

2010 - 2020

11
YEARS

Live encounters

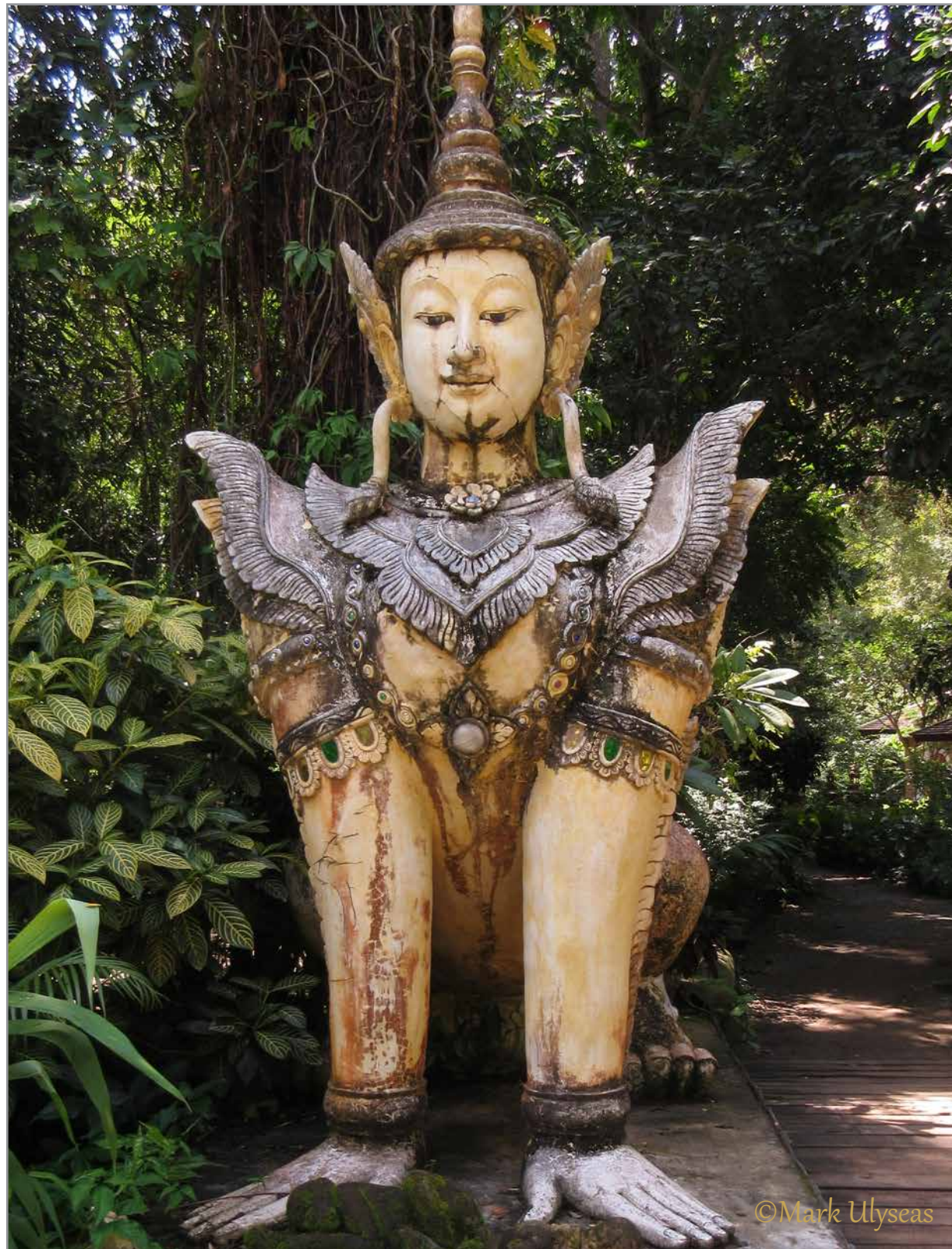
POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
VOLUME TWO DECEMBER 2020



MARY O'DONNELL
The House of the Now

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



Wat Pha Lat, Chiang Mai, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



SUPPORT LIVE ENCOUNTERS. DONATE NOW AND KEEP THE MAGAZINE LIVE IN 2021

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

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor
markulyseas@liveencounters.net

Donate

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



CONTRIBUTORS

MARY O'DONNELL – GUEST EDITORIAL

RANDHIR KHARE

THOMAS MCCARTHY

DAVID RIGSBEE

NOEL MONAHAN

ALAN WALOWITZ

ALEX SKOVRON

ALFRED CORN

ANTON FLOYD

ARTHUR BROOMFIELD

BOB SHAKESHAFT

BRIAN KIRK

CHAD NORMAN

CHRIS MOONEY-SINGH

DANIEL LUSK

DAVID GRAHAM

DIRK VAN NOUHUYS

EAMONN LYNSKEY

EDWARD O'DWYER

FRED JOHNSTON

GORDON MEADE

GRAHAM ALLEN

HARIS VLAVIANOS

INDRAN AMIRTHANAYAGAM

JACK GRADY

JAMES WALTON

JIM BURKE

JOACHIM MATSCHOSS

JOE COTTONWOOD

JOHN GREY

JOHN LIDDY

JOHN MAXWELL O'BRIEN

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS

JORDAN SMITH

KEVIN HIGGINS

KIERAN BEVILLE

M L WILLIAMS

MATT MOONEY

MAURICE DEVITT

MICHAEL CORRIGAN

MICHAEL DURACK

MICHAEL FARRY

MICHAEL J WHELAN

MICHAEL MINASSIAN

NIALL CAHIR

NOEL DUFFY

OMAR PÉREZ

OSAMA ESBER

PAUL CASEY

PETER O'NEILL

PHIL LYNCH

PHILIP GROSS

RICHARD KRAWIEC

ROB CHILDERS

ROBERT SHANAHAN

RUAIRÍ DE BARRA

SCOTT THOMAS OUTLAR

SVEN KRETZSCHMAR

TIM CUMMING

TIM DWYER

YUYUTSU SHARMA

Mary O'Donnell is one of Ireland's best known contemporary authors. Her poetry collections include *Spiderwoman's Third Avenue Rhapsody* (1993) *Unlegendary Heroes* (1998) both with Salmon Poetry, and *Those April Fevers* (Ark Publications, 2015). Her eighth poetry collection *Massacre of the Birds* appears from Salmon Poetry in October 2020 and can be ordered direct from Salmon. Her poetry is available in Hungarian as *Csodak földje* with the publisher Irodalmi Jelen Könyvek. Four novels include *Where They Lie* (2014) and *The Elysium Testament*. A volume of essays, *Giving Shape to the Moment: the Art of Mary O'Donnell* appeared from Peter Lang last June, and her new fiction collection, *Empire*, was published by Arlen House in 2018. Her essay, "My Mother in Drumlin Country", published in *New Hibernia Review* during 2017, was listed among the Notable Essays and Literary Nonfiction of 2017 in *Best American Essays 2018* (Mariner). She is a member of Ireland's multi-disciplinary artists' affiliation, Aosdana.

www.maryodonnell.com Twitter: maryodonnell03



MARY O'DONNELL

THE HOUSE OF THE NOW: POETICS OF THE GIANT WIRE BRUSH

One Saturday morning in 1986, a group of six poets gathered in an upstairs painter's studio in Temple Bar. Three women, three men. The women were Paula Meehan, Sara Berkeley and myself. The men—for some reason—I cannot recall, and I think that in the end they may not have pursued a life in poetry. We'd been selected by the late and lamented Derek Mahon, then Writing Fellow at Trinity College Dublin and were to have several workshops with him.

What I recall is how everything—and I mean everything—streamed into my consciousness that first morning, Derek's striding arrival in long brown boots, the setting, the light, the bare wooden floors of the studio, and all of us around a table. We scarcely knew one another, although I'd met both Paula and Sara before. Like all young acolytes, we had assembled our offerings, bare poetic fragments of our lives then, in all their half-realised, not-quite-fully-formed fidelity, and laid them on the table before the one who was, truly, a poet with a poet's mind.

Mary O'Donnell

Most of us won't write anti-poetry in the style of Różewicz. Most of us won't dispense with adjectives, metaphors, punctuation marks, similes, myth and complicated diction. The world—and poetry perhaps—has moved on and nobody but the insane or politically manipulative would dare to deny the fact of the Holocaust. Instead, we now possess different emanations of human activity in our present to which we can choose to respond.

The question of fidelity is apposite. Everything about continuity in poetry and writing is a lesson in fidelity to an idea as well as an ideal, to quasi-religious notions aligned to infinity, to the understanding that there will be no answer, no conclusion, no final 'best poem ever' no matter what any critic says. The workshop sessions passed blissfully. For me, this came from the fact that I was coming in from the suburbs, with its limited spaces, bourgeois notions (as I saw it then), and being allowed to expand my imaginative and mental horizons in a milieu that accepted what I wrote, seemed to understand what I was trying to do (even if I didn't understand it myself). I remember Mahon questioning my use of the word 'wire brush' in my poem *Border County*, ('Now, when winter scours this plain/like a giant wire brush . . .') raising the matter of its domestic sound. It hadn't seemed in the least domestic to me, as the emphasis for me was on the word 'giant', so I was not thinking of a bottle-brush. However, this is the sort of sifting debate that makes poets reconsider and redraft, and made this workshop so memorable and useful. Mahon was kind, good-humoured, and very very open to our work. He became part of the puzzle of my life in poetry, one to which I would return every so often. As a mentor, he kept in touch, encouraging in small ways by doing the Irish thing of 'giving you a mention' in a newspaper column, for example, or in my case, perhaps ten years later, quoting a few lines from one of my poems in the preamble to one of his own. I felt honoured.

But how to keep going as a poet, whatever about as a fiction writer? After the Mahon workshop I drifted on for a few years, writing, writing, publishing in journals and magazines, receiving a few awards that absolutely thrilled me. I left teaching, believing that as a full-time teacher I'd never write the poetry I needed to write, and entered journalism, which gave me more time to myself. I was a believer in art, in poetry, without ever seeing that for some in Ireland, it was a strategic game of whispers and nods, of in-groups and the institutionalised grabbing of advantage that sometimes excluded others. I realised gradually also that it was expected that younger poets (especially female ones) would not speak out too much, or review too many books in anything but a careful, sycophantic way. I watched, appalled, as some poetry colleagues dedicated poem after poem to poets they could not possibly have known closely, watched the waiting game for those who wished to ascend, and occasionally regretted my own open, frank, disposition.

Because of this early experience, I am all too aware today of a few younger poets who play the game of watching and waiting like slick performing seals, who already have forgotten how we as writers need to live, metaphorically at least, in the equivalent of an anchorite's cave, to be alone, unsocial, spare in our dealings, full of a religious passion about the words that emerge into our work. Don't do it, I want to tell them, don't do it!

Like the Polish poet Tadeusz Różewicz, I've always been in two minds about art, and that is probably why I also write fiction. Like Różewicz, I can respond to mainstream poetry, the celebrated, the out-there, the poetry which nobody is supposed to criticise. But like Różewicz too, part of me wants to fling it all away with no testing of the daily agenda, no reference to some social disaster, no honouring at all of the poetry heads who have preceded me. And yet . . . I too write with a responsive eye to society's moods and changes, to environment's disasters, to the untested future and its possible outcomes.

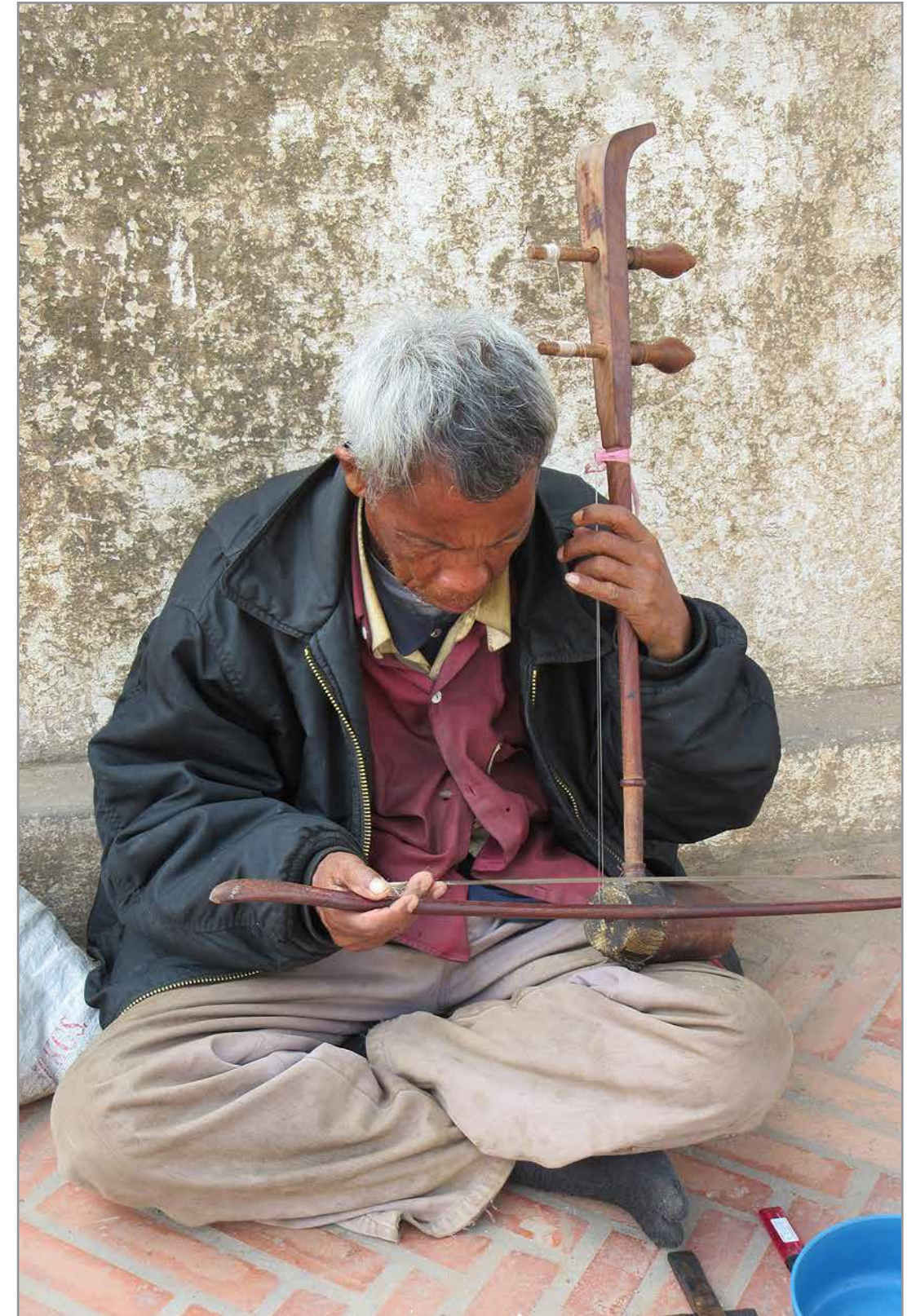
Różewicz was once described by Czesław Miłosz (in his *History of Polish Literature*) as 'a poet of chaos with a nostalgia for order'. This holds true for many poets today, I suspect, who necessarily work through their own divisions and contradictions. Many, like me, despise aesthetic 'values'. Poetry is not medicine, it is not good or morally uplifting. It lives in the interstices, amoral yet virtuous in the philosophical sense of virtue, stereotype-crushing yet recognising the forms of our dreams in the Platonic sense. It is healing, refining, and it sifts through human consciousness—if we allow it—replacing the dross with the healing freedoms that are often spare, brief, and free of political ideology.

Most of us won't write anti-poetry in the style of Różewicz. Most of us won't dispense with adjectives, metaphors, punctuation marks, similes, myth and complicated diction. The world—and poetry perhaps—has moved on and nobody but the insane or politically manipulative would dare to deny the fact of the Holocaust. Instead, we now possess different emanations of human activity in our present to which we can choose to respond. Because a poet's work arguably requires something lifted from the seed-bed of the local, which has never before held such possibility. We witness this with every CNN news report from Wolf Blitzer, we see it on Al Jazeera, on France 24, on BBC News and RTE News.

We also witness it in the local supermarket, on the street where an underfed child carries a kitten close to her chest, and in the hotels and guesthouses of Dublin which house whole homeless families in rooms for months, years, on end. We witness it when people are undermined for their identity, whatever it may be.

But this is where poetry lives: it inhabits the house of the now, keeping an inspired eye on the future, where its *ethical*—rather than aesthetic—responsibility—is to speculate and transform.

The presence of Derek Mahon in a 1986 Temple Bar workshop in Dublin offered my first chance to speculate and transform. I hardly knew what I was doing. I lacked the confidence of many male colleagues of those years, who seemed able to sweep forward and believe in their work. That workshop, because it asked me to reconsider my 'giant wire brush' image (though in the end I retained it) taught me that nothing is ever quite complete. There will be no final answers.



Street musician, Laos, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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

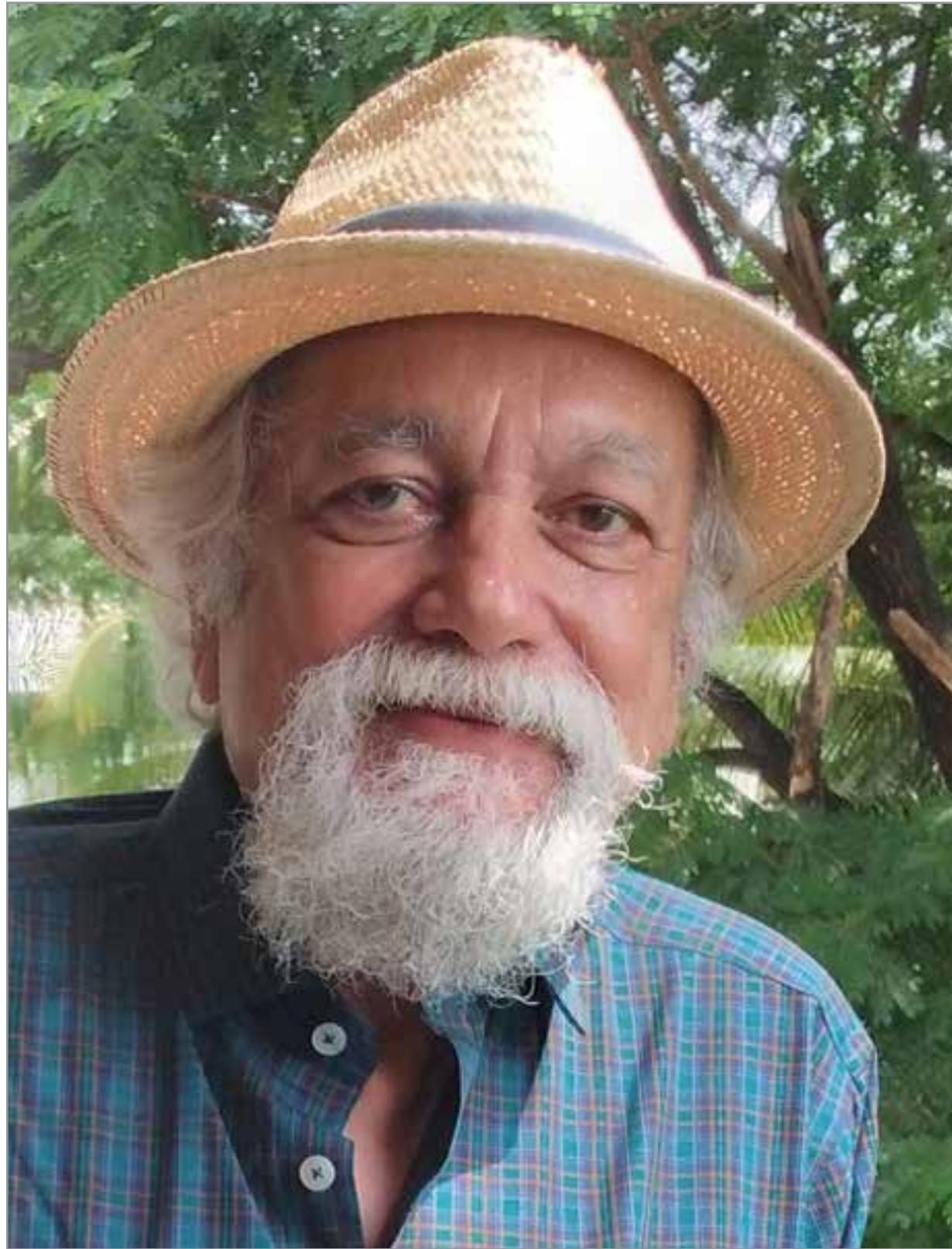
Randhir is a founding contributor of Live Encounters Magazine.

LITANY OF RAIN

I

Awake
Crickets creak in sparks
Appear disappear appear,
Fuse, expand,
Light rings hover,
Dog-barks explode,
Heartbeats throb a warm glow,
Rain raises her skirts
Settles her thighs on my city,
Air musky with longing.

I smell the dead in the streets
Floating, whispering,
Shouting, singing,
I know it's time to go,
But I don't know –
Is it my time to go?
Will I see a sign? A signal?
Will an angel hold my hand
And lead me on?
Or will I disappear...just leave
Without a trace
And reappear in the streets
Joining the procession.



Randhir Khare, photograph by Nadia Sen Sharma.

continued overleaf...

© Randhir Khare

LITANY OF RAIN *contd...*

II

Dear hope
I want a cup of tea
Just you and me;

Stuck between time's teeth
My feet cold and wet
The stench of dead breath
Fills my lungs,
I hear no answers to my questioning,
Pry me out and flick me in the air
I don't care
Where I fall
So long as you are there,
I want a cup of tea
Just you and me;

III

It rains on this shell, my home,
It rains on this city -
Where the walking-sleeping-living-dying
Wait for a miracle at the far end of a queue -
For a closed door to open with a burst of light;
Where the dark has entered pores
And smothers dreams,
Where the flesh of night is lightning gashed,
Where birdsongs will serenade the dead
When there is dawn,
Where hope is a rain-clean pebble in a park
Sunk in the litter of abandoned toys,
Where animals stagger in the streets
Growling and crying;
It rains on this shell, my home,
It rains on this city.

continued overleaf...

© Randhir Khare

LITANY OF RAIN *contd...*

IV

You are my reflection in the mirror,
I am your reflection in the mirror,
We are lost spirits frozen in the moment
Waiting for tomorrow,
Time ticking,
You are not you and I am not me,
We are not we,
Time ticking,
We will never be we,
Soon we will turn they,
Soon we will dissolve
Into grey rain over the city,
Into secrets that no one will ever understand,
Into the breath of evening smelling of stale love,
Smelling of you and me,
Smelling of me...

V

Let me out, set me free
From me, from you,
Let me out, set me free from fear,
From waiting, from hoping,
From dreaming, from loving,
From expecting,
From time;
Hold me in one palm
Let the wind blow me away,
For I am dust;
This is not the end,
This is not the beginning,
This is this,
The wind's way,
No home;
In the moonlight even the dead look beautiful
But there is no moonlight
There is no sunlight,
There is rainlight
In streaks, in slithers, in sheets, in wet whirls,
In pools, in puddles, in droplets seeping in through pores,
Down veins and arteries – heartwards,
Flooding my heart;

continued overleaf...

© Randhir Khare

LITANY OF RAIN *contd...*

V

I can feel the tides rising and falling,
The deep rumbling and exploding,
Foam-crested waves breaking and sliding,
And Noah in his craft of survivors
Huddled and praying –
For the waters to still and settle,
Christ dancing on the waves like a dervish,
Swirling and singing,
Each note knocking on the beams of the ark,
“Come on out, come on out,
Join the dervish dance,
Join Shiva’s tandav, catch the rhythm of heartbeats,
Dance the eternal now...”

Beyond the horizon of the flood,
A crucifix waits for the end of the dance.

VI

Rain falls on my city
Feathers of a great grey bird on its way to nothingness,
Crying eerily, flapping, gliding,
Migrating from nowhere to nowhere,
Feathers raining on the streets,
On the walking dead, on homes crouched into themselves,
On sabbaths of silence, on the chaos of loneliness,
On the loving of lovers,
On hands nailed to nothingness,
On the dull clunk of graveyard spades,
On spires, on the homes of the holy,
On the homes of the hated, on bankers and bullies
And the cacophony of stock markets,
On the spinning bloodied globe,
On sirens and messiahs, on the parade of priests
And the chastisement of the innocent,
On the great sea of battle washing from shore to shore,
From continent to continent,
From island to island,
From love to hate,
From you to me and me to you
And we are one.

Thomas McCarthy was born at Cappoquin, Co. Waterford in 1954 and educated locally and at University College Cork. He was an Honorary Fellow of the International Writing programme, University of Iowa in 1978/79. He has published *The First Convention* (1978), *The Lost Province* (1996), *Merchant Prince* (2005) and *The Last Geraldine Officer* (2009) as well as a number of other collections. He has also published two novels and a memoir. He has won the Patrick Kavanagh Award, the Alice Hunt Bartlett Prize and the O'Shaughnessy Prize for Poetry as well as the Ireland Funds *Annual Literary Award*. He worked for many years at Cork City Libraries, retiring in 2014 to write fulltime. He was International Professor of English at Macalester College, Minnesota, in 1994/95. He is a former Editor of Poetry Ireland Review and The Cork Review. He has also conducted poetry workshops at Listowel Writers' Week, Molly Keane House, Arvon Foundation and Portlaoise Prison (Provisional IRA Wing). He is a member of Aosdana. His collection *Pandemonium* was published by Carcanet Press in November, 2016. His new work, *Prophecy*, was published by Carcanet in April, 2019. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_McCarthy_\(poet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_McCarthy_(poet))



MASKS

You were with me in Venice in a world golden and red.
I was a Cardinal, and you were, I'm not sure.
The boatman on the vaporetto was cursing your lost shoe,
The madness of high heels on cobblestones.
We were far too soon for the Festival, but festive still
In the way travel prepares us to be festive,

The world towering above us in celebration
And us never wanting shelter.
Or that time you wore a mask that made you
Into Boy Robin, in search
Of Superman and what a Superman might do to you:
The cloak that covered you was a cape

Of possibilities. Unlike the masks we wear now,
Masks for the un-festival, the dissolution
Of things that sparkle. This functional mask
Has us backing away from a great plague, the wrath
Of God in the rearrangement of joy;
The world we come home to after a night on the town.

Thomas McCarthy

AFTER THE HEAT

The way that the afflicted in this place have become attached to me
Is an unwanted dog. This earthly island

And its transcendent self
Is like something I've owned for too long,
A stray terrier I'm trying to lose at the crossroads.

Here the four roads diverge and try
To dislodge a coffin. The mourners scatter

And the hearse is brimming with spirits,
Though there is no one left alive to improvise a wake.

Music grows distant and time is reversed;
The summer splits open

And a moth flies out of its broken half.
There is nothing reassuring to celebrate and yet

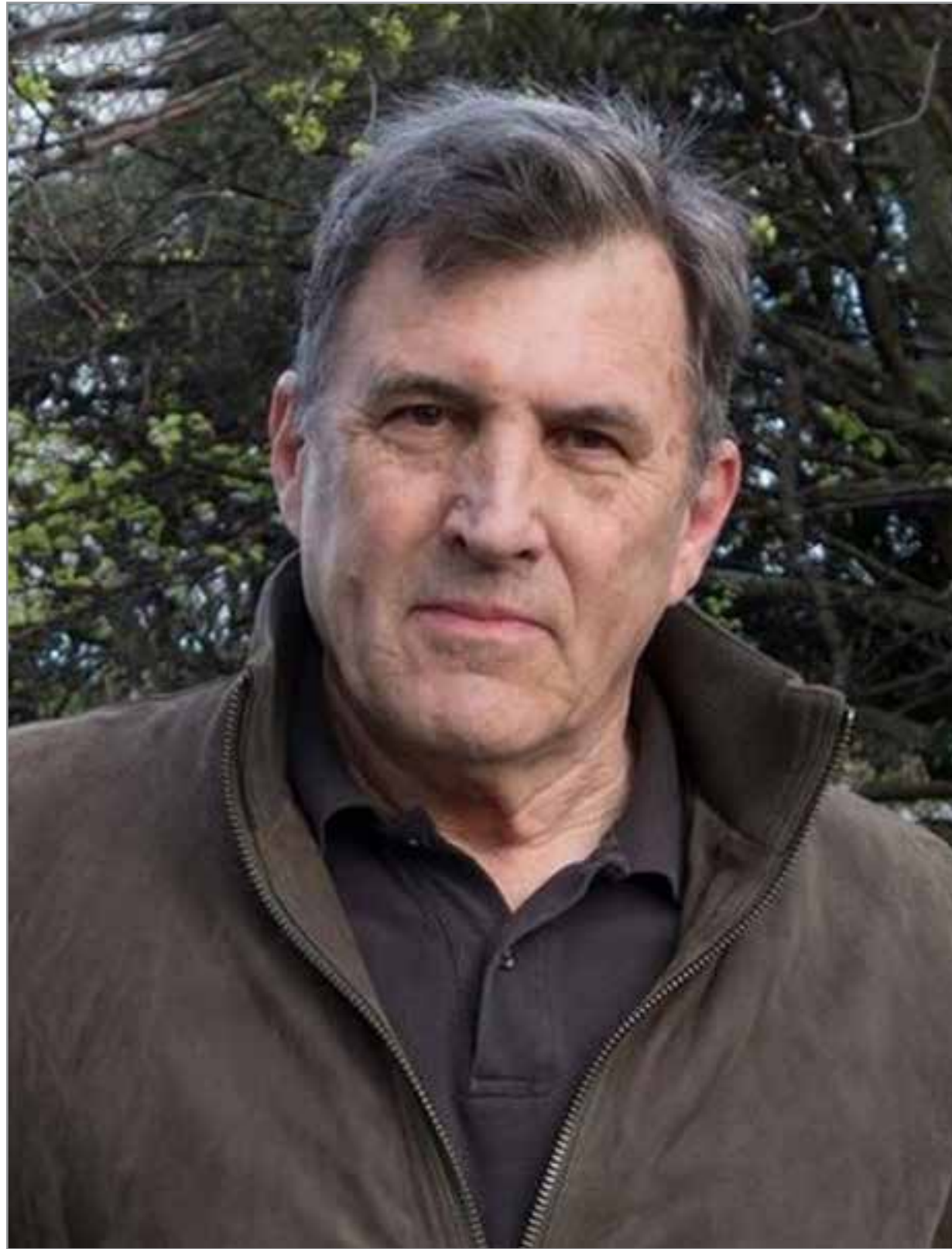
The hope of the world is in such heat

As I felt when a boy, as a boy does who had to drown
The spectre that whimpered, the ghost of a weakness following.

IN WARREN HALLAMORE'S HOUSE

It was in his house I wondered how my own life would seem
With a different typography. There was a T.P. Flanagan
Above the lighting fire: the artist, a cat, a painter's brush,
And the generous space on canvas or paper when an artist
Knows how not to cohere too completely. Mr. Hallamore,
At that moment, offered me the gift of his blue yachting
Jacket with silver buttons, something he had cast aside
From his American life. Incongruous as the blue in canvas,
I took it into my own arms, the sparkling fire incongruous
In both our faces. There was something in the space we made
That was hallucinatory: American consonants marshalled
As he spoke generously, his gifting used with a precision
I'd never seen before. When the light fell on one silver
Button from that Newport club, I could see my own face and
Its ungrateful certainties, the reflection like a hovering pen.

David Rigsbee is an American poet, critic and translator who has an immense body of published work behind him. *Not Alone in my Dancing – Essays and Reviews* (2016) , *This Much I Can Tell You* (2017), *School of the Americas* (2012) and *The Pilot House* (2011), all published by Black Lawrence Press, are but a sample. His complete translation of Dante's *Paradiso* is forthcoming from Salmon Poetry.



CARAPACE

I'm watching a bird drop down from a tree,
followed by a leaf. Little masters of trivia,
it is late summer. I don't know what
I'm waiting for. The trees are towering,
the sky an impasse. Down the hill,
the brook makes its way over the rocky debris,
forever a signature in its looping. Cicadas start up
then tire quickly. I think of myself years ago,
of the tiny spot of love I abandoned
like the carapace of a cicada. We used to call
them locusts, the way they overpowered the pines,
helmets of gold, their faces human faces.
They saw what the bird did, and the leaf.
They saw me then, and then they tired.
I don't know what I'm waiting for. The grass
shivers in the small breeze, the grass also small
and momentary, all the way down to the water.

David Rigsbee

TWO SHAMES

I told you I always carried shame that I couldn't
save my brother from the bullet that took him down.
You replied it wasn't my place to rescue such a man,
that there was something underneath he was keeping,
his own shame, and the fear of it, that parental curse
that trailed our childhood and darkened the way.
Of course, he had done something, yet it was always there.
But why, I asked, did he call me so soon before
imploping me to come to dark Ohio, if not to stop him?
I turned him down, and that was the shame. You said
mine was something I fed on, that let me nibble away
over the years. But for him, it was the underlayment
of every step he took. You couldn't have saved him, you said,
and I just murmured again: So why did he call me?
And why did I not go when I heard the shake in his voice?
You looked a long time at me as he would have. He didn't
call you for help, you corrected. He called to say goodbye.

A GREATER POEM

Diffuse sunlight in late spring
appearing, pulling back along a continuum
like stage directions for a play
its author hopes to be produced.
Instead, a rigid fern leads the eye
to a garage it only partially blocks,
two locked bays and white swinging doors,
then a gambrel loft of blue cedar tiles
and at the apex, a window,
ten panes in tic-tac-toe
with a triangular fanlight
all trimmed in white pine.
The sill is rotted, though
from this distance it could be
an outbreak of lichens such as
you find on old fence boards.
So much rain, and still only
the odd daffodil appearing overnight
reared-up from the dead grasses.
There is a greater poem here,
to which access is not granted.
Two portly robins glower at me
from the brown grass as I walk
under the stiff sycamores.
After all, who did I think I was
going back in memory, even as set out,
reverse-striver, rethinking an old poem,
thinking this is what I have,
and the thought of this poem,
as I walked, gripped me tighter,
the old poem so quietly unbending.

SECOND PERSON

I like the way the wind lifts
the glass twine of the green spiders,
but I save my praise for the switches
to which they are tied, also leaning
into the air. I was thinking of switches
the other day, how you had to go
and select just the right ones
when you had been found guilty
of something shameful, selection itself
being part of the penance and symbol too
of how that might be forgotten
(it never was) in wake of the lashes,
formally laid on to your tiny hide.
And nature is both creepier
and more absorbing than you thought
it would be, coming down to breakfast
in your slippers, the little edemas now
peeking out from your ankles, like you,
bleary to no one in particular.
How you hove off into the morning
again, switching your point of view
into the second person, like a sedan
having rounded a curve at the bottom
of a hill. Momentarily the glass flashes.

Sunlight connects with the windshield
and the oncoming traffic behaves itself.
As I say, the cables lift and hold,
a fine enmeshment easy to look past,
necessary even, in the dappled confusion
of ordinary morning, its grim processing
of nothing special. The mind says "Let..."
and off you go in your fabulous jalopy.
Even the weeds may be said to mean
you well in their nihilistic way,
as you blow past, half in daydream,
baseball cap reversed, shading
those mythic eyes in back.

DOWN IN HIS DREAMS

Meanwhile, on an emerald swale of moss
in the backyard the coyote curls up
in full view and sleeps. Dreams perhaps,
at least I think so. But my thinking
is an imposition, too pat to account
for what I'm seeing.
He breathes and twitches.
It's enough. I told myself I would never,
after the shambolic '70s, write
about a coyote, but that's the thing, isn't it?
He is down in his dreams.
Cassiopeia and the Bear will be here directly,
and he'll lunge up.



Detail on a Jukung, traditional fishing boat, Bali, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Noel Monahan has published eight collections of poetry. His most recent collection: *Where The Wind Sleeps, New & Selected Poems*, was published by Salmon in May 2014. He has won numerous awards for his poetry and drama. His work has been translated into Italian, French, Romanian and Russian. His most recent plays include: "The Children of Lir" performed by Livin' Dred Theatre. His poetry was prescribed text for the Leaving Certificate English Course 2011 and 2012. His seventh collection of poetry: "Cellui Qui Porte Un Veau" a French translation of his work was published by Allidades, France in October 2014. An Italian selection of his work was published in "Tra Una Vita E L'Altra", published by Guanda, 2015. His work appears in the recent Anthology of Poetry "Windharp" Poems of Ireland Since 1916, edited by Niall MacMonagle and published by Penguin, 2015. A new collection of poetry entitled: "Chalk Dust" was published by Salmon Poetry in May 2018. This is Noel's eighth collection of poetry.



LINUS

For Linus McDonnell, raconteur and storyteller

Linus poured pints of ichor, shots of benediction oil
And walked on hallowed ground behind his bar,
Moving from one story to another:

*This country has been propped up
By fabrication for years!
Yes! Oh yes!*

In every yes there is a no.

*We must restore our country
To its original state of corruption
Mother church and Mother Ireland,
All the tyrannies, democracies and aristocracies,
Has anything changed?*

*The R.I.C. eyes, the ears of the British Government,
Network of informers,
All gathering intelligence,
Did I hear an empty glass rattle?*

Linus knew each one by name,
All the mothers' sons, all the fathers' daughters,
The wounded and the healed,
Silent men in civil wars with themselves
And he entertained them with a smile, a story,
A flip of a drying cloth, a parade march, a salute
To a night full of stars.

Noel Monahan

SMILE ON AN INFANT'S FACE

For Fiadh, born 28th. February 2020

My name is Fiadh: Wild Deer
I am light-footed, the bones in my feet
Are graceful and growing,
Soon I will dance with the wind.
My eyes are sometimes misted by tears
But today they carry the sun.
My dreams are not revealed yet,
Somehow I know
 I have the gaze of a beautiful girl.
My brother Oisín is a little deer
He waters the flowers with his watering-can
My Dad grew a beard for Covid-19,
My Mom loves the smile on my infant face,
I feed at dawn, fade by noon
Into a soul sleep in her arms.

