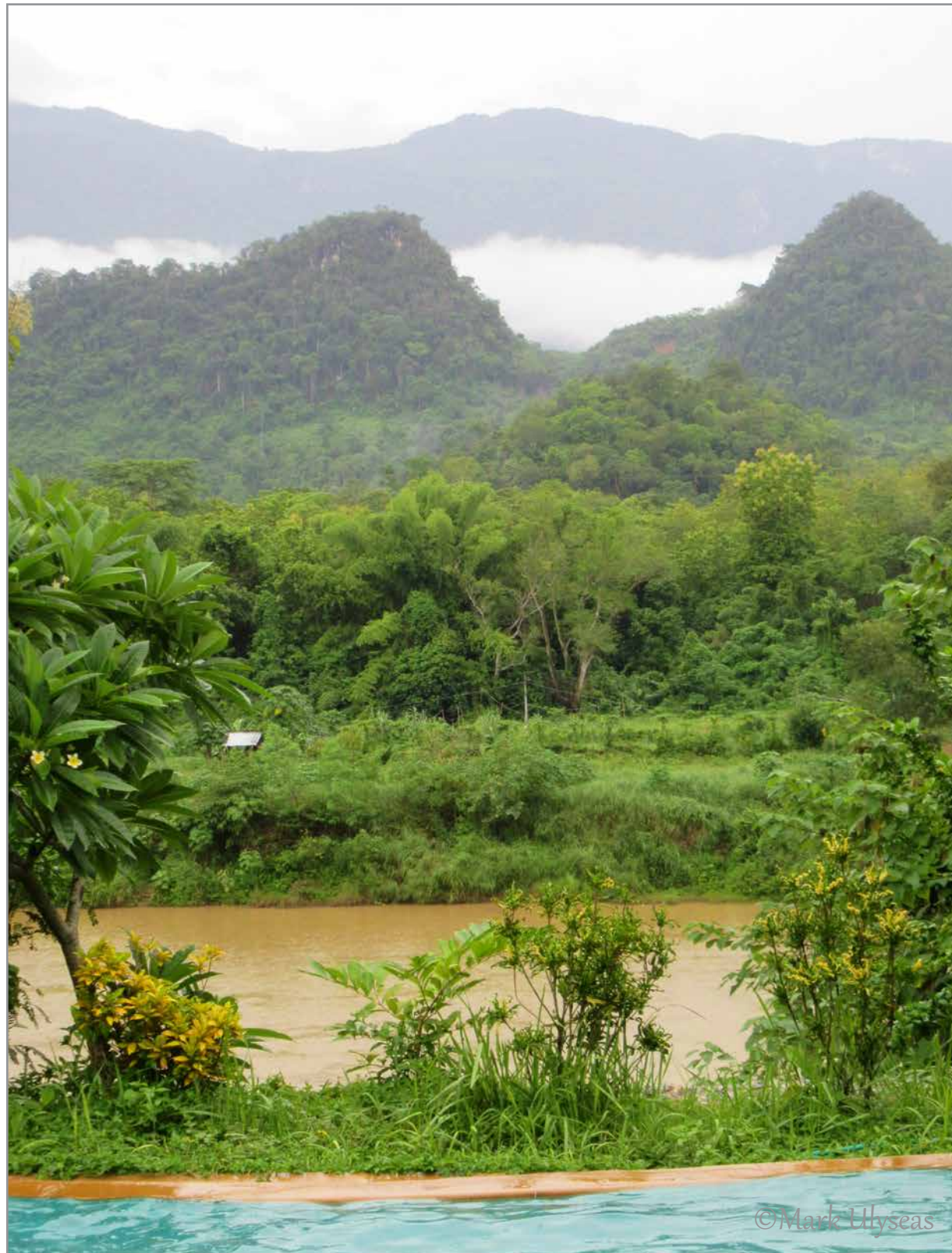
We are appealing for donations to pay for the administrative and technical aspects of the publication. **Please help by donating any amount for this just cause as events are threatening the very future of Live Encounters.**

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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On the banks of the Nam Khan, outskirts of Luang Prabang, Laos, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.





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Terry McDonagh, poet and dramatist, taught creative writing at Hamburg University and was Drama Director at the International School Hamburg. He's published ten poetry collections as well as letters, drama, prose and poetry for young people. His work has been translated into German and Indonesian. 2016: poetry collection, *Lady Cassie Peregrina* – Arlen House. 2017: included in *Fire and Ice 2*, Gill Education for Junior Cycle. 2017: poem, *UCG by Degrees*, included in Galway Poetry Trail on Galway University Campus. 2017: *Director of WestWords*, Irish literature festival in Hamburg. 2018: latest poetry collection, *Fourth Floor Flat – 44 Cantos*, published autumn 2018 by Arlen House. <http://www.terry-mcdonagh.com/>

Terry is a founding contributor of Live Encounters Magazine.

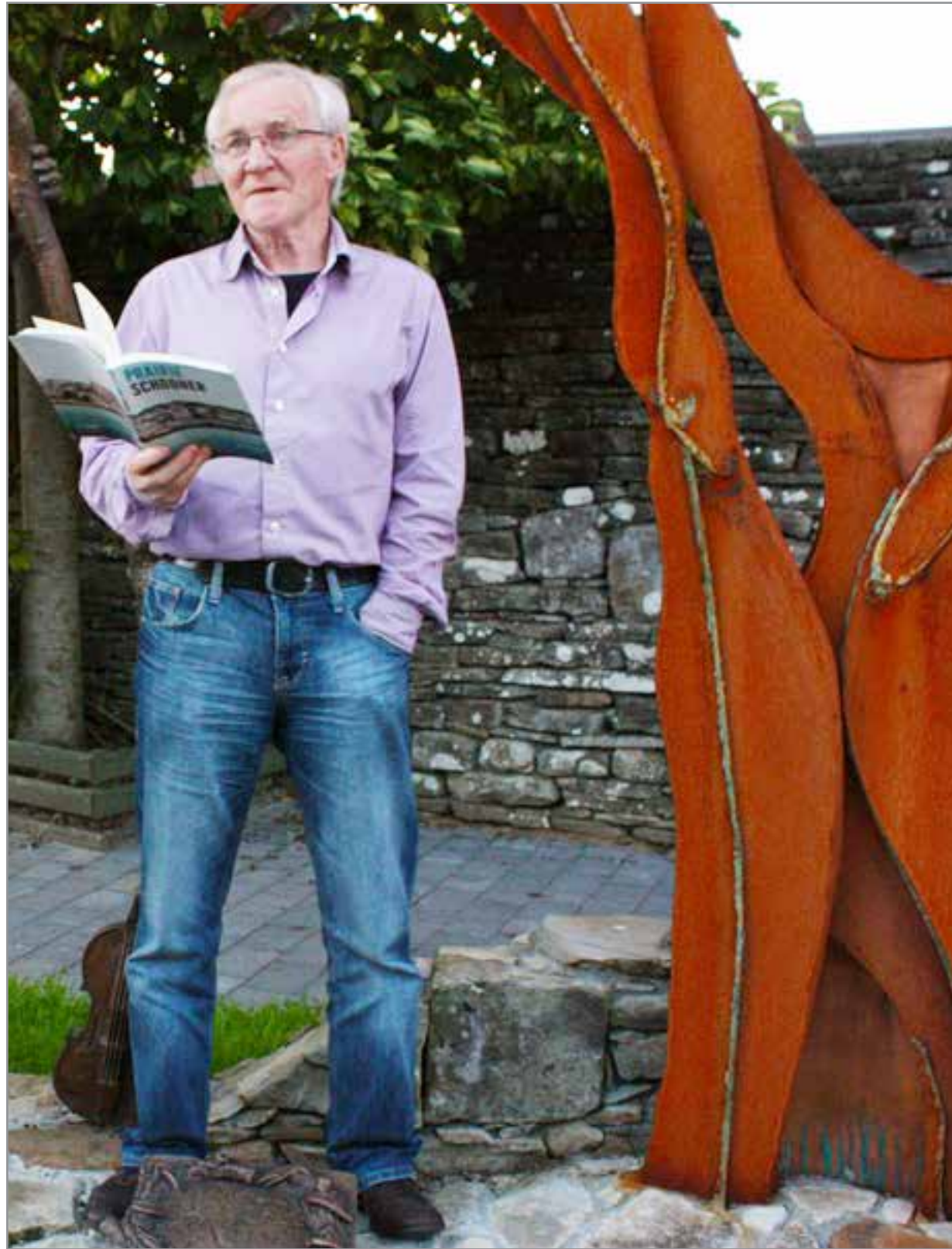
## TERRY MCDONAGH

### *Live Encounters Celebrates its Eleventh Anniversary*

Live Encounters is celebrating its eleventh anniversary. Eleven years have passed – years of peace, turmoil and toil. And there in the midst of it all, Live Encounters has created a quiet poetic swagger and its writers have laughed, wept and had a rich platform for their work. An anniversary is an opportunity to look forward and back over our shoulder at our own creative eleven as well as casting a learning eye on the work of others. Some writers and critics will outlive us – some won't but the quiet colours of autumn and the legacy of LE certainly will.

I feel I want to ramble carelessly, endlessly on a page. – reach that enviable stage *where I learned not to care*, as the poet, Patrick Kavanagh said. And on and on we go like squirrels with nuts. Minding our own. Eleven years have passed. The winds have come and gone in season; smoke dwindles when the fire goes out and it's all over almost as soon as it has begun. Climate change and Covid make us want to flee but where to! Poets sing to water and fish; they fight their corner as well as the next – they need to – and many won't be slow in lining up bursary applications. We push on like the pulse of time.

But when I read the poetry of Moya Cannon, I see the true value of quiet in the written word. I feel a sense of calm – a kind of peace that wants me to walk a seldom-used, overgrown lane. I want my childhood back. I want to be back in the world of that little boy that was me, who trudged home from school along rural lanes in late September.



Terry McDonagh reading next to a sculpture by Sally McKenna of the blind poet, Anthony Raftery (1779-1835) in the town square, Kiltimagh, where Terry grew up.





In her poem, Oar, Moya says:

*Walk inland and inland/with your oar/until someone asks you/what it is/Then  
build your house.*

Enough said. No explanation needed. It's as if a monk has placed some fish, olives, garlic bread and a glass of good red wine on a rough-hewn table in a clearing. It is summer and the foundations for a perfect home have just been poured. I feel drawn to this quiet. In No Sense in Talking, she asks:

*What knot at the root of articulation/have we said too much?*

I understand my own mother better now. She used to say, *enough said*. There's no need to have a say or a big voice in the world of words. A small voice will do. Some poems might even outlive us. Wouldn't it be just wonderful if a young enthusiast crept into our attics to rob a leaf of our poetic meanderings before we trot off into the infinite wind – from where we, perhaps, could look down on artists eating chocolate, dusting or sweeping the kitchen floor. There might even be a poet's graveyard out there on Planet Verse – free of money markets, emperors or cardinals – where dancing and a fine touch will go on forever. In the words of Pablo Neruda:

*I want verses of felt or feather/which scarcely weigh, mild verses/  
with the intimacy of beds.*

Neruda must be right. God will survive if he fits in and wears the party suit and tie, but Neruda is eternal. I wrote the poem, *Silent Orders*, (a version was included in a previous issue of LE) to step back for a moment; to distance myself from the taste of free-market codology. I am not particularly religious in a formal sense but, having sat in a beehive-hut-cell in *Cill Aodáin* graveyard, I felt inspired by the quiet spirit of those who chose the language of isolation and quiet to get closer to themselves. It is an old monastic settlement long deserted but it has left its mark on the landscape and in the minds and hearts of those who visit. Such a place takes the preaching out of poetry.

## Silent Orders

There were druids, ascetics and  
abbesses long before our day  
Most lived in routines of matins,  
vespers and herb gardens. They

had honey and garlic in their bones  
and could be seen  
in purple fields smiling alone.

They didn't need to screw up  
their eyes looking for playmates  
or lie on their backs to tarnish  
their faces in July heat. They'd

amble to and from toil when  
bells tolled and speak when  
spoken to. Hills and valleys  
joined with them in worship.

There was no panic in the fields.

If, only, we could down tools  
and listen, we might hear them,  
silent as ever – in their cells.

When I look back at the Live Encounters' spread of eleven years of language and pictures, I'm overcome by a kind of quiet joy, happy to be part of this whole unquantifiable bundle of people and words – by a great number of writers, poets and storytellers with thousands of words blocked into structures we call poems, stories and philosophies. It's a big gathering, a team as unsettled and fragile as any gathering or group.

I ask myself again and again, what is silence? What is poetry? Why write at all? We spend a lot of time analysing meaning, structure, imagery, noise, rhythm and so on. Over cappuccinos, we argue, contradict, disagree on the existence of angels and label poetry as good or bad. We make noise and stay on if the beer is good and Anna-Katharina pops in to say hello. *Honestly, that's not a poem at all. Yes it is and a good one. Which one? Oh jees, I'd better be off or I'll miss the last bus. I'm sticking to the day job. Ahoy.*

In Advice to Writers, American poet, Billy Collins suggests:

*Even if it keeps you up all night/wash down the walls and scrub the floor/of your study before composing a line.*

And, then again, in his poem, Introduction to Poetry, Collins writes:

*But all they want to do//is tie the poem to a chair with a rope/and torture a confession out of it/They begin beating it with a hose/to find out what it really means.*

We hear of the big, tragic events – we write and try to fill young minds with carefully constructed pieces but will they see and listen to the rhythm and music in colour gripping the day. Does a poem make a small thing into a bit thing or a big event into an important event. Brendan Kennelly makes me laugh:

*the old poet advises the young writer/If possible, make sure you turn/your suffering into royalties.*

Sometimes, when I think of royalties, I feel like locking myself up to stop myself grabbing at cheques with both hands. As a deterrent I've been thinking of ordering an angry t-shirt and big stick from Chicago – knowing that I love royalties and will indulge in the pleasures they afford me – but, at the same time, I'd hope not to lose contact with benign sounds from under rocks or the cry of a fish in deep water.

I usually begin my narrative by making no sense at all and end up by declaring that I'd like to join in conversation with people – who always trip up in tearooms. I'd like to think that's what writing does to you. To a degree we can only hope it disturbs – throws us up on the rocks – helps us to see language in a different light. *Out of the dying pan into the pyre* is the title of one of my own poems written in Berlin to celebrate a great evening with wine-minded poets.

Writing is a strange kind of alchemy. When I look back at the Live Encounters' spread of eleven years of language and pictures, I'm overcome by a kind of quiet joy, happy to be part of this whole unquantifiable bundle of people and words – by a great number of writers, poets and storytellers with thousands of words blocked into structures we call poems, stories and philosophies. It's a big gathering, a team as unsettled and fragile as any gathering or group. It would be special if we could, all, be quiet in our dreams lest we get swallowed up by the noise of the day.

I return to Moya Cannon and see her unite all of that huge gathering in a few lines in her poem, Narrow Gatherings:

*Encumbered by legend/we are foreigners here/and know less than we imagined.*

Again she writes:

*There are sounds/that we can/and do trust/a gale in the trees/the soft click of stones/where the tide falls back/a baby crying in the night.*

I have been involved in writing groups in many countries and with people of all ages and I often ask myself, who do we write for? Why do we get together? Why write at all? Patrick Kavanagh said, *Poetry made me a sort of outcast and I became abnormally normal.*

*A poem is like a radio that can broadcast continuously for thousands of years*  
– Alan Ginsberg.



*Poems are other people's snapshots in which we recognize ourselves*  
– Charles Simic.

*Poetry is not a fiefdom or a private domain. It is a city whose gates stand wide;  
which has never exactly welcomed its newcomers but has always found room for  
them* – Eavan Boland.

I see writing as a kind of exile – a kind of silence – a kind of Planet Verse where exile and silence have an opportunity to get together. This merging of silence and exile affords the uneasy opportunity to explore fear and joy in their extremes. It's a place where we have nothing to lose – where colours, sounds and senses are allowed to merge and find a way to each other.

Live Encounters provides this kind of space. It is a colourful platform where nothing but pursuit of what is best in us is expected. We are celebrating *our* eleventh anniversary and I'm sure I can say on behalf of other writers, who have had the privilege of being involved, we are grateful. Happy Anniversary Live Encounters and thank you, Mark Ulyseas.



Nutmeg, Bali, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Alisa Velaj was born in 1982 in the port town of Vlora, Albania. She was shortlisted for the annual international Erbacce-Press Poetry Award in UK in June 2014. Her works have appeared in more than 100 print and online international magazines in Europe, UK, USA, Australia etc. Velaj's poetry book "Dreams" is published by Cyberwit Press in India. Besides English, her poems have also been translated into Hebrew, Swedish, Romanian, French, and Portuguese. Her poetry collection With No Sweat At All is scheduled for publication by Cervena Barva Press in November 2020.

These poems are translated from Albanian by **Arben P. Latifi**.



Alisa Velaj

## A SHOW

*Inspired by a FB post by Natasha Spahiu*

A snowman  
and three women going crazy around him!  
(Each one dazzled by the white glitter).

The first had disowned waters without having seen them.  
She comes around the man,  
sniffing the carrot that stands for his nose.  
"Ah, my little sun, my little sun!" she croons.  
(To the carrot, of course).

The second, abandoned by a booming forest,  
a whitish complexion under pale sunlight,  
sets her imagination aflame  
how to drag this snowman to bed!  
(She once lurked on a river's flow,  
with no catch to take to the bank).

The third—from the same habitat,  
(of the other two women and her own old hubby)  
has forever fled from all excitement.  
Her Venus, not in the least a rocky relief,  
(dozing off by waters on this or that side)  
fancies the snowman as a lily flower  
and the carrot— as its stalk stemming up,  
like a slice of sun...

Ah, three women, plots of barren land,  
surrounding a poor man!

It is cold, it's so cold.  
Snow flakes start falling on the carrot.  
(Exactly the kind of snow that never stops...)



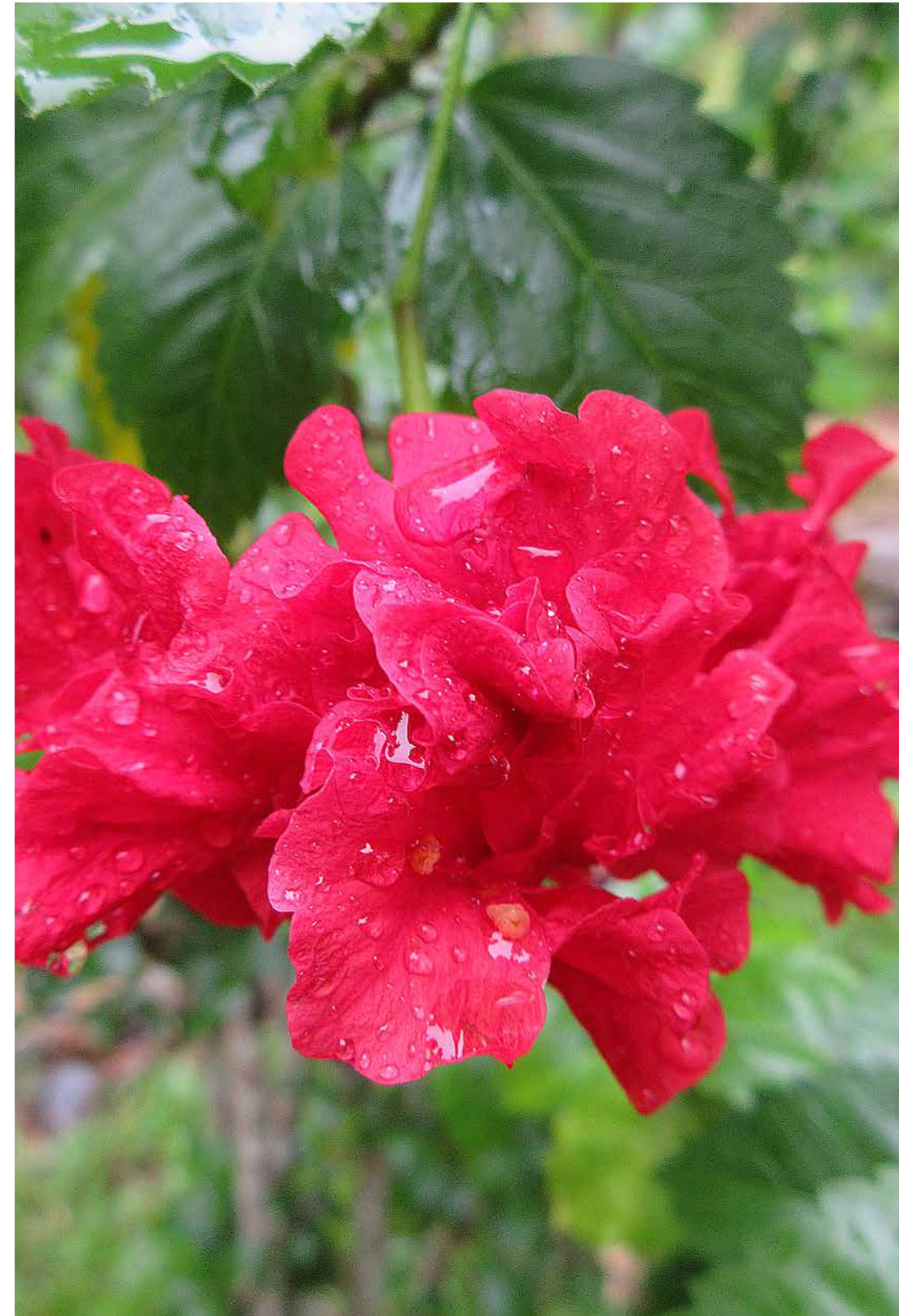
## RIGHT AT THIS INSTANT OF SUNSHINE

Right at that instant  
when the sun happens to be shining,  
quit partway whatever it is you are doing,  
even if it be love, right at that instant!

Hurry outdoors and enjoy the sights.  
Trees look prettier,  
skies feel nearer,  
while something yet unnamed  
is coming aboard the approaching train.  
Walk up to the station platform, wait for it,  
and, if nothing comes your way,  
smile sweetly to a kid just getting off.  
Tell a depressed elderly lady she looks gorgeous!

Right at that instant of sunshine,  
forget about love for just a bit.  
Breathe in an otherworldly brand of air,  
with invisible butterflies gracing your gaze.  
A melancholy...you feel like crying.  
Cry, cry right at that instant  
when the sun happens to be shining!

Head back home, afterwards,  
where love is waiting for you—thirsty,  
as parched land  
for your rain of joy!



Flower after rain, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Anamaría Crowe Serrano has written poetry for many years, including *Crunch* (Turas Press, 2018) and *onWords and upWords* (Shearsman, 2016). For the past two years she has been working on a novel, *In the Dark*, set during the Spanish Civil War, which will be published in 2021 with Turas Press. Excerpts appeared in the April 2020 edition of *Live Encounters*.



## ODDS ON DAY ONE

There are five patients in the ward. They are very quiet. One is an invisible woman, Aunt, who has just been wheeled in. She's beginning to come round and can't respond yet to the nurse. A chart on her bedside is proof that she has a history. Facts are added to her existence and sometimes she groans a little. Her quietness makes her unremarkable.

The second is an elderly man. He is Hanku, half-human, half-cartoon character. His head is bandaged like a helmet strapped under the chin, but he is sitting up, stony-faced and grey, ready for discharge. On the phone he talks sweetly to his wife, maybe a lover, explaining that they went in behind the eye and the back of his head. She can come and collect him and his voice trails off.

The third is a woman who is pretending to be deaf. She's the only one who hasn't had an operation. She had an MRI ordeal. This ordeal is broadcast back to her by her daughter, who is skilled at fussing, seeking encouragement from the nurses, making a hero of her mother for having survived the day. Her mother wishes she had been anaesthetized like everyone else.

The fourth is another woman. She should sleep now, but she can only think of Lee and the trouble ahead. Surgery is nothing compared to this. The monitor reveals increased blood pressure but, thankfully, nurses are not trained to guess domestic reasons for increased blood pressure. She waits, consciously alone, hoping the tears will have stopped by the time the physio arrives.

The fifth patient inhabits a body that will never be the same again after surgery. Clinging to the lining of his lungs, there may or may not be another body. The doctors don't know what the problem is. They haven't considered it might bring the world to its knees. Flowing through his veins there may or may not be ovine serum. But he is fortunate. He will be leaving hospital soon. In a box.

Anamaría Crowe Serrano. Photograph courtesy of John O'Rourke.



## K

He's done it again. At the bathroom door, eyes popping, roaring in his underwear and stocking feet. Her heart sinks, unable to stop him. Unable to help.

Wazze meaning o'life? he slurs through mangled tongue, frothing at the nose. He can barely steady himself against the wall, striking out like a new-born giraffe, yet this is what he's thinking: the meaning of life. He grins and gets distracted by invisible magic wafting in front of him. Woaaaah, he marvels.

Psycho. The fragility of that. The pain.

Nobody knows the meaning of life, she says, hoping it registers in his tortured brain. Hoping it's a comfort because somehow there is comfort in truth.

He stops lunging at her, suddenly puzzled. Jzozevhine? She says nothing, gauging his movements. Who'r'you?

When he was a toddler he disappeared once in the garden. The dishcloth hung in her hand as a sixth sense kicked in. Out she went and, sure enough, he was perched on the edge of the rainwater barrel, water seducing him with its murky reflections.

He still wants to slow it all down, see life as if for the first time, and not see. Disconnect from this world that is too brash for his sensitive soul. Had she not found him he'd have tipped in to touch that other world. Head first.

The scene replays in her mind these days, except that in her mind she stays indoors drying dishes while he dips his little fingers into the water, following the urge to explore its deeper meanings. Head first. A minute or two at most instead of this endless void he keeps trying to fill.

A teacup would have been enough. Or a plate.

## HOW FAR IS ONE METER

What was that like? Suk wants to know. Aunty, I can't see you.

Aunty shifts so she fills the screen again. Every night she tells Suk a story from the past. So that Suk will be ready for life in the past if things ever return to normal. But she worries that the past may be too long ago to ever come back.

School, Aunty repeats. It was a big building—

Like a hospital or a prison? Suk asks.

Yes, like a hospital or a prison, full of children wearing the same clothes.

Everyone matching? Suk is surprised. Like law enforcers?

Matching, yes, but not like law enforcers. Aunty laughs. It was just a uniform so that their home clothes wouldn't get spoiled. And we had to bring books with us to school.

Books? Suk interrupts. What's a book?

Aunty sighs. Things made with paper, she explains, lots of sheets of paper stuck together along their long edge, with writing on the pages, stories and pictures and explanations about how to do maths and science. That kind of thing. Like lots of those digi-templates you use for edu except they were on paper and we brought them with us to the classroom—

The what?

A big room where lots of boys and girls sat together with their books on desks facing the teacher—

They sat together in one room?

Yes, that's exactly what they did, Aunty smiles. Side by side. Touching distance. There was no distance enforcement back then. They could share pencils and sometimes, when the teacher wasn't looking, they might whisper in each other's...

*continued overleaf...*

© Anamaría Crowe Serrano

## HOW FAR IS ONE METER *contd...*

Aunty, the battery is running low. Hurry up with the story.

During break time we walked around the yard—

Like prisoners?

No, not like prisoners. Well, maybe a little bit, but we hadn't committed any crime. We were just there to learn. So we'd walk around telling each other our secrets, who we fancied and who we wanted to hook up with in the club at the weekend.

Suk opens her mouth to ask, but Aunty clarifies before she can formulate the question. Lots of young people your age dancing really close together. Not just family members. Friends and strangers. Less than a meter, yes, like in the old shops I told you about. Sometimes holding each other. Their bodies rubbing off each other without even meaning to.

Skin actually touching? Like in RetroLife?

Aunty looks at the screen. All she can see is a head, Suk's eyes are popping again. She always finds this unbelievable. Yes, skin touching.

Were they not arrested?

Suk has only ever sat on her own in her room communicating virtually with the education network. She has many friends on the network but has never even considered touching any of them. Why would anyone want to do that? When edu is over for the day they sometimes put on their goggles and cyberlink together in virtual reality to old-style shops like Aunty has described really existed. They sometimes bump into each other in RetroLife if they are looking somewhere else –it's allowed in RetroLife– but it's not for real and it's still embarrassing when that happens. They go into shops that sell the kind of stuff you'd normally cyberbuy. Loads of people can go into shops and as you go through the door the BuyMe selects what they need or might like. Items float by in front of their eyes, whether it's an edible treat or an item of clothing or accessories. Sometimes, for fun, instead of letting the wristchip register automatically for autopay on the way out, they go to a box thing called a till where there's someone just standing there waiting for them to arrive.

The tiller knows what they have selected and says that will be...whatever the cost of the item is, and they can present the amount with little chips or bits of paper that have a monetary value written on them. They're called coins and notes because RetroLife is pretty close to what real life was like in Aunty's day. It's hilarious to keep everyone waiting while this transaction goes on. Even the friends who are waiting always find it funny that time could be wasted in such a silly way but Aunty says that is exactly what used to happen in the past and there was nothing funny about it. Money was a real thing that you carried in a thing called a purse and people waited in a line in shops. No, not because they were desperate for the items. Most of the items they didn't even need. That was just the way it was.

Aunty laughs. No, she says, there was nothing to be afraid of if you casually bumped into other people. She goes suddenly quiet, looking at Suk. Normality boils down to our experience, she thinks. The rest is strange. Suspect. Comical.

Are you crying, Aunty?

No, love. Aunty brings her hand to her face. I just have something in my eye. I'd better say goodnight. Your battery is about to go.

Will you tell me more tomorrow about school and cubs?

Clubs. Yes, of course I will. Good night now, Suk. Big big elbow.

Big elbow, Aunty.



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



## THE PLACE WHERE POETRY HAPPENS

Sometimes it is an aviary echoing bird calls  
or a concert-hall with a Steinway Grand,  
a jazz club in the city with a tiny stage,  
an upright bass, candles crammed  
in Chianti bottles on the tables, couples  
holding hands, half-listening to the music.

Sometimes I am invited in to listen  
to a line or two, perhaps a wisp of dream  
or glint of something shiny that swam up  
from the depths into the net of memory,  
turned and flicked its tail, swam out again.  
But left an image that will unfurl  
like a water lily, or a series of words  
primed to explode on contact with the ear.

Angela Patten

## EVENING LIGHT AT OAKLEDGE

*"Nothing gold can stay." Robert Frost*

But I love the soft gold light  
of summer evenings, a slight breeze  
swaying the tall grass, dark trees  
nameless in the distance.

The city plans to let this meadow  
return to forest to fulfill  
some worthy ecological goal.

But I will mourn this horizon line  
of yellow ochre hazy in the heat,  
purple clover underfoot,  
timothy and touch-me-not alive  
with creatures rustling and lamenting  
in their own strange languages.

Small birds dart back and forth  
conducting their inscrutable errands,  
uttering sounds we can never translate  
for all our deft mnemonics—  
*teacher teacher, peter peter, pretty girl*

A sparkle in the corner of my eye  
might be a beer-can. No matter.  
I prefer the gauzy goldleaved long shot  
to the unkind clarity of the close-up.

Tonight I might have stayed inside  
morose, immune to wonder.  
This evening's light would have shone  
with or without an audience  
like a poet who keeps on writing  
even if no one comes to sit  
on those hard folding chairs,  
emits inarticulate embarrassing groans,  
then rushes up at the end to say  
she really really liked your work.



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](http://annapoetry.com)



## WINTER SOLSTICE

*after Plato*

It is possible we met in another life  
under the cold solstice moon,  
and danced and danced madly...

It is possible we were too close to keep warm  
to recall faces and the land of promise...  
What has left since?  
A dream haunts me...  
my garden flowering with you  
in every spring.

I never doubt all the possibilities,  
the life before, the life after,  
our wings joined together.  
A path, my feet hesitant to follow it,  
my eyes closed in...  
leaves marks in these poems,  
cold, outside,  
hot, inside.

.

Anna Yin

## BEGINNING OF AUTUMN

The day was just breaking, no birds' songs  
I fell asleep again  
from one dream to another  
The wheels of my heart passed over  
the flowing seasons  
all in silence.

No sound in the dream too  
Grey and white like a fog  
through the window  
through the house  
across the road and the wild meadows  
Yet hope remains in my heart  
for eternity.

## ON TRANSLATION

Sometimes it's a maze  
I fall into.  
I call for light, for a guide,  
struggle to find my way...  
finally, out of it,  
I am not myself.

Sometimes it's a lake,  
clear to see.  
I swim across it with ease.  
Looking back,  
I find my own mark left behind.

Sometimes it's a dialogue,  
words longing for one another.  
Two languages stream like songs,  
chiming from the deep.

Sometimes it's a dream  
I walk into yours,  
and find you waiting,  
then you lead me  
through each door  
with your own key



## HILL SONG

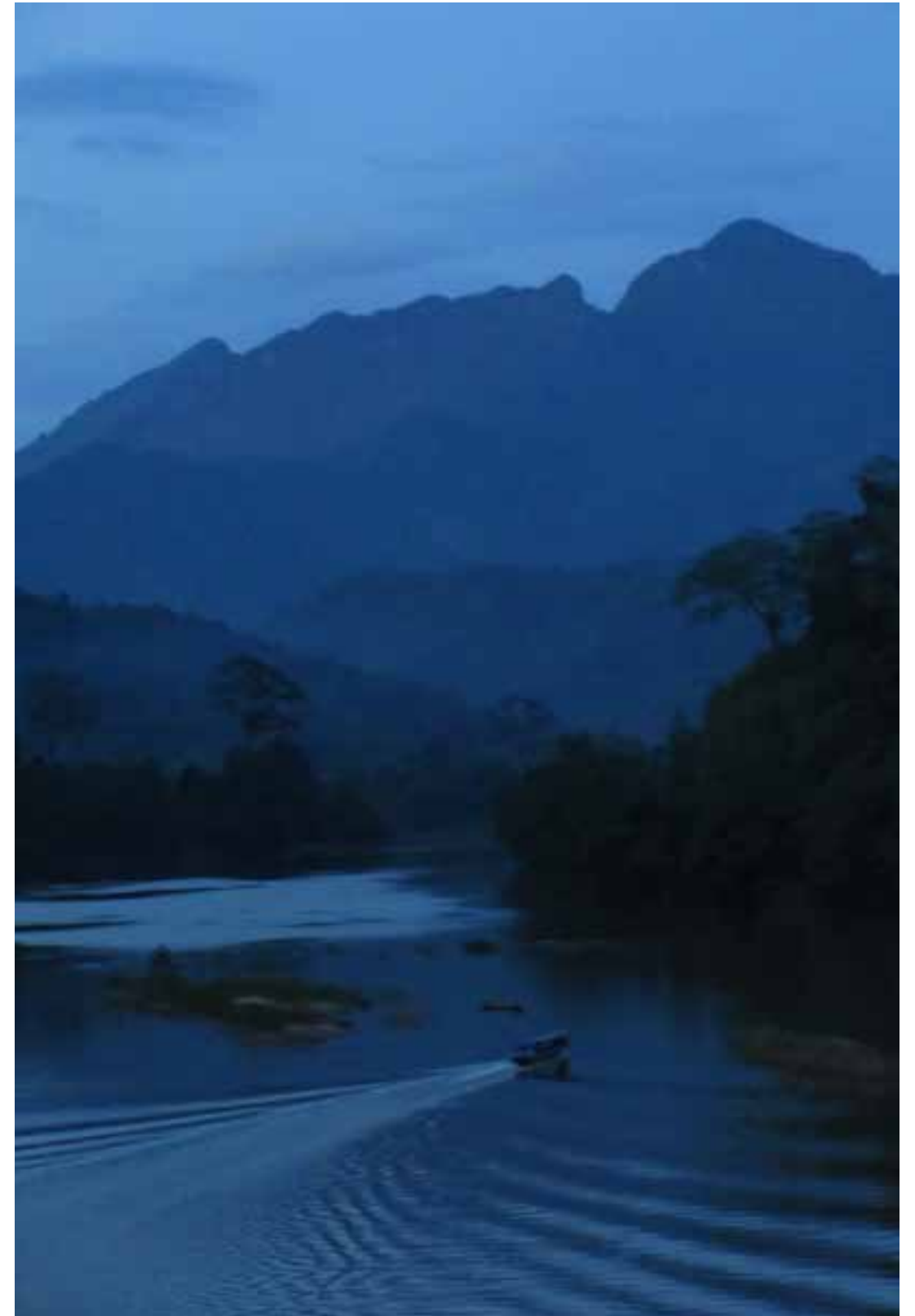
*a found poem after Jeff Hardin*

“Mystery, you will find”  
you muse,  
“somewhere in its resonance” ...

Handing me your signed book,  
you point at your own handwriting:  
“as time goes headlong  
filling itself...”

So here I am, listening to  
the hill song- the rain fills itself...  
on my fingers  
each drops a note,  
a sound of awakening-  
*O rain rained down to drench this song I am...*

Perhaps each comes inborn:  
*home is nowhere anyway but where*  
*I stand receiving what is offered me*  
this drop of life,  
this reflection of moment,  
*O rain rained down to drench this song I am...*  
I found the way  
*back down*  
*the hill and home.*



Nam Ou, Laos PDR, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

A journalist, magazine editor, legal author and media communications director for 30 years, Anne Casey is an award-winning Irish poet/writer living in Australia. Author of *out of emptied cups* (Salmon Poetry 2019) and *where the lost things go* (2017), with a third collection and a chapbook forthcoming in 2021, Anne's work is widely published internationally. [anne-casey.com](http://anne-casey.com)



## HOPE SPELL

*Gather together and muddle through under a shifting light:*

Spray of    ocean on a predawn shore  
Tender essence of    slumbering child

Saffron strands    extracted from sunrise  
Dewdrops of    first spring leaf-bud

Aroma of    unfurling lotus blossom  
Trace of    breeze on sunlit skin

Wisp of    cloud in cerulean sky  
Compress of    forest-floor underfoot

Heart of    tree-shrieking lorikeet  
Zest of    gatherings past and future

Warm press of    nestling dog  
Lavender    distilled from sundown

Sliver of    skylight crescent-moon  
Half-a-dash of    shooting star

Wing of    love over a bordered world

Anne Casey



## REGENESIS

If ever you find yourself  
in a place of unusual incongruity,  
at odds with someone, something  
or other, the whole universe, or even  
just yourself,  
take the time  
to remember  
when everything was grey  
and all over the world  
people were dying  
of one thing  
or another  
(but mostly that one thing)  
—a disappearing as if  
into an abyss:  
a great grey abscess  
which was an absence  
and how: when it became clear,  
a wave, small at first  
then swelling to a  
tremendous roar  
filled the whole world  
with the understanding  
and that was called  
the end of times  
because after it  
came the beginning:

and the world  
was made new,  
filled  
with that  
essential  
that had  
once been

so greatly  
missing

if only we had realised  
sooner

## HOW TO SURVIVE AN APOCALYPSE

Practice social media distancing.  
After every exposure,  
thoroughly wash  
heart (for at least 20 seconds).  
Do not hoard  
statistics — they have a short shelf life  
and offer questionable nourishment.

