

2010 - 2020



Live encounters

BOOKS - REVIEWS

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

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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It is only in *quietness* that true passion can exist to create life sustaining memories. In the *quietness* of reading books we inhabit memories of other worlds, worlds beyond the doors of *our* Time.

Books are here to guide us on our journey through these doors. And writers and poets are here to create these books for us.

Let us be thankful and buy books to read and share with the world.

– Mark Ulyseas

ANNA FOSTER / DENISE O'HAGAN
EILEEN CASEY / LYNDIA TAVAKOLI
BRIAN KIRK / DARAGH BRADISH
SINÉAD MCCLURE / TERRY MCDONAGH



Denise was born in Rome and lives in Sydney. She has a background in commercial book publishing, and worked as an editor for Collins, Heinemann, Routledge and Cambridge University Press, and was consulting editor for the State Library of NSW. In 2015 she set up her own imprint, Black Quill Press, through which she assists authors wishing to publish independently. Her *Mini Style Guide* (2018) is an easy-to-use guide for writers and editors across all genres. Denise is also Poetry Editor for Australia/New Zealand for Irish literary journal *The Blue Nib*. Her poetry is widely published and awarded. *The Beating Heart* is her debut poetry collection (Ginninderra Press 2020).

Websites: <https://denise-ohagan.com/>, <https://blackquillpress.com/>

Weblinks to purchase *The Beating Heart*: <https://denise-ohagan.com/the-beating-heart/>



Anna Foster is based in Kent, UK, and runs the leading life-story writing and local history publishing company, YouByYou Books. A former journalist, she has written for *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times* and was the launch business editor of *The European*. She founded YouByYou Books in 2003 to assist clients to record their memories. She also publishes local histories, and works with local history societies to create oral and written memoirs. Her book *Your Life: An Introductory Guide to Writing Life Stories* (2005) includes case histories of life stories and collective memoirs as well as step-by-step practical help in getting started with writing your own life story. She wrote her first biography on a third-generation, family printing firm in Leeds while studying for her Masters in Publishing Studies, which instilled in her a love of combining the written word with professional book production and printing. Website: www.youbyyou.co.uk
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/YouByYou>



<https://denise-ohagan.com/the-beating-heart/>

ANNA FOSTER Review of DENISE O'HAGAN'S *The Beating Heart*

While some of O'Hagan's poems were written years ago and have only now been brought together in a single volume, many of the truths they tell could only be felt and understood with the experience of age. So, *The Beating Heart* doesn't read like a first collection, which makes it all the more remarkable.

We travel through the last century from a poem about the poet's grandmother, who dies tragically young and which is based on a photograph reproduced next to the poem, to another about the poet's teenage son having cardiac surgery in Boston, Massachusetts and the strength that she draws from a visit to Boston's Museum of Fine Arts and a painting by Vermeer.

First the grandmother, 'Recalling Sarah': this young woman is pictured as 'a softly sepia'd twenty year old' in New Zealand in 1920, poised and expectant about her life ahead, yet at the age of 32 she passed away from pulmonary tuberculosis. Her young son (O'Hagan's father), is brought to see her before she dies, and it is this memory that never leaves him:

*'I think
He never stopped missing you
And the missingness
Was passed down, and down.*

*And so your photo
Still sits in front of me
A haunting, present absence.'*

A grandmother never known, a mother barely known – time cannot heal the loss, but through the photograph the poet is able to reach out and gather together the young life, the son's farewell, and her own sense of 'missing'.

Turning to 'Vermeer in Boston', this poem is set in 2015 when O'Hagan travelled from Australia to Boston with her poorly son. While he is in the operating theatre, she finds herself in front of Vermeer's *A Lady Writing*:

*'My thoughts haywire, clinging
To another imagined room a mere walk away
Where a team of specialists
Pored over our son
Whose opened chest
Was spread like a canvas
For the surgeons to splatter and daub
And create another version
Of his deformed and failing heart:
Their masterpiece.'*

In one room, saving a life and in another, observing a life. 'I met her painted gaze, unflinching,' writes the poet about the portrait and, as she waits eleven long hours for the call to tell her that her son is in recovery, 'I didn't feel alone'. Months later, she sees the portrait in a catalogue:

*'And in one moment
I was back in Boston with her.
Waiting.'*

These two poems, each based on a picture of a young woman (one real, one imaginary), allow O'Hagan to explore universal feelings of loss and anxiety. Yet a stillness brings each poem to a conclusion; the emotional response has been expressed, without sentimentality.

Perhaps it's her work as a book editor that gives her such understanding of language. She knows when to hold back with a restrained phrase and when to dramatise emotions with a full-blooded description.

An editor is always refining and honing the words of others, and the craft of writing is the subject of several poems. 'The beating heart', after which the collection is named, takes us back to the poet's childhood, where her mother types furiously at the kitchen table with 'pure energy', while her father writes about 'third-world food shortages' in the 'calmer, more cloistered atmosphere' of the study. The poet's love of words is born:

*'I was ever wrapped in words, and
Rapt in the worlds they made.'*

The poet's parents opened the eyes of the child to the creative life. This fascination with metapoetry is revisited in 'A glut of words', where signs, labels and shopfronts bombard the poet every day, and yet where 'passed over or forgotten words' also exist, in lovers' notes thrown away or 'scrawled on beggars' placards'. 'Must it be like this?' she asks. To the poet:

*'Words should be held like little gems
Precious-like
In the soft cup of a child's hand
And picked out tenderly, one by one...'*

In O'Hagan's hands, the words are indeed picked out tenderly, and never more so than when she is looking back at her own childhood in Rome. She gives a backwards glance at images and events from years ago and refreshes those memories with an adult understanding.

It could be the taste of pine nuts in 'Pine nuts at lunchtime' which she recalls on a casual visit to a supermarket in Sydney. She and her schoolfriends used to run and hide 'under the umbrella pines' until they sat down and:

*'We knew how to spot them then
Those slight charcoal-coloured oblongs
Of pine nuts nestled in the grooves of crazy paving
Like they had ben dipped in ash.'*

Yet, 'the pale, delicate-tasting flesh inside/fresh to the world,' is so different to the modern, packaged import on the supermarket shelf now in front of her. The imagery is sensory and, like so many experiences in the poems, relatable: be it tastes, smells, forgotten treasures or photographs. We recognise first the authenticity of the poet's response and then it pulls us in too.

The stone and marble of ancient Rome witnessed a thousand tales; and the writer knows that both stone and story will outlast her and future generations of writers. Rome is where her memories were formed, and she doesn't want them disturbed. In 'I don't want to go back' she writes that she has no desire to return as a tourist, 'Brushing shoulders/with ghosts of family and friends.' Her memories are:

*'... so carefully displayed
In the cabinet of my mind
Selected, positioned,
And polished to a gleam.'*

Yet those memories constantly jump out of the museum cabinet, giving her new insights into life today that she shares with the reader, conveying the continuity of time. This is a joyous collection from the heart: a life story in poems.

LYNDA TAVAKOLI

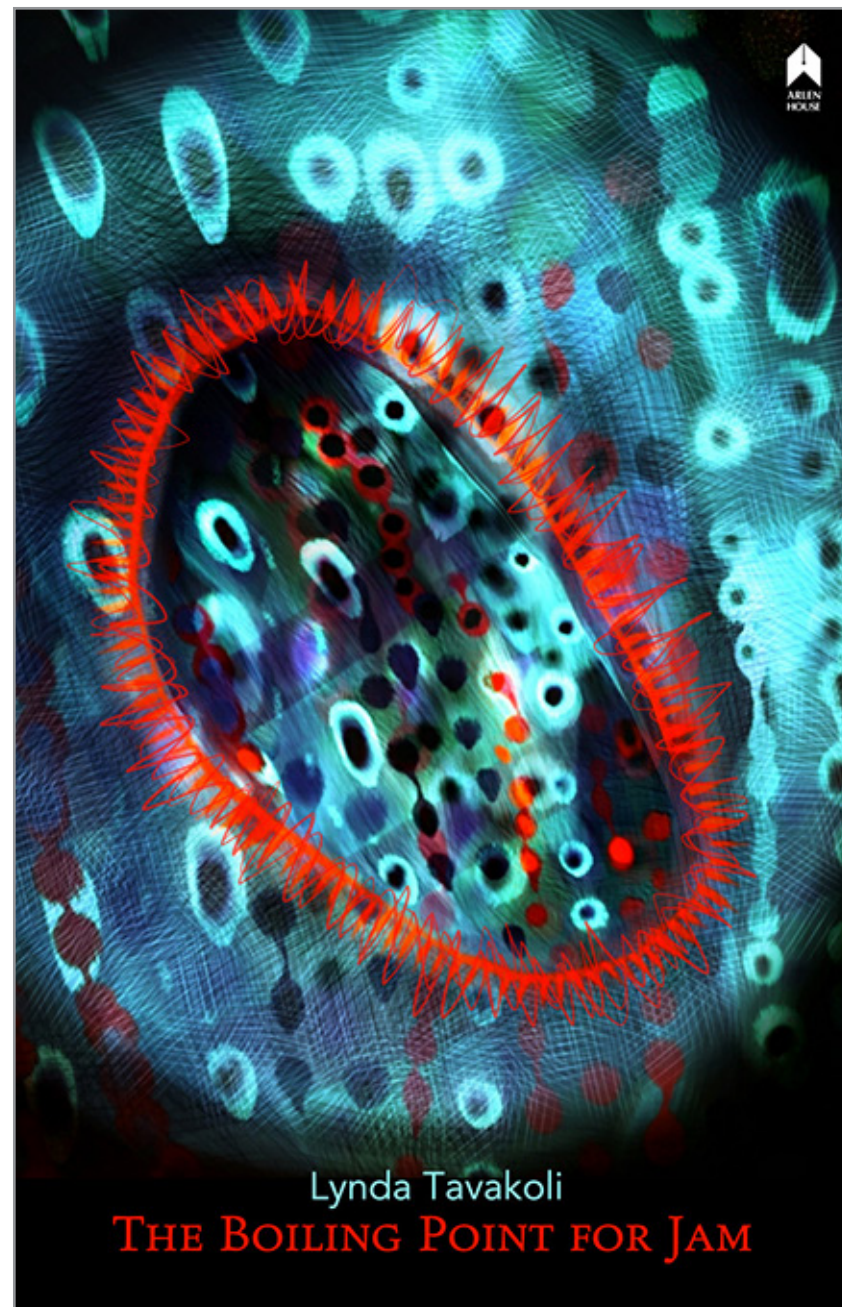


Lynda Tavakoli lives in County Down, Northern Ireland, where she facilitates an adult creative writing class and is a tutor for the Seamus Heaney Awards for schools. A poet, fiction writer and freelance journalist, Lynda's writings have been widely published in the UK, Ireland, the US and the Middle East. She is a contributing writer for The Belfast Telegraph and Slugger O'Toole and her work has been broadcast on BBC Radio and RTE. Lynda has been winner of both poetry and short story prizes in Listowel, the Westival International Poetry Prize and runner-up in The Blackwater International Poetry Competition and Roscommon Poetry Competition. Her poems have been published in The Irish Times and translated into Farsi for a Persian audience. Lynda is a recent recipient of an Individuals Emergency Resilience Grant from The Arts Council of Northern Ireland. *The Boiling Point for Jam* (Arlen House) is her debut poetry collection.

EILEEN CASEY



Eileen Casey's poetry, prose and short fiction collections are published by Arlen House, New Island and AltenTs (Rua Red Gallery). Work features in anthologies by Dedalus, Faber & Faber, New Island, Gandon Editions, The Stinging Fly, The Nordic Irish Studies Journal, among others. A Hennessy Award Winner (short fiction), she is a recipient of a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Poetry Fellowship. *Berries for Singing Birds* (Arlen House, 2019) is her fifth poetry collection. In 2020 she received support from Creative Ireland/Offaly Arts together with an Arts Council Bursary. Her small press, Fiery Arrow, publishes community based anthologies and individual collections. Currently one of three mentees with Filmmaker Helen Flanagan, she is also writing songs in collaboration with her son.



EILEEN CASEY Review of LYNDA TAVAKOLI'S *The Boiling Point for Jam*

https://www.bookdepository.com/Boiling-Point-for-Jam-Lynda-Tavakoli/9781851322497?ref=pd_detail_1_sims_b_v2v_1

Cover artwork by Emma Barone

Debuts are often likely to contain father/mother poems, sibling relationships, rites and rituals of growing up. Such poetic trove is indeed mined here. Yet, Tavakoli's ability to occupy fragile spaces with a muscular, sometimes visceral presence, renders the deeply personal universal, often with startling clarity. Life, love and loss may be well trammelled poetic tropes but through the prism of a keen eye and a commitment to language, the familiar translates into powerful epiphanies.

The opening poem begins with the tensions of 'post-war austerity brooding/on strained shelves' (*Kitchen Comforts*), a world where nothing went to waste 'not even the birdsong/wakening her at dawn/that somehow hummed upon her lips/for the remainder of the day.' *Kitchen Comforts* is a microcosm of what the reader can expect from poems where every word earns its keep, even tiniest details permeates emotional temperature. As in a description of jam-making; 'She adds sugar to the softened fruit,/stirs until its coarseness fuses the pulp,' (*The Boiling Point for Jam*).

Tavakoli's mixed race marriage shows an awareness of more global tensions and paradoxes. In lines such as 'Here on this Tehran Street,/Khomeini Street,/the black crows/softly trip the light fandango' (*Backward Glancing on a Tehran Street*). In Calling, 'Strange too, how a church bell/peals in lingered space,/filling gaps between/the foreignness of each refrain'. With finely tuned sensibility, the poet succeeds in creating fresh awareness; 'And there will be the scullery of coldness and oldness/and nothing much besides' (*Lily's Place*), 'sunbeams stroke from Velux windows/onto freckled carpets,' (*Is This What I do*), 'staring over heron stacks/that shock like bizarre haircuts/in the shallows,' 'a starved mouth of spitted teeth/spilling like sawdust onto the garage floor,' (*Bow Saw*) are but a few examples among so many.

There are a number of poems which illuminate vulnerable threads binding mother and daughter in the closing stages of an illness such as Alzheimers. With searing precision, Tavakoli captures the awful absence of memory, its storehouse emptying into repetition; 'Today we talk of blue dresses and funerals/and how you love my coat, and how/you love my coat,' (*Is This What I Do?*). Visiting a care home reveals further such repetitions via a much requested song; 'Will you not sing Carrickfergus for us?/as though the song had been already/chewed up, regurgitated/and made ready for repeat'. (*What We Waste*). There are softer truths here.

Watermark, i.m. Seamus Heaney shows the poet's sensitive handling of Heaney's legacy, his themes and the inevitable sense of grief at his passing; 'as the imprint of your watermark endures -/remembered, loved and missed,/for us; the lover's stamp, your final kiss'. *Watermark*, together with *You're Beautiful* are inspirational anthems for anyone who's experienced loss; 'say it even if the one/you say it to/wounds with their indifference/say it out loud/like a poem learned at school -/it will live in you afterwards' or 'When the sky cries/open up your face to it/and smell the rain' (*Petrichor*).

Throughout the collection are many award winning poems, among them, *The Big Freeze*, the poem that won the prestigious Westival International Poetry Competition, 2018. The poet's connection with nature, her ability to blend landscape into character, to illuminate the lives of two sisters found together 'limbs stretched like starched shirts/abandoned on a washing line,/fingers, stalactostalagmites of frozen touch.' The poet's realisation that nature is our consoler and comforter when language itself is no longer possible is conveyed with poignant grace; 'as one by one they picked words from the earth/and rested them upon the other's mouth/like a coming melt of snow' (*The Big Freeze*).

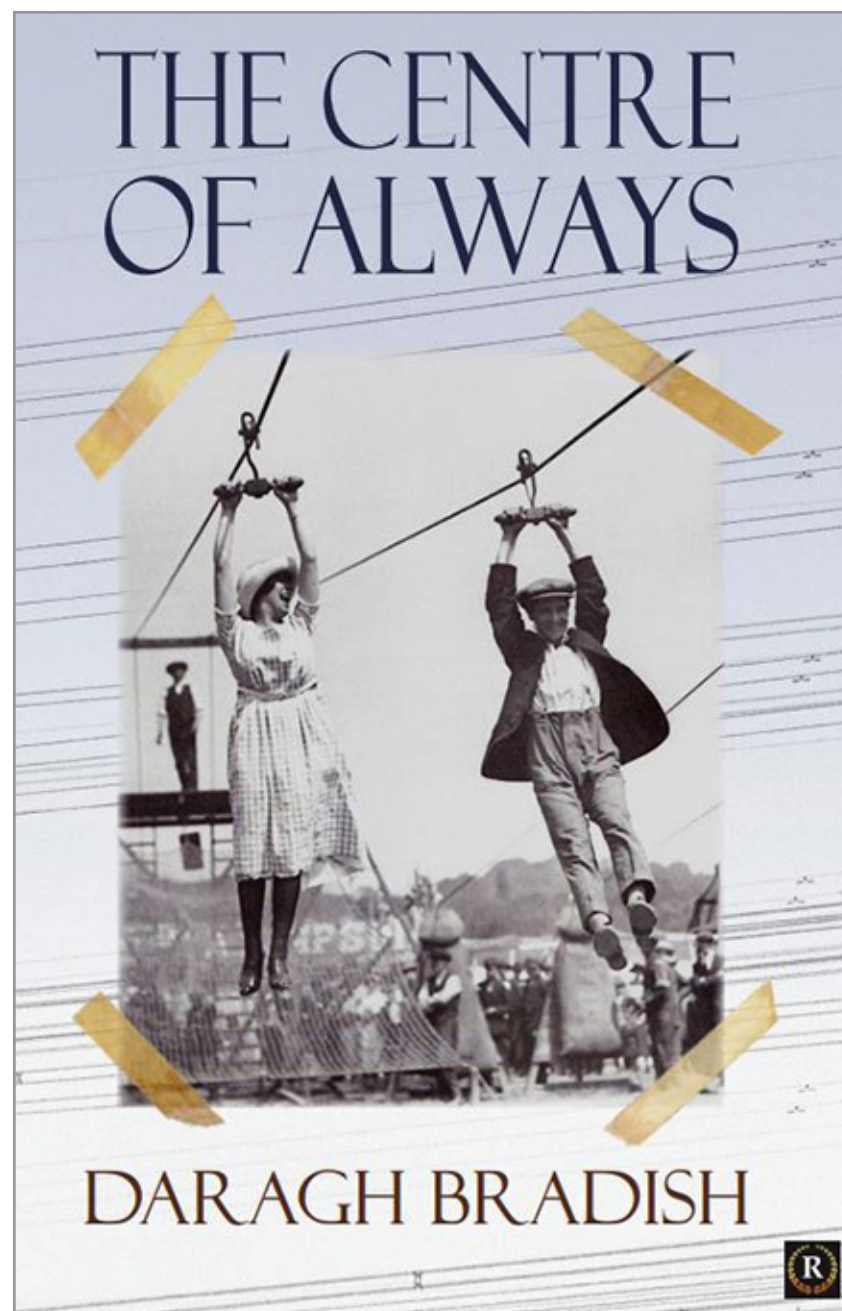
The Boiling Point For Jam is a welcome addition to the impressive catalogue of Arlen House. Few debuts say it as well as Tavakoli. Already an accomplished novelist and prose writer, this collection seals her reputation as a poet.



Daragh Bradish's poetry has appeared in literary journals such as the Moth, Cránnog, Poetry Salzburg Review, the French Literary Review, Acumen, Orbis, the North, and Irish Times. His first collection 'Easter in March' was published by Liberties Press in 2016 and was reviewed in Poetry Salzburg and the Galway Review among other journals. In 2018 his poem 'Disclosure' won the Poetry Ireland Trócaire prize, published poet category. From 2010 he coordinated the 'Sounding for Simon' readings in Dublin. His second collection 'The Centre of Always' was published in December 2020. To mark the occasion Daragh made a short video which can be viewed on you tube.



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.



<https://limerickwriterscentre.com/product/the-centre-of-always/>

BRIAN KIRK Review of DARAGH BRADISH'S *The Centre Of Always*

The first thing to take note of here is the striking cover image, a black and white photograph of a man and woman snapped by the camera half-way along a zip wire. In the background crowds look on, but what is of real interest is the faces of the pair, the absolute joy and abandon they express and embody as they fly through the air.

In the first poem *Towards Morning Light* the poet addresses uncertainties and prods at possibility: 'Answer the question, / or begin to write it down', the poem begins. There is that sense of taking the plunge, of stepping off from solid ground into the unknown. In *Sometimes The Earth* we have that feeling of uncertainty again, the juxtaposition of the childish and adult perception of the world:

*'Sometimes the earth trembles and we do not
feel it, but our mothers do
and order us outside while we linger,
waiting in night slippers.'*

The idea of the moment trapped in time persists as we read on. In *Afterimage / Oblivious Of The Birds* the poet captures the ekphrastic moment when the photographer snaps a group outing at the Cliffs of Moher in 1910:

*'The snap man called the shot.
One shutter slap
generations after seeing...'*

Photography has the power to preserve moments in time allowing the viewer to work back and forwards from that moment to rebuild a fuller picture of the life. Here poetry helps us to do this in a more comprehensive way than the static nature of the visual image can. Poetry is both in and out-side of time and for this reason we are not simply limited to a snapshot, but we are actually taken back to there and then.

The three-line stanzas of *Wild Atlantic Ways* give us haiku-esque glimpses of a touring group along the west coast of Ireland. Taken together they create a narrative poem of of subtle humour and striking imagery: ‘You need to bolt your / cap on cousin / for it might soar’.

Throughout the collection the poet engages with poets and writers from the past, but this does nothing to undermine the contemporary relevance of the poems. Time may divide us from them, but it also connects us (if we might paraphrase Simone Weil’s idea of Metaxu).

The sequence on Pasternak is very effective and affecting. It begins with a poem (*Pasternak At Kobulety*) based on an account of another poet, Simon Chikovani, who lived in the room above Pasternak while he wrote his poem *Waves*. As in *Wild Atlantic Ways* we are reminded of the connectedness of things. In the poem *Witness*, Bradish brilliantly captures Pasternak at work, seated at his desk by the window, the blank page before him waiting to accept his words. The effect of looking through many windows actual and metaphorical is neatly evoked as the poet’s eyes stray from the natural world outside to the world of the imagination.

In the second half of the collection Mary Shelley becomes the focus for a sequence of poems, some of which are told in her voice and deal in different ways with death and life and the idea of reanimation of dead matter. Five of these poems are nine-line formal pieces which rhyme in an outward fashion from the non-rhyming central fifth line. These poems are very well controlled and powerful, and the demands of the form give a further weight to this dark material. In *Her Other Dream* the poet writes of Shelley’s dream of her dead child coming back to life:

‘She hears a cry, the infant lip
no longer purple, her tiny hands grown warm,
a moment’s miracle, a Bethlehem.’

In *Large As Life* the monster makes an appearance. He is ‘what nature never dreamt of or begat.’ It seems to me that the pivotal poem in the collection is *Surviving Mary Shelley*. This short twelve-line poem, which appears almost at the half-way point, somehow manages to embody all of the ideas examined in the collection. There is an Nietzschean striving for all that is good and positive in life in the poem:

‘It is the forward leap that sows.
Belief in landing is the second thing
and not the first that captures
man’s prime need for reckless joy.’

Ah, reckless joy. We’re back with the couple on the cover on the zipwire.

In a later poem *Camp Joffre Detention Centre* the idea of reinvigorating the dead is revisited. What starts as a grim description of the abandoned camp and its history of inhumanity ends somehow with a cry for renewal: ‘We must await the countless to arise, / exhale and stumble to Jerusalem.’ The poems move to consider those who have come before us. These poems, such as *In Spirit And In Truth*, *Cup Candles* and *Harbour Moon*, while they look backwards by necessity, are also very much rooted in the now. In *In Spirit And In Truth*, Bradish writes:

‘Take breath. Sometimes
to stand beneath the mountain
is enough.’

Prospero’s magic is invoked in *We Are Such Stuff*, dispelling any sense of the fear of time’s passage. The closing poem *The Point of Possible* manages to pull together many of the important strands of life, death, love, ageing and passing time that have been considered in the collection in a controlled and compelling way. This poem, like the collection as a whole, is generous, precise and controlled. There is wisdom in the gracious acceptance of the human condition and the power of love to persevere, knowing that:

‘Once known, the pleasures of a given day,
stay waiting like a scented glove.’

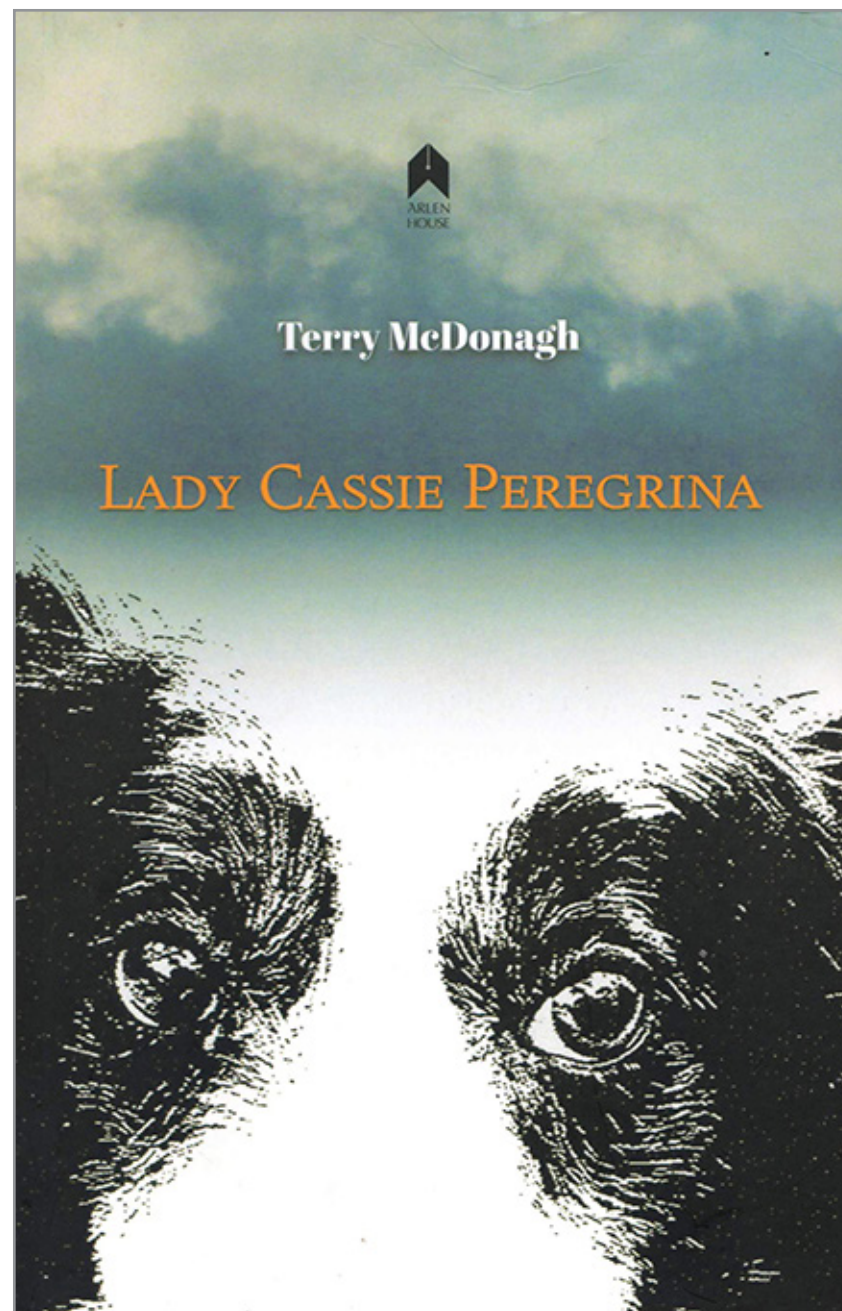
I recommend this thoughtful collection to all discerning poetry lovers.



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



Sinéad McClure is a writer, radio producer, and illustrator. Her poetry has been published on Poethead, Live Encounters ~ Poetry & Writing, Crossways Literary Journal, The Cabinet of Heed, StepAway Magazine, and The Ekphrastic Review. She was shortlisted in the Hanna Greally Awards in October 2020. Sinéad has written 15 dramas for the National Radio Children's Service, RTEjr Radio. Originally from County Dublin, Sinéad lives in rural Sligo with her husband Jho and their border collies, Ruby and Deacon.



SINÉAD MCCLURE Review of TERRY MCDONAGH'S *Lady Cassie Peregrina*

*"It seemed like only yesterday
a dark beast lurked
under my skin, but now
that I've found family
I don't have to be afraid anymore."*

The opening words from the opening poem in the book *Lady Cassie Peregrina* still gives me a shiver. I recall the day I placed the book between the soft folds of a dressing gown. A dressing gown unworn, the book as yet unread. Just hours before I had agreed, on my husband's edict to—*bring Terry's new book, the one about the dog*— back to the hospital with me. When I arrived at the hospital I was told my husband had suffered a full-blown stroke. He couldn't walk or talk. A dark beast was lurking and I was very afraid.

As the days moved on and he regained some physical strength, the speech therapist explained what happened in a way we both could understand;

"Imagine his brain was like a library of books that had collapsed, pages have been ripped apart, phrases, words, and sentences jumbled up together."

His stroke—on the left side of the brain—had badly affected his language centre. Terry's book sat on the side cabinet unopened, *Lady Cassie* looking back at us, her kind border collie eyes, all-knowing.

<https://www.amazon.com/Lady-Cassie-Peregrina-Terry-McDonagh/dp/1851321608>

<https://www.kennys.ie/shop/lady-cassie-peregrina-1>

There has been a lot of hard work, time, and patience involved in my husband's recovery, picking up Lady Cassie Peregrina and reading aloud was just the start, these words ringing true in, Nothing is as it seems;

*"Even if I can't read or write
I can imagine sun flooding a page,
an armchair out on high waves,
a mouse whistling in an attic
or I can tune in to the true note
in a creature heart."*

Of course, Terry is holding the pen, and he is a master at finding Cassie's voice. Anthropomorphising? Yes, how else do you give voice to an animal, but this is a very perceptive imagining of what is going on in Cassie the rescue dog's mind. Terry does what a good poet does well, by allowing inner thoughts to elucidate he is bringing to the surface just enough information so as a reader we place ourselves with this border collie. Ponder her predicaments, even contemplate them, as if they are our own. He then cleverly interweaves his thoughts throughout the book. It is this juxtaposition of human and dog that allows us to reach beneath the words even more.

The two—dog and poet—appear forever separated, even when it comes to the layout of the book. Cassie gets the first section, a rescue dog, happy but still finding her feet experiencing life in Cill Aodáin, Co Mayo. She, like the poet, digs through the bones of her past, though she is more fearful to tread there. We know Cassie is grateful to be here. There is a tenderness to these opening poems. Cassie talks about her daily routines, her first time in a car, her embarrassing habits, her warm Foxford blankie, about the flora and fauna of Mayo, and her fears become realisations as she scratches at *"the incomplete backbone of her previous owner"*.

The second section of the book is Terry's and his journey with Cassie through the same ancient landscape. Cassie becomes the cyclists' companion running alongside as Terry navigates the byways and boreens of his childhood, Cassie strides ahead, enjoying new freedoms, cautious not to ponder on the past.

When we shift back to Cassie in section three she is on an apprehensive journey through Europe. Her thoughts, we find out, are quite distinct from the writers, at this point. Terry the traveller is well used to the journey across Europe, but still learning and sharing new things through the road poetry of section four.

When Cassie is fearful though it seems Terry is also unsure, as evoked in a Mirror to Self;

*"We've been in Ireland for a year.
In that time, we've acquired
a dog—a true friend.
Cassie,
should we go or should we stay?"*

We find that although each section is divided between dog and poet, both are essentially taking us on a journey, and we are eager to see if these journeys coalesce at their destination. Cassie is the first to speak of new territory. She returns in section five, a dog on the continent. She lacks confidence but is hopeful. She remembers watching rabbits in Mayo, running free, now she's careful not to step off the kerb, and wonders what lies ahead. Therein lies a message of hope for the journey to continue, as simple as life is, the small wonders and discoveries and the encounters we make that colour our perspectives along the way. Coming full circle, as the poet does in the final section;

*"This morning on foot I circled the Alster
with a friend—marvelling at water—
wondering if home was a matter of the heart
in a no man's land of weeping or
not weeping in every man's land of spring"*

My husband didn't tell me until months into his recovery that when he had tried to read Lady Cassie Peregrina from his hospital bed his eyes wouldn't settle, he couldn't focus on the words, they danced about on the page. This meant that reading was impossible and it was his first frustration. However, I realised later on that the act of wanting to pick-up the book was a sign that in time everything would be okay.

In those early days reading aloud poems many of which from the perspective of an animal without the ability of speech, struck such a chord in both of us.

This surely is the measure of the poet's success with the book Lady Cassie Peregrina, that beneath the silence we heard her voice too.

We know Cassie is a valued companion, man's best friend, faithful and trusting. Her journey and the poets do coalesce, because the book is all about home, finding home, and what defines home and where the heart of it lies. Maybe, just like Cassie, comfortable in herself on her back all four paws pointing upwards. We too, thank doG, every day.

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