NOBODY HOME

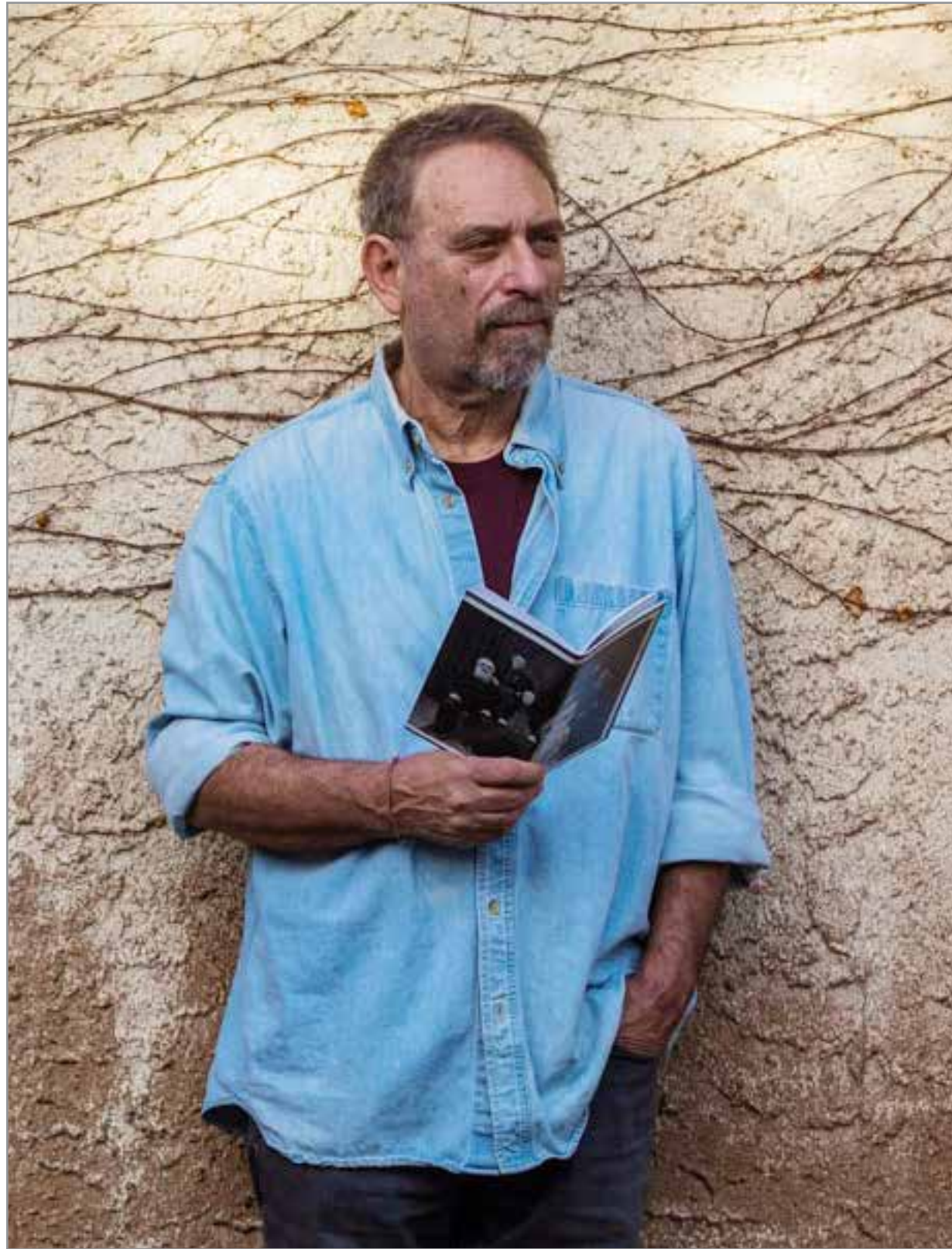
We peeped through a window,
The moon, my shadow and me.
Nobody home.
Mugs and plates on a table,
Empty chairs,
A blue Milk of Magnesia bottle
Alongside a statue of the Virgin Mary
On a shelf.
The floor hadn't been swept for years.

Alan Walowitz has been writing poetry for more than 50 years. He's studied with many well-known poets who would probably not want their names mentioned with his. He earned the bulk of his fortune as a teacher of secondary English and also served as Coordinator of English Language Arts in White Plains, NY public schools from 1992 till 2004. Before his latest retirement, he taught at Pace University, St. John's University, and at Manhattanville College. His poems can be found on the web and off. He's a Contributing Editor at *Verse-Virtual*, and his poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2017 and 2018. Alan's chapbook, *Exactly Like Love*, is available from Osedax Press. His full-length book, from Truth Serum Press, is *The Story of the Milkman and Other Poems*. His forthcoming chapbook, *In the Muddle of the Night*, co-written with poet Betsy Mars, will be published by Arroyo Seco Press.

ARS POETICA

In the Age of Google
the poems are all finished
by the time we arrive at the end of the line.
The curséd machine—
or for all we know,
a child-savant in the Philippines,
toiling alone in his bamboo room--
spins them out unafraid,
the way we would if our brain worked right
and we weren't invested in all this pain,
or what we'd sooner call our art.

Like the ungrateful child we
were told we were,
and now revel in our own telling,
a poem can't be everything we fancy
when we roll it from our fingers like dice.
If we'd only forego the fondling,
the blowing for luck,
the insistent and maddening desire
that everything turn out right,
it will grow to be what it wants
in its colicky by and by.



Alan Walowitz

THE DREAM OF THE BABY

In my dream, I bring you the baby.

Mind you, this is a dream,
and there is no baby,
despite all the rooms we've prepared
and the silly notions we've acquired to fill them.

The dream itself is silly,
I remind myself sleeping,
the way these things happen in dreams.
There is no baby, and I would wake
but for the shadows of babies lost or forgotten
that have always lived in our dreams,
and made us ill with rumors
of their endless shitting and pissing
and ruining our sleep with their
carrying on long into the night.

I hand you the baby in my dream,
though you don't know what to do with this baby,
or even what babies are for.
I'm tickled at your discomfort,
your absence of joy,
your hollow *kitchykoo*

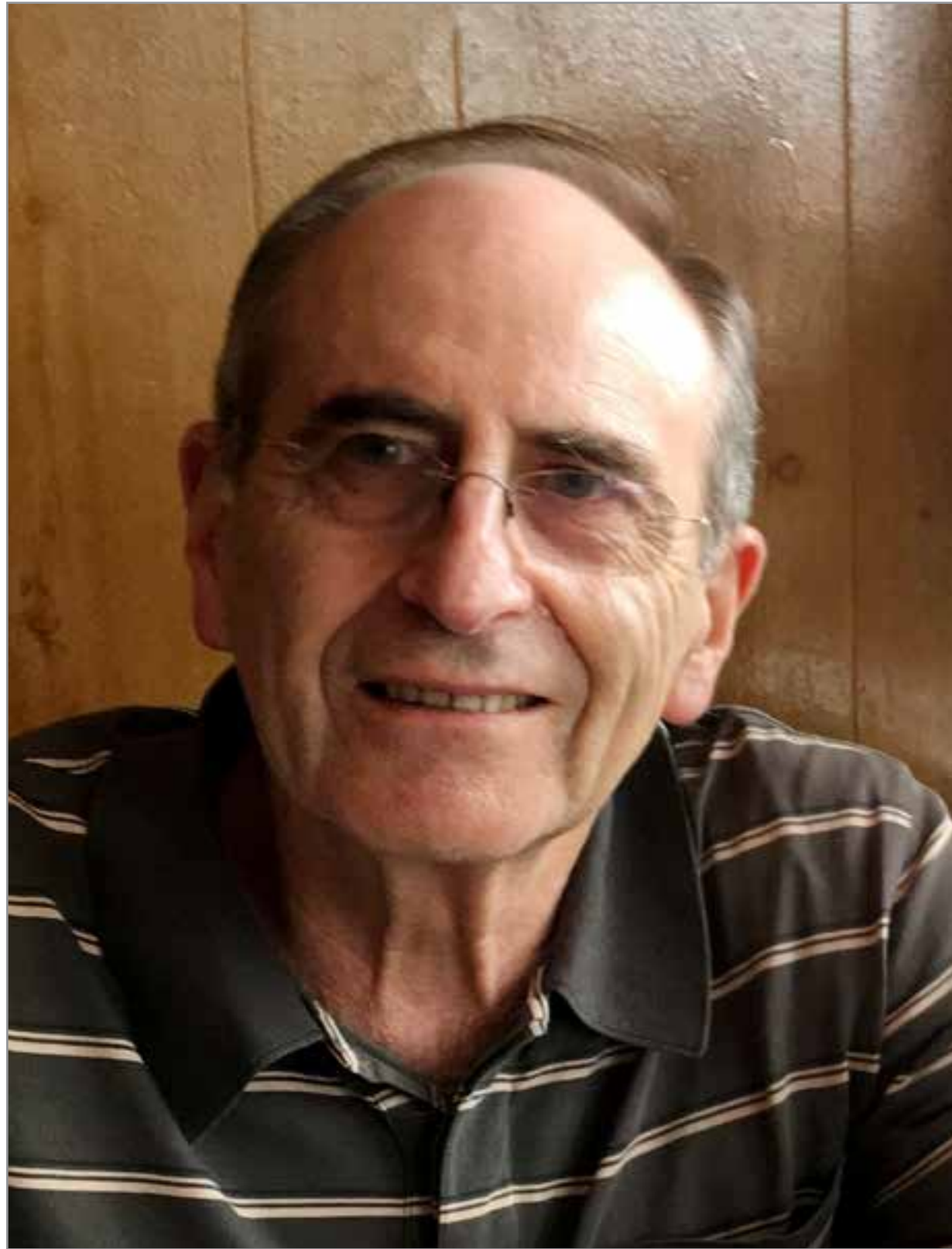
for the baby who doesn't exist,
and your perpetual disapproval
of the one who handed you this gift
you never asked for or required
even in our most vivid dream of our self.

In my most vivid dream,
I hand you the baby
and I say,
Hah!

APNEA CURE

Hook me up to any old machine,
threaten me with the early death,
I've already missed--
waking up forty-odd times an hour--this,
close to a record, the lab tech insists--
surely the cause of my heart trouble,
impending lung collapse,
not to mention long-term insomnia,
she's dropped by aiming to cure.
But I'll never get to sleep with this get-up on,
the neighborhood kids gathered round,
to take a selfie with me-- disguised as a guy
from that newly trumpeted Space Force--
Nope, just a Lone Ranger, nearly out of time--
in the long and star-bereft night--
Who wants to live forever?
with no one left to hug and rub my back,
once the lights are out, in this new iron lung,
I worked so hard to avoid
when I was young and waited in line
maybe Jonas Salk, himself, would make an appearance
and I was told I shouldn't sulk--or carry-on?
It would only hurt a minute,
and I had so much to live for.
But I swear, as the night is long,
and my heart beating like a metronome gone nuts,
not for what awaited me here.
Not for this. No, not for this.

Alex Skovron is the Melbourne-based author of six collections of poetry and a prose novella. His most recent book of poetry, *Towards the Equator: New & Selected Poems* (2014), was shortlisted in the Prime Minister's Literary Awards. *The Attic*, a bilingual selection of his poetry translated into French, was published in 2013; *Water Music*, a volume of Chinese translations, appeared in 2017; and his novella *The Poet* (2005) and collection of stories *The Man who Took to his Bed* (2017) have been translated into Czech. A new volume of poems, *Letters from the Periphery*, is due in 2021.



IF WORDS COULD SPEAK

after Sarah Rice

If words could speak, why would they speak
their selves when they could
deputize a billion counterparts
to voice whatever needed to be said?

If words could sing, more nimbly than they do,
would they still need to be encased
in lexicographers' brocade
while every tinted letter hummed along?

If words could dance, no alphabet we know
could entertain them to remain in place
but rather would they overleap the leaves
of print to learn unlettered flight?

If words could drown, would they subside
only to soundings where language swirls,
then re-emerge revitalized newclad
and dripping bright with intimations
of an unworded kingdom innocent of thought
and yet replete with mind?

If words could then aspire to everness
and watch their colours and their meanings flash
across the epochs as along a line,
why should we think so poorly of the world
that every word we speak draws us away
from every truth that every word would speak?

Alex Skovron

BEHIND THE SCOREBOARD

'Rumour, the swiftest of all evils that are.'
(Aeneid, Book IV)

When rumour breached the gates of the municipality
nobody dreamed what was about to follow
At first there was just the occasional silly mishap
since accidents after all are bound to occur
but soon a distinct pattern began to emerge
as one disaster took hold after another
The local gymnasium had its windows smashed
an antique church was reduced to a pile of cinders
the synagogue was bombed and offensive posters
materialized on every second corner
denouncing this or that established luminary
(all of them admired for their ethics and integrity)
over his or her affairs or misdemeanours
with innocent minors of whatever sex or sundry
secret embezzlements or profiteering
Then somebody got wind of something outrageous
the mayor was said to have uttered a decade back
and it wasn't long before a few enthusiasts
had assembled behind the scoreboard at the oval
and armed with slogans sticks shovels the odd stone
set off for the business end of town



Inverted sunset, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Alfred Corn is the author of eleven books of poems, the most recent titled *Unions* (2014) and two novels, the second titled *Miranda's Book*, which also appeared in 2014. His three collections of essays are *The Metamorphoses of Metaphor*, *Atlas: Selected Essays, 1989-2007*, and *Arks & Covenants*. He has received the Guggenheim, the NEA, an Award in Literature from the Academy of Arts and Letters, and one from the Academy of American Poets. In October of 2016, *Roads Taken*, a celebration of the 40th anniversary of Alfred Corn's first book *All Roads at Once* was held at Poets' House in New York City, and in November 2017 he was inducted into the Georgia Writers' Hall of Fame.



FINISHING EACH OTHER'S SENTENCES

A misdemeanor courtesy condemns,
But guilty of it we both were: "What I wish
You'd do..." "...is shut my trap." "No, that's not what..."
"Oh, no, I'd never speak an unkind word.
Ice-cream doesn't melt in my mouth, sweetie."

Among your clever infra digs the worst was:
"Don't be what everyone..." "...says you are."
Breakfast table cross-examination:
I'd try to try to shrug off those injunctions,
A ping-pong match that felt like doing time.

Bleak House. At length all litigation ends,
But desist in this case stalled until decease.
There's no point now in mourning your refusal
Ever to settle out of verbal court.
And our first years? Still fresh, those memories....

Let's interrupt them long enough to finish.
Terminal illness commuted rancor, judgment,
As you may have guessed when told I'd asked to see you.
Here's an acquittal, drawn from your last "No."
Case dismissed. Goodbye. You're free now. Go.

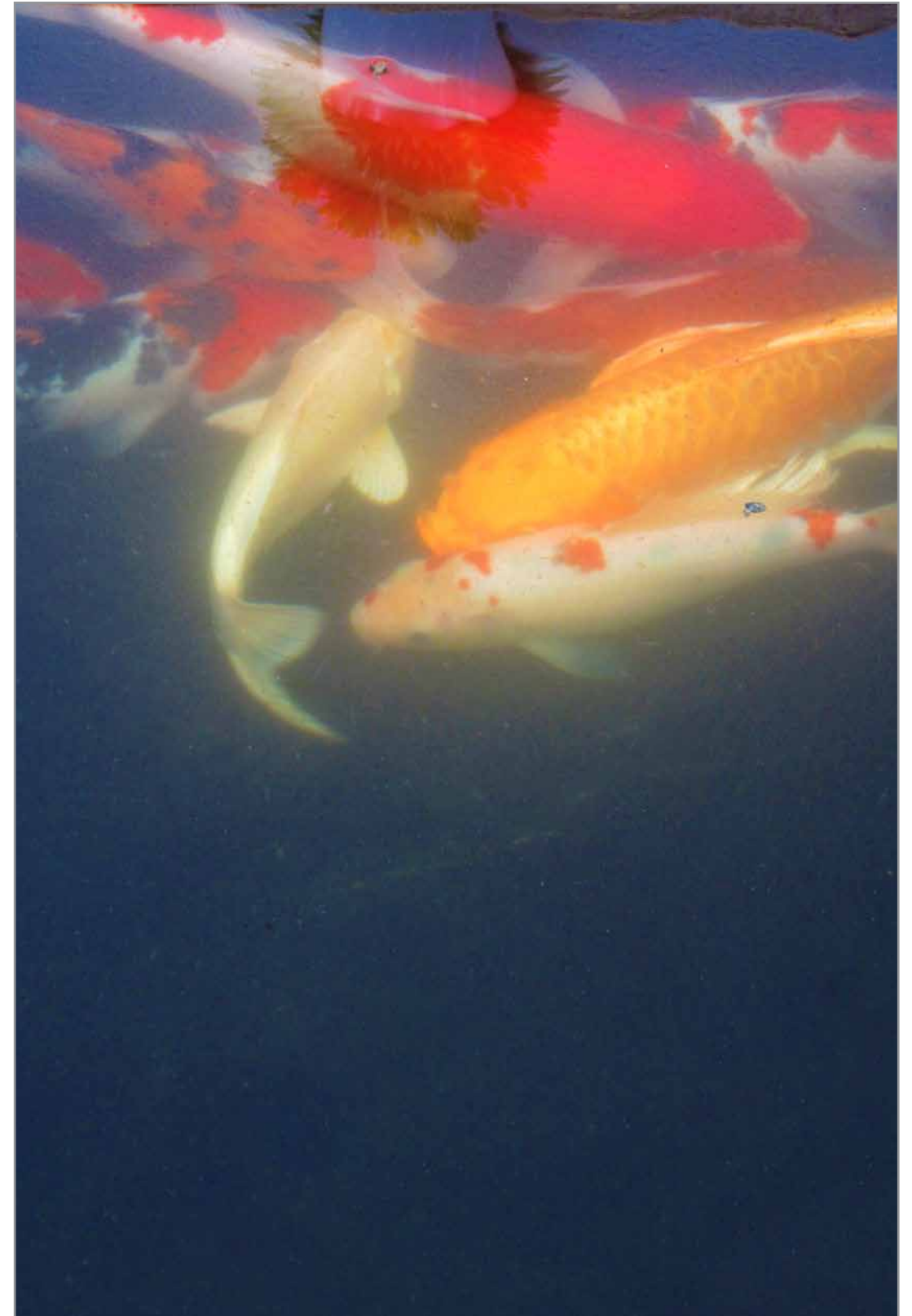
Alfred Corn, photograph Miriam Berkley.

JAZZ NOBILITY

Self-conferred: if your great-great-greats were born
to the last name of a planter, still your first comes
from Moms and Pops. And your nickname?
Friends will find something that fits.

Start with King Oliver, his musical throne built
on platters that did more than whistle Dixieland.
Whence came Ellington, among the dukes
who managed never to put 'em up, still winning
hands down through mastery of the indigo key.
Basie, too, was up for the count, swinging that eight
to the bar when the Lindy hop-hop-hopped up a big-band hall.
Lord knows Earl Hines and Erroll
Garner are on record for dispensing largesse
with all the generosity of their rank,
but to date no marquess or viscount
or baron has thrown down. We'll get one soon.

Post mortem, can we dub their biopics
so that the titles list them as Knights?
Miles, Bird and Diz, all errant Sirs,
all thirsty in the Five Spot afterhours
for music's Holy Grail. And then—screw
the arrests, the kangaroo courts, defendant unentitled
to basic consideration—she was and forever
will be Lady Day. Nobody's business, heroine
in her way, the man didn't get the last say,
no more than the fuzz nor the booze.
Miscarriage of justice: it wins for a while, not for all time.
Just ask Queen Latifah, who lately got to play
the sassy, downhome Empress of the Blues.



Koi fish, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Anton Floyd was born in Egypt, a Levantine mix of Irish, Maltese, English and French Lebanese. He studied at Trinity College, Dublin and University College, Cork. He has worked in the eastern Mediterranean and now lives in West Cork. Poems widely published in Ireland and internationally. A member of Irish Haiku Society, he is several times winner of International Haiku Competitions. A selection of haiku is included in *Between the Leaves*, an anthology of new haiku writing from Ireland edited by Anatoly Kudryavitsky (Arlen House, 2016). His first poetry collection, *Falling into Place* was published by Revival Press in 2018. He edited *Remembrance Suite*, a chapbook of sonnets by Shirin Sabri (Glóir, 2018) and an international anthology of poems, *Point by Point* (Glóir, 2018). He received the 2019 Literary Prize awarded by the Dazzling Spark Arts Foundation (University of Macau, China). A new collection, *Depositions* is forthcoming from Revival Press in 2021.



WARRIOR QUEEN - *after Adrienne Rich*

for Moze Jacobs

I imagine the cairn of her resistance.
 Because she loves the land she places
 each stone for large or simple reasons.
 This is her work of hands, the weight
 of the sun bearing down on her back.
 The prototype exists on Knocknarea;
 a sign to protect a queen's lands.
 And real as stones are, limestones
 worn smooth by wind and rain
 will, one day, all be gone. Her poems,
 her mythic syllables, painfully
 assembled, will outlast a pile of stones
 and more than stones will guard
 us all from fears that flood the mind.

Anton Floyd, photograph Carol Anne Floyd.

1. LEAF BY LEAF

for Richard W Halperin

And I feel how leaf by leaf
deepening shadows flood
the trees; and sunset's secret
is a slow and steady coming on.
I cannot guess at the weight
of shadows; those private griefs
we all shore up, minute by minute,
that taste of wormwood on the tongue.
While words like splints of thought
might stem this gathering mood
they cannot, hour by hour, prevent
what this slow dusk draws down:
It mutes birdsong. Petals fold shut.
Wounds close. And at the finish, what?

2. BLUE DAY

Only pain and love are real you said
that blue day with the smell of olive trees
beyond blue water and rims of sand.
The cries of seabirds were turning blue,
the blue of the peacock feather I imagine
the toque-hatted lady of your childhood
wore at a jaunty angle. I see the feather
poised in the air like that leap into the void.
The gelatin image of it, in my mind's eye,
is tinted the same blue as the lines
of your poem - words connecting
unseeable distances. I sail them now,
enter into the still centre of that day learning
of love's genius by the exquisite pain of loss.

OUR SAPLING OAK

i.m. Adrienne Rich

In your name I plant this oak.
You loved the land and could
see the country bought and sold,
a final stand of trees laid waste,
the persecuted becoming shadows.
This tree marks your resistance.
I should say ours, to honour
the common weal, to bring it back
into light from the edge of dread
where it has retreated. This sapling,
these bare stems, pared down,
vulnerable, vital, simple as breath
rooted in silence, history will record:
an unremarkable oak made a forest.



Silk Cotton Tree growing on the ruins of a temple, Angkor Wat, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Dr Arthur Broomfield is a poet and short storywriter, Beckett scholar and occasional lecturer from Ballyfin County Laois. He is the author of seven books including three poetry collections *The Poetry Reading at Semple Stadium* [Lapwing 2012] *Cold Coffee at Emo Court* [Revival 2016] *The Giants' Footsteps at the Rock of Dunamaise* [Revival 2019] and a study on the works of Samuel Beckett :*The Empty Too : language and philosophy in the works of Samuel Beckett* [Cambridge Scholars' Publishing 2014]. He delivers poetry and short story workshops and is available to mentor writing groups or individual writers and to give lectures on the works of Samuel Beckett and on Surrealist poetry. Dr Broomfield holds BA degrees in English and history from NUI Maynooth, an MA degree in English literature [NUI Maynooth] and a Ph.D in English literature from Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick.



THE NIGHT THE MUSIC DIED

I hadn't thought about what I'd signed up for till that night. I suppose those Nazi guards in Belson, and Auschwitz hadn't thought much either. You can lose your soul in these places if you've got the herd instinct.

I'd been detailed for nights so I tried to get a few hours' sleep before heading in good time for an 8 pm start. My destination, Allentown Prison, two miles from my rented rooms, set in the Bog of Allen, known as "the swamp", to us prison officers. We'd been condemned to isolation there by some or other superior officer who thought his life in Mountjoy might be easier in our absence. We didn't much like being called officers, even the so-called Chief Officers were more akin to the corrupt cops in *Serpico* or Clouseau in *The Pink Panther*. We preferred to see ourselves as jailers, a step above the prisoners we got paid to lock up in the evening, release in the morning and hold our noses while they slopped out.

I knew something was up from the number of cars abandoned around the gate, yet another hyped crisis, I supposed. Pat Moores opened the wicket gate in the steel-clad main entrance to let me in. He paused.

"What's up?"

"You haven't heard, Rob?"

"Heard? Oh yes Pat! I've heard alright. Heard that the pint's gone up in Campions, that Molly Casey is pregnant and...and the adoring father-to-be is a popular jailer ...and..."

"Shut de fuck up will ye, this is serious stuff".

"Oh", I said, "breaking news?"

"Oh", I said, "breaking news?"

Arthur Broomfield

“You’re to go straight over”, he pointed towards D wing, the four storied main block of the prison that housed one hundred and eighty men. “Shergar’s orders”. “Shergar” was the nickname conferred on Chief Officer John Pius Ballaterd by consensus of the officers’ mess. Like the legend of the famed racehorse Ballaterd’s efforts to procreate failed to bear fruit. Enquiries from rookie jailers of the nickname’s origin could elicit an explanation along the lines of.

“It didn’t stop him from ridin’, I’d have christened him Scobie Breasley”.

“Leave his private life out of it Jim, he rose without trace”.

“Aye, firing blanks as he rose”.

Idle gossip was one way we could get at Shergar, collectively loved as he was, in the way his victims loved Pierrepont. The curses and growls that could be heard coming from his office from time to time invariably inspired under the breath comments like

“some jailer’s goin’ to Cork or The Island”

“and the evil bastard ‘ll be shaggin’ the wife when he’s gone, promising her he’ll call on the influence of the sun, moon and stars, and his direct line to the Minister for potato stalks to get him back”

from jailers who would prefer Oliver Cromwell as their Chief officer.

“There’s war going on over there, and if I know anything Shergar’s at the back of it,” Harry Pilkington warned me, as he let me into the prison grounds through yet another barbed wire clad, steel reinforced portal, to an underworld of cigarette bribes, swapped porn magazines and unlikely friendships; the social contract that, in normal times, ensured the smooth running of the place. Tonight was not normal. I didn’t notice the incongruous roses this time, those red and yellow blooms that so impressed visitors on their way to weekly visits to a son or husband, I just sped over to D1 gates where Jeremy Hitchins, key trembling in hand, let me into the block. Normally the prison would have settled for the night by this time. Except for a couple of trustees, working in the kitchen, or coming in from day release, or in the odd case, one returning late from court, prisoners would have been locked up by now.

Sounds of radios, or a musical instrument, would echo round the block from the cells, bouncing back and forth along the dreary walls. Beads of moisture could be trickling down the bottle green painted plaster in damp weather. It was usually damp in the swamp. The red and grey floor tiles would be weeping. The four of us on nights, one to each routinely checking the cells through spy holes to check the mood of prisoners under close watch. I had my flask of coffee, beef sandwiches and a couple of Playboy magazines borrowed from my solicitor friend, Joey Morrissey, packed in a Quinnsworth bag. All going well we might grab a nap while a colleague would cover on our landing.

It sure hadn’t settled down tonight. “You’re in time for the aftermath, Rob,” John Devann, a jailer who’d joined the service years before me, remarked drily. By the look of the place it would take a bit of time. It was swarming with jailers, all pale and stressed, some with tunics torn. Beds and tables had been pulled out onto the landings, prisoner’s clothes and shoes were in piles outside cell doors. It was clear enough what had happened. “It began after lunch with a sit-down protest there,” John gesticulated to the floor of D1, “they were banging their mugs and singing ‘We shall overcome.’” Just like Martin Luther King, I was thinking, but what could a mob of criminals have in common with the heroic struggle for civil rights being waged by Blacks in the United States?

“The Governor cracked up, they say he’s in the nuthouse, and Shergar’s in charge now,” John said.

“So, what’s the story with the beds and gear, John?”

“Shergar ordered it. The only way to deal with the ringleaders”, he said.

“Some of them have nothing but a blanket wrapped around them. They won’t be getting them back tonight and that’s for sure.”

Shergar was hovering just ahead of me facing down D block. I scuttled round behind him to get to my post on the second landing. Below me groups of jailers were circulating round D 1 floor, peering at cell doors, trying to look alert, doing anything that might impress Shergar. His slightly rounded shoulders gave him the air of a beast of prey as his beady eyes scrutinised all before him. Now and again he’d shift his weight forcefully from one foot to the other or sweep his right hand downwards along the breast of his chief officer’s tunic. He oozed the aura of the man in control of something he’d desired for a long time.

Just then the strains of “Will you go, lassie go” filled the building. The sweet strings of a tenor banjo plucked the tension from the charged atmosphere. Some jailers smiled; others laughed. Shoulders lowered, and colour returned to cheeks. It really was music to their ears and how they needed it. We all knew it was Fester Connell, an itinerant prisoner and naturally gifted banjo player, doing his bit to clear the high-octane voltage from the solitary confines of his cell on the second landing. Shergar drummed his baton against his left hand as he glared sideways and upwards toward Fester’s cell. He suspended his shuffling and the stroking of his tunic.

“Officer Lawdon, bring five men with you and take that instrument from that prisoner’s cell’.

Shergar’s peculiar talent was at its sharpest when identifying a man for a definite job. Lawdon, a six-foot two weightlifter, had a proven track record in brutality and like Shergar, would have seen Fester’s intervention as a breach of discipline to be punished without mercy. I slunk into the recess of a cell door as he gathered up “volunteers” in his own likeness. “We’ll sort out this dirty lag and his tinker’s music for once and for all,” he was screeching at his troupe as they sped by me. Gazing straight ahead and fired with the intensity of a heavily outnumbered platoon of troops about to engage a formidable foe in a do or die fight to the death. None glanced sideways towards my hiding place.

I can’t be sure what happened in Fester’s cell that night, all I know is it wasn’t true to the Christian constitution I promised to uphold when I joined the service. I know that Lawdon and five jailers charged into the cell because I could see it as it happened. I know Lawdon screeched “Take off your shoes, take off your shoes.” I know there was a scuffle, followed by what sounded like fist crushing flesh against bone more than once. And I know it was Fester’s defiant voice I heard shouting,

“you cowardly bastard, I’ll get you yet you dirty arse bandit”

before two or three more blows, crunched against bone. I know the sobs weren’t coming from Lawdon. Soon after, Lawdon, his right hand covered in blood, his troupe in tow behind him, emerged from Fester’s cell, his left-hand gripping Fester’s banjo; one of his volunteers, Tiny Lavine, carrying a pair of shoes.

I still don’t know what sickened me most about that night but what happened next brought memories back to me. I’d been a Buddy Holly fan since the day he’d been killed in that plane crash in 1959 and I still played his records, even if they roused bittersweet feelings in me. But that night, in Allentown prison, was the day the music died for me. Lawdon slammed Fester’s cell door, turned the key expertly as only a jailer of years’ service can and to no one in particular announced “now we’ll see who’s the cowardly bastard.” He pushed the key deep into his tunic pocket then grabbed the banjo in both hands, raised it high over his head before smashing it down against the rail that protected us from falling to the floor of D block. Splintered, it gathered round Shergar’s feet. I knew right then I should do, even say, something that could be heard above the brutality, that might make someone listen. But the only voice raised in defiance was Fester’s.

I can still hear him screaming “you cowardly bastard” and even if he was screaming at Lawdon I was the one who received the message. I walked the perimeter of the landing, alone, “patrolling” as those in charge liked to call it.

Fester was huddled in a corner in his cell, shivering beneath the grey prison blanket Lawdon had flung at him, one eye puffed and closing, blood clotting round his nose and mouth. I glanced down to D1 floor. Shergar was walking towards the exit door, right arm around Lawdon’s shoulders, chatting to him and patting him on the back.

Residual guilt can haunt you for a lifetime. They say those who survived the death camps suffered most.

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



NOT ELYSIUM

A withering
 dark night could not shatter
 mountains toppling forever
 onto non-existent shores
 lapping waves gouged
 black depth gneiss
 barely visible
 amid maelstrom
 terror vibrant
 turgid tumescent
 tearing tumulus
 ear-splitting thunder
 streak-lighting-sky
 threatening ominously
 shrunken life skulking
 searching rescue
 and release
 of non-existing
 pacifistic purge
 adding horror
 to ever-ending
 tormentor's intent

Bob Shakeshaft

NA BEANNA BEOLA [TWELVE PINS]

Early morning shake-up and cold-stream wake-up breakfast of hot porridge
dollop of jam thick-wool socks inside ankle boots ready for the first-day trek up
to Lissoughter only 401m late evening back at camp boots heavy stomachs aching
legs urging sleeping-bag comfort 2ndclimb to Bengower 664m chatting between
breaths of yesterday's breath-taking beauty grey-green cliffs covered in purplish
foliage tinted gorse yellow splendid tawny vibrancy true wonder inciting harmonious
unspoilt despite my heavy prints down suppressing moment soon released on the
upspring downward trek to base-camp relief-removing boots comfort arrives
Bencollag 3rdmorning rise of 516m our eyes search each step getting closer
nearing the goal decided at last-nights camp-fire sing-song tambourine-led banjo
playing reverie as

we braked our boots in decline of climb our eyes caught in wonderous fascinations
nature pulling us into Garruan 598m day four lies ahead among sultry shadowed
sun-light tarried by cotton-wool mountain clouds obscuring vaguely teasing our
panoramic expectancy above a rest-drink break with sandwich jam heavy laden
pure heaven among blissful splendiferous high-light Bengllisky 516m on day five
we venture more hardily as we stride-stronger-confident looking down from our
mountain eyrie we spied a broad lake sheaved on both sides rugged peaks
alarmingly beautiful breathtakingly surreal and yet quite real in peace

Benbrack at 582m on day six we ventured in lively spirits now we had a sense of
real achievement and a touch of pride mingled in conversation descending to base-
camp rest with the promise of a hearty feed followed by chat and later napping in
our sleep-sacks dreaming upon Benbreen our next challenge upwards through
rugged-green sheer rocky with a slight peek of growth half-hidden yet just as
delightful to the wandering eye pulling on our curious senses of sheer
wonderment as day seven ends at base-camp-safety awaiting the onset of
Diamond Hill quartz crystal glitz shows isolated viewing of the twelve pins in
panoramic views to horizons edge along the many approaching path-way
climb-walks ever splendiferous joy on day eight reluctantly hesitant in our
descent to energy recovering rest till Benlettery urging breakfast eagerness to
stretch forth and climb 577m as we passed a hostel where many travellers take
rest from their seeking the mysteries surrounding and

blanketing all in cotton-wool peaks day nine a pure delight morning in reverse-rest
-trekking upon the tenth day to Bencorr standing tall at 711m sky-reaching in a
neck-stretching exercise bringing unchallenged views caught in iris-eye East-West
beckoning to us to approach stealthily respectfully as we plan a descent to food-
shelter-comfort-harmony springs to surprise day eleven is upon us now we are as
far as we were close to end our beginning to Derry Clare 677m where bees up borne
upon scented breath humming forth in drowsy satis brimming by wild flowers
bloom at our feet we in awe of nectar gathering so close we can almost taste-smell-
sticky-sweetness salivating our tongues trekking to edibles awakening to scale
Ben-Bawn 739m also known locally as Mont-blanc-Connemara culminating our
whole expedition among natures amazing wonderment we deep-breathe mountain-
fresh exhalation knowing tonight will bring peace in fire-side hilarities ending too

JINGLING-MATCH

what compromises woman
merely garlands man
with mystery
beauty is such
a fleeting moment
remorse a poison
of life...
a broken heart
an ache
hopeful-mending

CORONA

So far, we have not
eaten the forbidden
eve and I
gathering
in close knit weave

being aware of
cough-sound-sneeze
splash
day or night
in our own still
vale

our Eden-home
each day vivid
with feeling
dread- nights- pallor
wont tally

dark sleep
once covered
our ceiling
our paradise
learned
from eves
warm wisdom

still quickens my pulse
throbs

fleshed like me
and eve
feelings-quiver-clash
avoiding
the virus

Brian Kirk is a poet and writer from Dublin. His first poetry collection *After The Fall* was published by Salmon Poetry in 2017. His poem "Birthday" won the Listowel Writers' Week Irish Poem of the Year at the An Post Irish Book Awards 2018. His short fiction chapbook *It's Not Me, It's You* won the Southword Fiction Chapbook competition and was published in 2019. He blogs at www.briankirkwriter.com.

Note: These poems form part of a sequence of formal poems entitled Freedom in Constraint responding to life during the Covid 19 crisis. The poems focus on the themes of isolation and social distancing and the wider issues and challenges to community and family arising out of the current pandemic. The sequence is made with support from the Arts Council of Ireland / An Comhairle Éalíon's Covid 19 Response Award.

NEW DAY

The face I see when shaving isn't mine,
the features are the same, but they betray
a latent restlessness. My head's okay
despite the fact I stayed up late, drank wine,
and worried for a world turned upside down,
my finger scrolling screen to find some news
that wasn't grim. My brain's become a bruise;
my name a mumbled rumour, hardly known.
The distance between mind and body's slight.
The walk from bed to kitchen table takes
an age. I greet the morning with new eyes
but see each sunrise in the same old light.
The new day offers nothing between breaks
but memory, remorse, more damn blue skies.



Brian Kirk

PLANTING

This garden is the centre of a wheel,
the sun revolves around it like clockwork.
I use a spade to breach the crust, a fork
to break up clods. I pick out stones and feel
the sun's heat on my back, my knee joints creak.
I've learned the difference between work and rest,
regret the years spent idling at a desk.
The blisters on my hand mark me as weak.
Repetition. Dig and turn clay over,
mop brow, savour these authentic actions.
The fearless robin eyes the wriggling worm –
she is so close. Give in to the lover
who is here, all others are distractions,
plant the seed, water and make firm.

SEA DREAM

All night I dream I feel the tide's soft pull,
I drift, not waking yet nor sleeping still,
below are plankton clouds, cetaceans, krill.
The only sound is waves against a hull.
Moonlight-reflecting sea, a deeper blue
than any I have ever seen before. So calm.
Dismiss all thoughts of harbour, the sea is balm
for the worried soul, bathes me in its hue.
Eel-like, I twist, my limp body thrashes,
the blanket is a net, holding me fast.
The wind rises, a wave washes the gunwale,
thunder, lightning, the sky lit up in flashes.
I'm drowning but I grip the broken mast
and wake up on the far side of the channel.

COCOONED

It is important that you keep your head.
There will be time again to go outside.
Pull the drapes, turn the TV up instead.
The life you lived abruptly simplified.

There will be time again to go outside.
Smoke from the neighbour's barbeque annoys.
The life you lived abruptly simplified.
The soundtrack to each day is now white noise.

Smoke from the neighbour's barbeque annoys.
You hear raised voices coming from next door.
The soundtrack to each day is now white noise.
Above the buzzing you hear a male voice roar.

You hear raised voices coming from next door.
You try to sleep, swallow another pill.
Above the buzzing you hear a male voice roar.
You want to say something but lack the will.

You try to sleep, swallow another pill.
Pull the drapes, turn the TV up instead.
You want to say something but lack the will.
It is important that you keep your head.

THE NEW NORMAL

There's nothing new or normal anymore.
An optimist might say we will bounce back,
but after months of this I'm not so sure

we'll ever get to where we were before.
Our lives proceeded on a steady track,
now nothing's new or normal anymore.

Take some time to stand at the back door,
breathe in and let your aching frame relax,
but after months of this I'm not so sure

if I can keep it up; I'm getting bored
with my own company, the wine and snacks.
There's nothing new or normal anymore.

At night I lie awake till after four,
stuck on the same page of my paperback.
Now after months of this I'm not so sure,

this might be how things are for ever more,
crossing fingers, walking on pavement cracks.
There's nothing new or normal anymore,
and after months of this nothing is sure.

Chad Norman lives beside the high-tides of the Bay of Fundy, Truro, Nova Scotia. He has given talks and readings in Denmark, Sweden, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, America, and across Canada. His poems appear in publications around the world and have been translated into Danish, Albanian, Romanian, Turkish, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, and Polish. His collections are *Selected & New Poems* (Mosaic Press), and *Squall: Poems In The Voice Of Mary Shelley*, is out from Guernica Editions.



A FAWN'S STARE

Shortly after feeding the family
and speaking with adults I know
the blessing of healthy ears
led my wonder to the forest
growing in an industrial park
when the intermittent brave caws
confirmed the annual hope I carry
to say out loud to myself, "Yes, babies!"

Two new members now make seven
as parents watch what I do
happily seated on a stack of pallets
behind some business the virus reduces,
a time only I, the human, feels threatened
as well as what a few isolated moments
fill all five senses with when I lower
my head having heard some other sound
to witness a fawn's stare, another new one,
peeking up out of grass wet with gifts of rain,
ears like mine gathering, tiny spotted body
soon to turn and bolt back to mother.

How time can slow down, even stop us,
all these lives finding life somehow,
those with years running out, those
able to bear births with a trust almost,
but still hide to protect and teach.
As I stand to begin the trek to my home
new little spots, new open beaks
become all that is necessary to believe
tomorrow is there, perhaps, anxious to arrive.

Chad Norman

AFTER LEAVING A LOUSY JOB

Another new morning
comes with
another new education:

I can finally agree
the winter is over
as spring surrounds us,

the proof once more
being how a starling
feeds one of her young
among the impatient many,

quite like the opened dandelions
and the warm mothering sun.

ALMOST SIXTY-ONE TODAY

I hear
the happiness
in
so many caws.

I see
the family,
black-feathered,
in
so many trees.

Morning
is best,
they
want you
most then.

Chris Mooney-Singh's last two collections *The Laughing Buddha Cab Company* and *The Bearded Chameleon* appeared in Singapore and Australia. His verse novel *Foreign Madam and the White Yogi* was commended in the 2015 Victorian Literature Awards (unpublished fiction category). In addition, he has completed a doctorate in creative writing from Monash University, teaches in the M.A. Creative Writing at Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore and is Director of The Writers Centre, Singapore.



DISPATCHES TO THE EMPEROR

Lord of Heaven and Earth,

After many long months experimenting with the new fire-bomb medicine, I am pleased to send you plans for its use during naval warfare. Picture a hollow cast-iron mechanism packed with black powder, the size of a rice bowl. A wooden board weighted with stones is submerged. The dragon-king device rests inside, enclosed in an ox-bladder. Above, on the river's surface, a slow-burning joss-stick (kept buoyant on goose and wild duck feathers inside a container) is launched downstream toward enemy ships in the darkness. At the right moment burning joss ignites the long fuse through an air lock of goat intestine setting off the submarine dragon-king. A great explosion will follow.

I humbly submit this for the defence of the kingdom.

Jiao Yu,
Principal Alchemist.

Chris Mooney-Singh

continued overleaf...

© Chris Mooney-Singh

DISPATCHES TO THE EMPEROR *contd...*

Lord of Heaven and Earth,

I am pleased the campaign against the invaders was successful and the device is in service. Today, after much deliberation, I humbly submit another design. This dragon-king is spherical, made of cast iron. The fuse ignites by enemy movement disturbing a trigger mechanism underground. Cords and axles rotate a steel spinning wheel. When trodden on, weights drop. A pin-flint sparks the fuse. I recommend clusters of nine be dug into a grid of eight auspicious squares surrounding the city as per my diagram.

I humbly submit this for the defence of the kingdom.

Jiao Yu,
Principal Alchemist.

Lord of Heaven and Earth,

It is seven years since I left the court for my villa and peach orchards. As per your request I again submit a recipe for poisonous gunpowder in hand-lobbed or catapult-launched grenades. I advise this mixture of tung oil, urine, sal ammoniac, faeces and scallion juices be heated, then coated upon dozens of iron pellets, bits of broken porcelain combined with saltpetre, sulphur and charcoal. Even the birds in the air will not escape this flying sand bomb releasing ten thousand fires.

I humbly submit this for the defence of the kingdom.

Jiao Yu,
Principal Alchemist.

continued overleaf...

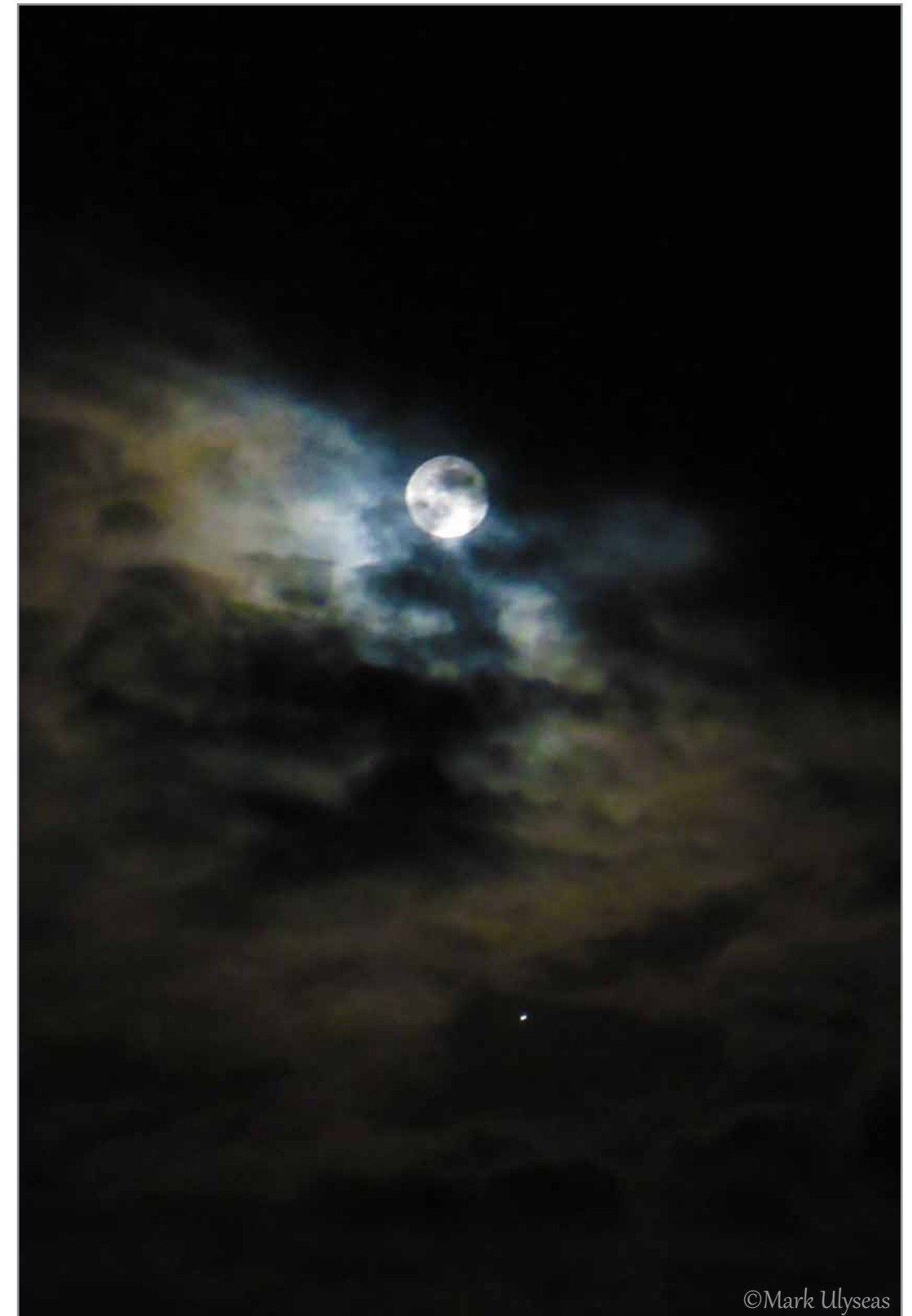
DISPATCHES TO THE EMPEROR *contd...*

Dear Principal Alchemist,

Greetings from the State Library, Melbourne.
I found your treatise - 'The Fire Dragon Manual' researching my paper on
Song Dynasty Inventions of the 14th Century. My husband, who served during
Operation Slipper in Afghanistan, land of ten million mines doesn't salute you from
his powered wheelchair. No need for gory details. You know what's worse?
We survive with alcohol and a copy of Disabled Sex for Dummies, while his ghost
legs walk somewhere around Kabul.

I humbly submit this in late summer when the last of my backyard peaches taste
bitter.

Wife of Lieutenant Morgan Small
Australian Defence Force (Ret).



Bad moon rising, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Daniel Lusk is author of several poetry collections and other books, among them *The Shower Scene from Hamlet*, *The Vermeer Suite*, and a memoir, *Girls I Never Married*. Well-known for his teaching, he also has been a Visiting Poet at The Frost Place (Franconia, NH), Eigse Carlow Arts Festival (Ireland), and Juniata College (Huntingdon, PA), and a Resident Fellow at Stranmillis University College-Queens (Belfast, N.I.), Yaddo (Saratoga Springs, N.Y.), and The MacDowell Colony (Peterborough, N.H.). His genre-bending essay, "Bomb" (*New Letters*), was awarded a Pushcart Prize.



ASP OF JERUSALEM

Woad.
Also cabbage blue.
Fierce, the Picts of old
were the cabbage men.

It was after berry-picking
somewhere Illinois.
A stranger. Invited to join
naked swimmers in a pond.

They were not attractive.
They were young.

Like being in a play in which
the poet Pablo Neruda plays himself.
So far from home and no regrets.

In the aspens yellow-bellied sapsuckers
laughed themselves blue.

Daniel Lusk

GLENCOLMCILLE

The cliffs here
refuse the sea,
over and over

and over. Yet
see this rock fall—

once
in a thousand years,
they yield.

DAWN AT SEAPOINT

First the blue water, pale
and reverential. Seen from a broad window
above the rooftops, past the dog-blind
skylights of shadow buildings
off Belgrave Square.

Now pearl grey-and-sand glass sea.
Almost spirit approaching imperceptibly,
cleaving to the far edge of horizon
whence it comes.

A winking buoy warning no one
echoed by glimmering lights of Howth
beyond and shadow mountains of Wales
farther on across the way.

A single bird pedals over the soldiering
silhouettes of stoic chimney pots.
The baleful cry of a black-backed gull
harks to the frail quality of mercy
that envelopes the sleeping town.

Glow of a streetlight off a brick hedge
by the seafront. No cyclist on the road,
no dog-walker, no swimmer with rolled togs
under her arm returning home.

.
A blackbird pipes from a garden wall.
Wood pigeon and taxi man,
like my father born this day in June, yet asleep.

EVERY SLOW THING

Isthmus.
Awoke, alone
in a hotel room, a word
in my mouth.

There is beauty
in every slow thing.

Tonight O'Hare Airport
a woman materializes
among the teeming crowd.

How light clings to her shift,
shaping her as mountain slopes
and glades of light and shade.

Isthmus, I say to no one
as if...*isthmus* she moves

a languid symmetry.
As if translucent,
a liquefaction of shadow and light.

Call her *Isthmus*. Or *Jeroboam*.
I say it in a whisper: *Jeroboam*.

Chicago, I say to myself. *Rococo*.
The noisy crowd
has fallen away. Pulse
of the room decrescendo.

And she approaches like a...
tidal shift, a mirage at sea perhaps.
What errand? What insouciance.

Hello, I want to say.
Enchanté. But nothing *entre nous*.

Most recent of David Graham's seven poetry collections is *The Honey of Earth* (Terrapin Books, 2019). Others include *Stutter Monk and Second Wind*. He also co-edited *Local News: Poetry About Small Towns* (with Tom Montag) and *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography* (with Kate Sontag). Individual poems, essays, and reviews have appeared widely in journals and anthologies as well as online. He retired from college teaching in 2016, and now serves as contributing editor for *Verse-Virtual* (<http://www.verse-virtual.org>), where he also writes a column, "Poetic License," on poets and poetics. He lives in Glens Falls, New York.



EVERYONE IN AMERICA

Everyone's driving somewhere in America,
going to work or coming home, heading out
to visit the kids, or escape the kids, or just
lull the cranky baby to sleep with a quick trip
out on the bypass, which bypasses very little:
a few swamps, herons standing in the shallows
like lawn ornaments; a gas station or two
gleaming like imperial cities in the night;
maybe one bedraggled motel saying Yes
for forty years now—but there are never cars
parked in that lot. Whoever is expected
has not yet arrived, and that's why everything
stays open so late in America, so you
can drive there, and buy things, all the while
singing the baby to sleep just moments
before you drop off yourself, O America.

David Graham

BIG MAN ON CAMPUS

Oh, I've seen bigger, believe me.
Many of us puff up quite regularly
while surfing big waves of idea
originating elsewhere. A wave
which is not water but the force
moving through, we repeat
from some dimly recalled lecture
we once sat through, with hissing
radiators and squeak of chalk,
while our souls turned to mud.

I mean, size is temporary. Do
I have to remind anyone of
the bald lies told on tombstones
and memorial plaques? Big
galloping words about Ozymandias
and his loyal entourage. All of us
losers in time's war, you could say,
but then, how would we know a winner?

SHE SAYS PLEASE

My mother does not ask
where we've been, but
seems glad to see us.
We've driven a thousand
miles and lived our lives
half a year since the last
visit, which she does not
mention. Nor does she say
our names—another grim
milestone on this twisted
path down the bleak
mountain. When we turn
to go back to the hotel
after dinner, she says please
don't. Then just looks
into space for a minute
before saying we have
no idea. We have to agree
with that. Again she says
don't go. And we go.

BAD ARIA

Damn the stuck-in-traffic clamor of crows,
and the mindless wimpy cheep-cheep
of wrens at first light, and especially
the everyone's-a-Coltrane whistles
of cardinals lording it over bush
and backyard walnut: damn all birds
and their prehistoric whinges
dragging me like a waterlogged branch
from the murky eddies of sleep.

My sleep! Damn the milky morning sky
so pale I want to scrawl great plumes
of black smoke across it. Damn the shoes
in parallel on the floor exactly where
I left them at one a.m., or two,
and damn the rumor of toast and coffee
sneaking up the stairs as if this were indeed
a new day, with its own savor and song,
as if the computer screen were about to load
a screen so packed with good news
you could spend the day just linking
and linking. And damn the unread books
sagging the shelves, and also those
read so long ago they have turned to dust
and lint and gray vapors, which is why
I wake sneezing and dripping, coughing hard,
exactly as if trying hard not to laugh.

ELEGY WRITTEN
IN A SMALL TOWN GRAVEYARD

Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate
—Thomas Gray

I like best the oldest old stones,
covered in lichen, letters blurred
and eroded like names written
in snow. How even solid rock
will fade and shrink. What are
hope and faith against
such long and steady rain?

Is it sad or not how even
names fall out of fashion
like Victorian gowns and hairdos?
Otto, Hortense, Edwina,
Harland, Meriwether, Theodora. . . .

It seems Jesus is anticipated soon
to walk this root-heaved,
much disturbed ground, but I
expect what I see: cluster of crows
high in an oak older than
the century, late sun catching
sight of itself across polished
granite, pollen enlivening
the stiff arms of a cross.

So many babies deposited
here! Four months and six days,
two years, a week—now they're
planted next to aged mothers
and fathers, and all by now
exactly the same age forever.

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



Dirk van Nouhuys

A VISIT FROM AN OLD FLAME

A middle-aged woman, more heavysset than slim, with long brown hair streaked with gray, wearing khaki slacks and a blouse in muted paisley, strode into Hemadri's office. She saw the face of the young man she had once loved hidden in that of the CEO, as the skull of some ancient hominid hides inside coarse and melancholy clay of a museum model.

"How are you, indeed, Hemadri?"

"Please be seated." He gestured toward a comfortable leather chair, rose, went to the door, told the woman at the desk outside to allow no interruption and closed it. The office appeared luxurious to her, and she immediately understood he wanted it to look English.

Walking back to sit behind his desk he glanced at her profile, heavier but still attractive. She was not wearing a wedding ring. She was eyeing details of the room, he imagined with the keen sight she had used on potsherds. When he was seated he answered, with a sweeping gesture, "As you are undoubtedly able to apprehend, I have accomplished what brought me to this country."

"Yes" she said, "I know a little about your career from my cousin, Anne-Marie Sutro." Hemadri ground his jaws at fate that had left him a hostage to what Anne-Marie might say or not. He had no confidence in Anne-Marie.

"In learning from Anne-Marie you have the advantage of me," he said.

He asked her about her flight from France, and they talked small talk for a while, of the weather, of how it differed from where she lived in France. She brought up how it differed from Patna in eastern India where they had known each other, but he merely nodded curtly. They talked about the traffic and freeways and the congested energy of the Americans. Then he asked her how she had learned where he was.

"From the Internet," she said. "Then I remembered that it was that I had a cousin in this region. I had not known her, but I wanted to come. It was a caprice, powerful but a ..." She paused, "a whim. Sometimes I am capricious. I wanted to see what the years had done for you."

continued overleaf...

© Dirk van Nouhuys

He nodded.

“So I got in touch with her through my family. Her father was the son of my uncle.” She paused and asked him if he knew about Anne-Marie’s father. He said they had not discussed their families. She described his career briefly and mentioned that he had killed himself when Anne Marie was 14. Hemadri nodded as if accepting a term of business negotiation.

“Listen, I contacted her and so discovered you were her client. I also had an interest in an archeological collection in Southern California, in UCLA.”

They talked for a time about the design work Anne-Marie had done for Hemadri. She asked him how he liked it and he said, “It was sufficient, appropriate; it is what wealthy men here in Silicon Valley have.”

“I hope to see it.” Arlette said.

He discoursed for some time on what he did, the technology, his wealth, and his increasing uncertainty as to his place in the company, something he had not articulated to himself until she sat before him.

Then Hemadri said, “I informed myself that you are widowed. Or course I have been negligent not to offer my condolences, let me take this opportunity to declare them.” “Yes, of course,” she said and told how she had met and married a political organizer older than herself. She described him as a serious, thoughtful, dedicated man with a wonderful sense of humor and how he had died of a stroke three years ago. Hemadri’s sense of this being somehow the same woman who had so remarkably given herself to him so long ago diminished as she spoke about her husband, and he noticed for the first time that she had a French accent. He wondered if it had always been there. She said that her loss was something she now felt herself recovering from, and at the same time knew she never would overcome.

“And I learned that you have two children.”

“Yes! Marc and Marija.” The village duty to have sons rustled through him and he fell silent.

“Her name is spelled with a ‘j’ — I named her after a woman famous in my field.”

“How is it, to have children?” he asked. His feeling of intimacy returned. He felt they would use the intimate forms if they shared a language that offered the possibility. He half imagined for a moment that when they had been lovers he had pictured a life with her raising a family, but, of course, he had done no such thing.

“It was wonderful,” she said, “I use the passé because they are not children now. Not that I love them less, but now they are young friends. Our son is 21 –how old were you when we met? I don’t remember.”

“I was twenty years of age.”

“Twenty. Of course! And I was twenty-three so he is your age. He is gay. He lives with another student a little older.” In dark moments Hemadri had thought of his debt to fatherhood, but it had never occurred to him that that son would do anything other than marry a woman and have sons in his turn.

“He is studying civil engineering,” she continued. “He thinks archeology is for the old ones, and I’m afraid he thinks computers are destroying hand craftsmanship.”

Hemadri grunted, “But he uses one without a doubt.” He briefly considered asking about her son’s hardware to determine if he might be using a card of his design, but decided it’s technology might oppress her.

“For sure he does. Our girl, she is nineteen, is starting college. On the outside she seems like the other children, all cell phones and torn blue jeans, but she is really an intelligent, thoughtful person underneath. She does not have a boyfriend yet”

A poignant stab of shame pierced his heart about what a foolish, thoughtless child he had been with her in Patna, but he felt he had no right to speak of it.

“But it goes very quick; they are first the dear, fascinating infants; then they are still close to you but reaching out; then you love them and help them when you can.” She went on about raising her children. She gave him a feeling that she had been a conscientious and caring mother, but a little brisk. In conclusion she asked him, “But you have never married?”

continued overleaf..

© Dirk van Nouhuys

He held his head still, frozen between nodding and shaking.

"When we knew each other, I never told you about how I came to the university," he said.

"I think not."

He then told her about how his parents had sold him as an indentured servant and how he had run away, breaking the indenture, and his good fortune in being taken up by a professor who recognized his talents.

They had begun in mid afternoon, when the sun was behind the building, and the shrubs and mounded lawn outside his window were in bright shadow, but when he concluded it was early evening, and lags of yellowing light trailed across his windows.

"Oh Hemadri, I never suspected....I don't know what I believed. I thought you fell from heaven. I was too green to ask." She reached out to touch his hand. But the desk was too wide.

"There is an additional circumstance that must be recounted," he said, "I am married." Her hand slowly receded.

"You see, before my parents...before they made the arrangement I referred to, they contracted me in marriage, as was the custom in my village, to a local girl in a neighboring village. I didn't meet her, of course."

"Are you bound...?" she asked

"I am bound. I betrayed one bond. I could not betray another"

"I see, and that is why you fled to America."

"I did not *flee* to America," he asserted. There was a snag in his voice. "I came to America because my teachers told me I had a future here." He gestured largely to the building and organization around them. "You see I have done what they advised was possible, and more." He leaned forward and lowered his voice. "And no one knew who I was or where I came from. In America you can accomplish being someone of what you make yourself," he concluded fiercely.

"Have you ever had any contact...?" she asked

He shook his head. "On no occasion."

"But she may have married someone else!"

"A vow is truth," he said.

"What have the years done to her?"

"In my village, if a woman's husband dies, and when the contractor came to my parents to demand return of the money he had given them, it must have been as if I died, her life is over."

"But, Hemadri, what does that mean?"

"It means becoming a sort of servant in the house of my family," he said. The words 'my family' were a rough, bitter tasting object on his tongue. He had never before spoken them as an adult. "Or," he continued "in the house of her family, perhaps."

"But you don't know?" she insisted.

His voice became shrill. "No, I don't know."

"But didn't you owe it to her?"

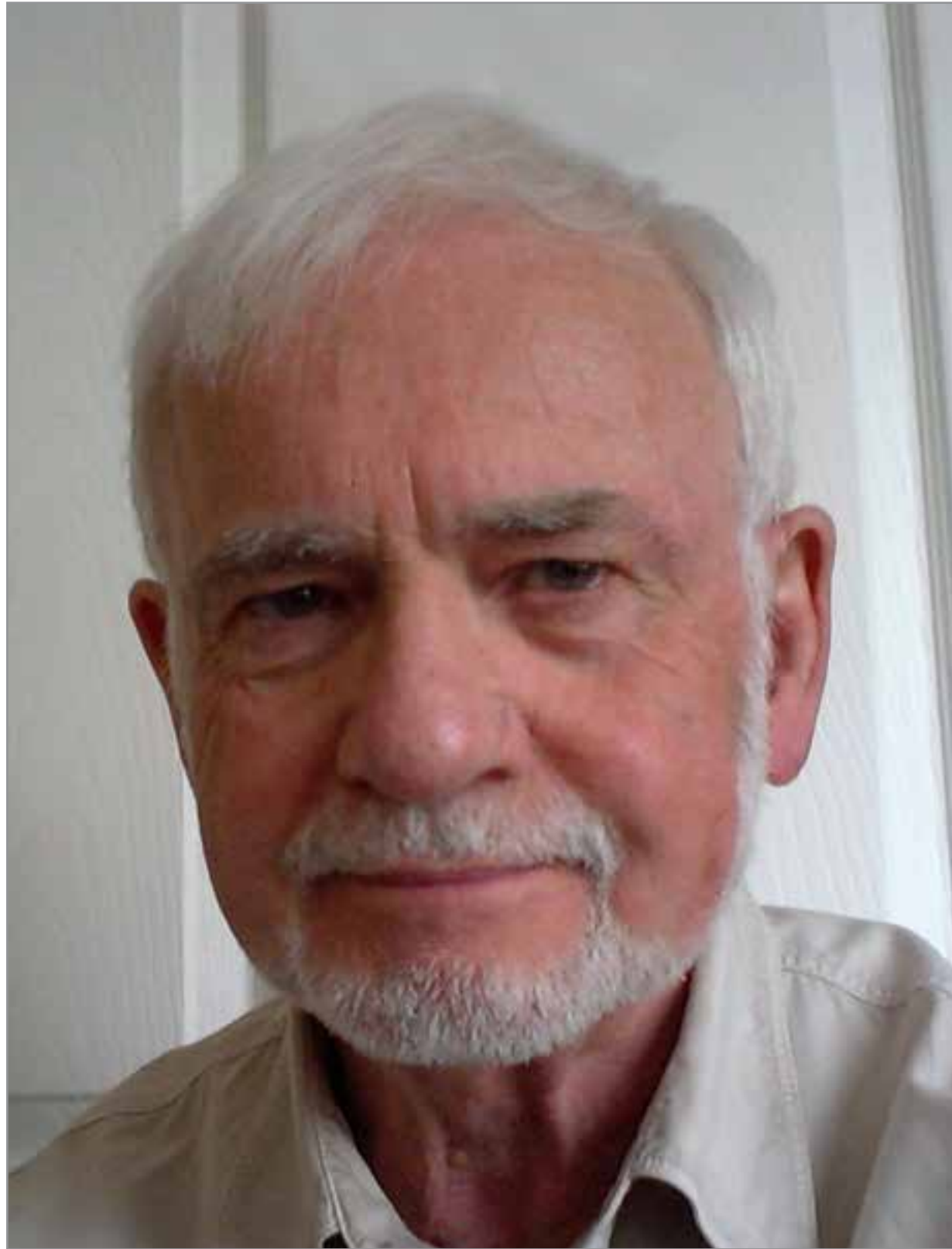
"I have to put all that ancient history behind me."

"I also wanted to come here so you could see what the years had done for me," she said. "Inevitably, the years are dead," he said.

"Excuse me," she said, "I have to go." She rose, put out her hand. Standing they could shake across the desk. Then she turned and exited with brisk strides.

Hemadri walked to the opened door and watched her down the hall. No one was around except his executive assistant, who looked up at him questioningly.

Eamonn Lynskey is a poet and essayist whose work has been published in leading magazines and journals and on-line. He holds an M. Phil. in creative writing from Trinity College, Dublin and a Diploma in Italian Language and Culture from The Italian Cultural Institute, Dublin. His third collection, 'It's Time', was published by Salmon in 2017 and a fourth is due out next year from same.



BLACK RAT REPLIES

Collection boxes are out again
to save the cuddly panda bear
and leaping antlered antelope.

No rattling of the box for me.
It's said, together with the flea,
I almost wiped out human kind,

although, unlike benighted creatures
trembling towards extinction, there
is something in the loggers, poachers,

drillers-down-for-oil defies
the odds. The question's often put:
what greater good had He in mind

to have me in His scheme of things?
What do I add to His designs? –
Not for me to answer, but

to say there is a killer species
He inflicted on the world
the which the world could do without.

Eamonn Lynskey

ON THE BUS

Not my usual bus this – travelling
my accustomed route yes, but
taking in a few more twists and turns.
Look, that crumbling wall reveals a gap
I hadn't seen before; that gable end
extends a length back longer than I'd reckoned –
all these unfamiliar Roads and Groves
disclose a new perspective on old journeys,

like this morning that discarded notebook
found forlorn in a desk-drawer
and my half-hour spent deciphering
who was it wrote those hurried lines – who was it
tried to slow the world was whirling round him
faster than these neat suburban landscapes
racing past my window now? And yet
I knew of course that hapless wight was me.

This filtering of the ever-present past,
this yearning to go back, rein in the years
and speak a word to all those selves I was,
selves gauche and ill-advised and God knows what –
I want to shout to them above the maelstrom
swept me on relentlessly before it.
What the resurrections could be mine
if like to Hamlet's crab I could go backward?



Beached crab, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Edward O'Dwyer is from Limerick, Ireland, and writes poetry and fiction. His most recent book, *Cheat Sheets*, was published by Truth Serum Press (2018) and features on The Lonely Crowd journal's 'Best Books of 2018' list. His third collection of poems from Salmon Poetry is due in 2020, entitled *Exquisite Prisons*. The collection *The Rain on Cruise's Street* (2014) was Highly Commended by the Forward Prizes, while the poem 'The Whole History of Dancing', from *Bad News, Good News, Bad News* (2017), won the Eigse Michael Hartnett Festival 2018 'Best Original Poem' Prize. His story 'The Man Who Became Poems' was recently a Finalist in the London Independent Story Prize. He is on Twitter at @EdwardODwyer2.



Edward O'Dwyer

THE TABLEUX OF MARRIAGE

I took to watching her through her windows, just her. I looked in as she performed mundane domestic tasks. There was nothing sexual in it, no, I don't think so. I mean that, though I'm not saying at all, either, that that sort of thing would be beneath me. I have done and will again do lower, baser things.

She was always fully dressed. It just became a habit. I became an expert, I suppose. I never touched myself or got a hard-on. Like I said, nothing sexual. I was never even aware of any attraction to her. She wasn't my type, not in the slightest.

It became something to do, another channel to watch. Did I need an explanation for it beyond that? Did I need to call in the Freudians? I was spending less time at bars drinking too much and gawking at pretty bartenders all the while. This, ironically enough, was very much a healthier and less creepy phase in my life.

After some time I upped my intake. The time I spent crouched at her various windows included times when her husband was home, and then those times started to become the times I enjoyed best. Enjoyed has got to be the wrong word here, but you know what I mean. I might watch them eat or argue or watch a movie.

I'd pull my coat around me, shield myself from the winter. The winter was jostling for supremacy at the windows during those days. We co-existed. I guess it was like the winter in any other circumstances. It would always be itself. You couldn't fault the winter in that sense. It kept its cold, wet promises every time, every time.

One evening, though, through a crack in the curtains, I watched, and something different happened. I was waiting for a scene of some kind, but not a particular one, and not even the typical crack in the curtains sort of scene. I'd never seen them fuck. I genuinely think I'd have left if I'd had a view of that. I think that was a line I was never interested in crossing, not this time.

She tore open the curtains suddenly and we were face to face at last. We were inches apart. I was closer to her than, say, two people having coffee in a cafe with tiny tables. I held my breath instinctively. I thought of running, of course, but instead froze, as though the winter, behind me, had whispered it and I was obeying. She didn't scream or look horrified, and I knew, looking out into the dark, she saw only the dark and the reflection of herself.

Still, I dared not move. If she could not see me in stillness, the game might yet be up with the slightest movement. She'd call for her husband. He'd spring into action. She'd pick up the phone. The police sirens would close in around me. I don't need all of that again, especially when I'm not a pervert, not this time.

And so I managed my breath so as not to fog up the glass. Tiny breath followed tiny breath. She folded her arms and looked at the glass and the darkness and herself. She was obviously in no hurry.

I looked into her eyes. I was aware of the fact that people are forever saying there was this or that in somebody's eyes, sadness or joy or loneliness or anger, but who can ever really tell? I looked into her eyes and I chose not to presume anything of what might be there. I think it's better that way. They were green, that's enough to say of them.

After a while her husband appeared in the doorway. He was looking at the back of her head, saying something, but I'm not sure what, and again I'd rather not presume. She didn't turn around. My feet ached under me as he came closer, but slowly, precisely. He placed a careful hand on her shoulder. She stiffened a little bit but left it there. He was saying something again, and I realised he was apologising.

Marriage is, among other things, I started to think, a series of apologies. It's like tennis, but with apologies instead of tennis balls. Ideally it finishes as a draw. The umpire calls it a tie.

My own marriage failed because I was never much good at apologies. I was about as good at marriage as I was at tennis. Anyway, that was a long time ago.

I watched his words, whatever they were, coax the stiffness out of her. Her body relinquished its rigidity. She didn't smile at all but her frown did soften. His apology, whatever it was for, was working. He got closer again, connected his body to hers. He slowly put his arms around her, and clasped his hands together at her chest. She let her weight rest against him.

Together they looked at the glass and the dark and themselves, the tableaux of marriage they were in that moment, as did I, but I was seeing it without the dark. I was seeing it in the pure light. I knew as I watched them there that it was time to go back to the bars, it was time to go back to the life I suppose I always knew I'd have to at some point go back to. It was mine just as surely as this was theirs.



Paper kite, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Fred Johnston is the author of nine collections of poetry, the latest being *Rogue States* published by Salmon, 2018. He is the founder of *Cúirt*, Galway city's annual literary festival, the city where he currently teaches Creative Writing at NUI Galway. He is also the author of three novels and two collections of short stories, he is currently working on his third collection. He has very strong links to France, having written many times in French and having also translated from the French. He won a *Prix de L'Ambassade* for his translations in 2004.



THE NATURE OF VIOLENCE

What is the nature of violence,
Is it all stone-throwing, shootings and rape?
Not at all: these are the skin on the bone
But it's the architecture of bone that lends shape
To the dumb inelegance of butchered thought
And that's before anyone's lifted a hammer,
Cocked a gun, locked a door
Raised a voice to declare its imminence.

A thought takes up a pen
Something dark, who knows, or well-intentioned
And draws a line through a point of view
Declares it too straight or honest to be mentioned
This is violation of another sort
And it can kill or shame knife-sure
As any drunken lust -
It's a thought that can be wiped and used again.

Behind the falling walls and
Bleeding children, let's not forget the arrogance
That breeds it all is born and raised in talk
So cheap it barely has accent or simple tense -
In the pub or war-room, simple things turn bad,
Words rot, transmute, enemies are assigned
And given names, sad judgments made
By poets and generals, and atrocities planned.

Fred Johnston

DRIVE

It took itself off between hot fields and the desiccated gates
 Of pitiful houses falling in on themselves as if they'd been blitzed
 A country Sunday road curving out of spite -
 The village pubs hadn't opened in months, they wept shards of paint
 Like children they waited for something to happen
 Behind dead petrol-pumps no one had the heart to uproot
 You take it all in while changing gears or slowing
 For the fat occasional tractors glimmering and new and arrogant
 And try to read road-signs that have forgotten to translate them-
 Selves to the metric system, that have a sense of apology about them
 While round a corner a jogger ludicrous in rainbowed lycra makes
 An absurd scarcely-identifiable flying object past the windscreen.

I wouldn't know the language here, its tempo and rough slant
 Or time the rhythm of the green silences between each stave of hedge
 Not a known road canyoned by concrete, the stretch of glass towers
 The slithery rhythm of taxis taking home the breathless young
 From happy outposts of neon to the quartered empty grids
 Of housing estates with their nervous ticking street-lighting
 The cafés shuttering down, the black city world shutting its eyelids -
 But there I know what to do to keep two feet solid to the ground
 I can read the signs, read the writing the rain makes on a window
 I cannot get lost. Reversing in the driveway of an audacious farm,
 I realize how little time I have for things in ruin or wide spaces
 Flags in schoolyards, headstones; a cruel, immoral patriotism.

THREE THINGS

This one's for Jacob
 Who spent an afternoon, an oddly sunny and gracious one
 Outlining to me his plans to build a house
 And where he'd set it, and the rooms it would have
 And how I should visit and stay when it was finished -
 And then stepped, drunk,
 Into a hot bath and slit his wrists.

This one's for the slim pretty girl
 Who fought so hard with her skirt as it blew up in the wind
 Revealing her strong, elegant bare legs
 Striding over the battering street in its Saturday madness
 As if she'd all of a sudden remembered
 That men might look at her,
 As I did, wanting her in heat and fire.

This one's for Nicholas
 Who in his attic flat wanted to lie alongside me, as he said,
 For the warmth (not to take anything louche from it)
 And the wintery morning was, indeed, cold
 As we lay there fully clothed unsleeping
 Sharing roll-up cigarettes -
 Funny the things you remember.

ADMIRATION

Two good men in their 'eighties have told me
They wasted whole portions of their lives
The greater parts
Doing what I imagined I should have been doing
The things I thought were acts
Of being normal, balanced –
Of real worth in the world.

There is no answer to that, at least I hadn't
An answer. Like many of my peace-and-flowers
Generation
I paid along the way, lacking what I saw
As stability. The view from a locked psychiatric
Ward is not reassuring. I might have said
Something about that.

But even listening to them uncomfortably
I knew that monsters enjoy good suits
Earn money
Not all can be put to flight with dalmane
Or clomethiazole or even university tenure –
Some are respectable,
Seductive. Some come like blessings.

But to go one's whole term and then
Feel a weight of loss itself monstrous
As they did
Itself terrifying more so because it is an absence
A vacantness, a hole from which whimperings
Escape, indistinct, familiar –
They confessed all this, these men I admired.



Mask on display at Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, Hanoi, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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



C O D

Although my name might well rhyme with God,
or stand for cash on delivery, when the Grand Banks
Disaster struck, I felt it more than most. A ghost

of my former self, I am now more style than
substance. Having been relegated to the minor
leagues, my global presence is less impressive.

I am not so prominent on your silver screens.
The bulging nets I used to fill are dwindling fast;
my promise of abundance seems to be forever

in the past.

Gordon Meade

SEA LION

Raised, as I was, on the Good Vibrations of West Coast Rock, it is hard for me to acknowledge the fact that the waters in which I was brought up are now polluted; that my dreams of pristine surf have had to be diluted. Just like the times

when Brian Wilson chose to sit bare-footed in a pit of sand to try and sing the sea; now, I, too, would rather listen to the breaking waves hauled out on land, instead of having to swim through fathoms of detritus, unsure of what I'll find.

VAQUITA PORPOISE #22

By the time this poem has been written, perhaps there will be under twenty of us left in the wild. And once it has been taken

for publication in an environmentally aligned magazine, maybe only ten. If it should ever make it into an anthology

of endangered sea creatures, we could be in single figures. And, when it finds itself in a collection, we might well be deemed

extinct.

Graham Allen is a Professor in the School of English, University College Cork, Ireland. Professor Allen is an award-winning poet. His poetry collections *The One That Got Away* and *The Madhouse System* are published with New Binary Press, as is his ongoing poem *Holes* www.holesbygrahamallen.org. His new collection *No Rainbows Here* will be published by Salmon Press in 2020.



Graham Allen

ON NOT BEING WORDSWORTH

Returning to the poet who returns,
Five years later, to a scene of meaning,
I cannot follow him in his design
Of open heartiness and feeling.

Today there is theme and theatre so wide
It defeats the great biographical tradition,
The task of the poet is to over leap
The tyranny of self's ubiquitous dominion.

But I cannot forge a voice out of the slaughter
Of the natural world and all that dwells within it,
Poetry flails against talk in billions,
Most readers write me off as vatic.

The world is dying and our ease is the cause,
The world is dying and we are the culprit,
And your pastoral charms are tasteless at best,
At worst they are unutterably decrepit.

We must renounce what once we loved,
Even Blake mistook Imagination
For something that builds a citadel on Earth,
The dirt under my feet was his gift to the Nation.

They all had the human at the top of a tree
We are now in the business of toppling.
Better then to lace your voice with elegy,
The game is up is a friendless lesson.

Better then sing an inconsolable song
Of the passing from the Earth of every mystery:
The lion in its pomp, the lizard in the grass,
The Orangutan and its peculiar glory.

continued overleaf..

© Graham Allen

ON NOT BEING WORDSWORTH *contd...*

Our children will curse our negligence
Over the salmon, the shark, and the bee,
They will wonder how we sat silent and sanguine
As the world was stripped of all vitality.

The world is dying and we are the cause,
It is emptying at a rate it cannot countermand,
We are the plague that desertifies,
The locust that works its way through the land.

We are the plague for which nature has no vaccine,
We are the plague that poisons every breath,
Every tick of the heart, every fold of the sun,
A disease that spoils every wonder that is left.

We are the worm concealed in the apple,
The canker on the brow, the midnight cough,
The sound of distant tanks as the family cowers,
Gleeful torturer who has never had enough.

The world is dying and it is dying from us,
We are the hole in the bough of the boat,
Those who would join the illustrious crew
Of past bards will have a knot in their throat.

The time is up on the majesty of man,
The time is up for romantic vision,
We're destroying the ground underneath our feet,
We are the ship, the ice, and the collision.

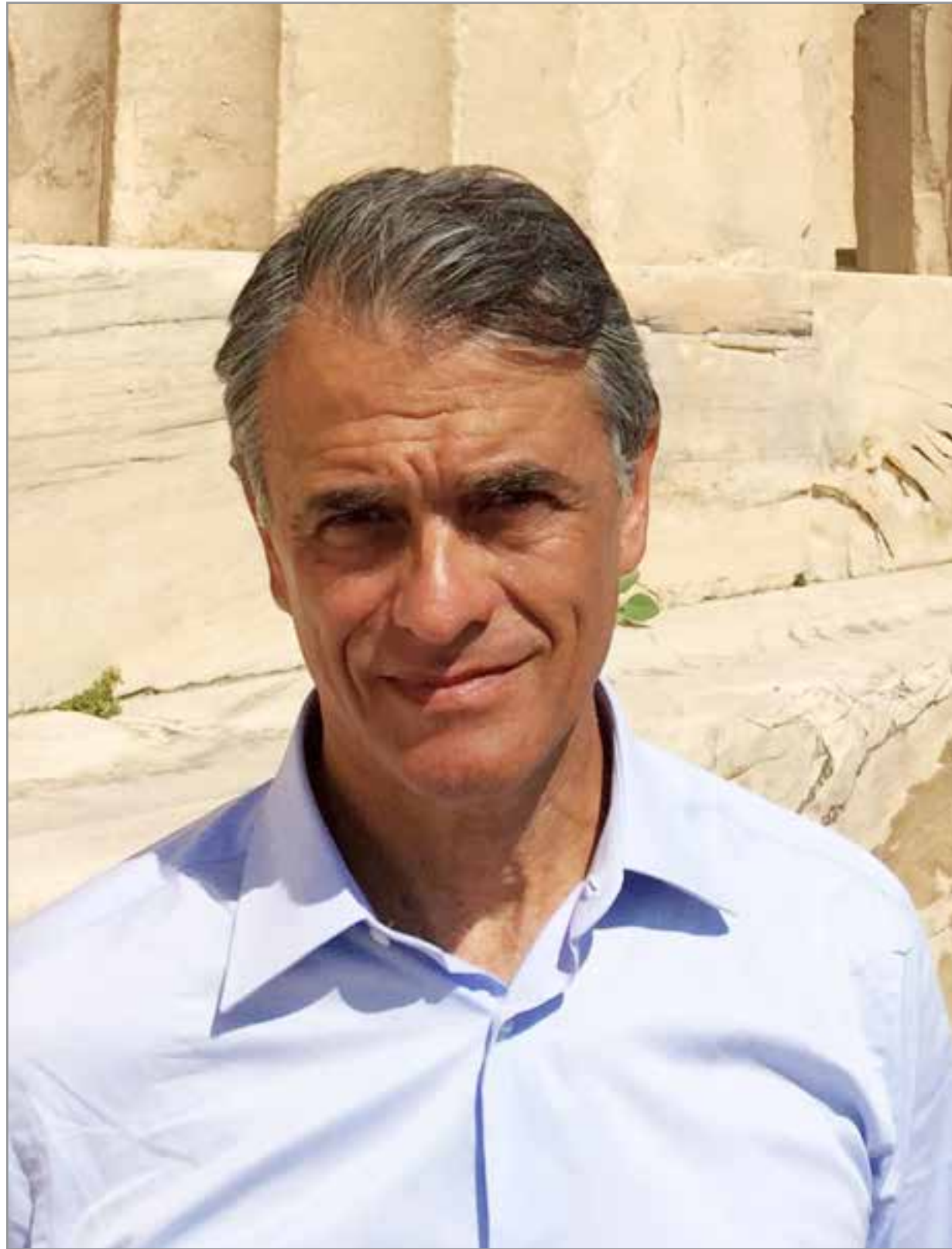
The time is up for within and abroad,
The one life that rolls through everything,
Our lust has brought down the great chain of being,
Left the idea of correspondence in ruin.

There is nowhere now that we can run to,
No childhood in the hillside we can remember,
No best friend extolling the unity of metaphor.
Our figures are bloody, only serve to dismember.

The natural world is no longer our guide,
More like a timer attached to a bomb,
If poets survive then they are Cassandras,
If poetry survives, it won't do so for long.

It is out of belated fear and adoration
That the chance of nature poetry dies,
All that is left are formal recriminations,
Mournful valedictions, craven alibis.

All that is left are idiotic rally calls,
Twilight tunes after all the gods have gone,
A strange, tipping day, final accounting,
The voice of the last man singing his song.



Haris Vlavianos was born in Rome in 1957. He studied Economics and Philosophy at the University of Bristol (B.Sc) and Politics, History and International Relations (M.Phil, D.Phil) at the University of Oxford (Trinity College). His doctoral thesis entitled, *Greece 1941-1949: From Resistance to Civil War*, was published by Macmillan (1992) and was awarded the "Fafalios Foundation" Prize. He has published thirteen collections of poetry. His most recent collection of poems, "Self-Portrait of Whiteness" received The National Poetry Prize, The Academy of Athens Poetry Prize, The Anagnostis Poetry Prize and The Readers' Poetry Prize. "Selected Poems" volumes of his have been published in England, Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, Holland, Spain, Ireland, etc. His book, "Hitler's Secret Diary" was recently published in France and Holland and his *History of Western Philosophy in 100 Haikus* in England and France. He has translated in book form the works of well-known writers such as: Ezra Pound (*Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, 1987; *Drafts and Fragments of Cantos CX-CXX*, 1991), William Blake (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 1997 - short listed for the State Translation Prize) and T. S. Eliot's (*Four Quartets*, 2012). His translation of Eliot's *The Waste Land* was published in May to great critical acclaim. He is the editor of the influential literary journal "Poetics" and Poetry Editor at "Patakis Publications". He is Professor of History and Politics at the American College of Greece. He is at present teaching a post-graduate course in Creative Writing at the Greek Open University, as well as, at "Patakis". <https://www.patakis.gr/default.aspx>

SELF-PORTRAIT OF WHITENESS

The following ten poems have been translated from Greek by Peter Mackridge.

Haris Vlavianos

ECCE MATER

Ever since she died
 (nine years now)
 she's not once appeared in my dreams.
 She refuses.
 I don't believe in ghosts
 (Yeats was crazy)
 but even if I did,
 even if I summoned her,
 she still wouldn't come.
 When I bring her to mind
 her face is always hard
 and covered in deep wrinkles,
 her eyes look at me with revulsion.
 I hear her saying to an invisible audience,
 "He wanted me to die as soon as possible,
 so he could get rid of me at last.
 Cancer granted his wish,
 it didn't waste its time."

I can't speak to anyone
 about that woman,
 about the unhealthy love that bound us together.
 Whatever I write will be a lie.
 I know how insidious words are,
 they comfort you for a while
 only to take their revenge on you later
 with greater frenzy.
 The more insistently you summon them,
 the more profoundly they despise you,
 like her in fact.

I give up.

A KNOWING LETTER

I know what you'd like now:
 breakfast in the garden of a grand country house
 with a view over the emerald green meadows of Somerset,
 and just as you're carefully spreading
 marmalade on your toast
 a butler suddenly appears
 holding a silver tray.
 Everyone can guess what's on it.
 That's not the question.
 Which of all your lovers thought of you
 after all those months when you've been ostentatiously avoiding
 every social event?
 As far as I know
 they haven't even read *Brideshead Revisited*,
 nor do they drink Pimm's while desultorily watching a cricket match,
 and they certainly don't have their suits tailored at Albemarle Street.
 Yet the fact that you still hope
 to see a beautiful fox dash out
 from the thickets of passion
 is admirable.
 Anyway, today it's full moon.
 Better to stay in your room
 and play with your old dolls.
 An escape to the past
 in this lovely hideaway
 full of bright photos
 and flashing smiles
 is always the safest solution.
 It's yours and nobody can take it away from you.
 I'll close with a line that reminds me of us:
 "Parachutes, my love, could carry us higher."*
 So high that your little fox
 would look like an ant.

*[Barbara Guest]

VOWELS SHOUT OUT LOUD

*The vowels are seven and they shout out loud.
Greek children's rhyme*

Following Tate

When at last my turn came to speak
I stood up from the table
and with slow steps
I walked towards the podium.
I looked at the members of the Committee
and realized
– with a certain relief I admit –
that I wasn't acquainted with any of them.
The guests, sitting at round tables,
went on greedily eating their dinner
(the main course was *canard à l'orange*)
while making awkward gestures.
From time to time they cast surreptitious glances
towards the speakers
to show that the topic of the Conference
was of particular concern to them.
They knew, of course, that they would depart
exactly as they had arrived:
enveloped in a thick cloud
of indifference and boredom.

It was natural
after such a long wait
that I'd forgotten what I wanted to say
and the sheets of paper in front of me
were unexpectedly blank.
To break the silence
I thought for a moment
of reciting a sonnet by Spenser
(as one of my wife's lovers has admitted,
I have a very good voice),

but finally, I decided that the "case of the Zukovski brothers"
– which has yet to be solved –
would be more interesting to them.
It would please the President of the Committee
who, ever since he saw me enter the hall,
never stopped smiling at me
in a disarmingly mindless manner.
Nevertheless, the waiters' worn-out dinner jackets,
the broken lamp fixtures on the walls
and the artificial flowers in the vases
discouraged me, I confess, from continuing.
The venue was more like a provincial card-playing club
than the *salon* of Mme de Sévigné.

What story should I tell them?
A dramatic incident from my childhood
such as you were naïve enough to suggest to me,
would only have complicated the situation,
since nobody is interested in being transported
from the comfortable present, which they have constructed so laboriously,
to the painful past of some stranger.
Reality, as we know, is merciless.
Constant activity, no postponement, no deferral, no pangs of conscience, is its motto.
By the way, how come you're here?
Don't you have your appointment with your analyst at this time on a Friday?
So I'm your analyst?

You see how quickly the time has passed?
We'll discuss your obsession
with Pound and usury next week.
Would you like a receipt for the seventy euros?

APRIL IS THE FUNNIEST MONTH

And the discussion begins with who, when and why.
But is there any point in moralizing retrospectively
when the sun has disappeared behind the mountains,
the circus has already moved on to the next town
and the only things left in ours
are the traces left by the big top in the grass?
We could of course pretend
that the clown's still here among us,
watching us with his mournful expression
and slowly repeating our every phrase
in his own incomprehensible language.
Besides, what would we gain from another exchange of fire,
especially now that neither of us
is able to clearly distinguish the target?
Each year, at this time, you announce the same news to me
(clearly to hurt me):
"Haven't you heard? Poetry's finished! It's dead!"
and I as usual reply:
"I didn't go to the funeral.
I stayed at home and watched it on television."
However, neither of us means what he says.

The peacock disappeared many years ago
in the dense thickets of passion,
but we never searched for it.
And we were right not to,
because I'm not Stanley,
nor are you, obviously, Livingstone,
and the duck pond
is certainly not Lake Tanganyika.
So let's welcome the Spring
that's persistently besieging our garden
with no more insinuations and sighs,
each of us filling the vase
with the flowers he loves.
Violets, chrysanthemums and hyacinths,
yellow, red and blue roses.
What does it matter?
April is indeed the funniest month.

APOCALYPSE TOMORROW

Where had we got to?
 Oh yes, your theory
 that the Islamists
 are being funded by the Jews
 and Obama is a freemason.
 Don't worry. It's nothing.
 After a certain age
 a lot of people construct imaginary conspiracies
 that explain everything
 – from the secret activities of the Bilderberg Club
 and the nefarious plans of the Illuminati
 to swine flu.
 How else could they bear the painful passage
 from one shore of reality to the other.
 The question of course
 isn't what reality I'm referring to,
 nor the content of your theory
 (it will end up in the garbage whatever happens)
 but your insistence on holding on
 to that little dead branch
 just when you think you'll soon find yourself
 at the bottom of the cliff.
 In a sense
 your attitude is admirable.
 It's not easy for someone to fly
 in a permanent cloud of incoherence
 wearing a self-satisfied smile,
 as though the message brought by the extra-terrestrials
 is directed exclusively to him.
 You're right about one thing, though.
 The world really is going to the dogs
 and it's carrying us all away with it to perdition.
 By the way,
 what time does your Rolex say?
 Should I put my oxygen mask on now
 or later?

THE POSTMAN WILL RING TWICE, BUT NOT AT YOUR DOOR

You don't see her much anymore,
 but even when you used to see her,
 did you see her?
 So why complain?
 It's better that the days turn their back on you.
 Do you really want to see their sour faces
 as soon as you open your eyes?
 Often there's a chink that casts better light on the story
 and forces you to come out of your comfortable shell
 and set off at last on your return journey –
 indifference → children → marriage →
 love → passion →

Don't you understand what I mean?
 It doesn't matter.
 I understand.
 Besides, the letter in question
 never reached your hands.
 Shall I tell you a secret?
 I'm really not who you think I am.
 But who are you?

A WHITE BRUSHSTROKE

Yesterday I visited the Van Gogh Museum again. This time, in contrast to my previous visits, my gaze dwelt for some time on two of the last paintings he completed in 1890 – shortly before his suicide. Many people see the well-known painting of the crows flying round a wheatfield as being the one that foretells the painter's tragic end. Yet shortly after completing this picture, Van Gogh painted other landscapes – such as the one with the heavy blue clouds covering a green meadow –, landscapes which, as he put it, “grant me energy and strength”. It is therefore difficult to diagnose – as certain critics have attempted to do with facile and predictable analyses – the motives and reactions of a psychologically disturbed individual. In the painting of the clouds, for instance, I don't see “the storm that is about to break”, but rather a harmonious combination of colours which might reflect the calm that Van Gogh felt at that moment – something that's hinted at by the white brushstroke in the top left corner of the canvas. Mere conjecture, someone might say, and rightly so. Nevertheless, I'd rather have a question that remains open than an answer that insists on closing the matter once and for all and burying it in some luxury album about “the madman who cut off his ear”.

WORDS, WORDS, UNBEARABLE WORDS

What's the use of losing sleep
because a French philosopher
(*charmant*, I grant you)
argues that the ghost in Hamlet
“has returned and has therefore never really left”?
You remember to keep looking at your watch
when on the Stratford stage Polonius falls dead
and you're impatient to find yourself back in your hotel room
between Melanie's shapely legs.
Except that the beautiful English girl forsook you as soon as the curtain fell
and hurried back to Matthew,
from whose arms
she'd slipped away a few weeks earlier for your sake.
As it turned out, she hadn't really left either.

So that freezing March evening
found you alone,
lying face up on the double bed
and pondering the intractable puzzle of that oft-performed tragedy
while casting furtive glances
at Telly Savalas's dazzlingly bald pate
(your grandma preferred Yul Brynner's)
which took up almost two thirds of the screen.

What can Melanie be dreaming of now,
while Matthew, beside her,
is secretly totting up her numerous lovers?
Now you come to think of it,
it's better that things turned out this way.
Essentially Denmark is always a squalid prison
and glorious Fortinbras
begins to do great things in the next act –
the one that the Bard,
in his furious haste,
forgot to write.

So what's the use of tears?

NEL MEZZO DEL...PRANZO

The quarrel started during lunch,
 as soon as we'd begun enjoying, after the soup and the asparagus.
 her beloved Chateaubriand.
 The trigger, as usual, was former spouses, wrong choices,
 wasted years, etc. etc.
 But after a while the conversation extended
 to other burning issues –
 from the seminars of that “charlatan” Lacan
 to the latest (and for me the ghastliest)
 Cronenberg film.
 At some point
 (I'd just uttered the phrase
 “spare me”,
 if I remember rightly)
 she stood up furiously from the table
 snatched the Viking edition of *Portable Dante*
 from the medieval literature shelf
 and stabbed me three times in the stomach with it.
 Now that I'm writing to you I'm in the second circle of the Inferno.
 Luckily Paolo and Francesca are great company.
 In the end life here isn't exactly how the Florentine described it.
 I'm impatient to go down to the lower apartments.
 Maybe I'll meet her there too,
 because I forgot to tell you
 that as I fell to the floor covered in blood
 I managed to knife her in my turn
 with *Wordsworth's Prelude*,
 which was lying – believe it or not –
 on the little table next to the standard lamp.

In the end I was right to insist
 on placing it there.
 The joke is of course
 that I haven't picked it up
 for more than twenty years,
 but it did its job.
 Just think if I'd been holding
Titus Andronicus!
 That really would have been the perfect crime.

ROSE IS A ROSE IS A ROSE IS A ROSE

To my daughter

As Forster said,
 “a poem must create
 a relationship between flowers and humankind”.
 Consequently, since for me humankind
 is now you alone,
 the moment I offer you this bouquet
 I've succeeded in writing the perfect poem.
 Pick it up carefully
 and smell its words one by one.
 They are all yours.
 Even its thorns
 highlight your beauty.

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



A LETTER TO THE SOUTH

When the storm raged last night and lights
went out and heat cloyed as if I were turning
on sheets by louvered windows in June,
the French Quarter, I recalled I rode the train
that summer to New Orleans and sent you
reports and poems every few hours on the way.
The train got caught in a terrible rain, the driver
stopped, and we passengers looked out at trees
swaying and bending, our loves in mind and heart,
wondering whether we would make it home.

I write to you now in your southern sojourn
and lights have just come back here in this
city bridge to the North, in my fingers,
eyes and heart. I am deeply in your,
and God's, debt for this inspiring love
beating on my forehead like rain
on the windows last night, wind whistling
and yet I felt you with me, the God-bless
you sent by Messenger, showing me
the light after the rain too that will pass.

Indran Amirthanayagam

FILL ME UP

In this year of the Covid plague. more than 800,000 have died . Many millions have lost livelihoods. Fear and loathing are running wild through families and neighborhoods. Loves are coming to an end or changing form. Great loves--ones that nourish for a lifetime. So what is to be done in the days after the disaster, after the slow-cooked, insidious spreading of the virus? Embrace the moment. Embrace the recent and distant past. Take stock of where you are and put one, then two steps forward. The God of love will replenish you. You may have lost a companion in the day-to-day but your poems have become richer, finer-tuned because of the costs paid in writing them. In the midst of great suffering comes great learning. Love is not exclusive, cannot be corralled, and must be let go to breathe free. The Muse will ride into the empty nest, her kitbag stuffed with stories and memories, and birds will drop seeds as they pass by above. Eternity will not leave a vacuum unfilled.

MASK MAN, ONE ISLAND

Taylor, *tailleur, taliare*, cutter,
with scissors, needle, thread,
seamer, working cloth to fit
dimensions of the man, sway
of the woman. Taylor,

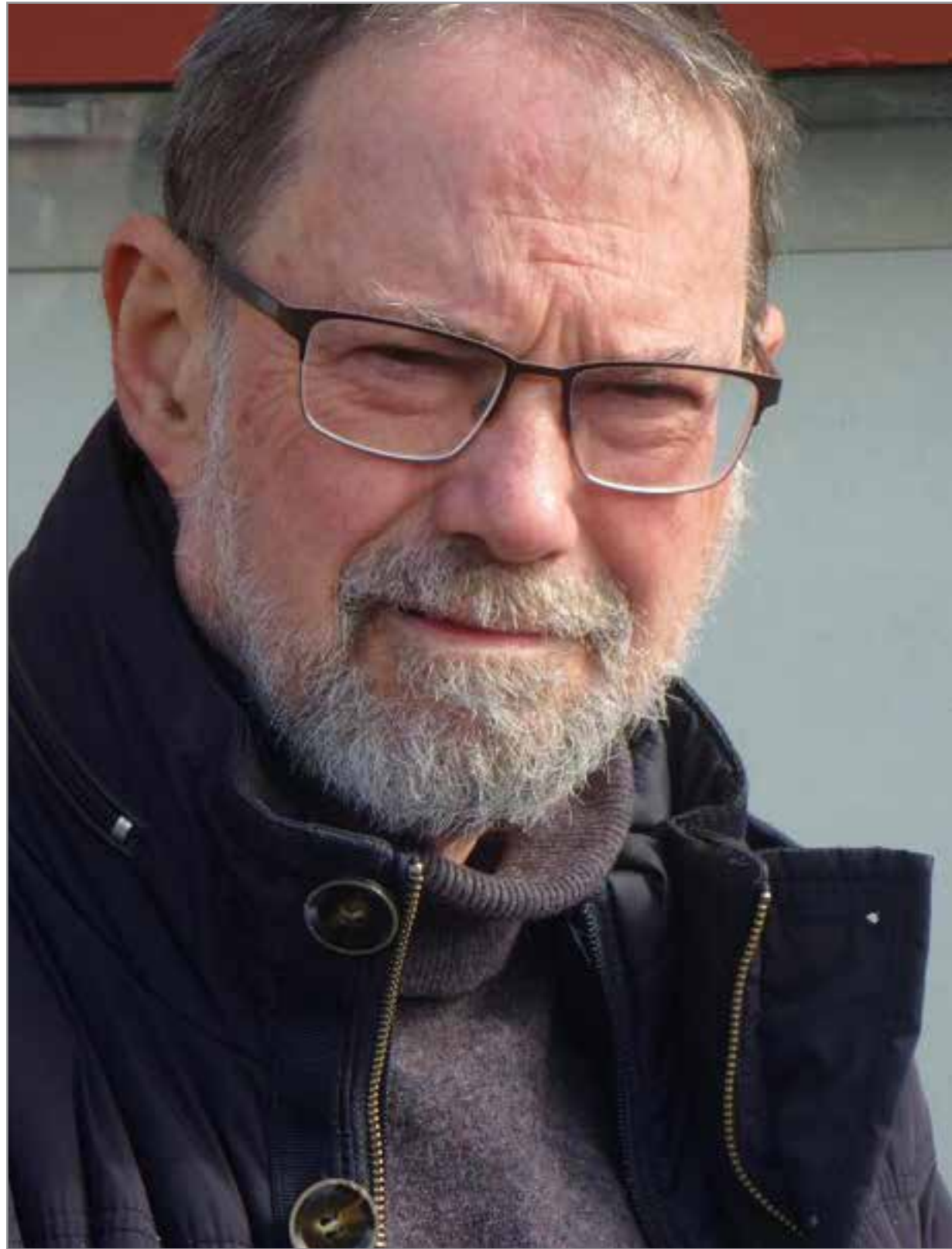
sequined, dotting the mask
with semi-precious stones.
Taylor, poet reading
Brooklyn jazz. Friend,
confidant, thank you

for the hand-sewn, unique,
indelible clothes, visions
through the back door,
landing at the Port and
greeting old schoolmates,

together in the *country*
of warm snow, writing
from island to island,
Trinidad between Hudson
and East Rivers, Labor Day

Carnival bringing all roosters
to roost, Belmont, Savannah,
Flatbush, spun in the same roll
of cloth, every Shrove Tuesday,
every Labor Day, masked.

Jack Grady is a founder member of the Ireland-based Ox Mountain Poets. His poetry has been published in Ireland, the United Kingdom, France, the United States, Canada, Indonesia, Portugal, Greece, Columbia, India, and Nepal. He has read at international poetry events, including the *Festival International Poésie Marrakech*, in Morocco; *Poesia a Sul* in Olhão, Portugal; and in Seville, Spain, at an event honouring Spanish poet Emilio Durán. His poetry collection, *Resurrection*, was published by Lapwing Publications in October 2017 and was nominated for the T.S. Eliot Prize.



BATHSHEBA SPOONER CONFRONTS THE FATAL CORD

The following five poems, under the group title of *Bathsheba Spooner Confronts the Fatal Cord* are from a work in progress, entitled *Unconsecrated Ground*, in which Bathsheba (a.k.a. Bathshua) Spooner and other individuals involved in the events surrounding the murder of her husband and what followed speak from their graves. Despite the fact that she was pregnant, she was hanged in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1778, for instigating the murder of her husband, Joshua Spooner. Those who actually committed the murder – Ezra Ross, James Buchanan, and William Brooks – were hanged with her.

Eight other poems in this series have already been published by Live Encounters Poetry and Writing.

The first four appeared in volume 1 of the December 2018 issue of Live Encounters Poetry and Writing under the group title *Unconsecrated Ground*. They can be read here:

<https://liveencounters.net/le-poetry-writing-2018/12-dec-pw-vol-one-2018/jack-grady-unconsecrated-ground/>

The second four poems in the series were published in the July 2019 issue of Live Encounters Poetry and Writing under the group title *The Murderers of Joshua Spooner*. They can be read here:

<https://liveencounters.net/le-poetry-writing-2019/07-july-pw-2019/jack-grady-the-murderers-of-joshua-spooner/>

Jack Grady

THE SPIRIT OF BATHSHEBA SPOONER DESCRIBES HER TRUE NATURE

You would understand me
if you had witnessed my way with horses.
No woman I knew could master
an unbroken stallion like I could.

And, whether seated
upon gelding, stallion, or mare,
I could never abide a pillion.
Even side-saddle I would not bear.

And, when young, I would choose men's breeches,
wrap my feet and legs in spatterdashes,
disdain the gift of a riding habit
with hood or plumed bonnet.

I felt freest unencumbered by a cork rump
or bound by stays, breasts pushed up.
A-hunting I would gladly go with my daddy
rather than entertain in the parlour with mother.

O, 'tis true, when older,
I applied myself to etiquette
and to poetry and music, and made myself
mistress of the arts of handsomeness –

how I would darken
my lashes and brows,
whiten my face in Venetian ceruse;
redde[n] my cheeks with cinnabar. –

In every way I made myself seem
the paragon of my gender
in both manners and beauty
while in the company of society.

But, with my daddy in the woods,
give me raiment of rawhide and coonskin!
If my father were Lucifer himself,
I would nonetheless follow his cause and our King's

to Loyalist victory or defeat,
even to my perdition, if that's where it would lead.

BATHSHEBA SPOONER'S SPIRIT DESCRIBES THE COLLAPSE OF HER MARRIAGE

When Joshua Spooner
made his politics known,
I would no longer surrender
my flesh to that traitor.
I still played a wife's role,
whenever the need arose,
by entertaining our neighbours and friends,
tolerated their banter and jokes,
held my tongue at my check
for as long as I could
every time I observed a smirk of disdain
at the mention of my father's name.

I accompanied Joshua to dinners and balls,
and, at Sabbath, no matter how cold,
I shared with him our family pew
and suffered the sermons of Nathan Fiske
in both morning and afternoon.
In Worcester, I witnessed Joshua's carouse
at the inn the rebels rechristened the Sun
upon burning the lion and unicorn sign
with its words – the King's Arms.

You may ask the reasons
I wed such a wretch.
Could I not conjecture
the trouble ahead;
how incompatible were we?
Was I so insensible, so utterly blind?
Was I not in my right mind?

THE SPIRIT OF JOSHUA SPOONER ADDRESSES HIS WIFE

Why, woman, do you insist on disrupting my peace
with your incessant appeals to the naïve,
ever seduced into sympathy for you
for what you declare you endured,

those dullards so ensnared
by your litanies of adversity and despair,
they place every blame to my account,
even justify your crime,

as if you were the victim, not I;
as if I were the murderer, not you.
Why, woman, do you torment me this way?
Why won't you allow me to sleep?

Isn't it enough that you took my life?
I would never now dare, woman,
to call you my wife.
Fiend is what you proved to be.

I am not hidden in an unmarked grave.
I am honoured with a headstone, unlike you.
It stands off the West Parish Road
in the burial ground near Brookfield's Green.

continued overleaf...

© Jack Grady

THE SPIRIT OF JOSHUA SPOONER ADDRESSES HIS WIFE *contd...*

'Tis now inscribed with words for all to read
to remind them of what you did to me,
you and two lackeys of your tyrant king
and that boy named Ezra Ross,

the only soldier in you monstrous lot
who fought for Freedom's cause.
He, whom I rescued from death
when I found him afflicted with fever

in the snow in front of our house.
He, whom I befriended and believed was my friend.
He, who lived with us, not once, but thrice.
He, whom our children adored.

That boy who joined Buchanan and Brooks
in the assault that took my life.
That boy, whom I loved as I would a grown son.
He, whom I discovered, in the clarity of my demise,

had betrayed me before, by sleeping with my wife.
He, your dear Ezra, your lover, your sweet;
he, my Judas, my Brutus I'd curse
if I were not rightly blessed with the mercy you seek.

THE SPIRIT OF THE REVEREND EBENEZER PARKMAN WARNS THE READER

I apprehend the reasons why
the spirit of Joshua Spooner
has been exceedingly vexed
for two centuries and more

by the gullible multitudes
who fancy his wife
a Juliet in a romantic tragedy,
while he, her victim,

she portrays as a villain
whose existence she deemed
sufficient cause for his extinction!
Heed not

that duplicitous woman,
for she bears 'a golden cup in her hand
full of abominations and filthiness
of her fornication.'

And, like the scarlet woman,
that mother of harlots
'drunk with the blood of the saints',
she yet remains

continued overleaf...

© Jack Grady

THE SPIRIT OF THE REVEREND EBENEZER PARKMAN WARNS THE READER *contd...*

drunk with the blood of her husband.
No, I vow she was no Juliet,
nor is she now,
for, even today,

‘false face,’ for her, ‘must hide
what the false heart doth know.’
Thus, conjure not her image,
lest you be charmed by it.

Read not her words nor listen
to their susurrations in the wind,
for they mask the serpent’s hiss
and will sting you with their sin.

SHERIFF GREENLEAF’S SPIRIT REFLECTS ON THE HANGING OF BATHSHEBA SPOONER

When, in gaol, I offered her the fatal cord,
she looked down, owing, I supposed,
to the shock of at last beholding
the instrument of her death,
the vehicle which that very day
would transport her to the place where she
would meet the Eternal Judge.

I believed that, upon seeing that dreadful thing,
she would faint directly at my feet,
but she remained standing without shudder or flinch,
nor did she cry out or even weep.
And when, at length, she raised her face to mine,
I was astonished to be greeted by a tender smile
and the radiance of her eyes!

She seemed undaunted and at peace
and thanked me for the precious gift;
assured me the noose she esteemed
more than a necklace of diamonds or gold.
And I was astonished again
when I read at the gallows the deathly writ
and she ascended to the platform to meet her fate

SHERIFF GREENLEAF'S SPIRIT REFLECTS ON THE HANGING OF BATHSHEBA SPOONER *contd...*

that her countenance remained serene
as she looked me in the eye and declared
'twas the happiest day she had ever known,
for she doubted not she would be in Bliss.
She owned she justly died, and, though she hoped
her friends she left behind would meet her in Heaven,
she wished none would travel to that divine abode

by means of the ignominious way she would go,
whereupon she announced she was ready
to begin her final journey. Her last words to me
before the hangman climbed the ladder,
fixed the knot, and hanged her
were that but a few years must elapse before
she hoped she'd see me and all her friends again.

Murderess and adulteress she may have been,
but, among the four put to death that day,
– and I can attest to this from what I saw
and the sounds I heard – that woman
was stronger than the men.



Owl in an abandoned church, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

James Walton is published in many anthologies, journals, and newspapers. He is the author of four widely acclaimed collections of poetry. 'The Leviathan's Apprentice', 'Walking Through Fences', 'Unstill Mosaics', and 'Abandoned Soliloquies'. His fifth collection will be released shortly. He was nominated for 'The Best of the Net' 2019.



I CANNOT GO INTO THE WORLD AGAIN

I have been retooled, visioned
fresh tasked
My mission statement lost to blue sky
steering not rowing

Getting some rubber on the bitumen
taking it upstairs
In need of a lateral dichotomy
but the cost benefit analysis

There, you see
It was all reciprocal obligation
someone has to pay

All that spreading grey
nomads of the fifth estate
lost to the Treasurer's advance

Told you it was aesthete but you heard atheist

I thought I saw a puddy cat
Just a sunset clause
only hear bass these days

Yell louder if you want me to hear

James Walton

BLOW YOUR TRUMPET, GABRIEL

The wind here peels skin
hones out the truth
birds stall in the veracity of physics

knowing the full irony
of a mad obligation

that long leap of colonial decades

leaving the river turned out
stench of mud howling condoms
dried out take-aways

look to the south west

where the clouds churn for hail
prepare to scrape calcium
make high cheek bones of panther

the unbroken gather there
an exhibition curated
by a jigsaw of lives

survivors of age and penury

and the small people
flecked at by society's tail
smile at what they can

one day a gentler hand
may arrange the pieces
patch the dreamy enamels

float the bottle into each House
rub the sides in new earnest
whisper a downpour of votes

if you stand into the gale
all it takes is breath

BY ELECTION PSEPHOLOGY

for two days it rained hearts

they came down steadily
no overflowing gutters
a saturating throb an ultrasound

some closed doors and windows
others recalled things

a chocolate mousse
a puppy licking faces
the first broken love
a child's hand
a pulled curtain and daylight
the nod of a bearded iris
a joy in a promise

by then it was Monday morning

a sticky red mess went smelly
hoses were turned on
big brooms pushed back

the streets were empty and proper
it was normal it was safe
a rainbow of oil slick

how far can a tear fall?
all the way through a sob

as far as a one-way apology

MALL VIEWS

There is a woman
A violin in her hair
Because the wind insists

If you do not listen
Something louder will come

Three steps too far
An unlistening pedestrian
The tram bells

An abandoned pram
Street sculpture for the sane

Texting walks into itself
Police lean their way
By the no exit lane

A shoe on its side
A seeking ice cream cone

Smokers protest the rules
Own ends all stubs
A shaky peace wanders

The post office
Older than the gold rush

A nonchalant memento
PMG extension post modernism
All steps for weary bystanders

PENNY OPERA IMPROMPTU ON THE COUNT'S JOURNEYS

As white as Poland in winter
a man on Main Ridge
checking out the memorial obelisk
mutters that Pawel passed again

within eight kilometres of this place
a bare frown line circumnavigates
the knobby places beneath his knees
latitudes mapped by gumboots

edged from distant plantations
slapped to conversion in a crucible
fired by oaths of the dispossessed
each atlas ring a determined step

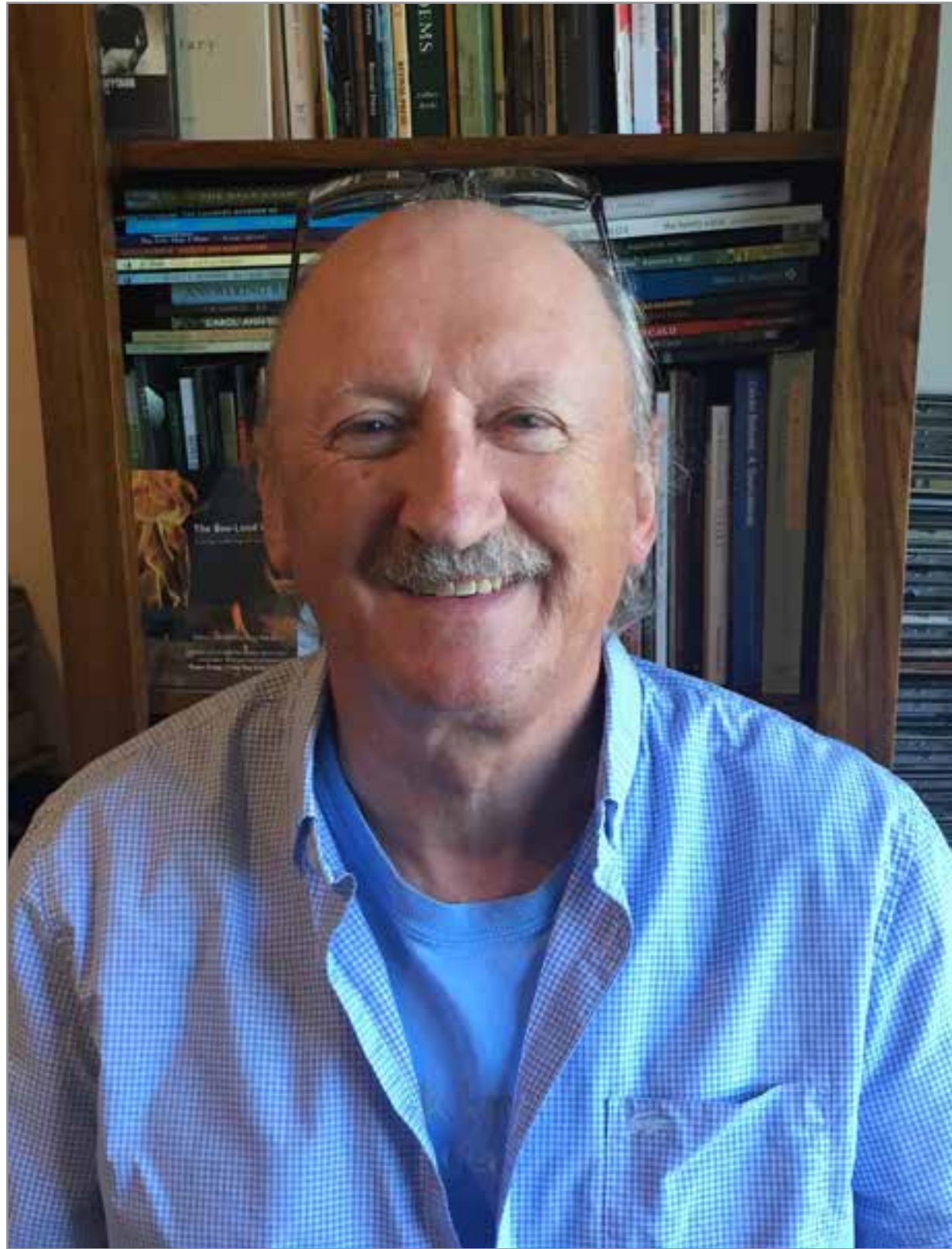
of his many overt sightings
following the marked out trail
where seven bronzed plaques meditate
a verdigris of tarnished seasons

brought naked into the sweet note
of bisecting currawongs summoning markers
opens his arms as he begins to sing
in a voice as wide as Kosciusko's plains



Angkor Wat, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Jim Burke is co-founder with John Liddy, of The Stony Thursday Book his poems have appeared in The Crannog Poetry Journal, The Literary Bohemian, The Shamrock Haiku Journal, Skylight 47, The Shot Glass Journal U.S.A., Live Encounters, Bali, Unbroken Journal, U.S.A. *Voices from the Cave*, an anthology on addiction, published by the Limerick Writers Centre. His Haiku were published in the anthology *"Between the Leaves,"* new Haiku Writing from Ireland, edited by Anatoly Kudryavitsky. He has recently completed an MFA in creative writing from MMU, Manchester.



THE WALK

After Raymond Carver

The walk when he skimmed a stone.
 The walk he picked for the smoky toke.
 The walk when he said blackberry, blackberry, blackberry.
 The walk he traded for a green Raleigh pushbike.
 The walk when he sobbed over a broken timing belt.
 The walk he took in the famous blue raincoat.
 The walk he took in the world trade centre.
 The walk when the lake wore a moon blanket.
 The walk when the answer was right under his feet.
 The walk when he climbed back into bed.
 The walk when he went deeper and deeper into the world.
 The walk around a house he can never own.
 The moon-walk.
 The walk with the girls of his youth.
 The walk he took on the tarred road.
 The walk when nobody was walking too close.
 The walk when he sits down in the waiting room.
 The walk his old man has got to.
 The walk when he turns away from people who want to come over and talk.
 The walk his feet refused to take.
 The walk-in closet.
 The walk when he and nearly everybody talk.
 The walk dripping reddish puddles under the car.
 The walk to where he is in the universe.
 His walk.

Jim Burke

IDYLL

Big trees drowse beyond the Dairy wall – James Liddy

Out Nan's garden gate,
first past the volcanic
dunghill in the sun.
Then the Kerry Blue
terriers, tormented titans,
we must hurry past.
Then oink, oink,
as curly-tailed
the piggery's all squealing.
Into the yard
where the saw-horse
idles in the sun.
And the wood-shed
hollers, 'C'mon.' 'C'mon.'
Yesterday, Din and Tim
worked the crosscut
feverishly. On a break
dangling two of us
on each arm, Din
flexed his muscles.
Up the wood
we climb, conquistadors,
overlords of everything
in sight. Then up the yard
to open the road gate
and take our mid-day dash
to the bridge,
where old Jack Grady always
dresses like a train driver,
and seats us in our carriage.
And tells us that once upon a time
he worked in Limerick,
and there he saw rats
that were as big as cats.

THE VOICE

can be all hot air
or it can be a sweet thing,
it can make the difference
through darker times.
it can be the strokes of the artist's brush
that shows you.
it can be saying: *baby, you understand me.*
it can be a bloodsucker
sitting in the crowd.
it can be a hippy
with a handsome mug on him,
hungry for tomatoes and green apples.
it can lay down these words
and say what about you?
you, in the light blue jeans.
it can be a memory of one day
in the big June sun.

ANTON'S HAIKU

bleak midwinter
the chaste snowdrop
I tune in

GERRY O'BRIEN'S

in a parallel world
our city
memories and ghosts

BILLY BROOKS

Billy, new year's eve,
napping under the table
before the chipper

Joachim Matschoss, born in Germany, is now living in Melbourne/Australia. He is a playwright, poet and Theatre-maker. His Theatre Company, 'Backyard Theatre Ensemble (BYTE)' presents diverse pieces of theatre nationally and internationally. Joachim's poetry is published in Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom and the USA, most recently *Sidewalk Theatre* and *Travel with Myself*. He published a travel journal in Australia (*Away with me*) and a novel in the USA (*Dead River Oaks*). A book about theatre and travel (*Rain Overnight*) has been published in India.



CLUSTERS OF TIME

there was a time
 not so long ago
 when coffeeshops were full of people
 smiling, chatting, reading, wasting time
 I was on the run as usual
 but still contemplating
 to exploit two minutes of my precious time
 I was ready to carve out
 one hundred and twenty seconds out of a full day
 or did I call it full-on
 each day was always packed tight
 cluster of time on top of cluster of time
 it was like that back in January 2020
 but these two minutes meant a latte
 if nobody would speak to me and I could pay cashless
 but baristas were chatty back then –

now the cafes are shut
 and time's maiden name is sourdough and banana bread
 should I dress the dog up as a cat
 or write a poem
 something to do
 in these days of endless time

Joachim Matschoss

STRATFORD SKY

people en masse in quarantine
in this long and lonely winter
everything
feels hopeless
as the world is on fire
or in flood
ecological grief
climate depression
are newly minted terms
for very real states of being –

looking at news reports
it all seems incredibly
irredeemably bleak –

but hope
is just above me
a crisp stratford winter sky
gentle azure blue light
and the swans on the avon
enjoy their river
as any other day

ADVICE TO A CHILD 2020

put on your shoes
play outside
tiptoe through the puddles
dance with unicorns
and make a wish

please keep your dreams safe
and deep in your pockets

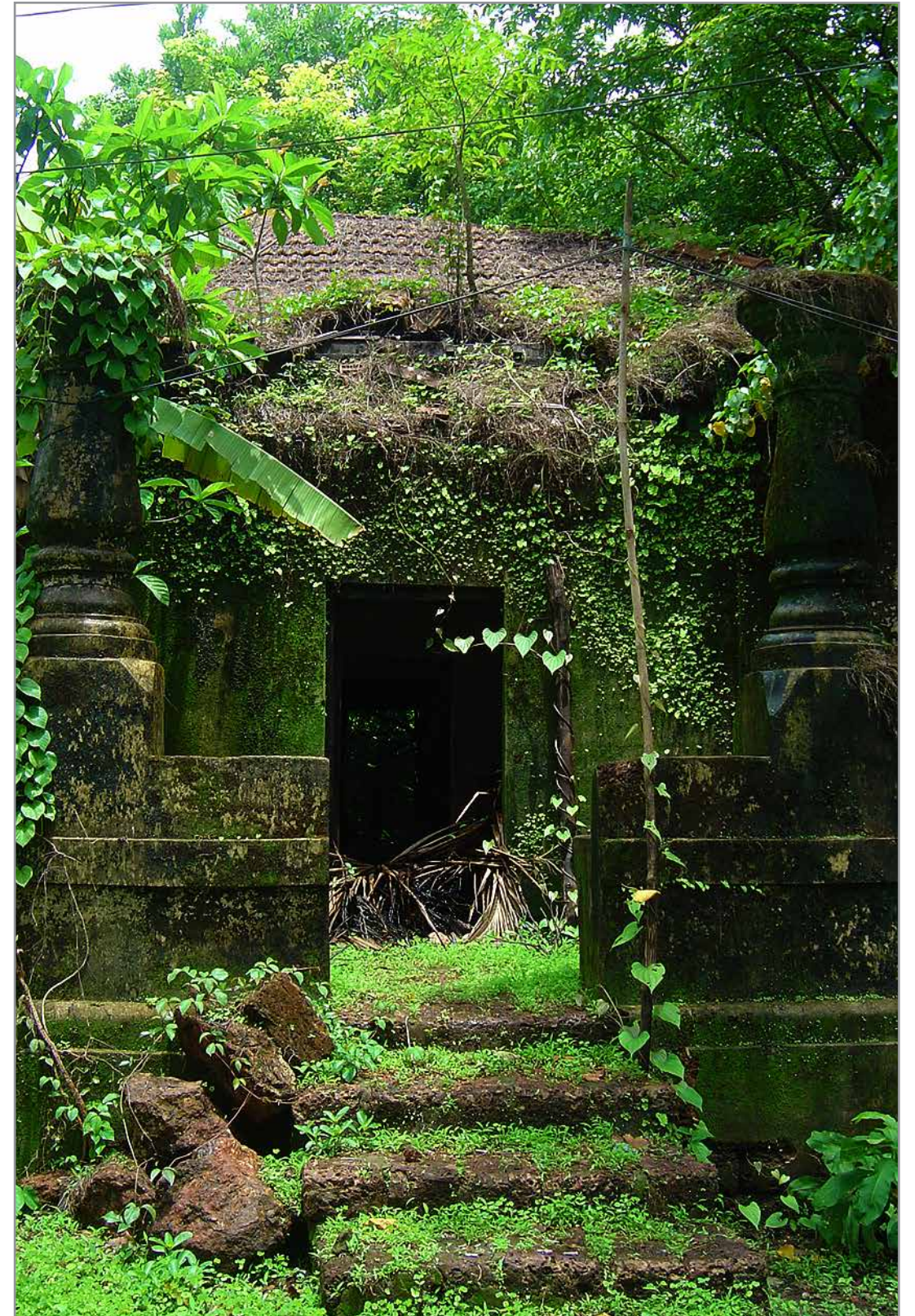
soon life will be different
something, not human
will replace
what you took for granted

breath will be short
and fear with demon thoughts
will rapture what once was
nothing
but a small rumble
in time

THE MELODIES OF MOSS

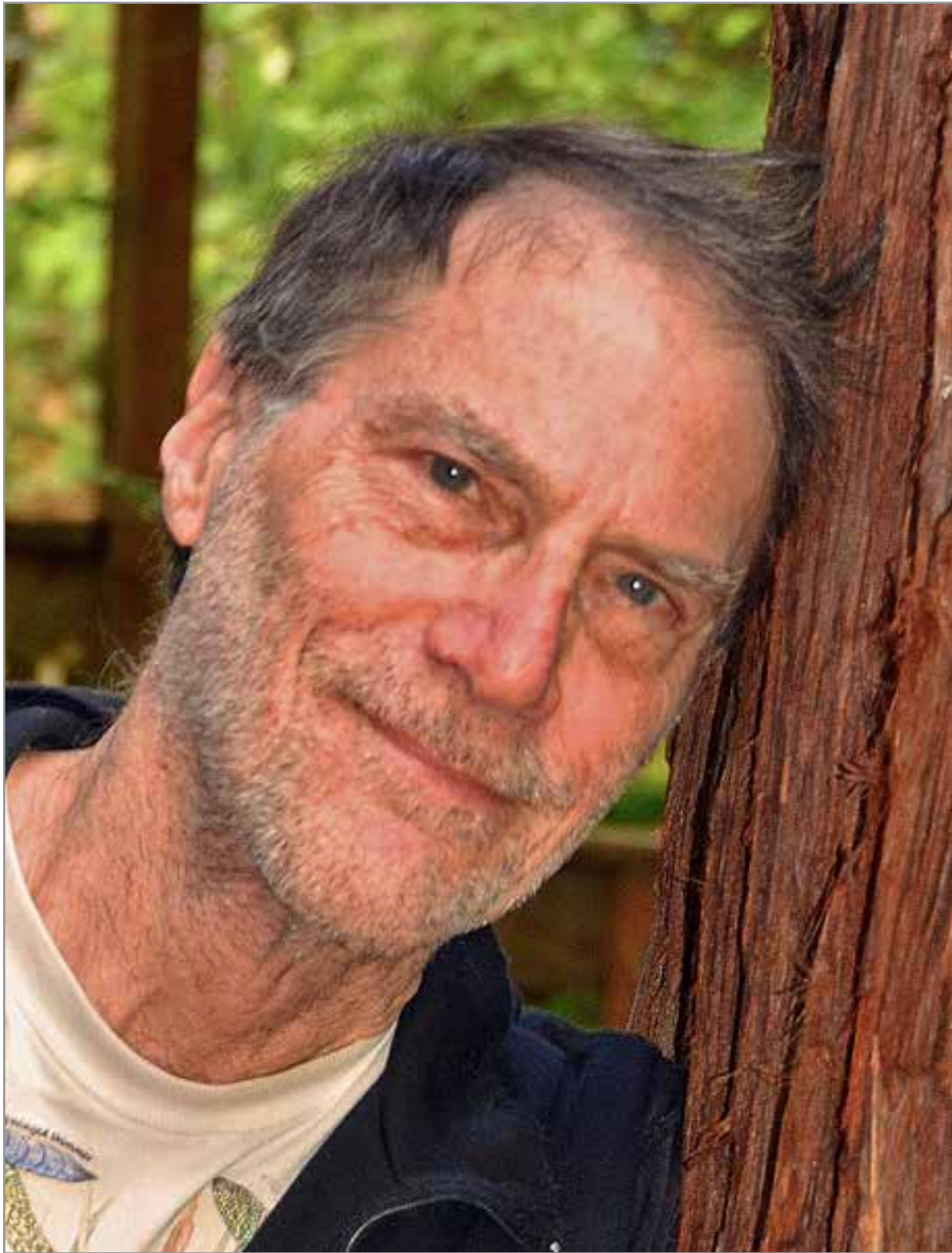
a little breeze stirs up the forest
to sing of spring dreams
brimful with green softness
as melodies ripple the skin
of this sweet earth

lay still
be mouse-silent
and breathe
just breathe



Abandoned home, Goa, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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



Joe Cottonwood

ARRIVAL, SFO

She is texting outside baggage claim
in a FUCK YALE sweatshirt
her hair the scent of cedar smoke
dark-rimmed eyes like a meerkat
one hand on a floral garment bag.
“Will you watch my stuff? I need to pee.”
She dashes in short steps, stiletto heels
below frayed blue jean cuffs.

The garment bag, could it be a bomb?
Me, the old creep nominated for smithereens.
Wait. Look — sticking out of a pocket of the bag —
a copy of a book. My novel!
From 37 years ago which is twice her age.
Portrait on the cover, a younger hairy me.
When she returns I will speak of it.
A bevy of bluebirds will fly from my lips to her ears.

An SUV stops, a burly man in sloppy necktie
opens the tailgate, throws the portmanteau inside.
I ask, “Are you sure you have the right bag?”
The man says, “Fuck Yale?” as she bursts
out the door breathless, not a glance to me,
not a thanks for guarding the bag, for authoring,
for appreciating her blooming effervescence.
Uh-oh: the book has fallen from pocket to pavement.
She hops into the shotgun seat. I wave the novel.
She shouts “Fuck it!” as the SUV lurches into traffic.

Through how many hands have these pages passed?
Passages highlighted in pink. Others bracketed by pen.
Sketches of horses in margins of a non-equine tale.
Spine cracked falling open to a sex scene,
the paper smeared yellow by something
I hope is tea. So: no bomb.
Mm-hmm. Fuck Yale.

DELI GRAB & GO

Skinny meth guy darts past you in line.
Lunges over the deli counter
to the cash drawer, cobra strike.
Turns to flee clutching a greenback
but you grab his wrist.
Reflex. Not thinking at all.

Other sandwich-seekers back off,
no help. Moments like this,
core programming acts by default.
You learn something about yourself.

He tries to shake you off.
You hold, wondering why.
The bill, a fifty, flutters to the floor
but still you have his wrist as he hisses
See! Asshole! Lemme go!
Somehow he breaks free, hoody flapping,
races out the door. Gone.

He coulda had a gun, sandwich man says.
You coulda been killed.
You hand him the fifty and order
turkey with tomatoes. He shakes off
your own small bills. *Gratis. Thanks.*

Only then, as adrenaline fades,
as you take the first bite, does it jell:
You stopped a robbery.
You never thought.
You wonder in your soul
if you'd do it again.

FANNIE AND CORYDON CRASH MY WEDDING PARTY

He's been dead 117 years but
Corydon's old-time photo flash powder
lights up the room as he asks
How much are you paying the waiters and cooks?
Fannie wants to know *Are you pregnant yet?*
Matter of family history, they birthed
my grandma six months after marriage,
same year President Garfield was assassinated.
Corydon published a newspaper,
Democratic in a Republican town.
The printing plant later burned down.
Go figure.

Corydon parts his hair wrong side, against fashion.
Fannie has a lap sought by children.
As a hobby she crochets homilies
for the Presbyterian ladies such as
STOP THE RAILROAD BOSSES.
Corydon offers a toast:

May your love bear fruit.
May you nourish the poor.
May you poison the rich.
Tell lies, you will be elected.
Tell truth, you will be shot.
May you tell truth regardless.

He leaves a silver dollar
under his plate.

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



1-2-3

That's us. The ones outside in the wind
with our hair blowing.

My brother has a frog in his hand
that he won't let go of.
My sister's ribbon comes undone,
threatens to fly.
I'm chasing a lizard, the slippery kind
I can never catch up to
until twelve years later, driving the family car,
I run over some poor skink in the driveway.

My brother claims victory over all living things.
It's unfair. He's never caught a lizard either.
My sister pouts. Not even that wind can blow
her cheeks back where they came from.
I spy the girl next door and spit raspberries
in her direction.
Twelve years later, of course,
they're sorta kisses.

My brother finally releases the frog.
My sister holds that loosened ribbon tight against her head.
I'm bored with both reptiles and the girl next door,
follow the others inside for lunch.

My mother's been watching us from the window,
pats every head in turn as we enter the kitchen.
1-2-3.

The same number within her control
as beyond it.

John Grey

A READING IN THE VILLAGE

I'm invited to a poetry reading
hosted by a friend down in the Village.
It's a private affair
held in a loft,
speaker in a chair,
everyone else on cushions.

She assumes all the parts in our lives –
anger, sorrow, fear, self-recrimination –
so we can just sit back
and let her get these things out of our systems
and into hers.

As poets go,
she's better than most I've heard.
She speaks clearly,
and not sing-songy
nor, as per the bane of most poets,
like a rapper on downers.
Sure, she's more miserable than most.
But her pain has words to back it up.

Later,
there's wine and cheese
and a chance to buy her chapbook.
She scribbles her name
in my copy.
I tell her I'm also a poet.
She says,
"Of course,"
not, "that's funny,
I could have sworn you were a fireman."

Oddly enough,
we take the same subway car home
though she doesn't recognize me.
She stares down at the floor mostly -
the angry, sorrowful, fearful, self-recriminating floor.

THE REASON WHY THERE IS NO REASON WHY

So that's why sometimes,
the explanation comes out garbled,
like a wrestler struggling
not to be pinned.
Or it's whispered
as if it's trying to avoid
the attention of the giant above.
Or it just gives up,
says nothing,
despite the head's
stream of instructions.
Right now, I'm silent,
though everything else is loud.



Sculpture on Otres beach, Cambodia, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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



ARIAS OF CONSOLATION PART EIGHT

XLVI

One day I will go to Ardnacrusha to appraise
Seán Keating's paintings in the flesh, admire
again the swans by the falls in *Dún an Eas*

the details in Lilburn's and O'Neill's maps,
Thorcor Town House from the 1450s,
the Ilen Launchilen from Windy Gaps

go back to Sarsfield's Rock near Saint
Bridget's Church in Templebraden and walk
with Tom O' Grady without constraint

through gaps in the hawthorns and talk of old
beliefs discarded by science, the role of Gods
in the bought and sold of the modern world

back for some more of the wherewithal
from Mary Hanley and Nora McNamara,
who helped me scale a boundary wall.

John Grey, photograph by Carmen Lafuente.

ARIAS OF CONSOLATION

PART EIGHT *cont...*

XLVII

Back to where I once held soft hands
on summer walks with those who will
always be young, back to the badlands

where I fell with my cross on my knees
as though in prayer, a dejected heart-scald
rising to face his woe, no longer ill at ease

back for an earful of local anecdote
to soften our cough for fear of losing
the run of ourselves, back for the fur coat

and no knickers on the bus into town
from a gas card not the full shilling but no
daw either, always on her Garryowen

for having been awhile in the long grass
and out of practice with the ludeen
beside a meah who was in a bad fuss

mollafoostered and kicked in the taws
maryah, all that cats' mallacky, dogs'
tobaccy for a lushers' cause

who tells me he has a gee in his back-
yard and other paraphernalia in a shed
behind the pad, a nincompook

only too happy to drip-dry me with more
spoof no sooner calved than licked,
a man on his picky with notions galore.

XLVIII

Back to the oonshugh with a bee in her
bonnet and rent-paying flies in a bedsit,
who knows all about paddy power

and orange juice, electricity palpable
between us, a jab of a nyuck nuff said,
the bee's knees, sensitivities incompatible

back with a piper's welcome on the pig's
back for the plerauca, accosted on a thor-
oughfare by the plucker-in selling ladies'

items for interested sheelas, a sheep's
eye on skirt that passes brightly by,
an old segotia, a sham who pisstakes

Seán Hannigan who'd shaft you as quick
as a shoneen, a sleeveen who slinges
past the shidogue, always on the take

a skooralo for a side-kick, a smather of hair
on his smig, a cat's lick upstairs, a smush
smullocking for hard tack on a sidedoor

without two pennies to rub together,
a gander at a galoot who suggested
breeding two gondolas on the river.

continued overleaf...

© John Liddy

ARIAS OF CONSOLATION

PART EIGHT *cont...*

XLIX

Back to where Tsu said 'find a man
and a woman who have forgotten
words so that I can talk to them'

where I can 'enjoy a grander sight'
said a poet of the Tang Dynasty
'if I climb to a greater height'

where 'I would still find time',
inferred Luther King, 'to plant an apple
tree if the world fell out of rhyme'

where not even God can tell how
another man's shoe is hurting him,
to where the weakest willow

binds the toughest wood, a delicate
colt becomes a competent horse,
where a hungry castle is a deficit

and sauce for the goose is sauce
for the gander but talk not fill
the stomach, where a silk purse

is not a sow's ear, a ploughed field
never done by thinking, the hen
involved but the pig committed
its tail integral to the whole,
the hide its value, the old man
gone out to the donkey's home

idle as a piper's little finger,
fit to be tied with an urge to hit
out on the name of the father

at a fly-by-night, weak as a gosling
but as boastful as a shop cat, with
not as much as an amen in him

to where anything with the tongue
can be done, knowledge no burden,
talk put in a bottle by the young

who'd make a nest in your ear
as quick as they'd look at you
but no clue about a lax weir

or a White Boat or men with two
feet on the loft, or where I'll get
the O'Kelly welcome anew

to where too much haste slows
things down, a swallow not make
a summer, whoever breaks pays

a knife not cut its own handle,
or trouble not trouble until trouble
troubles you, the test of the anvil

with a spit, where thought behind
a gift is what matters, to where
I can collop the wind.

continued overleaf...

© John Liddy

ARIAS OF CONSOLATION

PART EIGHT *cont...*

L

I go back to find all is set to change
again, back to a new beginning,
a familiarity of recognizable range

a subtle vicissitude, back to never going
back because you are always in me,
your arias of consolation furrowing

in my vein, your sights and sounds
my *gaothaire*, a windbag in the be-
witching hour of putdowns

and uplifts pertaining to birthright,
macushla meggegging my sleep,
persistent as tide and aplite

to write you for the oncoming fold
out of my spleen, where your fable
will forever continue to be told

by a child straddling a Sheila Wee
outside the Castle, a walk to Gillogue
across the Black Bridge, along Plassey

and off the main drag for a spree
with a wise old quail, a cut of a lumper
modelled in bronze on Steamboat Quay

taradiddles of Gurky, Lanty on the run
explaining to his famished friends: t'was
the eel that ate the rashers in the pan

a mejum for the nixer and the tangler,
nothing for the thorny wire with no
sponduliks, others on the tobar

'whatever you're having yourself, a mhic'
says Gabriel, connoisseur of Tawny,
who once returned a tap to a smart aleck.

Back to fearless days without the near
invisible corrupting a handshake, a cough
on a bus a sign of a phantom war

good times without the pounding of heavy
artillery heard from Plitivice's Nature
Reserve, peacetime and a striding beauty

in summer without a care, bright-eyed
as the dazzling water gathers in its threads,
conjures a cape like a cumulus cloud

'feach na luimneacha', 'look at the coats',
I hear her cry as she points at a window
display of Holman Lee-like models

the perfumed air adrift along the street
where I am in awe of all that you were, are,
will be, ethos, heritage, integrity replete.

John Maxwell O’Brien is an emeritus professor of history (Queens College, CUNY) who has written numerous articles on ancient history, medieval history, and the history of alcoholism. His best-selling biography, *Alexander the Great: The Invisible Enemy* (Routledge), has been translated into Greek and Italian, and he authored the article on alcoholism in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Professor O’Brien’s second life has been devoted to his first love, creative writing, and he has published a variety of poems and short stories in literary journals. His debut novel, *Aloysius the Great* (Propertius Press), published on Bloomsday this year and brimming with Joycean allusions, has been greeted with rave reviews on Amazon (where it can be purchased) and in Goodreads. Of late the professor says he thinks he has discovered his poetic métier in the haiku. Here are some of his initial efforts in that direction



HAIKU: A BAKER’S DOZEN

Freedom
 To say what I please
 Without being pilloried
 If one disagrees

Genre
 Haiku...no rhyme?
 Break that tacit rule... you
 Do so all the time

Birth
 Rosy-fingered dawn
 Flashing crimson bearing hope
 A new day is born

Mom
 Always the other
 Endless love for thee and thine
 Forsaking mother

Dad
 Never did falter
 Struck dumb about love...but
 The Rock of Gibraltar

John Maxwell O’Brien

HAIKU: A BAKER’S DOZEN *contd...*

Visage
It’s Ireland’s map
They’d all say of my freckled face
I’d pull down my cap

Me
Barely half as smart
As I pretend to be...but
Brilliant at the part

Children
Miniature me
Along with words my path to
Immortality

Art and Neurosis
The odd eye yields art
We stop...stare...and marvel
At a world apart

Revelation
Unpainted picture
In my window...more profound
Than Holy Scripture

Ambivalence
Both Jekyll and Hyde
Peering back from my mirror
Who’d like to guide?

Home
Castle and coffin
Bungalow...bed...bar...and bier
I couldn’t stop loffin

Death
Ashes to ashes
Mud to mud...and in between
A few bright flashes

John Sibley Williams is the author of *As One Fire Consumes Another* (Orison Poetry Prize), *Skin Memory* (Backwaters Prize), and *Summon* (JuxtaProse Chapbook Prize). A twenty three-time Pushcart nominee and winner of various awards, John serves as editor of The Inflectionist Review, teaches for Literary Arts, and is a poetry agent.



TURBULENCE

Like when gravity takes over you no longer call it *flight*
or once you've loved someone so long the loving becomes
impossible; unsustainable, though some say in this heaven
draws its contrast; not that the stranger I'm holding to
like a votive candle, trembling like us all, doesn't fear
the fall. In the absence of faith, two bodies terrorized
together will have to do. & to the faithful, the same.
One of too many oceans roiling, almost calm in its
constant churn, not far enough below. Life going
on down there, despite us. Prayers & toothmarks.
A moment to remember I've never been the subject
of this story, that all verbs are transitive, everyone
an object. Like bodies saved from the earth moving
steadily toward that earth.

John Sibley Williams

PLAYING DEVIL'S ADVOCATE IN AMERICA

Barren but for all this bloom. Unconquerable
but that we've detoothed every animal save ourselves.

How violence breeding violence retains
in its heart an unshakeable harmony.

A sparrow breaks its neck chasing a reflection.
My son learns to hand-dig a hole in the garden.

When the mountains melt, the rivers overflow;
when the rivers harden enough to feel like

land beneath us, the mountains rebuild, whitely.
Have you ever been so cold a moment of heat hurts?

If each kicked-in door unwrites the whole house,
repair must mean we're starting anew. Unthinkable

but that we cannot stop thinking about it. 14 children.
Three teachers. High water mark or is the ocean still rising?

BLACK HOLE

Vacuum. Repository. Not nothing
but close to. Like the occult depths
of that old well out back, the one
children have been drowning in
for a century. Like a backlit sun-
dress when all we really want is
to see our sister's face again.

Little absent star, am I over-
pronouncing the darkness
that makes us seem so bright?

If it were as heavy as it looks, the sky
would have crumbled & blown
over our awnings as ash by now.

If this distant light that divides us
into *hold & held, once & still*, is really
where worlds go to die, would we be
hanging so many wishes from it?

(like a noose, like a clothesline,
paper planets over emptied cribs)

If our hearts were as hardened as we want
them to be, we'd never know this home
that thrives in lost things.

& IN WONDER, TOO

Intensities. Anxieties. Swells & strains;
that the heart is running on fumes yet keeps
& cannot stop keeping, releases again & again
to give it something to chase, like a fisherman
with too many lures, too much time, & nothing
at home to return to. Where two forsaken
highways cross, between the overgrown train tracks
& shuttered stands that haven't seen fruit in decades,
a wilded meadow stalked by ghosts of wolves & rural
industry. Red slivers of a silo, grain still holding
together in its bodilessness. A quieted thunder.
Fathers of grown children pierce morning with buckshot,
carry sacks of feathers & food three miles along
a dried up creek to find someone's changed the lock
or that they've forgotten their keys again or that no one
lives in those houses anymore. It's not the idea of the thing
but the thing itself that cannot stay. All else being equal,
we are falling deeply in love with the space our bodies
take up, & it's the love, if not the us, we beg: *endure!*

AIRSHOW

Contrails divide the sky into risk & awe.
There's always a slim chance of crash
& it's this proximity to peril that leans
us from the bleachers up onto our elbows,
cheeks heavy in our palms, palms impatient
for nails, suffering as it waits for meaning.
All our country's colors, so stark at first, bleed
from the bellies of jets off into ether. Just
another unfulfillable promise. One more
reason to believe with all our hearts.
The clouds are the color of bone &
our bones are growing cold. Hiss, smoke,
& boom. How what looks like our death
rarely takes us. A single jet breaks formation,
dives down into the stands, just to rise again
without casualty, still burning with assurances.

Jordan Smith is the author of eight full-length books of poems, most recently *Little Black Train*, winner of the Three Mile Harbor Press Prize, *Clare's Empire*, a fantasia on the life and work of John Clare from The Hydroelectric Press, and *The Light in the Film* from the University of Tampa Press. He has also worked on several collaborations with artist, Walter Hatke, including *What Came Home* and *Hat & Key*. The recipient of grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Ingram Merrill Foundation, he lives with his wife, Malie, in upstate New York, where he plays fiddle and is the Edward Everett Hale Jr., Professor of English at Union College.

An Education in Several Poets, Two Musicians, Four Fur Coats, One Blazer, and One Lunch.

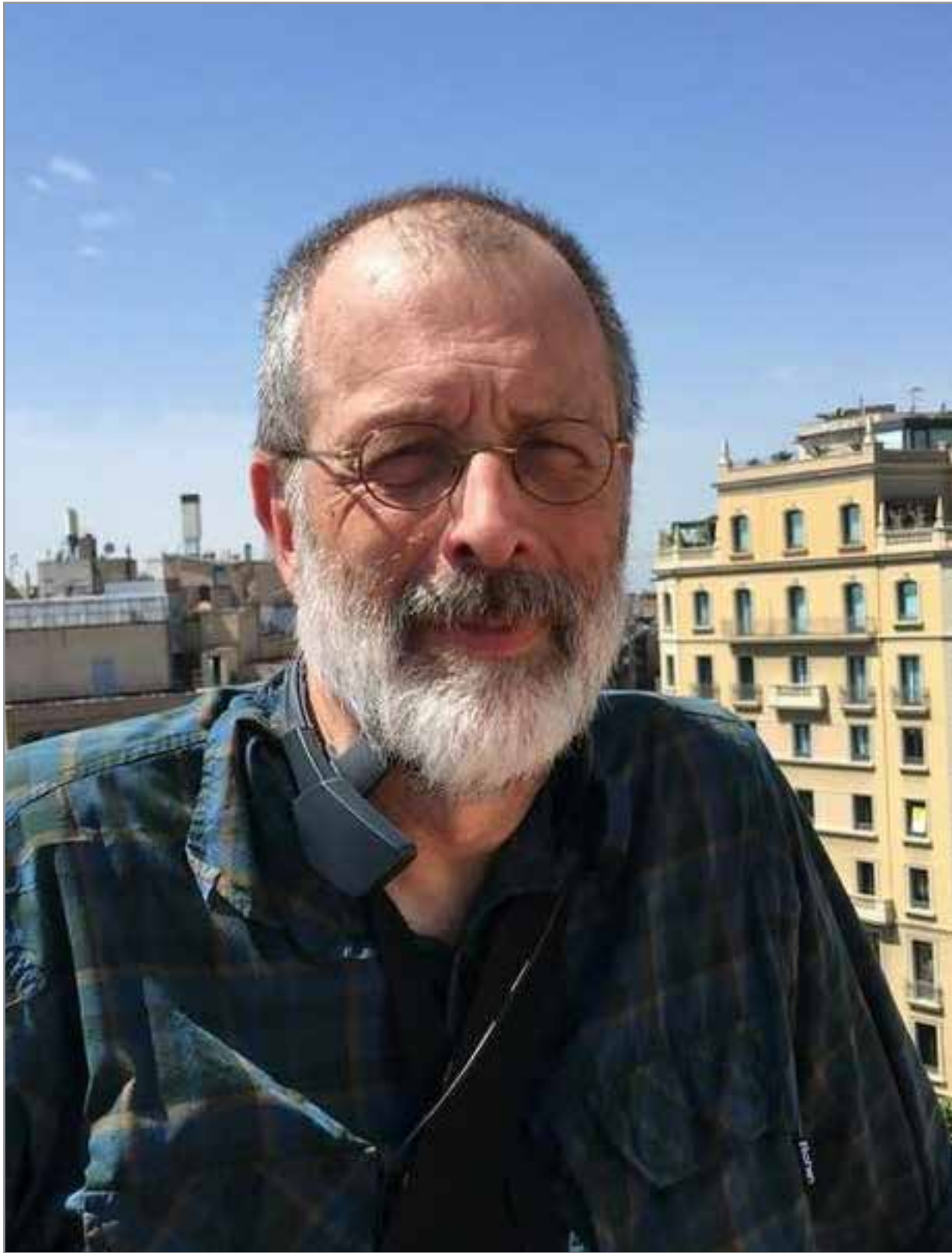
1. VISITING POET IN THE WORKSHOP

Trace of single-malt, trace of smoke,
Her voice, whiskey and... a cliché
She'd scotch as quickly as she did my joke
Of a freshman poem in class that day.

Angry, I barely skimmed her books.
Mistaking her strict, assured unease
For condescension, I overlooked
(In lines reworked from the Chinese,

Like silk embroidered, draped across
A polished mirror) the pained, the still
Elusive, allusive trace of loss,
Reflected, barely visible.

I can't recall that poem I wrote,
Or what she said. But over a plastic chair,
Folded casually, precisely her fur coat...
I still see it there.



Jordan Smith

2. CONFESSIONAL: INTERMISSION AT THE MARATHON, BROCKPORT STATE, 1975

Logan and Bly
 After the first
 Hour and a half
 Called a short break,
 The lobby full
 Of voluble
 Poets, with not
 Much to say since
 The war ended.
 From one square bench,
 A girl my age
 Read her free verse
 Confession of
 Her parents' sins,
 Of omission,
 Mostly. A claque
 Of friends nodded,
 While behind them
 In furs in her
 Unplaceable,
 Accent, leaning
 Toward her escort,
 A woman, hair
 Streaked like Sontag's,
 Implacable,
 Impeccable,
 Said, and hardly
Sotto voce,
Oh, she suffers!
Oh, do you hear
How she suffers.

3. AUSTERITY AT THE FREE JAZZ CONCERT, 1978

A duo, no drummer.
 They entered, trailed
 By two women in furs,
 Down the aisle

At Goucher College,
 Bass and sax
 On the bare stage
 No mics, no stack

Of speakers, no
 Intro, no breaks
 Between songs,
 No standard licks

Or standards.
 Two sets and done,
 That other world
 Never quite in this one

Drew nearer,
 Love's discordant
 Body, austere.
 And no encore.

4. LUNCH AT THE FACULTY CLUB, 1979

You go there, my fellow Fellow said,
For mellow baritone voices.
I told her I wouldn't be caught dead...
Well, so much for choices.

A coup de theatre, that lunch.
The Chair, full Windsor tie,
Striped suit, with a sudden, intent hunch
Forward, underlined

Whole paragraphs of talk. In jeans
And sweater, striped oxford shirt,
And living, well, beyond my means
(Say it, I won't be hurt)

Among such heady company,
I scanned the poet, his elegance
Unearned (it never had to be),
Unlearned (ditto) who with a glance

Took us in as if a tableau
Of his own making, words
Being the shadow-puppet show
(Recently Pulitzered)

With which he'd raised the dead, the stakes,
And by such sheer, untoward
Imaginative gall (displaced
Souls, Ouija board?).

A full professor (what was her name?)
Asked about Seth Speaks,
Added a dig at William James
And reincarnation freaks.

He raised his hand, equal parts
Blessing, condescension--
What I miss there is the art,
Shrugging, *good intentions...*

Kevin Higgins has published five full collections of poem with Salmon Poetry, most recently *'Sex and Death at Merlin Park Hospital'* (2019). *'Song of Songs 2.0: New & Selected Poems'* was published in 2017. His sixth collection, *'Ecstatic'*, will be out in June 2021. Kevin's poems featured in *'Identity Parade: New British and Irish Poets'* (Ed. Roddy Lumsden, Bloodaxe 2010) and *'The Hundred Years' War: modern war poems'* (Ed. Neil Astley, Bloodaxe 2014). The Stinging Fly magazine has described him as "likely Ireland's most read living poet".



DIARY OF AN ABSURDIST

This is not the usual route I'd take
to the place I never go.

I spend the holidays I don't have
listening to the albums
John Lennon would've made,
if he hadn't been shot.

My head's full of ways
back down mountains
I never intend to climb.

Anytime you want to talk
call me on the telephone
I just had disconnected.

I was once made violently ill
by a cheese-steak
I plan to one day eat.

I'm a big fan of the books
Paulo Coelho didn't live to write.

Come see me Christmas morning
for some eggnog and sauerkraut.
I'll definitely be out.

Kevin Higgins

MITIGATION

after Francois Rabelais

When he spoke his mouth
was the King of China's favourite part of a woman;
and his jaws wobbled like the King of China's
second favourite parts of a woman.
When he spat it was every time a different colour
and fell short, like a long jump that failed
to get the former champion the expected bronze medal.
When he tried to blow his nose
it was the same problem he had at the other end.
When he eventually sneezed,
it was the whole room.
When he cried, it was a truckload
of bitterly disappointed onions all at once
writing Facebook updates
about the manner in which they were peeled.
When he sweated he was Richard Nixon
dying under the TV lights.
When he tried to cough
it was a recording of the tiniest car
in the world backfiring, on repeat.
When he frowned,
it was the whole room again
and usually the room next door.
When he got drunk
it was a country and western song
being reinvented in a hotel bar
in the less fashionable part
of Limerick Junction
by a guy with a piano accordion.

When he danced
he was a cow with epilepsy
under a hundred stuttering fluorescent lights.
When he was lying
he blinked like an owl on methamphetamine.
When he nodded, he was telling her
he at least agreed with himself.
When he grew hoarse his voice was sandpaper
and untipped cigarettes from the good old days.
When he muttered, he was composing solicitors' letters
to his entire family in his head.
When he spoke to her,
it was the nine o'clock news
in 1970s Albania translated
into shouty, snot-flecked English.
When he climbed aboard her,
it was thrilling
as the brown curtains
his mother gave them
as a wedding present.

When she picked up that hammer
she'd only intended
to tidy it away in the drawer,
having yesterday used it
to put up that picture in the hallway.

But once again his faced opened
and words came out,
until they didn't.

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



HIGH TOWER

Stone by stone
 hewn and drawn to your holy hill
 where you dwell
 safe in lofty elevation
 closer to heaven.
 There you hear the still small voice
 whisper in the lonely hours.
 Danger shut out –
 of your self-imposed prison.
 All that is precious is secured.
 Besieged in your sacred space
 above the battle, beyond reach.
 Fire and flood cannot breach
 this bastion where you abide
 alone with God, your champion
 in the eventide.

Kieran Beville

HEAVY BOOTS

Sycamore seeds spun like chopper blades
in the autumn sun when we ran
through the school gate
towards the fermenting river
to drink in fun together.
When I looked behind you were gone –
Slipped on a slimy stone,
your satchel bobbing in the foam.
I still look back, alone.
They brought you ashore in the angling cot,
laid you on the forget-me-not
and wiped the beery froth from your mouth.
I traipsed home across the fields
trudging through thick mud,
clumps of clay clinging to my boots.
Now and then my steps lead me to the field of bones
where a sycamore tree has grown
near your grave.

THE CONCH SHELL

Walking on a foreign shore I find a conch shell
and remember my small hand in yours
the day you told me to hold it to my ear.
At your prompting I heard the ocean's rhythm –
Marvelling at the mysterious magic in my hand
as I paddled in the warm sea of your love
and strolled along the hem of sand skirting the coast
where my mother stood.
Then one day I clasped cupped hands to my ears
when you shouted at her.
Your voice crashed like breakers on the rocks
in the acoustic ocean of my tumultuous thoughts.
Her tears warm and salty as the sea
on my lips when I kissed her.
Your words reverberating through the years
Where you still resonate in the cavity of my heart.

BURDENS

A man in a beret, shivering,
from cold or fear I cannot say.
A woman in a winter coat and gloved hands,
linking, leaning into him.
They await a November train on platform nine,
shuffling slowly towards departure and destiny.
The train takes its time.
He stoops to kiss those ruby lips,
she stands on her toes to reach,
his hands rest on her hips.
She weeps,
says her goodbyes,
dries her eyes with his handkerchief.
He carries his duffle bag,
the burden that men must bear
as he goes to war.
But the load she bears is heavier
as she climbs the stairs
alone
to spend the nights in sleepless care
and prays that he'll come home.

THE ROAD TO SILENCE

Her tongue now silent as Latin once ruled my world –
Built inroads to my heart and left the same way.
When I was driven into the wilderness to pray
there were demons keen to talk.
Should I finish what I had not begun?
Or answer what I had not been asked?
The path to silence is paved with reasons to speak
that must be trampled underfoot.
The seeds of arguments must die
to germinate and bear fruit –
Thus becoming what they are.
So too with you and I
The journey is not far.

M L Williams is author of the forthcoming collection *Game* (What Books Press), the chapbook *Other Medicine*,s and co-editor of *How Much Earth: The Fresno Poets*. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in many journals and anthologies, including most recently *Plume*, *Salt*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Miramar*, *The Journal of Florida Studies*, *The Cortland Review*, and *Stone, River, Sky*. He teaches creative writing and contemporary literature at Valdosta State University.



LATE AGAIN

*"But, if you are certain, isn't it that you are shutting your eyes
in face of doubt?"—They are shut.
—Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, II xi*

Lost sound in the attic
above the ceiling boards
a scurrying a simple scattered
music I strain to hear again
if rat if squirrel if the deep
pull of time on wood
if startled birds or bats
if weight of moths circling
a light left on or bursting
in the heat up there
if a spirit the house incarcerates
a spirit it fails to keep out
there above the ceiling boards
a simple scattered music
it is not it is not it is not

M L Williams

SPES

Is hope a feeling?

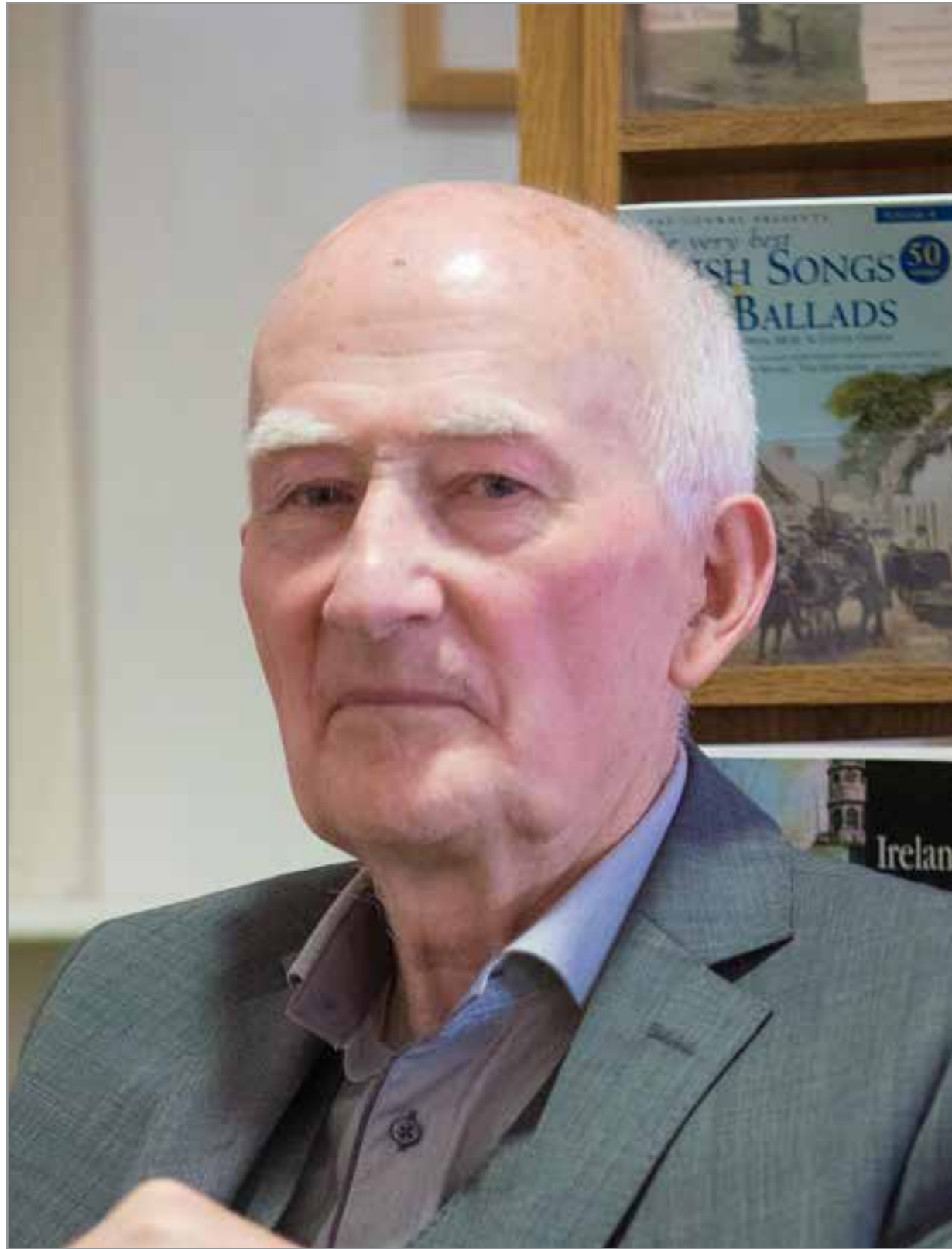
—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 554

The cat wailing is not her cat,
but she sets down her roses
and goes out, the night warm,
looks for the damn thing down
the road where it's curled up
after a fight to lick. She checks
night's ever thinning rage
of light, wishing for a rope
of fire to gather her up
somehow, each late thought
held like a scratchoff
in a liquor store parking lot,
no rush to reveal its numbers
against the moonshine
jar of this tight-lidded town,
but there's some kind
of leaving out ahead,
some way to add
to the chaos, something
more than just this
sick, quiet purring.



Street cat, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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



WINTERMAN

I do not like you Winterman,
walking slowly towards me
with your long black coat
brushing against the bushes,
black as well this evening.
It's your fault you old timer,
you stole the leaves of gold
and sent the sun to bed early,
donning your broad grey hat
for Halloween above us all.
Driving the grey road ribbon,
leaving Abbeyfeale behind,
headlights on at half past five
against your onward march.
Dipping downhill to Duagh
through descending darkness,
ever trying to creep over me;
a rising string of street lights
up the glenside football village,
each orange glow my beacon.

Matt Mooney

HOMELESS

A sleeping bag his home:
thrown around him,
seated on a city bridge;
his only company there
footsteps of indifference
making him invisible,
chilling him as they pass
and the river down below
on its way to Dublin Bay.
Used to staying silent,
catching now and then
snatches of what is said
in the evening rush,
left out of all that is,
despair gone to the bone;
no hope of good times,
his hand holding out
the hard to fill paper cup
and I drop in a coin
to hear the echo of it
sounding a happier note
in the hollow of his heart.

INFERNO

The wild creatures of the bog land
at midnight time of gentle sleep
all curled up in their slumbers
in furze bush and rush and reed
had to flee the frightened flurry
from a sudden racing raging fire.

Each furze in turn first crackled
then it blazed high into the sky,
lifting off the cloak of darkness
where I look down from the hill,
overflowing shining light on me.

Our songbirds sleeping silenced
and the magic of that cuckoo's call
I heard I'll hear no more I fear.

Blue lights flash and sirens wail
on winding roads in this inferno.

Tonight our backroom bedroom
is lit by burning bog land light
but tomorrow no furze in bloom
for me; only burnt black I'll see.

STEPPING AWAY

Using pints for punctuation,
farming friends around him
holding earthy conversations
man to man discussions
on someone's lock of cattle
or a lovely score of lambs.

Turning his back to the bar,
measuring his every move
he employs a walking stick
to aid his disappearance;
exiting black double doors,
writing off another night.

In good humour going home,
unconscious of the loneliness
of the silent sleeping village,
he sits into my waiting car
and we leave the street lamps
to the phantoms of the night.

THE JOKER

Note this that if and when ever I die -
(the word 'ever' I use reservedly
for we are regularly reminded
by reverend fathers at funerals
that death is one of a few certainties),
think of something funny to slip in
if you are saying farewell to me
in case they'd think I was too serious
or worse still to have been a bore
for you see I'm quite sure
it's the way to go - from what I know,
is to play the joker
if you have him up your sleeve
for I believe from what I remember
he could play his part and pay his way
better than any king or queen
welted down on a wooden table
with a sudden shout of victory
playing for geese or turkeys
just before the Feast of Christmas
on a winter's night in a country pub
giving off a sound like ash on ash
in an over heated local hurling match.

In poker jokers can be wild
and under his cloak of mirth and fun
can take the place of anyone
among the elite of playing cards -
though countless games they've won.

Winner of the Trocaire/Poetry Ireland and Poems for Patience competitions, he has been nominated for Pushcart, Forward and Best of the Net Prizes and been runner-up in the Cuirt New Writing Prize, Interpreter's House Poetry Competition and the Cork Literary Review Manuscript Competition. He published his debut collection 'Growing Up in Colour' with Doire Press.



A REHEARSAL FOR WINTER

Maybe we are slipped an *Indian Summer*,
two weeks in September when we forget
the natural order of things, as t-shirts
and shorts make a brief re-appearance,
until a first autumn shower, timed to
maximum effect, catches us too far gone
to go back, our destination foreshortening
as we quicken our step. Students sloughing
through the indecisive light, remind us that
the confident wash of summer will soon be gone,
and a neighbour, just back from three months
at the coast, wonders if, in his absence, anything
has changed, waves gingerly as he retrieves
his bin, and feels the first cut of winter
chasing down the side-passage, as though
someone, somewhere, has left a door open.

Maurice Devitt

EVERYDAY DREAMS

for Gerard

When I arrive,
I notice you standing in a corner
of the carpark,
cigarette pinched like a pencil
between your fingertips,
shoe lazily working a pattern
in the still wet gravel.
I hesitate for a minute,
unsure whether you are wrangling
with a seamy problem
from your business day,
or chasing
the chord progression
of a song you've never played.

INSIDE EVERY STONE

there is a story, and so it is for this mossy chock
of granite that has held the gate open for years,
its face a thousand little mirrors. No one knows
how it got there, perhaps kicked up from some
underground disturbance and abandoned
in what was then an open field above the village,
view unobstructed to the sea. In time the house
was built as a bolthole for a gentleman in the city
and someone, frustrated with the wilful swing
of the gate, retrieved the stone from a redundant pile
and nudged it into place against the crunch of gravel,
its eyes set to watch everyone who would come and go,
its ears growing used to the swelling cacophony
of their brickbat lives, on what was once a silent street.
But be careful if you wish to discover the hidden tale,
for rashly splitting the stone may lose the thread - it may
be better to wait for a stonemason with the hands of Bernini,
who could chip away patiently at any needless preamble,
taking time to reveal the story fossilised within.

WHAT COLOUR ARE ORANGES?

The oranges have waited in the bowl
for almost a week now, a sunny
counterpoint to the dark presence
of the dining-room table. You say
they soften and sweeten before they turn,
and that the ripest fruit is heavy for its size.
I lift one to test its weight, cup my hand
like the dish on a scales, roll the sphere
up my arm, then pop my elbow
to send it arcing back into my hand
(a trick I learnt at school that has gone
criminally unused). I press and circle it
with my palm on the table, like shaping
plasticine, sense the pith pulling from skin,
ligament from bone. I open at the heart
and tear downwards, taking care to undress it
as one seamless garment,
hoping that it's been worth the wait.



Marigold, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Michael Corrigan's poems have been rejected by some of the finest magazines around, some of his poems have also been nominated for The Pushcart Prize (USA) and The Forward Poetry Prize (UK). His debut collection, "Deep Fried Unicorn", was released in to the wild in 2015. His second collection when completed, will be launched on an unsuspecting public like a clown fired from a cannon. His poems have been published by The San Pedro River Review, Poetry Bus Magazine, Rebel Poetry Ireland, The Rye Whiskey Review, Bangor Lit. Review, The Lakeview Journal, MadSwirl.Com, Ink, Sweat and Tears, Angle Poetry, The Mojave River Review, Ofi Press, Live Encounters Poetry & Writing (Reference Points) and many more. He has spent his pandemic time doing wild and reckless things with his hair.

MARY FROM MAGDALA

She sang sea music, fluent in its rise and fall,
knew deep, dark places that calved the biggest waves.
From the flat roof of a prosperous house in Magdala, Galilee,
watched the purple gather of every winter storm
chase small boats to harbour before an angry swell.

Tired of watching her silenced sisters drown,
on a morning dreamy with cinnamon and baking bread,
she left to join the circus, to the fishermen without fish
become shepherds without sheep,
hippies without the hippy van.

Cold night on the deserts edge, stars singing the prickled skin,
brown faces in campfire flicker, living fresco of smelly, footsore men.
Strangers to bathing for days on end, beards tangled,
dark eyed gleaming, furtively coming to rest on her breasts.

She sought no approval, required no permission,
fierce intellect piercing the fluffy cloud of faith,
questioned, probed, incised, swift and sure
in the back and forth, message, not magic her inquiry.

In Ephesus her end of days,
nights shallow with shortening breath,
a mill beneath the small bare room,
millstones rumble-grinding, dark sea lapping at her door.



Michael J. Whelan

LIFE COACHING FOR GARGOYLES

Whatever it is, it is never your fault,
so build on a flood-plain, what could possibly go wrong.
When crossing a bridge bring petrol and matches,
the resultant blaze will be seen for miles.

Feeding the cat is a kindly act,
feeding the cat to the dog is not.

Your memory closet is full of bleak suits,
wear the darkest one each night in bed.

Pick drunken fights with your late-night self,
you might even win once in a while,
your body is a beautiful thing, so abuse it early
and as often as possible.

Always have access to buckets of sand,
enough to comfortably bury your head,
participative democracy is deadlier than Dodos,
just follow the leader, loudest is best.

The face of God can be found in the stars
or a slice of bread dropped jam-side down.
Love is transformative, so is tequila,
both will lead to handcuffs and tears.

Knowing good stuff is bad so don't,
but revel in ignorance, roll in its bliss,
you'll always look better when covered in crap.

JOHN THE BAPTISER

Like a whale breaching, bursting from the earth,
feral creature wearing camel pelt and mud,
a psychological vindaloo of recklessness and virtue
kite-high on desert honey, up to his belly in a river of souls,
his cousin Yeshua, a CEO in the social justice game
though the money changers planned to put a stop to that.
Speaking truth to a power hornier than The President
scripture like lava pouring from his mouth,
air flaying molten eyes impaling all he saw
past soft cloth and perfumed skin down to the hardest bones of truth,
but lost in the halls of the well-fed and finely shod,
with a rolling red ball of endless breaking news,
death on-demand a subscription service
for the dancing girl with her randy king
about to have him cancelled.

THE MORNINGSTAR DEFENCE

Thrown out of home for tormenting the pets
you blamed it on the boogie and went traveling.
Always a charmer though never the sharpest,
the quickest, the brightest, the kindest, the best,
a winged compendium of adult parlour games
you didn't bring the horror it was already here.
Deeply, profoundly, enduringly attractive
personification of The Pleasure Principle,
not for you those calloused hands of work
rather the priapic curves of hot, fleshy, horniness,
that tingling feel of skin to skin
licentiousness as proof of life,
laughter at the very thought
of "The Devil made me do it."

GOOD BOY-CRUEL WORLD

Time to abandon the burden of their crap,
Time to drop the winner-loser games,
Time to stop the addiction of regret
(it's chewy and will ruin your teeth),
Time to love the anxious child inside the angry man,
Time to repurpose each night to sleep,
Time to gain from all the loss, Time for music, Time to dance,
Time to watch a shooting star across a winter sky,
(flying like that final fuck you gave with all your glee),
Time to suck the marrow from the bone,
Time to lick the pattern from the plate,

Of all that's left of what's to come,
Of all that shines despite the dark.

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF REVIEWS PROGRESS TO DATE.

No Rubicon's left to cross,
just scorched earth now
as far as the eye can see.



Cremation, Bali, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Michael Durack lives in Co. Tipperary, Ireland. His poems have appeared in publications such as The Blue Nib, Skylight 47, The Cafe Review, Live Encounters, The Honest Ulsterman and Poetry Ireland Review as well as airing on local and national radio. He is the author of a memoir in prose and poems, *Saved to Memory: Lost to View* (Limerick Writers Centre 2016) and with his brother Austin he has recorded two albums of poetry and guitar music, *The Secret Chord* (2013) and *Going Gone* (2015). His first poetry collection, *Where It Began*, was published by Revival Press in 2017 and a second collection, *Flip Sides*, has just been launched by Revival.



TIDINGS

Our old gods did not do reticence.
 Their every utterance came with fireworks -
 lightning bolt, comet, burning bush.
 Or else they put the frighteners on us
 in the eerie darkness of eclipse.
 Our magi looked toward the sky for signs -
 smoke rings, dove with olive leaf,
 a bright star in the east.

But our new testament selves have eyes only
 for the smart phones in our pockets
 whose bleeps and tinkles alert us
 to all that we will ever need to know.
 God is in the digits of a wifi code
 and where we roam our data roams.
 The ones we love we turn away from,
 trusting to our numerous facebook friends,
 their likes, their comments and cheerful emojis.
 And when we've done our time
 and want to signal that we're coming home
 an exchange of short-hand texts will do the trick,
 no need for yellow ribbons round a tree.

Michael Durack

LUCKY STARS

The world has closed in upon us;
the hills, like shops, are shuttered up,
our new horizons walls and privet hedges
that gainsay excursion.

But there is vibrancy in this garden;
the birds of Spring are about their business,
and the stream by the edge of the lawn
ripples with sustained applause

Although we crave the warmth of human touch
smiling faces and cheerful voices greet us
from our phones and tablets.

We are at war, our leaders say, with an invisible enemy,
a phony war liable to turn real at any moment;
but we are resolved to dig in, to pull together,
ration our needs, not asking for so much.

Like the horizon, our egos condense.
And yet the sky at night fills up with stars;
let's call them lucky, shower them with thanks.

REDUNDANT

In our time of need
we turned to our leader,
appealing to his better nature,
only to find that his wisdom
was as unavailing as
the snake's bootlaces,
the salmon's step ladder,
the desert's undergrowth,
the mountain's depth;
his dignity as immaterial as
Thor's microphone,
Gandhi's machine gun,
the Slovakian navy,
Aphrodite's bra;
his courage as worthless as
the iceberg's topsoil,
the hermit's bus pass,
the volcano's cigarette lighter,
the gargoyle's beauty;
his humanity as redundant as
Midas's gold watch,
as God's supervisor taking Him to task.

A BLOOMING

for Declan Masterson

Blessed with the talent to do anything,
to bask in limelight, be considered great,
or serve in an unpretentious way
like Milton's *they* who *only stand and waite*,

You might have flamed like some flamboyant sun,
shimmered, dazzled, made a show;
noon danced in an azure sky;
daubed horizons with your afterglow.

Instead, you trained an unassuming light
on chill corners of obscure plots,
tickling the leaves of shy violets,
buttressing stems of frail forget-me-nots.

So, even when clouds enclose like wrapping paper,
in Joseph's coats the flowers will proudly caper.

BUILDING THE BARN

after "Witness" directed by Peter Weir

In the early weeks of lockdown *it was all shining*,
as the Welsh poet put it, *it was Adam and maiden*,
green leaves and bird song and unity of purpose,
the wheels of the twenty-first century ground to a halt.

Save for the social distancing it was *Building the Barn*,
Weir's Lancaster County Amish all in it together,
giant frameworks raised as if by one hand,
love rivals sipping from the same lemonade glass.

Our hero no longer the alien Philadelphia cop
but a carpenter adept with hammer and auger,
at one with his quaint-bearded, straw-hatted neighbours,
their smiling bonneted women and animated children.

Discord on hold, the barn, unlike Rome, built in a day.
For the five short minutes of Maurice Jarre's swelling score
we witnessed no dogma, no guns, no graft, no hate,
the serpent made to wait outside the garden.

Michael Farry's third poetry collection, *Troubles* (2020) has just been published by Revival Press, Limerick. It deals with memories and commemoration of the 1912-1923 period in Irish history. He has also published widely on the history of that era. Previous collections were *Asking for Directions*, (Doghouse, 2012) and *The Age of Glass*, (Revival, 2017). He is a founder member of Boyne Writers Group, *Trim*, and edited the group's magazine, *Boyne Berries*, from 2007 to 2014.



WHINS

I am no better than my ancestors
sitting under a whin bush
watching clouds race over the opposite slopes
cursing the Atlantic and prevailing winds
hoping for a dry spell to save turf
or hunt rocks for souvenirs.

That must have been the mushroom summer
when the sides of the potato drills
bloomed with white cups for ten days
Or that fertile summer father
brought in shallots and lettuce every evening
dropping clay on the kitchen floor
and we gave quick thanks for the bounty
and the freshness, enjoyed the fast food.

Every time I cross the furze-whin line
in the dull midlands, I give thanks for wild things,
unnecessary brightness, careless yellow gaiety
colonising our wasted edges
patient, watching us career into chaos
providing shelter for us useless beings.

Michael Farry

WALL PLASTER

Today in Haggard Street they laminate a cottage
 In stone slices, mimic some imagined past
 Where taste was humble, superior.
 Tom-foolery.

In the seventies All Saints parishioners expunged
 Scraps of bible history with electric sanders
 Preferring bare stone's unreal
 Perfection.

And in the distant dangerous times, white lime
 Figleaved all those great artless images, saints,
 Sinful passions, crucifixions,
 Judgements

On the failings of mortals, minders of mortality,
 The thin hope beyond the surety of our lonely
 Deaths, the fellowship of fragile
 Faith.

I have a white scrap of Creevan cottage plaster
 From a wall I remember studded with images,
 Smoke-stained ancient
 Icons,

Sacred Heart, the TB-taken mother, Robert Emmet
 Recovered from the dunghill where Crown Forces
 Threw it in nineteen twenty
 Subversive.

MÍCHEÁL

If we survive
 I'll take you by the hand
 down our small garden
 show you the sweet pea we sowed
 at the height of the pandemic
 the new shed we had installed
 just before the lockdown
 the dahlias which survived the winter
 and I planted out that lonely Easter
 tell you how I stared
 at every photograph
 watched you grow so quickly
 from snap to snap
 from video to video
 noticed each new expression
 movement, ability
 in tears, unable to hold you
 and terrified I never would again.
 You will not remember this
 how your first happy, secure months
 were spent in such a desperate time
 how your smile and gurgles helped.

TIMEPIECE

i
 When the kitchen mantelpiece clock was stopped
 for my great grandmother's wake
 I considered time, hands frozen on Roman numerals
 allowing me home from boarding school's
 Latin and Greek, dead languages,
 animate only in my text books.

When my clock restarted I continued
 into the big round calibrated world
 beyond the schools, my fuller foolish days
 to Dante, Swift, Jones, and all the other so-called dead
 through an array of timepieces and bells
 ordering hours, years into manageable chunks,
 slices of this and that.

She lives.
 I see her dark skirts brush the bare floor,
 hiding her secret tobacco. I repeat her Irish curses,
 share her fear of a pauper's funeral,
 show her elegant carved name
 to great great grandchildren.

ii
 Half an education later
 I was shocked when the father
 I had helped foot turf three weeks before
 was given twenty four hours on a Saturday morning
 by the fresh-faced physician who had tea and toast
 while we fussed about the absent,
 called Dublin, Sydney, New Jersey.
 He took thirty eight, left at mid-night
 no-one sure which day to record
 officially a Monday death,
 Saint Bonaventure rather than Saint Camillus.
 Does it matter?

As old now as he was then
 I am congratulated on my good health,
 vigour, positivity, and I smile the same smile
 potter on through chores and duties, distractions
 with just an odd sideways glance at the clock.

iii
 Yes, I have had an array of clocks and watches,
 analogue and digital timepieces
 checking progress, estimating improvement,
 tallying achievements. All now seem time-wasters,
 scrap metal fit only for landfill
 insistently ticking towards the future,
 while I try to find a gentle tock, an innocent countdown
 a rest from hours and minutes, deadlines, appointments
 half past eight, five minutes to six.

But there's duties to be done.
 A grandchild to collect.
 A meeting to attend.
 A poem to finish.
 A last collection to edit.
 Is that the time?
 Set the midnight alarm.

THINGS I LEARNED FROM UNCLE QUENTIN

Children who are late for meals don't deserve
hot bacon, mushrooms and fresh eggs.

Ice-cream and ginger beer are more dramatic
than this learned book you'll never finish.

The secret formula you work on all summer
has no solution, is futile, a mere plot device.

Friend and enemy are difficult to distinguish
by looks, only an author can discriminate.

The tall dark man with a rather fierce frown
on his wide forehead may be on your side.

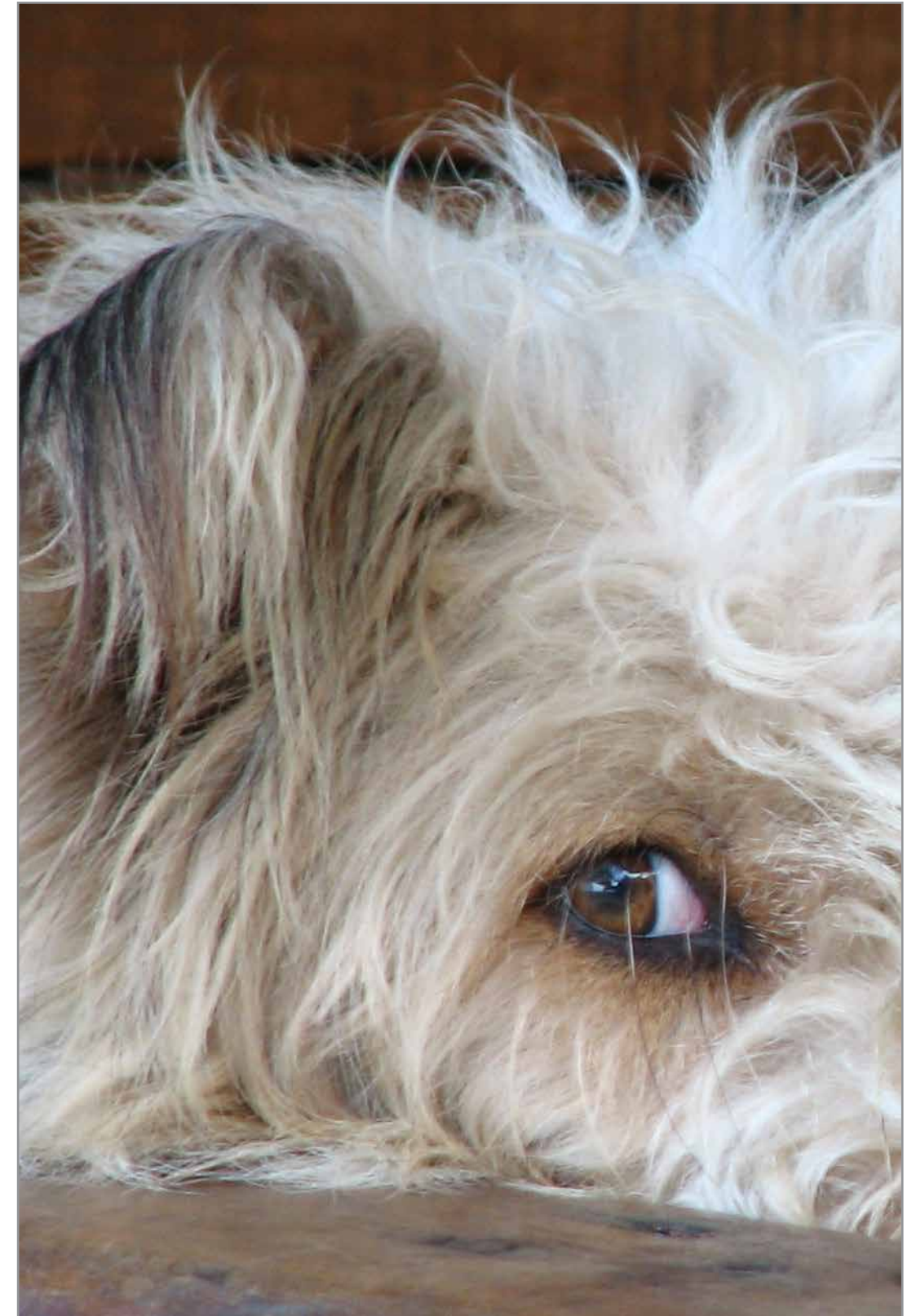
Don't ignore the rustling in the shrubbery
the shadow on the blind, spies everywhere.

The person wandering the hills with a net
after midnight is not chasing butterflies.

Even your writing den is not secure
especially during your afternoon nap.

But the gold ingots in the island dungeon
will be recovered, thanks to the children

so have patience, don't exclaim, the mystery
will be clarified in chapter twenty-one.



Dog, Bali, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Michael J. Whelan is a historian and soldier-poet living in South Dublin, Ireland. He deployed as a United Nations Peacekeeper with the Irish Defence Forces to the conflicts in Lebanon and Kosovo in the 1990s. He holds a Masters Degree in Modern History from NUI Maynooth and is keeper of the Air Corps Military Museum and collector of oral history for the Military Archives of Ireland Oral History Programme. His poems are published in Australia, Paris, Mexico, USA, UK, South Africa and Ireland and included in *'And Agamemnon Dead: An Anthology of Early Twenty First Century Irish Poetry'*, (Paris 2015) & *'The Hundred Years War: Modern War Poems'* (Bloodaxe UK) 2014. He was selected for the Poetry Ireland Introductions series and was 2nd Place Winner of the Patrick Kavanagh & 3rd in the Jonathan Swift Awards. He has featured on T.V. and radio and at literary festivals and his debut collection *'Peacekeeper'* was published in 2016 by Doire Press. His second collection *'Rules of Engagement'* was published in 2019.



THE LONG HOURS AWAIT THE SENTRY

'But a whisper is clearer to us than a shout to anyone else'
-Conchobar Mac Nessa, King of the Ulaid.

All the lesser caste shadows stretch longer,
darker, reach out, creep into each other
with a coldness pulling the night into the world.
And so the long hours await the sentry.

Guilt descends in a cloud of incense,
as if a whisper of bells tolling
between darkened shapes of winter city nights,
the skyline blacker than all of space
reserved for tainted priests.

He sees all the people then
are but Jerusalem trapped by walls
that rise and fall to times moral breaches
slung by catapults and crucifixions
and the market coins that rolled into crevasses
beneath its foundations.

Michael J. Whelan

STARING DOWN THE YEARS

Red tears pooled in the street
like petals fallen from a fuchsia.

A bright flower and grass
spring from a sea of cobbles.

He realises he's staring down the years,
the wind complains and rifles his ribcage.

He crosses far from the pedestrian black and white,
the corners howl at his hesitations.

AND THE GODS LOOK DOWN
ON THE 21ST CENTURY

In the wound's red lips
rimmed in black,
all of humanity piles,
jostling for a space, filthy and festering.

They are alone there, alone,
no gods, no power, no righteousness,
no saint protects them.
They must learn to teach their own hearts,
that all they have on that rock – that Jerusalem
is themselves, and they must realise soon
what the sun shares with them,
they must learn peace in their universe
before their moment ends
and dashes them into a comet's tail,
this arc of sky and all.

They are the migrating bird
that drowns in the ocean
without reaching its destinations.

REFLECTION

O darkness
my corrupted other,
in the night's un-curtained window
your argument sees through me,
I have no answer,
our reflections are mute.
Which is heaven, and which is truth?

THE ANNALS

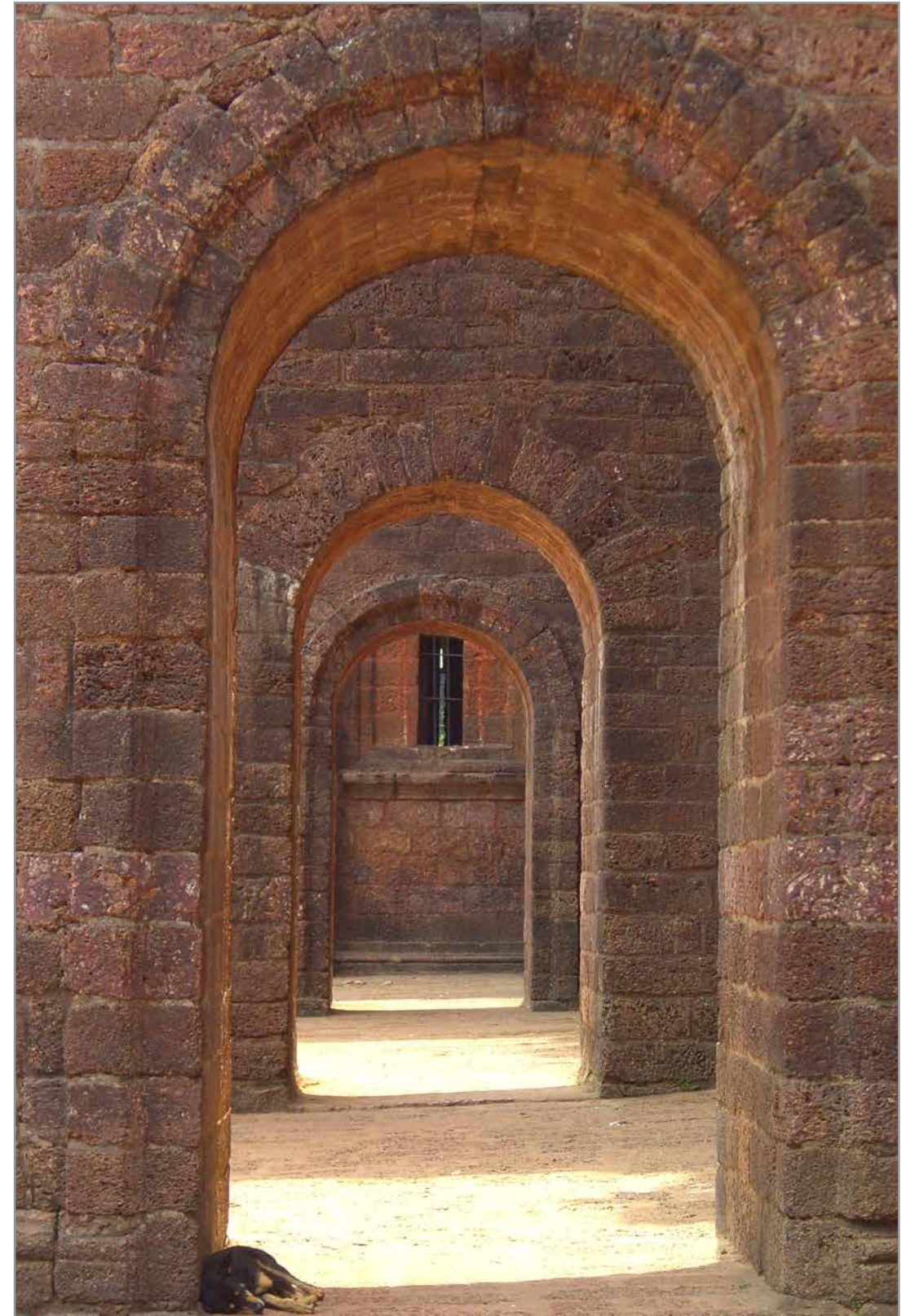
Since time immemorial,
in the night's dead haunts,
blackness still waves,
rolls and troughs
across vast oily oceans of this Earth,
slick and unwitnessed,

and the ancient monastery's enchanted cat
still threads inky black paw prints
over the velum pages of a long forgotten abbot's
unfinished transcripts.

Can you see them?

PEBBLES

The stars are many,
like pebbles on a long shingled beach
rippling under glassy water, moving
when the night's umbrella slowly arcs.
Only a halo of moon on the horizon
might separate them – their aeons,
and I would grieve then for my Age,
for my years and the wonders
I have not and will never see.



Old Goa, India, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Michael Minassian's poems and short stories have appeared recently in such journals as Comstock Review, Poet Lore, and Third Wednesday. He is also a Contributing Editor for *Verse-Virtual*, an online magazine. His chapbooks include poetry: *The Arboriculturist* (2010) and photography: *Around the Bend* (2017). His poetry collection, *Time is Not a River*, (2020) is available on Amazon. A second poetry collection entitled *Morning Calm* and a chapbook *Jack Pays a Visit* are also forthcoming in 2020. For more information: <https://michaelminassian.com>



A CHILL IN THE AIR

Autumn snuck in,
summer & sun
unhinged—

leaves fell
& scattered
like an afterthought.

Pages of a book filled
with random reminders
vanished in the failing light

as if I stood next to you,
our arms as distant
as the wind.

Michael Minassian

OLD FRIENDS

Last night our friends
came by for dinner—
we hadn't seen each other
for over ten years.

We cooked a feast,
filled counters and table
with grapes and cheese,
fruit pies and chocolate cake,
bread, tureens of soup,
rice, potatoes, vegetables,
bottles of wine and cold drinks.

All of us so full,
we could barely push ourselves
away from the table,
telling stories of the past—
family histories and legends
about growing up in the Bronx
under the shadow of the 3rd Avenue El,
not far from the cottage where Poe
lived with his mother-in-law
and wife (and first cousin) Virginia
who coughed up blood
while playing the piano,
then died a few years later.

Poe stayed up nights,
language stalled,
while he waited for the dead
to rise like yeast,
stuck in limbo or disbelief,
cursing his fate:
all the women in his life
dying from TB.

Hoping his next life will be better,
free from disease and memories
of loss, premature burials,
and the pendulum's breath—
a life with refrigerators
and iced tea, music,
poetry, and old friends
on the back porch.

THE NEW NORMAL

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow

This morning on our walk
we saw a cardinal swoop
down and land on a branch
directly in front of us,
appearing like Banquo,
drenched in red
and then gone.

*Look, you said, it's the first
one we've seen
since the lockdown.*

But I only noticed
he flew alone, no mate
to return his song.

Is this the new normal?

Masks to hide our faces,
no touch, hug, or handshake,
washing our hands
like Lady Macbeth,
birds and other creatures
ghostlike as the rest of us.

THIS FUGITIVE DAY

In the morning,
I watch the sun rise:
the sky brightens
like a piece of foil unfolding—

Cars roll past in the street;
from the treetops
birds announce their agenda—

I open the newspaper
it repeats the same stories—
I try to remember
which day it is, what date,
which mask to wear,
how many times I need
to wash my hands.

I prefer to measure time
by the movement
of the sun and moon,
the passage of one day
into the next—
the rest merely
clocks and the dead
talking to themselves.

Niall Cahir - Writer, Photographer, Artist. Based in Birr Co Offaly. Born 1966, in Cork City. His poetry is honest, deep and meaningful. Snap-shots of everyday life, thought provoking, with spiritual imagery. Measured shares of shade and light, strong yet delicate in texture, just like the man himself!



WINTER'S GATES

No thoughts of season-change, afore
At least the past four months, or more
As Summer seems to steal away
Her heat, my heart, and time of play

Miss Autumn stepped lightly to my door
Seductive sheddings that she wore
No sooner had her brown hues turned
Cool-linen that the sun had burned

Fall loose below her naked limbs
As migrant wings, hum winter hymns
Soft soundless landings upon mossy floor
Food ample, stored in sap-soaked core

Sensual moves turns voyeur's head
As shapely maple, sheds glucose red
Her fabric veil falls wafting down
Lands gold on yellow, orange on brown

Green chlorophyll, evaporates
Reveals cold threshold...
..of Winter's gates

Niall Cahir

GROW MY CHILD

I am twice now
..beyond your time

And once, plus two
..in perfect rhyme

Such rapid pace
The years pass me
Relentless seasons
Balance Chi

Yet, round and round
You'll go again
Maybe trice
..or even ten

And cry out loud
Your silent fears
Then dress the truth
In salty tears

I know, I speak
Of trodden way
Kicked fallen leaves
As they decay

To this long path
You have commit
And many traits
Will learn from it

And many more
Will gift - rebuke!
Their piercing truth
Like harpoon fluke

Milling miles
Much more to go
Rough tides will count
Your ebb and flow

Love's sometimes hard
To gift ..or host!
These be the ones
Who need it most

For this is why
We both are here
To grow in love

And banish fear

For all life's lessons, bar none yet
..despite their pain, do I regret

Noel Duffy's debut collection *In the Library of Lost Objects* was published by Ward Wood Publishing, London, in 2011 and was shortlisted for the Shine/Strong Award for best first collection by an Irish poet. His poetry has appeared widely, including in *The Irish Times*, *The Financial Times* and *Poetry Ireland Review*, and has been broadcast on RTE Radio 1 and BBC Radio 4 and more recently he was the recipient of the Patrick & Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in Poetry. A new collection, *Street Light Amber*, was published in summer 2020.



THE CROSSING

*The earthquake is not satisfied at once
And in this way I wrought upon myself,
Until I seemed to hear a voice that cried,
"Sleep no more."*

- William Wordsworth, *Prelude*, Book X

He arrives by carriage to the port of Calais, dismounts and gets ready to depart with a ruptured longing. What was it he was escaping from? – the cost of love or the cost of terror, Annette somewhere else without him, their daughter barely supping at her breast, oblivious to the horror unfolding around her.

He had come with such great hope, yet found instead a great despair, the cobbled street he so recently walked now blood-stained and foul; Robespierre and the myriad dead, their guilt consigning them to the will of the guillotine...

Such terrible things he has seen as the tricolours flutter in the bright morning air above the hotel, patisserie and bar: *liberté, égalité, fraternité*... but what of love? Was he, William, fool to imagine it differently, that such beauty and nobility of spirit might so swiftly turn to peril, the things he has witnessed here too much to carry?

Instead he holds two small cases and a ticket to England, takes a step forward onto the gangway of the ship, its sails readied and set to deliver him home to all he has known, awaiting his servile return. One day, he understands that he must write of this – to try, at least, explain to Annette and their daughter and how it was he came to fail them.

Noel Duffy

Born in Havana, February 19th, 1964. Poet and translator. He has published six books of poetry in his own country: Algo de lo sagrado. Unión, 1996. (Also published in the U.S in 2007, by Factory School, N.Y.; with translations by Kristin Dykstra and Roberto Tejada. www.factoryschool.org/pubs/perez) ¿Oíste hablar del gato de peleá? Letras Cubanas, 1998. (Translated by Kristin Dykstra and published by Shearsman, London, in 2010: Did you hear about the fighting cat?) Canciones y Letanías. Extramuros, 2002. Lingua Franca. Unión, 2009. He has also published a collection of essays on poetry and translation, La perseverancia de un hombre oscuro. Letras Cubanas, 1999. Crítica de la Razón Puta, obtained the 2010 Nicolás Guillén National Poetry Award, and was published also by Letras Cubanas. In the same year and with the same publisher, Omar Pérez offered a second collection of essays, El corazón mediterráneo. In 2016, he published Filantropical, with Letras Cubanas, and Sobras Escogidas, with Silueta, Miami, Florida. In 2018, Station Hill (N. Y.) published Cubanology, a book of days, while the Alabama University Press printed The race, a poem collection; both translated by Kristin Dykstra. Omar Pérez has consistently translated from the English, Italian, French and Dutch languages.



I AM NOT A BUDDHA

I am not a Buddha
 I have two hands, two feet like paws
 five finger each and with their claws
 I can break and tear but nonetheless
 I can also stop.
 I am not a Christ, i have a big mouth, not a Christ
 I have a reckless tongue, i am not a Christ
 I can lick and chew but nonetheless
 I can also shut up and offer you
 this silence as blue as death
 I am no meek sheep practicing Zen
 to avoid missing the train
 of Awakening
 I am a vandal trying to revert the scandal
 flowing from the Superego to regal legal
 supposing that, beyond or before the beatings
 life will give you unconditionally
 there's a void
 a subtle point of emanations, inverse or reverse
 never perverse, the brunt perhaps of crude existence
 I am not a Buddha, i just resist although resistance
 Is not a good instance
 I'm no Spiderman, Batman, jazzman, barman
 no Superman, Rastaman, bang bang gangman
 nevertheless i exist.

Omar Pérez

WRITE OR WRONG

camino junto a los grillos
 not much of an identitarian
 write or wrong?
 At dusk the river is clean
 the owl sings
 I walk aimlessly and diagonally
 nowhere to go nothing to come back to
 though I know that I look pensive
 I also know that i'm not thinking
 Proliferation
 a yellow atmosphere
 proliferation
 a virgin with a chain
 proliferation
 Saint Lazarus
 with two dogs in a fridge
 proliferation
 a convict raising a flag
 proliferation
 to love and to forget
 a virtual masturbation
 a background bolero
 a cataclysmic version
 the holidays belief: circumvention
 two lies a dollar
 one truth by two by three
 proliferation
 a gospel, a debate, an information
 a bible and a conflagration
 as if you didn't know

Cuba get along your highway
 Cuba country lane
 proliferation
 a statue in the open sea
 the best angels of nature
 dancing by the microwave
 buy and buy and by your way
 a land kaleidoscope
 to meet over the rainbow
 in a microscope
 proliferation
 may the wind knock
 the monument down
 for this occasion

OFFICE MIX

How remote! how remote?
 did you mention the literary creeps
 are they smiling? Yes
 they are. I feel again like
 a European, your rope hanging
 around in this translation workshop.
 THE OLDEST MISTAKE, she writes, IS
 TAKING THAT FOR GRUNTED,
 honest mistake to let things happen the way
 they should or shouldn't
 she smiles still beyond and below the horizon
 of her own nose.
 Her nose is our horizon, surely
 the Germanic madness, the curly demure, the bricks
 of language taking THAT FOR GRUNTED?
 continue:
 the porpoise of description
 (now they laughter with participatory indifference) some
 almonds, some eyes, some pumpkins; grapes of graph
 continue:
 generally spitting, as a matter of fat, everyone
 remembers each word that has been said: let's go back in thyme!"
 would you consider a dash after better than a dish
 before
 the way you pronounce "sentence" reminds me
 of a car trunk closing on a butterfly. Now, we all,
 in one way or the other, go over "butterfly"
 in a September School of Manners manner

I wish but I don't
 at a more pedestrian level, says the word doctress
 THE DASH IS NOT LONG ENOUGH TO BECOME
 AN OVERACHIEVER, then I think:
 There's only one thing more real than you
 and is the river.
 The 3rd person always wants to fuck the first person
 he (or she) meets in the sentence whereas you
 are still absent
 love poems are a sort of reaction, yes, the incubatory, the
 circulatory and the ejaculatory, side by side, ah!
 translate this:
 del árbol d la duda nacen los frutos d la perseverancia.

A SOLDIER IS A SERIAL KILLER

one wants to change the world instead of abandoning it
 to wage revolution even if
 it turns into involution eventually
 a tourist in perpetual convolution
 an ameba of change
 a quantity how many revolutions
 per minute
 a soldier is a serial killer
 a serial killer is a soldier of anomaly
 incorporated (anomalink)
 a priest, a certified persuader
 a television of purpose & will:
 divine or not divine, that is the purpose
 of anomaly, the price of malice
 the molasses of good: a player
 is a serial hero
 but is Venus really a porno star
 as it aligns with the crescent moon
 who's the serial rejoicer
 who's the animal player of the star
 singing is a better exercise than swimming
 which is the best exercise ever applied to the hydraulic condition of the human
 it's actually hard to sing underwater, so, who's the amphibian
 who's the soldier in the constellation of rhythmos
 in the session of Pathmos...whatever so as not to get formal
 in an anomalink of language and its music.
 As much as soldier, killer, pro hero porno star,
 an anomalink is an intersection of human and debris
 human debris, what a beautiful name! for any cosmic animal
 except the unicorn.

CHINESE HANDS

Chinese hands make my bed
 bake my bread shake my dread
 from many oceans of severity
 the mermaids come to the sororities
 is it a step towards debauchery?
 is it a road into imbecility?
 Chinese hands make my bed
 bake my bread shake my dread
 Chinese hands shape my dream
 stir my cream roll the rock
 and turn the silence into luck
 the journey into restraint
 where to go from these lakes of fireworks
 these drafts of loneliness?
 From ample oceans of commodities
 the manna rains on the minorities
 is it a shower of preconditions
 is it a deluge of humanimalities?
 Chinese hands make my bed
 bake my bread shake my dread
 Sombras come and go
 buttocks on the road
 like sombras
 do not burn ashes
 "he comido tanta mierda
 q ya me empieza a gustar"
 says the drunkard at the edge of the bar
 cliff of palatable shit
 sombras roll like billiard balls
 but they don't talk
 they say hallo
 on the I Phone, on the E Fun
 on the Hi Tone of the I Pod
 path of peas upon the rocks
 Chinese hand make my bed
 bake my bread shake my dread

LULLABY

People live in their drunkenness
enjoying the rewards of madness
and to whomever awakes from slumber
they all together sing this lullaby:
One strait-jacket, snow-white
One stone crucifix, pitch black
One gold medal, fairly false
And one chain
White, black, gold, chain.
Daddy, when i grow up
buy me a hero's disguise.
Son, buy it yourself
with the savings of your mind.
People go in ten parties
first party, those who kill
second party, those who teach
party number three, the diggers
party number four, those who fly
five, those who speak in numbers
six, those who weave with words
seven, the gardeners of patience
eight, the farmers of war
nine, those who play the game of seriousness
ten, those holding the righteous razor.
Son, when you grow up
you shall build me a big ladder.

Daddy, build it yourself
with the steps of your own tongue.
People live in their drunkenness
enjoying the rewards of madness
and to whomever awakes from slumber
they all together sing this lullaby:
One strait-jacket, snow-white
One stone crucifix, pitch black
One gold medal, fairly false
And one chain
White, black, gold, chain.

Osama Eber is a Syrian poet, short story writer, photographer and translator who presently lives in California. He is an editor in Salon Syria, Jadaliyya's Arabic section, and an editor in Status audio magazine. Among his poetry collections are: *Screens of History* (1994); *The Accord of Waves* (1995); *Repeated Sunrise over Exile* (2004); and *Where He Doesn't Live* (2006). His short story collections are entitled *The Autobiography of Diamonds* (1996); *Coffee of the Dead* (2000); and *Rhythms of a Different Time* (in process). He has translated into Arabic works by Alan Lightman, Richard Ford, Elizabeth Gilbert, Raymond Carver, Michael Ondaatje, Bertrand Russell, Toni Morrison, Nadine Gordimer, and Noam Chomsky, to name a few. He attended the international writing program in Iowa in 1995.



THE FIVE RIVERS OF HELL

These poems are translated from Arabic by the author and edited by the American writer Don Reneau.

Osama Esber

THE FIVE RIVERS OF HELL

The Euphrates (1)

River,
Where will we find candles for all the graves,
Angels to spend the night over wounds,
Heavenly ears to listen to the moaning,
To the last gasps of the dead in our breath?

In the smoke camouflaging dawn,
Casting it over faces like a sheet of flame,
In the splinters of a child dreaming on the threshold
And in dreams buried in ashes,
Strewn on burning banks,
Where graves are dug
Your water celebrates in our veins
We keep hearing a sound repeating:
Euphrates
A freshness
Writing its poem
On the leaves of light.

It is the calamity, river,
In our pores,
In the air we breathe,
That seeps to us forged messages of joy.

Your territories,
Mirrors in shreds.
The light that used to wave at us with sunny handkerchiefs,
Extinguished in hearts and faces.
The groaning
Like volcanoes erupting.
And the lava flies
Like incensed eyes over your bleeding cities.

THE FIVE RIVERS OF HELL

Quwaiq (2)

In your water, river,
Is another water that falls from the eyes.

Hands tied behind the back,
They cling to a passing light
And travel with it into dreams.

Muddy you flow, river,
On the two shoulders of a city,
Whose dreams precipitate to your bottom,
Another greenness for death.

With the nets of our hopes, we hunted corpses,
dragged them to the banks,
and bore them over shoulders to their graves
under an indifferent heaven that rained only shells
on a land that grew only fear
cut by roads that were not for the living.

Quwaiq,
River of corpses
And foregone possibilities
Wasted in black waters.
Of old there was purity in your water.
There was freshness
That we no longer see through our tears.

I was a but a mirage in the city,
In a khaki suit
Jumping over fences in search of Aleppo nights.
The bursting at all horizons still silent at that time.
In words there were holes.
Needles in the face sewing masks.
And among the pistachio trees,
Downcast under a shaded sun,
The heavens were a rock on my shoulders
And the land an abyss under my feet.

They called it marching.
It was entering the body tamed into a cage.
They called it a narrow city,
Its dreams never escaping the castle.
Its features mired in the mud of its past.

And your water, river, a question that mingled worlds.

THE FIVE RIVERS OF HELL

Barada (3)

On your banks my footsteps mumble,
And my head, victim of the old language,
Dreams of your water, flowing new, everyday.

Do you hear the bullets that penetrate now?
Do you see the smoke that writes the city's autobiography?
Where was this hidden?
As your water, which we do not see
Except when winter is angry?

Where is your water, river?
Should I hang an image for you on the wall to
glorify your old purity?

Barada!
What a beautiful word!
How beautiful to imagine the face,
To look at it,
To be attracted to it in your flowing waters!
How beautiful the banks burning with the violent green!

Al-Sinn (4)

Oh river of the depths
What distances you cross there inside to extinguish an old thirst?

I bow in front of your roar
And pray, asking waters for forgiveness.

River,
I hear your purity whispering in the ears of thirsty villages,
Whose sons are thrown to the flames,
And their ashes scattered in the winds of death.

River
How can we restore the dead from death?
How can we let your waters flow in their cheeks again?
How can we regain their pure hearts,
Pure love,
So they stay alive in an embrace that crosses borders?

River,
Al-Sinn River,
You know deep inside your waters
That life is more precious to be spilled
In a black drop of blood.

I see you
Weeping,
Spilling your waters
In the Mediterranean sea
Where the light is dimming
Expressing sadness over our death.

THE FIVE RIVERS OF HELL

Al-Asi (5)

I like the resonance of your letters,
The word that they form,
Your generosity, while amassing your waters,
And distributing them on the fields.

I did not hear you, river,
You were dry in my features,
Exiled from my veins.
I did not know that you have throats
From which waters rise
And angrily flow
Over the plains.

It is dryness, river
Hits you in the core,
While the hands
That deviated you from your track
Remain, in front of your eyes,
A symbol of dryness
That ties the noose
Around the necks of the cities.

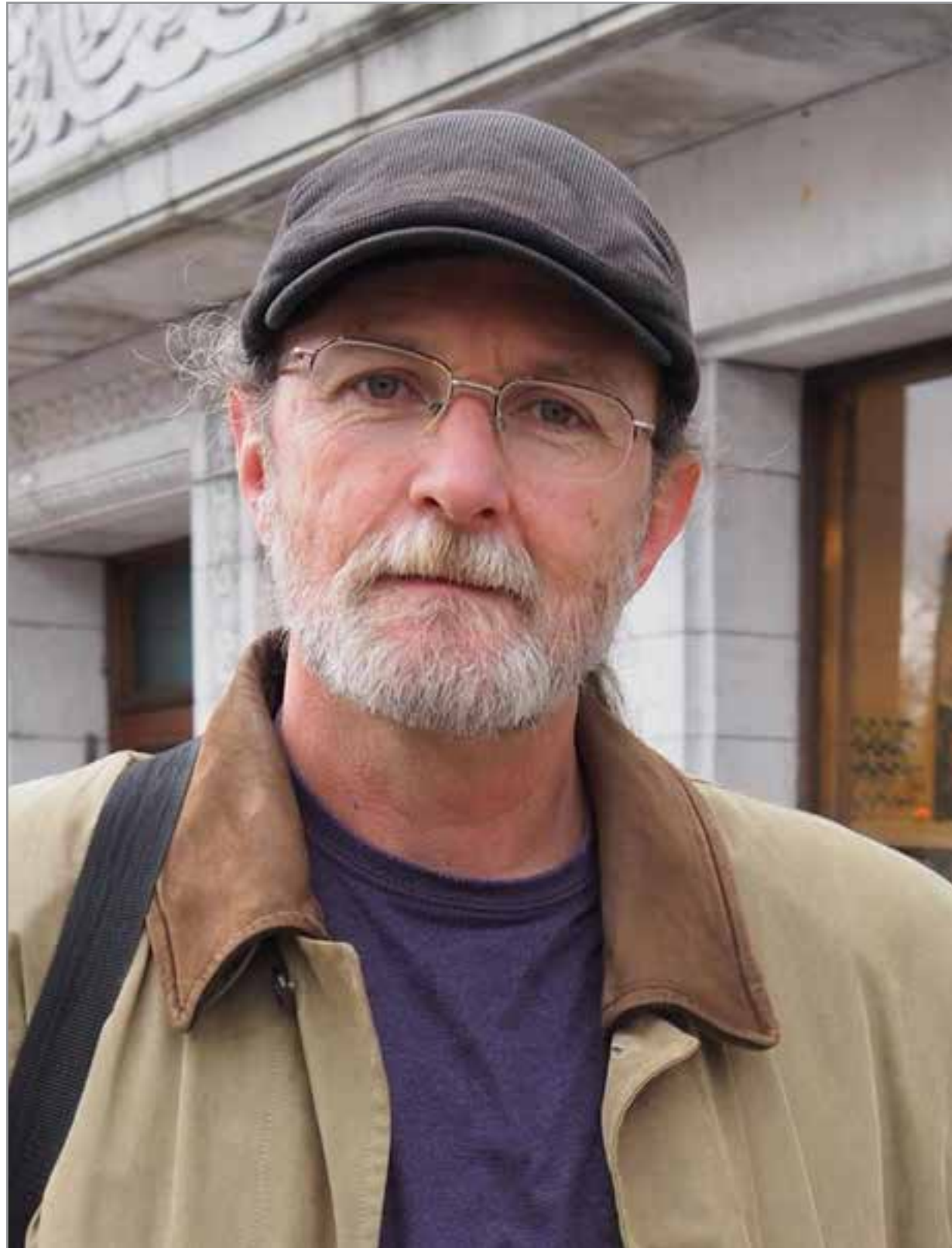
Foot Notes

- 1- Together with the Tigris, it is one of the two defining rivers of Mesopotamia. Originating in eastern Turkey, the Euphrates flows through Syria and Iraq to join the Tigris in the Shatt al-Arab, which empties into the Persian Gulf.
- 2- Is a river and valley of the Aleppo city, Syria and Turkey. It is a 129 kilometers (80 mi)-long river that flows through the northern Syrian city of Aleppo.
- 3- Barada is the main river of Damascus, the capital city of Syria.
- 4- The main river in the Syrian coastal region.
- 5- The Orontes or Asi is a river of Lebanon and Turkey and with a long course in Syria. The word Al-Asi in Arabic means the disobedient river.



Incoming tide, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Paul Casey's poetry has been published in journals and anthologies internationally, most recently in *New Coin*, *Backstory Journal* and *Cork Words*. He is the recipient of three writing bursaries from Cork City Arts Office. His collection *Virtual Tides* was published by Salmon Poetry in 2016. This followed *home more or less* (Salmon, 2012) and a chapbook *It's Not all Bad* (Heaventree Press, 2009). He edited *A Journey called Home* - poems and stories of the new Corkonians (Cork City Libraries, 2018) and he edits the annual *Unfinished Book of Poetry* for secondary schools. He promotes poetry in his role as the director of Ó Bhéal -<https://www.obheal.ie/blog/>



METAGAINST

These spectacles are no
submarine portholes
to hold back the crushing deep

My students no forest
mushrooms shining to
be picked and savoured

Nor are these homeless
motionless in doorways
waiting to be recycled

The impoverished no
nuclear waste drums
to shoot into the sun

Our elders no
outdated parchments
to be edited and archived

Asylum seekers no
pieces of broken fruit
for export jam factories

Drug addicts are no
bad dreams to be flushed
as effluent to the sea

Depressives are no
kettles to switch on or off
for occasional tea

Paul Casey

METAGAINST

contd...

The selfish are no gods
to placate or fear
to pile garlands upon

Mortgage holders no
piggy bank investments
but employers of bankers

Moon is no vanilla wafer
waiting to be devoured
by ravenous corporate clouds

As an android is no
social space to relax in
with other androids

Art can be no
social science to quantify
or compartmentalise

Empathy no commodity
no class A drug
to get higher on

Working class people
are no designer steps
to wealthier graces

And the great oceanic metaphor patch
is no recycling facility nor dump
for under or overused language



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Born in Cork in 1967, Peter O'Neill is the author of five collections of poetry, a volume of translation *The Enemy - Transversions from Charles Baudelaire* (Lapwing, 2015), and a work of fictional prose *More Micks than Dicks*, a hybrid Beckettian novella in 3 genres (Famous Seamus, 2017). With a background in philosophy and comparative literature, BA & MA respectively (DCU), O'Neill is currently working on a number of writing projects in connection with Baudelaire in preparation for the 200th anniversary of the poet's birth; he will be hosting a series of discussions and readings on the 8th April next spring for the Alliance Francaise de Dublin when his sixth collection of poetry *Henry Street Arcade*, a bilingual work translated into French by the poet Yan Kouton, will also be launched as part of the festivities.



From THE EROICA VARIATIONS

I

Not the sun before you shining down,
This great orb on fire, kilometres long.
Not your face from out of the body of the heavens ,
A rain of fire invisible through the great blue.

Yet, somehow still erupting from your youth,
You then but a sign or symbol of the contagion
That spreads out inside me, cancerous
Like the ultra-violet rays taken in too much

Abundance. So, like the careful bather that I am,
I step off the terrace out of the behemoth's
Fiery gaze to step into the cooler interior

Where the sound of a classical guitar is playing.
There, the notes strike a chord in the deep wood.
Membranophones offer counter stroke, and it's good.

Peter O'Neill

From THE EROICA VARIATIONS *contd...*

II

You have become like wind, air...mythologised.
A creature dreamed up, inhabiting now
Only the past, that carnival of imagery
And ghost wonder flickering sometimes in the head

Like the stills from some old favourite film
Where you are an actor playing your part.
Your role being Youth. Your body in the form
Of an odalisque, though the roles reversed.

I being the slave, seduced by the shock
Of your sex, the rupture with the ordinary.
Our bodies join like Plato's perfect forms.

Their smooth entry into certain knowledge.
Hanging onto the boughs of your legs.
Hypnotised by the branches of your smile.

III

The old wooden instrument sonorous and gentle,
Your voice singing with its melancholy.
Rinascimento. Oh, and there was Italy with
The vision of you angelic worthy of Leonardo.

But your voice kept singing deep in the night.
High when the voice had to take off like a bird
In flight. And low, almost masculine, when not. Hands
Studied, pressing on the strings, eyes registering

The events around with great whites opening.
And the lips, their playful seductions,
Opening then to give voice, the tone modulating.

Slightly American, the accent, and cheerful.
Always cheerful and young. Vexed then,
You get annoyed, and *whoosh* you are gone.

From THE EROICA VARIATIONS contd...

IV

"Hey, what are you doing man?"
The goofy collegian enquires.
"Push over!" She sits beside you.
Eyes beside you, looking at you.

Maybe smiling. "What's UP?"
She continues goofing, perhaps poking you.
Or sipping a little bit of wine from her glass.
Her actions bold, self- assured.

Moving with all of the bodily wisdom of Youth,
Sure in its attraction. Magnetically compliant.
The way her pants envelope her limbs.

The way her boots uphold her feet.
The way her lips unfold you.
And how your breath together flowers.

V

This demon hovers, her voice in your ear.
The images fall in a kaleidoscope of film,
All taken more than twenty years ago.
There in the apartments in *Dean's Hall*.

The cathedral beside you with the golden
Angel blowing forever Jericho, and the scent
Of burnt hops blown up from *Beamish* the brewery.
Cork in the mid- nineties, quiet and sunny.

Where you had your bedsit on the hill.
Wellington Road. It's still there. The old
Victorian terrace of houses where you let her in.

Taking photographs, which you still keep.
The black and whites of the Demon, tongue out
Laughing in your face, or head thrown back welcoming the sun.

Phil Lynch lives in Dublin, Ireland. His work has appeared in a range of literary journals and anthologies, including previous editions of Live Encounters Poetry. He has been a runner-up in a number of poetry competitions and shortlisted in others. He has performed his work at numerous poetry and spoken word events and festivals in Ireland and has also read at events in the USA, UK, Belgium and France. His poetry collection *In a Changing Light* (Salmon Poetry) was published in 2016. <https://www.salmonpoetry.com/details.php?ID=394&a=284>.



MISSION STATEMENT

Hey prophet, what's on your mind, why have you come,
has your mission a timeline, where are you from?

Have you come from the future or a dark past,
do you know for how long this thing is to last?

Are you a ghost, a hippie or a new poet,
a shamanic hero to keep us afloat?

I've followed your kind up hills and down valleys
through back streets and side streets, into blind alleys;

there were preachers and teachers, rebels and more,
I prayed at their altars, sincere to my core,

but always they proved to be nothing but frauds
who lied about truth in the names of their gods.

The holier-than-thous who act like they're lords,
their high moral perch built on spurious words;

they come with gospels in pitch-perfect voices,
climb on their thrones to anoint their new choices,

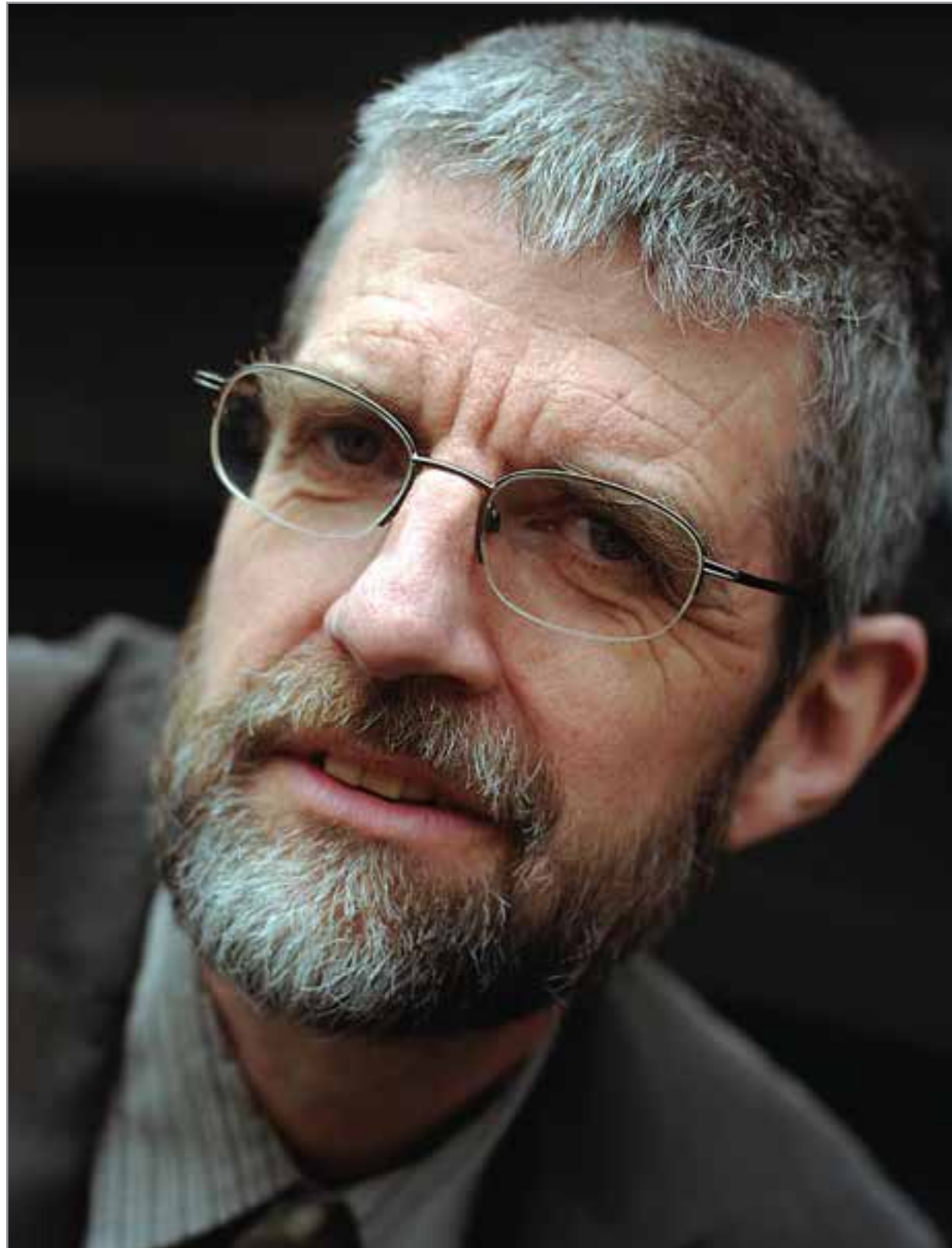
they come to seek worship in houses of learning,
gods, self-appointed, to fill all our yearning.

No! Go propagate on Facebook or Twitter,
I won't follow you or be a 'like' hitter.

Too long a follower, too often let down,
now I keep my own truth, I wear my own crown.

Phil Lynch

Philip Gross lives in South Wales and has published some twenty collections of poetry, including *A Bright Acoustic* (Bloodaxe, 2017). *The Water Table* won the British T.S.Eliot Prize in 2009. He received a Cholmondeley Award in 2017, and his science-based collection for young people, *Dark Sky Park* (Otter-Barry Books, 2018) was shortlisted for the CLiPPA award, 2019. He is a keen collaborator – e.g. with artist Valerie Coffin Price on *A Fold In The River* (Seren, 2015) and with poet Lesley Saunders on *A Part of the Main* (Mulfran, 2018). A new Bloodaxe collection, *Between The Islands*, appeared in 2020. <https://www.philipgross.co.uk/>



Philip Gross

NERVE TREE

We hang by a thread.

On the CT scan
a jaw appears, as if by archaeology

but monochrome:
yours. There's no pretence that this is ordinary seeing

– more like touch,
like handling the jawbone, cut down into,

slice by slice,
sinking into its texture, descending through

stiff-gritty cloud to a rumour of a runway dark below.

*

That knothole in the bone
is where the nerve emerges –

the tendril from which, in that particular,
you hang, fruit of the tree

of feeling
and of pain. Without the pain, now,

you... about the world; here's a lump
of yourself, in the way of yourself.

How will you inhabit this landscape again,
chalk plain

crawled over
by remotely sensing instruments

as distant from whatever
'you' might be as, say, a landing on the moon?

continued overleaf...
© Philip Gross

NERVE TREE *contd...*

*

You know the anaesthetic's starting when half your mouth is full of teeth.
You want to spit them out, but they're your own.

*

When he drills...
what else can you do
but witness
something you can't call 'him' or 'me'

in the space of your bone-box?
Rather, see a many-branching canopy,

bole, branches, twigs and smaller,
nerve ends
spreading out, suspended
in the body, as in sky

and maybe swaying, maybe
with bird shrills, bird thrills, twinges

to and fro.
There must be roots – the word
insists there are – but
whether they're deep in the earth

or inside you, deeper
than an arm can reach, you can't say.

*

The anaesthetic's working. It has stripped away the pain
like stripping the flesh from the bones.

What remains is the pressure, the weight, the too-insistent not-a-pain
of his work on the skeleton. That being what tooth is. *Oh,*
the tooth bone's connected to the
jaw bone, the jaw bone's connected to the
skull bone, the skull bone's connected to the
neck bone...

Oh, skeleton, ascetic brother,
would you miss our tingling wincing surfaces?
The way those filaments branch into the depths of us?

Would you miss referred pain: that symposium of hurts?
The old dawn chorus, like bad birdsong in the blood?

*

Verfremdungseffekt: standing outside – while being in
the experience too – not out of oneself (one's mind, one's body)

but alongside, in parallel space. Yes, the parallel universe:
that which is equally and coexistently the case

of which which we cannot speak, however,
due to our mouth being full of stainless steel machinery.

*

Bearing in, to a point, the dentist's attention,
focused down to, now, a single nerve's width...

while round it you're a vast and cluttered and yet empty landscape
like a roadside town, all truckstop and chickens, in the deep Midwest.

continued overleaf...
© Philip Gross

NERVE TREE *contd...*

*

Like having builders in the house:

you try to live around them, the pretence of being undisturbed,
when you're cowering.

Yes, like that. Like that except inside your head

*

To flinch is only natural – back from the mosquito-whining point.
But when the touch is inside you? Then where do you go?

'Out of body', they say, at the point of death or impact
but now, in the recumbent chair, beneath the spotlight,
your whole body asking to leave...?

And this is where
we live. Between the shrill transaction at the tendril tip,
the fine hairs of the nerve tree and the ripe nut of the brain

see the woods of us, the woods between us, swaying in the wind
the canopy rippling now, alive with bird cries

or, now, bare for winter, when the inner shapes of trees
show through. The tremor in the tips still can't stop singing
This is me this is me, this is you.



Banyan Tree, Nusa Lembongan Island off Bali, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Richard Krawiec's fourth novel, *Paria*, was published in France (Tusitala Editions) to widespread acclaim. He has published three books of poetry, most recently *Women Who Loved me Despite* (Second Edition). His work appears in *Drunken Boat*, *Shenandoah*, *sou'wester*, *Levure Litteraire*, *Dublin Review*, *Chautauqua Literary Journal*, etc. He has been awarded fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the NC Arts Council (twice), and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. He is founder of Jacar Press, a Community Active publishing company. <http://jacarpress.com/>



TRIPTYCH

I.

in a basin of limestone spotted with lichen
clusters of purple flowers quiver
within starburst stems wedged between crags
small white sprays hug the surface ride the back-
shivering grass black seaweed curls from granite
across gritty sand wavers in the pale green froth
salt-tanged water darkens to blueberry then black

II.

clouds process across Galway's sushing waves
pass over the low green-blue hills of Inishmore
where buses replace potatoes and wool Connemara
ponies harnessed to carriages plod tourists past shells
of Medieval churches no one believes in any more
than five minutes when they pause before clopping
forward to the next set of ruins

III.

perched atop seaweed rocks two seagulls
look shoreward cry to the seals slothing
atop a flat of tidal mud a trawler streaked red
yellow and blue splintered on the coastline
opens a collapsed hull full of crabs scuttling
along broken boards pinioned like bird feathers
through the slurry tidal wash into the sand

Richard Krawiec

THE LIMITS

I can fill the bird feeder with cayenne
to keep the squirrels away but I can't stop
the thrasher from flashing it's long, sharp beak.

Once a man on death row
told me that writing was the first time
he believed his life had value.

I hoarded those words like seeds
fooling myself into thinking
that every soil is fertile, that images,
and descriptions, careful sequencing
could sprout a sheltering tree
in anyone's life.

Wtf were you doing with a gun?

The cardinals and tanagers flutter close
then veer off. Finches and sparrows huddle
in bushes without singing. The thrasher
perches, releases a warning squawk
then stabs its beak down.

On screen a breathless announcer
dressed in a sleeveless party dress
huffs the facts - a customer bulletted,
a cook dead. Your priors. Your release.

The cell phone video shows you face down
as if sleeping on the asphalt while two cops
probe you with their booted toes.

WTF was I doing with a pen?

I convinced myself you were trying hard,
helped you meticulously map your movements,
revise to make the sequence work. The story
based on that first murder
which sent you to prison.

I gave you an A.

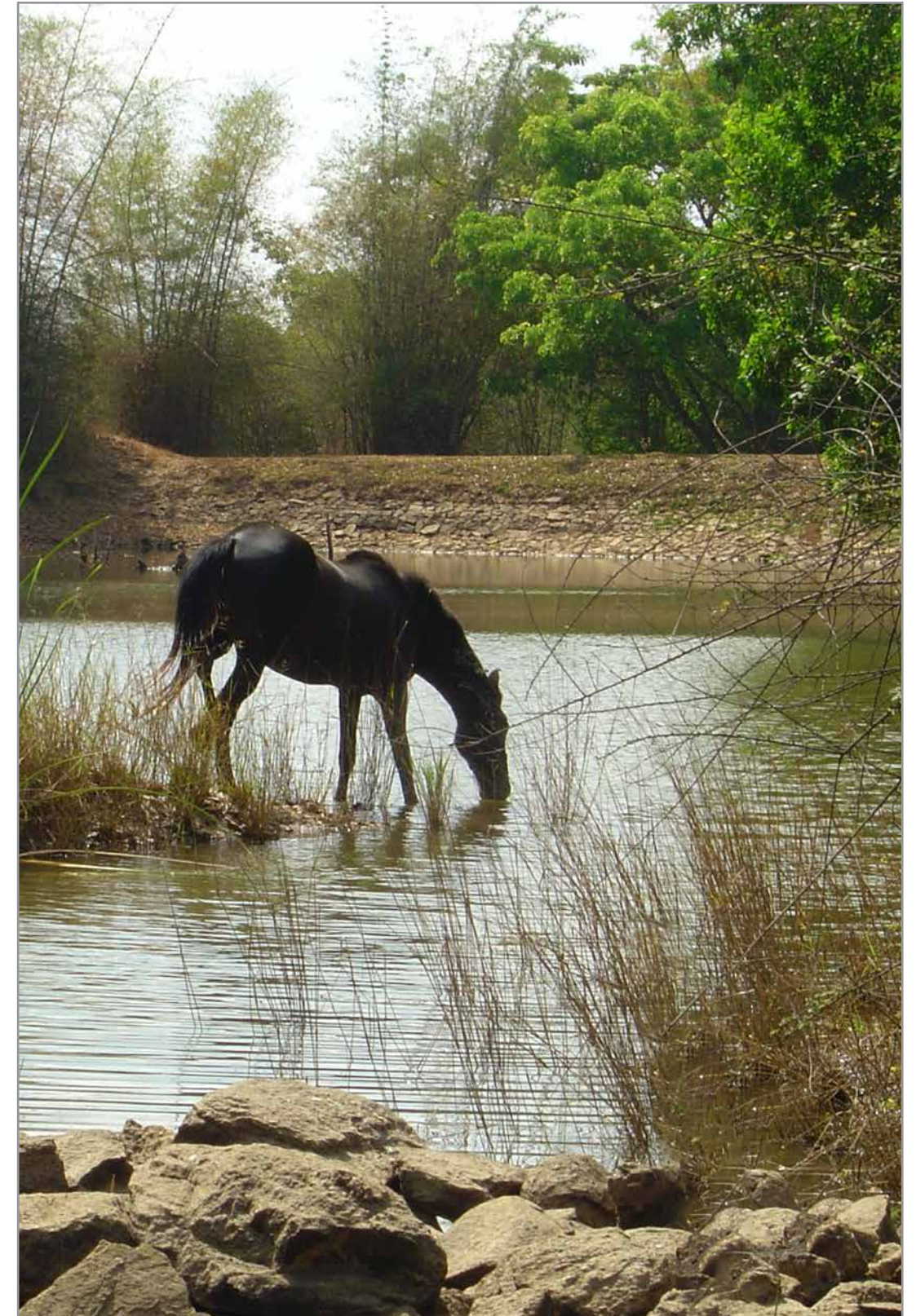
Watching the funeral I wonder
did I help you analyze or plan?
Did you use the grade as evidence
for parole? Did you plot your actions?
What part of your village am I?

JOURNEY

I have travelled from spy,
visitor, outsider squinting
past the chain links
I curled fingers around,
to a country road
of consistent noise -
mechanized hums, bass
drone of commuter tires,
the permanent, repetitive
barking of penned dogs.

Still, the tree limbs bounce
with tanagers, cardinals,
wood thrush and crows;
deers slow-pace the bush-
clotted woods, coyotes frame
their golden faces to me at night.

I grew up watching men
pound each other into the street;
now in the hurdy gurdy
of heaters and woodpeckers
I have arrived
at where I die.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Rob Childers divides his year between Alaska and Connemara. His poetry has been published in Ropes, Tule Review, Poet's Republic, Galway Advertiser, and Skylight 47. In 2014 he was a featured reader for Galway's Over the Edge library series and placed first in the Alaska Arts Council Annual Poetry Competition.



GULL DAY

It is a gull day,
wind whipping out blindly
white welts on the bay
sky's cloud-crew
dragging off tattered blown puffery
while Sun, no ray of concern,
shines brilliantly wherever He damn pleases.

And as song birds hunker
deep in the hedgerows,
quick flits and rustled hops
their nervous giveaway,
gulls, the blue-collar birds of the sea
raucously punch in.

They lift and turn working the swirl
competent in every wind-carving skill
until Sun, half an eye kept
and points awarded for style
reaches down to ignite them

turning their grey churn, now silver careen
into an un-choreographed spectacle,
drawing then capturing
even the coolest of gazes
assessing that wind blistered bay.

Rob Childers

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



GRAND ROMANCE

I write this at someone's gallery
Out of a maelstrom laden inundation

Escaping the relentless pelting rain
I pushed through the glass doors
Shaking myself
I stumbled and entered a greater unfurling chaos

As I looked at paintings and the installations
And the approaching faces of friends as 'strangers'

All were changed
All I could see was each of them transformed
Wearing the other ones faces
As I peered their faces continued to exchange
Women's becoming Men's then changing to children

Their very expressions as I knew them transmuted
And when I spoke to one then others
While looking where I thought their face that belonged was
I now spoke in the voice
Of the one that I was talking to!

The visages metamorphosis dulled vacuousness
These people filling spilling the vicinity of me
Acting as if nothing noticeable had even happened
Almost alive in their everyday expectations

Robert Shanahan

continued overleaf...

© Robert Shanahan

GRAND ROMANCE *contd...*

They point to the paintings
 Now flapping putrid soiled sheets
 One freed from its frame hangs as a cloak on me
 The instillations immersed discharging thick emissions
 I now in a whirlwind of unrelenting coughs

I felt as I stumbled outside
 I was not in my body
 As I lolled on the lawns
 The grasses stems startled
 As people passing
 See right through me I am not there!
 I am not here!

The compartments of my mind laid out
 Like as a child I did with lantana flowers

One day I will walk on your streets
 I will lean against the trappings
 The putrid wheeled engines whine
 Swaying street signs
 A kaleidoscope of abstracted shadows
 Flickering dead branches from ghostly trees

I will blink ten thousand times and now the street is quite
 You alone in your room will blink but once
 You will feel the desire for nectar

And alighting on sunlight
 Will go down to the street

You will spy me a standing
 Cut out from the crowd edging a wall
 I then appear closer still

We will embrace and sink beneath the sidewalk

Leaving behind taunt stringed marionettes
 Scarecrows festooned with all our pains
 Fears our heartfelt hurt
 All our disappointments

Effigies of ourselves
 Left for the world to deal with
 No longer as arrows in our sides
 All that knew us may greet us
 Not knowing our true selves are not there

We lay
 On verdant grass
 Our fingers toe's all appendages
 Are blooming amongst flowers
 Encompassing ferns shading a mothering sky
 We are in each other's arms
 Far from the destructive inhuman cities and minds

We are the hallowed future
 Futures a nature return
 Our prodigy like the grand animals as they sleep together
 Singing together
 Sing with us
 It's a Grand Romance

A MILD HALLUCINATION

The tilt of my head
 Listing
 Once then again diagonal

Aslant to my oblique oscillating face
 Emoting space moving through flux
 Space of oblivion thrilling
 I am greeting dramas of singing air
 Tunes of the dark senses hum to me

In the ocean again salted water waves
 My sinking log holds me safe
 Murk and gloom under me tremulous
 Yet I am not floundering!

I am in my bath
 Paint peelings floating bobbing
 Not a log I see now that my towel has fallen in
 Slow in my grasping I sink

Systematic extinguishing of oxygen
 Breath riding away on a fast horse
 I see its dyspnea tail
 Flicking at the night flies

I raise my head
 On the side of the bath
 Fluorescent shafted gleamings
 Mesmerize me in my splashing

High in the ceiling of shadowed plaster
 A radiance fighting its way through cobwebs
 A travelled moon mysterious to the eye
 Illuminating emitting Luna effusions
 Changing reorientations of Culture it seems

At once sandy emissions
 A painted black eye
 Falcon vision
 Horus

Then olive tree leaf silhouetted statues
 The explosive fire of drama
 Warming up the marble
 Poetic rhapsodies elegiac

Images undergo a change to drumming sounds
 Wooden idol splintering cracks deafening
 Animal skin beats
 I hear myself chanting
 Soft incarnations
 This strange moon counter-glow into my eyes

Unravelling frontal lobes
 Hallucinating
 I look into a broken mirror
 The palm of my hand
 Now behind me I see a hanging sign
 'Museum Entry'

continued overleaf...

A MILD HALLUCINATION *contd...*

Not my bath ah

I remember a fellow pirouetting stumbling
Around a marble statue
And I saw flowers around his head
Strange in their wilting

And as raise myself to try to think
His form was
If through a million mirrors reflections
The parts of me refracted apart
Then linked together as that marble statue

I sway at an ancient Irish hot air bath exhibit
Greetings I am an intruder
On marble tiles
Dirty feet
No shoes
Now as I look I seem to have too many toes

Dear Reader
What must you think of me?
Or please think for me!
Yes! Do my thinking

STRUGGLE

Lurched!
What be this!?
Stopped!
An undesired heave of the mind stills
Stalled not stilled I now feel

Away from cogent clutched display
Where all seemed to be flowing
Ahead of me

Perception now slipped abeyant
Demeaned
Concealing concept pathways
Imagery absolute pitch black

Pulsing through this mundane travailing
Muse now little felt masking itself
A griever a seeing of blank pages
Enveloping the entrusting
Severed Muse

Muse
If you are here somewhere
I now cannot channel you
Nothing now that beholds
Holds anything

Drugs cannot overthrow this
I cannot climb
On an empty bottle ladder
To release down a poetic strand
To land on my empty page

continued overleaf...

STRUGGLE *contd...*

Ah to the left of me A flick
 Then a flick again inside
 Flicking portraying disclosing
 Unknown concealed new characters
 Indiscernible spells come from them
 I cannot now facilitate them
 I scream "I have no words to describe you"
 "I cannot feel your stories"

Yet
 An unheard scratch
 Scratching
 Beyond scratching
 An itch beneath presence

My grasping fingers
 Scrawling in limbo
 Away from perceptibility
 Touching leaves
 Scribbling now with a caterpillar sac stain
 Veins lines of my descent

Something shakes me violently
 I scream

"Be as a fear"
 "As a bird"
 "Immersed in the weight of its cracking branch"
 "Falls"
 "I clap in startle"
 "Bird if I can I will catch you"

Brake!
 I stop the car
 Leaving the steel shell
 Harsh in production and movement
 Though held like I am in my lounge room

Stepping out
 Hard roadway beneath one foot
 Rubble and soil the other
 A miasma between my bracing toes

The road a shutter
 At once imposing in its hardness
 An imposition hard on nature
 Over the graves of the who and the many
 The forever unknown beings beneath this road

A wallaby
 Smashed in the path of speeding zooms
 I lay by its side
 In a puddle of drips from its snout
 Water from the watering holes
 Of its hind legs shared crowd

The graceful gaze in its dying brown eyes
 Grasses and leaves from its stomach
 Flow a deluge on the road
 Instantly the ants

Mix that last image Reader with your thoughts
 I will save the saddest bones

Ruairí de Barra is from Co. Mayo and now resides in Co. Cork. He is a sailor, an award-winning military journalist, and a poet. His creative work has featured with Tinteán, A New Ulster, Live Encounters, Bangor Literary Journal, The Ranthology Anthology, Black Bough Poetry, The Boston Globe, Boston Accent, Poetry Jukebox, The Silence Anthology and all his work can be read on <https://paperneverrefusedink.com/about/>



IN THE LOW VALLEY

In the dampness of the low valley,
all rows are remarkably dry and kept,
a handsome sty from rushy field,
brings the wandering foot,
to light upon the hard-packed earth.

Fingers intertwined,
hard grip to hold back,
a binding in the throat,
of a half remembered smokey knee,
beside the range,
memories of the exuberant release of the dark bottled gift,
illicit suck of bitter suds,
tasting the warmth of laughter.

Delicate treasures inhabit the front room,
spindled legged glass fawns mid china cups,
rich dark chocolate swirling,
drawn from the recesses of a handbag,
to mark the rare visit,
of a beloved one from across the sea.

All come flooding,
like the stream bursting from the hillside,
where misshapen trunks of ash,
guard the lost homestead,
while the blackbird rests,
black face sheep watch on in silence,
as goodbyes are said to grey headstones,
and we walk home alone.

Ruairí de Barra

ALONE

In that empty lifejacket,
adrift upon the sea,
was lost child or brother,
borne away so far,
to die alone,
reduced to a statistic,

Meaningless data thrown up,
racing endless streams of television,
infographic footnotes risk all,
carrying dreams,
daring tomorrows,
out on the waves,

Driven by the eternal motion,
as the grains all settle back,
washing final footprints from the sand,
no mother's tears will wet the shroud,
no mark left upon the earth,

Chasing midnight visions,
shining skyline of promises,
on white knuckled final journeys,
to impossible destinations,
separated in the darkness,
from ten dollars' worth of cheap foam.

21ST DAY OF SEPTEMBER

On the 21st day of September,
on the international day of peace,
conflicts rage across the planet,
people die from twenty cent Czech bullets,
five Yuan Chinese machetes,
two hundred Ruble Belorussian boots,
six hundred Dollar vigilante assault rifles,
as well as one hundred and seventy thousand dollar bombs,
a response to headlines screaming terror,
yet still poverty culls far more,
but that cannot fuel the industry,
so demagogues and war mongers,
make bellicose speeches to packed halls of expensive suits,
mostly delivered to people who don't live,
forty-five seconds of an artillery strike away.

OVER THE DECK

Twelve feet above the deck,
the smell can make you gag,
five hundred salt water soaked,
unwashed humans in forty degrees.

Make a few bad jokes to cover up your shame,
of stomach broiling from a scabies riddled teenager,
to mask your revulsion,
sunglasses will hide your guilty eyes.

Overcompensate later by giving an extra ration,
to a brown eyed child,
draped from shoulder to knee,
in a ragged adults jumper.

More than palms get calloused,
hardening hearts lead sharpening tones,
sharper still the baton strike bites,
plasticuffs for the shamed along the guardrail.

The smell lingers beneath the canopy,
seeps through the filter paper,
stains the rolls of cardboard,
brine, petrol, piss and fear.



The rip tide, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Scott Thomas Outlar lives and writes in the suburbs outside of Atlanta, Georgia. His work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. He guest-edited the 2019 and 2020 Western Voices editions of Setu Mag. Selections of his poetry have been translated into Afrikaans, Albanian, Bengali, Dutch, French, Italian, Kurdish, Persian, Serbian, and Spanish. His sixth book, *Of Sand and Sugar*, was released in 2019 through Cyberwit. His podcast, *Songs of Selah*, airs weekly on 17Numa Radio and features interviews with contemporary poets, artists, musicians, and health advocates. More about Outlar's work can be found at 17Numa.com.



FEVER

Machiavelli in a red dress
banging on stained windows

with an evil eye in her pocket
and a woe-be-all
heaving sigh
shrugging from shoulder

jumping out the side door
running with the priest class
howling with the wolves

the art of peace
tries to catch a breath
between two subtle shades
of dreaming and scheming

Scott Thomas Outlar

ON THE LEVEL

Take me back ten notes
ten years

color of almonds

when health was
uncrackably clean

One lone voice
in the park
singing a high pitch
for all to hear
her hum

probably mad
but that's fine
so are we

OF ECHOES AND EXPLOSIONS

If mourning doves
and pilot gods
bless our hearts
with promises of flight

the least we can do
is dance ecstatic
and echo the signal
with our feet

or freeze our little tails off
screaming at the sun
to come out and play

- - -

bleed it down
to the final drop

then suck it up
again

and return strong
to the narrow path

- - -

we came from the trees
or from the sea
or some earlier explosion

but all I care about is where we're headed

Sven Kretzschmar is a German poet. His poetry has been published widely in Europe and overseas, among other outlets with *Poetry Jukebox in Belfast*, in *Writing Home*. The 'New Irish' Poets (Dedalus Press, 2019) and *Voices 2020* (Cold River Press). He was shortlisted for several awards and competitions. Further work is forthcoming in *100 Words of Solitude* (Rare Swan Press, 2020), *Ireland Chair of Poetry Anthology* (UCD Press, tba), *Loch Raven Review*, *Drawn to the Light Press* and others.



SALTWATER

visiting Dun Aengus

Spray blown onto your face from the roaring Atlantic
finds its way down your cheek – a teardrop.
Childlike gaze toward stonewall and your father's heavy hand
on your shoulder; no getting lost between tourists here.

Discovering old ringforts carries romantic dreams of ancient
warriors, free men clad in fur and leather, of victorious
raids, heroic escapes, of days born
out of possibility, determined only by waves and wind.

Later, all warriors gone, you claim in the safe harbour
of a dry, windless car all the saltwater was brought to you
by gales from the past, which had it appear as if a strong boy,
a free man cried.

Sven Kretzschmar

RIVER VOYAGE

for Jasmin, after her 31st birthday

Distortion of current under surface,
breaking waves form splashing curls: a wild
rhapsody moves through a narrow streambed,

moss-lined, falls over rocks abraded by time
and drop by drop, into wider waters,
into rivers carrying it toward Atlantic sea.

Out of softwood forests half-hid in fog,
a torrent strips its bed off gravel
and flint, fir needles and dead insects

that boarded small leaf ferries. Those white
serpent waters, surreal though they are,
I'd navigate with you to the Beara shorelines.

Out to sea, past the old bridge near Lauragh,
carried by winds on a manifold of foliage
not yet landed in Kilmakilloge Harbour.

WHERE A WOODLAND PATH BURSTS

Nature has provided pale paint for
briar hedges, thorns, birch trees,
harvested fields along the ravine.
I stop where a woodland path bursts

into the open, pieces of bark thrown
in my way by nightly escapades
of wild boars, and devour this painting

framed with approaching fog
announcing a halt to the passionate season,

and the beginning of colder days.

PREMATURELY

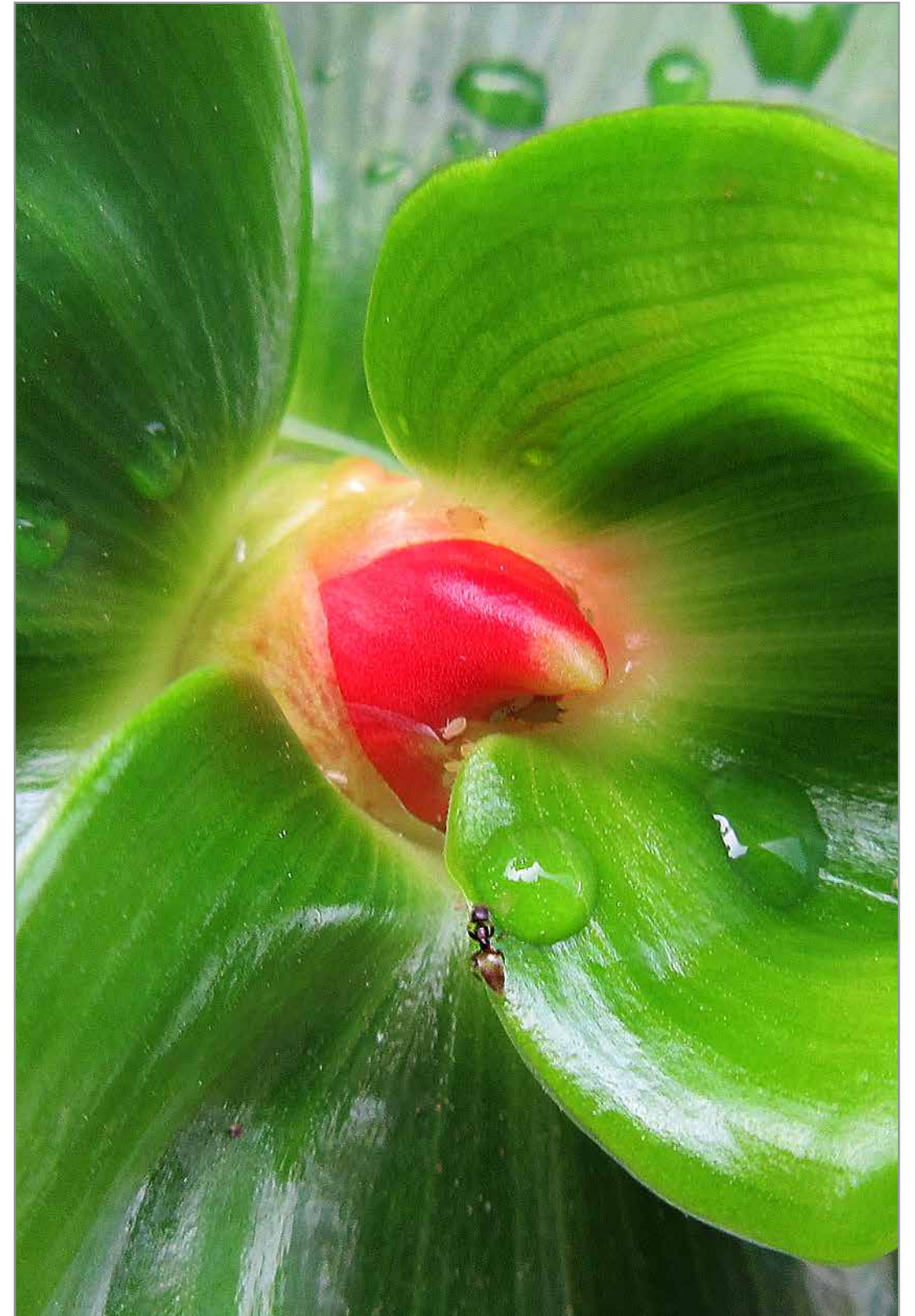
The lushness of undisturbed moss
at the edge of a faded flowerbed,
heavy-wet rustling of brown leaves
swept under withered roses and hawthorn,

the inert beauty in the pattern of grey
and yellow lichen wrapped around lilac
twigs in my grandmother's garden
can only for a short moment distract

and take my attention away
from buds showing, prematurely,
when autumn rushes towards exit gate,
when, as a child, I would welcome the thought

of winter-cold fields and a well-heated parlour.
Now, preparing the garden for a new season,
I find no welcome but worry in the thought
of buds announcing the return of spring

in December.



Bud of the Ginger flower, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Tim Cumming's collections include *The Miniature Estate* (1991), *Apocalypso* (1992, 1999), *Contact Print* (2002), *The Rumour* (2004), *The Rapture* (2011) *Etruscan Miniatures* (2012), *Rebel Angels in the Mind Shop* (2015) and *Knuckle* (2019), chosen as one of the books of the year by *The Irish Times*. His work has appeared in numerous anthologies, including *The Forward's Poems of the Decade*, the WS Graham anthology, *The Caught Habits of Language* and Bloodaxe Books' anthology of poetry from Ireland and the British Isles, *Identity Parade*. He made the BBC4 documentary *Hawkwind: Do Not Panic* in 2007, and has shown his film poems at cinemas and festivals worldwide. He writes regularly about music and the arts and his paintings have been exhibited at Slader's Yard in Dorset and the Rowley Gallery in west London. They can be seen at <https://timcumming.wordpress.com/>



CHANCERY LANE WORKING

How to describe the lineaments of the temple? Some working conditions are worth preserving in their own formaldehyde. There's an alchemist's laboratory in a castle to a town about 80 kilometres from Prague, fully stocked with the glassware and hardware of the cunning man. In Hammersmith stands the last surviving temple of the Order of the Golden Dawn, where Aleister Crowley, in a black mask and disporting himself in kilt and cloak, engaged in magical battle with WB Yeats over control of the workplace. Police were called to disperse the combatants.

I'd arranged a rendezvous for 11 one weekday morning on the corner of Chancery Lane and High Holborn. I stood there with a writer friend. The late Victorian block was in the process of demolition. Only the distinguished façade would stay standing, everything else ripped and stripped from the rear, as if they were the soft organs of a delinquent pharaoh, the exterior prepared for mummification.

But at that time, though derelict, the inside remained intact, if gouged. Stairs, walls, floors, the last remaining decorative metalwork that hadn't been hauled away to architectural salvage. Panels had been ripped away, some stairs were without cases, floors gaped open to lower levels. A young site foreman in a yellow jacket and hard hat emerged from his hut at the top of a flight of temporary steps. My friend Tom had made the appointment. Demolition engines were parked around the front and rear of the block.

'You're in luck,' said the foreman, when he hit ground level. We didn't shake hands. He nodded his head. 'We begin today.'

'How long have we got?' Tom frowned at his new smartphone. It was 11am.

'Begins at two. You have 45 minutes.' He looked at his watch. 'I'm coming with you.'

Tim Cumming

He walked up the steps into what had once been the main entrance and grand hall, a wide, elegantly if pompously proportioned staircase spiralling to higher levels. We knew the room we wanted was on that higher level. We began climbing the stairs.

‘Think it’s the third floor,’ said Tom.

‘What is it you came to see?’

I stopped on the first landing, looked down. ‘Know about Crowley?’

‘Crowley?’

‘Aleister Crowley?’

The foreman was young and looked at us with an untroubled smile. He shook his hand. He had not heard, no. Was he a DJ?

‘Lived here at the turn of the 1900s,’ I said. ‘We think it was,’ – I pointed upwards – ‘the third floor.’

‘Kept a kind of temple there,’ said Tom. ‘A room lined with mirrors.’

We’d climbed to the second storey, pausing for breath and continuing to the third. ‘You know,’ I said, looking back, ‘he was called the wickedest man in the world?’

The foreman came up behind us, glanced queerly and shouldered ahead. We took a corridor along the third floor and stepped into the opening to a large set of rooms. ‘He called himself Little Sunshine.’ I had a flash of Kubrick’s Overlook Hotel, the light hitting all the right angles. ‘Kept a skeleton in the cupboard and fed birds to it.’

Tom was staring around, holding up his phone to take pictures. “Dead birds,” he said loudly, maybe too loudly. We moved in to one of the smaller rooms. Tom’s voice echoing in the chamber: ‘One of his most important magical rituals took place here.’ It was like hearing a voiceover. His face was flush with excitement. ‘We are standing,’ he announced, ‘in the Black Temple.’

We looked at each other, and then at the foreman but something about the foreman had changed. I was surprised at first. The untroubled youthfulness had left him. I mean, absolutely. His face had gone completely white. He looked at us almost in fear. At about the same time, a great sheet of sunlight crashed through the window behind us. And people tell me it’s not a magical universe.

The foreman spoke in a stiff, grating voice. Our visit was clearly coming to an end. ‘We found a human skull in the basement this morning,’ he said. He gave us the hard stare, as if we were quarry. There was more. ‘Seven candles set around it. They were alight when we arrived.’ Did we know anything about this? I saw the Adam’s apple move in his throat. A skull and seven candles, and if it wasn’t us, then who? We were in what we guessed were Crowley’s inner apartments, raising dust into the sunlight. Tom took more phone snaps. ‘Incredible,’ I said. ‘Did you find out who did it?’

We heard a shout from below, the sound of demolition men moving about.

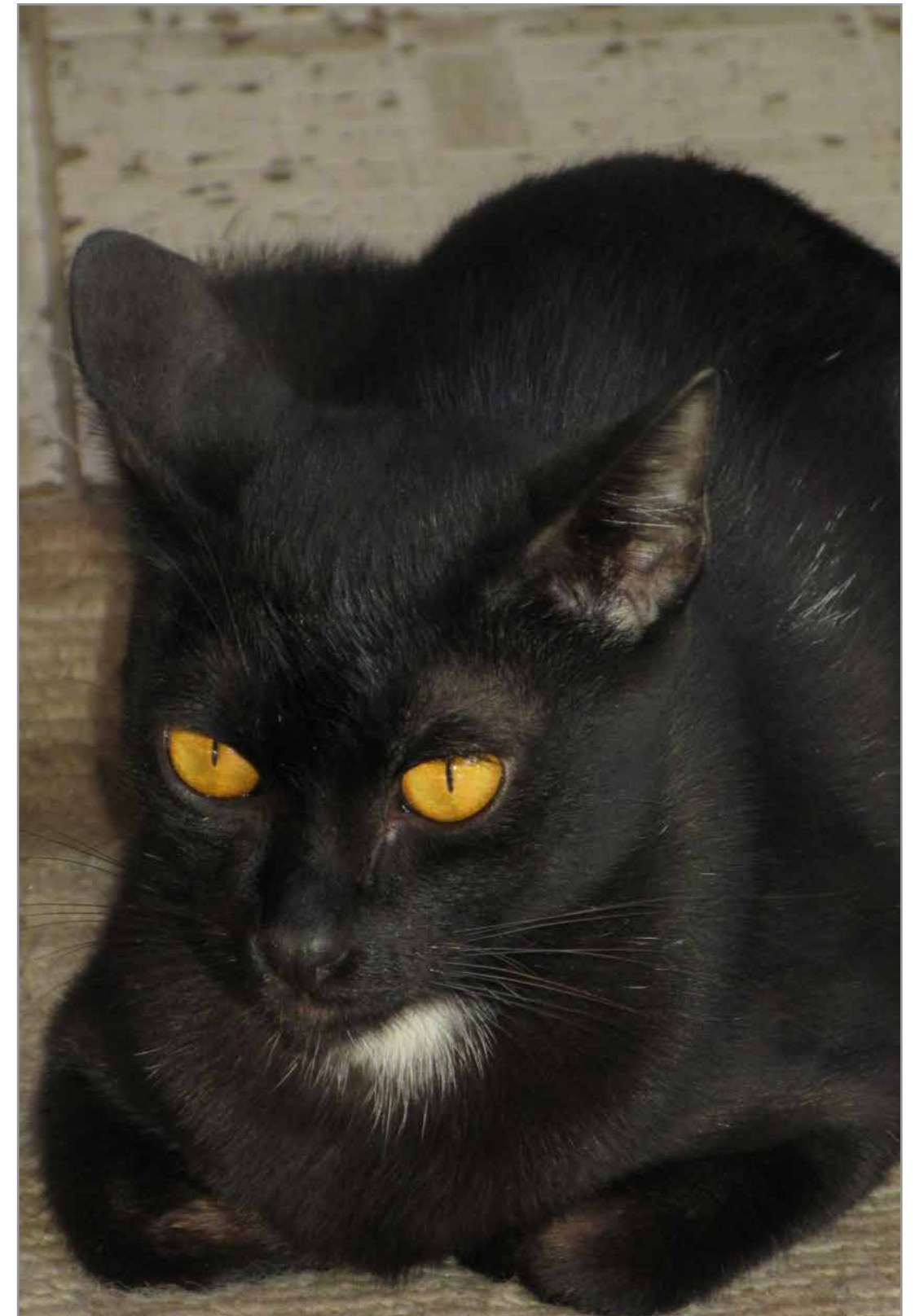
That morning, the foreman said, a nightwatchman had been suspended. The skull and candles had been removed. There was nothing more to see. He gave us a hard look. ‘You’ll have to leave. You’ll have to leave *now*.’ He turned around, not looking back at us as we followed him down the three flights of stairs to the basement. Birds blood and magic mirrors. Crowley had sailed from here for Cairo, where his young wife would channel the voice of Horus in the Belbaak Museum, and Crowley would write it all down and make a movement of it. Among his later followers was a young Californian named Jack Parsons who devised rocket fuel for the Apollo missions. He blew himself up mucking around with an explosive mix in his back yard and left his widow, Margaret Cameron, to continue the great work in Laurel Canyon, home to seventies soft rock. She became den mother to all those hippies. The woman is the Eagles’ Hotel California, that’s her. ‘You can never leave.’

The basement of Crowley’s Chancery Lane apartments spanned the whole block and was painted in earth colours, the red ochre archaeologists identify as the first human pigment, found in shells in the Bombo caves of South Africa. It felt musty and oppressive. I imagined the procession of mirrors when Crowley left the apartments in 1904. We saw the little blobs of candle wax where they had burnt in a circle on the floor. No, said the foreman, it wasn’t a real skull. But whoever put it there had serious intentions. Then we were back outside, standing on the front steps, the demolition crew stomping around us in hard hats and yellow jackets.

'Look at this picture,' said Tom; it was of the third floor room we'd realised were Crowley's. Great beams of light through the sash forged a weird figure from the world of otherness. An event in aethyr. The foreman left without a word. At the top of the steps, opening the door to his cabin, I saw him look back and down at us, his face twisted with hate.

Tom placed a story and the photo of the strange shape of light in *Time Out*. The foreman, he learnt through some channel or other, soon lost his job. Following the affair of the skull and the candles, security was tightened. Certainly no access for pedestrians, civilian writers with strange stories to tell.

We hit the Underground, where some kind of emergency was going on. People were coming out of the gates, but not going in. 'Will Inspector Sands report to the operations room immediately.' I thought of the skeleton, dripping with the blood of songbirds. And then the demolition began.



Cat in Laos, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Tim Dwyer's chapbook is *Smithy Of Our Longings* (Lapwing Publications). A previous contributor to Live Encounters, his poems have appeared in Cyphers, Orbis and Poetry Ireland Review among other journals. He recently moved from the U.S. and now makes his home in Bangor, Northern Ireland.



Tim Dwyer

SAILING BACK

After the war, he finally accepts
his brother will come into the farm.
On the Galway Road,
he labours with pick and shovel
for a ticket to New York Harbor.
There, he is a farmer
riding the subway,
ploughing through crowds
to a job in the South Bronx,
a half-life across two centuries.

*

Released from the walls of Tuam,
her baby never seen again,
she will be a servant in Dun Laoighaire
for the next seven years.
Cooking for a doctor's family
is a comfort and a grief—
the children of the house laughing upstairs,
the bottle hidden in the kitchen below.

One day, the doctor books her passage—
to sail away from the secret wound
she will carry to her death.

*

I carry it still.
Growing up neither here nor there,
ocean waves ebb and flow,
my life emerges, recedes,
emerges yet again.

The experiment in America
has come to an end.
My passage is booked,
I am sailing back.

THANKFULLY, NO QUARANTINE LETTER

Ballyholme Bay, 3 April 2020

arrived in the post today.
Flush of northern wind
enlivens the trees
on my way to the shore.

A skein of brants
lands in the mudflats—
I hope they will stay
until the viral eclipse.

I write on weathered paper,
texture of vellum.
On this strand, a 9th century monk
hears a blackbird sing.

I lean back on the pulsing wind.
Long ago, this gust
carried the voice of God.

*

Ballyholme Bay, 20 April 2020

Missing for a week,
the brants have left on their flight
to nest in Greenland.

I LIE AWAKE UNTIL THE BLACKBIRD

begins to sing.
This could be a sky
painted by a young artist,

she covers the canvas
with watercolour blue,
feathers in cirrus clouds
and a herring gull
eternally in flight.

My shy confession:
this morning I wish
to be part of the sky,
ever changing, always there

DAY OF THE EPIPHANY

Walking East this time of day,
my shadow stretches
over the incoming waves.
A toddler squeals in joyful fear,
knee deep in the foamy sea.

A golden spaniel greets me,
nuzzles my hand, believes
my notebook is a stick
for me to throw
and for him to fetch.

The white-haired sisters,
who call me writing man,
wave as they venture into the lough
for their first swim of this new year.

Keeps us forever young, they say,
as they take the icy plunge.



Sea shell on a pavement, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Recipient of fellowships and grants from The Rockefeller Foundation, Ireland Literature Exchange, Trubar Foundation, Slovenia, The Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature and The Foundation for the Production and Translation of Dutch Literature, Yuyutsu Sharma is a world renowned Himalayan poet and translator. He has published ten poetry collections including, *The Second Buddha Walk*, *A Blizzard in my Bones: New York Poems*, *Quaking Cantos: Nepal Earthquake Poems*, *Nepal Trilogy*, *Space Cake*, *Amsterdam* and *Annapurna Poems*. Three books of his poetry, *Poemes de l' Himalayas*, *Poemas de Los Himalayas* and *Jezero Fewa & Konj* have appeared in French, Spanish and Slovenian respectively. Half the year, he travels and reads all over the world and conducts Creative Writing workshops at various universities in North America and Europe but goes trekking in the Himalayas when back home. Currently, Yuyutsu Sharma is a visiting poet at Columbia University and edits, *Pratik: A Quarterly Magazine of Contemporary Writing*.

From my work-in-progress, *In God's Messy Workplace: The 2020 Poems*

NAMING

It's not good to name
such a being,
utter its presence aloud
or refer to its current avatar
raging in the veins
of the globe tonight.

Or to name
any of the 'lower' species,
as my mother
would have admonished me
in her fractured voice
in my in the early hours
of my childhood.

Name it and next moment
you would see it at your door
tossed back from the hills
hungering for its share of gloom.

It's inauspicious
to utter its name,
the very first thing
in the morning.

'What's it called, Jhai?'
I ask aloud, curious.
She places her slender
fingers on my lips
to hush me up...



Yuyutsu Sharma

continued overleaf...

© Yuyutsu Sharma

NAMING *contd...*

I see a hairy creature
scuttling in our backyard,
Nangal Township,
my father's hillside town,
crystal airs of the verdant valley
filling my morning lungs.

'You can't utter its name,
not early in the morning,
you could say --
Hanumanji or Pawanputra,
son of the winds,
something sacred,
a Yeti thing that comes
along your mind
but never ever
utter its real name.'

I got it all, the monkey that
came every morning to eat guavas
in our garden was Hanumana.
It's the naming that
mattered the most,
especially in the beginning of a day.

It's the naming that made us
sweat through the dark holes
to discover the round emptiness
from his large earlobes of wisdom.

Naming them is tempting
them into our world,
naming things
made all the difference
and on top of it,
naming them aloud
mattered all the more.

SMELLS

Days breed
along human hair.

Buzzards move noisily
over tin-roofed kitchen.

Beasts crawl
into the streets of my city.

Mornings move along
the dying light and dissolve

into empty bleak nights
that flush out a rancid daylight,

troublesome to a human soul.

One house, five rooms,
one roof

no roots snarl
out of the inner yards

slim serpents come out
from the discarded lodges

rotting out of a longing
for an arrival of their ultimate owner.

Bodies drenched
in the smells

dankier than the stench
that reek out of the city's

endangered zoos.

MY MISGIVINGS

Mother's day
I don't have anything
to post on my wall today.
I see them debating
forgotten frontiers of humanity's walk.
Lysol, Liberty, Languages
Lighting lamps, banging plates
pranks to raise demons
from their secret dungeons.

Mother's day.
I don't have anything
to post today.
Only shady sketch
of my loud betrayals
slowly eating the innards
of my fast fading body
where the Lord rests,
keeping a vigorous
record of my misgivings

GRASSES

I sit on the rooftop
and watch snow peaks

appear out of
a swarm of clouds,

a revolution,
a view of glistening world

ancient enough
to make me forget

the insults the spring
has suffered this year

in my beloved cities.

I turn to the canyons
across the neighboring hill ranges

drowned in mists
to reach the mule paths

that would make me alive
and burn the grasses

of my life's guilt.



Burning field, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

2010 - 2020



POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
VOLUME TWO DECEMBER 2020



COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE