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# Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH

JUNE 2021

TERRY MCDONAGH  
*Raftery Returns*

COVER ARTWORK BY EMMA BARONE





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Marigold, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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



## TERRY MCDONAGH RAFTERY RETURNS ARTS FESTIVAL IN KILTIMAGH, COUNTY MAYO, IRELAND.

In the week, September 26th to October 3rd we will be celebrating the life and work of the blind poet, *Anthony Raftery*, of Cill Aodáin (Killedan), Kiltimagh. Previous generations kept the memory of the poet alive and now it's our turn to honour his life and work. We will begin by symbolically returning him to his birthplace when a group of cyclists will travel the one hundred kilometres from Raftery's grave to Cill Aodáin, Kiltimagh where he will be paraded through the streets in style.

Visitors will be welcomed and treated to a whole week of events that include creative writing workshops in English and Irish. Readings with writers *Colette Nic Aodha*, *Gabriel Fitzmaurice*, *Ger Reidy*, *Terry McDonagh* and others. Tertulia bookshop will provide us with a pop-up bookshop for the week. Publisher Alan Hayes of Arlen House will talk about publishing. There will be open-mic sessions and a poetry competition with a first prize of Euro 500. In addition, the winning poem will be unveiled, as part of a poetry trail, on March 30th 2022 (Raftery's birthday). There will something for everyone: talks, music in pubs, a concert with Sean Keane, creative writing in schools, theatre and a literary walk through the townland of Cill Aodáin.

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



Raftery is special in the legends and lore that surround his unconventional life and work. It’s reported that he died on a wild and windy Christmas Eve and was buried at midnight in the tiny graveyard of Killeeneen. Witnesses related that an old woman lit a candle to show the way and, even though the night was wild, the candle refused to go out. “It could not be quenched”.

Anthony Raftery, the last of the travelling bards in Ireland, was born in 1779 in Cill Aodáin, Kiltimagh, County Mayo, and died on Christmas Eve 1835 in Killeeneen, County Galway, where he is buried. The story goes that he left Cill Aodáin in a hurry after an altercation with his patron and mentor, the landlord, Frank Taaffe. Although he’d always longed to return, he never did. In one of his most well-known poems, *Cill Aodáin*, he gives expression to his longing.

**Antaine Ó Raifteirí**

“Anois teacht an Earraigh  
beidh an lá dúl chun shíneadh  
Is tar eis na féil Bríde  
ardóigh mé mo sheol  
Go Coillte Mach rachad  
ní stopfaidh me choíche  
Go seasfaidh mé síos  
i lár Chondae Mhaigh Eo.”  
Cill Aodáin an baile  
a bhfásann gach ní ann,  
Tá sméara is subh craobh ann  
is meas de gach sórt,  
Is dá mbéinnse i mo sheasamh  
i gceartlár mo dhaoine  
D’imeodh an aois díom  
is bheinn arís óg.

**Anthony Raftery**

Now with the coming of spring  
the days will be getting longer  
and after the feast of Saint Brigid  
I will hoist my sail  
and head for Kiltimagh and  
I won’t stop for a moment  
until I’m back again  
in the heart of my County Mayo  
Killedan is the place  
where everything grows.  
There are blackberries and raspberries  
and all kinds of fruit there.  
If only I could only be standing  
among my own people,  
age would disappear from me  
and I’d be young again.

Raftery is special in the legends and lore that surround his unconventional life and work. It’s reported that he died on a wild and windy Christmas Eve and was buried at midnight in the tiny graveyard of Killeeneen. Witnesses related that an old woman lit a candle to show the way and, even though the night was wild, the candle refused to go out. “It could not be quenched”.

But the story of Raftery only really took off about 1900 when Lady Gregory, a cultured, County Galway, Anglo Irish woman of wealth and influence, heard two old women arguing about the greatest poet and storyteller in the area. Although he’d already been dead for about forty years, one of the women argued, vehemently, in favour of Raftery – his ability in storytelling, fiddle playing and poetry was special. She talked about his talent with words and his gift of being able to memorize his own work. He would travel the roads and always be welcomed by rich and poor alike. The historian, James Hardiman, said Raftery played the fiddle tolerably.



Photograph by Joanna McDonagh.



By the early 20th century, the landlord Taaffe had been succeeded by the very literary and influential McManus family who, aided by my great grandfather, Thady Conlon, began a Raftery regeneration. Thady, an Irish language speaker and teacher, had translated one of Raftery's best-known poems, Cill Aodáin, into English for the McManus family. It was the time of the Irish literary renaissance and the old stories and traditions began to play a very important role.

Lady Gregory became fascinated and began her research. She, with the support of WB Yeats, Edward Martin and people from the area, saw to it that his grave got a headstone. With her friend, Doctor Douglas Hyde (future first President of Ireland) she became a driving force behind the revival of the life and works of the bard. Hyde compiled a collection of Raftery's song and poetry. Research took them to Raftery's birthplace in Cill Aodáin (Killedan) – their intention being to get to know and understand more about the poet's background. They were to learn that he'd become blind when nine of his siblings lost their lives, and he his sight, when smallpox ravaged through the area.

By the early 20th century, the landlord Taaffe had been succeeded by the very literary and influential McManus family who, aided by my great grandfather, Thady Conlon, began a Raftery regeneration. Thady, an Irish language speaker and teacher, had translated one of Raftery's best-known poems, Cill Aodáin, into English for the McManus family. It was the time of the Irish literary renaissance and the old stories and traditions began to play a very important role. WB Yeats, Lady Gregory, Edward Martin and others founded the Abbey Theatre as a State Theatre in Dublin with the intention of promoting new Irish work as well as giving voice to all that was of significance in the Irish cultural tradition.

Thanks to The Western Development Commission and our main sponsor, Spot-lit – a Europe-wide promoter of literary tourism – it has been possible for us to, symbolically, return Raftery to his birthplace in Cill Aodáin, Kiltimagh and to present a really interesting and exciting programme. In addition we are grateful to Kiltimagh Tourism for continued support. We are delighted to have been able to establish relations with other participants in the SpotLit literary tourism programme, such as Cáirde Sligo Arts Festival, Tertulia bookshop in Westport, Artisan House Letterfrack and Kiltartan Museum and Thoor Ballylee in County Galway.

We look forward to welcoming lots of visitors to the festival. It's a fresh start to be continued long into the future.



Photographs/collage by Joanna McDonagh.



Sandra's poetry has recently been published in Griffith Review (Griffith University), The Blue Nib, Canberra Times, Contemporary Haibun Online, Ribbons, Hecate (University of Queensland), Other Terrain and Backstory (Swinburne University), Meniscus (University of Canberra), Axon (University of Canberra), *Australian Poetry Journal* 2019. Her recent collections are *It's the sugar*, Sugar Recent Work Press, 2021, *Acting Like a Girl*, Recent Work Press, 2019 and *The Orlando Files*, Ginninderra Press, 2018. *Acting Like a Girl* was the winner of the 2020 ACT Writing and Publishing Award for Poetry.



## WALKING BOTH AWAY AND INTO

an old felt hat  
brings back memories  
of the desert treks  
no footprints for 500 kilometres  
Oh! the space of it

silence  
wind worrying sand  
leaves evidence  
of prescience  
sand swirls, ridges dry, desiccated fragile  
ephemeral waterholes

Parchment desert spreads a full vista, wrinkles of dunes, spinifex and dune grass  
as far as far. Wildflowers, muted pinks and yellows, already dried, a gift from  
the parched. Walking both away and into. Steps punctuated by camel bells,  
creaking camel saddles, occasional sighs from the camel string, soft-voiced  
cameleers. Rush of budgies, thousands fingerprinting the blue — unison magic.

line of horizon  
clear and uncluttered along dune tops  
on the ridge, camels  
miniscule in perspective  
underlining the enormity of universe

Sandra Renew

## BACK LIGHT

it's never a good thing   always a bad look  
 when a backstage roadie   is sure they're being robbed of the limelight  
 kept in a back room   taken for granted

grabs centre stage   the spotlight  
 proving they're more than just background music  
 deserve to be seen   front and centre

their electric effect   on the rest of the cast  
 we're shocked by their player skills   searing sciatic pain  
 brought to our knees   bowed to the floor   crippled on every level

all play stops while we soothe, sedate, centre our attention  
 on the backside player   our offerings are wrapped in silver sleeves  
 golden promises of immediate relief   massaging more than the ego

strange, exotic choreography: glute bridge, single leg dead lift,  
 crab walk, donkey kick, glute squeeze   strange moves   crouching stretching  
 relieve the agony, a momentary relief

until hurt feelings assuaged enough, largesse of attention  
 causes stage fright, the glute reverts behind the scenes to a finely tuned,  
 finger-in-every-pie   posture

*Note: The gluteus maximus muscle is regarded as one of the strongest muscles in the human body,  
 responsible for movement of the hip and thigh.*

## SEASONAL NOMADS

Restless souls, itinerant drifters, our forward momentum miniscule,  
 we smell the rain, newly fallen on dry earth and parched eucalyptus,  
 before the earth is slaked, seasoning of petrichor rising around us,  
 looking ahead, asking *what is free?* Tinkers of the universe, banging  
 our pots and pans, tapping at the edges, mending where we can.

seasonal nomads  
 caravan trailing an unreliable rig  
 track the backroads  
 fruit harvest, digging potatoes, working a yabby farm  
 retirement shelved for a living wage



Pratibha Castle, born in Dublin, now lives in West Sussex. She began writing on her mother's death, graduating aged 60 from Chichester University with a first-class honours degree in English and Creative Writing, studying further on their Creative Writing MA. *A Triptych of Birds and A Few Loose Feathers* (Hedgehog Press), her award-winning debut pamphlet, publishes summer 2021. Her work appears in *Agenda*, *Dreich*, *The HU*, *Blue Nib*, *Fragmented Voices*, *Saraswati*, *Reach*, *Words for the Wild*, *Bonnie's Crew*, *Panoply*, *Poetry and All That Jazz*, *Fly on the Wall*, *Lothlorien Journal*. Winner of the NADFAS poetry competition age range 13 - 17, 2009, she was Highly Commended in Binsted Arts, Sentinel Literary Journal Competitions 2021, Storytown 2020, and Hedgehog Press, *Postcards from the Hedge: A Bestiary of the Night*. She has been longlisted in competitions, including The Brian Dempsey Memorial. Anthologised, she reads regularly on Wilts Radio, The Poetry Place.



Pratibha Castle

## DAWN WALK AT WITTERING

The sea sparkles,  
a glimmer  
of fallen  
stars, glint  
on the horizon  
of coral light. I pause

at the water's edge,  
bowl my  
hands as  
if dawn  
might be  
cradled like  
a gull's egg. Waves

sluice the shore,  
the legs of an oyster catcher  
stood, head bent, a prophet,  
hearkening; my  
bare toes

scrabbling at lines  
fine as capillaries.  
Mysteries clammed  
in sand and heart that,  
as I watch, dissolve.

Sun seeping through the clouds  
is an ache for my mother's smile  
at our chance meeting by the Cross  
when, instead of spoiling her  
with tea and *craic*,  
I hurried on.



## AFTERWARDS

After they took away the body,  
the nice young men in  
green uniforms, their eyes  
shiny, like everyone's that day,  
their voices the soothe of pigeons  
on the roof: *best not watch, love,*  
*steep stairs, know what I mean?*  
*Better off in the garden.*

You shred a forget-me-not, recall  
the hike up Benbulbin Mount, her eyes  
squinting as she told you  
about her and Daddy.

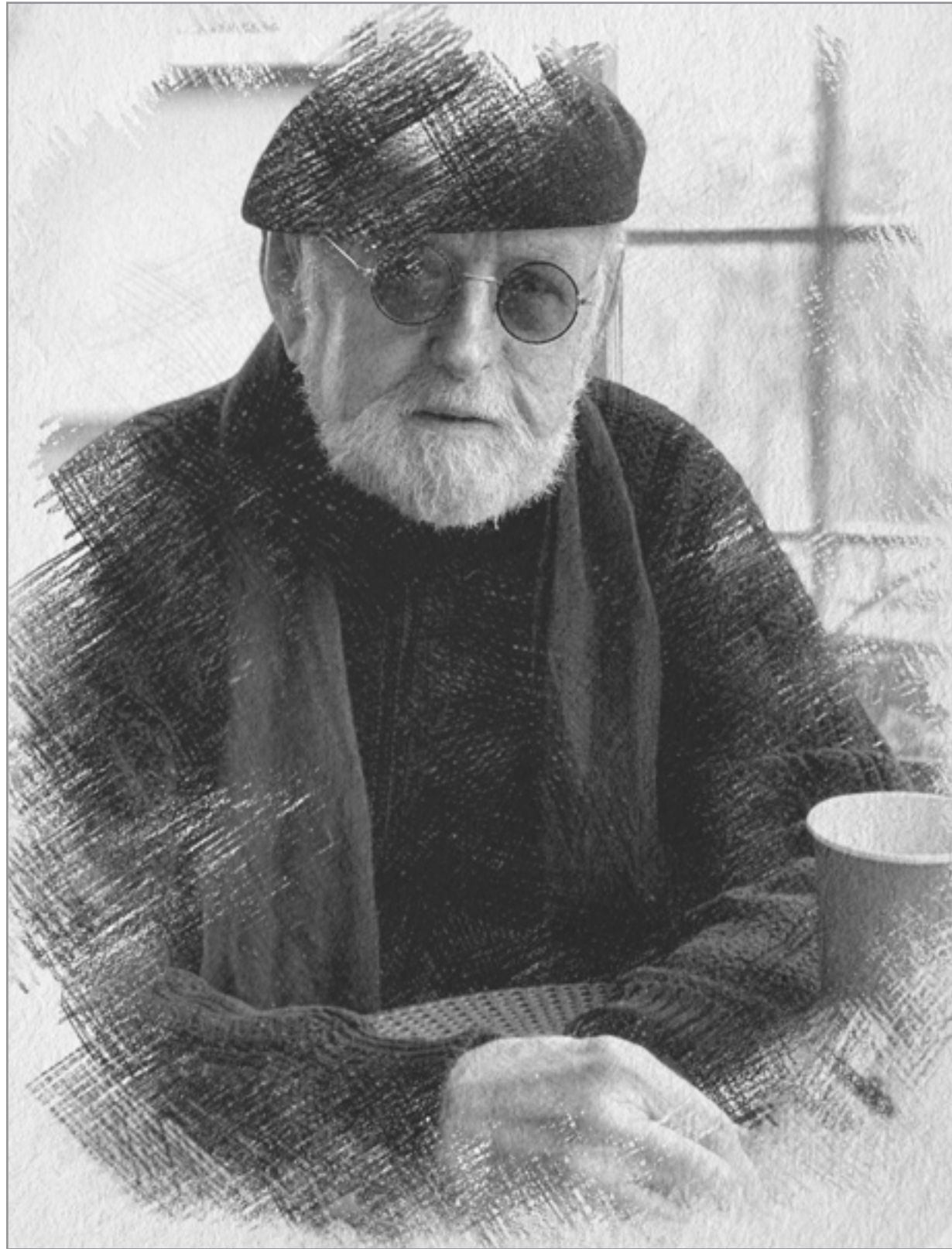
After, once the ambulance has left,  
at the *Crown and Shamrock*, you  
weep into a glass of Merlot, large,  
fidget the pearl rosary you  
loosened from her fist.

The waitress (from County Clare, her eyes  
the same quare blue of Mammy's that,  
according to the fancy of the moon,  
flashed crazy like a Kildare mare) nodding  
as you hiccup how you'd dropped by  
for tea with a batch of scones,  
to find herself abed. Asleep,  
you'd thought, till you saw  
her fingertips, a ruin  
of fallen plums.

The napkin sops,  
a Glencar gush of tears,  
your heart of ice you took for hatred,  
melting; loosed, like one of Grandda's racers,  
only this was a race already run.



