

2010 - 2020



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
MAY 2021

RANDHIR KHARE
Bodhi

COVER ARTWORK BY EMMA BARONE



Fallen lotus petals, 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

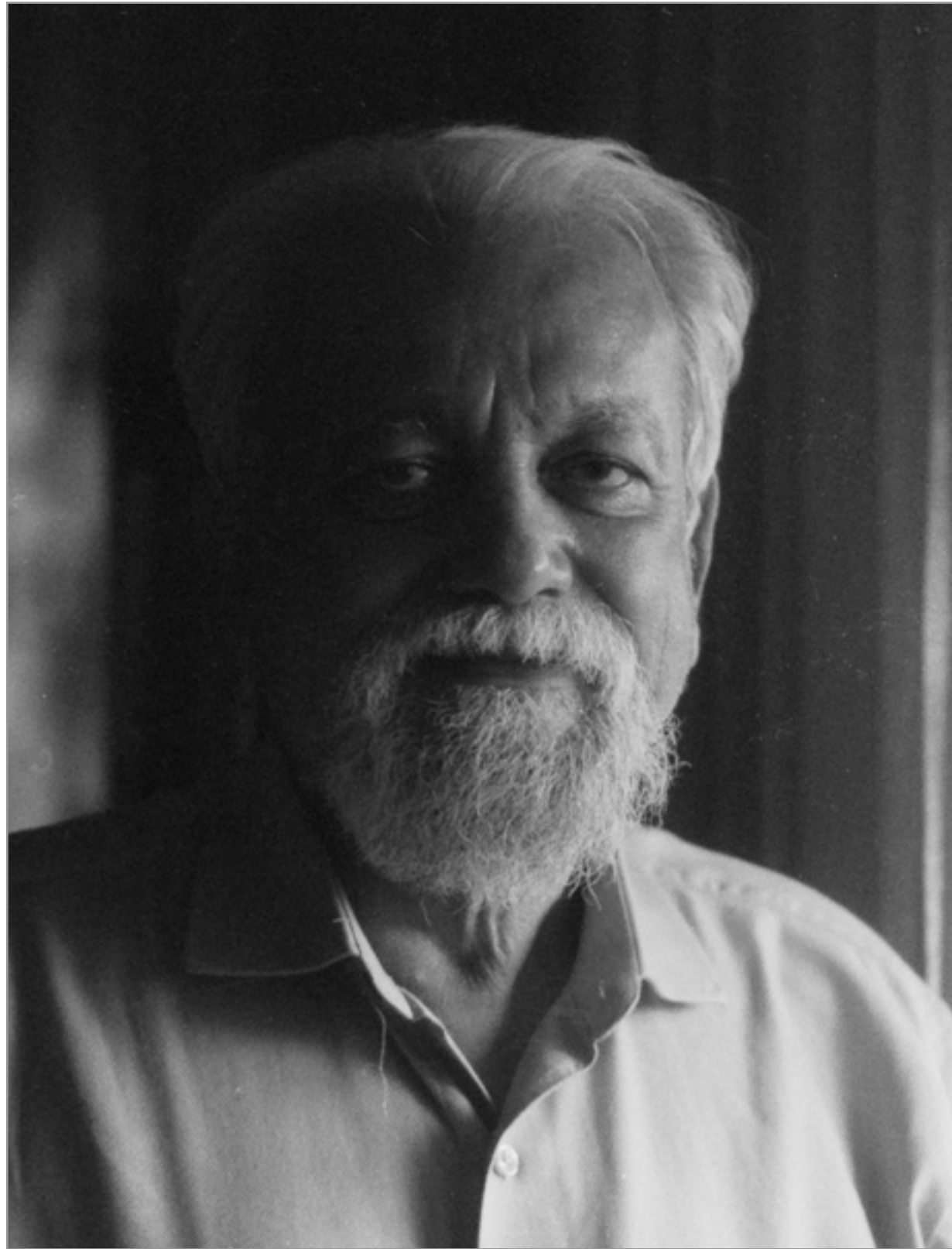
All articles and photographs are the copyright of www.liveencounters.net and its contributors. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the explicit written permission of www.liveencounters.net. Offenders will be criminally prosecuted to the full extent of the law prevailing in their home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



CONTRIBUTORS

RANDHIR KHARE
CELESTE AUGÉ
DAVID RIGSBEE
SUSAN AZAR PORTERFIELD
LISA C TAYLOR
LES WICKS
RICHARD W HALPERIN
MOYA RODDY
JOHN W SEXTON
MICHAEL DURACK
PETER O'NEILL
ÉAMON MAG UIDHIR

Poet, novelist, artist, teacher and playwright, Randhir Khare moves from role to role effortlessly, reinventing himself, expressing the modern-day spirit of the Renaissance through his creative work which has garnered numerous awards and accolades. He has published thirty-six volumes of poetry, fiction, essays and translations and has had seven solo exhibitions of his art. His new book of poems *Travelling Light* and memoir *The Flood & After* is soon to be published. Apart from his numerous public commitments and his own creative pursuits he is a professional mentor to children, young people, young adults and emerging artists and writers, encouraging them to find their own voice through the arts. <https://randhirkhare.in/>
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMjxaciJiopg2Y1I1Wl67gw>



BODHI

It's been a long journey through dark and light -
 Walking, dreaming, hoping, loving, losing,
 Being born again and again from pyre to pyre,
 Gyre to Gyre;
 Now in the shade of this tree
 Where birds roost in silence
 Evening rests it's palm on my shoulders
 As I wait for the sign,
 Prayer bells rise with flocks of egrets
 And dissolve into the dark.

I will return tomorrow and wait
 Empty hands,
 Empty bowl,
 Empty mind,
 Cleansed of memory,
 Cleansed of dreams,
 Cleansed of all that I was
 Cleansed of all that I hope to be...
 But I know there will always be dust
 Lining the hems of my robe:
 Dust from the roads I have travelled,
 Dust from the homes I have lived in,
 Dust from my worn out promises,
 Dust from this debris called life.

I rise and walk away,
 I will persist
 From life to life,
 From pyre to gyre to pyre to gyre,
 Great whirls of longing to be free
 Beyond me...

Randhir Khare. Photograph by Raghuvir Khare.

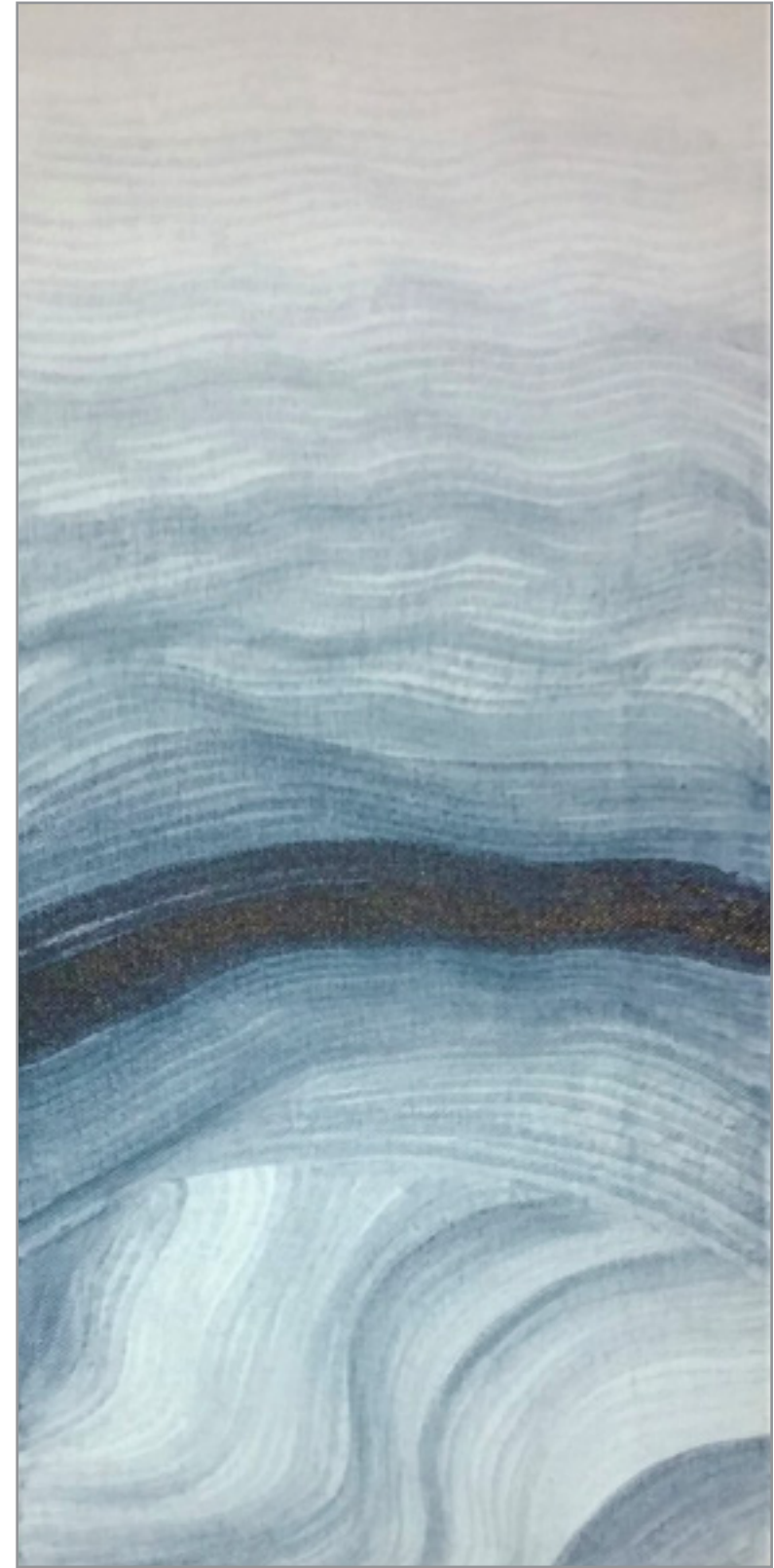
continued overleaf...

© Randhir Khare

BODHI *contd...*

Spin me, fling me, tear me limb from limb,
Crack open my skull,
Let the birds feast on what remains,
That I may become bird, forget myself,
Feed me to worms that I may return to earth,
To the elements, to nothingness....

I know something will remain.
Something WILL remain
Somewhere
Somehow...
Dear light within, set me free.



Riding the wind - *ink on canvas by Randhir Khare.*

WE ARE AFRAID

We are on the edge of a salt lake of questions,
 Unable to strip ourselves and walk in
 Because we are afraid of the scars on our bodies,
 Afraid that they will grow scabs
 And scabs will waken wounds beneath them
 And the wounds will push out and flower,
 Opening petal by petal. Full-bodied. Wholesome wounds.
 Faces of lost friends rising. Broken hopes. Despair.
 We are on the edge of giving,
 Unable to open our palms, spread our arms,
 Afraid that the other is not there, is just a dream,
 A figment of love;
 Afraid that love is a liar, a cheat,
 A gypsy whistling an enchanted tune
 Walking under frozen stars, content with being alone,
 Countryless, homeless, heartless.

We are on the edge of flying
 But cannot beat our wings
 And rise like the great white birds of the air
 Because we are afraid;
 Afraid that when we rise, feet off the ground,
 The ground will disappear
 And we'll remain suspended in the air –
 Slammed by gusts of wind,
 Moving, spiralling upward, onward,
 Towards the sun, scalding feathers,
 Burning bones till they dislodge
 Hurling down through space
 And meet the earth, headlong,
 Like glowing meteorites,
 Mud folding around us as we journey
 To the centre of the earth that swirls in flames.

We are on the edge of ourselves,
 Like water lining continents, lapping, grating,
 Gnawing the shoreline, unable to break in.
 The most we do is carve small islands
 From ourselves, set them afloat.
 We are the unresolved. We are.
 I speak on behalf of us.
 I am the voice. What I say, we feel...

Raise us up in the palms of your hands
 Like you would water from a flowing river.
 Take us out of the current, suspend us in air
 Then sprinkle us across the landscapes of our lives...
 The past, the present, the future,
 So that our wetness spans time and makes it whole
 And makes us one. If you are there.
 Raise us up in your fists like you would sand
 From a moving dune,
 Take us up and throw us skywards...
 That every grain may separate and drift far out
 Across the roving blue –
 And backed upon the wind and set us free.

If you are there.
 Raise us up as you would a pot of ashes from a pyre,
 Carry us to a sacred watercourse and empty it
 That we may feel the gentle ebb and swing of the living
 For the last time and not forget the fullness of this life we have.

If you are there.
 Speak to us, we request you. We demand of you.
 You who are supposed to be infinite, all seeing, all knowing,
 Speak to us.
 Is this a joke? A poor sick joke? Are we talking to ourselves?
 Speak.
 If you are there.

ON THE EDGE

On the knife edge of night
 When last dreams share embraces,
 Bodies clutching bodies,
 Unashamed whispers,
 I watch the moon
 Falling into a silent river
 Turning amber
 Till it dissolves in sewage glow.

Why do we struggle to love,
 Struggle to belong,
 Struggle to breathe into each other's beings,
 Struggle to pray,
 Struggle to believe,
 Struggle to hope,
 Struggle to trust,
 Struggle to tell ourselves there is a beyond?

Still,
 In the heart of this moment
 I wait -
 For the cracking of the shell,
 For the yolk to ooze,
 For my voice to become
 The voice of another,
 For the word
 To curl in my palm,
 For each breath to become a prayer bead,
 Still.

Lord of the unknown,
 Topple me over the edge so I may dissolve
 Like sweat
 Drop by drop
 On rooftops,
 On streets strewn with silence,
 On alleyways that lead nowhere,
 On minefields of malice,
 On the waking cry of a new born,
 On limbless eyeless mouthless hopes
 Swirling in foreverness,
 On the night sleeping in the sewage river.

Lord of the unknown,
 Turn me into a fistful of swallows
 Throw me into a dark whirl of wings -
 Travelling towards a summer of violets
 Dust-hazed with wandering;
 Turn me into questions without answers,
 Into songs without words,
 Into arriving without departing,
 Into the moment of now
 Suspended over the moon drowned
 In the wastes of this city
 Flowing like an open wound.

I SING

I sing of drowned sailors,
Bones polished smooth lying on the floors of silt,
Layer upon layer,
In the shadows of leviathans.
Constellations of bones wait to rise up with the land
When waters shift and continents are born;

I sing of them
Hard on dry land, smelling of shells and silence,
I sing of them waiting to form rocks and sand,
Moving ceaselessly like the wanderings of time;
I sing of them, the drowned sailors,
Bones polished smooth lying on the floors of silt.

What does the pillar of smoke say,
Drifting along the underbelly of the sky,
I want to be a cloud? A cloud heavy with rain,
Unzipping water on a restless land.

The dead cannot turn to water.
The dead remain. Fine particles of dust. Worlds.
And inside those worlds, more worlds and worlds beyond.
Beyond, within, deep down within.

I sing of drowned sailors,
I sing of the rain that fills the oceans
Moving across the city like angels.
Feet sweeping rooftops.
Hair trailing wet over the hoof-prints of the wind.
Bells stop ringing in factories and the hooters are silent,
Waiters and watchers at lonely windows turn and smile,
Remembering returns and reunions
And the meeting of bodies and the drowning of eyes.



Flight of angels - acrylic on canvas board by Randhir Khare.

continued overleaf...

© Randhir Khare

I SING *contd...*

I sing of the rain in the mountains,
 Moving like flocks of wild sheep
 Over mossy rocks and ferns,
 Over bare hands and shoulders,
 Over wooded humps of prehistoric mammoths,
 Over abandoned Arks,
 Over stranded seashells hoisted by the earth
 Some shuddering aeons ago,
 Over bat-stench nights of time,
 Over the mute song of the sea.

I sing of the rain moving across open plains,
 Licking ears of grain, drawing out sighs
 Trailing mist over sleeping farmlands,
 Entering their dreams, mixing colours,
 Smearing, smudging, flowing,
 New colours emerging, trickling out,
 Forming streams,
 Streaking between emerald fields,
 Wild cocks crow, hens cluck,
 In the shade of giant lantanas
 Boars bruise mud for roots and bulbs,
 Ants shelter in the dark bark of trees.

I sing of the rain moving along the coast,
 Patting the sand down as she goes,
 Polishing coconut palms, combing casuarinas,
 Playing with a lost ribbon in the wind,
 Swinging on racks of dried fish,
 Lying down in empty boats,
 Straddling waves between damp thighs,
 Riding out to sea.

I sing of the rain moving like a lost child
 Down the empty passageways of our lives,
 Across our cities, our mountains, our plains, our coasts,
 Along the borders of insanity, beating with tiny fists
 On the grey walls of memory,
 'I want to go home, I want to go home,
 Please let me go home to the nights of the moon
 Where trees spoke in the language of silver,
 Please let me go home
 To the rambling house and the river.'

I sing of the rain moving in great spirals outwards,
 Onwards, away, leaving me wet and gleaming
 Like a new born calf,
 Wobbling to my feet, nostrils flaring,
 The cud of silence rising to my mouth.

MIST

In the arms of trees all night,
Mist slides down trunks, swinging from branches,
Dripping from leaves into dustbins,
Over free dogs curled into themselves
Empty bellied, scabbed,
Dreaming of kindness.

I understand longing, now
That I have walked through the dark,
A free dog, tired of fleeing from stones
And closed gates
And wire nooses of control
And the indifference of many.

I have nothing to give
Only an empty purse, an open palm,
Stories of past lives, past loves, past hopes,
Past wanderings on pathways
Of dark and light,
Surrendered hopes.

I want to lie down and sleep
As my kindred souls the free dogs do,
Just curl into dreams,
Free from myself, my graveyard heart,
And let the fragrant arms of mist
Embrace me.



Bloodline in the blue - acrylic on canvas board by Randhir Khare.

QUIETLY

Quietly when the wind blows
I rise and walk the night
With nightjars, snails and owl-wings
And silent words in flight.

Stardust on my bare skin
Moonlight in my hair
I move through gusts of crickets
And climb a midnight stair.

Over domes of sleeping trees
I glide on wings of dark
Sway with music of the dead
And the creaking of my bark.

There's forever in my breathing
And wandering in my song,
For I walk the midnight soul-way
Carrying my heart along.



Wandering song - acrylic on canvas board by Randhir Khare.

Celeste Augé is the author of *Skip Diving* (Salmon Poetry, 2014), *The Essential Guide to Flight* (Salmon Poetry, 2009) and the collection of short stories *Fireproof and Other Stories* (Doire Press, 2012). Her new collection of poetry, *I Imagine Myself*, will be published later in 2021. World Literature Today wrote that 'In her debut collection of short fiction, Augé creates poignant and accurate outlines of women and their places in the world', and their review of *Skip Diving* claimed: 'Celeste Augé's poems are commendable for their care, deep thought, and intellectual ambition'. Her writing has been widely published in literary journals and she has given readings at festivals, libraries and pubs, as well as chairing various literary events. She lives in Connemara, in the West of Ireland.



WHEN I GROW UP

When I grow up I want to be a cat lady.
I want to take care of the neighbourhood cats,
slink along with them, anticipate their moods,
then ignore them. We'll thrive on sardines and toast.

I want to rescue dozens of cats,
care for them, have them perch on my shoulder
while I'm trying to cook, or weigh down my keyboard
as I type. I want to talk to cats — variously

named Wollstonecraft and Pankhurst and Steinem.
Judge all you want, but I'd rather be eccentric.
Dye their fur electric pink. Actually, when I grow up,
never mind cat lady, I want to be *a* cat.

I want to fall into that deep slumber and wake up,
feline stretch, lift my paws out straight, one by one,
slowly, indifferent. Alone as I please,
hunting for warmth or sport or food.

I will no longer care who reads my next book,
I will sway through every room doing exactly
what every cat is supposed to do,
in exactly the way every cat does.

Even with my superior balance I will not gloat.
I will hunt dreams at midnight,
I will survive in the wilds of my own imagination.
I'm a cat now and there is no hurry.