Wherever possible, dress  
inappropriately.  
Seek advice from trees.  
Trust the judgment  
of animals —  
even the tiniest ones.

Practice free flight  
in your head.  
Become attracted to light.  
Love immoderately.  
If in doubt, dance.



Snail on the door of an abandoned house, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Anne M Carson's poetry has been published internationally, and widely in Australia. Recent publications include *Massaging Himmler: A Poetic Biography of Dr Felix Kersten* (Hybrid, 2019), and *Two Green Parrots* (Ginnindera Press, 2019). She has initiated a number of poetry-led social justice projects. She is currently a PhD candidate at RMIT where her project includes poetic biographies of two creative women – Anna Magdalena Bach, a 'flawless' soprano (according to her husband, Johann Sebastian Bach) and George Sand, prolific French novelist.



## ON BECOMING ANNA MAGDALENA BACH

Twenty years a Wilcken,  
under father's roof,

in a family of Wilckens  
then overnight

I become a Bach  
under the roof of another

in a family of Bachs.  
At the market they say

*Guten tag Frau Bach*  
and I turn to see who

they address. Me – a frau?  
Seasons pass before I know

myself in this other guise:  
Frau Cantor Bach.

Anne M Carson

## ANNA MAGDALENA TALKS ABOUT ERSTER UND ZWEITER SCHLAF

Our nightly ritual for the *erster Schlaf*  
is to go to our bed not long after dusk.

Exhausted we immediately fall asleep  
then wake around midnight, to pray, talk

about the coming day and play the games  
spouses do. In the early days, keen to snatch

moments of tenderness from the everyday  
maelstrom, we would talk, wanting to know

whom this person was whom I had wed. Johann  
would hum a few bars, little tunes which

came into his head more easily than words.  
Then I had to sing the next few bars sensing

where the music could go – not so easy for  
me at first, but with practice I improved.

Lying in his arm-crook feeling the hum-vibration  
deep in his chest; under the kind auspices

of the Almighty, I knew as perfect contentment  
as possible in this human life. Back and forth

our hums went, singing the felicity of our  
connection. Sometimes we made harmonies

and counter-points that soared in a night-time  
language of our own devising. Around 2am,

we fell silent once more, at one with each  
other, the created world, and our Lord. Then,

head-long we tumbled into *zweiter Schlaf*.



## THE GIFT OF THEE

Other times I wake  
after our *erster Schlaff*

my reach for him is  
full of ardour and affection.

Then the moonlit room  
fills with our want of each

other and our prayers  
become bodily. *My soul*

*praises the Lord for the gift  
of thee*, I whisper in his

ear, voice choked with  
love and longing.

*\* In the 1700s in Europe, sleep was divided into two phases, first and second sleep.*



View from my window, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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 October 2020



Anne McDonald

## THE POMEGRANATE TREE

Abebi stopped the elders at her cabin door  
baying for her girl child to be cut,  
her husband cracked her face with calloused hands  
but she slammed the flimsy plywood door shut.  
She tore the skin from her uncle's forearm  
when he tried to lift the child from a pallet bed,  
her eyes red raw from crying, Abebi kicked  
the still hot ashes from the grate into the faces  
of the elders gathered at her garden gate.  
The girl child asked "Mama, do they wait for me  
Under the pomegranate tree?"

She screamed a string of litanies and hexes  
As they waited with their dull edged rusty blade,  
and other sister mothers carrying babies  
gathered whispering softly in the midday shade,  
then screeched their worries into the ink black night  
that Abebi's actions with the girl child would invite  
back luck and her daughter should prepare  
for a life of barren spinster hood, Adebi didn't care.  
Still she saw them gather round  
when the dawn broke on the sun parched dusty ground.  
The girl child asked "Mama, do they wait for me  
Under the pomegranate tree?"

The girl child gripped gripped Abebi's skirts,  
when she heard the drums and pleading in the sun  
from the husband and the family and the women  
of the village, worried that the harvest tillage  
would be failed and curses would be railed down  
from angry Gods and prospective husbands.  
The girl child said "I know what you have done for me  
As I will do for mine, hold fast now Mama"  
And the girl child asked "Mama, do you think we are free?  
No more the pomegranate tree?"



## IMBOLG ON THE 29A

*Abbey St. to Baldoyle, Dublin 2109*

Was St. Brigid Jesus's girlfriend Mammy?  
 -She was not son, sure we don't even know  
 who Jesus really was,  
 he could have been a leprechaun.

Or a woman Mammy?  
 -Don't say that! He was a man,  
 look at him in your book!  
 But he is wearing a dress and he has long hair Mammy

-I don't care, he was a man  
 and he lived in Nazareth  
 it says so in your book, look!  
 Anyway he has a beard.

If today is St. Brigid's day,  
 when is Jesus's Day Mammy?  
 -That's Christmas,  
 do you not know anything?

Where is he now?  
 Is he dead like they said Mammy?  
 Where is he now if he lives forever?  
 -He is everywhere and he can hear you  
 pestering me with all your questions.

If he is everywhere, where does he sleep Mammy?  
 -He never sleeps, I don't think.  
 I can see you winking, so you're lying Mammy  
 and that's a sin.

-Get your bag, put that can in the bin.  
 we are going to be late.  
 Is Jesus in Baldoyle Industrial Estate?

## SLAP

I didn't see the slap coming  
 when it cracked my jaw and stung my skin  
 I spilled the milk and watched helpless  
 as it bled white seeping stains on red Formica.

I couldn't understand  
 all I did was say what you had said,  
 I thought that it was funny,  
 you said Granny was a "nosey bitch"  
 my face burned welt red.

I suppose you didn't realize that the granny  
 was standing at the back door,  
 and if I was wise I would have kept my mouth shut  
 eyes fixed firmly on the kitchen floor.

But I was five and salt tears of shame  
 at some unfathomable misunderstanding  
 came thick and fast,  
 I tried to focus on the plate,  
 wells of water blurred my vision  
 as Angelus eighteen peals of purgatory  
 blared from the television.

In bed at night at twelve years old  
 I dreamed of leaving, my chest cracked sore  
 with heaving sobs, but I didn't know  
 that you were grieving  
 for a dead baby.

Maybe if I'd known I might have stayed  
 until the cord was ready to be cut,  
 but at seventeen me and Janis Ian went  
 on a J One visa to the states,  
 the slap still stinging on my face,  
 and pulled the back door shut.

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.



Anni Wilton-Jones

## CONFINED TO QUARTERS

A mimicry  
of starlings  
crowding branches

or flying  
beaks laden  
worms and wasps  
bees and butterflies

to fill  
the ever-open  
nestling throats

house martins  
swooping and swirling  
catching and carrying  
to nests high up  
under eaves

a cat  
confused  
running distractedly  
too much prey  
too fast  
too far away

a buzzing  
a chattering

my acre  
overflowing

unappreciated  
until now

Covid 2020



## DOWNPATRICK HEAD

Bent against the gale  
raincoated cameras  
at the ready  
we are here  
to record the storm

high-rising surf  
pounding  
swirling

waves beating  
on towering cliffs  
spume flying  
skywards

all around  
the crash  
the thunder  
the howl  
of power unfettered

absorbing us  
into its life  
elemental  
exhilarating

exhausting

departing  
drained  
but ecstatic  
we are aware  
the photos  
will be amazing

but still only  
a poor reminder  
of the day  
we were one  
with the wind.

## CRACKED

In the mirror  
I am distorted  
split  
down my forehead  
and my nose  
across my mouth  
and chin

as if  
I am two separate selves  
which look alike  
but act apart

and  
if I close one eye  
I can hide  
my left-sided deeds  
from my right-sided soul

but then  
I can do that  
without a broken mirror.

## UNDER OBSERVATION

A blasé browser  
she idles along aisles  
saunters round shelves  
casually toting  
an open bag

suspicious  
he observes as she  
picks up products  
inspects  
rejects  
and puts them back

as he watches  
she wanders away  
dissatisfied  
and departs

turning back to his task  
he makes a memo  
in his mind  
for a caustic critique

*stock so shoddy  
the shoplifter shunned it*

on this  
his final  
Secret Shopper assignment  
it's a denunciation  
to die for!



Petal of Gul Mohar flower on temple wall, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Antonia Alexandra Klimenko was first introduced on the BBC and to the literary world by the legendary James Meary Tambimuttu of Poetry London. Her work has appeared in (among others) *Live Encounters*, *XXI Century World Literature* (in which she represents France) and *Maintenant: Journal of Contemporary Dada and Writing and Art* archived at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. and New York's Museum of Modern Art. She is the recipient of two grants: one from Poets in Need, of which Michael (100 Thousand Poets for Change) Rothenberg is a co-founder; the second—the 2018 Generosity Award bestowed on her by Kathleen Spivack and Joseph Murray for her outstanding service to international writers through SpokenWord Paris where she is Writer/Poet in Residence. Her poetry collection, *On the Way to Invisible*, is forthcoming in Spring of 2021.



## NOVEMBER

Myth of unsolved mystery  
 Color of smoke and shadow  
 What have you done November  
 with October? last September?  
 Not even cold December  
 could resist your profound shudder—  
 your dark obsessions musty scent  
 distant rolls of thunder

Silent film on tiptoe—  
 Chaplin Bergman Pasolini—  
 heavy trains of thought  
 limping through me now

Deep in my throat's forest  
 your oboe's haunting timbre--  
 twisting tones of burnt sienna  
 living embers turned to ash

November  
 dismembered  
 hands pointing to  
 The Eleventh Hour  
 ever on the edge of slumber  
 your days of dead  
 were never numbered

Antonia Alexandra Klimenko

## A WRITER'S HABIT

for David Barnes  
*"Make it come alive!"*

The hour is turning shades of blue  
and I in eclipse like this crescent moon  
lament the loss of fullness  
in these shadows passing through

Ancient echoes  
resound in me are profound in me  
as from another time and place--  
yet cannot fill this hole in me  
Heart's whole of me this shattered space

We trace our lineage from dying scrolls  
to lips of living Light--  
harmonic vibrations of the soul  
intonations approximations  
howling breathing illuminations  
flickering candles in the night

We catch the blur of a reflection  
in a café window a passing train  
as the scent of perfume  
still unnamed  
(or is it only our perception)  
skims our senses drifts by evokes  
moves in past tenses  
then falls away in silence  
undisturbed

Anonymous passers-by  
hum a distant tune inside our brain  
Memory fades to black  
We looking back upon histories  
draw ink like blood from collapsed veins---  
slide the needle to present perfect  
score another line or two  
for the monkey on our back



## TWILIGHT

His love of open space  
left blanks between his words  
gaps between his teeth  
silences within  
All intervals in time--  
the measure of height and width  
the depth in which all things exist  
and move moved in him--  
a boundless three dimensional  
journeying between the planets and the stars  
the flat surfaces of his mind

How he distanced himself  
from things and people  
invading his terrain--  
floor space parking space  
objects and events which occurred  
in the space which occupied him--the Absolute Space--  
was beyond even him

Often he would go to great lengths  
extending himself  
the rings around his eyes--  
sunken in their dark orbits  
spinning  
in some alternate Universe

Space  
is relative to position and direction  
he said  
but only in the physical realm  
The celestial beauty of inner space  
is infinite  
There is no separation between  
sunrise and sunset  
shadow and light  
the dead and the living  
Life belongs to both worlds  
and to neither--  
rests in the breath  
inhabits the mystery  
of here  
and oh so there

He said he said  
taking one last drag  
on his burnt-out cigarette  
before he shut the door

behind him  
Blew his brains out  
in the hallway he did

*Now, go to Hell !*  
he said

## THE MERRY-GO-ROUND

So here we go again you and I  
picking up speed on our magic steed  
riding sliding up and down  
whirling round and round  
with no ending or beginning

Everything comes full-circle  
Everything passes through us--  
a breath a memory a vision  
some inexplicable Miracle  
that has happened before  
that is happening right now  
all at the same time

One moment...  
you're a child of six  
gliding into the sunset on a wooden pony  
Next moment...  
you're a child of six-ty  
shuffling back into yourself  
like your favorite rerun

Tonight  
your dreams have packed their bags  
and are leaving for Paris without you  
your night-lite is flirting with that first star on the right  
all the lovers in the world are coming together  
in spontaneous combustion

In this very moment...  
a stellar explosion thousands of light years away  
is spinning through space  
is becoming that radiant smile  
on your down-turned face  
Past future and present  
are converging in harmonic synchronistic rhythm  
The sun and moon are aligning  
with Venus Jupiter and Mars  
Energy synergy electricity deaf lightning  
is coursing through your varicose veins  
Every broken atom every imagined pain  
every cell is being reborn  
Words that have flown south  
missing in action or in revision  
are coming alive are exploding into light  
are *taking back the night*  
The unspoken and unsaid at this very minute  
are orbiting your head

Soon...  
dust particles are colliding coalescing  
merging converging to form a new planet T  
The music of the spheres is unrehearsed  
Black cosmic rays are holding the magnetic field--  
a convex mirror in reverse  
My tears a cinematic film  
are rolling back into my eyes  
Regret that once escaped my lips  
is falling to its knees  
is begging me to PLEASE not wear it  
like a saddle 'round my hips  
is begging for forgiveness

*continued overleaf...*

© Antonia Alexandra Klimenko



THE MERRY-GO-ROUND *contd...*

So here we are again you and I  
 on a carousel in the park  
 We fall off our horse and dust ourselves off  
 and fall in love again of course  
 before it grows cold and dark

One day we'll get it right you know  
 The moon is out tonight you know  
 Nothing is by chance  
 The music is playing  
 Remember our first kiss?  
 Please save me this one last dance

## FAMILY ALBUM

The key is in the lock  
*Places, please!*  
 Dinner will be ready in half an hour  
 There's Susie clearing the table  
 Photo of Skippy feeding the cat  
 Here's Hubby taking out the garbage  
 Morning will follow  
 Kiss me to the door  
 this one last time  
 We made love or didn't make love  
 The night before we cried in our pillow  
 Dust collects with photos on bookshelves  
 Friends come and go  
 Babies are born parents die  
 Everyone say *Cheese!*

One by one the pages turn  
 moments pile up  
 Whole sentences semicolons  
 in linear suspension  
 He said this she said that  
 sometimes out of sequence  
 But does it really matter ?  
 marveling as we do  
 in spite of it all  
 in spite of it all  
 how everything you loved  
 or didn't really  
 is a voice remembered--  
 how even the unknown  
 will soon ring of the familiar

Attracta Fahy's background is Nursing/Social Care. She works as a Psychotherapist, lives in Co.Galway, and has three children. She completed her MA in Writing NUIG in 2017. Her poems have been published in Live Encounters, Banshee, Poetry Ireland Review, Poethead, Orbis, Abridged, Impspired, Silver Birch Press, Honest Ulsterman, and many other magazines, at home and abroad. She was the October winner in Irish Times; New Irish Writing 2019, has been nominated for a Pushcart prize, included in Anthologies; Impspired, and Of Mouth Northern Women's Writings, nominated for Best of the Web 2019, shortlisted for 2018 Over The Edge New Writer of The Year, and long listed for 2019, shortlisted for Allingham Poetry Prize 2019. She was a featured reader at the January Over The Edge Open Reading in Galway. Fly on the Wall Press published her first chapbook collection *Dinner in the Fields* in March 2020.



## DECKING

In bubbles of colour, hydrangea  
bulge between rails,  
kiss potted geranium, milkwort,  
and poppy.  
Willow legged, green bamboo,  
stretch towards sun.

Brown strips of worn board,  
lead into earth, memories  
of children who run its tracks,  
pick crawling insects, pluck  
slithery creatures;  
later, wash hands hurriedly,  
the scent of barbeque  
smoke infuses the air.

It needs something, a new coat of paint,  
blue perhaps,  
nature overtakes it with green  
sheets of mildew, algae and mould,  
creeps into joints, crevices.

Patient, it waits its time, in the future.  
And one day, workmen sit for tea,  
the boards splintered between their feet,  
their laughter bellowing out jokes,  
so much the joints rattle, threaten to split,  
and the table creaks.

Attracta Fahy



## THE DAO OF A&E

Friday morning, early January, the season of flu.  
Three hours queuing, my ninety one year old aunt  
stares at the ceiling reciting prayers.

The long stretch of linoleum, greens across floor,  
one vibrant red square, two yellow strips, each side  
run parallel all the way to a grey wall, orange curtains  
keep us focused.

On and off the sirens, low voices in short flurry,  
silence. Blue skimpy blankets cover the old people  
waiting on trolleys,  
'We are very sparse with everything,' the staff say,  
I wrap my coat around her.

'Apologises for the shortage,' they say,  
– no pillows either. I use my handbag.  
A nurse with a kind voice tells us she doesn't feel good  
about this,  
'We are still seeing yesterday's patients.'

Inside the waiting area, constant flapping door  
becomes rhythm, hum of ambulance crews chatting,  
another admission, another old person checked in,  
from different counties, even as far as Donegal.

It goes on all day, trolley after trolley, chairs, wheelchairs,  
doors open, shut, and another patient lined up to the right,  
to the left, in every corner.

We waited in noise, screens, flashing blue lights dominate  
periphery. Tired of distraction I give up trying to read,  
with my aunt saying prayers, nothing to do,  
I practice mindfulness, breathe.

A lime coloured circle centred on a random jade tile  
the size of a face, takes my eye. I ponder the intention  
of interior design, wonder at the madness, this bizarre floor,  
then zoom back to the circle, began to reflect on mandalas,  
how they contain.

Our wait goes on for two full days, and nights  
before my aunt on a trolley, fasting, get's a cubicle.

## WANGARI MAATHAI

*Environmentalist, political, activist, writer. Founder of; The Green Belt Movement. Nobel Peace Prize winner 2004 for her 'contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace. First African woman, and first environmentalist, to win the prize.*

*All I want is to plant trees, spread a green belt across every nation.\**

Born in a mud hut in Kenya, you tilled fields,  
wished light to last longer, so you could cultivate  
more, until your mother had courage  
to send you to school.  
As a child, you watched trees felled  
And ached.

Your courage to resist norms, refusal  
to lower your gaze in presence of men.  
You travelled through villages,  
encouraged women to see  
*The tree is a little bit of our future.*

Beaten and jailed many times, you said,  
*'I have done nothing.*  
*I was only planting trees at freedom corner.'*  
In your work reached far away countries.

*We are not only losing the water, we are losing  
the soil.* You made your bed,  
they tried to kill you.

At the centre of a circular flower garden  
in Pittsburg, dedicated to Gaia, women  
and children of the world, a lone ornamental  
maple tree stands for your global vision,  
signifies  
*how one small seed can change the world -*

*\* All italics are quotes from Wangari Maatha*

## IN PRAISE OF SILENCE

As friends were busy praising your good fortune  
– I stayed quiet,  
an occasional nod. I rumbled, wondered,  
what you were thinking when you purchased  
the home of a family evicted.

We knew your bargain tossed them further in the pit,  
'they made mistakes' you said,  
as you put on lipstick, 'and I don't want to hear  
anything bad.'  
We don't speak of distressed children, a mother  
with cancer, and a father out of a job.  
We crack open champagne.

You knew when neighbours stepped in,  
and it didn't sell at the auction, banks, revenue  
at war, you could offer pittance.  
We raise our glasses,  
praise goes on, and I'm a killjoy.

You ask how to cleanse negative energy, friends  
chime in with solutions, as if pain's ghost  
can be cleared with a swoon of incense and herbs.  
Burning sage will not help, neither will cedar.



Barbara Crooker is a poetry editor for *Italian Americana*, and author of nine full-length books of poetry; *The Book of Kells* (Cascade Books, 2018) won the Best Poetry Book 2018 Award from Poetry by the Sea and *Some Glad Morning* was published in 2019 (Pitt Poetry Series). Her awards include the WB Yeats Society of New York Award, the Thomas Merton Poetry of the Sacred Award, and three Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Creative Writing Fellowships. Her work appears in a variety of anthologies, including *Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania*, and *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*.



## NEW ORLEANS

where we learned that a great roux is cooked on high,  
wooden spoon making the sign for infinity until  
it's the color of peanut butter or dark bourbon. That  
anything you have in the fridge is all right in a gumbo:  
tasso ham, andouille sausage or fat-headed shrimp  
and crawfish. If you mix in enough rice and filé powder,  
it's jambalaya. Pralines are the marriage of pecans,  
brown sugar, and butter, and even the bits that stick  
in the pan can sweeten your day. The Holy Trinity  
is not the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but onions, peppers,  
and celery. Purple, green, and gold look good together,  
and you can eat foods in those colors, too. There are pairs  
of beads in all the live oak trees, tangled in the Spanish moss,  
left over from last year's Mardi Gras, shining in the sun.  
So meet me on neutral ground. Gimme a little somethin',  
mister. Throw in some lagniappe. Pour me a chicory coffee  
with a side of beignets, and let the powdered sugar fall on my plate,  
a dusting of snow on the ground.

Barbara Crooker

## AT SEVENTY

No one wants to hear about it, the body's slow wreckage: skin cracking like porcelain left in the kiln too long, words that recede mid-sentence like the tide slowly ebbing. A string of minor infirmities, I tell them like a rosary: the need for more breath going up hills, the clarity of events from ten years ago, while yesterday is cloudy weather. Sleep that fails to come, the digital clock at 3 am. Knees on the stairs, refusing to hinge. Spots on the hand that mimic the small toad I found sunk in mud in a corner of the vegetable garden last spring. Bunions that scream Mercy! at the end of the day.

## AXIOMS

Whoever said, "God never gives us more than we can carry" has never done any heavy lifting.

All roads lead to confusing traffic circles, at least in New Jersey.

If one door closes, don't count on that window to open; you might only get your fingers slammed.

Count neither your eggs nor your chickens.

Look on the sunny side of eggs.

If you are a liar and your pants are burning, who will put the fire out?

Instead of saving for a rainy day, try counting the silver raindrops as they fall.

Don't look for the silk lining in clouds; water vapor is difficult to weave.

Why would you want to make a purse out of a pig's ear?

The heart is a lonely stuntman.

## ELECTION 2020

The corn is ripening all over Pennsylvania, fields and fields of it, slowly turning to gold. In the weeds at the edges, red political signs sprout overnight, radiating hate in nearly visible rays, like cartoons. Our amber waves of grain. How have we come to this, creating others instead of neighbors? Mistrusting anyone whose skin is different, who has an accent? And this makes me think, who gets to decide who doesn't belong? Who has a place at the table? Whose mother traveled all those miles through the desert, no water, to have her baby placed in a cage? Who builds the wall we are placing around our own hearts?

## REDBUDS, VIRGINIA

*Cercis canadensis*

We'd been in the West this spring, lucking into the super bloom of poppies, although I'd been following wildflower websites for weeks—so the luck was really that we were in California at all. Coming off the highway, we stumbled into bare hillsides exploding in citrine and butterscotch, papaya and mandarin; the sky, a flawless blue backdrop behind them, the opposite side of the color wheel—

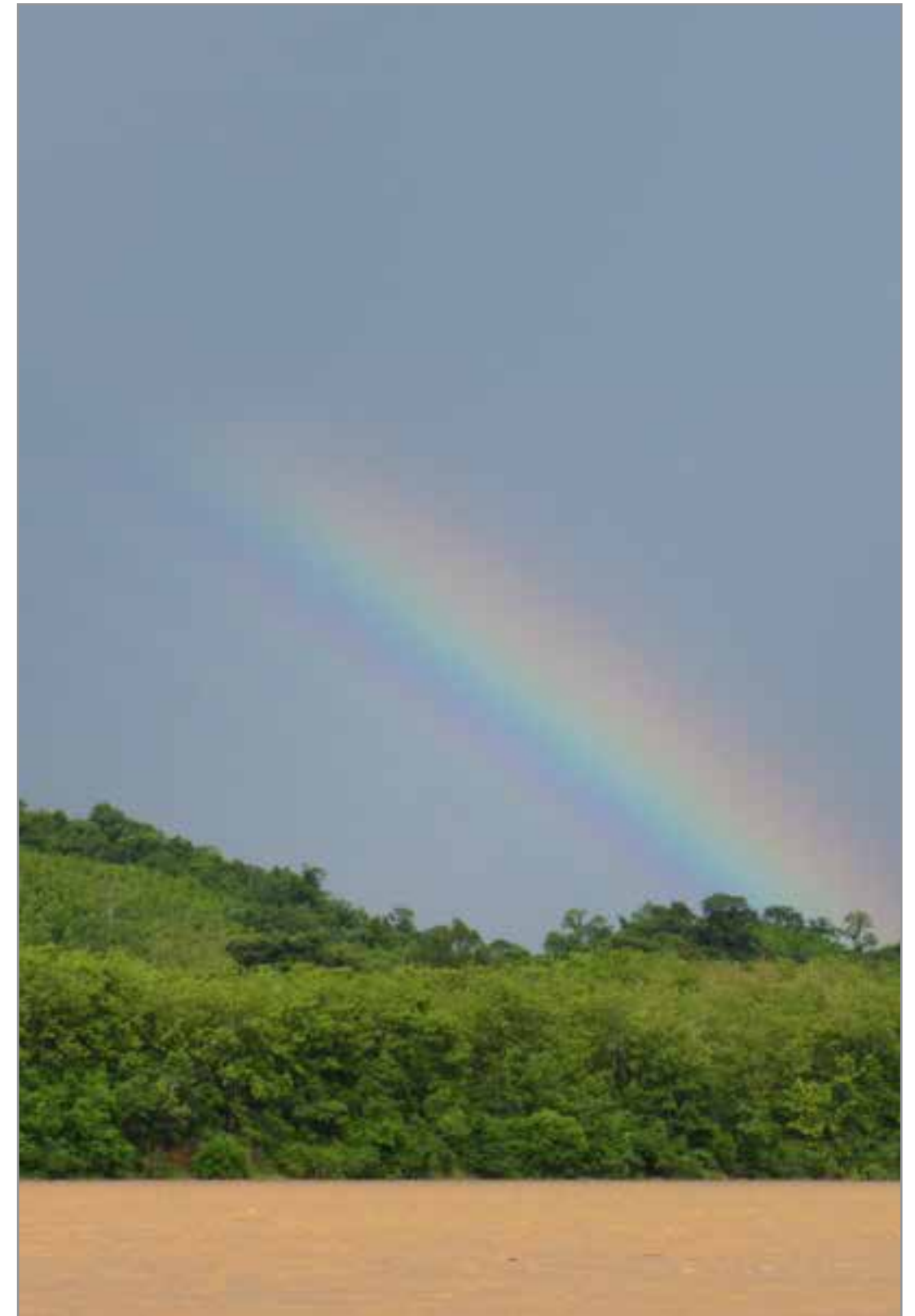
Back here in Virginia, the roadsides and mountains have burst into purple: redbuds everywhere, magenta and ultraviolet, going for broke with their glorious inflorescence. It's orchids! as far as the eye can see. When this brief bloom time is over, fascicles litter the lawn, baubles from a broken necklace. And then, just when you thought beauty had left you, the bare black branches break out in hearts, simple and translucent, that will remain steadfast, green flags flying, through summer's drought, the scorching sun—



## DUFUR

*The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.  
- Walt Whitman, Song of the Open Road*

Climbing the steep hill to the microwave tower,  
the gravel path leading us on, I am struck dumb  
by this landscape, like no place I've ever been before:  
soft green hills, rolling seas of wheat, some enormous  
sky both dwarfing us and tucking us in. My  
friends are walking ahead through a field  
of lupines, and there is something about this day  
that makes me want to freeze the frame: three  
women, two dogs, deep silence, and the troubles  
of the world nowhere in sight. Only grasses  
and wildflowers, bending in the wind.  
And the light tread of our sneakers  
trudging on the earth, *the earth that is  
sufficient.*



Rainbow after the rain over the Mekong, Laos PDR, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Dr Beatriz Copello, is a former member of NSW Writers Centre Management Committee, writes poetry, reviews, fiction and plays. Beatriz's poetry has been published in literary journals such as Southerly and Australian Women's Book Review and in many other publications and anthologies in Australia and overseas in English and Spanish. She has read her poetry at events organised by the Sydney Writers Festival, the NSW Writers Centre, the Multicultural Arts Alliance, Refugee Week Committee, Humboldt University (USA), Ubud (Bali) Writers Festival.



## MALEFICARUM

they called them 'witches'  
and they died by fire  
sometimes hanged  
others by drowning  
innocent women  
healers and midwives  
who lived on their own  
they were wise females  
independent and self-sufficient  
reveres of nature and Earth  
the populace perceived them  
as evil and imagined them  
huddled over a cauldron  
to create potions and poisons  
boiling bones and frogs  
the 'Hammer of Witches' dictated  
how to identify the sinners  
who cohabited with the devil  
torture - confession - death penalty  
demonology at its zenith  
persecution of those  
believed to be heretics  
sorceresses' power  
their knowledge to cure

Beatriz Copello

## NIKOLA TESLA

Slowly he enters  
into a world of sombre shadows  
where cadavers rest without concerns in a life parody

scared of them  
he wants to pray but how?  
anchored to his shoes there is one metal ball

one note sounds ...  
on a one string discarded violin  
a deaf man cries as he meticulously plays Chopin

a dog barks  
the closed eyes open to see  
what or who is waiting behind the closed door

pain pleasure sex  
memories hidden in a sick mind  
rancour disguised as love flagellation in the initiation ceremony

salacious mind orgasms  
a stick that writes on sand  
inventions plus madness, poverty and loneliness

he wakes up  
the nightmare left like his pigeons  
but what is left? Electricity energy and the magic numbers 369.

## DEFIANCE

A universe hidden in your palm  
power ingrained in your cells  
Who are you blaming destroyer?  
Ignorant of our fears you immolate  
the innocent as well as the rebel.  
Universal joke your power  
to create miracles. Blessings  
to the hens who lay eggs  
and the roosters who sing  
when the sun rises in the horizon.  
Predictability of protons, neutrons  
or light travelling through empty space.  
Like an oyster living in a hard shell  
shamelessly you hid our inheritance  
in one of the pockets of your robe.



## AWAKENING

Morning glory honeysuckle  
Convolvulus Lonicera  
kisses and cuddles  
awakenings of the souls  
embraces of the minds  
the radio is playing Mahler.  
A tea would be nice  
for the rested bodies.  
The dogs are running  
up down the corridor  
they also want their meal,  
and the sun dances  
in the front garden  
waiting for Godot.



Gul Mohar early morning under an overcast sky, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Bernadette Gallagher is a poet from Ireland. Her work has been published in Irish Examiner, Boyne Berries, ROPES, Stanzas, in the US peace journal DoveTales, In the Cinnamon Corners, Ó Bhéal Five Words and in various online journals. A selection of her work has been recorded by the University College Dublin Poetry Archive. She has been invited to read her work in Ireland, UK, US, and at the Sahitya Akademi in New Delhi, India. Further details at [bernadettegallagher.blogspot.ie](http://bernadettegallagher.blogspot.ie)



## REMINDERS OF THINGS TO DO

grass gone to seed  
birds and bees feed  
weeds grow in gutters  
watering the plants below

paper on the floor  
boxes stacked high  
clothes laid out —  
waiting for an iron

seeds out of date, unopened,  
chimney in need of a brush  
paint cracked on the door  
books — some shelved, some not

walk down the lane, listen  
for buzzard call  
watch as they soar and dive  
remember this.

Bernadette Gallagher

## MULLAGHANISH 2020

We climbed and saw her  
across the valley  
Goddess Anu lying back  
breasts bared to the sky.

Like sheep, we zig-zagged  
our way up, sun high  
the sound of birds and water  
flowing downstream.

Standing on the highest spot  
we point to familiar landmarks —  
look for where our home might be

unseen but knowing it is out there  
a few giant steps away.

## OUT WALKING

Like Morse Code  
one barks  
another responds, quickly  
followed by a third, fourth  
and fifth message until  
the whole neighbourhood  
of house protectors  
have decoded my presence.

On my way home the sounds retreat.  
The dogs lie again in wait, alone.



## DON'T WRITE ABOUT DEATH

Maybe you could write a poem  
about words, those words you  
copy in your word book.

I chose *jejune* — unsatisfying to the mind  
*veridic* — shown to be true  
*ratiocination* — a reasoned train of thought  
*hegemony* — the strongest and most  
powerful, able to control others.

Why are these words so *recondite*, so  
obscure?

There is no *insouciance* here  
no carefree thoughts, but  
concern for the *ontological*  
the why of being.

I am but an *epigone*, a less  
distinguished follower  
leading to my demise.



Bodi Tree or Tree of Life, Karnataka, India. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Beth Copeland is the author of three full-length poetry books: *Blue Honey*, recipient of the 2017 Dogfish Head Poetry Prize; *Transcendental Telemarketer*; and *Traveling through Glass*, recipient of the 1999 Bright Hill Press Poetry Book Award. She owns and operates Tiny Cabin, Big Ideas™, a residency for writers.



## ABANDONED NEST

You hand me a nest, a bowl of pine straw, moss,  
and leaves with three eggs like speckled jelly beans,  
hardened, unhatched; we wonder what happened,

why the bird left, and laugh about weird locations  
where wrens build nests—on a grapevine wreath,  
in the crotch of your jeans on the clothesline.

Later, I look at properties on my laptop, dreaming  
of a place of my own, a condo in long-leaf pines  
or a brick church I could convert into a home.

I pack miniature houses in bubblewrap to ship to  
my daughter and sift through a battered footlocker  
of old diaries and letters too heavy to lift, deciding

what to keep, discarding the rest. When did we quit  
trying? When did the life we warmed with our breath  
turn cold? When was our ending etched in stone?

Beth Copeland

## THE VISITOR

I step out of myself onto the lawn,  
away from sumacs with spikes of red,  
lemon-scented berries, from fallen trees  
rotting under a canopy of poplar leaves,

from milk caps and amanitas poking  
through moss, their white, fleshy heads  
heavenly or deadly, from the water  
oak and sugar maple grove.

My fawn shadows me onto gravel,  
stepping cautiously as if on first snow.  
We graze on purple heal-all, purslane,  
bitter dandelion and wild violets.

When I raise my head, a woman  
speaks to me through the screen  
door, a silhouette of stillness. *Don't  
be afraid. I won't hurt you.*

*You're welcome here.* But who is she  
to invite me, as if I'm the visitor,  
when she's the guest? These woods  
belong to my spotted fawn and me.

## APIARY

Cultivate balm and humility.  
Forage in fields  
of milkweed, lavender, and sage.

Dive-bomb dandelion suns.  
Carry pollen to the humming hive.  
Fan flames with your wings.

Don't envy the odalisque  
sleeping on white satin, her torso  
elongated and small-waisted.

Move with millions  
en masse toward one goal—gold  
in the hexagonal honeycomb.

Measure the angle from tree  
to hive. Dance to show others  
the way home.



## BUDDHA, BUZZED

The fly wants to get out, bumping into the glass  
but unable to pass through the pane to pines, to green  
poplar leaves, palmetto grass, and fetid trash where a fly  
might feast. Zooming to the lamp, it perches on the burlap  
shade, then nosedives into the lightbulb as if it's the sun.  
What would Buddha say to the fly? That glass is an illusion?  
That life is suffering? That if it meditates on the windowsill  
long enough it will pass from this transient path to a higher  
plane of existence? I've shooed many a fly from the face  
of a sleeping child, but how do I know if it paused there  
to do harm or to whisper a blessing into the baby's ear?

Tomorrow I'll find a dead fly on the sill, its metallic blue  
thorax like a miniature shield. I'll pick it up with a tissue  
and throw it into the trash, relieved I didn't have to swat it  
and bear the burden of its death, that it bludgeoned itself  
against the glass and passed from this dimension of blood  
and breath onto the land of enlightenment or samsara, only  
to return as a cobra or cat or someone like me who ponders  
these questions without knowing that I'm pushing against  
an invisible barrier, frustrated, wringing my hands, eyes  
glued to a world that lies beyond my grasp, trying to pass  
through this fence of flesh to the other side of the glass.



Peacock in Buddhist temple north Thailand, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Betsy Mars is a poet, photographer, and occasional publisher. She founded Kingly Street Press and released her first anthology, *Unsheathed: 24 Contemporary Poets Take Up the Knife*, in October 2019. Her work has recently appeared in Verse Virtual, San Pedro River Review, Kissing Dynamite, and Better Than Starbucks. Her chapbook, *Alinea*, was published in January 2019. In the *Muddle of the Night*, with Alan Walowitz, is coming soon from Arroyo Seco Press. Her poem, *Pyriscence*, won one of the Alexandria Quarterly First Line Poetry Contest Series awards in 2020. She is grateful for having had the experience of living in Brazil as a child which exposed her to another culture and language at an early age. She is an avid traveler (when possible), language learner, logophile, and animal enthusiast.

## PROVIDENCE

I want to live where it's possible  
to have a doe lay down her fawn  
in a pile of violets and cedar  
upon my lawn, with bird song  
to lull since I can't sing - to be  
the bird (or even the fawn),  
the doe out searching when milk  
is scant, the rabbits tumbling  
in the field, the woman who mows  
and walks the labyrinth - or even  
the labyrinth itself, pilgrims  
mumbling, quiet path of meditation  
laid out for work, a different kind  
of use than this daily wearing,  
feeling tread upon, a kind  
of searing self-abuse. I want  
to live in fields of violet, lie down  
in the temple of the twilight.



Betsy Mars



## FROM A DREAM OF DROWNING CHILDREN

Everywhere the I submerged  
there were two of them  
a boy and girl, eyes pleading  
reflected in spoons  
or the surface of lagoons  
the wait, for me, endless  
their lashes wet  
so long and bright.

## RED FLAG WINDS

*For CK*

Charles returns on a gust through an open window.  
In my room curtains billow, blinds lift,  
paintings hung on nails shift as air comes in.  
In the night, the house shakes  
with what could be a foreshock.  
A door slams as the house seeks equilibrium.  
As I settle back into sleep, he laughs,  
his mouth full of air again.  
We find each other in the hall.  
There is no aftershock  
as we grapple with our luck,  
the wild joy of it all.



Cathy Altmann's first collection, *Circumnavigation* (Poetica Christi Press, 2014), won the FAW Anne Elder Award. Her second collection, *things we know without naming* (Poetica Christi Press), was published in 2018. She is a poet from Melbourne, Australia, whose poems have appeared in journals, anthologies and on trains. She holds a Masters in Creative Writing on poetry and cancer, and teaches English and Latin. 'lacrimae rerum' was written at the height of Melbourne's lockdown in 2020.



## LACRIMAE RERUM

Close of day. The  
cloud trails its  
grey edge over  
the city, over  
the road cresting  
near suburban  
houses. Trees are  
silhouetted – more  
solid than the  
cloud, which  
masses in the  
evening air, a  
sculpted form  
of ash and ochre lit  
with white, like  
the depths of  
a distant nebula. It  
says something  
in a language I  
have forgotten,  
of the pocket  
handkerchief of  
grief I hide and  
twist, of the ash-  
ochre pulling through  
my breast. It collects  
the tears in things,  
suspended between  
the sleeping city  
and the sky – pulling  
them from us,  
holding them in  
jars to the last of  
the light.

Cathy Altmann

Charlotte Innes is the author of *Descanso Drive*, a first book of poems (Kelsay Books, 2017). She has also published two chapbooks, *Licking the Serpent* (2011) and *Reading Ruskin in Los Angeles* (2009), both with Finishing Line Press. Her poems have appeared in Valparaiso Poetry Review, The Hudson Review, Tampa Review, The Anglican Theological Review, The Sewanee Review and Rattle, with some anthologized in *Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond* (Beyond Baroque Books, 2015) and *The Best American Spiritual Writing for 2006* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006), amongst others.



## THE UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE

*after Infinity, a painting by Annie Clavel*

“Can love change?” you say, “not ours of course,”  
as you flip the burgers in a pan. I force  
a smile. “What do you mean?” Meanwhile, fleets  
of Nazi warplanes buzz my thoughts and the heat  
of the kitchen turns my sweat to blood. “Now sauce,”

you murmur, searching the fridge. Some say divorce,  
oddly, can topple liberty – with remorse,  
or grief for good times, sucked on like a teat.  
Can love change

so much you want to ditch it all? “It’s Claus  
and Marguerite,” you say. “They’ve split.” But the source  
of what you’re thinking – we both know. I retreat,  
warrior woman facing fire, till a sweet  
smile turns wasps to diamonds. This shifting discourse.  
*Can love change?*

Charlotte Innes, photograph by John Rou.



## PANDEMIC #6

Naked again, she twirls along my street,  
sits down in traffic, picks up stones like plums,  
inspects them, throws them away. Katha screams,  
*Miguel, Miguel, where are you, Miguel?* He comes

at last, lays down a blanket and they sleep,  
unless they're high. Then it's a night of curses,  
screams. By morning, the sidewalk's inches deep  
with litter. For Miguel and Katha, home. For us

sheltered people, already fearful enough,  
their life's a deluge flooding ours, a madness  
we can't control—for all our meetings. It's rough.  
The screams break us apart, ignite old sadness.

Worried for our health, we envision viral  
droplets filling the air. Two people, I tell  
myself, of hundreds. All the numbers spiral.  
To the East, more madness. This won't end well.

AFTER DRIVING HOME  
FROM THE CREMATORIUM

Remember how you forced yourself to wait  
in the sparse shade for ten slow minutes  
for the No Parking time to end, and how,  
except for the distant river rush of cars,  
there was quiet, the late light deepening  
till even your dusty feet seemed to shine,  
and how in the awful weeks to come, you hung  
on to the way that light at certain times  
can thicken pastel colors, thicken the air,  
as if it were a presence, and how that made you  
think, not of the stillness that is death,  
nor of the body that is not the body,  
but of quiet afternoons, of waiting,  
the back of your neck burning in the heat.



## STONE, GLASS, WOOD

*after a visit to Lincoln Cathedral*

A dog is peeking round a pillar,  
with an impish sideways glance.  
A fiddler—what? both man and lizard?—  
sings to a sprawling girl in back.  
With eyes closed, she seems entranced  
or smashed. A party. Carved in stone.

Why not? Today, through high windows,  
the late spring light conveys a canny  
whisper from the sun: *enjoy!*  
Savor the lacy canopies  
of wood, the polyphonics of  
misericord and reredos.

Applaud the colorful scenes on glass  
that glorify the Lord, the pictures  
of sinfulness, or hell, the sequel,  
that kept the people terrified—  
so clerics thought. Praise the masons'  
skill in carving human cravings,

viz., the lecherous serpents curled  
round Adam and Eve, the sweet bottom  
of a naked boy dancing, or comic  
replicas to tease their friends,  
two men with pudgy cheeks, a louche,  
an almost toothless man, yawning.

If glass is sacred transformation  
and wood can soften into beauty,  
earthbound stone smirks at how  
we scorn each other, why we laugh,  
like the impish dog who seems to breathe,  
*play on, but careful, trouble's coming.*

Claudia Serea's poems and translations have been published in *Field*, *New Letters*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Malahat Review*, *Oxford Poetry*, and elsewhere. She is the author of five poetry collections, most recently *Twoxism*, a collaboration with visual artist Maria Haro (8th House Publishing, 2018). Serea received the 2013 *New Letters* Readers Award, the *Levure Littéraire* 2014 Performance Award, and several honorable mentions for poems and chapbooks. Her poems have been translated in French, Italian, Arabic, and Farsi, and have been featured in *The Writer's Almanac*. She is a founding editor of *National Translation Month*, and she co-hosts The Williams Poetry Readings.



## HOOPS

I stopped to watch the kids playing  
in the courtyard, yelling,  
their sweaty faces,  
lit eyes,  
quick hands and feet,

the ball, alive,  
the dribbles,  
the shouts—

Pass, pass!!  
Shoot!  
*Bang*—missed—  
Here, here!  
*Swoosh*—  
Score!!

A few cars passed by.

From the corner  
of my eye,  
I saw Death  
down the street,  
in his ragged raincoat,  
scurrying away.

That's right,  
I muttered.

Nothing for you to see here,  
motherfucker.

Claudia Serea

## ONCE, I WENT TO A PSYCHIC WHO TOLD ME THE FUTURE IS MEANT TO BE

This water bottle,  
this thirsty gulp.

This messenger bike,  
crossing at crazy speed,  
this crowd at the traffic light,  
this new skyline,

everything is meant to be.

This suitcase  
I pack all night.

This camera I bought  
because I didn't have any pictures  
of my previous life,

this woman who volunteers for a church,  
who gives me her business card  
with a number I'll never call,

are meant to be.

This one way ticket,  
this stamp in my passport  
showing this alien number,  
are meant to be.

This Customs officer  
who looks bored,  
hands me back my papers  
and says, *Welcome to the United States*  
without a hint of kidding.

This new money  
that can't buy back my life.

This pair of Roman sandals.

This step away from the past,  
towards you.

All are meant to be.



## WINDY NIGHTS ARE LIKE ALCOHOL

They both bring back the past  
in sips and blows,  
both make me dizzy,  
drifting.

And, of course, the wind doesn't speak to me  
and the leaves don't gossip  
in a foreign language,  
but still—

On this windy night, I walked out of the bar  
where we went for drinks for my colleague Steve  
who's leaving the office,  
and where I found myself telling Sam  
the story of my life, over Heineken,  
from Romania to the United States  
(short version, because he asked,  
and you should know that Sam and Steve  
are half my age,  
and charming).

So I realized I drifted through life  
sometimes with eyes closed,  
other times, wide open,  
and, in rare moments, seeing it from above,  
understanding it  
with a dizzying clarity.

Left and right, people rushed, laughing,  
chatting on the phone,  
looking,  
not seeing,  
engrossed in their own screens.

The night was windy  
and charged.

A Chinese woman passed by  
with a blanket over her head,  
pushing a loaded cart  
with two big sacks of cans  
hanging on its sides,  
contorted wings.

And her small eyes met mine.

*I've seen  
what you've seen,  
they said.*

## IN THE CITY WITH TIRED BONES

With her long legs  
and a short-short dress,  
spring rushes on 33rd street.

She's late.  
She's sorry she's late—  
sorry, not sorry, everyone knows.

In the city with tired winter bones,  
with her messy hair  
and mascara-streaked face,  
spring trots down 33rd street  
in ridiculous high heels,  
looking for the wrong address.

From Penn Station to Manhattan Mall,  
she dances with bald men.  
*You know I'm no good*, she says.

With blazing yellow daffodils  
and blasting fire truck sirens,  
spring shows up on 33rd street,

and brings me an email from Esmeralda,  
the famous psychic and tarologist,  
who promises me money and fortune,  
money and fortune,  
if I only click this link.

In the city with hacked bones,  
with pigeons and trumpets,  
and a Rangers parade,

springs leads her marching band on 33rd street  
in this city of diamond bones,  
and promises money and fortune,  
money and fortune,  
and fame, and good poems,  
and blazing daffodils.

*What about love?* I ask.  
*What about it*, she says.

## ON 33RD STREET, I WISHED IT WOULD SNOW

Granted, it was a gray day  
that smelled of snow,  
the low clouds needing just a nudge  
to let go of their down.

Wouldn't it be nice  
if I could make it snow?  
It can't be that hard.  
After all, in Romania there were rumors  
that Russians could make it rain at will.

It would be great to cover the world in white,  
a sheet over its sins and wounds,  
a chance to find new roads,  
a clean slate.

On 33rd Street, in the sparkling city  
full of Salvation Army bells,  
I wished it would snow.

And it did.

It can happen to you, too.

And when it does,  
you'll write the first letters  
on the new page,

dip a gloved finger  
in invisible ink  
and scribble

*I was here.*



Bayon temple, Siem Reap, Cambodia, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Colette is an award winning poet who resides in Galway in the West of Ireland. She writes in both Irish and English. She has fifteen publications which include a volume of short stories, *Ádh Mór*; as well as an academic study of the blind poet Anthony Raftery, an 18th century bard whose songs and poems are still recited and sung today. She has one volume of English poetry, *Sundial*, which was published by Arlen House Press. She also has two dual language collections of poetry by the same publisher; *Between Curses: Baine Géar*, and *In Castlewood: An Ghaoth Aduaidh*. Her work is on the syllabus in Primary, Secondary and Third Level colleges. Colette's latest collection (bilingual) is titled *Baine Géar: Sour Milk*, which is available in hardback and softback, published by Arlen House, 2016. : Colette is pursuing a PhD in the English department of NUI Galway; she also has a master's degree in modern Irish. Her newly published collection of Irish language poetry and art is entitled *Réabhlóideach* is published by Coiscéim, Dublin, 2020.

## EVE

Not less than coincidence  
this month of November,  
the month of Adam and Eve  
in the calendar of Islam, and I here with you.

You turn towards the tree  
that is mentioned in the Book,  
tempting fate, watching your every move,  
I pray to their holy scripture

on my knees. The hand of time,  
confessions of skin on skin,  
silent notes on repeat  
guide like a star as I journey East.



Colette Nic Aodha

## GOOD FORTUNE

I worried our house  
 had a floor of sand  
 but as days passed  
 I felt a touch of stone,

on stepping out  
 to gain perspective  
 I noted our position  
 rested on a cliff top

much too close to the edge,  
 I considered your brazenness,  
 the invitation to build,  
 looked down at my feet of sand.

You forwarded an architect's plan,  
 I sketched its outline  
 with a pencil of graphite,  
 theb buried it deep in the shale.

## SONNET

I dive into deepest blue;  
 Caragh lake and Lough Guitane,  
 when you hold me in your gaze so true  
 this unrequited love knows pain  
 of parting keener than the agony of Finn as he waved farewell to his only son  
 at Glenbeigh when Oisín was under Niamh's enchantment;  
 he went with her to Tír na nÓg, *Niamh Chinn Óir*, the golden haired one.  
 O fair-haired would-be lover I wish to implore you under crescent  
 moon to move soft and low over this unexpected declaration,  
 secret me with you in dreams as you traverse the Connor Pass.  
 I treasure memories of you, your tenderness towards your brother's children  
 who still live in the land of Ciar, domain of the son of Fergus.

In your absence I search for you in the still turquoise of Orbsen,  
 waiting to betroth you with aquamarines and this love song.

## NOT READING

This morning I cannot find Gerard Murphy's translations of old Irish lyrics and my internal organs begin to slowly collapse, I can neither stand or sit, walk or lie down, something is gnawing at the pit of my existence, I have to settle for Paul Muldoon and a breakfast of my discontent. Definitely breakfast and not brunch, in fact I haven't had a brunch for longer than I care to admit. The handsome artisan that I am having an affair with is far too busy and besides....

I should have thought of it years ago... married men... they never stick around long enough to get on your nerves and what is more they tell you the latest trend in holidaying (by the lakes in Finland).....good luck and have a lovely trip. New kids starting new schools (that they may have a long and fruitful education and be brimming with the blessings of God..... Oh, not my God darling, your own gods..... I wouldn't wish mine on anyone.....

To put the tin hat on things my turntable has come to a full stop and not even the mellowing strains of Dave Brubeck, who I always leave out for such emergencies, can soothe me out of my lost volume...Muldoon it is as my boiled egg cools and it is with great reluctance I start on *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing*, (signed Galway 2015, his usual scrawl) forearmed with the knowledge that I can reacquaint myself with King *Guaire* and his brother *Marban*, whom I dearly miss (I'm pretty sure there should be a *fada* over the 'a' in *Marban* but as they probably don't have fadas in America and since I can't find my *Murphy* I'll let that one pass)

I secretly despise (well maybe not so secretly) inadequate regurgitation of medieval verse the way in which it is smoothed out, that which is ragged and rough with beauty....

I Linger for a moment on the cover image of a lookout post on the Armagh hills and wonder if the vantage point is *Sliabh Gullion* or who knows what it is to drive the Concession road with a gun to your head..... while attempting to count your life in passing trees...

It has been a while since such tin assemblies vanished..... Replaced with booby traps on propaganda posters, desecration of graveyards, more savage forms of assassination like a crow bar down the throat or bog drownings, dissection and maiming by four wheel drive vehicles.....and other collections of close narratives which makes me yearn for the innocence of bullets.



Cynthia Schwartzberg Edlow is the author of *Horn Section All Day Every Day*, a 2020 Phillip H. McMath Post Publication Book Award Finalist, and *The Day Judge Spencer Learned the Power of Metaphor* (Salmon Poetry, 2018 and 2012, respectively). Honors include: the Red Hen Press Poetry Award, Tusculum Review Prize, Willow Review Prize, a Beullah Rose/Smartish Pace Prize, and three Pushcart Prize nominations, two of which were nominations from the Pushcart Prize Board of Contributing Editors. Recent poetry is in or new poetry is forthcoming from *Plume Poetry 7 Anthology*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Gargoyle*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Plume*, *Salamander*, *The Ilanot Review*, and *Mudfish Literary Magazine 22*. She is working on her third full-length poetry collection. Visit her at <http://cschwartzbergedlow.blogspot.com/>.



## Two Poems

Cynthia Schwartzberg Edlow

## DRIED MANGOES

Delicious like this, not messy juicy, not  
too sweet they mask their tang. Ever since thinking  
man came on the scene even luscious  
mangoes weren't safe from being fiddled with.  
Hark, you! a bold motorist once  
urged: Turn your head around and look—  
There is no blind spot!  
Earth gives everything but light  
and in return we give it convenient respect.  
No wherewithal to scheme out the asteroid  
that fingers our address  
so earth does its thing. Spinning. And overtipping  
ever so slimly ever so rarely. Then undertipping  
on that fantastic wobbly axis  
to neutralize like self-cleaning systemic anatomy. Thank you  
for the weather. Whether we can intervene on the asteroid Apophis,  
go ahead and guess. One  
person or another will try to tell you  
it is they who are assailed or jobbed or maligned  
or forsaken  
and yes, everyone deserves the same amount  
of listen  
but listen.

I wish I could assert authoritatively somebody has got it  
better. I would point to that person, that crowd, the entire  
vast league of the mutual breathing.  
Any rest of the full circle might then lament  
with unfavorite-child distaste—Yes! we *do* drive bricks for wheels—  
a swank time waste. No such colossal customer exists.  
Turn your head around.  
We are all of us  
marginalized.  
Sit down with the improbable me.  
Maybe we can embark again by being  
unanimous  
on fireflies.  
Or on the inexhaustible patience of the green heron  
with the blue Mohawk, at the block fence beside the  
petite Yellow Lady Banks climbing vines, arrested  
forever, then snapping up a five-inch lizard in its bill  
jockeying it about a bit and swallowing it whole.

## VIBE ORGANIC

Is this what *pattern* is? At the bedside stand olive-hued leaves with big personalities list inward

at your unrestricted ear, a yielding lightless access which just yesterday a puckish gray moth madly

swooped at your naked shoulder to get to also, though its impromptu cluttering method made

your palm slam.  
A brazen attempt to tunnel a home out of you.

In the hushed bed your best friend sleeps. If you nudge him from sound slumber, he will stir, (then, rumble):

*I had to move the hair out of someone's eyes  
But it wasn't Robert this time  
Or pretty Cassie—all her spangly curls*

Curious his words, like the puzzling silver dots  
spattered on these leaf surfaces, as if a painter had shaken  
her brush at the plant in a wild covenant for talent.

Their underneaths blush ultra-purple from the burden  
of holding title to malevolent roots, and the sketchy appetite

for bedfellows. Shoots in plum jackets. A plant's inclination  
is to be lured to an overbright star. The dark-

skinned man's hairs on the linen pillow act  
like tendrils, such effort at funneling into threadwork,

grasping hold, making cavernous company. Tender  
the protector, protect the tended. Alliances and allowances.

Recently, you were privy to someone predicting someone will  
discover how we might all learn to hear, no hold up—

rather, it was, we might all learn to breathe land.



Denise O'Hagan was born in Rome and lives in Sydney. She has a background in commercial book publishing, works as an editor through her own imprint Black Quill Press, and is Poetry Editor for Australia/New Zealand for Irish literary journal The Blue Nib. Her poetry is published widely and has received numerous awards. Her debut poetry collection, *The Beating Heart*, is published by Ginninderra Press (2020). <https://denise-ohagan.com/>



## NOT YOUR TIME

It was just short of midnight, but when he breathed the air had thickened like custard, with that middle-of-the-night consistency. He flicked the bed-side lamp off, and lay listening to the rain fall and the squelch of passing tyres up and down the high street, watching pinpricks of light seep through the weave of the curtains – was that streetlamp ever turned off? He wondered if he would die in this adoptive city of his, the city that never slept, home to a thousand orphans. But night-time was not for thinking, not at his age. He turned over, folding himself up in blankets and memories so as not to wake his wife, wondering at the darkening at the window as the dancing dots of light were extinguished and a fan of cool air brushed him alert again. He caught the black outline of a cape before he heard the voice, and it seemed to him then that the moment had been coming for a long, long time, the knowledge of it nestling in his very bones. His shaking hand reached for his pills, his flailing spirit for fragments of prayer. And with the turning of the cape, he caught the scythe lowering and the dropping of words hard as pebbles, 'You're right, it's not your time yet,' and remembered no more until his wife was standing over him, orange juice in hand, and worry clouding her eyes. 'Really, you've got to be more careful, dear. You must have left the window open – we could have caught our death of cold last night!

Denise O'Hagan

## EARTH TREMORS

He was in Lima  
When the tremors came.  
Instinct saw him  
Pyjama'd and spread-eagled  
In a hotel doorframe  
Watching the world tilt.

Chairs and table  
Shuddered across the floor;  
The lamp swung low  
Skewed as a broken limb.  
Dry-mouthed,  
He witnessed the collision  
Of a glass of water  
With a littered floor;  
Its fragments pooling  
To multi-stringed cries,  
Cut through by  
A child's thin shriek:  
The raw twang of fear.

He hardly noticed  
He'd been holding his breath,  
That on the cusp of chaos  
The tremors had ceased  
The furniture stilled  
And the corridor echoed with  
Moans for what might have been.

Slow tremor was felt back home,  
A coin spinning slowly through pale air:  
Reverberations of another kind.  
In a room far away a receiver clicked,  
I pulled up my grey school socks  
And let out my breath  
As my small world buckled  
And I brushed the far reaches  
Of possibilities, and  
My father's mortality.

Note: On 9 November 1974, at 7.59 am local time, Lima, capital of Peru, experienced an aftershock of one of the largest of its many earthquakes which had occurred just over a month previously, and had left 78 dead and 2400 injured.

## I WALK ON SEASHELLS

I walk on seashells, I walk on oyster shells  
And tread the fine-grained sand between,  
Gaze at the rippling water's pearly sheen  
Stretching to waterfront lawns of grand hotels,  
The ebb and flow of the tide, the swells,  
And wonder again what might have been.  
For I lost it all, yet still I dream  
Of castles, bells and citadels.  
I gather my skirts, hold my head up high:  
He bruised my body but not my mind,  
My penurious family turned a blind eye  
Pray tell me, on whom could I rely?  
My husband is seen as wealthy and kind –  
But I'd rather the boarding house nearby!



Bali, Indonesia, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Donna Prinzmetal is a poet, psychotherapist and teacher. She has taught poetry and creative writing for more than 30 years to adults and children. Her poems have appeared in many magazines including *Prairie Schooner*, *The Comstock Review*, *The Journal* and *Verseweavers*. Her first book, *Snow White, When No One Was Looking*, was published with CW Books in May of 2014. She is the recent recipient of the 2020 Lois Cranston Prize from Calyx Journal.



Donna Prinzmetal

## MOTHER TONGUE

I want to speak the language of shells,  
their pink emptiness, held  
between dark and light.

In the afterbirth of morning  
when I am alone, I begin to vanish.  
I invite my mother's ghost

into a house we never had.  
Like a dream, there is a kitchen window  
and a field of dahlias.

She says *believe in the space between  
the carapace and the body.*  
We are on the balcony looking

out at the sea, which isn't a sea.  
If I had more hands  
they would all hold hers.

But I have swallowed so much light  
I have become unbodied.  
How will I find my way?

The nautilus chambers have labeled corridors.  
I ask my mother which hallway says *sadness*,  
which one says *hold me*.

When she doesn't answer, I curl  
my whole self into an empty chamber.  
My heart, like a hermit crab

searches for a new home.

## ELEMENTARY ART

*April, 1962*

“Why is your tree blue?”  
my teacher thundered,  
“with purple leaves?! Trees are green.  
Skies are blue.”  
My father painted  
burning landscapes of color,  
and a woman with long black hair  
whose skin was an amethyst purple.  
I tried to tell her, but the words  
stayed caught in my mouth  
behind the bars of my tiny teeth.  
I could feel the prisoners, all the words  
caught in my mouth.  
I tried to tell her about the deep purple skin,  
the woman with a river of black hair,  
every burning landscape in my father’s painting.  
“Skies are not always blue,  
trees are not just green, purple  
is a good color for leaves, a tree  
can be bluer than the sky.”  
In Kindergarten, my teacher thundered  
“Why is your tree blue?”

## AFTER

After sleep ran away like a startled horse  
leaving hoof prints in snow  
most days back then I lived in a jazz sadness  
after the bees stopped buzzing the lavender  
after language forgot itself  
I didn’t understand words  
the not emptiness of them  
after I joined the universe of untouched things  
there was a vertigo of backwards glances  
after the shimmer of polka dot dresses in the sun  
a ceremony had begun  
oh the suddenness  
the serendipity of lost objects returning  
after nakedness  
after shells  
after the mosaic spilled its cargo  
who was there  
febrile and vanishing  
after the mingle  
the letting go  
hiding in a tangle of sheets  
my burning my lover my shadow  
we had stopped telling the world anything

who would listen anyway  
after we forgot our own names?



Poet, fiction writer, journalist, Eileen Casey was born in County Offaly, now based in South Dublin. Most recent poetry collection, 'Berries for Singing Birds' published October 2019 (Arlen House). Poetry is published widely in anthologies and journals by Dedalus, The Stinging Fly, The Nordic Irish Studies Journal, Poetry Ireland Review, Lisburn Linen Museum, The Moth, The Ulster Tatler Literary Miscellany, among others. Poetry awards include The Oliver Goldsmith International Prize, The Hanna Grealley Awards (Roscommon Libraries) and a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship, among others. Five poetry collections (including two in collaboration with Offaly Visual Artist Emma Barone) are published by Arlen House, New Island, AltEnts (Alternative Entertainments, Rua Red Arts Centre, Tallaght). 'The Lea-Green Down', a response anthology to the poetry of Patrick Kavanagh and featuring works from over 60 poets was published in 2018 by Casey's small press Fiery Arrow. Currently working on a series of poems documenting her Stonemason heritage, an undertaking supported by Creative Ireland Support for Artists and County Offaly Arts.



## STONEMASONS\*

My maiden name is Cordial. My father's people were stonemasons and their people before them. The beautiful Georgian town of Birr has examples of their work. The long aisle of mosaic tiles in St Brendan's Church was laid by my grandfather Robert Cordial. His first wife Kathleen was from Mullingar.

\*These poems are supported by  
Creative Ireland and  
Offaly County Arts Office

Eileen Cordial Casey



## GRANDFATHER ROBERT (1865 – 1936)

His people might have been hatters, copper smiths,  
labourers. Publicans, combers or bakers. Instead,  
he was born into stonemasonry. His craft took him  
outside the town, as far as Mullingar where he  
worked on its grand cathedral. Met, then married  
his first wife, bore five children with her;  
nine followed with his second wife Elizabeth.  
She outlived Robert by thirty-seven years,  
his age when wedded for the second time.

He named my father Edward for a prince, Birr being  
Parsonstown then, Offaly dubbed The King's County.  
He built opulent homes while his own small cottage  
scarce large enough to house his growing brood.

My first sighting of him so many years later;  
a tiny photograph, grainy window on the past.  
Cement-splashed overalls, in his hand a trowel,  
symbol of the stonemason's trade. Primed and loaded,  
ready to unite brick to brick with clean, graceful skims.

From the neck up, he'd pass for a gentleman,

handlebar moustache, fedora perched on his head.  
A nod to the prince who made it popular.  
Both were rarely seen without it.

Protection against all weathers,  
It sheltered Grandfather's head or hung on a coat  
stand. Indentations in the felt, pinched by his fingers  
in its putting on or taking off, made a pitched  
shape like an arch. It softens his presence  
in a world of stone.

## VOUSSOIR\*

In buildings around the town, I sense their presence.  
Chapped hands, weathered yet skilled, finely tuned  
as any instrument. These men knew spirit level balance,  
understood straight edge language. How to cut curbing.

Perfect poised keystones hold weights of time, place.  
Arches formed by bricks neat as slices of cake,  
gazed at by generations of children bearing  
Cordial name. The old question echoes  
through vaulted space: *Who made the world?*

Especially admired, yards of tile cleave together.  
Mosaic pattern laid whole length of St. Brendan's  
like a field of poppy drenched green.  
Where I bowed my head, genuflected, received  
First Holy Communion, was Confirmed.  
Held my sister's bridal train, carried sons  
to be baptised.

I walk behind coffins too as years go by,  
vision blurred by grief. Memory curves back,  
opens pillared portals to where it once began.  
*Who made the world?* A child was asked.  
I knew the answer. *Sylvester Cordial and his Masons.\*\**

\*a wedge-shaped element, typically a stone, which is used in building an arch or vault.

\*\* Sylvester and Robert recur frequently as the names of the Cordial male line.

## SUDDEN DEATH

*i.m. Great Grandfather Robert Cordial, Stonemason, 1848.*

He died on site, aged 74 years, Wednesday, 17th March.  
Hedgerows brimmed with flower, swallows not yet  
arrived to gather leaf and twig in familiar nesting places.

End of day, his work hours already in; an inquest  
returned a verdict – disease of the heart,  
Robert's health threadbare as his work jacket.

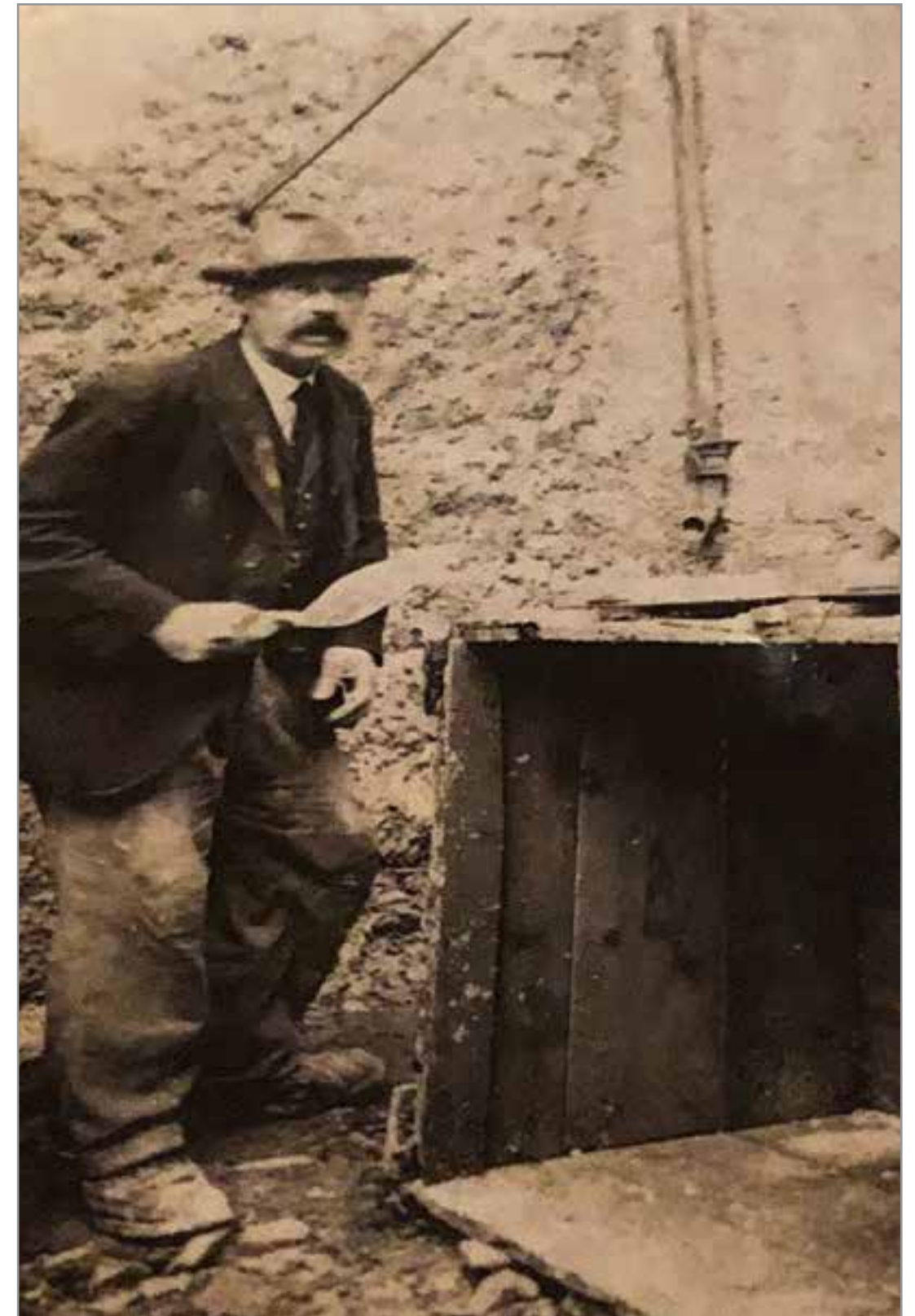
A short paragraph in the *Kings County Chronicle* details  
sons who worked alongside him, were there to mark  
his passing. Noted: "The deceased was a respectable man  
in his rank of life and was much regretted by his neighbours".

There is no memorial where he died. Lasting monuments  
instead sculpt the town. In arches, pillars and portals.

Employed by Mr Theophilus Wallace, both graves  
lie almost side by side in Birr cemetery. Robert's grave  
sheltered by Cypress trees, his stone plain and faded;  
unlike his employer's ornate curlicues, Victorian  
grandeur. Twists and turns of fate.

Great grandfather breathed his last, Vienna  
and Berlin in revolt, Ireland in the throes of famine.  
His skill saved his family from the workhouse.

Ashen faced, his chisel slipped from his fingers,  
cement splattered skin already hardening to stone  
while his wife prepared a meal, awaited his return.



Grandfather Robert, photograph courtesy Eileen Cordial Casey.



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

These poems are translated from Greek by **David Connolly**.

## MYSTERIES AND FRAGMENTS

Just as unimpeded  
your mirror's hair  
turns gray  
in rehearsals that swoon  
in meaningless performances  
that without applause fall silent  
as long as the day's clone  
remains an accident  
where the frightened ovum hides  
the persistent fish  
swims against the current  
till it encounters  
the reflection  
of happiness.

\*

Behind bars  
silk fringes  
the revolutionary brushstroke  
disintegrating dries  
and longing  
gagged as it was expires  
wrapped  
in a red scarf.

\*



Elsa Korneti

*continued overleaf...*

© Elsa Korneti



MYSTERIES AND FRAGMENTS *contd...*

At the bottom of a glass calyx  
 with clay stamens  
 – without any sharp objects  
 in your bags –  
 you hide  
 from the flying cockroaches  
 the nausea of the turbulence  
 the onslaught of wrinkles  
 while round about you  
 unloosed  
 the time lost  
 dries  
 the rose petals with the hanging whites.

\*

In the perfect tale  
 leading roles are played by  
 imperfect people  
 with green winged tails  
 and a deep dive.

\*

The human firmament's pulp  
 is constantly at the right temperature  
 for boiling.

\*

The last diamond ring  
 of the aristocratic kleptomaniac aunt  
 still sparkles at the pawnbroker's.

\*

The family rallying over some tragedy  
 The loss of the tight-rope walker  
 The collapse of the paper tower.

\*

Bizarre.  
 He was the first man  
 who talked to you of love  
 dividing it into stages  
 as though it were cancer.

\*

And when her bright displacement  
 remains one-eyed  
 you deceive her  
 using as a pretext  
 the loss of beauty.

\*

From the start we were too many lines  
 in this shape.  
 I withdraw quietly and silently just as  
 I entered  
 For quite simply I'm one straight line too many.

\*

Learn to think  
 what you feel  
 even when on waking  
 your face  
 is the foot of the rhinoceros  
 that passed over you in the night.

*continued overleaf...*

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MYSTERIES AND FRAGMENTS *contd...*

Learn to think  
what you feel  
even when on waking  
your face  
is the foot of the rhinoceros  
that passed over you in the night.

\*

Let's walk in the light,  
for you well know  
we can't gag  
a herd of rapid pulses  
and the newborn cry of beauty.

## Μυστήρια και θραύσματα

●

Όπως ανενόχλητα  
τα μαλλιά του καθρέφτη σου  
ασπρίζουν  
σε πρόβες που λιποθυμούν  
σε ανόητες παραστάσεις  
που χωρίς χειροκρότημα σωπαίνουν,  
όσο ο κλώνος της ημέρας  
παραμένει ατύχημα,  
εκεί που κρύβεται το φοβισμένο ωάριο  
το επίμονο ψάρι  
κολυμπά αντίθετα στο ρεύμα  
μέχρι να συναντήσει  
το αντικαθρέφτισμα  
της ευτυχίας

●

Πίσω από κάγκελα  
μεταξωτά κρόσσια  
η επαναστατική πινελιά  
σε αποσύνθεση στεγνώνει  
και ο πόθος  
όπως φιμώθηκε εκπνέει  
τυλιγμένος  
σε κόκκινο κασκόλ

●

*continued overleaf...*

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## Μυστήρια και Θραύσματα *contd...*

Στον πάτο ενός κάλυκα από γυαλί  
με πήλινους στήμονες -  
χωρίς αιχμηρά αντικείμενα  
στις αποσκευές σου -  
κρύβεσαι  
από τις φτερωτές κατσαρίδες,  
τη ναυτία των αναταράξεων,  
την επέλαση των ρυτίδων -  
ενώ γύρω σου  
αδέσποτος  
ο χαμένος χρόνος  
στεγνώνει  
τα ροδοπέταλα με τα απλωμένα ασπρόρουχα



Στην τέλεια ιστορία  
πρωταγωνιστούν  
ατελείς άνθρωποι  
με πράσινες φτερωτές ουρές  
και μια γενναία βουτιά



Ο πολτός του ανθρώπινου στερεώματος  
βρίσκεται μόνιμα στη σωστή θερμοκρασία  
βρασμού



Το τελευταίο διαμαντένιο δαχτυλίδι  
της αριστοκράτισσας κλεπτομανούς θείας  
λάμπει ακόμα στο ενεχυροδανειστήριο



Η οικογενειακή συσπείρωση γύρω από ένα δράμα  
Η απώλεια του Ισορροπιστή  
Η κατάρρευση του χάρτινου πύργου



Bizarre.  
Ήταν ο πρώτος άντρας  
που σου μίλησε για τον έρωτα  
χωρίζοντάς τον σε στάδια  
σαν να ήταν καρκίνος



Κι όταν μένει μονόφθαλμο  
το λαμπερό της εκτόπισμα  
την απατάς  
με πρόσχημα  
την απώλεια της ομορφιάς

*continued overleaf...*

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## Μυστήρια και Θραύσματα *contd...*

Από την αρχή ήμασταν πολλές γραμμές σ' αυτό το σχήμα  
Αποχωρώ αθόρυβα και σιωπηλά όπως μπήκα  
Γιατί απλά είμαι μια ευθεία που περισσεύει



Να μάθεις να σκέφτεσαι  
αυτό που νιώθεις  
ακόμα κι όταν ξυπνάς  
με πρόσωπο  
την πατούσα του ρινόκερου  
που πέρασε από πάνω σου τη νύχτα



Έλα να περπατήσουμε στο φως,  
αφού το ξέρεις ότι  
δεν μπορούμε να φιμώσουμε  
ένα κοπάδι γρήγορους σφυγμούς  
και το νεογέννητο κλάμα της ομορφιάς

## MURAL

*On Jackson Pollock's canvas*

It's another life  
It wraps you tight each evening  
printed on a strip of paper

when you're asleep you hold on  
to a butterfly's broken leg  
like that you feel less wretched  
you're used now to tolerating  
the broken words

the lovely blue passion  
withdrew  
the spattered shoes  
walk on the canvas  
the white landscape melts

you wonder:  
"what does the unusual taste like?"  
once again  
you persist in focusing  
on the cheekbones' flawless anatomy

"But you promised me you'd think less"  
"I can't" you say "it's the sun that whispers  
the hot air in my ear"

in a careful groping of cracks  
you faithfully follow the brushstrokes  
left on the mural  
by the instant attraction

*continued overleaf...*

© Elsa Korneti

MURAL *contd...*

ragman  
 from opportune betrayals  
 the alien body hosts you  
 out of necessity

desperately you seek limpidity  
 but remain enclosed in the  
 cloud  
 “how can you be so  
 sought after and alone at the same time?”

first image:  
 the couple  
 arms outstretched  
 welcome you  
 so you’ll enter into the spirit of the role

second image:  
 the persecution  
 the loss  
 the arms  
 in a reverse circular motion  
 a clock without hands  
 spells out hours washed away

a strange desire  
 your body confuses you  
 the wrapping is you see  
 flashy  
 to your surprise you realize  
 that the body is missing

you memorized the inadequacy  
 now you seek generous compensation  
 for the anorgasmic years

you think  
 that you have need of  
 a bold and desperate act of resistance  
 (against death?)

third image:

get undressed now!  
 let’s not waste time

the sound of the rain  
 on the leaves  
 the powder of the kiss  
 in the shape of a half-moon

the wind  
 the water  
 do you feel them?  
 panting  
 flows in your eyes  
 two fluffy clouds  
 copulation  
 on the bottom of a blue can

There she is! Do you see her?

the moon woman  
 the moon woman breaks the circle

the word left unsaid  
 will have to be said  
 to elevate  
 the poetic perversion  
 to eternity

“Do you love me?”

*continued overleaf...*

## Τοιχογραφία

*στον καμβά του Jackson Pollock*

Είναι μια άλλη ζωή  
Σε τυλίγει σφιχτά κάθε βράδυ  
τυπωμένη σε λωρίδα χαρτιού

όταν κοιμάσαι κρατιέσαι  
από σπασμένο πόδι πεταλούδας  
έτσι νιώθεις λιγότερο άθλιος  
συνήθισες πια ν' ανέχεσαι  
τις χαλασμένες λέξεις

ο ωραίος γαλάζιος έρωτας  
οπισθοχώρησε  
πιτσιλισμένα τα παπούτσια  
περπατούν στον καμβά  
το λευκό τοπίο λιώνει

αναρωτιέσαι:  
«τι γεύση έχει το ασυνήθιστο;»  
για άλλη μια φορά  
επιμένεις να εστιάζεις  
στην αψεγάδιαστη ανατομία των ζυγωματικών

- «Μα μου υποσχέθηκες να σκέφτεσαι λιγότερο»  
- «Δεν μπορώ», λες «τις σαπουνόφουσες  
μου τις ψιθυρίζει ο ήλιος»

σε μια προσεκτική ψηλάφηση ρωγμών  
ακολουθείς πιστά τις πινελιές  
που αφήνει στην τοιχογραφία  
η στιγμιαία έλξη  
ρακοσυλλέκτης  
από ευκαιριακές προδοσίες  
το ξένο σώμα σε φιλοξενεί  
από αναγκαιότητα

αναζητάς απεγνωσμένα τη διαύγεια  
όμως παραμένεις εγκλωβισμένος στο  
νεφέλωμα  
«πώς μπορείς να είσαι τόσο  
περιζήτητος και μόνος ταυτόχρονα;»

εικόνα πρώτη:  
το ζευγάρι  
τα χέρια απλωμένα  
σε καλωσορίζουν  
για να μπεις στο πετσί του ρόλου

εικόνα δεύτερη:  
η καταδίωξη  
η απώλεια  
τα χέρια  
σε αντίστροφη κυκλική κίνηση  
ένα ρολόι χωρίς δείκτες  
συλλαβίζει ξεπλυμένες ώρες

μια παράξενη επιθυμία  
το σώμα σου σε μπερδεύει  
είναι βλέπεις το περιτύλιγμα  
φανταχτερό  
με έκπληξη διαπιστώνεις  
ότι το σώμα απουσιάζει

την ανεπάρκεια την αποστήθισες  
τώρα ζητάς μια γενναία αποζημίωση  
για τα ανοργασμικά χρόνια

σκέφτεσαι  
ότι έχεις ανάγκη από  
μια τολμηρή κι απεγνωσμένη πράξη αντίστασης  
( ενάντια στο θάνατο; )

*continued overleaf...*



## Τοιχογραφία *contd...*

εικόνα τρίτη:

γδυθείτε τώρα!  
ας μη χάνουμε χρόνο

ο ήχος της βροχής  
πάνω στα φύλλα  
η πούδρα του φιλιού  
σε σχήμα μισοφέγγαρου

ο άνεμος  
το νερό  
τα νιώθεις;  
αγκομαχητά  
κυλούν μέσα στα μάτια σου  
δύο αφράτα σύννεφα  
μια συνουσία  
στον πάτο γαλάζιας κονσέρβας

Να τη ! Τη βλέπεις;

η γυναίκα φεγγάρι  
η γυναίκα φεγγάρι κόβει τον κύκλο

η λέξη που δεν ειπώθηκε  
θα πρέπει να ειπωθεί  
για να υψώσει  
την ποιητική διαστροφή  
στην αιωνιότητα

- « Μ' αγαπάς ; »



Tree in my little town, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Enda Coyle-Greene was born in Dublin and lives in Skerries. Her most recent collection, *Indigo, Electric, Baby*, was published by the Dedalus Press in February 2020. Her debut collection, *Snow Negatives* (2007) won the Patrick Kavanagh Award in 2006 and was followed in 2013 by *Map of the Last*, both also from Dedalus. She teaches creative writing and facilitates poetry workshops and is curator of the annual Fingal Poetry Festival.



## CONVERSATIONS WITH FRIENDS DURING A PANDEMIC

*for Susan, Ann, and Tony*

1

Our news on the phone,  
*All about small spaces now —*  
my sky-filled skylight.

2

In Buenos Aires  
*Learning Tango*, she's turning  
so I face her view.

3

*Everyone's living  
like poets now*, says a friend  
and fellow poet.

Enda Coyle-Greene



## WAVE

*i*

On my lockdown walk,  
hand gel, phone, two sets of keys,  
stones in my pocket.

*ii*

Between this and that  
house, empty since December,  
a whole world, shuttered.

*iii*

Stopped at the Hoar Rock,  
I wait inside a silence  
moved on by one gull.

*iv*

Light lands on water  
silver-bitten, jitterbugged,  
I see a cliché.

*v*

This flat-calm morning  
only ripples fret wet sand,  
the surge is held, still

*vi*

until it hits me  
opening the door, that wave  
I'll have to breathe through.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Ermira Mitre Kokomani is a bilingual poet, essayist and translator living in New Jersey, USA. She has published poetry, short stories and scientific papers in Albania and United States. She defines poetry as “the song of the soul with healing power”. Last year her book of poetry “The Soul’s Gravity” was published in Albanian. Her poetry has appeared in CAPS book “Mightier-Poets for Social Justice” New York, 2020, Rutherford Red Wheelbarrow 13, New Jersey 2020, the international anthology of “The POET” summer 2020, “ON THE ROAD”. Also in Mediterranean Poetry 2019, Montclair Write Group anthology, NJ 2018, and a range of other print and online publications. Ermira has also translated from Albanian into English the fiction novel “The King’s Shadow” authored by Viktor Canosinaj, published in Amazon and Albania 2018. She works for Rutgers University libraries.



## THE EXISTENCE

Blossoming fresh every morning like a Lotus flower,  
and waking up by touching the dawn,  
while the eye balls kissing the vastness of the light.  
Waking and feeling the joy of being alive.  
Living through the day and experience,  
the joy of living, the thunders, the storms,  
the earthquakes, the adversity that bring shakiness,  
and awakens me as much as the labor of a childbirth.  
Still standing up and building up being grabbed,  
infused by the strength that lies beneath and beyond.  
And yet, blooming peacefully as a Sacred Lotus,  
with petals of purity not ruined by waterspouts.

Sleeping is falling in quietness and stillness,  
and darkness of the other side of our existence,  
Being born thus waking up,  
living through the experience,  
and Dying thus Sleeping in Stillness,  
are the matching pieces of a puzzle,  
named as “our known but unknown existence.”

Still blossoming fresh every morning, a sacred Lotus,  
breathing within our life’s unending cycles.

Ermira Mitre Kokomani

## DRINKING WITH CHARLES BUKOWSKI

He nodded at me,  
the only audience in the room.  
His head,  
in visible swollen veins  
on both temples,  
weighing heavier,  
filled with verses  
that sing and laugh  
and clash.

He, drinking beer  
I, drinking wine.  
I broke the ice:  
“How’s your beer Charles?”  
“Sad,  
from last night’s Presidential debate.”  
“How about your wine, Petit?”  
“Sour,  
because of burned grapes in California’s fire.”

“Do you have your steel up there, Charles?”  
“I do, Petit, I do.  
But, no need to use it on God.  
I sharpened it  
for the screwed breed  
down there, with you.”

I don’t save my advice, Petit,  
because saving it makes it inexistent.  
Even when I am not there,  
I deliver my share in a faraway spirit,  
not to do things the wrong way.

Like having  
a recession, a depression,  
an electoral regression,  
a Pearl Harbor, a Hiroshima,  
twice,  
then roll down of the top  
and crash as a lonely dice.

## WE ALL BURN IN THE END

Stacked over one another in ages,  
years burn in fire as wood,  
some turn into sly ember to sting,  
some into ashes of strength.  
Burning is a challenge, dear,  
over time, as kindling we burn,  
in wrath we burn our bridges,  
coming across brittle paths.  
Burning inside self, dear,  
our concern for those we love,  
if we give them enough esse,  
what do they give us in return?

We all burn in one fire, dear, we all burn in the end.

Burning from hate is defiance, dear,  
If, who we hate, hates us more,  
then we worry and wonder,  
what springs from ugly, hate pool?  
Burning is extra daring, dear  
when love-hate shadows emerge,  
stemming from the Erebus cave,  
pull you in foul plays and blacmal.  
Don't fall in their daunting misery, dear,  
in their deep infernal abyss, don't fall,  
instead, slam the door shut behind you,  
and sing the Savior's song.

We all burn in one fire, dear, we all burn in the end.

To be a dissenter from shadow, dear,  
It's the choice of your heart,  
sorted is mine, to rise from fire,  
like Phoenix ascends above.  
As I go ahead, the dust outpaced,  
those particles for the rest to wrest,  
to breathe in those ashes of might,  
I arise amidst rainbows, O' bless!

We all burn in one fire dear, we all burn in the end.



Eunice Yeates is a freelance writer from the Republic of Ireland, now based in Northern Ireland. In addition to spending some years in Japan and South Africa, she has also lived in London, Brussels, and Boston. Her work, which often explores identity and sense of place, has appeared in a variety of publications, including *The Dublin Review of Books*; *Flash: The International Short-Story Magazine*; *Ink, Sweat and Tears*; *The Bangor Literary Journal*; *Aerial Magazine*; *Coming Home*; and *Jawbreakers Flash-Fiction Anthology*.



## THE SUN RISES IN THE EAST

The first thing that surprised Dee was the door; scarlet, crimson, bold. The second was a battered planter on the sill, brimming with broom. She stood on the pavement by the To Let sign and looked both ways. Baked brick. A row of terraced houses facing an almost identical row of terraced houses. Mostly brown doors, or black, but for this one. No trees, no gardens, and not a single blade of grass, though here and there were window boxes, some with plastic flowers from the Pound Shop.

Dee had resisted viewing properties in that part of town but now she was running out of options. When she had viewed this place on the Internet, every photo in the gallery depressed her. The buff-coloured carpets. The magnolia walls.

After 13 years abroad, Dee had forgotten the dull palette and the narrow residential streets of East Belfast. She suddenly thought of that Heaney poem about the man-killing parishes where he feels lost and unhappy. And at home. Southern hemisphere sunshine, it turned out, had been a poor trade-off for the turbulent relationship that splintered her spirit and kept her far from loved ones.

The estate agent arrived, harried. He shook Dee's hand, then rattled a clatter of keys until he found the right one. A chill wind from the Bloomfield Road whipped down the avenue. Dee shivered.

"What are you after?" asked the agent.

"Solid ground," replied Dee.

He peered at her, then laughed, not unkindly.

"Fill your boots," he said, holding open the red door and gesturing expansively inside.

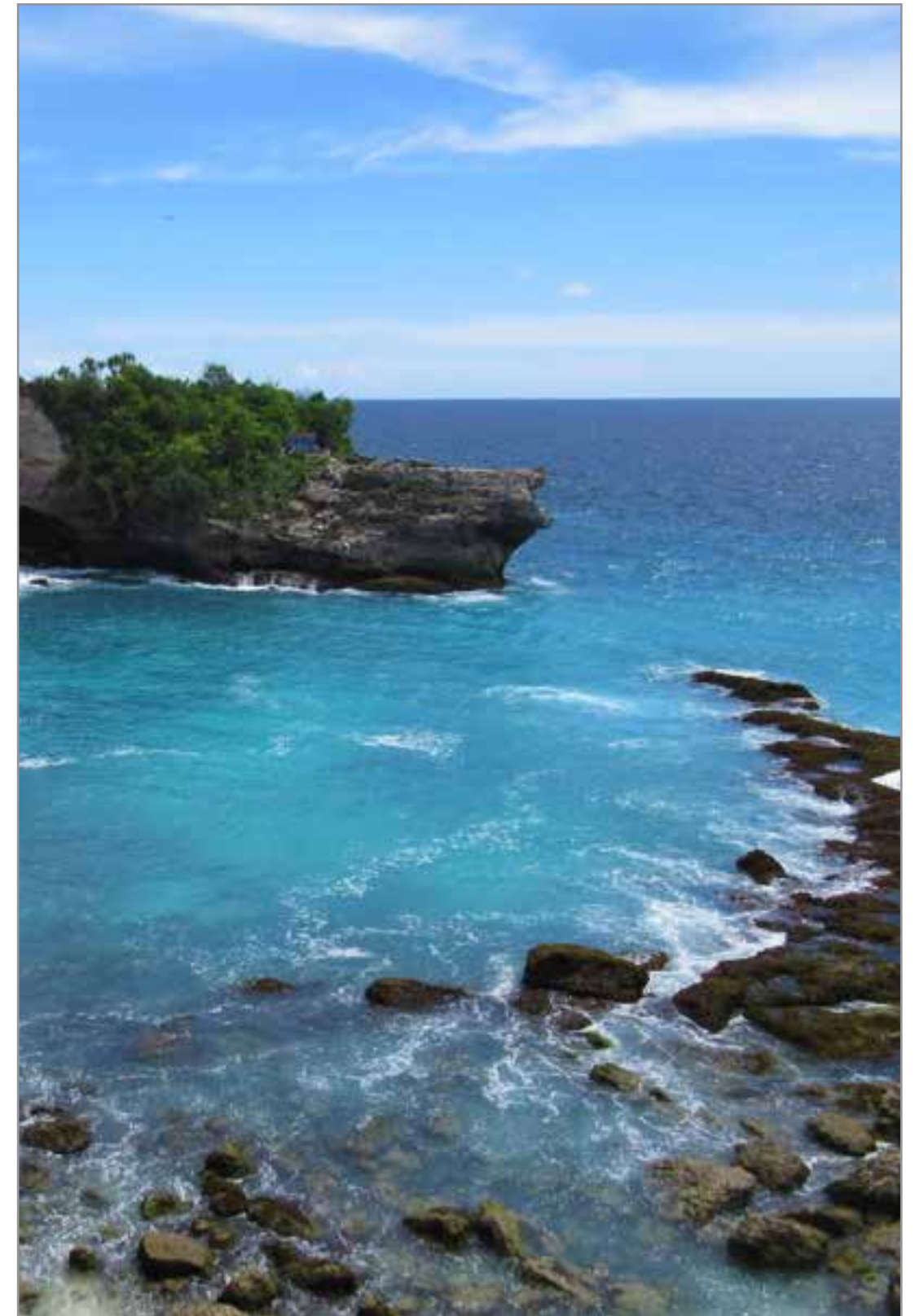
Eunice Yeates

Dee crossed the threshold, relishing the hush when the door clicked closed and the hum of traffic faded. She stood there regarding the hallway. She hadn't understood from the online pictures how high these ceilings actually were, nor had she noticed any of the period features like the cornice mouldings or the corbels. She admired the glass-panelled interior doors on her left.

Just then, a cloud shifted and the October sun rallied. Heat and light radiated through the rectangular transom window above the front door, and through its beautiful fanlight higher up. The nine individual frames of textured glass cast bubbled reflections against the wall and Dee found the shimmer intoxicating. It made her think of the Mediterranean. It made her think of being underwater. She leaned into the luminosity and closed her eyes. Peace.

"I'll take it," she called out to the estate agent who had gone upstairs for some reason. He assumed she was joking.

The paperwork was signed that afternoon and finalised the following day.



Ceningan Island next to Bali, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Frances Browner creative writing/history tutor living in Wicklow. Poetry has appeared in *The Irish Examiner*, *Ogham Stone*, *Skylight 47*, *Poems on the Edge*, *Tales from the Forest*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Live Encounters*, *A New Ulster*, *Bray Arts Journal*, *Boyne Berries* and on *Limerick's Poetry Trail*. *Micro-Chap, Selfies*, was launched online by Ghost City Press, Syracuse, NY, summer 2019 and collection, *Roots & Wings*, published by Revival Press, December 2019.



Frances Browner

## EXILE'S LAMENT

Lying in bed, missing my home town  
Two Church spires against a sepia sky  
Royal Marine sandwiched in between  
Yachts moored at the harbour  
In the Baths, children scream  
A stroll on the pier, Teddy's ice cream.

The woman in the Metals every morning  
on my way to work, smudged pink lipstick  
to match her scarf. Coffee in McCullagh's  
Purple Silk Cut from the corner shop on  
Cumberland Street; Friday night pints in  
Norah Barnacles, might lead to Peekers.  
The shopping centre packed on Saturdays.

One day, I hopped on a 747, not the 7A  
landed in America, made my home in  
Manhattan, Yonkers and the Bronx  
Montauk, on the tip of Long Island.  
Ma wrote me letters at the kitchen counter  
the mail boat gliding across the Bay.

Twenty years later, everything changed  
Buildings boarded up; the centre a shell  
the heart torn out, but the soul remained.  
The seafront exploding with arts, letters  
Pavilion Theatre, Town Hall, Peoples Park  
a new Lexicon soaring into the skyline.

Then, things were quiet again, streets empty  
dogs roamed. Down the coast in Greystones  
I looked out at the same sky, the same sea  
but, for a while, it was not to be.  
Exiled once more from my home  
Outside the five-kilometre zone.



## GUITAR GENTLY WEEPS

I got no intonation  
Strings have lost their zing  
Got no inclination, for  
Playin' chords that bling.  
Plectrum is a strummin'  
Nerves are taut 'n twangin'  
Fingers keep on pluckin'  
But, sounds they are a suckin'.  
Have I no more Mojo  
No key changes, Capo?  
Even with this hard neck  
Is my beat off a wanderin'  
Or am I gone all crappo?  
Blank faces in a square  
Look back at me and stare  
Captivated? Confused?  
Mute, unmute, overused.

Hey, hold on, I got it!  
No sweat, no threat  
No need to fret  
I'm on it  
No worries, don't despair  
I ain't outa tune  
I just been on Zoom.

## SHE HAS TO STAND HER GROUND

Because you want to buy fancy furniture  
And fine paper for your printer  
She daily fights illegal loggers  
Helps save her husband's agriculture  
Because you like to wear high fashion haute couture  
She has to trod barefoot on barren earth  
Watch her children choke on polluted water  
Stave off drought; suffer beatings and threat  
So you can remain outstanding on your ground

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 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.book-depository.com/search?searchTerm=geraldine+mills&search=Find+book>



Geraldine Mills

## ALL HALLOWS

*For Susan Rich*

Let me tell you of what I've been thinking,  
the ghosts that I speak to when I wake in the dark,  
the poems they have entered, the ones they have fled from,  
along hazel grove road where they leave shadow marks.

This eve is All Hallows, that one time of year  
when the door inches open between the two worlds,  
their old selves sneak through, eat the soul cakes I'm baking,  
display all the guising they've finally unfurled.

They gather within my first place of growing,  
where my sisters and I sleep three to the bed.  
They knock at the door in the bleak mid of winter  
to say that our brother is dead.

My parents come towards me in their black Sunday best,  
the trees look so sad and forlorn.  
The owl's spent feather at the edge of the lane  
when they bury their second-born son.

So, let me tell you of what I've been thinking,  
imagine your studio glinting with sun,  
the mouth-scented sweet of old mango wood  
from the seat where you ease off your shoes,

neat them away after walking the shore  
while leaves cluster in heaps on your porch,  
your cats raise a quizzical eye as you pass,  
ask: 'why did you leave us and where did you go?'

Take your tea to your desk, waxed with lyric and bee,  
its provenance intact, fills the room with new light,  
while Watson and Duende do what they do best,  
you pick up your pen and you write.



## THE BYPASS

They're pulling down our house,  
driving the dual carriageway right through our front door.  
With diggers and bulldozers they will cover over,  
wipe out all my early years.

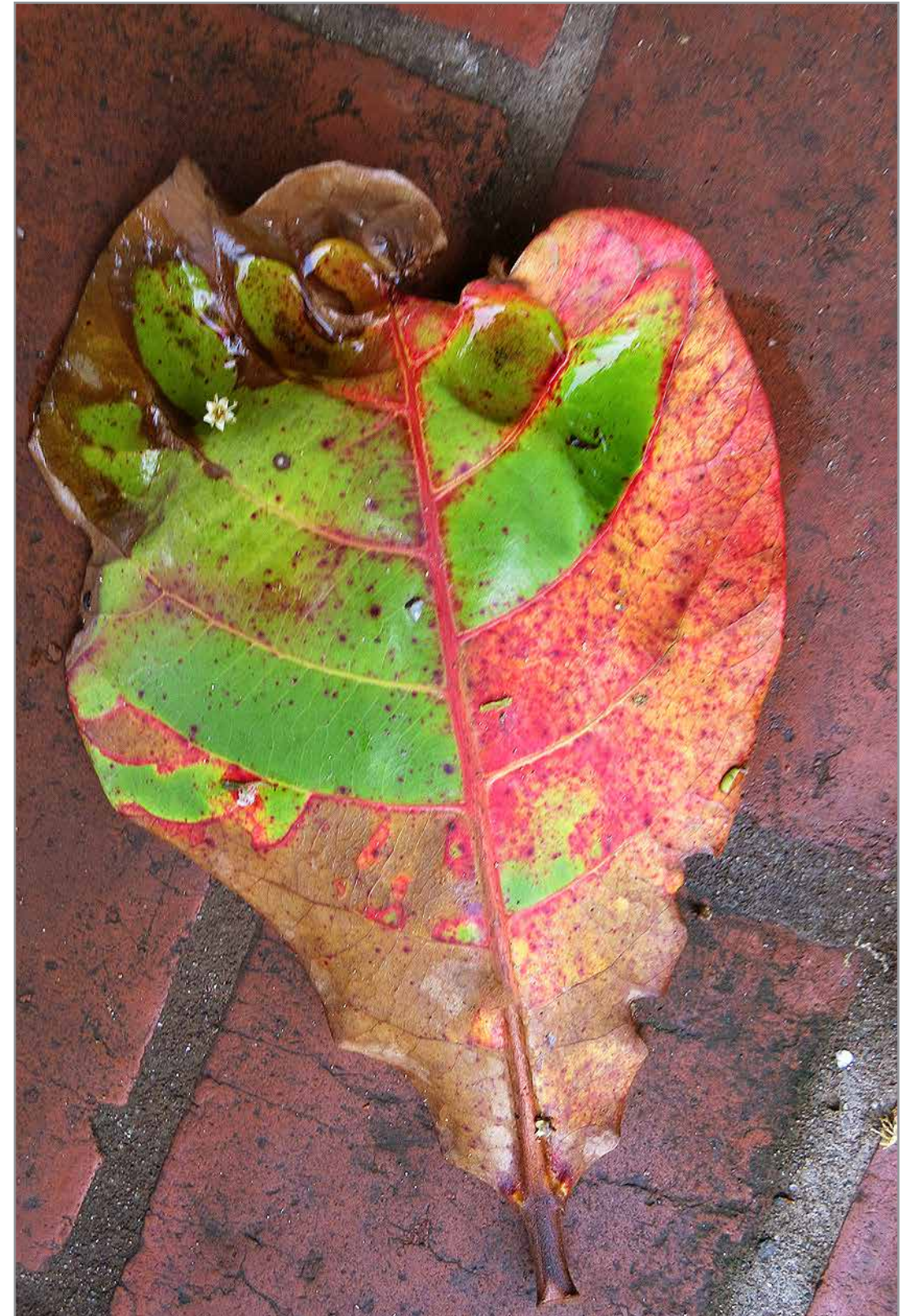
Gone will be the table at which all life was fought,  
the one and only socket for the PYE radio,  
the bed where my father slept  
before they took him to hospital for the last time.

They will plunder the grass that we cut with the clippers,  
as they will the montbretia all along the wall,  
and the wall itself where we sucked the small stones  
clean of mortar and lived to tell the tale.

The neighbours' homes will be gone too,  
as will the local shop, where I sang my weekly song:  
'a loaf, two pounds of sugar, a packet of tea,  
and mammy will pay you again,'

to the shopkeeper who broke  
the Marietta biscuit in half,  
to make sure its excessive weight  
did not topple the quarter pound.

In the unblinking of an eye, cars and trucks  
will whizz along the bypass,  
no time to spare for the once-lived lives,  
buried now between asphalt and tar.



Autumn, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Hedy Habra is a poet, artist and essayist. She has authored three poetry collections, most recently, *The Taste of the Earth* (Press 53 2019), Winner of the Silver Nautilus Book Award, Honorable Mention for the Eric Hoffer Book Award, and Finalist for the Best Book Award. *Tea in Heliopolis* won the Best Book Award and *Under Brushstrokes* was finalist for the Best Book Award and the International Book Award. Her story collection, *Flying Carpets*, won the Arab American Book Award's Honorable Mention and was finalist for the Eric Hoffer Award. Her book of criticism, *Mundos alternos y artísticos en Vargas Llosa*, examines the visual aspects of the Peruvian Nobel Prize Winner's narrative. A fifteen-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the net, and recipient of the Nazim Hikmet Award, her multilingual work appears in numerous journals and anthologies.

<https://www.hedyhabra.com/>



## DISCREPANCIES

On TV5, the French restaurant owner keeps  
repeating: this is just another flu.  
With a large smile, she presses  
every newcomer against her generous bosom:  
'on se fait la bise,'  
both planting a heavy smooch on each other's cheek.

In Milan, my friends' children flock to bars  
and around the piazza while in Bangkok  
monkeys invade the deserted streets.  
In Chicago's Shedd Aquarium, penguins freely  
visit their neighbors through the glass exhibit,  
pacing corridors like guards in formal attire  
Dolphins and swans enjoy Venice's transparent waters,  
refuting the city's legendary smell.

No planes threaten birds in flight nor the purity of the air.  
Flowers grow on cracks, on walls, on the sidewalk.  
The grass has never been greener.  
An apocalyptic silence permeates large cities  
and everything seems superfluous,  
all the things on the to-do list can wait,  
as long as we have our supplies,  
as long as we're sheltered.

Hedy Habra

## THE SMELL

We don't know where it came from. We first thought the house needed ventilation. We later lit all sorts of scented candles, all to no avail. Each whiff made us dizzy and we became sensitive to every waft of air. The smell kept getting stronger but more elusive, ranging from a potpourri of spices and herbs to a mixture of dung and chemicals that made us want to throw up. It could be mistaken for sweet or foul pollen, depending upon the time of day, and it insidiously invaded all spaces. We started wondering why the smell carried memories, mostly deranging ones.

We decided to seal all doors and windows. We took turn in steaming pillows, sofas, rugs and most surfaces, then gradually retreated to a room not too distant from the kitchen. Lately, we grew wary of calling friends or family, lest the smell would be carried by voices as though surfing over the radio waves. Even books became the repository of different odors. The moment we flip through any of its pages, a strange halo envelops us leaving us with shortness of breath. But at least we can turn the tv set on and drown within another world, preferably one without subtitles, the most foreign the language, the best since the smell is conveyed with meaning.

## LIFE AFTER THE INSIDIOUS CROWN'S DEMISE

People will learn sign language to communicate. Lovers will read mystical poems, eating each other with eyes: touching will only be permissible after a long hot shower while clothes get cleaned. Skin against skin will become a scarcity. After all, having once known the danger of kissing will forever dampen desire. Intimacy will be restricted to committed relationships and couples will avoid holding hands in public; they will learn to wait till they get home and wash their hands and faces.

Every public bench, bus seat, taxi seat or airplane seat will become suspicious and no one will go out without a special UV sanitizing device. At the office, no one will switch desks or use someone else's computer without risking serious altercations. Affection will be demonstrated with artistry: glances will become more sophisticated, even a smile will have a number of oblique symbolic meanings.

Paper money will disappear and you'll wipe clean your credit card after each use. Glove manufacturers will make a fortune, offering from transparent gloves to feather-like and softer than silk or to even the memory of a touch. But don't worry, they will be available for every budget. People will start stroking their own heads and hair as they talk to their children and grandchildren who will automatically feel the warmth of their caress. Skin will be lonely and more sensitive, moisturizing lotions will become indispensable to avoid dry, aging hands.

## OR HOW CAN WOVEN WHISPERS BE DECIPHERED ?

*After Women Against the Night* by Helen Zughaib

What do such repetitive patterns mean,  
inserted visual poems, wordless speech  
lost in a scarf or a shawl, shaded emotions  
hiding under every motif, inside every angle,  
an echo of Philomela's cries bursting in silence,  
each colored thread telling of the outrage,  
of a beauty flawed, of a body no longer hers,  
of a tongue severed as a trembling stem.  
See how carmine blood runs thick  
between her thighs, down her throat,  
suffocating her. Only deft fingers would feel  
the softness or ruggedness of each fiber  
and weave relentless nightmares, whispering  
night after night against the darkness.



Woman and chilli, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Ilhem Issaoui is a Tunisian researcher, poet, and translator. She has been published in many countries including the US, the UK, Canada, and India in print and online. She is in the process of publishing her second poetry collection.



## SAINTE NITOUCHE

I have a hole dug inside  
And all those who fall, fall in  
And the more I eat, the more I am hungry  
Is it because I was starved?

To be loved, you tell me, is good  
Good for what? I'd rather pain them  
Not a sky in pink, nor summer, nor spring  
I'd rather inhabit the woods

A morning with birds, but not crooning, only feathers  
A day without bees but some honey was saved  
A void that shouts and with teeth and claws commits suiphagy  
What is missing?

## THE YOUNGEST KID

It was all mere and kitschy impromptu trials  
Until the last kid is to come  
Preferably a tractable  
Not a terrible one  
One with a brain to trail along  
And pluck its skeleton  
And wears its skin  
In front of people  
But a brain that can't make legs run  
You know, to run: to grow,  
To flee, to make a home  
To know that, without, it can  
That is not what they wanted  
Not a terrible one  
But one who looks through windows  
Marvels at lemon trees and a false sky it won't own  
Nor call home

## THE WAITING

Every day I wait for the cake  
As if it were the only sweet thing in the whole day  
If I wake up early I pretend I am asleep  
Until it is there  
The mind demands it  
And the amarulent mouth too  
I let my mom let me miss the early morning  
She closes the window shutters in mornings and nights  
Whether it's hot or cold  
And goes to buy me the cake  
And sits in the nearing room mumbling prayers  
I am the one she never waits  
I am always in the room  
Nevertheless, she always checks and rechecks

## ALL I WANTED IS TO TALK

Of anything  
Of something else  
Other than the past  
Other than the future  
Of things and roles  
Of the present  
That a cat ate all the birds  
And now they are reduced and traduced  
To mere feathers  
And now mom doesn't need to worry  
About the birds' dirt  
And now I have to endure my mornings without them  
Of how unfit I am  
For the job, the night, the relations  
Of the void of the wells  
And the pain of the body  
That wants to just eat itself  
With its desires half met  
In an attempt to own itself  
Of the lies that are not me  
The braggadocio that I am  
And the panjandrum hiding behind  
And the cries I wanted to cry



Fallen flowers, Indonesia, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Ingrid Storholmen was born in Verdal, Norway, on 22 May 1976. She studied literature at the University of Bergen, and spent one year at a creative writing school. She was the literature editor of *Morgenbladet*, a culture newspaper in Norway. For five years, she was the writer-in-residence at 'Adrianstua', a writer's house in Trondheim. She started the Trondheim International Literature Festival during her stay there, and also founded the literary magazine *LUJ* with two colleagues. Ingrid has published six books: *The Law of the Poacher* (2001, Shamespeesch); *Graceland* (2005); *Siri's Book* (2007); *Voices from Chernobyl* (2009); *To Praise Love* (2011) published by Aschehoug in Oslo, Norway. *Here Lies Tirpitz* (2014). She has received many literary awards and prizes for her work, and her poetry has been translated into eighteen languages.

This poem is translated from Norwegian by Kenneth Steven.

## SORROW

How much before death has sorrow begun?  
Will death from now on be the eye I see my life with?

When death came, I crept into bed and lay down beside the child  
I got the last warmth – I stole it for comfort

Of death one only can say that it exists  
for it was born at the same moment as the child

Must believe in heaven after the child's birth, for where else was it before it came  
Must believe in heaven after the child's death, for where else would it be when it left

Your death is not my death. I cannot fathom it  
One tiny hand completely alone, she waves, that hand

You will be in the living  
With the living, I correct myself

In the end I open my mouth, call, I call, come home  
Sorrow answers: I have lived, existed  
Am loved  
Pain will be cut into ribbons of remembering, become thinner, it must be this way  
but my motherhood stands over death's own borders



Ingrid Storholmen, photograph Merete Haseth.

Hvor lenge før døden har sorgen startet?  
Vil døden fra nå av, bli øyet jeg skal se livet med?

Da barnet døde, krøp jeg opp i senga og la meg ved siden av  
den siste varmen fikk jeg, stjal jeg, som trøst

Om døden kan man bare si at den er til  
for den ble født samtidig med barnet

Måtte tro på himmelen etter barnet fødtes, hvor skulle det ellers vært før det kom  
Måtte tro på himmelen etter barnet døde, hvor skulle det ellers være da det dro

Din død er ikke min. Jeg klarer ikke fatte det  
En liten hånd helt alene, hun vinker, hånden

Du vil være i de levende  
Hos de levende, retter jeg

Til slutt prøver jeg min egen munn, rop, roper jeg, kom hjem  
Sorgen svarer: jeg har levd, jeg var til  
Er elsket  
Smerten skal klippes opp til minnestrenger, bli tynnere, kreves det  
men mitt moderskap står over dødens grense



Walk on the beach at daybreak, Bali, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Jean O'Brien is working on her 6th poetry collection, which will be published by Salmon Poetry. She has won/ been placed in many competition and is regularly published both on-line and in print. Most recently she was involved in the past UK Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy's project *Write Where We Are Now*. She holds an M.Phil from Trinity College and tutors in poetry/creative writing at University level.



## BULLION

I knew a man who died with his lungs  
full of goldust, rich as Croesus  
you might think, worthless to him  
as it stole from his chest  
much-needed breath.  
It slowly killed him just as if  
he had spent his days working  
with asbestos instead of a precious  
metal. Every ring he shaped,  
every ingot or chain he fashioned  
winded him, as unnoticed he breathed  
the glittering dust in, its Troy weight  
heavier than than his own breath.  
The havoc of his heart reflected gold like  
sunlight on a cornfield as it slowed.  
Somewhere here is a warning  
to be careful what you wish for;  
sometimes the glittering prizes  
are made malleable with alloy  
and are full of shade and shadow.

Jean O'Brien



## RANSOM

Everyone is a little frayed about  
the edges now and speaks in stuttering  
sentences as if their tongues were rusty,  
and like the world are now untrustworthy.  
Our world and words are fractured, a badly  
put together ransom note cut from mis-  
matched newsprint, the out-of-kilter letters  
in a crazy mosaic of differing  
type sizes. We all feel ransomed, kidnapped  
from our mundane lives by a rapacious  
virus laying waste all before it. We  
use arcane language and newly minted,  
tell ourselves and one and other what we  
will do. *When all this is over.* And long  
for the hurly-burly of our old lives,  
redemption our only grounding.

## PHILOMELA AND HER SISTER

Scarlet thread rakes the frame from edge  
to edge, a bloody flow, backlit with a cross-stitch  
field of yellow rapeseed. A black cat is filled in  
at the side of the frame where clamps hold the hoop  
in place. Philomela chooses her silks and yarns  
with care. Two sisters at a joint embroidery task,  
something to while away the royal afternoon.

Poor Philomela has lost her tongue, some accident.  
No one knows. She is an open mouth, a hollow cave.  
Using back, *knotted, chain and running* stitches  
to voice her anguish, plying her steel needle like a sword  
to slash and rage, she threads the eye with pain,  
fills the canvas with the lustre of her bitter tale, screams  
at the injustice done in jagged lines of ravelling silk.

Until at last her sister understands, can read  
the scene of her husband's betrayal, how Philomela's  
brother-in-law raped her and after with her tongue  
a telling swell in her mouth, he cut it out. She was left  
a dumb weight of darkness pinned to a cloth.  
The sisters, daughters of a king, unpicked all the stitches  
and gathered up the coils and twists of jewelled yarn.

Distraught, they stitched azures, scarlet and burnt umbers,  
slipped the knots of gravity, tuned into the call  
of birds in their throats, shook out their new plumage  
and took to air. Shape-shifting into passerines,  
singing the lament of the nightingale, their wings and tails  
trailing like loose threads they hauled themselves out  
of earth's despair and filled their eyes with shimmering sky.

\* based on part of the Greek myth of Philomela, daughter of the king of Greece  
who was raped by her sister's husband King Tereus who cut out her tongue to silence her.

Laura Johanna Braverman is a writer and artist. Her poetry has appeared in journals including *Plume*, *Levure Litteraire*, *Sky Island Journal*, *New Plains Review* and in the anthology *Awake in the World, Volume II* by Riverfeet Press. *Salt Water*, her first collection of poetry was published in 2019 by Cosmographia Books. She is pursuing her MA degree in Poetry at Lancaster University, and lives in Lebanon with her family.



## 1 FLOWER GIRLS

Two young girls sit on concrete blocks,  
caged by interweaving city streets—

my car's right-turn signal ticks  
while the open window invites a voice.

One girl sings with long drawn tones,  
they vibrate low in her narrow throat—

she stares out, spell-bound somehow,  
her hennaed hair is loosely braided.

The smaller girl kicks off a boot, no sock  
on underneath; shakes it for a stone perhaps.