John Maxwell O'Brien is an emeritus professor of history (Queens College, CUNY) who has written scores of articles on the ancient and medieval worlds. His best-selling scholarly biography, *Alexander the Great: The Invisible Enemy* (Routledge), has been translated into Greek and Italian, and is currently being translated into Arabic. His celebrated novel, *Aloysius the Great* (Propertius Press), features a history professor who is writing a biography of the Macedonian conqueror. Professor O'Brien and his daughter Christine O'Brien are currently collaborating on an illustrated lyrical biography of Alexander the Great.



## POEMS HA'PENNY EACH

### Identity

Probing...to...find...me  
Masks...until...I...found...myself  
Now...I'm whole...and...free

### Writing

Loosen...let words flow  
Like crimson leaves ...when autumn  
Winds...do...howl...and,,,blow

### Books

Scribble...you...and...me  
Desperate thrusts...we...make...at  
Immortality

### Shadows Numberless

We come...and...go  
Vestiges at first...then...just  
One...in...a...long...row

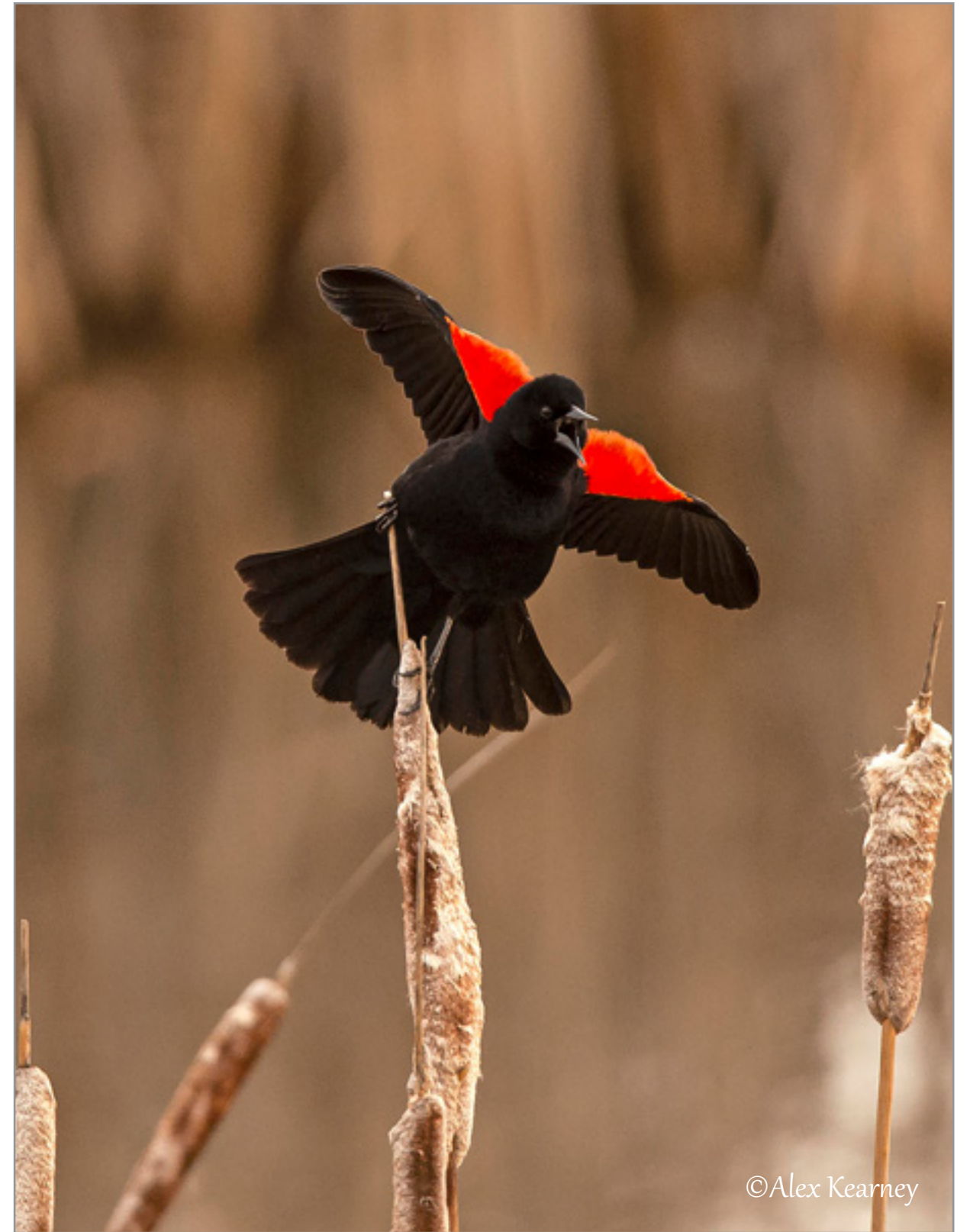
John Maxwell O'Brien



## POEMS HA'PENNY EACH

### Harbingers of Spring

The green fuse...pulsates  
A red-winged blackbird flutters  
Patient...spring...awaits



©Alex Kearney

Photograph by Alex Kearney, Montana, USA.



Lorraine Gibson is a Scottish-Australian anthropologist, writer, painter and neophyte poet. Her work is published internationally in journals, books and magazines. This includes her book 'We Don't Do Dots: Aboriginal Art and Culture in Wilcannia New South Wales', 2013. Sean Kingston Press: UK.



## TRANSPLANTED

Summer comes banging like brass. Scorching westerlies strum invisible fingers across a sweep of palms in a frantic concerto.

A scrum of white explodes above the casuarinas – bands of punk rock cockatoos flick their yellow hairdos — raucous

scrawking making everything seem hotter. I step outside. Sweat creases slick behind my knees, pools in nascent mid-

life folds, maps unwanted patterns on my shirt. This country that I love three-quarters of each year is telling me 'you're

not from here'. Hard-won suntans of my younger migrant years curse my Celtic skin with bills from dermatologists. Reminders

that I am *Made in Scotland*. And yet for decades I have treasured life alongside crumbling golden sand-stone cliffs,

brash lorikeets, honeyed grevilleas and lemon scented gums: longer than I lived alongside pines and snows and hibernating

hedgehogs in my youth — my childhood island home. Now home is here in Mungo Man and Dorothea's country

beside my Aussie children, my partner and my cats. And yet each time I hear the koel calling out the light of summer dawn

I wonder, do her offspring nurtured graciously in their adopted home ever feel — just sometimes — they do not quite belong.

Lorraine Gibson



## PAWN SHOPS AND OTHER STORIES

It was a Monday morning when I stopped soaring  
*over the rainbow* with Judy. The day my Mother  
took my records to the shop with three brass balls.

She often took small artifacts of mine along for  
short trips on a double-decker bus. 'Just far enough  
away' she said, 'so her next door won't know'. Next

my little Dansette record-player (red and cream)  
received its one-way trip. It gained the usual bright  
blue ticket, ten Embassy tipped cigarettes and one

small jar of jam. This was, she said, 'a fair exchange'.  
My birthday camera fared better: it raised an amber  
bottle of 'the very best of spirits' and four 'singles'

from Jassal at the corner shop (he threw four matches in).  
My older sister found a hidey hole to store her tiny  
farm yard figurines. A game of cat and mouse ensued.

I learned quite quickly trouble doesn't always *melt*  
*like lemon drops* — no matter the altitude. I learned  
at the flick of a fraudster's wrist recycled coins could

keep us warm all winter. I learned imagination is essential  
to survival, like scraping 'please let me be beautiful' into  
window frost — a fingernail appeal that seemed important

at the time. Sometimes retrieving things and people isn't  
possible. I could not redeem my Mother's boyfriend Duncan.  
He took his smoker's phlegm and blood and left us all for

T.B. land. Despite 'please let him come home safe' written  
in my window's condensation, there was no lullaby no bright  
blue sky. There was no bright blue ticket that I could swap for him.

*Note: 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' lyrics by Yip Harburg (1946).  
Certain shops in Glasgow, Scotland, used to sell individual cigarettes  
'singles' to smokers who could not afford the smallest available pack of five.*



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



## FUDGE

Today I want to thrash those dandelions,  
the colonising buttercups, glaring at me,  
the ironic beauty of the milk thistle.

I won't dig the dun earth  
with my heavy-duty mattock  
or disturb the sad soil  
with the spade bought for the event.

Today I'll walk in slow time  
down the bog lane,  
I'll pick a bunch of prickly furze,  
purple foxgloves, meadowsweet,

listen to the double bass coo coos  
of the Woodquest,  
the dirge from the rookery,  
and carve your name on the flagstone  
where you used to lie on hot days.

I'll sanctify the spot  
with scents from our walks,  
sip sparkling water  
and wait for the dawn chorus,  
the morning star.

Arthur Broomfield



## THE MEETING ON THE TURRET STAIRS

After *Hellelil and Hildebrand the meeting on the turret stairs*,  
Frederic William Burton. The National Gallery of Ireland.

In another time, when this is a theme park  
or the dredged remnant  
of an orange grove,  
or the Mars office of the New York  
stock exchange,

a couple will surmise,  
as they stroll home in  
a dewy twilight, a cyber rose  
clasped in her hand,  
that here had been a coffee shop, once.

He might say, *those two used to meet here,*  
*regular like, you know?*  
*Oh!* she may say,  
listening for the hiss of steam  
from the Costa Express  
drift across the ethereal,  
*I can smell the cappuccino,*  
*it must have been something special.*

## THE MEETING ON THE TURRET STAIRS 2

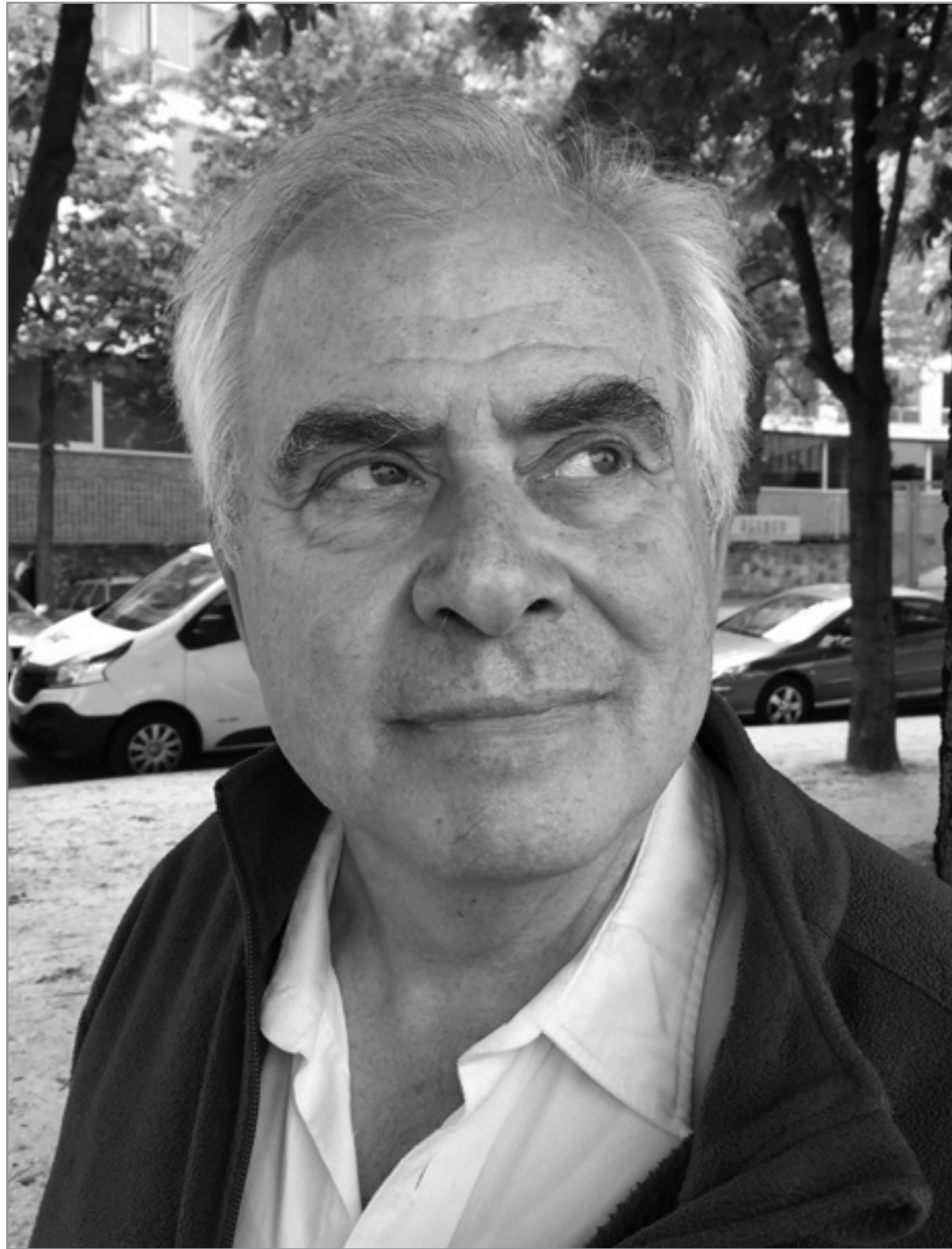
She who has touched him -  
rid of chain mail and helmet,  
sword in repose -  
he would, he planned,  
touch,

here, beyond the curve in the stairs  
where her hair caresses the stars,

he would tell her things in words  
forbidden to a knight  
in armour,  
kiss her, as the poet  
would kiss the muse  
and name her Erato,  
here and hereafter.



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.



## INK, BLOCK, SCENT

### i. My pen writes

My pen writes.  
I try to follow it  
As best I can.

I do not know  
If it is running to something  
Or running from something.

As a boy, I enjoyed golf.  
Hard to play in the middle of  
Manhattan Vienna Paris

The places I have lived in since.  
Green terrains  
Where even the surprises

Are planned.  
Where tempers can be lost  
Without calling the police.

Where if things change  
From 4 to 3,  
That is jolly good.

Some writers are terrains  
Which I like to be in.  
Jane Austen, Arthur Waley.

Jolly good.

Richard W Halperin



INK, BLOCK, SCENT *contd...***ii. Lines**

I broke with a friend  
And am unhappy about it.  
He was my friend.  
My back was totally exposed.  
He said what he said,  
I had no preparation for it.

I turn to Chinese poetry.  
It is some help but not much.

A broken marriage  
An unhappy love affair  
A confusing childhood  
These all find their way  
Into poetry,

But a broken friendship  
Has no place to go.

**iii. Irish Grey**

There is green of course  
And all those other colours.  
But for me  
Grey is Ireland.

Irish grey  
Brings out the colours  
In everything.

Paris grey  
Is vibrations of light.  
Sometimes it hurts the eyes,  
The glare of it.

Irish grey is soft.

Ireland and Paris.  
I have lived in other places  
But grey has little to do  
With them.

Paris grey  
Is what it is.

Irish grey  
Falls on me  
Like a sorrow.

INK, BLOCK, SCENT *contd...*iv.     **Lovely Lady**

She arrived  
During my college graduation  
In the Bronx.

I was not at it,  
I was working a summer job  
In Chicago and glad of it.

At the ceremony,  
I was to be awarded  
The college's Liberal Arts medal.

A pal who did attend  
Wrote me he was disappointed  
That Dorothy Lamour hadn't arrived

On an elephant  
To pick up my medal for me.  
Who didn't love her?

She had got me through  
Some tough times in my childhood.  
And the Bronx could have handled it.

v.     **To a Friend**

Your poems are a complete delight.  
You write them in English  
But they read as if translated

From a language in which  
Words are not necessary.  
I also write

Which gives me a complicity  
In such things.  
I shall not mind dying

Or at least I think I shall not.  
At worst, it will mean  
That I shall disappear.

At best, it will mean  
That we shall walk together  
Where we already are



Dr Greta Sykes is a German/English writer and artist. She is a trained Child Psychologist and has taught at the Institute of Education, now, UCL, London. She has produced two volumes of poetry, the most recent called *The Shipping News* and other poems, as well as two novels, *Under Charred Skies* and *The Defeat of Gilgamesh*, 2020. She is co-chair of the Socialist History Society and contributes to their publications. She is an Associate Researcher at UCL on Antiquity and the Middle Ages with a focus on women's emancipation. Her essays can be found on academia.edu and liveencounters.net as well as on <https://www.gretasykes.com/>  
**The Defeat of Gilgamesh**, An ancient epic history of love and power by Greta Sykes is available at her website, Amazon and publisher <https://www.austinmacauley.com/book/defeat-gilgamesh>



## A TABLE AND TWO CHAIRS

The lockdown plague  
 Caused by humans,  
 No kisses, no touch, no hugs.  
 A lamppost leaning to drink your coffee.  
 A draughty street corner to eat your sandwich.  
 You spread pestilence among nature.  
 You've reverted to unicellular.  
 You're alone, just one,  
 Moored to the early earth's unicellular life.

Then the archaea, bacteria warmed  
 Lonely single cell beings using the sun,  
 And multicellular life could begin.  
 That was on the 12th of April 2021.  
 I bought a sandwich  
 And found a chair at a table  
 To sit with you, Maria,  
 On the other chair.

Talking together  
 of love and despair,  
 happiness and sadness,  
 childbirth and death.  
 We had become multicellular.  
 A quantum leap into connectedness  
 By way of a table and two chairs,  
 We could restart civilisation,  
 A house, a village, temples  
 And a school.

Dr Greta Sykes

## SPRING

Spring twists and starts, it jolts and jerks,  
It shudders and shivers,  
It jitters in fevers of spasms of life  
Of ecstasy in shimmering light  
Of sudden blossoms  
Blurring my vision,  
my heart is throbbing  
with spring's joyful sobbing.

## THE FULL MOON

I bedded the moon,  
Numinous mana,  
In the morning hours,  
The radiant beam lay in my bed.

## BETULA PENDULA

Deciduous beauty in spring.  
Like the heaven's chandelier  
with a thousand golden  
Catkins incandescent.



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 July. His poems have been translated into French, Italian, German, Spanish and Arabic.



## THE DARK ROSE

I am reminded of the violence of the Rose,  
When I see you sitting cross-legged on a park bench,  
Dressed in your summer dress  
With the floral patterns tattooed across both breasts.

And your two lithe and voluptuous limbs  
Conceal the pale whitened barbs of your silken skin,  
While the twin pools of your darkened eyes  
Consume my sense of self; such is my demise.

Everything about you comes in pairs!  
Balancing precariously by your sides,  
Your two empty hands sharp as shears.

And as the thorns of some dark rose, they'd rip  
The skin off any part of a merely mortal man.  
She then conspiring to *une fleur du mal*.

Peter O'Neill

## EVE

The third month of the calendar, a dangerous one,  
Eve signalled by the apple which she holds  
Of course in her left hand held behind her back,  
Smiling up at the heavens like one of the justifiably Damned,  
Crowned with Laurel and bearing a quill in her right hand.

Wearing only a pair of stiletto,  
Her stage then a book with a great *R* printed behind her;  
*Rombaldi, Éditeur, 184, Boulevard Saint-Germain, Paris.*  
The title of the book *Les Fleurs Du Mal*.

The year of issue 1935 printed on the spine.  
So, Eve witnesses the fall of the Third Reich.  
You picked it up in an antiquarian bookseller in

Saint Louis in Versailles, 60 years later.  
*Une nuit que j'étais prés d'une affreuse Juive,*  
I think of you now, whenever I read this line

## THE BOOK SHELVES

What about those other stories that books secretly tell,  
Those unbound stories which know no ink nor author,  
But rather emanate from the pages through signs  
Other than those of words, written instead in wine stains

On the discoloured pages of summer holidays  
Baking in the Meditteranean Sun; those same pages,  
Sea- soaked, and whose sheets are forever shaped  
By sea- water and the sun of a certain High Summer?

Who is *their* author, those stories told in other  
Languages and fashioned from other senses other than  
Than those abetted by both ears and tongue?

There, dear reader, open the pages and bend right in,  
Inhale the scent of the O so gently baked paper and smell  
The gentle aroma of pines which have long since faded upon the shores.



Anne McDonald is a Dublin based spoken word poet, dramatist and creative writing teacher whose work is centered on the challenges we face in a society that is changing rapidly and how we respond or react to those changes. Through her writing she explores themes of parenthood, aging, death, loss, inclusivity and response to the human condition, the changes to the political landscape in Ireland and the guttural reaction to those changes on a personal and societal level. She is interested in the power of enabling people who would otherwise not be considered “writers” to find ways to give voice to their own experience. She has had work published in *Women’s News*, *Hot Press*, *Electric Acorn*, *Woman’s Work Anthologies 1 & 2*, *The Blue Nib*, *The Strokestown anthology* and online journals and reviewed and broadcast on RTE Radio. Anne has an M.Phil in Creative Writing. Debut collection - [Crows’ Books](#).



## DAWN AND PRIMROSES

As the sky broke its blackness  
and the streaks of silver  
sliced the dawn, I planted primroses.  
I pressed the damp earth from roots  
circled in a plastic pot,  
weeping silently for room to grow  
and placed them in a soft bed of peat,  
spreading out the tendrils  
so they could wrap themselves  
around warm earth,  
to take their place  
in the springtime garden.

I know the day will fill itself  
with things to do,  
and people needs,  
and places to go,  
and jobs to be done,  
so I loved the earth a little bit  
in the quiet hour  
when it was just me,  
the dawn and primroses.

Anne McDonald

## BUILDING BRIDGES

Today I opened my new front door of my mother's old house  
to my sister, to my brother, to their husbands and wives,  
and for once in our lives we could talk about  
patio heaters and plants and fairy lights in a hawthorn hedge,  
and what we could do with the patch of meadow  
beginning to sprout with cowslips.

No need to say I am sorry, no need to say I was suffering.  
I didn't need to hear anyone explaining why their hurting  
split their tongues in two and who said what to who.  
It's all gone now. The worry and the stress,  
the complicated mess of families trying to negotiate,  
the irreversible long drawn-out death of parents.

Today I opened the door of what will now be  
the new family core and hoped that cake and coffee  
and rhubarb tart and cream will go some way  
to soothe away the never-ending, long bad dream  
of twenty plus years of grieving. I have no fears  
and know that now we will be gentle with each other.

We have space to heal, space to rest  
space to find our feet on our own paths  
yet being there if needed for each other,  
which is what this messy, complicated,  
boisterous, opinionated family  
does best.

## THE FIXER

The fixer in any family is usually the middle sister  
and so it is in mine.  
The upside to having a fixer is we get to dawdle  
on the sidelines of any conflict,  
say our bit and fuck the consequences.

The downside is the fixer is never fixed  
and suffers from the never-ending  
tug-of-war of family dramas and the constant  
"He said/she said" and "I don't want to know."

Today I spent the afternoon with our family fixer  
in the springtime sun.  
We dressed the grave and parceled gifts for Mother's Day,  
drank tea and ate toast in this my new kitchen,  
in my mother's old house.  
For once, there was nothing needed fixing.



## TEA POT

I want to give you something to say thank you,  
but the gift is way beyond a bottle  
of drugstore wine or a bunch of flowers.  
There is nothing I can give that can recognize the hours  
and hours you put in to help me cross this threshold.  
I looked to find a thank you in the cards and malls  
and halls of hand-crafted gifts and then I thought,  
it was the gift of drinking tea  
we missed the most when mam got sick.

The endless talk and cakes and food and schemes  
to lose weight and make money,  
what was funny about the latest gossip,  
leaving in the evening with a bag of food,  
or slips of plants or charity shop clothes  
for grand-kids, hand picked with love.

I wanted to give you a gift,  
then I realized we also love tea  
and cakes and talk about how  
to lose weight and make money  
and funny stories and the latest gossip  
at this, her table where you come  
to while away the hours watching tiny birds  
peck seeds in Peggy's garden.

You have her strength,  
and in your eyes, I saw her smile  
when I gifted you a teapot.



Artwork by Emma Barone.

Tanja Bakić is a poet and literary translator from Montenegro (former Yugoslavia). She is a PhD candidate in English Literature at the University of Montenegro. Her first poetry volume was released when she was 15 years old. To this day, she produced four poetry volumes. Her poems, apart from being frequently anthologised, have appeared in *Words Without Borders*, *Modern Literature*, *Bosphorus Review of Books*, *Poem Hunter*, *Recours Au Poème*, *Rochford Street Review*, etc. She was an invited guest at numerous international literature festivals and gatherings and served several international Artist-in-Residence programmes. .



Tanja Bakić

## ILLUSION

Where are you now?  
 Are you perhaps sitting in some corner  
 Thinking about the things  
 You used to think when you were with me?  
 Did you forget me?  
 Are you laughing?  
 Are you happy?  
 I know your lips won't be able  
 To tell me anything right now  
 I don't even know where you are  
 But my eyes remain fixed on you  
 This chance evening  
 This chance moment  
 As I imagine us eating the Earth  
 And slurping down light borrowed from Heaven

No longer is there you and me  
 We left and now live somewhere  
 In events dreamed of long ago  
 The illusion replenishes  
                     the image of chrysanthemums  
 Whose fragrance you smell before my eyes  
 And the image of us rain-soaked  
 Walking around a reality  
 That never looked like the sea  
 Nor will it ever

Silently I watch the lake before us  
 As the fishermen cast their nets  
 Through which the Sun of the morning  
                     Drips its rays.  
 I still don't know where you are,  
 I still don't know whether you exist.  
 Are you alive? Tell me.  
 I close my eyes and remain silent.



## A FOUR-LEAF CLOVER

I stumbled across a four-leaf clover  
Some twenty-odd years old  
Placed inside page eighty-five  
Of a primary school  
Biology textbook.

The page was dog-eared  
And yellow with dust, creased,  
But as far as I can tell  
The clover remained  
The same as it had been back then  
When I put it there  
Twenty-odd years ago –  
Pressed, flat, green.  
I smelt it,  
And instantly saw before me the little girl  
Whom adults had told  
That if she found  
A four-leaf clover,  
It would make any wish  
Of hers come true.

And so the little girl  
Found her  
Four-leaf clover  
In the grass  
And she said her  
Wish – big, yet small.

And so after all  
These years,  
Laid down  
In the dust  
In the closet of our  
Dreams and thoughts  
I somehow forgot  
Whether the wish the girl had made  
Had actually come true  
In the meantime.  
I cannot even remember  
Exactly what her wish was.  
All I know is that now,  
When the girl stumbled across  
Her clover  
After so many years had passed by,  
She rejoiced again  
As she had done years before  
When she saw it  
For the first time in the grass.

All I know is that  
She took her old clover  
In her palm  
Caressed it  
Whispered to it a new  
Wish – small, yet big –  
And put it back  
Into the same biology textbook  
On the same page  
Eighty-five.



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