Celeste Augé

GROWTH SPURT

My teenage son is outgrowing his own body,
 muscles stretched beyond capacity —
 he pops his meniscus
 from the safety cup of his knee
 swinging his legs out of bed.
 Outgrowing me, outgrowing safety.
 Outgrowing my illusion
 that I could ever keep him safe.
 Bursting us out of my handmade cocoon, unfurling limbs
 then folding them back into the driver's seat
 of his own made-up life, he drives off
 and grinds the gears. And I don't even
 shout after him,

Clutch in fully!

Okay I do but he doesn't hear me
 or he pretends not to.
 He doesn't realise he is driving off
 with my fears, my love, my prayers
 my genetic material
 my conditioning
 my relief

expanding space

(space opens up in his wake) —

look back, no don't look back —
 each of us becoming
 miles,

ideas,

away.

MIDLIFE

Midlife feels like a pair of old strimmers
 dragged out of the shed in spring,
 neither working properly, one starts
 but stalls as soon as it touches a weed,
 the other won't even splutter
 to life twenty strokes later.

HOW ARE YOU?

Fine.

That's what we're supposed to say, anyway.
 We have osteoarthritis or undiagnosed Lyme disease or
 chronic fatigue or ME or MS or ankylosing spondylitis
 or asthma or acute allergies or hormonal deficiencies
 or unidentified pains in our lower legs
 or the lurgy or the hair ache or the bottle ache
 or man flu, we're in the horrors or in a heap
 or we have gambling addictions or clinical depression
 or a chronic aversion to backchat chitchat chinwags gabfests
 or we have migraines or fibromyalgia or we're mitred
 with the sinuses or we have endometriosis
 or we have arrhythmias or we suffer from broken hearts.

Sometimes we need to sleep too much,
 rest more, we get cranky for no obvious reason, sometimes
 we're not happy to see you and it's not because of you,
 it's the DTs or the fatigue or the dizziness or the pains
 in our bones, and other times we're happy to see you.
 In that case, it's definitely you. Sometimes we haven't
 gotten out of the house in weeks, sometimes we just need
 to laugh.

On the outside, we look perfect. Two eyes,
 one nose, two left feet. Normal, or at least the same as most people.
 A typical human creature. Like most people —
 we have to lie to get by.

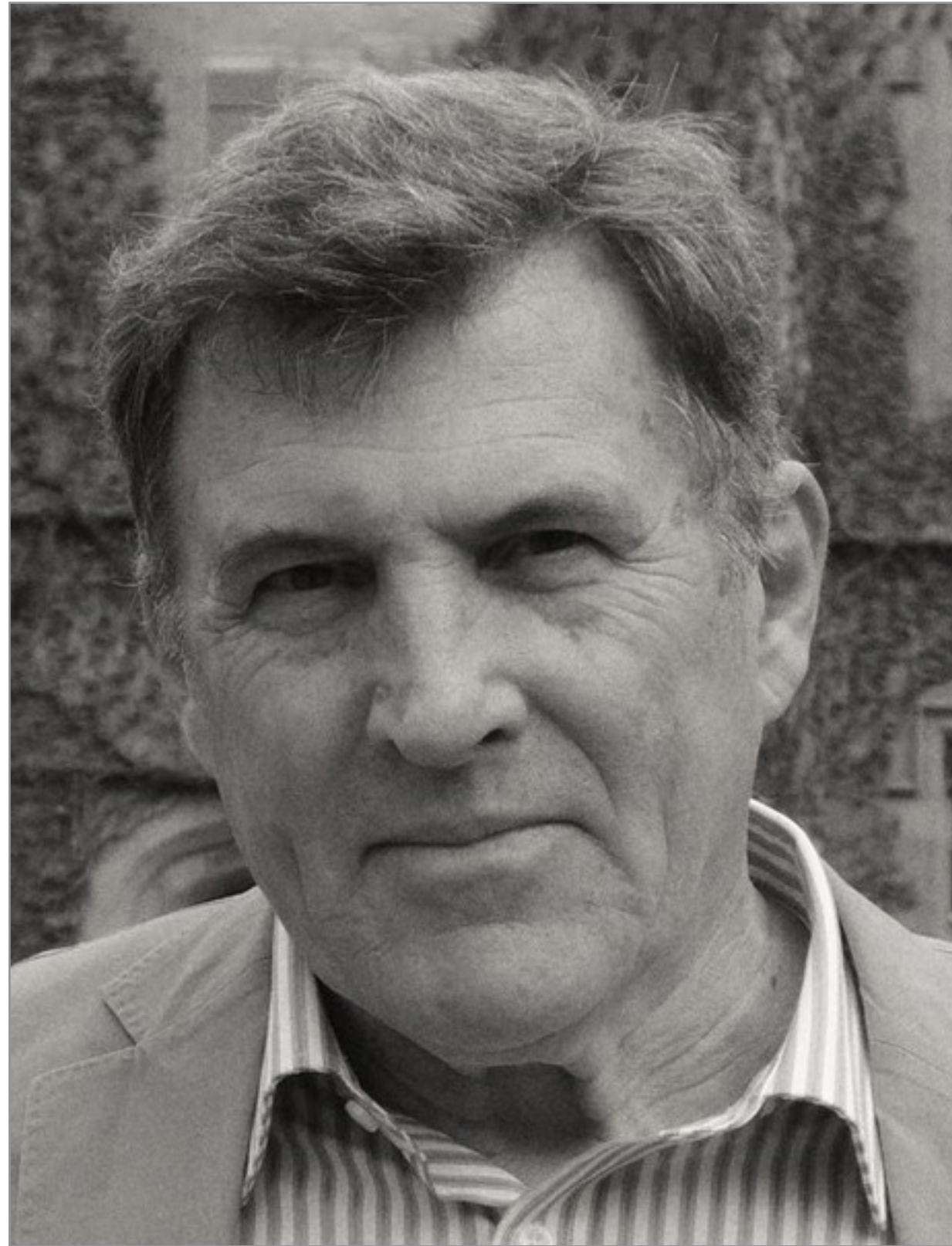
I'm fine.



©Mark Ulyseas

Dragonfly on water. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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. Forthcoming in the fall is his complete translation of Dante's *Paradiso* from Salmon Poetry, and *MAGA Sonnets by Donald Trump* from Main Street Rag, a series of 85 quotations from Trump's speeches and interviews bundled up in sonnet form (political satire and grimly humorous).



David Rigsbee

MAGA SONNETS

Introduction

Although it's probably true that no readers of poetry would care to hear the voice of ex-President Donald Trump again, I got the idea of putting these together in the fall of 2020, the middle of the pandemic and the U.S. presidential election season. In this time of high anxiety and spreading disease,

I began trolling transcripts of the Trump rallies and interviews during my morning coffee, and I saw that his off-script remarks hovered around themes: the cheery slurs, his obsession with Abraham Lincoln, with the size of crowds, with the "fake news," with appearances (hair, hand-size, the look of people), his blithe misogyny and ruthless rivalries, all pseudopods to his lumbering, unlimited narcissism.

So I thought it would be interesting to see how a traditional poetic form, often thought often thought to be dainty, could cut Trump down to size, i.e., 14 lines. His cadences seemed to fall into the form well enough, so that by election day last November, I was cutting and pasting often two, sometimes three, sonnets a day. As you'll see, the form itself transforms his (often incoherent) utterances into political satire, amusing and horrifying at the same time, all the more so because it's all verbatim.

Forthcoming from *Main Street Rag*.

THE NOBEL PRIZE

I'm going to tell you about the Nobel
Peace Prize, I'll tell you about that.
I made a deal, I saved a country, and I
just heard that the head of that country
is now getting the Nobel Peace Prize
for saving the country. I said: "What?
Did I have something do with it?"
Yeah, but you know, that's the way it is.
As long as we know, that's all that matters.
I saved a big war, I've saved a couple of them.
They gave one to Obama and he had no idea why.
That was the only thing I agreed with him on.
I would get a Nobel Prize for a lot of things,
if they gave it out fairly, which they don't.

A WALL AND A WHEEL

Two things—and I say it—two things that never
get old. Remember the Democrats are saying,
"A wall won't work." Really? Tell me about it.
Wall works! That's one of the reasons our numbers
are so good, but two things will never get old.
You know what they are? A wall and a wheel.
It'll never get old, a wall. I see so many things,
and I see all these businesses, computers,
you come up with a new chip, you come up
with a new computer, you come up with a new laptop.
Three weeks later, you buy it, three weeks later,
it's obsolete. But a wall will never be obsolete,
and a wheel will never be obsolete. You come back
in a thousand years: a wall and a wheel.

NO RAILING

I said, "General, I've got myself a problem, General."
Because I'm wearing leather bottom shoes
which is good if you're walking on flat surfaces.
It's not good for ramps and if I fall down.
This was a steel ramp, you all saw it.
It had no handrail, it was like an ice skating rink,
and I said, "General, I have a problem,"
and he didn't understand that at first.
I said, "There's no way." He understood, I just
saluted almost 600 times. I just made a big speech.
I sat for other speeches. I'm being baked.
I'm being baked like a cake. I said, "General,
there's no way I can make it down that ramp
without falling on my ass, General. I have no railing."

THANKING ME

By the way, when I came in backstage,
A very, very powerful guy, a big, strong guy,
with tears coming down his face said,
"Thank you, Mr. President for saving our country."
This happens all the time, all the time.
I said, "When was the last time you cried?"
He said, "I don't know that I ever cried."
Even as a baby, this guy didn't cry, but he
was crying backstage. I mean, tears
are coming down, thanking me. And it's true.
I was happily building buildings in Manhattan,
having a good time, having a nice, simple life.
And then I said to my beautiful First Lady, "What
the hell, let's give it a shot!" And look what happened.

ACTING PRESIDENTIAL

If I don't sound like a typical Washington politician
it's because I'm not a politician. And if I don't always
play by the rules of the Washington establishment
It would make my life a lot easier, to be honest.
I used to play the game about acting Presidential.
I'm a smart guy, I'm smart. And I always said,
"It's much easier to be Presidential than to do what I do."
And I said, "I'm more Presidential if I wanted to be,
but I got to get things done. I don't have enough time.
I used to go and I would have fun, and I'd imitate
a President who's playing Presidential, that's so easy
compared to what we do. I said, "I can be more Presidential
than any President in our history with a possible
exception of Abraham Lincoln when he wore the hat."

SUPERMAN

And they call them therapeutics. For me,
it was a cure. I mean, what's the difference?
I say, "Give me a definition." I wasn't like,
"Oh gee, I feel great." So I hate to admit it,
but you know what? I was not feeling great.
But the great thing is when you're President,
you have so many doctors. I was saying to a group
this morning, I said, "I had so many. I had 12 doctors
around the bed. And everyone was grabbing
a different part of my body. And they're all super geniuses."
But anyway, I took this drug. It's a transfusion,
as they say. And the next day I felt like Superman. I got up,
I said, "What the hell is going on?" I felt like Superman.
I said, "Come on, bring them on, bring them on, whoever it is!"

SO HANDSOME

How about Stephanopoulos the other day? You know,
he interviewed me. He gave me a tough interview,
but I didn't consider it unfair. Although it turned out
the audience was stacked against me, you know.
There were some Trump people and some Biden
people, and actually they were very nice, right?
The one woman said how handsome I was.
You know, the one woman... I'd rather have that.
I'd rather have that than have her say,
"You're a wonderful politician." To hell with that.
I'd rather have her say—what's better than that?
Right?—"He's so handsome." You have such a great smile.
See, now the fake news will say, "President Trump
went on a rant talking about how handsome he is."

FLUSH

I called up great dishwasher company from Ohio
that we saved, by the way, I said, "What's the problem
with your dishwasher?" "Well, they don't give us any water.
I mean, you know, it'd be nice to be able to get enough water."
So we gave them what they need. And now the dishwashers
are incredible. The same thing with the restrictors in the faucet.
So I hate to say the three things: it's the shower, it's the sink,
and you know the third element in the bedroom.
But I don't say it because every time I say it,
they only talk about that one. Because it's sort of gross
to talk about, right? So I won't talk about the fact that people
have to flush their toilet 15 times, okay? I will not talk about it.
I'll only talk about showers and sinks, okay? But there are
three things. I won't talk about it. This way they can't report it.

WANTING NO ACCLAIM

Jared has the Middle East coming along, coming along good. We signed the United Arab Emirates, Mohammed, one of the most respected warriors in the Middle East, and Bahrain. And we have other countries lined up. Even The New York Times said it's incredible. I can't believe it. I said, "No way. I'm sure that person was fired." No, it was Tom Friedman. They're not going to fire him. But they said it was incredible, but this guy has done a great job. And you know the nice thing? He wants no acclaim. He just wants to do what he wants to do. And also worked on Israel, the capital Jerusalem, right? And he has no weight problem, that I can tell you. He's so skinny. How do you stay so skinny, Jared?

MY BOY

Baron, Baron Trump. Barron Trump had it, all these young guys. Barron Trump had it. He's very young. He's 14. He's very tall. He's very tall. But Baron had it, our First Lady had it, I had it, Baron had it. "Sir, Barron tested positive." I said, "Oh wow. How's he going to do?" "Very good, sir. No problem." I said, "Good." Like 14 minutes later, "How's Barron? How's he doing, doc? How's my boy doing?" "Sir. He's cured." "Well, how did that happen?" It took about 12 seconds. "How's Baron doing, doctor? I want to make sure my Barron's okay." So Baron had it, it came, it went. I said, "Barron, you're my man. How are you feeling?" He didn't even know what I was talking about, actually.

GET SMART

You know, they always said, “Oh Europe, Europe, Europe.”
Look at our numbers compared, and we had the biggest
of any country, the biggest comeback. We came back faster.
We went down less, economically came back faster.
If you want depression, doom and despair,
vote for Sleepy Joe Biden. And boredom.
You know the great thing. I always say, someday
these people, look at all them. Look at all of those cameras.
You know what I say, someday, they’re going to get smart.
They’re going to endorse President Trump, because
if you had Sleepy Joe, nobody’s going to be interested
in politics anymore. That’s going to be the end of that.
They will all go out of business. They should have gone
out of business four years ago. Then I came along.

WONDERFUL COWS

Joe Biden will give you the single biggest
tax hike in the history of our country.
He’s talking about quadrupling taxes—
the Green New Deal. The Green New Deal:
no cars, no airplanes, no cows! No cows, you know?
Whatever happened? Did they ever leave
the cows in? I think they had to take that out, right?
Originally, it was no cows. They didn’t want
to have any cattle or cows, which is pretty brutal
when you think of it, right? The Green New Deal,
which would crush our farms, destroy our wonderful cows.
They want to kill our cows. You know why, right?
You know why? Don’t say it. They want
to kill our cows. That means you’re next.

TESTING POSITIVE

They came in and they said, "Sir, you've tested positive."
I said, "Tested positive for what? And they said, "For COVID."
He actually used the term "COVID." He's more politically
correct than I am. I said, "That's not good." But I didn't feel
good, and we went over to Walter Reed Medical Center,
which is phenomenal. And Johns Hopkins was great.
We had a lot of doctors gathered around. But I didn't feel good
and they gave me something, Regeneron. And I woke up
the next morning and I felt so great, I wanted to rip
that Superman shirt open. I wanted to come back.
They said, "Sir, how about taking it easy for a couple
of days?" Maybe now I'm saying, well, it probably
wasn't the drug, it's just that I'm in such perfect
physical condition. And I'm very young, so I said that.

UFC

I went to a UFC fight and this gentleman, and he
is a gentleman... Great guy, actually, hard to believe.
How the hell are you such a nice guy? I have a feeling...
I don't know. He was fighting a young superstar, right?
He was a young, handsome guy. Really good looking guy.
Maybe that was the problem with him, he looked too good.
But we had this young guy, handsome, really. He looked
like a male model. And this guy walks in and the fight lasted—
what was it?—one and a half seconds, I think. Five seconds.
It was the quickest knockout in the history of the UFC.
No, it was like, ding! He runs across the ring, kicks
the hell out of him, right in the face. And I said,
We need more people like him, I can tell you.
We need people like him in our government.

NORMAL HANDS

Now I have my hands, I hear, on The New Yorker,
a picture of my hands. Look at my hands. They're fine.
My hands are normal hands. This was Rubio that said,
"He has small hands and you know what that means."
So, he started it. So, a couple of days later, I was on line
shaking hands with supporters, and one of the supporters
got up and he said, "Mr. Trump, you have strong hands.
You have good-sized hands." And then another one
would say, "You have great hands, Mr. Trump, I had
no idea." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I thought
you were, like, deformed. I thought you had small hands."
I don't want people to go around thinking that I have a problem.
I even held up my hands, and said, "Look, take a look
at that hand." And by saying that, I solved the problem.

AUTOMATICALLY ATTRACTED

I moved on her, actually. You know, she was down
on Palm Beach. I moved on her, and I failed. I'll admit it.
I did try and fuck her. She was married.
I moved on her like a bitch. But I couldn't get there.
And she was married. Then all of a sudden I see her.
She's now got the big phony tits and everything.
She's totally changed her look. Yeah, that's her.
With the gold. I better use some Tic Tacs just
in case I start kissing her. You know, I'm automatically
attracted to beautiful — I just start kissing them. It's like
a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're
a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab 'em
by the pussy. You can do anything. It's always good if you
don't fall out of the bus—like Ford, Gerald Ford, remember?

DEPLORABLE

I'm an innocent bystander. Every time that starts—
 "He started it"—I always act extremely innocent.
 All I have to do is mention her name, "crooked,"
 "disgraceful," "deplorable," "irredeemable."
 They said "deplorable" and "irredeemable."
 I thought irredeemable was worse than deplorable.
 She came out, she said, "deplorable," but she also said
 "irredeemable." To show you what I know, I said,
 "Oh, she used the word "irredeemable" about our people?"
 But it was deplorable that caught on. Right?
 But, whoever her speechwriter is, I don't want him or her.
 That was a disaster, but I never thought it was going
 to be that bad. The next day I showed up at a rally.
 Everybody said, "I'm a deplorable! I'm a deplorable!"

DEPLORABLE II

Hillary, with her statement about the Deplorable,
 right? The Deplorable. Well, the Deplorable
 decided to vote. That was incredible. Was that
 incredible when she said that? Who would have
 thought that was so bad? It was the pros.
 She actually said a worse word than that,
 right? The Irredeemables. Remember, she said
 the Deplorable and the Irredeemables.
 I thought irredeemable was worse than a deplorable.
 Right? But it didn't catch on. The thing that caught
 on was deplorable. The next day, I was making
 a speech like this and it came out, it came out,
 we are Deplorable! We are Deplorable! They came
 out by the millions. That shirt sold like crazy.



Susan Azar Porterfield is the author of three books of poetry—*In the Garden of Our Spines*, *Kibbe* (Mayapple Press) and *Dirt, Root, Silk*, which won the Cider Press Review Editor's Prize. Her work has appeared in *The Georgia Review* (finalist, Loraine Williams poetry prize), *Barrow Street*, *Mid-American Review*, *North American Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Nimrod*, *Rhino*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, and elsewhere. She is the editor of *Zen, Poetry, the Art of Lucien Stryk* (Ohio UP) and has written on poetical subjects for *Poets & Writers*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, and *Translation Review*.



MARRIAGE

On his ritual walk
he looks for blue

shell shard, seed pods,
a hand-shaped leaf.

Bring me something,
I say.

Therefore
are his eyes not his alone.

Angles and glints 3D-pop
from background flat, stop

him mid-step: a feather,
penny made of steel.

Keep a dime in your shoe
the elders used to urge.

Love demands baggage,
carry us, carry we each inside

the other inside
the world pocketed home.

Susan Azar Porterfield

Lisa C. Taylor is the author of two poetry collections including *The Other Side of Longing*, a collaboration with Geraldine Mills published by Arlen House, and two poetry chapbooks. She also has two collections of short fiction with Arlen House, most recently, *Impossibly Small Spaces*. Lisa's honours include Pushcart nominations in fiction and poetry, residencies at Vermont Studio Center, Willowtail Springs, and Tyrone Guthrie Centre, shortlist designations in the Fish Poetry and Fiction contests in 2020, a Hugo House New Works Fiction Award in 2015, and along with Geraldine Mills, the Elizabeth Shanley Gerson Lecture of Irish Literature at University of Connecticut in 2011. Lisa is the fiction editor for Wordpeace.co and a regular book reviewer for Mom Egg Review (MER). A recent transplant to a small mountain town in Colorado, Lisa is working on a new collection of poetry for publication in late 2021 or early 2022. www.lisactaylor.com



LUNAR ECLIPSE

A shadow of wing crossed my field of vision.
Tuesday, night of the lunar eclipse,
I awakened, looked up.
Stars blinked themselves into oblivion.

Tuesday, night of the lunar eclipse
I saw ghost tracks of cars
Stars blinked themselves into oblivion,
A shadow of wing crossed my field of vision.

I saw ghost tracks of cars.
No one whispered or handed me a map.
A shadow of wing crossed my field of vision
as I stood at the window, looking out.

No one whispered or handed me a map
The shortest day, light erased from every surface.
As I stood at the window, looking out
a light snow began to fall.

The shortest day, light erased from every surface.
I awakened, looked up.
A light snow began to fall.
A shadow of a wing crossed my field of vision.

Lisa C Taylor

DESIGN FOR A CHAOTIC WORLD

Deep dive to a place
without commerce
where rare lifeforms
flock: frill, or tentacle,
singularity of purpose.

The color of the sea found
six meters below the surface:
blue recast as green,
then clear or murky.

Is this the design
for a chastened world?

Bee balm, and aster hold court
near deserted beaches,
while Northern gannets and gulls
swoop amid the spray
for sardines or crabs.

Loved ones lost to storm or tide
hover above a residue of ashes
strewn by sons or granddaughters.

Hazards drowse on mossy rocks
or overhead in mercurial skies,
and wind heaves
its mastery over elements.

Goblin shark and dragonfish,
trap prey,
pioneers of concealment.
Habitual sustenance,
their endgame,

a ministry of focus,
amid the clamor
and muddle
of the world.

NON-SEQUITURS

I believe in bulbs transforming
into tulips, lost dogs
sniffing their way home.

Foxes who raid chicken coops
need to eat too.

I aspire to find purpose
in all living organisms
except hornets or ticks.

The color of algae and lily pads,
transports me to a lake
in a rowboat with rusted oarlocks.

When I sing, I pretend
I can be heard across the sea.
When I dance, I think of swallows.

As a child, I imagined my bicycle
would take me to Canada if I peddled
hard enough.

Things I'll never do: scuba dive,
parachute, zip line, rappel.
Things I'll likely do: bike
on a bumpy trail, snorkel, make a meal
for a stranger, love with abandon.

Nature interrupts us with storms
or calm. We don't deserve its beauty.

I want to untie dogs
waiting outside pubs
or convenience stores.

Uncomfortable places:
MRI machines, doctor's waiting rooms,
benches outside courtrooms.

Fire is beautiful until it isn't.
Also stunning and dangerous:
mountain lions, venomous snakes,
humans.

IMPLICATIONS

I ignore mating calls
and the thumb
of wind on branches.
Pollen dusts my blouse,
and the earth vibrates.

Lying on a cushion
of grass, I examine an iridescent
leaf beetle and familiar bluet,
insects I do not own
though I'm responsible
for my footprint.

White blossoms perk like ears,
by an ash tree
decked with greenery.

Honeysuckle strangles zinnia.

I consider renaming myself
after noise or despair.

Too much havoc,
too few honeybees.

Six unfamiliar birds trill
in my backyard
and I don't recognize
the veiled bough
grazing my arm
though I call sunlight
what it is:

an implication.

THE RULE OF THREES

Three men on faux leather stools
lean into their beers,
their wide glasses
like women's mouths.

After two drinks,
a woman twirls her paper parasol
until it snaps,
inferior wood
she says

leading one of the men
in a leather jacket with a chain dangling
almost to his belt
to buy her another,

passion fruit concoction,
ferrying her across the river
of her past
to a Siddhartha infused
enlightenment, papaya
and guava sunlight
distilled.

Then she opens the door
(which might be the future)
stumbles into city dark,
a razor moon above her,
the pavement below
slick and broken

under three cockeyed
neon stars.

RIVER WALK, PANDEMIC

I used to pretend it didn't matter
if a hiker met my eye,
red-tipped braids like kerchiefs waving
to draw in a stranger's gaze.

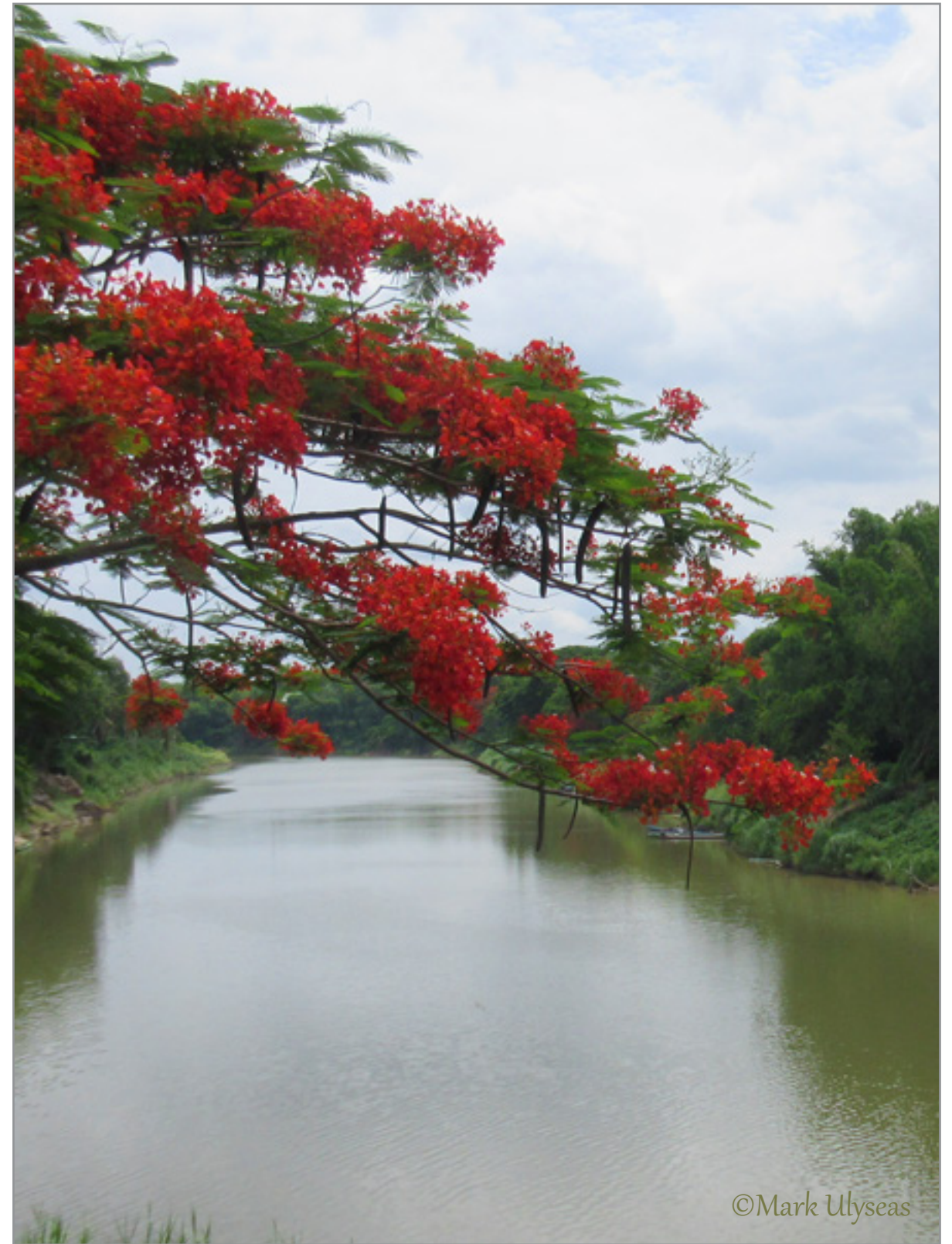
I'm here, he tells me
and I don't correct him,
clear pebbles with my foot,
circumventing a tree root
that protrudes like a nail.
He doesn't understand
when it hit me,
the sense of place as transient.

The vellum of landscape
bears a signature I recognize, thrum
under a parchment sky that is poised
to swallow everything I know.

The river, rusty clear,
clouds thin as an old woman's hair.

A child in yellow boots
holds her father's hand
while something rustles in the brush.
I recognize that scrape of claws
on decaying leaves
as the child stirs water
with a stick

and the sky goes on
being threadbare blue
and dingy gray.



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Les Wicks Over 45 years Wicks has performed widely across the globe. Published in over 400 different magazines, anthologies & newspapers across 32 countries in 15 languages. Conducts workshops & runs Meuse Press which focuses on poetry outreach projects like poetry on buses & poetry published on the surface of a river. His 14th book of poetry is *Belief* (Flying Islands, 2019). <http://leswicks.tripod.com/lw.htm>



OFF NATIONAL PARK RD

Despite this morning's poorly named downpour
there is no falling at the waterfall
no pooling at this pool.

This day both placid &
adamant alongside unapologetic winter — 25°.

I wish I could leave words to other people
me lacking both the succinctness of wandoos
& the promiscuity of the breeze.

A 10-year-old is shepherded past —
it's the worst walk I've ever had! But
I just wait for the viral silence to return,
my reliable page.

The rust & glower of stonefell.
Staunch mantis green concedes to worn linen
shade rations itself
& is infested with ants.
Does the shrike react when I say it is elegant?

But there are shoots everywhere...
a cuneiform of life
beneath notice, against the odds.

I am thirst
& trespass.
One cannot plough the scrub into linebreaks.
Could sow all the words I have
& the magpies would still think themselves free
or at least have no notion of a cage.

Envelopes won't seal the wounds,
feet haven't got the rhythm
& my sweat is tasteless.

Les Wicks

BELIEF BEACH

Anchored in the treachery of sand
wearing waves
until the snip of a certain comber
shreds them landward.
They call this weed.

There are people here too
busy in their pleasure
they stare further out
across the stolid hungers of tankers queued
to feed national necessity, rapacity.

Boardriders have learnt
those arts of waiting.
One child, one gull, the pantomime of chase.

What comes next?
No point to paint anxiety
on that small forest of eelgrass.
That's ours to bear, our curse.

A granite breakwater, that construct built on collapse
is the human pretence of permanence
a theology of safety...
that most friable of gods.

Below the surface
hardier energies persist.
Though lifeless, sand has its ructions.
Waves bustle in the frenzy above
they too are ignorant of the one before, the one after.

Deluded in the shifting breeze
(that is a life in itself)
one placid pensioner
will not go deeper than his knees.
He is content in the fake permanence beneath his feet
that is neither loyal nor solid
as it buries abandons undermines
all that is somehow held to be true.

JUST SAYING...

Love is the answer.
Try that argument
in the camp on the Turkish border.

Beneath American summers
a woman is losing her mind.
Tax policy has made no difference
& healthcare, well you gotta laugh
or rage.

Every step I've taken
has been on stolen land, guilt builds
like soil formation & blood has always been
the best fertilizer so our crops shimmer, vitamins
sizzle in the sun as an ageing world salivates.

We are carp, gasping on the banks
of the river of our own design.
Do I bite, bale
or just flap about uselessly?

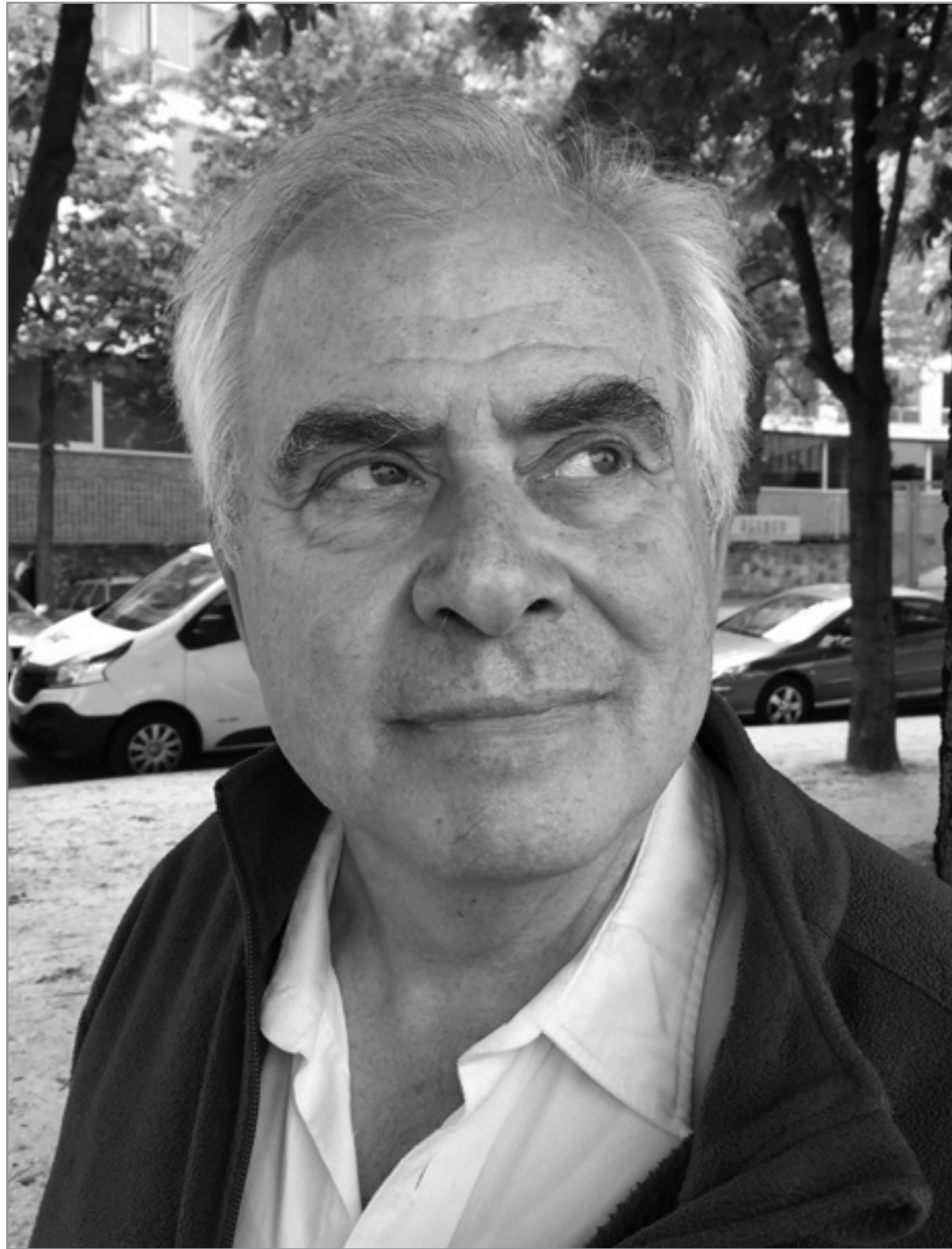
This weekend, further up in the hills
a "controlled burn", "hazard reduction".
Look down the valley
Perth wears the smoke like some kind of armour.
Like us all, yes it does inhale.

When the petitions arrive, I sign.
Some women aspire to emulate male extremity,
not a moment too soon.
Men are puzzled but there's a kind of way forward.
First People are changing all that needs to
& Bren is just what the component parts feel —
a person, unworried about gender.

Another march? Do we buccaneers
turn pamphleteer again? Brochures
are no more readable when soaked in tears.

This old carp won't refuse
any lifejacket offered.
With impotence as the new flag
we compose/decompose at a bright future.

Richard W. Halperin holds Irish-U.S. nationality and lives in Paris. Since 2006, he has seen over 450 of his poems published in literary magazines, mainly in Ireland and the U.K, with an especially large number taken by *Cyphers* and, until it closed, *THE SHOp*. Since 2010, he has published four collections via Salmon Poetry. The most recent is *Catch Me While You Have the Light*, 2018. In complement, since 2014, he has published thirteen shorter collections via Lapwing, Belfast. The most recent is *Richard Dalloway in Wisconsin: Two Poem Sequences*. The second sequence, *A Country I Remember Fresh as Morning*, is dedicated to the peace educator Betty A. Reardon.



SOMETHING ELSE

'How can I restore what I have never stolen?'
Psalms: 68:5

They cry of the oppressed.
The eternal cry of the oppressed.
The cry of the eternally oppressed.

My cat looks at me.

Whatever he is thinking
It is never that.

We both get to the next minute
In parallel

Richard W Halperin

SNOW MOON

The name for the full moon in February.
First used in Maine, where snowfalls are heavy.
Language, though, is alive, cannot be confined
Even by the good people of Maine.

For me, snow moon is the full moon in any month,
Pure as driven. White is not necessarily something
To be emulated. The dead turn white, for example.
I prefer luminous.

Garbo, after retirement, received an honorary Oscar
For her 'luminous performances.' It could as well
Have gone to moon phases. Snow moon.
Soon gone. Never gone. Eventual resurrection.

The Book of Kells is also snow moon. The colours
Mask it, as did the paint on ancient Greek temples.
Snow moon. When I say the two words, mountains,
Valleys, libraries, I myself, drop sheer away.

CONVERSATIONS

With schoolmates. With teachers.
Where are they now, those conversations?
Not about literature or science,
Although that's what we thought they were about.

Conversations about ourselves only,
About how intelligent we all were being.
Passionate opinions,
Most of which subsequent tragedy burnt entirely away.

Conversations which continued on without us
Through inter-stellar space.
To be eaten by angels maybe,
As the resurrected Jesus ate that grilled fish

DAY MOTH

For Elizabeth A. Farrell (1942 – 2021)

'What he could do he did,'
Virginia Woolf writes.

About the moth
In 'The Death of the Moth.'

And I, as my life nears its close?
I have not done what I could.
Do is a terrifying verb.
The responsibility.

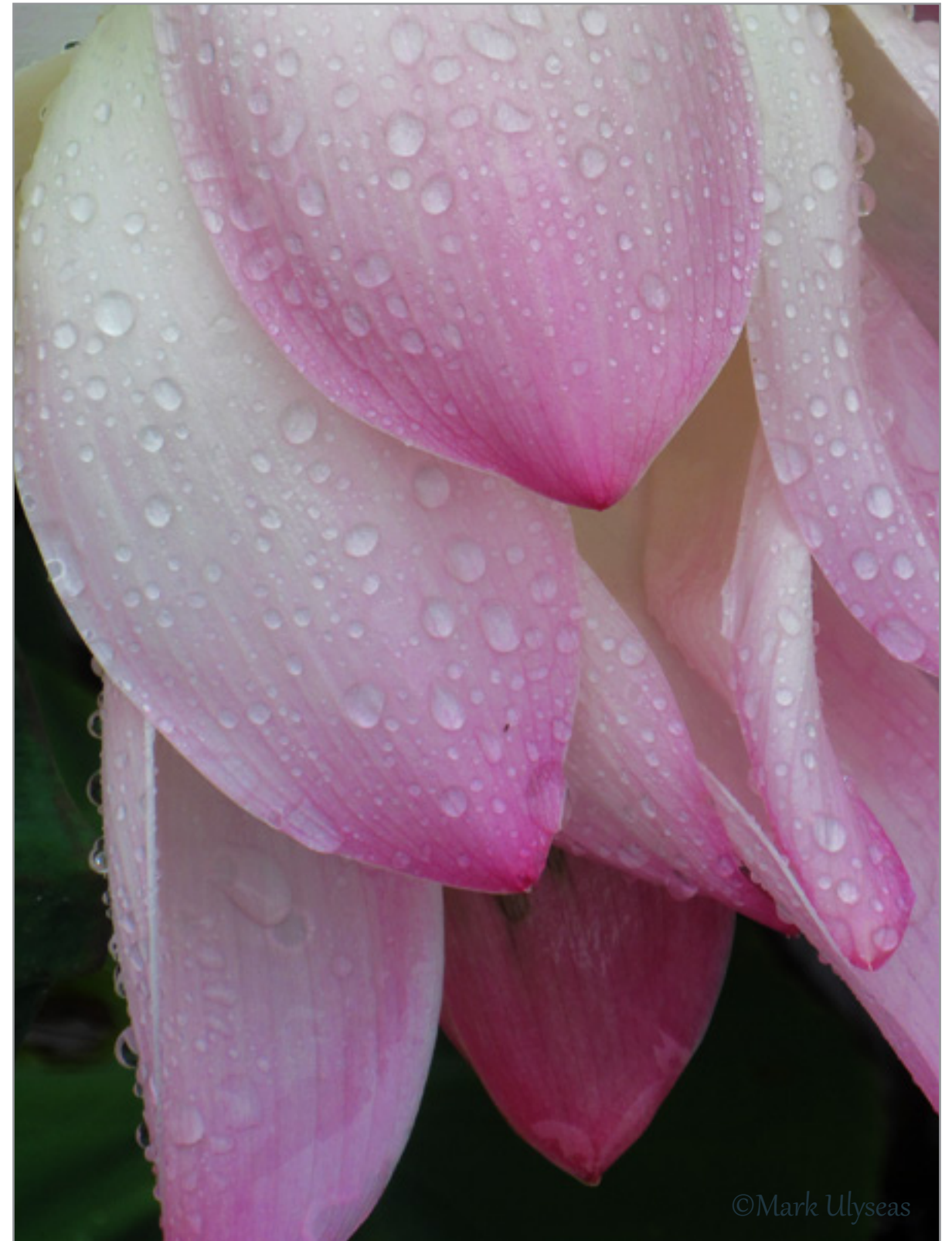
Be is the verb for me:
Be I cannot help.

A moth flutters against a windowpane
On a summer day.
Bangs against the pane.
Slows down against the pane.
Falls nearly weightless to the sill.
Dies.

In one regard I do do what I can:
I write.

Not to be read by readers.
Not to be read by myself.
Not to be read by windows.
One can open windows.
I write to be read
By windowpanes.

I can see through them
But I can never pass through them.



©Mark Ulyseas

Lotus washed by the rain. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Moya Roddy's debut collection *Out of the Ordinary* (Salmon 2018) was shortlisted for the Strong/Shine Award. Poet Jessica Traynor described it in North Magazine as a "... book of minute observations ... sudden seismic epiphanies" Her poetry was also shortlisted for the Hennessy Award. She's published a collection of short stories *Other People* and two novels *A Wiser Girl* (Dec 2020) and *The Long Way Home* described in the Irish Times as "simply brilliant". A new collection of short stories *Fire in my Head* is due for publishing in September and her second collection of poetry shortly afterwards. She also writes for radio, television and film. Moya facilitates Meditation every Sunday at Brigit's Garden in Galway, Ireland.



DROPPED STITCHES

The back almost finished, you notice
dropped stitches several rows down,
others threatening to slip their moorings.
Nothing to do but unravel, slowing
as you get closer to the giveaway line;
then the painstaking job of getting
stitches back on needles, one by one,
plain and pearl twisting in opposite
directions. Using the crinkled wool
you begin replicating what's been ripped:
a phantom piece of knitting hovering –
like a memory you can't put a finger on.

Moya Roddy. Photo credit: Jess Walsh.

YOU WERE EVERYTHING

You were everything
I never wanted to be
you were hanging out washing
sweeping floors and making beds
you grew fat then thin producing babies
as if they were going out of fashion
you were saggy breasts and varicose veins
giver and withholder
you were everywhere
you were in the way
an insoluble object I had to overcome
you were court shoes and slippers
double meanings and mixed messages
go-between and in-between
placater and protector
the patience of a saint
you were for making the best of it
finding the good in everything
keeping your voice down
you were ill health and doctor's orders
heart racing and palpitations
waiting rooms and hospital beds
getting sick and being sick
you wrote letters to your own mother saying
I don't think my daughter loves me
you were a keeper of lore
apples for moisture
salt in burnt saucepans
coal among lettuce leaves
you made rhubarb pies and gur cake
blackberry jam and crab apple jelly
you made things last

you read stories with morals
Pinocchio, Wizard of Oz
danced the Charleston
your elastic stockings slipping
loved Nescafe and Fox's Glacier Mints
you cleaned up shit and puke
wiped dirty noses
buried your youngest son
you delivered the Sacred Heart Messenger
with its lurid red cover
put egg white round your eyes to stop wrinkles
had a beautiful voice
you loved flowers and gardening
looked beautiful in your grosgrain suit
and once when you unbuttoned your blouse
sat on the back step to sunbathe
you were sexual
you were Brown Scapulars and novenas
collected rosary beads memoriam cards
went to Mass every day
trusting in God and goodness
it didn't stop us fighting
me attacking you deflecting
slow attrition
you loved your sons more than your daughters
had your own version of re-incarnation
hoping to come back as a snake or a flower.
I don't think I ever thought of you as a person.
Mammy, I hardly knew you.

IN FLIGHT

When the call comes there isn't time
to search the net for bargains,
it's dash to the airport, grab
the first available seat –
and even though the plane's travelling
hundreds of knots an hour
my heart outpaces it, each cell in my body
willing it on, assuring me you won't die
while I'm in flight, will wait – as you
always waited – 'til I get home.
I can see you at the top of the stairs:
What time do you call this, Missie!

Hurry, I urge the taxi driver. When he
pulls up outside the hospital I jump out,
blunder through revolving doors,
race along corridors, your image looming large:
only to find you shrunk, childlike
in your bed; asleep or in a coma the nurse
can't say: *Speak to him, they sometimes hear.*

Embarrassed, I whisper *Kojac* in your ear –
your favourite TV show. As I stoop and kiss
your gravelly cheek a smile appears. *Go and
have a cuppa*, the nurse advises. I do as I'm
told – return to find you've slipped away.

The journey back feels endless, one thought
circling: had I missed the flight or the taxi
broken down would you have lived longer?
Or like the ratio of wingspan to fuselage
—a precise equation of length to breadth—
which keeps the plane airborne: is each lifetime
so many breaths, so many breaths and then
no more.

COLOUR CODE

Barely in the place a wet Sunday when
they painted it a jaw-dropping turquoise;
not only the house but the walls surrounding
the house, the lean-to at the gable end.
The locality saw red – who did they think
they were painting a house that colour,
showing no respect for the countryside
or those living in it – a complete eyesore –
blow-ins wouldn't you know and that house white
for as long as anyone could remember.
What was wrong with white – if they
didn't like it weren't there forty shades
of cream to choose from? People muttered
behind their backs, crying blue murder;
but gradually they found something else
to talk about and the strangers turned out to be
just like themselves, sending their kids
to school, shopping at Supervalu.

That seemed to be that until one day
the front door of a neighbouring house
was painted a screaming magenta; an old
outhouse turned yellow and in jigtime
the whole townland was a rainbow; regulars
at the pub saying what's the harm,
it spiced things up, added a bit of colour;
pity no one thought of it sooner.

SCHRODINGER'S HEDGEHOG

After a couple of glasses we end up
in the garden, debating whether
the hedgehog we've chanced upon
is alive or dead. There's a curious
cast to its eyes – open but unseeing.
It could be hibernating, I venture;
puzzling over your perfume –
musk, I decide, a whiff of predator.

As we chatter idly above the possibly
lifeless creature, I wonder if there
isn't more to Schrodinger – if being
alive and dead at the same time
isn't our default position.

A QUESTION OF LUCK

The electricity goes and I curse, fumble for
matches. Locating a box, I strike one after
another in a search for candles; chance upon
a couple of stubs at the back of a drawer.
I should have paid attention to the warnings,
I berate myself: I could have got some in,
re-charged my phone—

I catch myself on! All we're getting is the tail
end of a storm. On the other side of the world:
mudslides, floods, contaminated water. People
dying or displaced. Homes reduced to matchsticks.

John W Sexton's poetry is widely published and he has been a regular contributor to *Live Encounters*. His sixth poetry collection, *Futures Pass*, was published by Salmon Poetry in 2018 and a chapbook of surrealist poetry, *Inverted Night*, came out from SurVision in April 2019. His seventh full collection of poetry, *Visions at Templeglantine*, came out last April from Revival Press. His next collection for Salmon Poetry, *The World Under the World*, is forthcoming. In 2007 he was awarded a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in Poetry.



Ω

The grey London sky breaks into seagulls. Dad says they are the River Thames and I think I know what he means. He says we'll go to the River Thames on Sunday. Sunday comes and dad says, *here we are, this is the River Thames*. There are cars driving and traffic lights and people walking on the river. No, says dad. *This is the bridge, the river is below us*. Then I see it, green and grey and brown and in a temper. There are boats in it and then seagulls everywhere. I tell dad a boy hit me in school. Hit him back, says dad. *I can't, dad, he's bigger than me*. Everyone is bigger than me. *Hit him back or find a way to hit him back*, says dad, *or it will go on forever and he'll keep hitting you*. Dad says this like it's the best help ever. We go home. I have a grey Airfix airplane because I can't paint it. Dad is too busy to paint it so it stays grey. It looks like a seagull. A little pilot is sitting inside its head. They are the River Thames. I play and play with the River Thames until bedtime. I wet the bed.

John W Sexton

Ψ

The boy hits me again. *You smell like piss*, he says.
 Another boy hits me, and then another. *You smell like piss. You're a Piss Boy.* I cry and a teacher in the playground tells me to stop making a fuss.
 I have an elephant in my pocket. He was part of the Jungle Set with a lion and a camel and a palm tree. The elephant is strong. I receive elephants. Receive is a word mum uses. It's a word from Mass. *One day you will receive Jesus*, says mum.
 I decide instead that I will receive elephants. This elephant is strong. He is grey like the River Thames. He has a loud trumpet sound. He is making the loud trumpet sound in class but no one can hear him. He is running very fast through the jungle with his funny clumpy stiff legs. I am laughing at his funny run. The teacher asks, *John Sexton, what are you laughing at?* I tell the teacher that the elephant is running through the jungle. I tell her that I am receiving elephants. Everyone in class laughs.
 I have to go to the front. *Put out your hand*, she says. I lift out my hand and show her the elephant. She takes the elephant and puts it inside her desk. I get two slaps of the ruler. I pretend the elephant is still in my hand but the ruler stings. I never see my elephant again. Another boy says, *that is my elephant, Miss. John Sexton stole my elephant.*
 I cry and the teacher says stop making a fuss. All the other boys say it's true. That I stole the elephant. The teacher gives the boy the elephant. That night I play with the River Thames again. The pilot visits the elephant but says he won't come back. The elephant is going to stay with that boy. The lion fights with the camel. The palm tree watches. The palm tree is the jungle. I wet the bed.

X

End of summer I split dandelion clocks with my breath. How many dandelions become from a dandelion? I am eight. Then I'm nine and it's summer. The dandelions are only a summer old forever. Then they think themselves from their heads and colour the sky white with their spokes. Then Christmas. The sky is black. There's rain so much it's pouring inside everybody. Mum and dad have thunder and lightning and there's an argument. Dad takes the nut cracker and breaks open a walnut. There is no nut inside, just a small unformed thing that looks like a shrivelled baby. I eat it and swallow it anyway, and dad laughs and says, *I bet that tasted like bird shit.* I look carefully at the inside of the walnut shell. It is full of empty rooms. I get an idea.

φ

The room that the baby walnut was in is haunted.
There's a lingering feeling like a sadness.
I do not go into that room. That room still belongs
to the tree. I have no idea what walnut trees look like,
but I know the shell of the walnut is still connected
to the tree it came from. One day, I think, I will travel
to that tree. I choose a room near the centre of the hollow
shell. I join the two halves of the shell in my mind.
I am now standing in darkness. The shell will
take me. I think myself to the railway embankment
between Hornsey and Harringay Stations, right behind
my friend Liam's house, where there's a secret slit
in the fence. The sloping bank is blinding with snow.
The canal that runs alongside is frozen. But it's the winter
before, when Liam Gray dared us to go there. I can see
both myself and Liam, but they cannot see me,
for I'm as small as a maggot. I see myself tread through
a nail buried in the snow. I am screaming with pain. My right
footprints hold dots of blood at their centre. Liam says
if the rust in the nail meets the iron in my blood then
I'll die of rust. I know what is going to happen,
for it has happened already, so I go back inside
the walnut shell and open my eyes. The one-bar
electric fire in my room glows bright red but I still
feel the snow gone through me, still feel the nail
in my foot of a year ago. I had limped home that day,
terrified I would die of rust. I told dad when I hobbled
through the door. He said there was a fear of me arse,
but then he laughed and tousled my hair. I knew then
that I wouldn't die. I've already been to all of these pasts.

I want now to go to the future, but when I try, the future
won't let me in, is a grey blizzard like the static noise
of the television. Instead I travel to the bottom of the sea.
It is dark inside the shell and colder than the snow was.
My feet are wet and suddenly I realise that the shell is leaking.
If I open the shell I will drown. I go back home straight away.
I want to go to space now, but then I think that space might leak
into the shell as well. There is a sharp taste in my mouth,
as if the ghost of the empty room is now inside me.
I don't want to travel in the walnut shell anymore.

U

That night I dream of the dead baby walnut that I swallowed.
The baby walnut is floating in front of my face, bright
as a ladybird. Then she flits into my ear and says,
*Follow me, follow me, don't be scared. The walnut shell
is our flying house. Dad set me free when he cracked
it open. And he let you in at the same time. You did not
spit me out, you swallowed me safe. You kept me.* I wake up.
The bed is dry. I go to the window. The garden is full
of moonlight. I look up into the sky and suddenly there's
a shooting star. It falls quickly towards Turnpike Lane.
I go back to bed and sleep. I dream of sitting on a cushion
inside the walnut shell, and the baby ghost is with me.
Now she has wings and really is like a ladybird, but
her colour is back-to-front, her body black with red spots.
She flies about and about, talking talking. Talking talking.
*Everyone goes to the future, it's just waiting there.
No one goes back. So go back go back, go back. Go back.*
And she just flies about and about, talking talking.
Then it's morning and I wake up. But she's still talking.



©Mark Ulyseas

Night sky. 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.



HARD HANDS

On his deathbed my father remarked upon
the hardness of my hands enclosing his,
repeating the mantra, "Your old hard hands,"
still baffled that a life of pen pushing
had failed to plane the coarseness out of them.

Today he's nineteen years in the grave
and I contemplate the still unyielding hands
bequeathed to me by farming forebears,
Duracks and Guerins, Clearys and Gildeas
who milked the cows and followed the plough,
and from the maternal limb of our genetic tree
tradesmen and herdsmen, Moroneys and Hayeses.

Raised a middle child of three, all sons:
the youngest coarse-palmed like myself,
having been a farmer all his life;
the eldest with calloused fingertips
from countless years caressing a guitar;
the stiff handshakes with which we greet the world
belie (we hope) the softness of our hearts.

Michael Durack

MARCH

The third month of the calendar, a dangerous one,
in like a lion, out like a lamb, many weathers.
Caesar was butchered on the Ides of March,
Christ crucified on its Nones.

St Patrick expired on the 17th, the anniversary
(so the Biblical chronologists say)
of Adam's farewell to the Garden
and Noah's maiden voyage aboard the Ark.

The Covid waves washed over us in March,
leaving our arks at anchor, our airships grounded,
our garden gates slammed shut in our faces.

ROMEO ON THE DOORSTEP

A Georgian terrace on Rathmines Road;
a love-struck Romeo ringing the door bell
of his unresponsive Juliet on the third floor.
The faint buzzing tickles our ears on the fourth.

Silence. Then Romeo, throwing caution
to the wind, fingers a raucous serenade,
playing the bell buttons like an accordion.
The house in uproar, we open our window,
shout "Go home to fuck!" and pitch out
a basin of water to dampen his ardour.

Half a century ago. The dousing did the trick.
But, Romeo, after all this time, no hard feelings.
I hope your heart got mended. And, Romeo,
wherever you are, I hope your suit got dry.

POMEGRANATE AND NARCISSI

The pomegranate was pressed into my hand
in a sleeper carriage aboard the Red Arrow
speeding from Moscow to Leningrad.
It was neither gift nor robbery, an exchange
for a chocolate bar of *pomum granatum*
from a businessman out of Azerbaijan
to a wide-eyed tourist from Tipperary.
The fruit, looked like it had seen better days;
its flesh remained unbitten, its seeds undigested.
Persephone might have escaped Hades
had she been offered my pomegranate.

Back then I was not *au fait* with the myth
that spawned the seasons, balanced life and death.
I had no cause to fear for daughters
drawn to lines of daffodils on our lawn
hugging the little stream that might have been The Styx
but likelier would become the Irish Sea.



<https://pixabay.com/photos/pomegranate-exotic-fruits-fruits-3802408/>

Peter O'Neill is the author of six collections of poetry, most recently *Henry Street Arcade* a bilingual edition, his first, with translations into French by Yan Kouton published by Éditions du Pont de l'Europe, 2021. He has also published a book of translations *The Enemy - Transversions from Charles Baudelaire* (Lapwing, 2015) and the hybrid prose work *More Micks than Dicks* – a satirical dig at the current world of Beckett studies (Famous Seamus, 2017). He has just finished curating *Baudelaire 200 Years!* an online festival for the Alliance Francaise, and a new book, again inspired by Baudelaire, *Ideals and Spleen* is due out in the summer.



WAKE NOT WOKE

For Kevin Kiely

And the words were spoken ever so gently.
So gently gentile that even the gentlest
Reptile that ever leapt off of a leaf of
Four leaf clover wouldn't have noticed them passing!

And the smiling faces on em' –
Physiognomy of ignominious half-wits
Half- heartedly babbling out their Babel-like spout,
Sprouting atop again; "Round and roun' again."

Their greasy inner chameleon, skin of leather
Pulling over their leaden eyeballs, inviting
Envy and words so gently spoken. Gentle as Gently

Like, wouldn't harm a fly on a flyby passing.
So gently as gently like *plámássing* -
All the while their two feet stuck knee-deep in it!

Peter O'Neill

Éamon Mag Uidhir was born in Dublin but now lives in County Kildare. He has published poems of late in *Cyphers*, *The Moth*, *Cran-nóg*, *Revival*, *The SHOp*, *The Caterpillar*, *College Green*, *Boyne Berries*, *Skylight47* and *FLARE*, and online in *HeadStuff*, *The Galway Review*, *Live Encounters*, *Misty Mountain Review* and *Burning Bush II*. He edited *Icarus* while at Trinity College during the 1970s and currently edits the narrowsheet *FLARE* which emanates from the Sunflower Sessions readings in The Lord Edward pub in Dublin. He was one of the writers chosen for the Poetry Ireland Introductions Series readings in May 2015.



SUPER BLUE BLOOD MOON

My feet knew the stairs,
the flip and flop
of sole on step,
the rise and ease,
the shift of weight,
as a milkfloat horse
plods and feeds,
stopping at paying
customers.

The blood moon
super moon
blue moon
condescended
incandescently
through the window as
I reached the landing,
bright as a chilly day,
bright enough to read
a watchface by,
bright enough to jot
down a poem.

Éamon Mag Uidhir

PHILATELY WILL GET YOU NOWHERE

A furtive nod harbingers the coming
cornucopia, anticipation ardent
as the plangent thrill of the Mick McQuaid
baccy tin pinging open, and a
classmate's swops spread over the
ink-stained desk, and the
hypnotic vista of two sinfully artful
sets of triangulars
with their brash Leeward songbirds
and the urgent wild flowers of
the Slave Coast shore; to gain
and possess these was to be
born, live and die of joy in a
single mayfly moment.

A STREAM IN THE GALTEES MAKES ITS PLAY

in your memory, my water is
clear, smooth, obstacle-free,
flowing as it will. but then,
and there, it had an ochre slick
wafting through it, with
earth-brown tadpoles and
swimming creatures with
far too many legs. grains of
fine gravel, many-coloured,
sandstone returned to sand,
glinted within it, distorted by
the flowing lens. if you were
there, and this was then, you
would wish you could reach
down and cup a palmful of
my water, and pocket it
like a pebble souvenir that
calls you back to a beach
long after you've gone home.

2010 - 2020



11
YEARS

Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
MAY 2021

COVER ARTWORK BY EMMA BARONE