Soon the light will change—if I keep  
east on this road two hours so I'll reach

Damascus, City of Jasmine, named  
for those tiny petals of too much honey—

Laura J Braverman

## 2 DARSHANA

It is a meeting, something shared—  
if you stay quiet (if you are lucky)  
a doe will give you *darshan*  
in the woodland hush, will raise her

slender neck, her head to grant you  
witness. Stay still and wait. Soon  
the wind will lift—a shift, a spring,  
and only trees remain. Or perhaps

the clouds will part as you look up—  
reveal the massif face lit up by sun.  
Maybe a humble culver will flutter

to the windowsill—linger there, while  
its five-beat coo joins nearby school  
yard shrieks, the hum of city streets—

## 3 STILL LIFE

We've fallen back. Daylight saving time  
is ended. Strange the one-hour change, how  
it alters the day; at four forty-five  
night arrives, a stunted dusky afternoon.

I amble to our local market, storefronts  
throw electric auras onto sidewalks—  
and as I pass the *Pharmacie du Quartier*  
I nearly miss a man planted by a skinny

city tree. His knees are raised, head bent  
and heavy over folded arms. Is he sleeping?  
Unwell? He doesn't move. The street is quiet

save for an intermittent car. Another man  
stands by, a sentinel. I wait too; don't know  
for what. We three are frozen—joined.



## 4 WHAT'S ABANDONED

Our rented bus plots a clumsy path  
 through tight Milanese streets, the lady  
 lake our goal. Here for the birthday  
 of the patriarch, three generations  
 chatter, then someone shouts: We're  
 one bag short! The driver informed  
 we slow towards an open curb—I see  
 a man stand sidewalk-bound, married  
 to a construction sign: black shovel  
 graphic on a triangle of marigold—  
 his trousers shine with use and grime,  
 the high-top tongues of his shoes  
 lie flat, his gaze is fixed as people pass.  
 The bus turns back for the forgotten bag.

## 5 NOW WE SEE FACE TO FACE

Who or what do the eyes receive?  
 A saint, a mountain peak—  
 Your household god, the blackbird  
 perched in a ficus tree?

Dirt-smudged toes of a child's  
 eager exploration, da Vinci's Mary  
 of gentle mystics? The prayer

of seeing is given and received—  
 no need to take up temple rites.  
 Is it a gift: beholder to beheld?

Maybe the reverse is true. Mother  
 of our tongues, made from universal  
 thrums, says *darśana* is a vision,  
 yes, but also vision's method—

## 6 WHAT'S BORROWED

Builders gather at the site next door.  
The metal clangs and high-pitched  
whirs narrate my working hours—  
though today something feels askew.  
In dusty clothes and heavy shoes—  
the men, migrant workers from our  
warring neighbor, glance and shift,  
restless in their group. Why is that?

As the circle widens, I see a body  
draped across a net of arms. I hear  
mingled exhortations, scrapes of rock  
under boot. The body's limbs hang  
loose, emptied of decision—what  
was there, interrupted or replaced.



Discarded bowl, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Liz McSkeane is a Dublin-based poet, novelist and short story writer, born in Scotland to an Irish/Scottish family. Her poetry has been published in the Irish Times, Poetry Ireland Review, The Irish Pages, The Shop, The Stinging Fly, Orbis and others. In 2016, her novel *Canticle* was one of twelve winners in the Irish Writers' Centre Novel Fair. She was 1999 winner of the Sunday Tribune/Hennessy New Irish Writer of the Year Award for her poetry. Liz has had one novel published, *Canticle* (2018, Turas Press) and three poetry collections: a chapbook, *In Flight*, (Lapwing, 1996); *Snow at the Opera House* (2002, New Island); *So Long, Calypso* (2017, Turas Press). She is currently working on her second historical novel, set in the aftermath of the Great Lisbon earthquake of 1755. Her new collection, *Learning to Tango* will be published by Turas Press in late 2020.



## OCHOS

Those figures of eight can take you  
anywhere you'll allow:  
permit the toe-tip of your shoe  
to trace infinity here, now,  
on this wooden floor, heart open  
to your partner, you pivot just  
as much as you are led, take one  
step – forward or back? – drawn in dust.

Liz McSkeane



## TANGO SOLO

They say it takes two and on the surface  
they're right. But tango is an iceberg,  
you see only the tip. The rest that stirs us  
to the dance and makes it happen, is submerged:  
posture, breathing, muscle memory,  
concentration, as mind and body meld  
to control the change of weight in harmony  
with every step, your own balance held  
unwavering, ready, poised to respond  
to any invitation the leader  
may propose. But there's no magic wand  
for this and once smitten, you'll go deeper  
to summon powers no one can learn for you.  
To breathe, to walk alone, know what you can do.

## TANGOPHOBIA

some days, to be honest  
you're a little afraid of tango

afraid of how you must  
be on the dance floor and off to show

that you deserve a place  
in this world where it's so often touch

and go those nights you brace  
yourself to meet the gaze of the judge

who decides if you're good  
enough the one within or outside

yourself who says you should  
settle for a quiet night in hide

then you make up your mind  
you'll wear red as red as you can find

## THE PRIVATE LESSON

I am about to pay good money  
to a man who barely says hello  
and is much too cool to crack a smile.  
But my experience reminds me  
how the tango embrace, though silent,  
says more than hours of talk; and I know  
that if the class goes not too badly  
later, if he's at the milonga,  
who knows, at some point he might even  
invite me to dance for one tanda.



Canna lily, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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.



## TETOUAN

A maze of streets,  
decisions and indecisions,  
astray and found,  
while odonyms conjure up  
children playing in a Galician  
military town.

The colonial nightmare  
Plaza Primo, General Varela, Ensanche...  
Today, a remote memory, perhaps  
a deeply buried grievance, maybe  
while the city spreads its white dove wings.

Manuela Palacios



## MARRAKESH

A glacial gust —  
The Atlas girds the city with snow —  
In a nineteenth-century photograph  
the ochre ramparts cuddle  
evergreen palm fronds – the vast plain  
fringed by the white-crowned range.  
The frost subdued by roseate walls.  
Dust, a harbinger of the encroaching desert.

## ESSAOUIRA

Amina gets ready for a corner kick while  
Mourad complains the ball never crossed  
the line  
Aicha, the goalie, shouts instructions  
at her team's defenders and  
Mohammed gives his attackers the signal to  
RUN!

Boys and girls in their teens  
covered or unveiled  
soccer their common goal  
on the Essaouira sands.

## ASILAH

Silis – Arzila – Asilah  
lost and regained  
time after time.  
Through centuries, a craftsman  
crouching in a dark gateway  
illuminates pottery with vibrant pigments,  
colour flowing now in a deluge over  
walls, doors and windows with  
cobalt, saffron, henna and mint.  
Buttressed town of past daredevil  
exploits now coquettish and welcoming  
us, who stand by the Sidi Mansour dome  
facing our shared ocean.

## TAROUDANT

We quench our thirst with papaya juice  
from Ali's walled garden –  
Asma's congenial nest.  
Fresh sap in our veins, the affable host  
expounds on the medina's wonders and woes,  
guiding our steps.  
Grandmother town of shed royal blood  
you cherish the virtues of the caravansary –  
robust, spacious, all-embracing site  
of solace for the adventurous traveller.

## FES

As the story goes,  
they were the daughters of a prosperous merchant  
–Fatima and Maryam–  
from ninth-century Kairouan.  
The imbroglios of history led the family to Fes where,  
learned and enterprising,  
each sister founded a mosque –  
Al-Qarawiyyin and Al-Andalusiyyin –  
memorials of Arab inflow in Morocco.

As the story goes,  
Fatima would only use the property's  
land to get the necessary sand, plaster and stone  
for her mosque.

As the story goes,  
Al-Qarawiyyin would soon become  
a madrasa and, then, the first university in the world  
hosting a bounty of librarians' treasures.

Why should I want to dispute a story about  
two wise, resourceful and honoured women?



Morocco, photograph by Manuela Palacios.



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



## MURRAMARANG

Ships first appear like angels' wings  
 sprouting from god-like backs, breaking  
   the plimsoll line of horizon  
 that divides water from sky, parabolic  
   dunes from white coastal cliffs.  
 Natives in rough dugouts  
 make no move to paddle out, examine  
   the massive apparition  
 ploughing through their waters.  
 A mirage of sunlight  
   it would disappear.

Near Brush Island, Cook and Banks  
 attempt to make anchor  
   the seas too rough, surf  
 towering like glaciers.  
 From a distance they (re)name  
 landmarks: Dromedaries Head, Jervis Bay  
   the shadowed dome of Pigeon House  
 chasing the coastline. *Smoaks are seen,*  
   at night five fires, the land *rather*  
*more populous* than first surmised.

\*

Margaret Bradstock

*continued overleaf...*

© Margaret Bradstock

## MURRAMARANG *contd...*

At Murramarang Point  
the complex of 12,000 year old middens  
stretches through history  
meeting place for Wandandian  
and Walbanga tribes  
the headland a burial ground  
for massacres by local pastoralists,  
ancestral skeletons eroded  
out of sand deposits.  
Shells, bone tools, millions  
of stone artefacts the vestiges.

A small, brackish lagoon to the north  
an unidentified waterhole  
are home to a Dreamtime serpent,  
habitat of swamp oak and paperbark.  
Black swans, little pied cormorants  
and white-faced herons nest here;  
sand mining and vehicle access  
deep wheel ruts and erosion  
scars across the country.

\*

All Cook saw was a primitive  
aimless culture  
naked bodies painted with  
broad white stripes  
slow wing-beats of a swan in curving flight  
over the lagoon, a continuous series  
of sand dunes and a land  
inhabited by no one.

## TRIM (1799-1804)

*One of the finest animals I ever saw....his robe a clear jet black,  
with the exception of his four feet, which seemed to have been  
dropped in snow....also a white star on his breast.*  
- Matthew Flinders

Born on board *Reliance*, in the Southern  
    Indian Ocean, he took the captain's eye,  
 the cat who walked by himself,  
 named for Tristram Shandy's butler  
    but trim, like his master, or the sails  
 on a seaworthy ship, adjusted to suit the wind.

Falling overboard, he swam after the boat  
scaling the ropes to safety, bravery rewarded  
by a seat at Flinders' table (sometimes swiping  
tidbits from the forks of others).

Foregoing feline pursuits, he became a seasoned sailor  
first mate and kindred spirit to the reckless,  
star-crossed, and sometimes disagreeable captain:  
*My faithful intelligent Trim! The sporting, affectionate  
and useful companion of my voyages.*

## from THE EXPLORERS' TREE

*"If there really exists within our great continent a Sahara...great lakes...  
or watered plains which might tempt men to build new cities, let us know  
the character and promise of the land..." - Rev. John Storie, August 1860.*

### John King:

A rousing farewell at Royal Park  
we set off proudly for the Gulf country,  
fourteen men, twenty-five camels, horses  
and twenty tons of baggage,  
aiming to fill in the great blank in the map  
the ragged emptiness  
like a hole in the night sky.

*The camels gave us trouble from the beginning.*  
The horses cannot stand the smell of them  
so our party advances in two straight lines,  
Burke riding down the middle, his pistol cocked.  
At the Darling River he disagrees  
with second-in-command, George Landells  
giving rum to the camels to calm them.  
A shouting-match ensues, Burke smashes  
every bottle of rum, Landells resigns  
and Wills is promoted. They might have done well  
to have drunk the rum. At base-camp Menindee  
travelling now into the hot and dry interior  
Burke quarrels with surgeon Herman Beckler.  
By Cooper's Creek, we're down to four men, six camels,  
dump much of our swag, for a mad dash to the Gulf.

A hard, slow slog through *soft and rotten country*,  
sandy and stony in turns, arid scrub, occasional water-holes,  
sparse pasture. Not even the triumph of reaching the sea,  
only a tidal channel amid the mangrove swamps.  
The return journey no better, severe storms, ground so boggy  
the camels cannot walk on it, the torpor of stifling air.

Burke catches Gray eating stolen floury gruel  
and thrashes him. He shoots the camel Boocho  
then later his own horse Billy, and we eat our fill  
as much as our stomachs can hold. Falling behind,  
now tied to his camel's saddle, in the trek  
across Sturt's Stony Desert under a blazing sun,  
Gray dies. We scratch out a shallow grave and stagger  
into an empty camp, the depot party gone.

### William Wills:

*Our deaths will rather be the result of mismanagement  
of others, than of any rash acts of our own.*  
Coopers Creek, June 1861

And so we come to our explorers' tree  
the "dig" tree left by Brahe, a blaze on the trunk  
a small supply of food, and *the pleasing information*  
of their departure. What were they thinking of?  
Encouraged by the sound of crows ahead,  
the sight and smell of smoke, we start for  
the blacks' camp, thinking to live with them  
learn their ways and manners, but they've moved on.  
Reduced to starvation now on nardoo cake,  
by no means unpleasant, but for the weakness felt,  
I sense the darkness tumbling in...the silence of letting go.

Near daybreak, King sees a moon in the east, a haze  
of light stretching up from it, declares it to be  
quite as large as our own moon, and not dim at the edges.  
*I am so weak that any attempt to get a sight of it  
was out of the question; but I think it must have been  
Venus in the zodiacal light....*

*Nardoo is no fit food for white men.*



## MELTING

In the city, in springtime, Anna steps out into drifts of hail the size of boulders, into floods and gale-force winds, and thinks of billions of tons of ice, flowing faster than snowfall replenishes. An iceberg breaks off from Ross ice shelf, and the Bay of Whales ceases to exist. Ice that trapped Shackleton and crushed his ship, the floes that proved impassable all melting now, faster and faster, locked into a process already begun. An extra five metres added to sea levels will mean submerged buildings and motorways, the coastline another Atlantis. Shackleton gave Frank Hurley his mittens, suffering frostbite himself, so the photographer could walk out into his frozen image, as though part of some vanishing point in another century.

Burning fossil fuels have already melted the first two sections of the Larsen ice shelf. Now the third and most massive section, an iceberg twice the size of Samoa, calves off into the South Atlantic Ocean, shatters like safety glass. A century ago Carl Larsen, master of the Norwegian whaler Jason, sailed past that sculpted ice front from Cape Longing to Heard Island, stunned by its fringing bays. Anna decides she must see glaciers, before they all vanish.

She leaves on a cruise ship for Alaska, aware of the many differences between her journey and those others. Winter is rising, but the peaks of distant mountains are barely touched with white. On the eighth day the ship approaches Hubbard Glacier which surges towards the gulf, blue beneath the waterline and just above it. Ice blue as blown glass or ammonite shell calves off like bubble-foam. Anna hears the glacier split, broken floes drifting by the boat, imagines a migration of fish, birds, mammals. When they dock at Ketchikan, she will buy a piece of ammonite shell as a memento.

On a rocky island nearby, sea-lions stretch out in the sun, as the world that survives grows smaller.



West Bali, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Mari Maxwell's work features in Pendemic.ie; Honest Ulsterman; Headstuff.org; *Her Other Language*, with Women's Aid Northern Ireland; Libartes.net (translated to Serbian); Healing Words Exhibition, London, and University College Dublin's Poetry Wall in 2018 & 2019. Her work is online and in print in Ireland, USA, India, Brazil, Australia and Serbia. She is a 2019 Words Ireland/Mayo County Council mentee, former member of the Irish Writers Centre's inaugural XBorders project. She received The Story House Ireland/Galway County Council bursary in 2016, The Story House Ireland Residency in 2017. Her poetry/fiction placed second in the Dromineer Literary Festival 2015 & 2008; highly commended for the Francis Ledwidge Poetry Award 2018 & 2014; shortlisted in the 2014 Walking on Thin Ice Short Story Contest; shortlisted in the Cork County Council Arts Service From the Well in 2020 & 2017; and longlisted in the 2013 Over The Edge New Writer of the Year.



## FISHERMAN'S BAIT

It sat through Connemara winters  
up on cinder blocks  
there on the back lawn.

An ebony beetle husk with  
ribs splayed to the sky.

Waterproof aged planks  
webbed and crumbling  
never shifting in Aran winds  
nor gales nor hail.

A solid hulk, biding spring  
when he upturned the currach,  
slathered warm sticky syrup into joints  
then stalked the Mayfly and  
let the mackerel beckon  
them home to Galway Bay.

Mari Maxwell

## MAYO MAGIC

Outside my window  
 a hare blurs past.  
 His white tail shakes  
 as he bounces by.  
 And just when I've smiled at his  
 randomness,  
 he's gone without a trace.

In the fields where sheep graze,  
 pheasants court.  
 The male chafes his desires,  
 a grating squawk.  
 Chases her through fence and pasture.  
 Stretches high, pumps his wings,  
 his red and tannin waistcoat.

At the edge of the tree line,  
 where the turlough recedes,  
 a buck keeps watch.  
 His doe curls in the copse,  
 ears alert, her spine a tender curve.  
 In the softness of her belly  
 a fawn dozes.

From the depths of Lough Mask  
 a trout spins high,  
 up up past the surface.  
 Rainbows arch and swirl  
 as the ripples close.

## PLEASE CALL THEM BY THEIR NAMES

In Hot Springs Arkansas they warned,  
 don't climb on the kitchen cabinets  
 so they zip-tied her to the bed.  
 Mother used a half-inch thick wooden paddle.  
 Ligature marks and half-healed scars  
 across her daughter's back.  
 The live-in boyfriend called her Idiot.  
 A joke, he'd said.

She stood in December frost,  
 begged for her coat, her medicines.  
 In a hospital bed, in Ireland's sunny  
 south east, he called his mother Fatty.  
*Can't anyone take a joke?*

In suburban Dublin, father screeched  
 bastard, imbecile, bollocks.  
 At dinner, siblings watched tea leaves freckle  
 their brother's face.

And so the wheel goes,  
 spoke by spoke  
 until the cradle falls.



## WINDS OF CHANGE

You spirited past,  
silver light grazing your plumage  
as you glided over Lough Mask,  
just before the rains upended  
and the waves spat white.

Here terns freefall in the breeze  
float and scoop the currents,  
as the wind guides them sideways  
and up, up, up  
to where they arc like arrows.

I sit on limestone.  
Anchor myself with each bubble burst  
and float above the laughing treeline,  
the churning water,  
to dig deep in the wild iris and lily pads.  
Rooted firmly.  
Homeward bound.

## UPON REFLECTION

They took your leg  
To save your life.  
No longer viable,  
they said.

They took my breasts.  
One cancer journey, and yearly  
threats, pokes and squeezing.  
I gave them up.  
Willingly.

Now we can balance each other,  
hold each other up, I said.  
It's not the same, you said.  
No mom.  
It is not.

Educationist, poet, translator, essayist and peace activist. Maria A. Miraglia was born and lives in Italy. She graduated in Foreign Languages and Literatures, got a master's degree in Evaluation and School Orientation followed by one more in Modular Education, an HLC from the Trinity College, Edinburgh. Teacher of foreign languages in public high secondary schools and a ministerial lecturer for English language teachers. An active member of Amnesty International, of Ican, of the Observatory for Human Rights, Deputy President-Coordination, at the child rights global organization, United World Movement for Children(UWMC), Kenya, she herself founder and chairwoman of World Foundation for Peace. Dr Maria Miraglia is a founding member and the Literary Director of the Italian cultural association Pablo Neruda and a member of several international editorial boards. She collaborates for poetry with national and international magazines. Her poems are translated into several languages and collected in numberless anthologies. Among her recent poetry collections: Star Dust, 2018; Confluence, 2019; Tra Realtà e Sogno and Labirinto di Pensieri, 2020. She is a recipient of several recognitions and awards.



## DON'T SMILE AT ME

Don't smile at me  
every time I pick for you  
a flower  
along the meadows  
where the paths of life  
lead my steps

Whenever  
my hand gets ready  
to pluck from the earth  
one more  
quick the thought goes back  
to the time when  
on the high seas  
young and strengthless  
you expected  
I held out my hand  
while you felt like drowning

In the very act of bending  
I ask God's forgiveness  
for failing  
for not giving you  
what you expected

Your cries for help  
came to me  
as words of rejection  
and there I stayed incredulous  
hoping that at least once  
you would have called my name

Maria A Miraglia

## INADEQUATE

You thought  
 you had learned to accept it  
 the pain  
 also because you can't refuse it  
 that comes suddenly  
 when you least expect it  
 to devastate you inside  
 break all those mental structures  
 that you have built over the time  
 to defend yourself  
 You can't see it  
 but feel it  
 like blades  
 tearing those threads  
 that like a spider's web  
 you have woven  
 and with difficulty  
 over time  
 You say I know life by now  
 you feel prepared  
 to go through new storms  
 that are there  
 ready to surprise you again  
 to make you feel inadequate  
 to think you have to start over  
 all over again  
 to understand  
 comprehend  
 to accept

## I CAN'T BREATHE

They look at me  
 As if I were nothing  
 Tug me  
 Arrogant in their uniforms  
 Pounce against me  
 Like dogs whose  
 Leashes have been removed  
 One of them writhes my arm  
 I don't resist  
 Other times it happened  
 But I feel now  
 That the worst is in the air  
 I can only say and  
 In a slow voice  
 I can't breath  
 But with his face  
 So close to mine  
 He pretends not to hear  
 His eyes don't change expression  
 Taken as he is  
 By the effort to press on my neck

His cronies are there looking  
 They talk  
 Sometimes laugh  
 Who knows how many scenes  
 Like this  
 Have seen them as witnesses  
 I look at the white man  
 On me  
 While the sight slowly fogs up  
 And turns off

But not far away  
 I still can see that face  
 He loosens his hold  
 Light and painless  
 I look at my lifeless body  
 And for a while  
 I can't but go on saying  
 'Cause I was a black man



Maria Castro Dominguez is the author of 'A Face in The Crowd' her Erbacce Press winning collection and 'Ten Truths from Wonderland' (Hedgehog Poetry Press) a collaboration with Matt Duggan. She won the third prize in Brittle Star's Poetry Competition, was highly commended in the Borderlines Poetry Competition and finalist in the Stephen A DiBiase Poetry contest NY. Also she has been longlisted in Write Out Loud's Beyond the Storm's poetry competition. Her poems have appeared in many journals such as Orbis, Obsessed With Pipework, Popshot, The Long-Islander Huntington Journal NY, The Stockholm Review of Literature, Pank Magazine, Empty Mirror, Dream Catcher and London Grip. She has flash fiction published in Out of the Gutter and Friday Flash Fiction. She has a master's degree in English Philology and is a freelance writer.



## WIDOW

a woman who has lost  
a husband by death  
a woman who has longing in her heart  
but has not married again

I used to be a chess widow  
my babies born alone  
I called out to him  
in pain but he was busy  
winning or losing a war

widow  
a last word  
falling off the cliff of a page  
falling on white space  
I think of what being a widow  
is falling or as the dictionary has it  
being empty

they are the same widows  
which remind me of a door closing  
and somewhere the opening of a window

Maria Castro Dominguez

## ASH

I'm listening to the light,  
stamping my feet  
on your earth to imitate rainfall  
to call the earthworms to the surface  
and try to persuade them to haul you out.

A bee scrawls a figure eight  
around your fragrance  
scattering pollen from its tail,  
it feels like backdraft of ash blown in  
my face momentarily  
making my eyes tear-filled.



Withering rose, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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



## EVENING WITCHERY

Nobody noticed the shadow shifting behind the greenery, and even if they had, they would not have believed their eyes. The drooping leaves of the palm trees took odd rhythms and shapes under sea breeze.

Strange birds squealed and screeched in the shrubbery around them. Cuba Libre cocktails and other sweet alcoholic mixtures eased them into a feeling of security, into the evening's witchery.

Tutu clad waitresses excited male imagination. Female perceptions became attuned to dark and brooding bar attendants. Salty wafts assailed the air, and the repeated sea hum lulled them into an easy state of euphoria.

Amanda, as always, refused to take what they were having, though felt the edge of temptation each time some skillfully concocted mixture, topped with multi-coloured umbrella, cherry and olive was brought to the table. She could not, literally, tolerate alcohol. After half a glass of wine the tip of her fingers began to itch, after a full one the palm of her hands turned bluish, took a life of their own and could not keep them from fidgeting with anything within her reach. Embarrassing.

Sober as she was, she did not see the prowling figure because she sat with her back to the beach, and the muzzle flash was lost in the light of the many red and pink globe paper lanterns hanging in a cave-like ceiling of branches, reeds and greenery in the patio.

Clear headed, she should have noticed the unusual, pervasive squeal and screech in the undergrowth, know that the unease she felt was real, not a sign of her annoyance seeing her friends in such a state, especially John slumped over his chair. She did not know his fixed gaze wasn't due to the beauty of the starry sky.

Maria Wallace



## THE POWER OF THE LINE

Writing, that's what I do,  
not brilliant writing,  
not glittering fiction but the beading  
of precious words,  
semi-precious stones assembled  
to form a chain of sentences,  
sparkling necklace put together  
with feeling,  
polished surfaces  
catching sunbeams.

Writing, the need to compress  
and give shape to some thoughts,  
shape to something as ephemeral  
as life and mist.

## RE-EMERGING

I'm fashioning a rebirth  
from a place of nowhere to here,  
to the page, to a vocabulary  
that falls short  
to describe an act of faith,  
a re-emerging of the self  
back into the everyday,  
into the power of the poem.

To that purpose  
I repeat words,  
form sentences in an effort  
to clarify meaning  
and give power  
to this invention.

## INVITING SANDS

Once she entered the mirror  
not knowing  
the reverse view was different.  
She walked on dazed by the light  
of the smooth surface.

The polished,  
shimmering sands  
were so inviting,  
she forgot that beyond it  
there was a stormy sea,  
gigantic waves,  
devouring sea monsters,  
unforgiving depths,  
an underworld from which  
no one ever returned.

She trusted  
the clear face of the mirror  
not knowing how easily it lied.



Sea water trapped by sand, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Throughout her work Marion has tried to challenge the politics of representation through a poetics of resistance – in poetry, (third body Whitmore Press 2018; *Fragments from a paper witch* Salt 2008, a finalist in the 2010 Adelaide Festival Literature Awards: Innovation), novels (the most recent of five being *konkretion* UWAP 2013), playscripts, and memoir (*The Man on the Mantelpiece* UWAP 2018). Her novels have been shortlisted for major Australian awards and twice for the Canada-Australian Prize, with *Not Being Miriam* winning the WA Week Prize for fiction back in 1988. Her critical monograph *Poetic revolutionaries* (Rodopi 2014) explored intertextuality and subversion. Although semi-retired from university work, she still supervises graduate writing projects at Deakin University. <https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/writing-and-literature/marion-may-campbell/>



## AFTERLIFE

you come to me at night  
with your huge hands  
signing dark & slow  
my sentence  
& I sail

as slight  
as a tangent  
off your buoyant breast  
into the bigger breeze just  
coasting along

refusing  
for the moment  
deflation like the withered  
parachute's inverted  
flower

the first death always returns  
& the clouds ride a carousel  
around a hill  
singing out  
carnival tunes

summer comes in  
like fish & chips in the air  
down on the boardwalk  
where are you & where  
is our assignation

Marion May Campbell, photograph by Zoë Campbell Walker.

*continued overleaf...*

© Marion May Campbell



AFTERLIFE *contd...*

not here not here & I dream  
you & I are reconciled  
finally in some kind of  
gracious afterlife  
a sweet reprieve

to eat & talk  
at this eternal banquet  
but all the food  
is just pictures of food &  
all our talk is just pictures

of words like Ed Ruscha's  
painting 'Vanishing Cream'  
yet there's no picture  
of wine & as you begin  
to vanish I wonder

was it the Cheshire Cat  
who ate the vanishing cream  
but your lingering smile  
clearly says it's you  
who first have vanished me



The Crossing, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Mary Melvin Geoghegan has five collections of poetry published. Her most recent *As Moon and Mother Collide* with Salmon Poetry (2018) Her work has been widely published including Poetry Ireland Review, The Sunday Times, The Stinging Fly, The Moth, Crannog, Skylight47, Orbis185, Hodges Figgis 259th Anthology, Live Encounters and Poem on the DART amongst others. She has been shortlisted for many awards, including the Fish Poetry Prize, Francis Ledwidge, Curit New Writing, The Rush, Padraic Colum, the Jonathan Swift Poetry Award and won The Longford Poetry Award. Currently working on a new collection *There Are Only a Few Things* to be published with Salmon Poetry.



## MOMENTS THAT DO NOT LAST

but, somehow endure  
in that common miracle of presence.

Between you and me son  
and this limited routine  
wearing a mask -  
always, checking going outside.  
When you first came five months ago from London  
I wasn't sure -

Yet, a love  
so familiar but separate  
unlocked.

Mary Melvin Geoghegan

## TAKING A LOOK

We googled his old home  
- Zwolle in the Netherlands.  
And before I knew it  
he'd slipped from the stool  
and was a seven year old  
running down the lane  
joining friends waiting for him.  
That day they were planning -  
and then a swim in the pool across the road.  
When he returned  
he talked of a wisteria fringing the front door  
as it had always done.  
I noticed how well the house looked  
after over eighty years.

While at the keyboard  
we then visited my old family home  
on Old Finglas road in Dublin.  
It hadn't withstood the years as well.  
The garden could have done with my Dad's clippers  
and the dark blue walls  
aged the house – giving no hint  
of all the life, joy and disappointments  
that had emanated from all within.

## ACROSS FORTY THOUSAND YEARS

an ivory strip -  
On the floor of the Hohle Fels Cave  
carved from a mammoth tusk  
with four intriguing grooves.  
puzzled –  
Until archaeologist Veerle Rots  
began feeding plant fibres  
through a bronze replica.  
Discovered - four strands  
could combine to form a rope.  
So this was how our stone-age ancestors  
created rope and twine for fishnets,  
snares, traps, bows and arrows.  
A technological milestone  
saved on a strip of ivory.



## ALMOST, UNIMAGINABLE

How in Ballyseedy, Co. Kerry  
during the Civil War, in March 1923  
nine republican prisoners  
were bound to a land mine  
before, being blown to smithereens  
by forces of the Free State.  
Who only a few months previously  
had fought side by side  
with the same comrades.  
And for days afterwards  
birds were seen eating their flesh  
from the trees at Ballyseedy Cross.

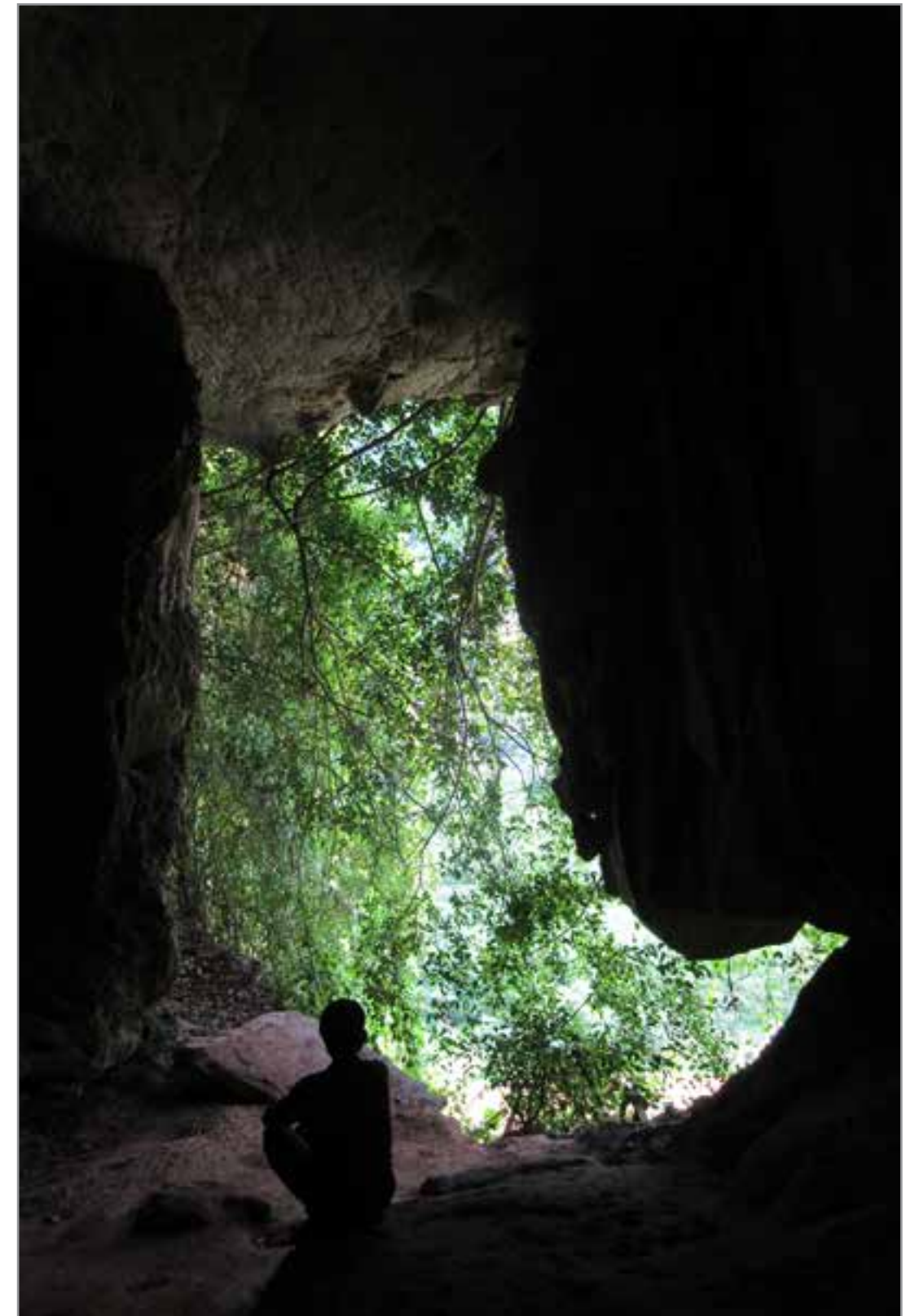
Only one survived Stephen Fuller  
who was thrown into a ditch  
and managed to escape.

## AT THE START OF A NEW WEEK

there's a hare on the hall table  
by Hans Hoffman (1585) almost identical  
to the one I saw years ago  
in the Albertina Museum, Vienna by Durer.  
I bought the magnet -  
Now, that hare sits ready to leap from the fridge door  
clearing a path through the undergrowth  
halting before gratitude  
and the heart of the woman  
who had brought our choir  
to stand before it.

## FROM THAT FIRST DAY

the moment was webbed  
nothing living in isolation.  
How, the world was contracted  
in a secret sympathy with itself.  
There was power in places  
where landscape met its own.  
In the transient of waterways  
and the crucible of mountains.  
There was strength in all.



Cave, north Laos PDR, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Moyra Donaldson is a poet from Co Down, Northern Ireland. She has published nine collections of poetry, including a limited edition publication of artwork and poems, *Blood Horses*, in collaboration with artist Paddy Lennon. Her most recent collection is *Carnivorous*, Doire Press, 2019. In 2019, she received a Major Individual Artist award from Arts Council NI.



## IN THE MOVIE

My young mother walks across a beach,  
the tide is out, I'm in the pram she pushes  
over the wet sand; the man beside her says  
he'd bring me up as his own,  
if she would come back to him.

She remembers freedom,  
Armagh dance halls,  
her fingers playing tunes  
on the button accordion;  
arms around him  
on the back of his motorbike  
before her father came  
to bring her home where she belonged.

She drives me home  
to where her husband waits,  
my father -  
and we all live in the bed  
she's made for us.

Moyra Donaldson



## 1ST SEPTEMBER 2020

From our tower, we watch the rising harvest moon,  
full ripe burnt orange orb, autumn's colour,  
cut through, bisected by one thin, dark line of cloud

and it's as if we've never seen the moon before,  
or it's a memory of moon, familiar and strange,  
both beautiful and alien, ours and not ours.

We have locked the gates, raised the drawbridge.  
Whose turn is it tonight to play the castle Fool,  
speaking truth, veritas in vino?  
Where would I be without you?  
Circling some other planet.

## ROCK OF AGES

Fear was the rock on which our faith was built,  
fed in mother's milk through generations,  
in prayer and catechism, chapter, verse.

Fear was my nourishment, it formed my bones  
and sinews, grew me up in contradictions  
and in all the ways of loss.

My poor mother envisioned me in hell, eternally  
gone, Persephone in her dark god's lap, but worse –  
no possibility of coming back.

A living god  
has always been  
a fearful thing.

## NOT THIS TIME

Nature is offering her condolences -  
the high sky, the geraniums,  
the gleam on the horse's coat;  
seedling, raindrop, rainbow,  
stone and bird, weight and lift -  
my heart is having none of it.

## WINTER DAY

How often have we driven this road along the edge of the lough and  
every time there is something to catch us. Today it is the snow on the  
top of the Mourne, turning the landscape into a Japanese painting;  
geese are scattered across the shallows, feeding. Crows and seagulls  
make one black, white flock above the plough. A hawk sits on a telegraph wire.  
Despite the argument we had earlier, we soon settle into the particularity  
of this place.  
A folding together  
of time and time again. Flick through the days; the images seem to move.  
Life plays out.  
Nothing stands still and nothing is forever.  
There is this moment when the mountains' snow caps catch our eye.

a single moment  
a book of days, winter snow  
on the horizon

Natasha was born and raised in Athens, Greece. She is an academic researcher lecturing in literature, drama, and critical theory and has held academic posts as an Assistant Professor at Qatar University, the National University of Ireland, Galway and the American College of Greece. She is also a volunteer English teacher for migrants/refugees campaigning to end Direct Provision. She holds a Ph.D. in Classics & English, a M.Sc. in English Literature: Writing & Cultural Politics, and a B.A. in English & American Literature. She has published chapters on Irish studies in edited volumes and journals and is currently writing her monograph on Irish theatre and rights. Her poems have appeared in *Melodia* magazine, *The Anthology of Young Greek Poets*, her poetry collection "The Dialect of Water" in *Writing Home* (Dedalus Press) and her essay in the *Correspondences Anthology* (The Stinging Fly). Her homes are Athens, Edinburgh, Doha, and Ireland since 2003. <https://www.dedaluspress.com/product/writing-home-the-new-irish-poets/> <https://www.rte.ie/culture/2019/1210/1098209-correspondences-the-anthology-giving-voice-to-direct-provision/>



## AN INTERVENTION

Look: across the provincial abattoir  
a stray cat has paused, a solitary audience.

Through the glass window she studies  
the spectacle of an anatomy lesson from a distance.

Hanging from steel hooks,  
polished, severed, still dripping,

pig heads, limbs, guts, and a goat's heart  
leave their defeat on the counter.

Fresh in order, carved with care,  
the price of flesh laid bare.

When the butcher's knife was raised  
over the lifeless muscle,  
I saw the cat walking away with a sparrow  
caught in her mouth.

Natasha Remoundou



Nessa O'Mahony has published five volumes of poetry, the most recent being *The Hollow Woman and the Island* (Salmon Poetry, 2019). She lives in Dublin, Ireland.



## LOW AND LEVEL

*for Donal Lawlor*

'How's she cutting,  
low and level'.  
You gave me that phrase in February,  
around the table, calm, collegiate,  
notebooks poised, hearts open to words.  
By March, the wind had shifted  
and other words were at the ready,  
acronyms we learned to decipher  
as fear reproduced itself numerically.  
By April you had confirmed  
your place in the fight for breath.  
All we could do was wait,  
keep our heads down, hope the bullets  
went over our heads and dodged you.  
By late May there was news of rehab,  
recovery, of breaths released.  
By June you were writing,  
your own phrases shaping  
the slow crawl towards light.  
It's August now. I sit and watch clouds,  
how veiled sun filters light,  
and open the notebook, channel  
to the page where your father's phrase  
of greeting starts us off again  
on this pilgrimage of word.

Nessa O'Mahony



Niamh is a writer from Dublin. She has published in four collections including an Easter 1916 commemorative edition of poetry. Niamh is a member of two writing groups and regularly chairs workshops at these. Niamh has just finished her first novel 'Ruth' about women and war. Niamh teaches Creative Writing and has a MEd in Adult and Community education. She has performed her work at the Red Line Festival Civic Theatre Tallaght Dublin and in St John's Theatre Listowel Co. Kerry. Most recently, two collections Niamh has published in were shortlisted for the CAP awards 2017 going on to win for Circle and Square first prize for best anthology.



Niamh Byrne

## MERCY

The wind is high, the clouds a sea of pearl on a southwest tide. The clothes twist and knot on the line. The garden a wet muck, the plants limp sad cold. The sun is white bright behind the clouds. The dust catching on the window, finger prints and the paw from the cat. Inside the TV is a black screen, the stereo idle, the fireplace empty of ashes. The Christmas lights off, the dust has settled. A fine grain of it on the furniture, on the pictures, on the carpets. I opened the blinds in the kitchen delph left drying on the rack, a pot soaking in long forgotten suds. The bins nearly full, turkey and ham cooked and out on the counter. I'll put it out for the foxes and birds. The making of a desert left in a bowl. That was a fast year I say it out loud that was a fast year wasn't it, no one answers because there all gone on with their own lives. I ponder the pot, the dust, the delph. If I put it away what does that say? If I clean their dust what does that say? If I make that cake who will eat it? I wonder what it was the last thing they did in their own home. Was it hang out the washing, switch off the lights before bed, say I'll make that desert tomorrow. The presents are under the Christmas tree; maybe they wrapped them and went up then to their bed. But sure, didn't I know what the last thing was they did.

If I had of dropped by ... maybe; maybe I could have undone the play interrupted the set. I was like an actor waiting on cue. My belly was sour with it all. Across my ruminations of my struggle to accept betrayal, lies and deceit. Always hoping when someone is speaking that it is the truth coming from their being. I know it, I have always known. It is because I do not know how to cope with liars that I pretend to believe them. Like I pretended to believe you.

'Ah no everything is grand, no nothing to worry about; the doctors they don't know what they're talking about.'

But I went, and I saw those doctors. This was too, too important; no this was life and death. I waited all day on a bench in a corridor outside their office. I stood when I saw them coming, I was invited in and told. I always know when people are lying but it's the people I love that lie, I know what it means. This is the end they will not be in my life anymore. It's a premonition of my future. Sometimes I'm relieved, sometimes I'm scared, sometimes I pretend but this time. This time it's not like all the others. This time the inevitable too big for the lie. This time it's different.

I spend the next day outside another doctor's office; she is kinder she arrives when the nurse pages her. Yes, it is true but your Mam she signed you're Dad out, I am sorry because I know she is not well either. Thank you doctor they just want to be together in their own home, if I could speak with someone who could help, help us for them to be together at home. The nurse makes calls; I go drink a coffee in the canteen. The nurses and doctors all eat their food and chat. An odd person sits over a coffee, I catch one of their eyes, and we nod. It is evening before we meet to make the plan of action.

'But being the holidays; if you fill this prescription, pain relief to make them comfortable as is possible.'

I thank the social worker wish him a merry Christmas he says he has two boys waiting on Santa. I wonder if I ask Santa what would happen. I go to the church instead, there are too many people its normally empty. I light a candle anyway and I ask God to forgive me. 'The lie' I say 'I know what it means can you help? Will you give your mercy?'

I leave the church and I do what needs to be done.

Afterward I eat the Christmas dinner, I pull the crackers, I drink wine, I watch a movie, and I go to bed. I dress early, I drink a long glass of water, and I close the door quietly. Pulling into their driveway I vomit out the door onto the path, the cat walks over to it I hiss it away. My head spinning. I decide I'll make tea I'll bring it up to them. It's their decision I say aloud it's their decision, their lives. I make a pot; I put milk in the jug sugar in a bowl. The turkey and ham out on the counter cooked and ready, the makings of a desert in a bowl, delph drying beside the sink, clothes twisting on the line. I steady the tray as I walk up the stairs, their door is shut tight. I have to put the tray down and shoulder it open. I don't look straight away. I hold onto the door and there it is. Not like in the movies when the couple are lying wrapped around each other forever embraced. No.

My mother's leg hangs from the covers her mouth is wide open she is sideways across the bed. My father is foetal on his back like an astronaut in space; his knees face the ceiling, his mouth open his head tilted back.

I say, 'I'll kill the pair of yea look at you's where you at that wine again.'

I fix my mother into the bed, I pop three pillows under her head it's not easy Mam's nearly hard. I can't push my Dad's knees down, so I sit him up and put a cushion behind him. I get an extra blanket from the hot press.

'Now you must be frozen, I'll put the heater on, I have a cup of tea for you, now a cup of tea come on now wake up.' I put it beside them on their lockers, beside the empty wine glasses and the packs of pills. I brush their hair. My Dad's with his comb, I fix my Mam's wig. 'Now that's better.'

My bowels strangle, I run to the toilet into the sink I vomit, and the toilet fills with the sourness of Christmas. I pass their room, I can't look their faces grey, their mouths wide open, their arms hanging from their shoulders. I get downstairs, I search my bag for my mobile. But I know I must go back up. I charge upstairs I put mams right hand under the covers my dad's left hand under the covers and I clasp their left and right hand together over the blanket. I fold the blanket neatly and straighten it out. I turn off the heater, slightly open the small top window. I shut their door tight.

'Ambulance please, no need to rush no, no pulse no, no heartbeat no.'

The house fills, guards wait we offer sandwiches, biscuits, tea, coffee. Autopsy, inquest is mentioned. We bury them together we play their songs, say prayers, cry at the grave go home sit and stare at the wall.

The sky is bright a southwest wind blows, the turkey and ham are wrapped now in tin foil, they came in handy for the sandwiches. I'll put that out for the birds, for the foxes. I go and take in their clothes. Fold them put them away.

'Who filled the prescription?' I hear the detective's voice in my head.

'I did' I say.

The room quietens; the whole family and the neighbours are looking at me. I stand taller I hold her eyes. I didn't take my eyes from the detective's.

'I did' I say again.



‘A lot of morphine on there.’

‘For the pain.’ I say.

She holds my eyes there’s just me and her now the rest fade out.

‘The social worker said it would take time for plans to be put in place, hospices and homes and such.’

She looked back down at the empty packets in her hand and the bottle of wine then looked back. I’m still looking at her.

‘And you are?’

‘I am their daughter.’

‘And you went and got all this by yourself?’

‘I did’

‘Did they ask you to go?’

‘To go?’ I say

‘To go to get the whole lot.’

‘Yes, we decided it was for the best.’

‘For the best?’

I breathe into my belly; I won’t let her look away.

‘Because of the holidays, the pain we weren’t taking any chances.’

She looks at the empty packets the half empty wine bottle.

‘They liked a good red.’

She’s looking at me again.

‘Good for them’ she says.

‘Good for them.’ I say.

Orla Fay edits *Drawn to the Light Press*, a new online magazine of poetry. Her chapbook *Drawn to the Light* is available from Amazon and her first full collection is forthcoming from Salmon Poetry. She edited *Boyne Berries 28*, *The COVID Issue*. Her work has appeared in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Cyphers*, *The Irish Times*, *Crannóg* and she has a poem forthcoming in *The Ireland Chair of Poetry Commemorative Anthology*. <https://drawntothelightpress.com/> Twitter@FayOrla



## MOTHER OF PEARL

*or, A skin for broken things*

Darkness begins to fall after four in the afternoon  
so, when I leave the supermarket the streetlights  
spill orange and yellow paint across the carpark.  
I think of more northern places, Scandinavia  
under a green and dancing aurora borealis  
and Alaska where a vampire movie I'd watched  
had been set. *30 Days of Night*.  
It had been a dread-filled fight to keep the demons away.

An email pings and I open my phone to read it,  
a poetry submission has come through  
from a young man who writes that his decisions  
haunt him daily. I feel a kinship of conscience then.  
He finds no port in a porous lover's embrace,  
intimacy much like the moonless, immortal kiss.  
I realise then that I have been dead for too long,  
anaesthetised by fear and without faith, lacklustre.

My mind is made up to be wholly myself,  
this devil must abide her angel, the wired glass  
of the shattering fall to earth. When you see me,  
I will be self-conscious, blushing, consumed by emotion,  
trembling before the leap, innocent, shy, sweet,  
resilient, miraculous as a mollusc exposed,  
salted daughter of the ocean, a rock crystallised by fire,  
a sight I could stand myself to watch.

Orla Fay

## SNOW DREAM

There is a lake in Finland frozen over in the coldest months. I go there because it is a clear space away from the forests. At night I sleep on the solid water in my cabin on skis. I lie on a warm bed looking through a glass wall on the aurora borealis.

Green, purple and blue  
the sky is a laser show –  
somewhere an avalanche

Wind shakes icicles from spruce and pine. They tinkle like windchimes.  
The sound travels. An arctic fox is crying out the pain of humanity. The stars are piercing. Orion's Belt is the string of pearls Alnitak, Alnilam and Mintaka.  
They are lilies on a midnight pond that stretches to an eastern morning.

Puffed clouds on waking  
scurry in a plane's descent  
hyhmä on the shore

*hyhmä (Finnish, snow floating atop water)*

## GRIM AFFAIRS

Berries on bushes drops of blood  
on handkerchief, paths into woods  
charmed by the ages in hawthorn,  
rosehip, blackberry, and elderberry.  
As winds rise and blow the turning trees,  
from the chestnut a horse, Falada, is thrown,  
his cantering beats out a tempo  
"Goose Girl, Goose Girl!"

By dusk the owl opens her saucer eyes  
in which lesser creatures have come to know  
a faithless moon, a fateful moon  
they sail to death's shore on.  
She opens her wings, night's sovereign,  
a monster, queen of the damned,  
the starlight on her feathers is witchcraft,  
a cloak of bespoke pentacle.

Jorinda and Joringel by the castle fall,  
rue the day they courted by garden wall,  
she, cursed by the enchantress to croon  
caged as nightingale. He dreams passion's flower  
with pistil of pearl, seeks it out with conviction.  
With such intention the seven thousand avian  
are freed to dance again in the sun,  
to whirl at dawn, dervishes.

Over glass mountain the princess climbs  
with three pins for picks, across three swords  
she rolls in a plough-wheel, and a wide lake swims,  
to find her prince whisked away, betrothed to another.  
From walnuts she magicks dresses for her rival,  
reversing misfortune, denial of one true love,  
the fairy-tale ending, the keeping of her heart  
in an iron box, a treasure chest of plunder.





Patricia Sykes

Patricia Sykes is a poet and librettist. Her poems and collections have received various nominations and awards, including the Newcastle Poetry Prize, John Shaw Neilson award and the Tom Howard Poetry Prize. Short listings include the Anne Elder, Mary Gilmore, and Judith Wright Awards. She has read her work widely, including on Australian, Paris and New Zealand radio. It has also been the subject of ABC radio programs, Poetica and The Spirit of Things. Her collaborations with composer Liza Lim have been performed in Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, Paris, Germany, Russia, New York and the UK. She was Asialink Writer in Residence, Malaysia, 2006. A selection of her poems was published in an English/Chinese edition by Flying Island Books in 2017. A song cycle composed by Andrew Aronowicz, based on her collection *The Abbotsford Mysteries*, premiered at The Abbotsford Convent Melbourne — now an arts precinct — in 2019.

## MERIDIAN

Drift wreckage and spumous air.  
Flags of kelp thumbing a lift  
with the incoming tide.  
Mouths caught among the drag  
gasp at the speed of it  
that pummelled ride to shore  
that burn of salt and sun  
the potent reek of it  
lodging in the pores  
like an infinite lifetime.

To be a child of ocean  
stranded on epoch sand  
as chunks crumble from the cliff  
  and each day to watch  
  the white-faced heron  
wheel in lowering spirals  
as thermals sink  
to the level of erosion

the foot shuffle  
of human cause is  
so clumsy beside the grace  
  of birds. The swift step-step-pause  
  of hooded plovers so delicate  
among rock pools, relics,  
they live too warily  
to ignore the signs  
  theirs not to deny  
  that this is a wormhole year  
on minutiae watch  
as death comes roaring  
like a passionate wave.

## PROFILE

The woman doodling her particulars  
I know her I think. She sings and is  
no seraphim, speaks and is no seer,  
her voice not the first voice, her name  
not the first proper noun. Digestion  
sometimes appals her. Gut-ache is  
not particular: kōlon, cōlon, colonic  
can amass to gripe, pain shared, on  
colonial turf when all's said and  
done, history's to excise or ignore.  
Survivors must nourish themselves.  
Kissed by each other's bacteria  
(your yeast, my bread, your  
life, my breath) our warm  
flatulence bouquets the air  
indiscriminate, bared.

## EXPEDITION

Land wears its scars heroically.  
The body's are miniature seismic.  
Circulation's pins and needles  
cannot reattach you to what you were.  
Absence crept in and changed you  
as you wrote lines. Now you  
are daughter to a new self.

How many hours did the clock  
deduct while your mind  
was gone? Your pulse  
so glad to hear its own  
*oosh oosh* it staggers  
out to embrace  
the arriving chill, sun

so low on the horizon  
spine has to tiptoe its vertebrae  
to catch the rim. Hush, there's  
a twilight to be enjoyed  
a night slept away, a slew  
of pages in your hand, written  
in your own original (perhaps)  
today as you were dying.



Perie Longo, Poet Laureate of Santa Barbara, California (2007-2009), has published five books of poetry: *Milking The Earth* (1986), *The Privacy Of Wind* (1997), *With Nothing behind but Sky: a journey through grief* (2006), *Baggage Claim* (2014) and *A Mosaic of Poetry* (2013), an eBook of poetry for children. Her poems have been published in journals and anthologies including *Askew*, *Atlanta Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *International Poetry Review*, *Miramar Magazine*, *The Mochila Review*, *Nimrod*, *Passager*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Quiddity*, *Rattle*, *Solo Novo*, and *Wisconsin Review*. She taught poetry in local schools through the California-Poets-in-the-Schools (1984-2014), and is on the staff of the annual Santa Barbara Writers Conference. Poetry chair for the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, in 2005 she was invited by the University of Kuwait to speak on Poetry as a way to Peace. As a psychotherapist, she integrates poetry reading and writing for healing.



## HUMMINGBIRD LATE NIGHT

*...Some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor. - Rumi*

I step on the porch hearing a slapping against  
the stucco—click on the light, dodge  
a hummingbird's whizz trapped beneath  
the porch's wide overhang.  
I consider the bird's low swoop, perhaps shaman  
bearing magic. My husband paying visit  
from on high? My daughter checks her iPhone: *hummers  
seek only sky...mount something red beyond.*  
In-out we race frantic as the bird in our desire  
to save him, as we could not her father.  
She slips her red hat, with sparkles that flicker,  
over a broom, presses it into the ground.  
I place red impatiens beneath with sugar water  
to lure him from the high lamp where exhausted,  
he clings for life. Last look, he's a fist  
of feathers, collapsed behind the Ficus.  
"There, there," I hum, point to the tree tops, the moon,  
pray nature intervene. Past midnight,  
I can't help peeking. No trace, not even a feather.  
I enter the sky, full winged.

Perie Longo



## BAG CHECKER

I'm holding my last indestructible plastic bag,  
banned for the rest of our natural lives,  
one of billions that could kill dolphins and turtles,  
bury us all in graves of convenience. I remember

my mother's job as a part time bag checker,  
basement of Gimbels department store  
just after World War II—years before plastic bags.  
*Making-do*, she called it, some extra pennies  
for mittens and socks, maybe a candy bar if we behaved.  
"I caught two," she'd brag, shoplifters sneaking off  
with pilfered goods. This bag I'm saving

for a rainy day, a souvenir I wave like a culprit  
with a little snap. In the film, *American Beauty*,  
such a bag lifted in the breeze dancing  
like Margot Fonteyn along the rim of a curb,  
up a flight of stairs with the grace of a swan

like my mother's hand as she lay dying.  
I tried to take hold of it, floating, pulling away  
in the empty air, finished, unfettered.

## UNWALKING THE BLACK CAT DURING COVID

The one crossing my path outside  
past the planter box of red geraniums.  
I'm wiping down the groceries  
should the corona virus crown me.  
You can't be too careful at my age,  
so I begin backstepping, unwalking cat's slink  
in the Lysol scented air, bananas and grapes  
floating in a sink of soap. It's an Irish thing,  
hands covering the eyes to unsee what you saw,  
unwinding the clock, which makes sense  
to me curious where the day went  
at bedtime when I unnews the news.  
Since quarantine, the top of my head has blown,  
turned snow, yet the cat bears not one whisk.  
Her stride uncolored me. Have I fallen  
for an old conspiracy? Remember that Celts  
say these cats, bless their unblinking stare,  
also bring good fortune if you will,  
love and good health  
at the stroke of twelve,  
or before if you cast your spell right. I step  
outside to undo what plagues, retrace  
her steps forward calling *here kitty kitty*,  
*come back*. Find her in a whirl of dust  
in the field out back

unwinding.

## ZANE AT TWO

Four days old, he scowled  
 at the princess crown  
 his two sisters decked him with,  
 eyes rolled up with a  
*here we go* look into this life  
 that might be trouble.  
 Right away, cars became  
 his thing—feeling their power  
 to get you places beyond  
 a house full of tutus.  
 Every chance he has, he crawls  
 behind the wheel  
 of his parent's car, checks  
 right, then left, saying  
*Go! Go!* Soon as I give him  
 a book of TRUCKS emblazoned  
 with gold letters  
 it's the only one he wants,  
 runs his fingers over  
 their pictures—the treads  
 and spokes, axles,  
 wraps his tongue around  
 car transporter, excavator,  
 bulldozer. Last night  
 I watched him on his back  
 rolling the tiny fire  
 and garbage trucks over  
 his pudgy cheeks, humming  
*truck truck truck.*

## CLING

Like that glistening drop  
 of rain at the tip

of a pine needle flung  
 across the hedge  
 whose name escapes me

like the meaning of many things  
 like remembering what's to be done  
 in the middle of what's going on here  
 before day's end  
 or the world's

my mind flung as the needle  
 in the storm clings  
 to the fact, unaltered,  
 that truth is a beautiful thing

the poem's aim and mine,  
 sealed for keeps that holds me

so I won't fall away from the edge  
 where we find ourselves in a rage

leaving too many stranded  
 no way            back home.

Pippa Little is a Scots poet living in the North East of England. She reviews, edits, mentors and is a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Newcastle University. Her most recent full collection, *Twist*, came out in 2017 from Arc and was shortlisted for The Saltire Society Poetry Collection of the Year. *Overwintering*, published by OxfordPoets/Carcanet, was shortlisted for The Seamus Heaney Centre Prize. She is currently working on her next collection. She has a Hawthornden Fellowship, won many awards, been published widely in magazines, anthologies, online, on radio and film and has read across the world.



## THE CUPBOARD

I'm always first down  
into the cool blue kitchen  
bare feet hit the flags  
fridge hums at my back  
the cat's saucer eyes  
mark my every move:  
lately it's got tougher,  
good reasons to uncurl from bed  
difficult to muster  
old cracks in the heart re-open

I pull wide the cupboard doors, inhale  
Earl Grey, lemon, Assam,  
ginger, hibiscus – soft and woody,  
shade and ease and summer grasses –  
from a lower shelf, coffee's smoky odor  
stings orange and grainy, sings Mexico,  
Blue Mountains, that dream of late night  
lanterns flickering along the shore,  
the world open-armed for a kiss

how it pleases me, these  
memories that lift and circle when I set them free:  
enough to set the kettle on the flame,  
to say, today I'll stay alive.

Pippa Little



## HORSE LAKE, GALWAY

The day I fed from your hand  
like the wild creatures I remembered  
coming through the lake shoulder-deep  
raising their huge heads over us  
so we offered them what we had  
and they ate, sweeping their lips across our skin  
so my whole arm tingled as if from fever –  
then stood a while, looking,  
and only an hour later the surface of the lake  
was its old grey lilt again  
as if those wild souls had never come, or gone:  
my hand only, when I pressed my nose in it  
remembered them: prickle of sunflower sleeves  
and their own scent, green shade of a new-mown damp:  
but the day I fed from your hand  
I nipped your skin with my teeth, an animal's  
warning you didn't notice, the kind of lure  
like scraps, rags, anything that gets lost  
and catches in fences, but only for a while.

## SOLE TO INSTEP

Warmth looks for warmth,  
even in deepest sleep

my instep finds your sole,  
rubs and nudges

in the cold fathoms of our bed  
so sparks glimmer and blur -

not extinct, only  
fragile now

even a lightest touch is pain  
so I half-wake to the graze

your long-boned foot gives mine  
and press back,

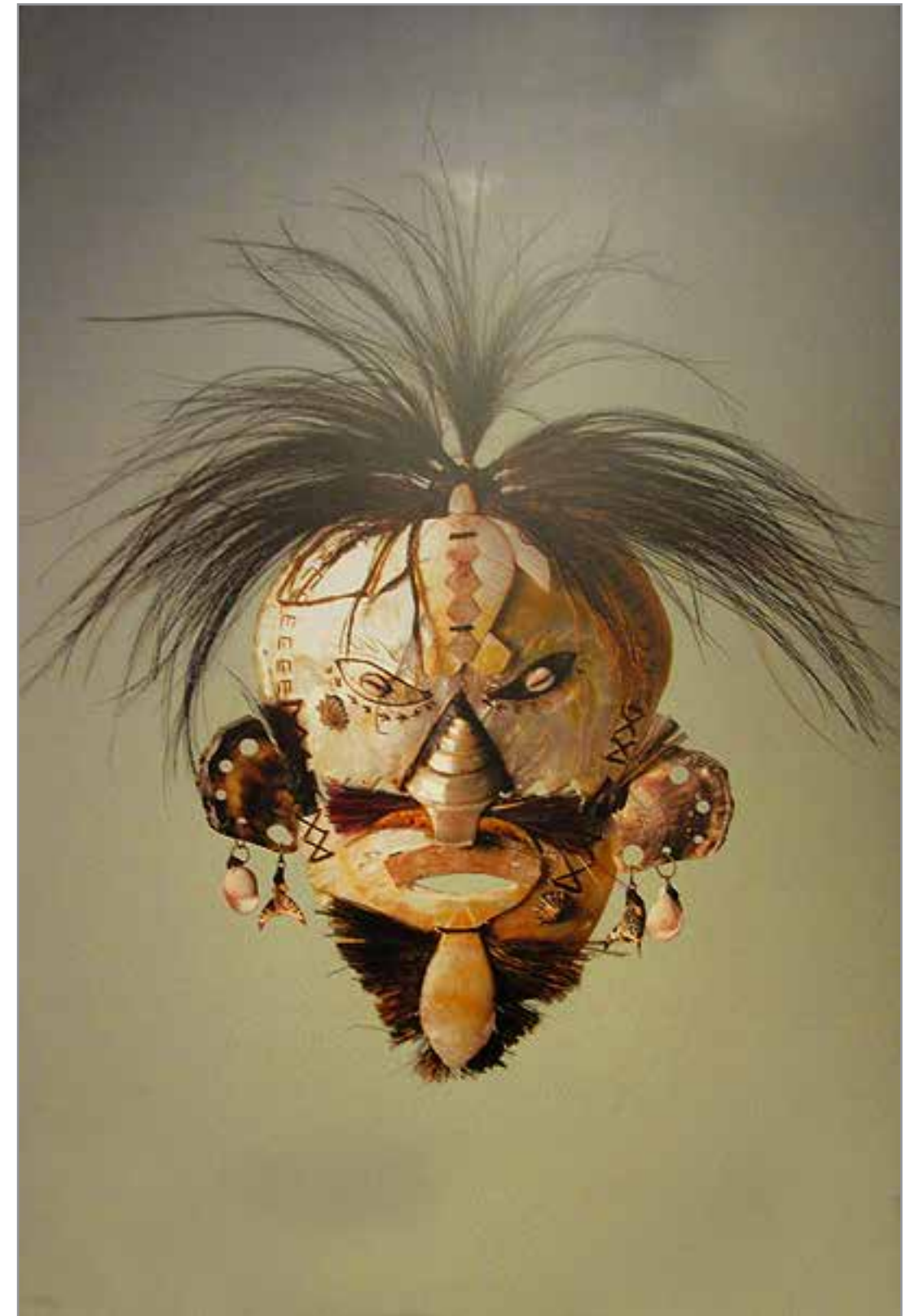
I would be a boat  
the length of you, perfect

vessel to fit you  
wholly

## NOTES THE DEATH-MASK MAKER LEFT BEHIND HER

The face falls at the moment of death.  
Very slow: the moment itself is  
invisible in plain sight but its aftermath  
can be seen if you move your eyes away/then back  
as if from a glacier about to calve.  
Once I used to tie the jowls tight with torn linen:  
these days the mandibles are superglued  
to smile in the face of gravity. After all,  
the head is now merely a sign of itself,  
surface to be made facsimile – so  
no disrespect. I am always careful.

Something has gone, yes –  
but what I make preserves that absence.  
In the process of covering over the planes and angles  
of bone and lip I am completing, memorising  
'the spirit beyond the skin'. I press  
and mould anew every crease, follicle, blemish:  
this negative, turned inside out, becomes the likeness  
someone loved once: eerie, they often call it,  
wanting to touch. But it is neither warm nor cold,  
and I do not tell them of the time it took  
to rub the real head clean, to separate each hair,  
each eyelash from my sticky alginate.  
I have boxes lined with silk to fit.  
Better, I think, than a jar of grit and bone.  
Centuries I have been making the dead into the sleeping:  
nobody owns life, after all, it slips through us.  
When you see me, look for someone else.



Artist: Eddie Nona, Badhu Island, display at Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, Hanoi.  
Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Polly Richardson Munnely is Dublin born poet, currently living and writing in Dingle co Kerry, Ireland .She continues to run the Bulls Arse Writers group Navan co Meath remotely and her Tuesday's Zoomers group of international of poets .. She has been published both nationally and internationally. Her debut collection *Winter's Breath* is out and available on Amazon. She is currently working on her second collection.



## PAUSED

On the crest of wave, mountain, hill  
 under full constellations  
 hidden by blue, yet there. Right there, reasoning.  
 Stilling in my quakes beyond footfalls seeking  
 their own indentations, where rainbows kiss,  
 shadows quieten, caught in sun-light-slinks  
 unawares of mid-blink pauses,  
 I hear grass sing. Seep into  
 wonder lust,  
 lone stag greets moon as  
 if lover baying  
 his instinctual plight.  
 Each tree absorbs those  
 echoes, saves them  
 for birthing themselves. Tucks them tightly  
 under gnarly bark with warmest of sap  
 and breath.

Polly Richardson, photograph by Geno Cussen.



## BRIDGE - BEAUFORT KERRY

Echoes of footfalls. I stand. Mimic Heron  
 The place of two directions. Easting west, as if  
 swaddled in by Carrantuohill's mountainous arms – beckoning,  
 lullaby hummed beyond her clouds,  
 looked on by MacGillycuddys Reeks knowing his

nature's nurturing, flowing Laune's succulence. I beckon,  
 yearn Dunloe's kiss, seeped in stories etched in Ogham,  
 circling centuries, their whispers vibrate to the listeners.  
 Distortions grapple as rapids bounce, play.  
 Bathe my eyes, sink into silt beds,  
 copper rich contorting

rooted flora neon lush bedded where sun  
 breaks her bleak,  
 I stand, mimic Heron,  
 and merging merpeople's murmur  
 between the shimmers, greening pleats,  
 gather in shoals matching moans,

I blink, leave eye lash for next wish upon- a- frog.  
 Flowers still bloom under autumnal breath,  
 knowing barren slumber awaits Imbloc serenade,  
 Loan Raven perches left,  
 for now  
 eyes bathe.

## DINGLE WILDS 7 - DANDELION

From bee whispers they form, sun yellow as lemons on trees  
 megalithic- still awaiting awakening like Sleeping Giant and the Skellig's  
 afloat on horizons, cradled by her pull.

Dotting like earthen constellations amongst green grasses swaying waves  
 catching bare footfalls in-tune, as rabbits basking, twitch timeless amongst burrows  
 and the dead.

All enveloped. The Three Sisters silent serenades as if Sirens enchanting  
 lures to bare footfalls listening, awaiting flowering transfigurations to disperse.

To winds, each one will dance with a wish delicately blown  
 I imagine fairies, translucent,  
 gently guiding  
     softly chanting  
     seedlings in flight, over turquoise- blueing sea swell and churns  
     to the Blaskets beyond

maybe fall on rugged edges kissing Dun Chaoín and paint listening purpling boulders  
 fringing Ventry's sands crowning them king as those sea churns come rolling with  
 white horses pounding, gifting her strand,

or greet at the mouth of sucklers and heifers, bathing, nasal licking, playing peek  
 -a-boo in the silence of their kingdom on Ballydavid's own hum , where the shags  
 mimic megalith -still , each wing held up to sun as if in yoga meditations or frozen  
 flight ,  
 like chameleon their blackness blends them in on jagged rock jutting up, birthed by  
 sea, keeps their secrets.

And the dandelion takes root, cocooned awaiting awakenings to greet bee hums  
 be sun yellow as lemons on trees.

Robbi Nester has spent countless hours working on poetry projects during the pandemic. This has resulted in 4 books, one still in process, including an anthology, a chapbook, an ekphrastic collection, and a general collection, all seeking homes at the moment. Her most recently published book is *Narrow Bridge* (Main Street Rag, 2019). Her poems have appeared most recently in Silver Birch Press, Live Encounters, Pirene's Fountain, and North of Oxford.

The following poems are from Robbi Nester's collection in process, *Shall Remain Nameless*.



## SEEING

I found my father's steel-edged magnifying glass  
buried in a kitchen drawer. I was four, knew  
even then the kitchen was dangerous, full  
of knives and other tools that might draw me  
to inspect sharp edges, but that day it was  
the magnifying glass, an empty eye, ballooning  
scissors' blades into an arctic ice field, woven  
out of metal threads. I stood on tiptoe to lift  
it from the box, and ran outside into the sun,  
the pavement busy with red ants, each  
carrying a morsel of dropped cookie  
to the nest. I held the glass above them,  
inspecting their small bodies, tiny hairs  
wavering like seagrass on their backs,  
until the grass began to smolder, and  
the ants ran everywhere. It was my first  
experience with power, the cruelty of  
curiosity, a fire I couldn't quell. Who knew  
that just by looking I might destroy a world?

Robbi Nester

## FIRST JOB

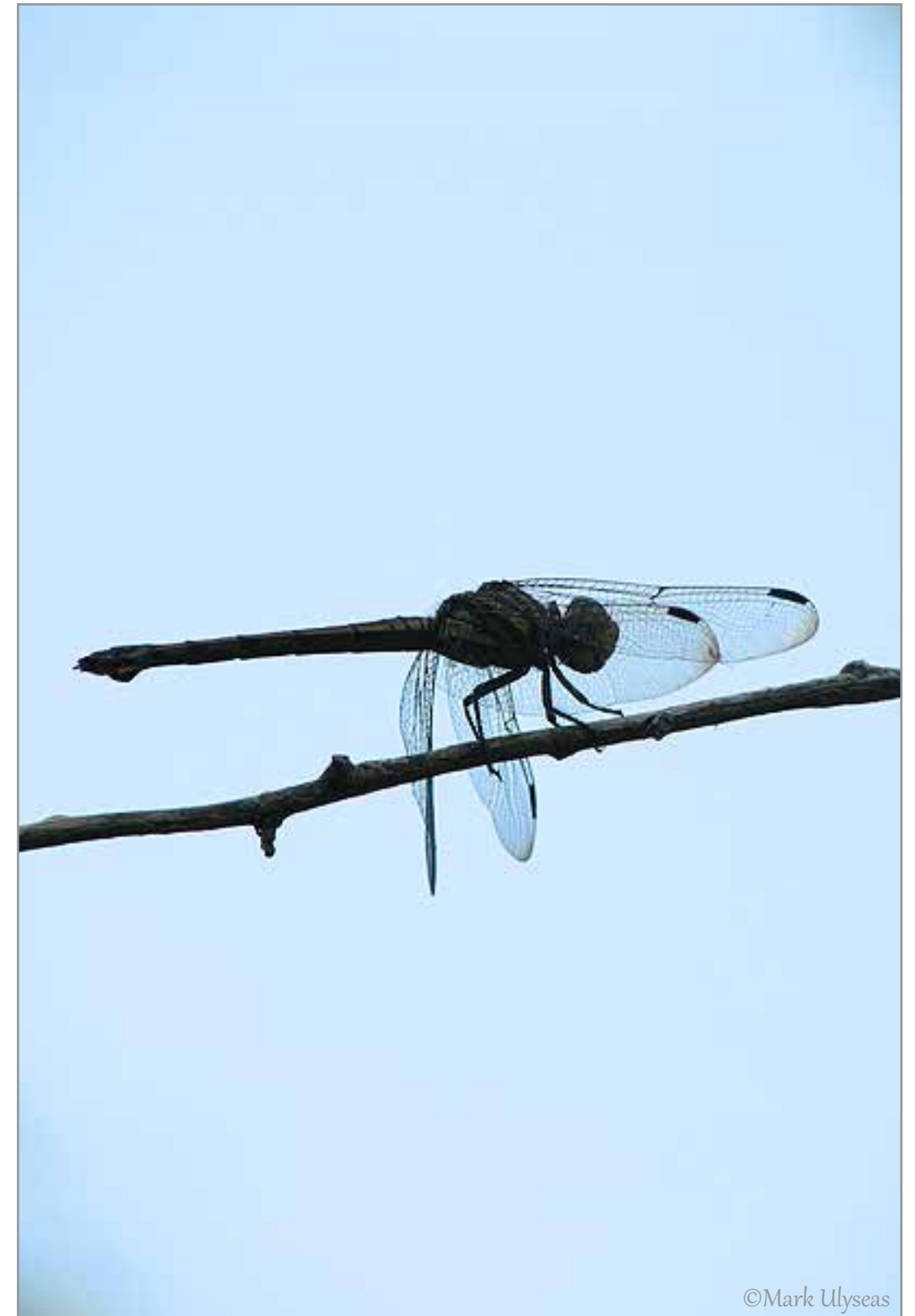
When I was 15, my father spread the newspaper out wide on the table, and called me over, pointing to the help wanted listings. "It's time you took a job," he said. "You've been a child too long." By my age, he'd held many jobs. His favorite had been wiping down the horses at the track, filling feedbags, eying the jockeys, short and muscular like him, wearing their shiny silks. Later, he built radios in the room he shared with his three brothers. All I did was read and draw, talk on the phone, and shop for shoes I didn't need. My parents never urged me to do chores, insisting I couldn't do them well enough to be a help. They didn't expect much, didn't think me able or intelligent. The closest job was at a bakery in Oxford Circle, where the trollies took a turn. I imagined I could learn to bake, though at the time, I'd never baked a thing. Yet they hired me, gave me an apron, taught me to fold cake boxes, the pink of Pepto Bismol, how to bind them with black string.

It helped I knew the names of every pastry in the case: eclairs, glazed with ganache and oozing cream, crullers, rugalach, and my favorite apple turnover that shattered into shards each time I took a bite. I folded each one in a square of tissue paper, careful not to squeeze too hard, smiled politely as I took the money from the first customer, her quarters slick with summer sweat, her wilted bills, stood on tiptoe to hand the box across the counter. But the bow I'd tied didn't hold. A dozen Danish rolled like hubcaps across the neatly swept linoleum. Next customer, a box unfolded, the chocolate layer cake falling, frosting first, at her shocked feet. That was the first time I had worked for pay, the first time I was fired too. But not the last.



## SOUTHPAW

I didn't choose to be the odd one, and didn't even know I was until I clutched the crayon with the wrong hand, couldn't wield a pair of scissors or cut meat, took an age to learn to tie my shoes. Cursive was a bear—my pen grip graceless. Later, I burned my forearm ironing, inked a blue streak to my elbow when I wrote. To learn from anyone was hard; I had to find my own way in. By the time I started school, teachers and parents didn't force a child to switch. And yet they couldn't help remarking on the difference, visibly flinched just trying not to seize the pencil out of my left hand, put it right. I learned it's always been this way—the left was gauche, fear of the atypical rooted deep in history, when difference marked a more essential flaw. And still today, people in some places use left hands in lieu of toilet paper. When I was small, I thought I was the only one who stood appalled before the chalk board, who never knew the answers. I learned that there were many ways one could be different, and that people fashioned gadgets making it easy to be odd, though it's still hard to be the odd bird out, the bowerbird among the crows.



©Mark Ulyseas

Dragon fly at rest, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Dr Robyn Rowland AO has 14 books, 11 of poetry, most recently *Under This Saffron Sun – Safran Güneşin Altında*, Turkish translations by Mehmet Ali Çelikel, (Knocknareone Press, Ireland, 2019); *Mosaics from the Map*, Doire Press, Ireland (2018) and *This Intimate War Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915*, Turkish translations by Mehmet Ali Çelikel, Five Islands Press, Australia; Bilge Kultur Sanat, Turkey, 2015; republished Spinifex Press, 2018. Her poetry appears in national/international journals, over forty anthologies, eight editions of *Best Australian Poems*. She has read in India, Portugal, Ireland, UK, USA, Greece, Austria, Bosnia, Serbia, Turkey and Italy and is published in translation. She is filmed reading for the *National Irish Poetry Reading Archive*, James Joyce Library, UCD, available on YouTube.



## Operation Unclarified

*That is what war is: confusion.* Janine di Giovanni, war journalist

Disentangling is so difficult,  
fisherman's net caught with weed,  
fishing-line, propeller, rusted  
metal anchors, hanging, dropped  
and the fish crazy about where  
they are, inside or outside,  
free or trapped and  
always the ocean pounding  
against their slim scales.

War is a mesh of bloody chaos. Kosovo,  
lost to the Serbs when Ottoman power rode in  
prising it from one empire to another, 1389,  
Albanians doing the unforgiveable, converting,  
Islamic and thriving. Balkans aflame 1912  
it's channelled back; then into a Yugoslav Federation,  
1946, knotted together by Tito's communism.  
Fraying to shreds on his death, it's back to the whirlpool,  
Milošević snarling the lines of nationalism.

Flapping about in a frenzy of fear, Albanian Resistance  
kills Serbs, Serbs kill Albanians and the Roma swim  
and swim, no way out unguarded by barracuda or shark.  
So much sand is stirred up, clarity lost,  
bodies flung by Albanian 'liberators' into Lake Radonjić,  
many more Albanians, dug into hidden massacre  
sites in Batajnica, Serbia by the Yugoslav army.  
Buried together in thousands, years later identified by DNA,  
they return to families in piles of dust, chips of bone.

Dr Robyn Rowland AO



OPERATION UNCLARIFIED *contd...*

*Sanitation, identity cleansing, archival cleansing*  
carve out new words for genocide. Take passports,  
birth certificates, land titles, photographs,  
every thing that could endow memory.  
Homeless, carrying nothing, march Albanians out  
of Kosovo through snow-thickened mountains  
driven by a Serbian army frenzied on generational history  
that came with lullabies and mother's milk.  
Stunned fish, blank-eyed, scaled, dying from exposure.

It's tangled, cloudy, when NATO wades in.  
Bombs drown Belgrade, sometimes Kosovo, Montenegro.  
The Serbian government lures its people into the open  
holding rock concerts on bridges under the crash of sonic bombs.  
*Operation Allied Force, Operation Noble Anvil*  
language is a shifting current, confused by translation  
into *Operation Merciful Angel*. But families  
cooking dinner in Belgrade, crouching beneath tables,  
leaving cafes running, don't get it.

Women giving birth on branches laid quickly in mountain snow  
escaping Kosovo, don't get it. Chinese killed in their embassy  
and those in the watching world, confused, don't get it.  
Remaining are rising cancer rates after depleted uranium in allied  
bombs; the widows of Krushë e Madhe, Kosovo  
who watched their village burned to the ground, all men shot;  
flourishing sex trafficking following peacekeepers in Kosovo,  
and in Tašmajdan Park, Belgrade, a grey stone memorial shaped  
into open butterfly wings, engraved : *We were only children*.



Ball cactus, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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



## RELINQUISHED

*after Sharon Olds*

I relinquished her to amber evenings and covert stars,  
to shucked oysters and tarred currachs

I relinquished her to saffron shadows and emerald canyons,  
to pink-blush parasols and sufi dancers

I relinquished her to chess board floors and celloed ceilings,  
to botanic aviaries and orchid springs

I relinquished her to a Pacific Ocean and Indian tides,  
to fossilled jewels and sweets of pebble

I relinquished her to gaberdine souls, sodden by a Tuesday bus stop,  
to laughing babies, their chubby bellies bouncing wide

I relinquished her to amber evenings and covert stars,  
to us, to air, to here.

Roisín Browne

## PRAY AIR

a breath taken on ocean mornings,  
exhaled on whitened moors

air dancing on scarlet plains,  
coating coral stars

birds swift on copper fields,  
swallowtails glancing mint-veined leaves

foals that leap on new found earth,  
limbs that stretch in ancient poses;

dive deep as indigo sands,  
flame quick as tangerine coals

skim topaz warrior rivers,  
be honey blossom, tumble

grasp nothing, fast and slow  
open eagle canyons and gather kin.

## GENTLE

Let the Invisible,  
becalm your tendered heart  
console your pummelled sinews  
refresh your heavy frame  
and inundate your fractured space,  
with a sheltering embrace.

Rosemary Jenkinson is a playwright and short story writer from Belfast. Her four short story collections are *Contemporary Problems Nos. 53 & 54*, *Aphrodite's Kiss*, *Catholic Boy*, and *Lifestyle Choice 10mgs* (Doire Press 2020). She was the Artist-in-Residence at the Lyric Theatre Belfast and recently received a Major Individual Artist Award from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to write a memoir. Her plays have been performed in Dublin, London, Edinburgh, New York and Washington DC. *The Bonefire* was winner of the Stewart Parker BBC Radio Award 2006.



## FIRST DRAFT

**Emma de Vere**

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland  
Stormont  
BT1

Dear Secretary of State,

Dia duit! (hello in Irish) How's about you, you girl ye! (ditto in Ulster Scots). Many congratulations on your new post as Secretary of State for what we affectionately call 'our wee country'. No doubt you will be 'getting to know the craic', as we say here.

I'm sure you are busy meeting the party leaders and special advisers, so I don't want to encroach too much on your time, but I would love to take this opportunity to introduce myself. I am a Reader in Post-Conflict Reconciliation and Ethnographic Integration, but am now concentrating on my own writing (essays and, rather daringly, political poetry). If you would like to know more about me I refer you to my blog site: [multicultural.rus.co.uk](http://multicultural.rus.co.uk). I am also deemed individually worthy of three paragraphs on Wikipedia.

As I mentioned, I'm cognizant of the fact that you will be inundated by political advisers and you may even be undergoing a period of cultural immersion, such as enjoying a glass of the black stuff (N.B. in Northern Ireland, glass equates to half a pint), but let me fire ahead with my chief purpose in writing to you. I am delighted that you and the Labour Party have arrived in Belfast. I was a great supporter of the wonderful London multicultural experiment under the leadership of Tony Blair. Multiculturalism has effectively dissipated the grass-root racism at the core of every white Englishwoman's or man's heart. And to those who say that this policy has exposed London to Jihadi threat, I can safely say that every successful policy is subject to minor teething problems.

Rosemary Jenkinson



FIRST DRAFT *contd...*

I truly believe that you can transform the metropolis of Belfast in the same way and end the bigotry and terrorism that has beset this land since circa 1606. I'm guessing you have been briefed in your new adopted country's history and, if so, please excuse the lesson, but 1606 heralded the beginning of England's Protestant plantation project in Ireland.

I sincerely hope that you don't feel, as other Secretaries of State have, that in being seconded to Northern Ireland, you have been exiled to Siberia. Northern Ireland has, to be fair to Siberia, some similarly beautiful scenery but has the greater advantage of being a fifty minute plane-hop from London. In my discussions with otherwise open-minded English academics, many have expressed the opinion that Northern Ireland should be towed into the Atlantic and bombed. Of course it's ridiculous but, even if it were possible to displace a landmass, I need only point out the obvious, that it would be doubly impossible due to our conjunction with the Irish Republic.

By now you will have met our local politicians who, I hope you realise, are not at all representative of us citizens as a whole. I can only blame the rural bible belt for voting in such creationist dinosaurs – though of course creationists don't believe in dinosaurs! Please be assured that most Northern Irish people are forward thinkers like myself.

Without further ado, on the subject of forward thinking, here is my proposal:

*To rapidly increase the immigration rate in Northern Ireland until every other household is non-indigenous.*

To me, it is logical that if fifty per cent of households are from an ethnic minority, the identifying of districts as Protestant or Catholic cannot be maintained.

Hold on, I hear you saying, this is a bit radical, even for someone such as I from the Labour Party. I would point out to you at this juncture that the Labour Party, in my opinion, has ceased to be radical these past twenty years, so it is time for you to re seize the radical nettle. But, I hear you say, isn't this merely an example of a crackpot theory pedaled by an inhabitant of an ivory tower?

The answer is that I do not live in an ivory tower; I live in a suburban semi. What I'm proposing is an example of real-world thinking, based on clear empirical evidence derived from my own experiments within our family unit. Let me tell you about my own case study. I and my husband have one natural, let's say in this case indigenous, son, Emmet. When Emmet was two years old, he returned from nursery and uttered the words: 'I don't like black people'.

Needless to say, like all right-thinking parents, we were horrified. We had expected him to pick up colds and infections from nursery, but not racist dogma. Emmet was unable to explain his illogical assertion, even though we had repeatedly impressed on him the importance of reasoning skills. And things were about to get even worse when the following day he expressed an inexplicable distaste for children of a Catholic persuasion. It was clear that we had to do something.

So this is what we did: we went ahead and adopted little Changying from China and Constance from the Sudan. Constance, I think it advisable to point out as one must never assume, is black. When we ask Emmet now what he thinks of black people, he hugs his little sister and brother hard. Sometimes a little too hard, but he is working on it! I admit there has been one incident at the nursery but, in Emmet's defence, in no way did he bite the boy because he was a Catholic. It was because the boy wouldn't let any of the girls on the slide. Yes, as you may gather, Emmet is a proud feminist too now! We fully backed him vis-à-vis the nursery as sometimes violence with a point is necessary. Or even violence with two points (I refer to the two incisor indentations!).

It may seem that I digress but the point is that family integration can be replicated within society. Too long we have had to suffer sectarianism here. No doubt, like many politicians from the mainland, you regard our views as 'medieval' which is a tad inaccurate as Elizabethans and Cromwellians had even stronger views on religion than any self-respecting Medieval.

Your adoption of my proposal (adoption being the apposite term!) would have an even larger benefit for society. Many white, Protestant/Catholic areas have strong antisocial elements as they are not used to considering the feelings of their neighbours. An ethno-religious mix would mean more people putting out their bins and fewer hoods speeding around on mobility scooters.

FIRST DRAFT *contd...*

Of course, I am not advocating the removal of families from their houses to make lebensraum for the new immigrants. That, to me, would be Hitlerian. I am simply advocating a programme of new social housing.

Currently, one of the main hurdles to inter-ethnic progress in Northern Ireland is the Irish language. I found myself beguiled by the Irish language a decade ago, so much so, I attended a class run by an ex-terrorist (a self-termed freedom-fighter) in the Culturlann. However, I have since lain down the language of the leprechaun and have become hugely disenamoured of the white supremacism of this language. Instead, I have been learning Chinese and Sudanese in modest anticipation of a far-seeing Secretary of State such as you adopting my proposal. I mean, why would any sane individual support an Irish Language Act? In pure number of speakers, a Polish Language Act should take precedence.

My one plea to you is, let us take the anger of Irish politics. Let us take the 'ire' out of Northern Ireland. If we are merely left with the words, 'Northern Land', that is enough: a land where everyone is different, yet because of that difference, is the same; a land that is a transnational ray of light.

I truly hope that you will take the time to consider my proposal. I recommend a trip round the peace walls that divide Catholic from Protestant, so that you can see for yourself the perniciousness of our society as well as taking in some of the attractive butterfly murals. If you wish to contact me, I would be delighted to speak to you at length.

Wishing you all the best with your new tenure,

Yours sincerely,

*Melanie Connolly Carson*

Reader in Ethnography, Polemical Discourse and Post-Conflict Resolution at the School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics  
Fellow of the Senator Patsy O'Halloran Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice  
Queen's University  
25 University Square  
BT7

## FINAL DRAFT

**Emma de Vere**

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland  
Stormont  
BT1

Dear Secretary of State,

Congratulations on your recent appointment. As an expert in Post-Conflict Reconciliation and Ethnographic Integration, I would greatly welcome an opportunity to meet with you and discuss how we might help transform Northern Irish society.

I realise you are busy, but I trust you will grasp this once-in-a-political-lifetime chance to hear about my exciting new proposal. Please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

*Melanie Connolly Carson*

Reader in Ethnography and Post-Conflict Resolution  
Queen's University  
25 University Square  
BT7

Sandra Yannone published her debut collection *Boats for Women* with Salmon Poetry in 2019 and will publish *The Glass Studio* in 2022. Her poems and reviews have appeared in numerous print and online journals including *Ploughshares*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Blue Nib*, *Live Encounters*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Lambda Literary Review*. She currently hosts Cultivating Voices LIVE Poetry on Facebook on Sundays. Visit her at [www.sandrayannone.com](http://www.sandrayannone.com).



CREVASSE

I possessed two hands	that longed once to hold
her let this elusive	white space on the page
be the body's stand in	be the irrefutable
place of conclusive	vanishing the morning's
search party follows	always the blizzard's blinding
white out the body	frozen under flakes of ice
without swallowing	is just another form
of drowning the body	flawless as it performs double
time and it's here	in the snow's shackling
drift that she told me	in so few words
so many times where	I could find her and so
it's for reckoning I plead	for the restless chance that
the rescuers will break	their way through this snow globe
avalanche for the sake	of my reckless snow-bound hands.

Sandra Yannone



## DEGREES OF ISOLATION IN PHILIPSBURG

*after Richard Hugo*

At the entrance to the Philipsburg Cemetery,  
the worn-down signs read *All Ground Flowers*  
*and Trinkets must be removed ten days*  
*after Memorial Day and Please*

*No Dogs Allowed* this sun-soaked April  
afternoon. More people inhabit the ground here  
than downtown where the World's Greatest  
Candy Store has closed until further notice.

Granted, those among the well-groomed  
graves are aged, all under chalky grass, some  
since early last century, so Richard Hugo knew best  
when he wrote in 1973: *Isn't this defeat?*

*So accurate, the church bell simply seems*  
*a pure announcement: ring*  
*and no one comes?* I stare at the lone, shut-in  
librarian through the library's glass-paned door.

The books heave their sighs alongside her.  
Everything and nothing now in this world is overdue.  
In Philipsburg, the sun keeps breaking  
through the intermittent grey. Hugo knew this

because he stood here once writing  
all the populated desolation down, but today  
there's few here to notice except the despondent  
bar owner keeping his social distance, grumbling

to a patron-turned-friend about the Governor  
and his stay-at-home order. The barkeep's built  
a decent business at convincing people  
not to drink at home alone -- now that's in jeopardy.

At least Sherry's Pies is still selling  
homemade pastries and biscuits and gravy  
for take-out, although no one is biting today.  
With nothing open except the big sky above us,

we might as well head back to Missoula, leave Philipsburg  
alone, but if I die here in Montana, far, far  
from my hometown Atlantic's blue swells, please  
bury me here in Philipsburg with plenty of trinkets.

## INAUGURATION NIGHT

Tonight we stand ceremonial  
on the front porch, give

our addresses to no one  
but the January sky turned low

and each other, a crowd of two  
gesturing toward a way to move

the future forward, the aging,  
glass globe overhead

washing its subdued light  
through the roots

of our historied hair. Poised  
with that shouldered weight,

I consider asking her  
for one dance to turn

this modest concrete slab  
into a dizzying ballroom

if for only a moment  
of swoon. But this night

concur it is the speeches  
I come for – both orator

and audience. No bunting.  
No brass. No tuxedos. No press.

Just the vast, small space  
love always occupies

when my feet trip over  
the air, a rhetoric

for the ageless.  
And she, still shadowed

in that makeshift  
spotlight as we look out

across the lawn  
and the black velvet

trees, punctuates  
with her fist that luck

has nothing to do  
with what we pledge

*continued overleaf...*

© Sandra Yannone

## INAUGURATION NIGHT *contd...*

alone to our country  
out here in the middle

of this alternative night,  
where now I can't remember

the stars, if they are here  
bearing witness, except I feel

something breathing  
down my neck, mistake

this January chill,  
my breath pooling

toward her, as if wanting  
to resemble some kind of warmth.

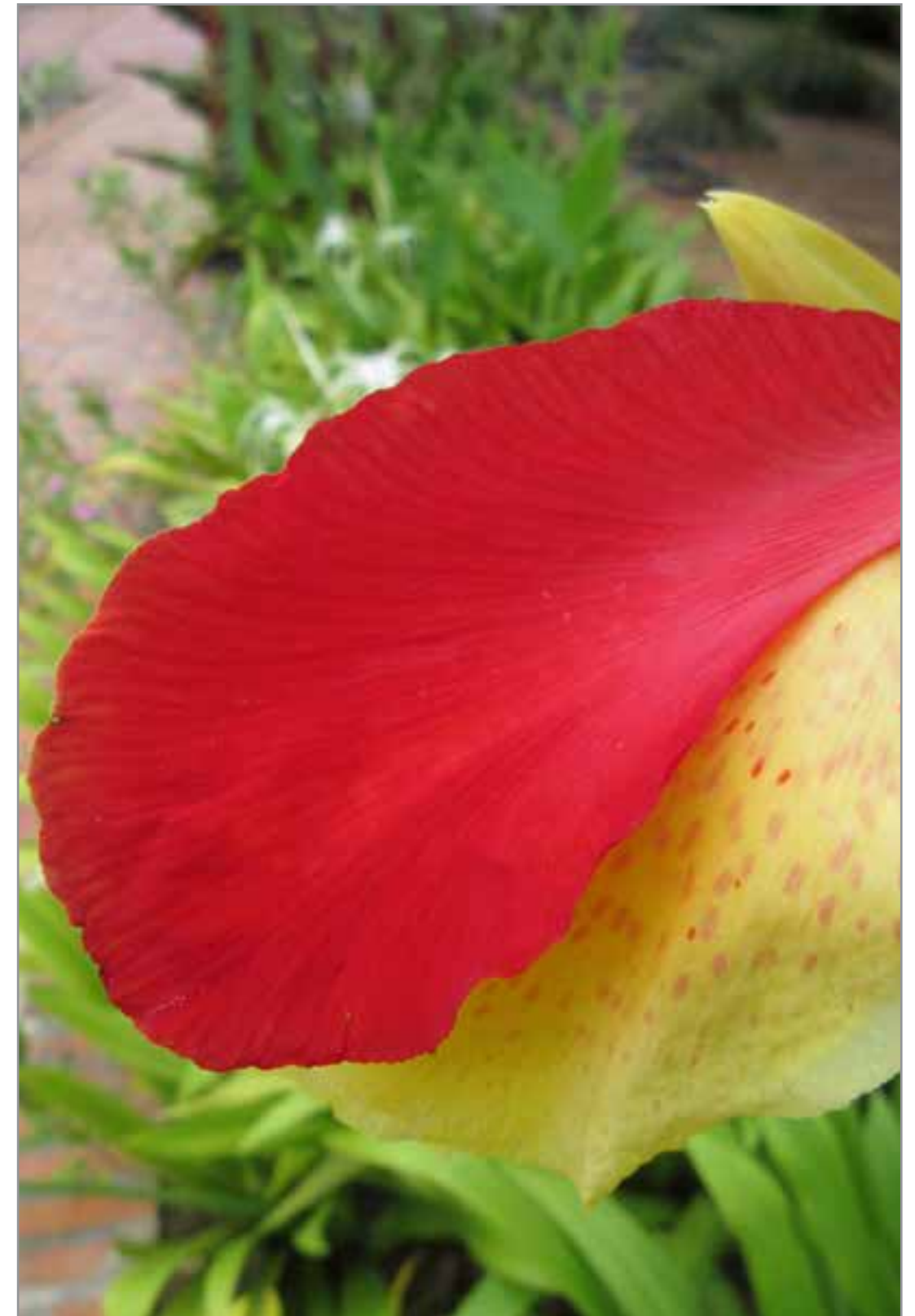
The coyotes begin to heckle  
some kind of approval.

And so I'll remember tonight  
like politicians say they mean

forever, speechless  
on our cavernous tongues,

before one of us  
dares to inaugurate

eternity in the ballroom  
of the other woman's mouth.



Canna, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Sinéad McClure is a writer, radio producer, and illustrator. She has written and co-produced 15 dramas that have aired on RTEjr Radio. Her poetry and prose have appeared in Crossways Literary Magazine, Meat for Tea—The Valley Review, Live Encounters Poetry & Writing, Poethead, and The Ekphrastic Review. She often revisits the theme of the natural environment in her work and has a particular interest in wildlife conservation.



## HERON

You unfold;  
a feathered accordion,  
one wing to cast a shadow  
now straightening to meet the other.

This iron-rusted riverbed  
turns the willow leaves above it  
from silver coins to golden fish  
you wish you could catch.

Even sticklebacks evade you  
as they tease insects  
from the wet feet of creeping buttercups.

Bored by the wetland  
you lazily raise your wings  
strike out towards the mountain  
pale legs dangling beneath you.

Sinéad McClure

## FOX

Each night we feed them dry kibble  
frozen in blocks  
big enough to fit the jaw

even though we saw what they did here,  
how they silently attacked the muscovies—  
ribbon-red on icy days—  
How they gathered in groups  
to take the chickens.  
Carried them away without leaving a feather.

When we stopped keeping poultry  
they still called around  
waited by the back door  
orange tails tickling the concrete

until we gifted a salmon head,  
a chicken leg, a piece of bread  
and now every evening after  
they are fed  
a complete mix  
to keep their red coats shiny.

They don't trust us  
they still approach in parcels.  
One keeps watch  
as the others wind their way  
through the long grass.

They still know fox haters,  
corrugated people  
who carry shotguns  
when sheep are yeanning.  
Set traps deep in the forest  
with teeth sharper  
than any creature's bite.

A fox cry up here  
strikes fault lines through the mist  
leaves an echo hanging in the hollows.  
A deep wound  
we dress each day,  
until it heals.



## RAFT

We had webbed feet once,  
and when swimming was done  
we'd pitch flat stones against the tide  
let them ride the waves.

We quarrelled them out.  
Flat, strung boats—  
our hydrofoils  
to skim the dips.

You said yours would slide to Holyhead  
caught by tides, carried on the sneaking current.  
Echolocate with basking sharks  
who'd let it ride their backs.

You said seagulls would mistake mine  
for a sleeping crustacean,  
bring it back, to crack against the rocks.

So I would stand taller,  
throw better.  
Swing my arm, angled sharp,  
a javelin,  
my webbed feet  
clinging to shale.



Egret, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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



Susan Azar Porterfield

## WHEN SOMETHING IS OVER OR THE INESTIMABLE BEAUTY OF NOT KNOWING

Late October--what will happen  
now? The earth moving re-moves my focus,

each moment inviting the then and  
then: Petunias nag me for drink.

I'm deaf to their pleas.  
Milk on the verge spilled now (why wait?).

Novels I will not read twice.  
Return texts I just won't send.

You say,

fusty peaches may yet revive as pie,  
but, confess it, Luv,

reincarnation's rare.

Oh, to make a start . . .

A clean desk rumoring the wide open,  
the naked-spirit air.

A new book humming in the hands.  
Hair I've green-lighted to amble gray.

Seedlings I'll swaddle in April, and well,  
you know how that story begins

and ends and begins and

## ILLINOIS, AUG. 4, 2020

*The expanse is dotted with small signs of previous lives.  
- Port of Beirut, Aug. 4, 2020, Washington Post*

We fancied birds or mice could use the hair  
I'd trimmed for you out on the deck, so we gathered

the strands gently, as if they might yet live,  
and nested them atop the flagstone wall.

We dreamed a new life.  
You as a couch for the winter to come, you

as furnace, you as crib. We imagined silk,  
like seashells, small gifts in a sparrow's beak,

treasure given unasked.

But no one came.  
For months from the window, we watched

the curls unspring until they seemed to blur  
into the stone, leaving a brunet tint.

How could we have forgotten?  
Other plans had been made,

not ours, for bone and blood and hair  
to sink back into earth.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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



## WONDERFUL TONIGHT

Angie wakes, for the first time in months, without a feeling of dread in the pit of her stomach.

The room is bright and warm. Keeping her eyes closed, she stretches, pushing her arms and legs out as far as possible. Her lips turn upward as she holds the pose.

'My little starfish.' She hears Joe's voice as if he's still right beside her.

Rays of light fall across her skin. Her lashes flutter. Not wanting to break the spell, she fights against the urge to open her eyes by focusing on her breathing. One deep inhale. Hold. Count to five. Release slowly. Repeat.

As the house comes alive she burrows under the duvet to drown out the noise of banging doors, feet on the stairs and the incessant hum of the shower. *So much for doing our bit to save the planet*, she thinks, jumping up and shoving her feet into purple slippers.

The day beckons and she responds.

Much later, when the children have settled for the night, she takes time to pamper herself; shaving her legs, painting her nails and styling her long hair until it hangs in a gleaming mane of chestnut curls.

'Alexa, play *Wonderful Tonight* by Eric Clapton,' she whispers.

As the first chords sound, a lone tear breaks free, rolling down her powdered cheek. Using the side of her finger, she carefully wipes it away, dabbing on more powder to repair the damage. Rummaging in her make-up bag, she locates a lipstick and twists it until a chiselled block of Ruby Red, peeps through. Leaning closer to the mirror, she pouts, gliding colour across her lips until they shine seductively.

Susan Condon



Removing a blue silk dress from her wardrobe, she steps inside, contorting like a gymnast to fasten the zipper. Delicate silver sandals push her skyward by a couple of inches. A spritz of jasmine behind each ear and at her wrists and she's ready.

Standing in front of the full length mirror, she barely recognises the stranger staring back. Joe was right, the azure blue dress really does accentuate her eyes.

'It's been a long time,' she says, her smile lighting up her beautiful face.

Angie twirls around slowly, watching as the folds of the fabric dance around her long legs.

She walks to the other side of the wardrobe and carefully removes a clothed wooden hanger. She lays it on the bed, adjusting the charcoal grey suit so that it sits perfectly over the crisp white shirt beneath. Taking a silk tie from a drawer, she knots it expertly around her neck before removing it and adding it to the hanger. Spraying Joe's favourite musk after shave onto a handkerchief, she then places it into his breast pocket before returning the hanger to the empty wardrobe.

The anticipation is, almost, as much of an intoxication as their first date all those years ago.

Stepping inside the wardrobe, she closes the door, wraps her arms around his suit and breathes him in.

'Joe,' she whispers.



Wonderful Tonight, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Susan Millar DuMars is the recipient of a 2020 Irish Arts Council bursary to support her as she completes her second collection of short stories. Her first collection, *Lights in the Distance*, was published by Doire Press in 2010. Susan has published five poetry collections with Salmon Poetry. The most recent, *Naked: New and Selected Poems*, came out in 2019. Susan and her husband Kevin Higgins have organised the Over the Edge readings series in Galway, Ireland since 2003



## LENORE

When I was a little girl, Constance was my world. I'd stand on her skirt, tug at her braid, grab her hand in both of mine and pull. "Let go, you chubby thing!" she'd say. But I'd hold on until she relented; took me up on her lap, into the calm shade of her, smoothed the curls from my forehead with long, cool fingers. We were together all the time. Constance and Lenore. I thought my name was 'and Lenore' as I never heard it but linked to hers.

Everything came to her first – dolls, clothes, attention. Not that she does not deserve such. No one could say that, for Constance is perfect. Slim and ladylike, luminous as stained glass.

Now if Constance is the prettiest lady in Philadelphia, Guy De Vere is the prettiest of gentlemen. Or do I mean handsomest? He looks a great deal like what's-his-name, the actor, Edwin Forrest. Except of course where Mr. Forrest glowers, Guy sort of twinkles. And Guy isn't quite so sturdily built. But he has the hair. Wild, thick hair, dark and shiny as a newly waxed table. And when he remembers to take his silly glasses off, Guy's features could be carved by angels out of the most sympathetic marble.

I was sixteen when Guy became Papa's pupil. I'd contrive to run into him in our front hallway. He'd be on his way to Papa's study, his arms full of old books. He'd smile at me and say, "And how is lovely Lennie?"

"Just fine," I'd say, smiling back. "Just dandy." And we'd have a little chat, sometimes there by the coat rack, sometimes in the parlour over a cup of tea. Constance would be there too, of course. And Mama and the servants would be in and out. But Guy would talk to me. Mostly about theater -- he was a regular attender of the Walnut Street Theater, and had seen Edwin Forrest there, in the flesh. Guy would describe these nights out to me, and it was as though I could feel the plush of the seats, hear the hush as the gold braided curtains parted...I would ask lots of questions, mostly to keep him with me longer, and Guy would give each one such careful thought. His lovely brows would pucker.

Susan Millar DuMars

But eventually Papa would appear, with a professorial clearing of the throat, and Guy would grip his books to his chest and say *sorry Sir, yes Sir* and the two would disappear behind the study door. And Constance would say *Well!* and draw herself up. And then the house would go back to being quiet. I would open the heavy front door and stand on the top step, glorying in the rush of cold air, watching black birds wheel across a colourless sky and envying their flight.

And so things continued, week after humdrum week. Until the White Plague waved its wand over all of us. And everything changed.

The first victim I knew was Maude Quincy. Stout, bespectacled Maudie. She was unmarried, and she occupied herself by contributing articles and bits of verse to *Godey's Lady's Book*; one way or another she managed to become a sort of acolyte of Papa. She would shuffle into Papa's study for poetry tutorials, never saying boo to myself, Constance, or anyone in the household. Then she stopped coming, and the word *consumption* began to be whispered behind hands.

The next time I saw her, she was transformed. Interestingly pale, a good deal thinner, her eyes alight with the glow of an internal flame. As though her soul was a votive candle and all of us in her bedchamber were praying around its flickering light. She periodically coughed into a white lace hankie. And when she took it down from her mouth, across its cloudlike innocence would be a spray of red. A collective gasp would be heard. I was fascinated.

I volunteered to ferry books from Papa to Maudie's chamber, the better to observe these devotions up close. Guy was often there too, for he and Maudie had sometimes met with Papa together. Guy would sit at her bedside and pat her hand and speak with her, about – well, I don't really remember what about. Some piffle about poetry, I suppose. What I noticed was the way he looked at her. Funny old Maudie had him mesmerized. Every wheeze of hers caused him to wince so miserably, one would think it was he who struggled for breath.

When she finally died, old Maudie was given a splendid funeral, and Godey's published her final poems alongside a glowing obituary that declared her 'a woman of spiritual purity, her sensitivity heightened by her suffering'. Not a bad result for that little field mouse who used to scuttle up our front hall.

The White Plague gradually changed from something peripheral and strange to something omnipresent. Each person knew a person whose family was affected. It was all anybody could talk about; one could scarcely clear one's throat without receiving cow-eyed glances of concern.

Strange to think, but in her own way, little Maude Quincy was at the vanguard of fashion. For fragility became the style. Before long all the girls were using white face powder to affect the look of one ill. Some of us learned to swoon. And those who were actually unwell became the focus of small cults who would encircle the sickbed, memorizing every fevered last utterance. It was all terribly romantic.

The only one who didn't think so was Constance. "Ghoulish," was her pronouncement on the business. Constance doesn't use powder, ever; her face is always scrubbed pink. How effortless is her beauty! How easily she glides forth to be the centre of everyone's attention. How little she understands the hunger others might feel to be so adored.

And I only wished to be adored by one person...just one. That was not unreasonable, was it? He already liked me; this I knew. Just occasionally, I would be allowed to accompany Guy and Papa on one of their walks. Guy would take my arm. He would listen to me. I mean truly listen. Can you understand what that felt like? His attention was the coolest balm on the deepest burn. He listened and he tilted every word I said to make of it the best and prettiest thing. "My clever Lennie!" he would say. No one else ever called me clever.

But I wanted more.

So I tried fainting. I went with Guy and Papa to Head House Square one chilly afternoon; there was a scattering of rain which made Papa hasten to the cover of the Shambles. There the market stalls were busy and loud. I remember as Guy and I approached hearing men haggling in bold voices, smelling the sudden fleshy, tangy smell of the place and seeing the lurid colours of the stacked vegetables. A lone globe of crisphead lettuce rolled along the bricks toward my feet. It seemed the right moment. I made a little oh!, arched my throat in what I hope appeared a swanlike fashion, fluttered my lids and fell backward into Guy's strong grip. It was easy. He was right there. He held me tightly, his fingers on my back. Cold raindrops on my upturned face. The distant caw of a circling crow. Guy's voice, calling my name, my proper name. "Lenore!" After that, he never called me Lennie again.



It got to be a habit, I'll admit. I learned the art of it, signalling first with a sound and a certain clawing of the air. Once I fell too suddenly and wound up in the sweating arms of Cook. After that I took care to manoeuvre myself as near to Guy as possible before I swooned. We fit together so well, he and I, in those moments. It was as if we were dancing.

At this same time I started applying powder liberally to give me the proper pallor. I began to winch my corset tighter to create the impression I was getting thinner. I then added a cough. When the cough became routine, I cut my finger and bled into a handkerchief. This I produced in Guy's presence, held it to my lips during a coughing fit and allowed him to see, afterward, the scarlet stain. The way he looked at me! He took my hand, clutched it to his own chest. I could feel the thud of his perfect, opened heart.

My actual symptoms, when they came, interwove with my feigned ones. For a long time I kidded myself it was all my grand performance. I was an actress on a stage. And the heat was the heat of a spotlight, and the noise of blood and bile in my chest a trick to win applause. I dwindled to the shape of an angel, feather-light and solemn, my hair a golden halo. It all went faster and faster. I spun harder and harder – not a real angel after all but a Christmas ornament. Falling. Soon to break into pieces. But not until he was mine.

It was a Sunday in December. Guy sat by my bed, reading to me from one of the fat, yellowy books of verse that he and Papa spent hours poring over together. I have no idea which poem it was, for I was not really listening to the words; only to the warm, sweet up and down of Guy's voice. My hand was nesting within his.

Time had made a circle. For a few brief weeks I had smelled the rain, heard hoofbeats on cobbles. Felt Guy's arms under me, around me, his breath on my cheek. Now I was returned to the house's thick silence, Guy's voice a small, bright window through which I could glimpse, but not touch, the magnificent world.

My eyes felt hot, so I closed them. In the darkness I heard a strange sound. Three sharp taps. Then a fluttering, like wings beating frantically. I looked and Guy's face was near to mine, his lovely eyes creased. "Lenore, dear heart, stay with me."

"Did you hear – has a bird flown into the room?"

"No, my darling. All is well." He was squeezing my hand so hard I thought the bones would break. "You must not leave us yet, sweet girl. Oh, how can I make you stay?" It was the moment. All my life had led to this. "Marry me!" I whispered.

Guy smiled as his eyes filled with tears. "Yes! Yes, of course I will." He leaned forward and kissed me, very softly, on the forehead. I still feel it, the warm weight of his lips and his vow. I am marked by both.

Shortly after Guy had left, Constance came to me with a pitcher of water. I was doubled over, coughing helplessly, and she perched on the edge of the bed and rubbed my back with her free hand. When my breath returned, I said without looking at her, "I have accepted a proposal from Guy."

The pitcher, a graceful thing made of white porcelain, did not shatter when she dropped it. But the handle broke off, and water soaked the rug.

Once when I was eight, I stole a piece of cake Cook was saving for Constance. They found out, of course; I'd left a trail of crumbs. There I was, hunched on the stairs, licking icing from my fingers. They told me I was wicked, and I felt wicked, and was ashamed.

But wickedness is like a fire; it devours and it shines. I do find its light so wild, so pretty. She loved him. I knew it. Perhaps I knew it better than she did herself. It was clear in all her actions. The moments she'd pause at the hall mirror, patting her hair and moistening her lips before opening the door to him. The syrup in her speech when she'd offer him a cup of tea. Sometimes she'd shake off the servants and bring it to him herself.

Constance loved Guy, and it would have been the most natural thing in the world if he'd loved her too.

But what I learned, watching Guy with Maudie, is that Guy longs to rescue someone. And Constance, proud ship that she is, sails majestically across the waves of fate, never sending up flares, never asking for help of any kind. So instead, I allowed him to rescue me.

When I woke for the last time, it was night and it was cold. Someone had left one of the windows open. I could see the cold, drifting in little white clouds across the room. And through the trailing vapors, like two ice flames, stared the red eyes of a crow.

It was big. It was perched on the end of my bed, observing me.

I shrank in fright. "Shoo! Scat!" I cried, but my voice came out a throaty whisper. The bird stayed where it was. Where was my family? Where were the servants?

It was just us two.

The bird simply stared. I fancied I saw judgement in its sharp face. I knew, somehow I knew, that it had been watching me for a long time. Collecting evidence against me. I looked at its red eyes and I knew it had seen every bad thing I'd ever done. It had followed the cake crumbs to this moment, here, where I sat, betrothed to the man who owned my sister's heart.

I knew I would not live to see my wedding.

It had decided, it had decided! I would only wear white in my coffin.

"He loves me!" I wept. "Oh please, please...just let me have him!"

The raven slowly opened its wings like a great black cape.

Hell is not hot. I suddenly knew that it is a cold place. Creatures in ebony robes pass sentence, and ruby eyes dissolve you into a chill and restless wind, destined to cry ceaselessly on death's dark shore. All because you hungered.

I pleaded, my voice a ragged hiss. "When will I be with Guy?"

The raven, I know, will have the final word.



Night wing, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Theresa Griffin Kennedy is a lifelong Portlander. She is a writer, poet, author, editor, publisher and abstract painter. She writes Gonzo Journalism from time to time, and focuses on literary fiction, memoir, crime history, restaurant history and confessional poetry. She was educated at Portland State University and lives in Portland with her husband, Don DuPay, also a writer and author, where they both continue to write and be published.



Theresa Griffin Kennedy

## LAUGHING SCARECROW PEOPLE

*May 9, 2020*

*Dedicated to Miss Julie Generic*

When your damage becomes your crutch, when abuse masquerades as love, you learn to let things go—the beauty of a freshly washed window, white roses in a clear glass vase, the elegant writing you hope to sprinkle on a blank page—that goes, too.

When your damage becomes your crutch, you let possessions go, as you head out alone, wandering the streets, meandering through avenues, letting the moments dissipate into one simmering ribbon of memories you share with no one, as you pass out to strangers antique books, brass opera glasses and the silver jewelry you never wear.

When your damage becomes your crutch, and you're still holding out to be loved, the hours become one deep cauldron of blurry images and consumed time—becomes a video montage of screamers, and laughing scarecrow people all melting together into one single grimace as you continue down a dirt road, purple with shadows, and walking after dark, when you know you shouldn't.

When your damage becomes your crutch, you drift away from things that might otherwise make you still—the shimmer of moonlight on Jade-colored nighttime water, the toxic rain that collects in the grooves of the petals of a rose, the perfume of a man who passes you on a downtown street, his handsome face made shimmering because of blonde hair and the sparkle of perspiration on a high clean peach colored forehead.

*continued overleaf...*

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LAUGHING SCARECROW PEOPLE *contd...*

When your damage becomes your crutch, you believe the token promise of returning home, of redemption, of cure, of finally reaching sweet hope after being lost for so long.

When your damage becomes your crutch, you continue to walk in the direction of dim spent chances, and the crumbs of sweet fantasy, the final joke, the endgame illusions continue to mock, extends their hands, telling you they will help you, they will protect you, they will love you.

*When your damage becomes your crutch.*

## LUSH SILENCE, 2005

Silence is what I shall give you, lush and precious, finally the silence you claim to have longed for. To wonder what possessions I hold in the tender of my palm, what oils or salts I sprinkle into the bath water, opaque and bluish through sunlight.

To speak of me or think of me, when I am not present, this is what you will have and nothing more. The salaciousness of imagination is now my gift to you.

Things you can never know, will lead your moss-colored eyes to blank walls. Struggling to pass through windows, you will be blocked in ether and disallowed to enter. The darkness of my perfumed bedroom you will not be allowed to see.

The slate grey blinds and sheer curtains, over those portals will remain unmoved unfluttered by your invisible essence. The repainted metal bed, you caressed with both hands will remain unseen by you. It was only a momentary respite, filled with lurid desires spoken through your dim tongue. Fierce precepts of pursuing love, courageous and determined to take what you could, you fled with the penny purse, but by then, you were an extinguished shell, your eyes full of want as you peeked into other peoples windows.

I sought you in your various coves; strove to hand you back your pain. And with sweet revenge on my lips, I closed my eyes and felt the tears fall from your face, smiling as I did so. It was a promise made; now it is fulfilled. The moments have passed and it is, silence, quick in its consumption of time and fleeing from your rapidly.

As seductive as Laudanum is to the addict, the glittering liquid that never eases its claim, silence, only silence is now my gift to you.

Tobi Alfier is a multiple Pushcart nominee and multiple Best of the Net nominee. *"Slices of Alice & Other Character Studies"* was published by Cholla Needles Press. *"Symmetry: earth and sky"* was published by Main Street Rag. She is co-editor of San Pedro River Review [www.bluehorsepress.com](http://www.bluehorsepress.com).



## SUMMER STORM FRAGMENT

There's no kayaking for us tonight  
under the polished coin of a full-lit moon.

The water's high, unpredictable.  
The sinuous creek's a full-blown silt edged river.

I saw a blue heron today, posed in still-life  
along the water's edge. If the tides were as calm

as that bird, we'd be headed out now, slipping away  
to that spot, the island just off-shore.

Whispers would bounce between kayaks and fog-shot cloud.  
Shadows like comfortable friends would guide us.

Not tonight. Our whispers would stumble,  
the boats would rock, oars out for balance like dancers

on a tightrope. We have known each other for years,  
lived on these banks for longer than we've known.

Tonight can wait. Take the thermos, the jackets and gin  
to the barn, the warm inviting space.

We'll climb up, hang our feet over the loft's edge,  
talk about everything and nothing until the blush of dawn.

We'll listen for the warbles and songs of the morning birds,  
the sound as wildflowers unfurl in the oncoming daybreak.

Tobi Alfier

## A DELICATE CONSTITUTION

That's what they said about her.  
 Quite happy to walk down streets,  
 frighteningly bright sun reflecting  
 on the back of her neck and in eyes  
 the pale blue of huskies and newborns,  
 a song in her mind, slight humming  
 on her lips, it seemed she had no cares.

She did have some demons; you'd never know.  
 Filigree on closed eyelids brought  
 terror rather than peace, and the scurrying  
 of animals hit like a shot of tequila  
 with no lemon to soften the swallow.  
 It had always been that way,  
 especially at night. Anything around  
 the next corner in her worst imagination.

In truth she saw herself a daughter of the light.  
 She never saw the moon's abalone glow  
 or the spark of fireflies in fields of wheat.  
 Past twilight she saw labyrinths of endless walls  
 reflecting shadows and the dark.  
 An aria of fear for nameless reasons,  
 all she saw was murkiness and shadow.

## COAHOMA, MISSISSIPPI NARRATIVE

A soon to be broiling Tuesday morning.  
 On a packed dirt road between two forgotten towns  
 stands a tiny church nestled in fertile earth,  
 waiting for a small band of beauty bringers.

Some will make sure the bright white is welcoming,  
 a few will sweep the porch and miniscule insides,  
 one will climb a short staircase and polish the bell.  
 At noon they stop and rest inside,

their baptism by sweat—they are satisfied.  
 Passed over by the interstate there is no sadness here.  
 The church is not left to falter, rather it chooses  
 to remain. A traveling pastor comes weekly to preach.

Many a wedding and wake has brought all together.  
 More than one match made over Jello salad,  
 better than over a bottle—  
 the young are compelled to stay, not fly the roost.

A quiet graveyard behind, protected from sight  
 by fields of cotton. Unseen from the street,  
 only the ones who must know do know,  
 they tend to it with reserve and respect.

All travelers are accepted in this church.  
 Above suspicion. On this day too hot for asphalt  
 and door handles step indoors. Go out when the sun falls,  
 the dark won't find your shadow.



## OF FOG AND DREAM

Fog drifts over the fields  
the way a blind man touches  
everything—thoughtful, gentle,  
a quiet understanding of all,  
fingertip memory of much.  
No need to speak, just drift along  
with time the way the gray of morning  
waits for the warmth of sun and breeze  
to chase it all away.

Only the blind man has no need to run.  
He can read a person's trust  
in the crags of their face—man or woman,  
he is a good judge of character,  
has entire conversations without a word.  
To meet him is to understand a gift  
he gives to you to learn about yourself.  
I met him last night. I was still,  
something I was never very good at.  
He was kind, accepting of the brandy

that helped me relax. He placed my hands  
upon his face. I closed my eyes, mimicked  
his exploration of brows, closed lids,  
the shape of upper lip, his chin a cleft  
unlike mine. Short hair unlike mine.  
Warm breath upon each other's palms.  
Like the fog, he never wavered as he turned  
the color of shadow and was gone,  
before I'd even opened dreamy eyes.



Banana blossom at dusk, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Torie Cooper is an Australian-American poet who has authored two volumes of poetry, *Nature: A Collection of Poems* and *Laying Nana Down: Poems of Caregiving and Loss*. The latter volume is currently used for educational purposes by staff at Calvary Hospital, Sydney. Torie's poetry has also appeared in a variety of publications. She recently wrote her first non-fiction book, *Love, Laughter, and Morphine: A Compassionate Guide for Caregivers of the Terminally Ill*.



## THE CAMP

There was silence in Heaven.  
Yahweh wept in anguish.  
Crematoriums ceaselessly coughed  
black smoke of horror.  
Beyond barbed-wire fence,  
delicate fallow deer  
quietly foraged  
in nearby woods.

Torie Cooper

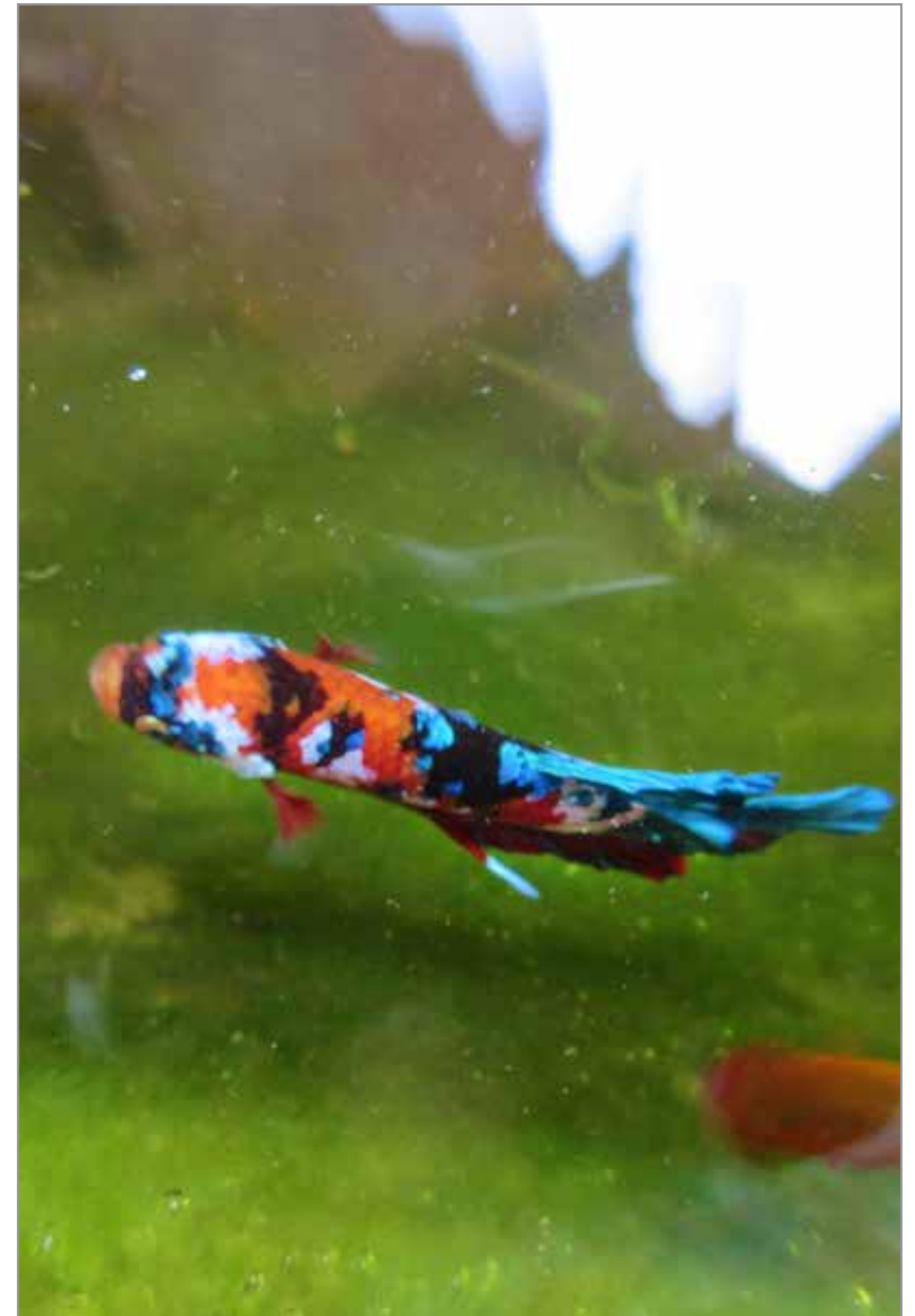
## SEASIDE MARKET

Shiny, silver-scaled fish  
with sunken eyes  
lie side by side,  
tucked into beds of crushed ice;  
piscine companions  
of capture.

Opaque squid with flaccid tentacles  
rest alongside  
mussels and Dungeness crabs,  
dreamless beneath frosty  
fingerprint-riddled glass.

Curious children bundled in coats  
stand tippy-toed,  
ignoring pungent odor  
for a peek at other-worldly creatures  
of the cold sea.

Fish monger smears gloved hands  
across damp white apron  
before deftly wrapping  
Coho salmon in butcher paper;  
transferring package to  
outheld hand across the counter.



Siamese fighting fish on sale, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Writer and editor, Tracy Gaughan is based in Galway, Ireland. Her poetry, fiction, and non-fiction work is published in Live Encounters, The Blue Nib, Headstuff and others. She is IRL/UK Poetry Editor at The Blue Nib



## LITTLE RED SUITCASE

*after Edip Cansever*

A woman flush with making a lie of herself,  
put two shirts and a toothbrush  
into a suitcase. Put a makeup bag and a skirt  
in there. She put the sound of the car engine  
and the orange light from the bedroom  
in there. She put the memory of a doll  
whose shoes were always stuck to its feet  
in the suitcase. The woman emptied herself  
of emptiness and put that in there. Into the suitcase  
she put birds returning to the telephone wire,  
words coming back to a page. She put the legislature  
of a whole country in there. Into the suitcase,  
she put her rage and her inability to convert percentages.  
The woman put the pleasure of the sky and the juicy flesh  
of danger in there. So many times she wanted a lover.  
She put his arms around her in the suitcase. Kissed  
his lips soft as air. She zipped it up and rolled it down  
the red carpet of her lover's tongue. He swallowed her  
like a grave, with her shoes still stuck to her feet  
inside the suitcase.

Tracy Gaughan

## THE WATERMARK

Below it the world is fluid and truths untrue  
but I knew it was *a woman went out*  
with hands full of words to shape the world.  
She swam in my dream in a river *with a pen*  
*in her pocket*, from some wily-eyed man tucked  
into his notebook like a bird into its breast.  
He made a song of the sound of her eyes: siren's  
gills opening and closing. 'You were never here'  
the song sang and he folded her like a wave  
into a page, pilfered the pen, tossed it to water.

Swift-swimming after the writing instrument,  
she was an anti-fish unschooled in the spawning  
place of life vibrating below. Swimming faster  
than demi-gods fleeing, faster than autumn  
evenings itself toward winter or the rowdy mouth  
of a river reaches a state of being wordless -  
every body of water is woman's body,  
a viscous second skin that easy snags on hidden  
thyrsus, holds her back until some ragged hero  
returns to let her go -

she emerges, out across wide land territories  
of sea already drawn by men, sitting on rocks  
like cormorants, waiting for ink to dry their paper  
wings. Then a bird in the sky like a hieroglyph  
on sandy wind from that cave at Serabit-el-khadim  
*and the silent speech of Canaanite women*  
dressed in red seeking heavenly blue, crying  
for beauty and a lost land, making words  
of pictures to remember it: the last leave-taking,  
*the first letter of the alphabet.*

Rivers lead to thoughts not dreams, because I knew  
it was a woman who went out with hands of words  
*to shape the world.* Her glyphs are hiding  
in the letters, *like a watermark.*

## AFTER THE FIGHT

He lay down, a dead wind in a pool  
 of himself. A muscle rich  
 mountain-moving boy  
 left lumps the size of hillocks  
 on his legs.  
 His thoughts were blown leaves  
 spinning across the still water;  
 a fugue of horses breaking free.  
 He held onto them and fell  
 from the world.  
 If he could have lost the night  
 he would have tossed it  
 to some chance gulf beyond the dark trees  
 where his scarf still hung blue,  
 schoolbag empty,  
 pens in the moss.  
 He fell for years like that  
 swinging from a blue tail of memory  
 somewhere between heaven and earth;  
 before the fight and after.  
 He would never be sure of himself again.  
 Not sure as North for a needle is.  
 Nor would he dream of southwestern summers  
 by sea in lemon shorts, waving at me  
 from across a dune.  
 He would fall.  
 Fall again.  
 The horses' hard-tempering reminder  
 of the forest where he once lay  
 helpless and waiting, like a leaf waits  
 for rottenness.

## EASTERN LEAF

Dear one, sometimes I'd catch you  
 growing more lovely by the window,  
 listing starboard toward the light  
  
 spending your eyes on starlings  
 grubbing in the garden. I'd wonder  
 how you felt about their foot-strong  
  
 freedom to flock on a whim, to never feel  
 alone like water often does without colour  
 or taste. In one molten-iron sun-glow,  
  
 I was aroused by a flourish of wrinkle  
 on your face. It reminded me of what it was  
 between us and how it fitted once, inside  
  
 a yoghurt pot. How it grew, with me always  
 soaking you up down to your roots, you  
 loving me like a mistake you were making,  
  
 relieved almost, when I'd walk past  
 you in the hallway like a forgotten  
 keepsake, thriving on neglect.  
  
 But relief is a fruit with juicy flesh  
 and my body was a cutting board, drenched  
 in the succulence of someone who wanted me  
  
 more than I knew.



## MONKEY HEAD NEBULA IN ORION

Centuries before NASA named it, before Bruhns or Hodierna,  
two merchants rode out by camel by night en route to Samarkand.  
To the land of silk and spices they trekked for weeks  
through Tian Shan mountains, stopping at an inn built by a Khan,  
half-buried in a gorge at Tash Rabat. An old monastery courtyard

crowded with caravans, thieves, and browsing dromedaries. Dealers  
traded silk for horses. Blue dragonflies flitted about their ears,  
underfoot lizards in yellow dirt. A long-haired macaque  
on the younger's shoulder ate figs from a market in Xi'an.  
The saddle-bagged riders withdrew to a domed stone room with a hole

in the roof. And with heads joined as one looked up to see first stars  
appear. Elder versed younger about the rocks of fire Zeus flung at the sky.  
Suspended midheaven he said stars watch the earth with eyes like patterns,  
divinable as tea leaves in a cup or handfuls of sand cast on the floor.  
There are titans in the stars that counsel what to sow, when to harvest,

how long the night. A god's bull and golden ram that can say the psyche  
of a woman or a man. Fish bound by ribbons that bring the snow.  
A crab in mist that tells a storm is long to pass. A hunter hidden  
in an hourglass. But for younger the creatures were alchemy,  
the universe vast. Its stars mere shavings of a grated moon impossible

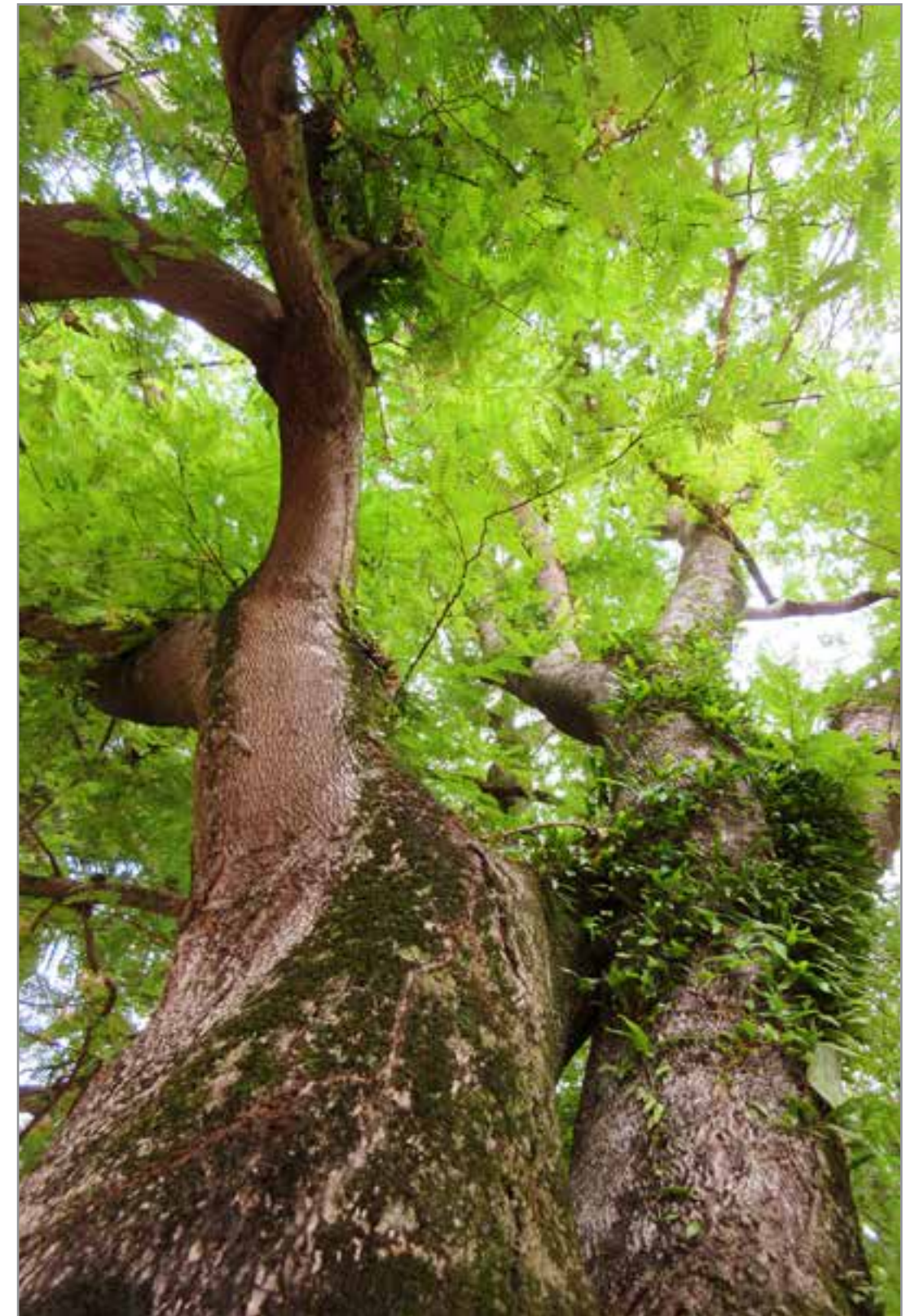
to construe. So, from out a satchel, elder took a mirror, small, round,  
and gold as an autumn leaf - a Venetian amalgam said traded for jade  
in the deserts of Azerbaijan. He placed it in his palm, turned it up  
to the roof and the mirror pulled beasts from the cosmos one star at a time.  
They dropped like diamonds in a pool in his hand. As night followed

night new patterns appeared and as earth rushed east, the stars drifted west  
until younger read the sky in the mirror like a book, one page at a time.  
One night, as elder lay sleeping, he put the axioms of tuition to use alone.  
In the morning, tales of an unknown beast. A monkey in the mirror.  
Face like a walnut-shell big as the moon, breaching the eastern horizon.

Feverish with fascinations of new constellations and cometary theory,  
the riders rode out to find Ulugh Beg's finest observatory.  
But they left behind younger's macaque -  
still trading figs for apricots, in trees atop the monastery roof.

## THE GREEN HAMMER

You waited like something  
with roots in the ground.  
Waited all afternoon in the dust  
for him to come back to tap a wall  
plug through a shelf that would float  
like a cloud in the atmosphere;  
a redwood ghost above the fireplace.  
You waited like a lover waits  
a rendezvous at midnight:  
certain, as the sea of the moon.  
When the books and mementos  
were shelved elsewhere,  
you just lay there,  
fresh and green as a leaf  
unconscious of its falling.



Tree on the banks of the Mekong, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Vanda Petanjek was born in 1978 in Čakovec, Croatia. She graduated from the Department for English and Croatian language and literature at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb. She writes in Croatian and English. Her poems have been published in various literary magazines and internet sites and some have been aired on the radio. She lives and works in Zagreb.  
<https://www.facebook.com/vanda.petanjek>



## NEXT TO GODLINESS

I saw you brush your teeth the other night  
 strolling through the bathroom void of yourself and the world  
 with nothing on your mind  
 nothing on your face  
 nothing on your tongue  
 but a toothbrush  
 and there you are in that moment  
 a child licking a lollipop  
 prepared to embark on a journey of carelessness  
 ready to hop on the spinning wheel of imagination called ferris  
 orbiting around a luna park of your mind  
 a lunar spot on your forehead  
 you smile as you go along  
 biting a doughnut  
 mixed with popcorn and salt and caramel between the teeth  
 as now with toothpaste  
 and though older and much less enthusiastic about the ride  
 still  
 a child with naked elbows and knees  
 holding a toothbrush in your left hand  
 I saw you stride among the towels the other night  
 it was already too dark for you to illuminate the room completely  
 but I caught a glimpse of your passion for the ordinary  
 while placing your face into the mirror  
 spitting the white saliva on the faucet  
 and cleaning it with your sleeve  
 thinking no one was watching  
 and I thought how extraordinary this is  
 being hugged with the everyday motion  
 and how peaceful you looked in your ordinary emotion  
 for a simple act of being clean  
 nothing beyond that  
 nothing beyond that

Vanda Petanjek



## VELASQUEZ

I was already here  
the air reminds my body of its density  
I was here once glowing in iron dust  
watching my hair under blazing electricity  
helpless to free itself from the grip of scalp belts  
convulsion  
epilepsy  
tightly clutched thighs in a frame  
I remember well  
I threw my dress on an anvil here  
its bottom part resembled a trimmed crinoline  
ribbed in design like the fabric of my body  
squared under fingertips  
clenched at the waistline like fists  
a yellow ballgown perfection for a tiny infant  
I stripped myself naked and lay down on the dress and the anvil  
and battered each square  
carefully  
with a hammer  
a sledgehammer  
irons are for cowards

## VELASQUEZ

bila sam već ovdje  
zrak mi podsjeća tijelo na gustoću  
ovdje sam već sjajila u željeznoj prašini  
i promatrala kosu pod užarenim elektricitetom  
nemoćnu da se otme remenima tjemena  
trzavica  
padavica  
čvrsto stegnuta stegna za okvire  
sjećam se dobro  
ovdje sam na nakovanj bacila haljinu  
žutu  
donji dio nalikovao je podrezanoj krinolini  
rebrastoj u tkanju kao moja konstrukcija  
lagano kvadratičnoj pod prstima  
stisnutoj u struku kao pesnice  
balsko savršenstvo za malu infantu  
skinula sam je i gola legla na nju i na nakovanj  
i svaki kvadrat  
pomno  
izudarala čekićem  
maljem  
glačala su za kukavice

## LEMON

we started off well  
 I watered it  
 made sure it didn't shiver  
 turned it towards the sun  
 talked into soil  
 I swear I looked after it  
 last night the leaves fell off the top  
 I turned to you and said  
 this one will go just like orchids  
 your laughter was so yellow  
 you said  
 you watered too much  
 you worry too much  
 to keep it for yourself  
 you ought to keep it from yourself  
 take a bath  
 that's what you said  
 I put my foot in the wash basin  
 pouring water over me as if it will help  
 not to dry out  
 and give you fruits  
 you've reconciled with that  
 I only shrank  
 watering myself with yellow muskat  
 smelling of citrus  
 of mild sugary surfactants that remove impurities  
 of sesame oil that hinders skin from drying out  
 I felt like breaking from gentle and effective care  
 and breaking him in half also crossed my mind  
 for looking down at smaller me  
 bigger only if I'm able to carry  
 that's how I felt  
 and maybe it is my fault  
 perhaps a fruit is a burden  
 a hand grenade for the body  
 a hand grenade for the lemon tree

## LIMUN

počeli smo dobro  
 zalijevala sam  
 brinula da ne drhti  
 okretala suncu  
 pričala u zemlju  
 zbilja sam se brinula  
 sinoć je otpalo lišće s vrha  
 okrećem ti se i kažem  
 ovaj će otići kao i orhideje  
 kako si se žuto nasmijao  
 kažeš  
 previše si zalijevala  
 previše brineš  
 da bi ga sačuvala za sebe  
 moraš ga sačuvati od sebe  
 okupaj se  
 tako si rekao  
 ulazim nogom u lavor  
 polijevam se vodom  
 kao da će mi to pomoći  
 da se ne osušim  
 da ti dam plod  
 ti si se s tim odavno pomirio  
 ja sam se samo smanjila  
 zalijevam se buteljom žutog muškata  
 i mirišem na citrus  
 na blage tenzide šećera koji odstranjuju nečistoće  
 na ulje sezama protiv isušivanja kože  
 došlo mi je da prepuknem od nježne i učinkovite njege  
 i tebe da prepuknem na pola  
 što me gledaš manju  
 što mogu biti veća samo ako nosim  
 tako mi je bilo  
 i možda jest do mene  
 možda je plod teret  
 ručna bomba za jedno tijelo  
 ručna bomba i za limun

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.



Vivian Bolognani

## SPLENDID

Crickets and frogs harmonise in the dying light, cicadas rattling a rhythm to life Tupelo trees and bald cypress roots cast long shadows over the murky water. I'm reminded of nights spent watching dancers circle a bonfire, their whoops and cheers rising with the pulsing drumbeat and my Ma's smiling face as she takes my hand in hers and tells me to *dance, Hadiya! Dance!*

Those nights are as far as the sun now— long gone. The fingers of my right hand run across the palm of my left. I remember gawking at just how small my hand looked against hers. A whisper of willow leaves makes me look up from my lap. The wetlands are pitch black, dotted with fireflies floating like embers. In the sky, a curve has been cut into the side of the moon.

The wicker chair squeaks when I get up and head inside my shack. Ma's wine-red ceremonial dress is draped on the back of a chair; she'd never let me wear it, but tonight I will, once all the dirty work is out the way. All her clay bowls of dried herbs and ground-up animal bones lay out on the floor next to unlit candles. My stomach twists a little and there's a bitter taste in my mouth— it feels wrong to come back to this business after all it took from me. After all *Ma* took from me.

I look over at the dinner table where the glass jar sits, filled with her blood. The once-white square of cloth beside it seems to be dry enough now.

It keeps me company, tucked in my dress, as I head down to the solid land at the banks of the swamp. I stop at a wooden stake rising from the tallgrass, careful not to stand on top of the small grave it marks. I stare right at the bat skull still sitting on top of it, putting aside all those months spent holding my breath and looking away, with Ma telling me *it ain't good to dwell on it, especially for as long as you have, honey*. Of course she'd think that, glad as ever to have a real fresh start. It's you and me now and that's all we need.

Over in the distance I spot a slender tree with two low branches sticking from its sides. I laugh a little— it looks like a man! Nearly as tall as Joseph from back home had been. "Why, you're looking handsome as ever, Joseph." I point at the grave at my feet and raise my eyebrows, "Us three could've had a good life, you know." Joseph, of course, doesn't answer. I chew on my bottom lip and grab the pair of scissors from where I'd set them down in the trampled grass earlier today.

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“Course you had your missus to worry about...” The woman had been a wretch— I wonder if Joseph misses me or if he’s forgotten our nights together, sneaking around his big fancy house, down to the empty boatyard. No doubt that little wife of his would ever get up to anything near as exciting as those moments Joseph and I shared. Why, she was just about as fancy as Joseph’s folks were; with her own big house and shoes cleaner than the plates my Ma and I ate off of. I snort, bet he’s having fun with a girl like that. Lively as a slug, that one is.

To the left of the older grave is a larger, open one. I move over to it, avoiding the mound of dirt between them, and set the blood-soaked cloth down beside me. Both my free hand and my knees sink into the loose dirt around the pit— it’s soft; Ma looks comfy down there, and if she still had breath in her chest, I don’t think she’d have used it to complain. I reach down and pick a tightly coiled lock of black hair, snipping it off. The end of it gets caught in the still-sticky gash on her throat. “Come on now, Ma...” I pull the lock towards me and watch it stretch before springing up. “Thank you.” I set it down on the cloth, wrapping it tightly and tucking it into my dress.

I stand up and pluck the shovel from the ground, taking a moment to look at Ma’s blank face one last time. All the warmth has left her familiar brown eyes. There are crow’s feet etched into the corners of them, from years of laughter. I’ll never see her smile again. My stomach lurches suddenly, I grit my teeth. Now’s not the time to get all soft. If only she hadn’t dragged me out to the middle of nowhere— away from my friends, away from *Joseph*. I should’ve paid more attention; I could’ve stopped her from taking the only thing I had left of my old life from me. My fingers tighten on the shovel handle. I spit in her grave.

All that time Ma was feeding me chicken feet, saying it was to protect the baby. I should have known she would curse them. She’d have never let me keep anything linking me to Joseph. I still remember the sharp, stabbing waves of pain in my belly, the soreness of my lower back at night, and the splintering headaches in the mornings. Ma was supposed to help me, to make me and the baby better. I knew, when I cried on the floor, blood running down my legs and pooling beneath me, my happiness robbed from me, that she only helped herself. And although she was with me, the shack felt like it stood empty and silent for many weeks.

As I bury her, I let myself smile and look back up at the moon, more than halfway covered in darkness— I won’t be alone for much longer now.

Once I’m back home I clean myself up and change into Ma’s ceremonial dress. It fits me perfectly and I can’t help but think how angry Ma would be if she saw me now. I sit on the floor, light the candles and gently open my journal to the pages where I’d pressed a loop of fine hair months ago. I pinch the lock between my fingers. This time, I won’t have to share her with nobody. It’ll just be the two of us— without Ma getting in the way.

Some of Ma’s blood sits in a clay bowl to my right, the two locks of hair and stained cloth lay in a bowl to my left. I strike a match, drop it into the bowl on the left and watch it catch fire. The hair shrivels as the flames eat away at the dark fabric. Eventually there’s nothing but ash remaining. Smoke rises from the bowl, straight as a thread pulled taut, before curling like a drying leaf. When the last wisp of smoke lifts into the air, I inhale and hold it in my lungs. It smells vile and my tongue tastes like the charred bottom of a frying pan, but it’s got to be done. I scrape the ashes into the bowl of thickening blood, mixing until it turns into a paste, then finally exhale.

Outside, I hear the wind-chimes tinkle. A breeze rushes through the window, killing the flickering flames dancing on top of the candles all at once. I’m left sitting in a square of red moonlight, stretched across the floor. I’ve finished the ritual in time for the blood moon to have emerged. Ma always told me how magic was strongest on those nights.

There’s not a sound— no trace of the band of bugs and frogs, not a creak from the shack or a rustle of leaves. The world is waiting with me. Then— a shrill cry. It’s muted but unmistakable. Oh Lord, it’s happening. I rush back outside, running down the steps, hearing the wailing get clearer the closer I get. There’s a patch of mud hidden in the grass and it makes me stumble. But that doesn’t keep me from moving forward, tripping over the hem of Ma’s dress.

My heart thunders; I can feel it in my throat, in my bones. My stomach’s cramping with anticipation but I can’t ignore the part of me that tells me this feels wrong. What if something went wrong and I’ve lost Ma over nothing? What if, after all this, I still wind up alone and worse off than where I started? Nothing good can come of all this but God I just want my little girl back.

I spot the stake with the bat skull; the shrill cries, despite coming from deep underground, are deafening. Looking frantically to my left, I see the shovel poking up from Ma’s grave and snatch it, the movement yanking some dirt with it. Something rises in my throat, I choke back a sob. It’ll be worth it.

With a deep, shaky breath, I raise the shovel and stab solidly into the ground. My foot comes up to sink it deeper into the more solid earth. When I push against the end of the shovel handle, it scoops up the first mound of soil. It feels like I'm cracking my own ribs open. This land was meant to keep my baby safe, undisturbed. I'm going to hell for breaking that peace but I'll be damned if I'm leaving her down there all alone.

The crying seems to echo through the swamplands. It's not the mocking call of a bobcat at night, this time; it's my girl and she's right there. I dig and dig and my shoulders hurt, my forearms burning. With a glance up at the wetlands I note that the whole landscape is washed in a rusty brown colour. It seems to grow dimmer— I've not much time left, the blood moon is slipping away.

Soon enough I'm crouching in a waist-deep hole, clawing at the smooth dirt. I can feel it settle under my fingernails, it's uncomfortable but I couldn't care less. The moonlight is fading fast, red shifting into pale white and I still haven't reached her coffin but Lord I should have by now. I'm shivering, the night air scorches the inside of my throat as I pant. She's so close. I call out to her when she whimpers. My fingers finally scrape against wood, they come away with splinters lodged under the nails.

Desperately, I throw handfuls of dirt out of the grave, pushing clumps to the side when I uncover more of the small coffin. A sob drops from my lips. "Oh, baby, hush now... I'm here- give me just a second, baby..."

Just as I pull the coffin open, she goes silent. The blood moon has passed. She's washed in white light and it's too harsh, too cold for my little girl. She's supposed to meet the soft, warm glow of a red moon, not—

I reach for her, lift her to my chest with trembling hands and press my nose to her forehead. Her skin is smooth. "It's alright now, I'm here... Ma's got you..." My heart clenches, her brown eyes stare, unblinking, at the ivory moon above. No— it's okay. It doesn't matter. She's here and she's not Joseph's or Ma's or anyone's— she's mine and she's so beautiful. It'll be just us two; we'll look out for each other and we'll be perfect together.

I stroke her cool cheek, the back of her hand, letting out a wet laugh. It's so small against mine, her whole fist fits in my palm... I plant a kiss to the top of her head and rock us back and forth for a long moment. "Oh my girl... my darling... my Splendid..."



A face of an angel, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Born in Germany in 1954, Wiltrud Dull lives in the West of Ireland, near Portumna for many years now. In 1998 she experienced a lively Baffle poetry night in a local pub and was hooked on writing poetry. Since many years she is a member of the "PortumnaPenPushers" a wonderful writers group. The Arts in general, painting, crafts, reading, gardening and cooking are important to her, and the language we use to express ourselves about everything. Her poems are published in: Baffle Poetry Collections. Maple Leaves Anthology 2005. The Blue Max Review 2015. Boyne Berries 2015, 2018. SiarSceal festival, Anthology-Centenary in Reflection 1916. in 2016, also 2018, 2019. Shorelines Arts Festival 2018 "Pens to Lens" project. Her villanelle "Wuerzburg 16th March 2015" was set to soprano and piano by composer Derek Ball.



## SHADOW BLOOMERS

Troubles get dug up, worries weeded out, anger clipped!  
On a glorious day, time and age forgotten,  
gardening is sheer bliss.  
Back-pained and sun-flushed  
I turn to a cool corner for a rest.

Huge heads of white bloom spill over  
a moss cushioned wall,  
bluey green rushes at its feet.  
Phone in hand, I lean back into this mass of flowers.  
They hug me like excited friends, kissing each other and me.

Sun blushed and smiling, I struggle for a spot in a selfie.  
Hydrangea aborescens is determined to get on screen.  
A dozen faces, pixelated by florets surround me.  
I often spot them amongst the shrubs and trees-  
my dead people, who loved me in life.  
Their silent presence comforts me, keeps me safe.

Wiltrud Dull



## ATMOSPHERE

The firmament above Mount Fuji sparkles with stars.  
Rumbles, rising far west vibrate in the air,  
as wild horses gallop across the Gobi desert.

Come twilight the sweet aroma of vanilla  
blows across the vast Indian Ocean.  
The Madagascar orchids settle Australians to sleep.

In Istanbul a Muezzin calls for the day's last prayer,  
while faintly catching the music and clapping  
of circle dancers at a wedding feast somewhere in Greece.

A full moon shimmers across Galway Bay.  
Waves lap against the harbour wall and echo the flapping wings  
of geese, gathering for the evening in Nova Scotia.

Herdsmen scan the horizon before the sudden darkness.  
It will be another chilly night in the Kalahari Desert.  
But the rhythms of Brazil warm with a last fiery glow.

In a Mexico city slum twenty four babies are born at midnight.  
Their mothers pray for their future, dream for them,  
barely hearing children's laughter in a Tokyo school yard.

## FEELING GOOD

The laundry flaps  
and waves in the breeze,  
applauding the day.  
Bending, stretching,  
to clip on the pegs,  
my body moves in rhythm.

My arms embrace heaven  
with basketfulls of exuberance.  
I pull the line suspended between the trees.  
Through the lace of the birch leaves,  
sunlight sprinkles confetti,  
from a sky rinsed with freshness.

Perfumed with delight  
I unfold another damp sheet.

2010 - 2020

11  
YEARS

# Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE