Terry McDonagh
Twelve years of Live Encounters

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Live Encounters is a not-for-profit free online magazine that was founded in 2009 in Bali, Indonesia. It showcases some of the best writing from around the world. Poets, writers, academics, civil & human/animal rights activists, academics, environmentalists, social workers, photographers and more have contributed their time and knowledge for the benefit of the readers of:


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

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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Terry is a founding contributor of Live Encounters Magazine.

TERRY MCDONAGH
TWELVE YEARS
OF LIVE ENCOUNTERS

Twelve years of Live Encounters and all of the encounters have been colourful, uplifting and very much alive. Thanks to Editor, Mark Ulysseas. In Tintern Abbey, William Wordsworth talks of five winters with the length of five long summers – LE can boast of twelve winters with the length of twelve long summers. It has been summers of words blended into a colourful journal of experiences, poetry and short stories. In quiet moments I try to sense the mountains of loss, happiness, joy and despair suggested and expressed in and between all of those lines and rhymes.

And I often ask myself: where does poetry come from? I really don’t know but I imagine it must begin somewhere in dreams and between the folds of dawn and dusk. TS Eliot said poetry was a perfect arrangement of words and he might be right but I feel that poetry arranges its own words – it goes much deeper than a planned orchestration. Poetry, dreams and special moments are closely related. Most words on a page – unable to get at fundamental truths – hint and suggest while we, the readers, take what we can from all those promptings.

Poetry seems to come to the page in heightened moments and times of struggle, tragedy, success or happiness – when a child is born, a loved one dies, new love begins or a frayed one crumbles. It has to do with memory – with experiences long past, half-forgotten and buried in childhood and in our subconscious. It’s as if we attempt to dig deep and paint our findings onto a page all dressed up in appropriate colour and costume.
And language is cultural. Just recently I had the pleasure of listening to a poem being recited in Japanese. The performer explained the context and gave us a short summary, first, but the real pleasure was in simply listening to the rhythm and music in language. I didn’t understand a word – yet I felt inspired. It had to do with the language of the heart – a tango and ballet in sounds.

I lived in Germany for many years. At the beginning, trying to understand and communicate was not easy but it was an exciting experience for which I am grateful. After a time I began to hear differences in intonation, regional accents and expression – a bit like living in a poem that was trying to find its way on to a page. On one occasion in Munich, I was delighted when asked how I could possibly live in Hamburg – I had picked up some words and intonation, peculiar to my adopted city. That felt like a poem. I liked it even if I had to let my thoughts catch up. It wasn’t just the words themselves but the silence between them that was the puzzle.

Here in the west of Ireland I talked to my neighbour about profit he had made on a few cattle he had sold the previous week. He wouldn’t give much away. It was like trying to decipher a complex, barely accessible text – I had to listen between the lines. He hadn’t lost money, of this I felt sure. He was smiling.

Did you make a few quid?

Well now...

I’m sure you didn’t lose?

Good cattle made their price.

People use the words they use. Sometimes words use people. We celebrate, embellish and place words in an order that supports our argument or position. Language is spontaneous too. We enjoy watching reactions and listening to ourselves sifting and sorting as we work our way through our topic. Well now, speaks volumes. It’s almost a poem steeped in the history of a region. Even when the listener takes it on walks and journeys, it can never be fully understood – therein lies the challenge and fun. In most cases a few well-placed words smooth, unite or annoy. Temperatures rise and cool. Villages and families celebrate or fight to procure possessions or gain the upper hand. Fellow hunters always try to cross borders and poach in foreign waters. The grass is greener and poems will come and come.

Malala Yousafzai said, one child, one book and one pen can change the world. She could well be right. These cannot change everything but the spoken and written word can awaken a sense of belonging in a cramped childhood. I will always remember working with a group of teenagers where one very disturbed teenager threw caution to the wind and put his wish into four lines:

I wish my mum and dad
and my sister and me
could all be together in a house
by the sea. That’s my wish.

When he had read it to the class, he seemed happier.

The opportunities afforded to writers by LE are special. It’s one thing to write but another to find an outlet for your work. Not only does Mark Ulyseas publish work but he surrounds it with rich pictures that support and enhance the written pieces.

Twelve years and Live Encounters has remained vibrant and generous in its promotion of new and not-so-new writing. The number twelve is special...it leads us into a new year...a chance to begin again.

Pablo Neruda, in his poem, ‘Keeping Quiet’ begins by saying:

Now we will count to twelve
and we will all be still.
For once, on earth,
let not talk in any language;
let’s stop for one moment
and not move our arms so much.
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Live Encounters has reached its twelfth year.
Congratulation and thank you to Mark Ulyseas.
A GYPSY WOMAN IN IRELAND

These days in Ireland, people talk about the price of sites, the cost of tribunals, property abroad, or foreigners...refugees: lazy people come for our riches, who won’t work. They steal, eat raw from our fields, blacken our reputation and colour the skin of our children.

I am Sonia, a Gypsy woman who dreamed colours and grew up gathering berries in a village in Romania. I earned my way to university to become a doctor and the pride of my mother’s heart.

My father never had a nation and died in Auschwitz.

I was arrested with a bundle of leaflets and when I had to flee to Ireland, I was sad: not to be a doctor, not to visit my mother’s grave, to marry an Irishman.

I have never stolen. I am spring clean, stalk strong, proud and honest as the memory of snails and owls in our desolate garden.

I fled when a sneering bullet ended my mother’s life. She died at the mean will of our state; in our house; in my place.

Now, I can only shelter behind my husband’s curtains in a childless fourth-floor flat before closing time in Dublin.

I still see my uncle blazing with his shining sickle in shirt sleeves.

My husband in Ireland you gave me my first passport and beat me daily:

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Published in the inaugural edition of Live Encounters January 2010.
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© Terry McDonagh
**THINGS ON MY DESK**

This now slightly rancid coffee cup from months ago
Has stood on a blue plastic box of faded 35mm slides
Since that early April evening I brought it here, coffee
Still steaming and the cup itself vibrant with accrued
Conversations from the city below. I forget which group
It was that gathered in the coffee-shop beneath the
Wearily heavy railway bridge, but as the names fade
And that golden feeling of being in very good company
Also dehydrates for want of practice, I take a look at
These slides from the blue box and think how time,
That old projectionist, sends back the light to me that
My sense of isolation had dimmed so fatally. Images of
People whose names I’ve now forgotten come between
Me and the low energy bulb swinging from the ceiling.
I’ve disturbed something on my desk that didn’t need
To be disturbed from among the paper-clips, fountain
Pen ink cartridges, blank diary and unused bus tickets –
A coffee scent that has surfaced like ink through a need
To disturb this melancholia, this year’s settled idleness.

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Thomas McCarthy was born at Cappoquin, Co. Waterford in 1954 and educated locally and at University College Cork. He was an Honorary Fellow of the International Writing programme, University of Iowa in 1978/79. He has published *The First Convention* (1978), *The Sorrow Garden* (1981), *The Lost Province* (1996), *Merchant Prince* (2005) and *The Last Geraldine Officer* (2009) as well as a number of other collections. He has also published two novels and a memoir. He has won the Patrick Kavanagh Award, the Alice Hunt Bartlett Prize and the O’Shaughnessy Prize for Poetry as well as the Ireland Funds Annual Literary Award. He worked for many years at Cork City Libraries, retiring in 2014 to write fulltime. He was International Professor of English at Macalester College, Minnesota, in 1994/95. He is a former Editor of *Poetry Ireland Review* and *The Cork Review*. He has also conducted poetry workshops at Listowel Writers’ Week, Molly Keane House, Arvon Foundation and Portlaoise Prison (Provisional IRA Wing). He is a member of Aosdana. His *Pandemonium* was published by Carcanet Press in 2016, and his latest collection, *Prophecy*, was published by Carcanet in April, 2019. Gallery Press, Ireland, will publish his journals, *Poetry, Memory and the Party*, in late 2021.

Rooks in September

On a day of late Autumn heat, of such hot oil
Clinging to the burned trees, an abrupt fury
Of untidy feathers. With churning wings
Two rooks rise and fall,
The leaden sycamore shivering in appeal –
So late in the year that rage seems pointless.
Their bitter recriminations wake
The whole neighbourhood of feathers,
Startling trees that were nearly asleep.
A blackbird veers to avoid the fuss
And settles in a lower hawthorn bush –
Things that are smaller need the dead calm
Of this late September evening, not the fuss
Of untidy wings, of April’s wild ridiculousness.

D.V.

Burdens that the poor seemed to carry were lighter somehow
Between the will of God and the will of God. The hard rain
That fell slantways across your frayed coat, the blue snow
That made your delicate, girlish knuckles also blue; the pain
Of not knowing and never knowing how the house might appear
As you climbed the frightened, ungrateful tenement steps:
Such things were how God ventured, such things were in the fear
You felt for the lives of others and never your own life, except,
It must be said, in the days leading to Christ’s day of birth;
Days when you thought, to the end of Advent, to a turning of the key,
That something of Christ’s peace might have landed on earth –
On your own house specifically. Worried, you might say,
Very quietly, “God willing, let’s hope the mood is good inside.
Let’s hope his mood has changed again.” But flesh and state
Would be too weak to yield to our dreams; his crushing diatribes
 Awaited your cold, ashen face. My hand in yours, I lost my faith.
Angela Patten's publications include four poetry collections, *The Oriole & the Ovenbird* (Kelsay Books), *In Praise of Usefulness* (Wind Ridge Books), *Reliquaries* (Salmon Poetry, Ireland) and *Still Listening* (Salmon Poetry, Ireland), and a prose memoir, *High Tea at a Low Table: Stories From An Irish Childhood* (Wind Ridge Books). Her work has appeared in many literary journals such as *Calyx Journal*, *Nimrod International Journal*, *The Café Review*, *Crosswinds Poetry Journal* and *Poetry Ireland Review*; and in anthologies including *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, *The White Page/An Bhileog Bhan: Twentieth-Century Irish Women Poets: Cudovista Usta (Marvellous Mouth)*, *Drustvo Apokalipsa* (Slovenia); *The Breath of Parted Lips Volume II: Birchsong I and II: Poetry Centered in Vermont*; and *Roads Taken: Contemporary Vermont Poetry*. Born and raised in Dublin, Ireland, she now lives with her husband, poet Daniel Lusk, in Burlington, Vermont, where she is a Senior Lecturer Emerita at the University of Vermont.

**SUMMER SUNDAY IN SOUTH COUNTY DUBLIN**

After weeks of steady rain
the benediction of the sun
prompts the world and his wife
to strip to their skivvies
round up the kids and head
for the seaside to cook themselves
red as beets, tender as sirloin.

Old women dig out ancient
sundresses while old men
roll their sleeves to the elbow
and loosen their ties
in deference to the heat.

Later parboiled redheads
will stroll home draped in towels
sated with heat, smelling
of baby oil and salt, wet togs
tucked under their oxters
like Donnelly’s Irish sausages
taken home for their tea.

Angela Patten
SUMMER SUNDAY

SUMMER SUNDAY

Mono Lake, California

A small grey lizard darts away
perfectly dressed to disappear
on the rocky surface. Osprey nests
loll on top of ragged tufa towers.
Alkali flies form a cloud on the water
scatter when we wade among them.

In late summer the flies carpet
the shoreline and California gulls
run along the edges of the lake
beaks open to gather in the glut
like greedy children at a tea party.

No fish can live in this salty stew
which reminds me of the fish we ate
on meatless Fridays of my childhood
when everybody spoke in code:

Put down that yoke and hand me that gazebo.
Now pet, say day-day to the gee-gee.
Would you ever go out and get me the messages?
You’ll do it while a cat would be chewing a marble.

And so I thought outlandish places
such as Jericho and Timbuktu existed
only in the stories of Scherezade
and The Dead Sea was nowhere
on a map but only in my dream
of floating supine in its brine embrace
suspended by the miracle of salt.

Wellfleet

Fiddler crabs are so named because the male holds one claw, always much
larger than the other, somewhat like a violin. Encyclopaedia Brittanica

In the distance a house on stilts
all its balconies facing the water.

I imagine living there, encircled
by the sea’s perpetual music.

Long grass of salt marshes, tidal flats
shallow pools thrumming.

Fiddler crabs appear and disappear
diving and surfacing in an endless rhythm

rolling the sand as they sift and scavenge
for nourishment, pausing only when

the males brandish their colossal claws
to wave at their prospective mates

moving their instruments in unison
like the string section of a surreal orchestra.
Nude in a Cathedral Window

Next door, the grand barn window
of a stained-glass studio. A figure lies naked
on the broad sill inside, skin like terracotta.

Art students wipe charcoal dust
from their hands and abandon their easels.

Refractions of sunlight cast a border
round her window like prayer flags.
The air perfumed with the scent
of laneway Century trees.

In the geometry of summer lassitude
an ensemble of musicians surrounds her,
improvising harmonics and hues
that resonate among her shadows and swells.

Later they may take off their shoes
and approach her unafraid.

Over in Christ Church the choir singers
have come to practice in the nave;
the Quality of Mercy soars into the arches.

The psychoanalyst in her salon
murmurs something about iconography
and crosses her legs.

Who is the man outside the window
on whom the girl reclining smiles?

This is the mad monk’s inhabited letter
in the Third Book of Djinn,
where the poet interprets the dream.
Kiss the Lion
— Looking Glass Theatre, Chicago

Houselights come up
we clatter through the lobby
buoyant, elated    wildness clinging to us
like wool and whimsy and the crackle of laughter.

Our minds clutch remnants we liked best
to recall over whiskey or when we sit alone.
How she how they, the fireplace mirror an illusion
how a ring a rope can mime a rabbit hole
the giant queen her black mustache
the Hare a-scamper down a row of chairs

and how in a golden age of skin
after a naked swim an actress knelt
beside the mirror of a neighbor’s pool
a glimpse    a pause    the ladder of her hem
and I    a useless pronoun    wanton
gems of water on her secret hair.

Those pebbles later at her window so
cacophonous    she will she won’t
the white knight on a silver bicycle will
crash and clattering to bits    a metaphor
but then return astride his wheel a plethora
of dear mistakes much like our own
regrets gathered will-he nil-he in his arms.

A song next door, a peacock’s cry or else
the cat in pain reminds us
of a laughing moon    the ladder of her hem
and when she ate the rose    was it a fake
a ladder to the balcony    and did we
did he really fall?

Daydream 20 years and more the Hatter mad,
the whiskey good again, that play, the pool
_o puss, o purse o sighing hills_.
_Wasn’t there a lion?_
Daniel the Vegetarian:
Book The Second

— "...and the king saw the hand" etc. Daniel 5:5

Not long after the cave incident, the King was back with another dream for me to puzzle out. He had forgiven me for the fried food remark, but I knew he had not forgotten. His aura was better, pale purple like my mother’s after prayer circle. Said the hand was there again, only this time writing in left-handed cursive, suggestive of a ransom note in Chaldean. Something about taking chamomile tea with paprika at bedtime. “Turmeric?” I offered. Great with goat. Also good for curing insomnia. He grumbled something unfortunate about vegans I knew he had heard from Jay Leno. Likely why he thought to call on me again. I caught a whiff of lion breath. But what does it mean? He was obviously desperate. Now I understood the earlier cave episode: a pride goeth before a fall. Why is it nobody dreams of kohlrabi?
Sunset of the Winter Solstice

Response to a painting by Pádraig Lynch

Snowfall has almost stopped.
Sunset fills my mind with colours:
Tangerine, ochre, orange ... warm-blooded
Solstice sits like a bird’s nest on fire
Its mystery holds our attention
Caught like a ball in the branch of a tree.
Umber tree trunks
Hold up the clouds. Winter snow binds us
In a trance. Smudge of scrubland in the distance,
A man and his dog wander into view
From somewhere. Sunset of winter solstice
Turns on its axle to face the surprise of spring.

Noel Monahan has published seven collections of poetry with Salmon Poetry, Ireland. An eighth collection, Celui Qui Porte Un Veau, a selection of French translations of his work was published in France by Alidades, in 2014. A selection of Italian translations of his poetry was published in Milan by Guanda in November 2015: “Tra Una Vita E L’Altra”. His poetry was prescribed text for the Leaving Certificate English, 2011–2012. In the past Noel has toured in England, Italy and America giving readings and delivering literary papers on Irish literature. His play, “Broken Cups” won the RTE P.J. O’Connor award in 2001 and Chalk Dust, a long poem of his, was adapted for stage and directed by Padraic McIntyre, Ramor Theatre, 2019. During the Covid-19 lockdown, Noel had to reinvent his poetry readings and he produced a selection of Short Films: “Isolation & Creativity”, “Still Life”, “Tolle Lege” and A Poetry Day Ireland Reading for Cavan Library, 2021. The filming and editing of the same was by Pádraig Conaty, Niall Monahan and Jago Studio, Cavan. Noel is presently working on his memoirs and the opening chapters will be published by New Hibernia Review, Center for Irish Studies, University of St. Thomas, Saint Paul, Minnesota. A number of his most recent poems have been translated into German and will appear later this summer.
Seisreach

Cuimhním m’athair ina chéachtair,
Dhá chapaill ag tarraingt
Iarann céachta, is iarann rotha
Ag triall go mall síos an chnoic,
Is súile m’athair ghreamaithe
Ar sceach gheal taobh thios de
Is an line díreach á choimeád aige
I bpaire seimre chapaill, i grónai.

A Pair of Plough Horses

I remember my father ploughing,
Two horses pulling
The iron plough and the iron wheel
Moving slowly down the hill
And my father’s eyes glued
To a white thorn bush below him
And he forever keeping a straight line
In the red clover field.
Today I walked the shore at Mornington
in light that sparkled off the river.
The same path beside the same house
that my mother was born and reared in,
one I walked many times as a child.

I pass the river I to learned to swim in,
wear my granny’s cotton bloomers.
Touch the sand banks where we used to slide
skutch grass on cardboard in a place
we called the “Burrows”.

Walking now at low tide, I hear the curlew’s call,
it, too, is the same as I remember.
Tiny pebbles crunch beneath my feet,
and the salt-sweet smell of seaweed
carries on the wind across the river from Baltray.

Today I walk the memories of being eight years old
and stabbing with a stick, silent stranded jelly fish,
ignorant of the idea of causing pain.
The horizon is as wide as I remember,
in my youth I saw it as a blue-grey prison wall of water.

Today I walked where she walked.
I falter as I picture her small hands picking sea shells.
I see her waiting for the pilot boat to cross the bar,
his older brother at the helm,
his hero never far away and always coming home.

As I walked her path, in her shoes, I heard again the curlew calling.
Today I really missed the child who became my mother.
A VERY MAGIC MUSHROOM

We both saw it at the same time
the bin man and I,
sticking proud as you like
out of my blue pot of pansies
at the front door:

"I never saw that before", I said.
He winked and answered
"I have tried every drug known to man,
and I can tell you now Missis,
I am three years clean today.
There is no way I will be taking any
of your magic mushrooms".

A man delivering a plastic bin
for me to put my junk in
was young and fit and lean,
keen to tell me life, for him,
was not always like that.

"I threw my hat at it one day,
moved away to a different town,
got clear of the clowns who sold me gear,
if I didn't do that,
I don't mind telling you,
I wouldn't be hear now
happily married with two kids.

You think it was the drugs that is the worst,
but for me it was the drink.
Anything I could get my hands on,
and anything I could do to pay for it,
I did.

I even hid the bottles in the
Next door neighbour’s garden,
little Baby Powers, you could slip
one into your top pocket in the morning
and you think no one will know.

But they had me well copped,
the wife, the kids, the mother
and the fella I owed money to.
I moved away got to fuck,
clear of it all, got myself a job
delivering bins in my own van
I’m a new man.

And here is you,
showing me a magic mushroom".

© Anne McDonald
Fish & Shamrocks

I am from a long line of labour voters and men of the sea, fed on fish and cabbage grown in patches under nets to stop the caterpillars, and parsley picked in early morning for white-sauce on Sunday dinners.

I am from keepers of hens and pigs and greyhounds, walking dogs in winter’s frost with children’s hands wrapped tight in leather leads, the dogs too fast for my young legs, but too slow to win a race.

I am from paper chains strung from ceilings every Christmas and apple-dunking into ice cold water for Halloween, pious attempts to say the family rosary every spring that erupted into laughter on the red-tiled kitchen floor.

Knees creaking in confession boxes, making up sins that were bad enough to warrant a few Hail Marys, but not enough to warrant a whole decade of the rosary. I am from a Catholic family of immaculate conceptions.

A tribe that gives a name at birth then changes it to something unconnected. Cecilia Maria Gorretti becomes Sandra, Margaret becomes Peggy. Robert changed to “Eamon” in homage to DeValera.

I am from the people who picked shamrock from the roadside with bone-handled knives in March before walking to the chapel and singing out-of-tune to the Saint Patrick who was apparently glorious.
Three Thousand Miles

For the poet Barbara Bald, New Hampshire, US.

You track wild animals in the snow.
I plant primroses in the sun.
I struggle with the weight of being a mother.
You struggle with the choice to remain childless.
You craft words with care and practice.
I throw words together on a page, and yet between us,
we dig an age of ancient wisdom from wells
hidden far below where bog lands or mountains
hold them safe.

You find the perfect shaft of sunlight.
I take the tail end of a rainbow.
Together we burrow with words and rhyme,
moving back and forth in time
between walls of water.
Crafting poems out of love, about love,
made with love to celebrate all there is to love
between two women of a certain age
documenting life in the pandemic.

In this world of magic we sit separated
by three thousand miles of water;
poetry reducing it to nothing.

Flying over the Indian Ocean. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.
Lux Fluens - A Triptych

for Cian born 23 January 2019

In Utero

I know every life is a mystery, a gift of the cosmos, precious and like the constellating stars must surrender to the laws and rhythmic symmetry of time.

Your mother carried you folded in her body, the soul’s homeland, an origami of cells, an embryo, an evolving amniotic secret, tuned to the timpani of pulses and the frequency of her voice.

You are heir to all the ages a saint of negative capability sculpting an instinct for love.
Lux Fluens - a Triptych

Yellow Flares

In April the field sloping from our house is filled with daffodils. Some days ago these moons and suns with springing hope shook free of earth their yellow flares. This was once your mother's childhood estate you too one day will chase your green thoughts here as they rise and fall like finches wings. For now, I hold a photo of you moulded in your mother's arms. She has rocked your fretful scansions into easeful sleep. I imagine the magic of your innocent dream like golden pollen floating in the silken air. It is caught by a planetary wind. It overhauls horizons, banishes winter days.

Lux Fluens

I pull down a branch whose first leaves grope for the sun. You reach for it too. There's no lie in that fire - the fluent energy that lux fluens in you. It identifies you as you. Certain as the tides, it drives the first image forming in your inner eye - vivid as blood vital as breath. It is there in you when you practice on the single sheet of the air your first few syllables, form the vowels and consonants of your mother tongue. It is a deed of greatness to braid sounds together. Primed from solitude, being grows towards eloquence, balances understanding with being understood.
November Sunset

Trees felled or fallen
lie prostrate, overlooked
by those still standing.

A sliver of sunlight
picks out at random
one tree then another.

All at once a ripple of wind,
traffic noise, a bird, water
dripping — so much to take in.

And I dare ask what is it all about?
As I place one foot in front
then another and turn homewards.

Bernadette Gallagher

Bernadette Gallagher lives in County Cork, Ireland. She writes under towering poplars that she planted thirty years ago. Her work has been published in: Southword 41, Irish Examiner, Boyne Berries, ROPES, Stanzas, in the US peace journal DoveTales, In the Cinnamon Corners, O Bhíol Five Words, In Dappled Shade, and in online journals including: HeadStuff.org, Picaroon Poetry, Poethread, The Incubator, Live Encounters, Backstory, Other Terrain, Shot Glass Journal, The Galway Review, Pemiotic, The Poetry Shed, Issue 1 Bealainn, and Issue 4 Drawn to the Light Press. She has an essay on Dorothea Herbert (1767-1829) in Irish Women Poets Rediscovered: Readings in poetry from the eighteenth–twentieth century edited by Maria Johnston and Conor Linnie published 2021 by Cork University Press. A selection of her work has been recorded by the University College Dublin Poetry Archive and her poem 'Coming Home' has been added to Words Lightly Spoken podcast. bernadettegallagher.blogspot.ie
Fledgling

You lay there alone
on the roadside
your little body still warm

crushed by a car

you chose a sunny day to make
your first and final flight.

Stone Words

Each word a pebble — this poem a small stone
in a dry wall, sitting unremarked for centuries
until man or animal break it

apart, to make an opening to a field beyond
or piece by piece build a house or mend a wall.

A stone fallen onto the road — I lift and put it back
sitting beside a different neighbour and likely
not its final resting place.

Larger rocks sit and challenge me to wonder how
they came to be.
School Resumes

Something is different in the air. A door has creaked open on its squeaky hinge and children with their new lunchboxes and thermoses rush in, pasting roughly cut out birds onto jagged branches of rusty trees, thin tissue paper leaves fluttering to pile on the earth in my memory.

The warmth of summer retreats, gives way to flash cards and football, plastic totes and coat hooks labeled with heat-sealed names. Small chairs scrape Lysoled linoleum floors, students look shyly at classmates. And I look out upon the empty street where my own children stumbled and our black Lab streaked after tennis balls, at the rail we added when my mother grew unsteady, and later when my father did as well.

Now I am the old one on the block, planting for butterflies and bees, laying seed, lighting the path for my own inescapable exit.

Betsy Mars practices poetry, photography, pet maintenance, and publishes an occasional anthology through Kingly Street Press which she founded in 2019. Her poetry has recently appeared in One Art, MacQueen's Quinterly, Sheila-Na-Gig, Muddy River Review, and Autumn Sky, as well as numerous anthologies and journals. She is a Best of the Net nominee and her photos have been featured in various journals including RATTLE and Spank the Carp. Betsy is the author of Alinea (Picture Show Press) and co-author of In the Muddle of the Night with Alan Walowitz (Arroyo Seco Press).
Imposter Syndrome

Yet another dream where I am collecting shit everywhere, dropping out of me as I sat -

where was my underwear?

I tossed the small balls of dung into bins, the dishwasher, any dark place where I hoped they wouldn't be noticed, as I hung on, played innocent, tried to pay attention to the others in the room, as best I could

while consumed with hiding the waste still coming, incessant.

MY BROTHER SHARES A ZILLOW LINK

My brother shares a Zillow link for our parents’ last home and I wander through, a virtual voyeur, landing in the foyer.

I tour the master suite where my mother died more than twenty years ago.

Now there’s a different bed, a different fireplace molding—a staged scene, fire crackling—eating oxygen as it did that night, swallowing her last breathing.

Downstairs is the room where the extra crib stood. To get there, the stairs my children rode, sledding down on feathery pillows.

Upstairs the kitchen where they made cake out of air, carefully measuring and stirring—making their generous offerings.

In this place so much is buried—my mother’s ash still nurturing the soil beneath the grapefruit tree.
Remember London in an alcohol-fuelled daze,  
Saturdays spent falling in and out of pub doors,  
the endless cigarettes, deferrals and delays,  
detaching yourself from those you considered bores,  
although you recognise that you were one of those  
who trod the same old ground each day, complaining  
that your romantic-seeming world offered dull prose  
when you expected poetry in everything.

Later you realised all cities were the same;  
noisy, lonely, empty, draining your life force.  
In London there were few who knew you by name  
and you were happy to be exiled from your source.

That was the point, to escape father and mother,  
to push yourself beyond the comfort of childhood,  
to be a man alone without sister, brother,  
friend or lover and not complain. You understood  
that this was your life to be lived on your own terms,  
so you turned away from everything you cherished  
and set your face like flint, determined to bear arms  
against this new world – what of it if you perished  
in the attempt? And you nearly did that first year.  
For months you only dreamed of going home again;  
no one could say you hadn't tried, but you drank your beer  
till there was nothing more, no pleasure and no pain,  
beyond the night-time high and morning headache.  
Pretending you knew what you were doing every day,  
fixing your tie in the mirror while your hands shake,  
holding the handle on the tube while bodies sway.
Remember

...cont’d

like seaweed on the tide. You sensed an emptiness inside you couldn’t name and were afraid to own; it followed you around, was nothing more or less than your own self asleep inside you like a stone.

Your soul once danced in time to your potential, hugging the body in a symbiotic clinch, feeling the world and self as one, both essential to the other, eye to eye, so neither one would flinch,

but flinch you did and more than once. That time you stayed at home and drank alone for days avoiding the truth. This should have been your prime, but you were trying not to think, moving sideways or not at all, blinded by the headlights of the endless London traffic, dazed by an unacknowledged fear of heights that left you clutching the bar counter, friendless, watching other people leading normal lives those nights

when you would not go home because you hated your own company. But you were alone in every crowd, with nothing on your mind beyond getting intoxicated enough to loosen your tongue so you could speak aloud to another person without them sensing how inadequate you were in every way. You revelled in that high wire walk, to be drunk enough yet sober-seeming, cigarette smoke adding implication to your broken talk.

While all the time detesting how your true self failed to rise above the routine run of undemanding jobs that passed the days, allowed you to desensitise yourself to your own failings, but didn’t quell the sobs late into the night. Far too much cheap red wine, alone, mind racing, waiting for sleep to overtake your worries and delay the moment when another tedious day might start, postpone the ache of knowing that you weren’t living right, a truth that scurries along the edges of your vision like a rat the morning after.

For months you suppressed all curiosity of mind with thoughtlessness, became a person of no humour whatsoever, laughter was as unknown to you as much as play or playfulness.

Just as cigarettes kill taste and alcohol desire, so were you stripped of appetite for life by a drug of your own making. You dared not take on any task, took comfort in the nondescript, applied yourself to nothing but the drudge of work, breaking only to embrace self-pity, thinking of the lonely life you forced yourself to lead; took perverse consolation in the sorry figure you’d become as if you were a stoic, dignified by trial, coerced to spend his days and nights alone in silence, a bigger person than the herd, apart, serene and wise.

But you were none of these; a lonely boy who cried himself to sleep at night, who in the morning dried his eyes, put on a mask for the world beneath which he was terrified that things would always be this way. How long life seemed back then, no sign of end to tedium, worry, solitude; the pain of waking up on winter mornings when you dreamed that you were happy, were somewhere else with someone who’d loved you was the worst. Cruel subconscious that identified your weakest point and having done so determined to have sport, picking the thing you lacked the most, turning you inside out like an old coat, revealing the threadbare lining of your heart.
BRAEFOOT

For Ella and Lochlann

Sending Titans and their cousins to my Scottish niece
besotted by Hogwarts,
she lives in the Highlands, suitable backdrop for Wizards,
a different alphabet fits with stone monuments –
her father, a Pict, her brother, Viking –

born of the skin of longboat, ivory horn of Narwhal,
she takes to the mountain tops, home of the gods,
sickle in hand, wolf and bear are friends
as Neptune washes ashore in the Firth of Lorn
collecting horseshoes for his Steeds.
Doorway

Portal to otherworld these tombstones
quartz glistens in the sun

(there was quartz left at the gate
Of the old cemetery at Balvicar.)

Concentration of spirits
Pour forth, possibilities of growth,
quartz enhances creativity and inspiration,
do not wonder at its scattered fragments.

pebbles
flint knife
arrowheads
a cow tooth....

Look to the east...
Look to the west...
Look to the north....
Look to the south....

mound stones
chamber tombs....

A ceremonial avenue
lined with tribute pots,

I look for the boar in the woods.

Temple

Temple Wood’s stony floor
ceremonial copse
that reaches for sky,
ladder to Sungod,
Moonqueen

watch the midwinter sun set
over its southern aspect

full moon rises from opposite position
concentric circles
spirals
recall ancient artisans,
their Orkney and Irish cousins.

Sun disks, sun marks, sun seeds
earliest man left flint arrowheads,
stone scrapers,

and then ....

A beaker pot
Tooth of child

Is this ivory for decoration?
babytooth stolen from beneath pillow?

Odd connections sweep through memories,
kin with ancient monuments
as custom continues, one hand to the next.
SOMME

wounded and battle scarred
semi-reclined in chairs
mass of bloodied bandages,

some with crazed speech,
voices animated
soon turned tears
my heart breaks
for these young men,
my son amongst them

no amount of mother’s milk or tears
can cleanse the memory of this morning
or festering wounds……..

no help forthcoming
eyes averted in distress or fear
looking away
medics move to the next body,
place Band-Aid in gaping wound,
nothing stenches the loss…. 
no surgeons – it is the weekend
pity the victims with no mother
to fight their corner

they slump in slumber
or remain wide eyed
as machines beep a cacophony of distress
much like the battle of one hundred
and five years ago
psychological trauma

drenched
is yet more flammable
hearts break.

DILEMMA

I would write a poem for Kirsteen
If only I could remember her name
OK: think of “Fairytale of New York”
...that’s Kirsty……
She has the complexion of a teen....
Definitely .......

Put the two together....
admire how she handles the Kubota,
steers the ferry,

Go Mairífdh tú* a Kirsteen!

*Long life to you!
YELLOW HAG

comes between me and sleep
bends bones low with her venom

motionless, before her one eye...
she is Balor’s wife
giving me the evils

stricken
I fall.

Fallen banana tree in lake, which is reflecting the surrounding vegetation and evening sky.
Photograph by Mark Ulyseas
Christine O’Brien holds an Honors degree in Classical Civilization from Boston College and has just embarked on her literary career. The stanzas below are taken from a poem which is her creation.

Extract from
ALEXANDER THE GREAT
A Lyrical Biography

Alexander the Great: A Lyrical Biography (with illustrations) consists of an epic poem portraying Alexander’s life written for people of all ages from the curious teenager to the venerable student of life.

The poem is accompanied by classical and contemporary illustrations of Alexander, his family, and significant events in the Macedonian conqueror’s career.

It is designed to stimulate your appetite for more information about Alexander.

It will be published by Marquette Books on July 20th 2022, his 2,377th birthday.
Extract from
ALEXANDER THE GREAT
A Lyrical Biography

Twenty days into July
Three fifty-six BC
A boy of royal blood was birthed
Unto history

His father’s name was Philip
Reigning King of Macedon
His mother was Olympias
And he her only son

The seers prophesied this child
To be a great commander
Superlatives were always used
Describing Alexander

Less than average height he stood
One brown eye the other blue
But all that was foreseen for him
Was destined to ring true

In our histories we have
But fifty who are “Great”
And being first amongst this list
Was Alexander’s fate

The Birth of Alexander from a 15th century miniature in the Musée de Petit Palais.
Extract from Alexander The Great
A Lyrical Biography...contd

And so I beckon to my Muse
Please whisper in my ear
A melic tale of peerlessness
I’ve yearned so long to hear

*  

His life was filled with struggle
Almost from the very start
His parents ever colorful
Were culpable in part

*  

More blessed with name and privilege
Than any child could be
He felt the pressures early on
Of meritocracy

*  

His mother was a brilliant soul
Who came from royalty
Bringing him his greatest gift
Eternal loyalty

*  

Tough as any man
Walking on this earth
Olympias was his sentinel
From the moment of his birth
Extract from
ALEXANDER THE GREAT
A Lyrical Biography  ...contd

A devotee of Bacchus
She entwined herself with snakes
Enough to ward off enemies
For both of their sakes

* 

Descended from Achilles
Greatest hero of the Greeks
Expecting no less of her son
In laurels that he seeks

* 

When he left for Asia
She said without demur
Be worthy of divine heritage
About which you can be sure

* 

His father was a warrior
And thus not often home
All across his conquered lands
The king would often roam

* 

Philip's plan was first to quell
The Greeks and those up north
Reluctantly most states succumbed
An Hellenic League sprung forth

Olympias and Alexander drawn by the contemporary artist Doug Jamieson.
©Doug Jamieson.
A L E X A N D E R

Philip II and Alexander drawn by the contemporary artist Doug Jamieson.
©Doug Jamieson.

Extract from
ALEXANDER THE GREAT
A Lyrical Biography ...

This league was just a power tool
To keep the Greeks at bay
With everything at home secured
He'd need no longer stay

* 

For Philip had a glorious dream
To conquer Asia Minor
Greece was a sweet victory
But Asia even finer

* 

Little Alexander knew
The victories of his dad
But Philip's countless triumphs
Rarely made him glad

* 

If all Alexander wanted
Was the power without merit
All he'd have to do is wait
And soon he would inherit

* 

But this was just the problem
In Alexander's eyes
To him a soul without a dream
Inevitably dies

© Christine O'Brien
Next Time You See Her

After a death come the ordinary shocks—thinking you glimpse her at a crosswalk as you sit with your foot on the brake till the car behind starts honking. Or in your dream she’s opening a door, starting to speak but you can’t quite make it out, then abruptly you’re awake, your heart gradually slowing down.

That daylong heaviness, like walking into a stiff wind, even as you write your usual emails, lift the dog’s leash from its old hook, and chuckle over some blooper of a headline —Good News About Death!— that you really must remember to tell her next time you see her.

Most recent of David Graham’s seven poetry collections is The Honey of Earth (Terrapin Books, 2019). He also co-edited Local News: Poetry About Small Towns (with Tom Montag) and After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography (with Kate Sontag). His poetry has been featured on Poetry Daily, The Writers Almanac, and in many journals and anthologies. He retired from college teaching in 2016, and now serves as contributing editor for Verse-Virtual (http://www.verse-virtual.org), where he also writes a column, “Poetic License,” on poets and poetics. He lives in Glens Falls, New York.

David Graham
Elegy

As the last egg in the carton,
I should tell you about the others
—Jackie Craven

I’m the last egg in this carton,
little dab of wine in the bottom
of the glass you can’t drink,
single patch of snow left
in April, sooty and hard as stone
in the garage’s penumbra.

I am the lone sock in the dryer,
the dip in the road that hoards
rainwater; final phone call
that neither of us knew
would be the last, and now
only I am left to know it.

One more page before sleep
arrives, phone that rings once,
last scoop of chocolate ice cream
long since crystallized and forgotten
behind some ice trays and three
bags of frozen peas and corn.

I’m throwing the ice cream out
while remembering the night we
shared it, just the two of us,
ever glancing at the clock, not
checking our email, saying things
we could not say to anyone else.

I could tell the others about you,
but won’t. It would be like
explaining a joke. You understand.
**Crow Beethoven**

Hawks and swallows, hummingbirds
feint and loop, carve the air like thought
made visible, and the spirit yearns
and rises in harmony, but I rather like
the ragged-ass crows toiling hard
as they struggle to harry and curse
the magisterial eagle, pestering it
into departing their patch of woods,
squawking in pissed-off joy
as the Buddhist raptor merely tilts
its broad wings in an updraft,
then rises out of reach forever. Eagles
are Mozart, angels lifted in sunlight
by the hand of God. Crows, God
bless them, are Beethoven, red-faced
and sweaty, pounding their hard way
to heaven note by heavy, dying note.

**Backlit**

*in memoriam J.C.P.*

These memories backlit with dread:
my dead student
I see dimly—tilt of his head,
pondering, one hand brushing back
his hair, or how he strode
purposefully across my path
ignoring my casual wave.
I’ll never know
if he saw me, that final day,
as an already-filed memory,
or just part of a world
he would prefer not to see.
AZULEJOS

Old men chat together in the shade
and smoke and sip their beers and watch the tourists
brave the heat to photograph these tiles
designed to baulk the savage midday sun.

Rectangles frame triangles, interlock
with squares, repeat themselves in patterns
devoid of human figure or divine,
as laid down strictly in the Prophet's laws –

until by force of arms Queen Isabel
declared her Christian kingdoms purified
and Blessed Virgin Marys, Lambs of God
and other of the re-established Faith

appeared above the doors and lintels. But
the Azulejos held their place, survived –
the useful always will survive – to lend
the heavenly some material support.

Eamonn Lynskey

Eamonn Lynskey is a poet and essayist whose work has appeared in many magazines and journals. His fourth poetry collection, 'Material Support,' will be published by Salmon Poetry in early 2022. www.eamonnlynskey.com
NAZCA

I will never need to venture past the Pillars of Hercules

Three storeys high, another world hoves into view: birds’ nests reveal tight architectures, vagrant weeds inhabit corners, playing fields display white geometric lines and ventilator shafts converge.

No daring voyage beyond the rim will take me to more curious regions

Seen from here, a wondrous realm of flat roofs trapping rainwater and mirroring the infinite—a world as strange and unfamiliar as the windswept plains of Mars, or valleys under Venusian cloud.

I never linger on this stairwell but, transfixed, recall again

the Pampas de Jumana carved with giant figures: hummingbirds and snakes, invisible from below—a landscape Sir John Mandeville might have described. And runways laid, it’s said, to welcome back the Gods.
A Weaving Eye

Midlands’ landscape was, still is, flat - a place - they say - once housed textile workers.

Hard to believe this world round. No linen mill found. Napoleon and his wars put paid to that. Only cotton. Miles outside the town, white-washes summer bog lands.

My maiden name is Cordial – it’s well known Huguenots settled in the midlands long ago, brought linen and lace though what I’ve learned came from vestments starched by nuns for altars. Or seen in creases, knife-edged, worn by a woman like Jackie Kennedy, her gaze hidden behind dark glasses.

Sometimes I made rope or twine, useful things. Flour bags too transformed to sheets for beds, Manufacturers’ names stamped in red – bleached to eerie brightness. The better off lay linen squares over pillows – for appearance sake. Grandeur stretched full length its narrow width.

Truth is stranger than fiction flax far stronger than cotton; Ancient Egyptians bound their dead in Woven Moonlight, through centuries luminous.
Confined

We gather mirrors like candles in a power cut
so images double and quadruple, just
like the old days; a full house. You pouring
cranberry into crystal. Me fussing with gravy.

Flesh and blood gestures trapped
behind cold surfaces seem more real.
Us but not us. The same yet not the same.

But this isn’t Versailles. No courtiers
in the long hall to fawn over pompadours
however high. Bejewelled costumes.

Or a fairground from our past, reflections
larger than life distortions.

How long this isolation lasts who can tell
unlike tins and packages stored by shelf
life date, what’s least likely to go off.

Who knows how long this glass will hold
before isolation sledge into slivers
optical illusions, piercing truths.

Smoke

Outside my hotel there’s a chimney in the middle of the road.
All day it spouts ribbons of smoke from the subway;
tensions released in a white gasp.
I take a photograph, halt the ghostly spiral amid
bustling downtown New York.
At the subway, I descend the warren of entrances and exits
Leading to unbearable heat. Prized by wintering homeless.
Trains roar up to the platform, departing
uptown, downtown, anywhere you want town.
I pass a living, breathing memorial. Young men,
lungs entwined in sleep, faces beautiful
as Michael Angelo’s David. Despite weather
tangled hair. Empty bottles nearby.
Later, that stilled jet of smoke brings memory.
First people in a new world. Tribes ago,
sending signals skyward.
And cool summer linen. For sleepers lost
In troubled slumber.
ARGIOPE

Art is reality; a work of art is a language –
art is a way of recognizing oneself
Louise Bourgeois

There is no possibility for return, cancellation, erasure, a new beginning.
The course has been set. The past sinks into an abyss. Statues are not carved to domesticate wild beasts.

Louise Bourgeois, who could make skeletons and rows of teeth dance,
first enshrined the family phallus, then tamed the spiders, rocking the final Argiope in a silken cradle.

Once, eternity bent over her in the guise of affection to give her this advice:
*The fastest route between two points is a straight line*
And she answered, cocking her eyebrow to the sky:
*No, thank you. I prefer the twists and turns.*
DOLL HOUSE

When you were just a young 'un
you played hide and seek with dolls for fun
and that's how one fine day
you ran off and hid away
somewhere where you left no trail
Then, locked in a lilliputian jail
you found yourself by accident
By accident the cat swallowed the key
By accident no-one noticed your truancy
And by accident one day you grew
Your arms hung out of the windows
Your legs out of the door
Your head poked out of the chimney flue.

And your doll house prison break
by mistake was believed to be
a mutiny.

ALL OUT OF LOVE

Do you hear it?
We're out of tune again tonight.
Teetering on a loose guitar string
we grind our teeth
a discord of loveless glances.
Remember?
Once you used to treat me to a fairytale lightness,
spying under the Earth’s unbuttoned shirt
we’d touch each other with electric fingers.
Now:
You are an armchair of stolid movements,
I, a chandelier with moribund flickering light.
Shedding a love threadbare
that used to be like a temple, made up and trimmed in gold.
Do you feel it?
So stiff tonight again
and another evening puts out its cigarette
in our aching joints.
Our bodies embrace an emptiness
With no spark
No flare of spontaneity.

Only the chatter of the voluble mosquito
The piercing drone of jackhammer mouths
The tyranny of white noise, you see.
Almost

Sails billow back drawing strength to return with a rigid force, repeatedly I’m assaulted by the stunning blow of the boom as it swings in the storm.

I grasp the mainstay, my grip loosens. By morning we have disintegrated to broken selves; directionless the prow bobs in a calm sea. Our hull is sunk.

For months I am almost motionless, then I move where reflection pools. I stand by these long, wide places hearing only the quiet sip of canvas.
Celebrating 12th Anniversary

The Pillow Talk of Ailill and Maeve

after the old Irish Legend

The castle was night quiet, drapes billowed at the ope. We rested against a bank of pillows when Ailill remarked on my good fortune to have met him. Enough to make any woman get out of bed to feel the ground under her feet...

No one can afford constant raids and losses.
You know your lands were run down.

Injury assembled, he insulted my army. Approaching rage tide, I overpowered his comment by listing my mercenaries, counting the men from our province, and abroad. Ailill’s face endured.

How sought in marriage I was!
Well then, why didn’t you pick them?

I retreated to his heart as darkness curls into a crescent moon, I thought of my conversation with the worm; how Ailill strode ahead in battle; his generous spirit (unlike those, who’s beaded eyes intuited each dark coin)

Let me take your hand Ailill
When he looked like he might speak, Injury re-assembled, blooming red.

How fortunate you are!
You gained the finest chariot,
The breath of your face in red gold
The weight of your left arm in white bronze

His retort: his possessions eclipsed the land!
I had servants fetch the wooden cups, and the iron vessels, for us to compare, our bracelets and thumb rings, traipse off for our gowns; purple, the yellow. Our flocks of sheep were herded to the lawn. All alike, as were the horses and swine.

In Ailill’s cattle herd, stood Finnbennach: the special bull, a calf to my cow.

He does not wish to belong to a woman, he has taken his place in my herd

Peace in the castle at night, the cool draft, distant now. I was weary however I will not be inferior in anything, for then I am owned.

Get the bull – Donn Cualinge
FOREST

Pillows of moss hillocks, abundance of leaping green,
not the sleeping green of spruce sustaining
a circle round me, branches resting on each other like hands
and the curved backs of the ferns moving to

light delivered by a sky of papered leaves
around this sink hole of dripping weeds and earth juice
Listen, a fungus speaks of under-ground,
Here a cache of acorns: future-proof for squirrels and jays.

SHORE

Moss green and mustard lichen
rock pools that flicker and shudder
with shrimp. Hard runnels of sand
an audience of neat knees.
A tangle of plump plant,
interrupted with orange star.
Fish skulls edged with fine rows
of needlepoint. Blanched sea holly,
silver grasses papered with pinks.
Frayed turquoise ropes, peach
punctured buoys. Great antlers
doctor wood the colour of ash,
decorate the shoreline.
Hold the day
Mulled wine
Waratah red
Lipstick on rim
Glass gathers dust
Cracked window ledge
Flowers air dry
Nail set in stone
Apron hangs threadbare
Yellowed photograph
Travels back in time
Childhood faces fade
Flakes to a white nothing
Gatekeeper in the hedgerow
Kites bullied by the wind
Boy sings to a bird
Woman in blue does not look
Fifteen storeys high
Brass numbers on door
Key breaks in lock
Chain of helplessness
Man of many colours
Songs on railway track
Thin line of bluebells
No life on platform one
Gardener prunes cherry trees
Iron gate, red brick surrounds
Cat sleeps on warm headstone
Guided tours available

Fotoula Reynolds is a writer of poetry, born in Australia of Greek heritage. She lives in the Dandenong Ranges in southern Australia. She convenes a poetry reading group in her local community and regularly attends and participates in spoken word events in and around the city of Melbourne. She is the author of three poetry collections and is published widely in anthologies, journals, reviews and magazines. Fotoula is a 2019 Pushcart Prize nominee.
Trees on both sides

On the road where
My childhood
Dared to dream
I learned to count
By two's
English first then Greek

Rain drops tap danced on
Glinting tin roofs
They were a standout
In an avenue of music
Looking up, I'm sure
I got a peek at heaven

Spring and summer
Smelt the same
Catching the tingling
Sunlight between us
I came and went
And you stayed

Upright and still
They held one entire street
I never knew its name
I skipped with the
White butterflies
My arms outstretched

I heard the trees
On both sides talk
In whispering tones
All I could do was
Hold that moment forever

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.
What is happening right now is happening always.
Octavio Paz: Telling and Singing

There's another one gone -
How well the oily clichés run
At our age it's a given that the shadow by the door
Is a hag pointing a bone
We pointed a few in our day too, remember?
Rowdy, raunchy heroes were we
We got away with things.

Is that the best that can be said
Of this one, too?
Is there more? They die younger each day these days
They're not getting away with much.
Is longevity down to luck, like strokes and tumours?
Perhaps our bawdy girls of beery memory all have arthritis
Or like Amazons, conceded a peachy breast

For a month he fobbed off the hot pain
It started innocently enough
Then his eyes turned a funny colour; the whites of them
Yellowed, and that was that.
 Doesn't do to play around with your chances
We're none of us young bucks
We've lost what we knew of decent language

And ancient formulae rush the brain
Say this, nod at that
Get by. Tell lies. Make it up as you go.
You buried your mouth in all that was holy of her
The young wouldn't believe what you'd get up to
Now even her house is demolished -
Never mind. All in the same boat now.

Fred Johnston

Born in Belfast in 1951, Fred Johnston has published nine collections of poetry, his most recent is 'Rogue States,' (Salmon Poetry 2019.) Co-founded the Irish Writers' Co-operative in the ‘Seventies with Neil Jordan and Peter Sheridan and the annual CÚIRT literature festival in Galway in 1986. In 2004, he was appointed writer-in-residence to the Princess Grace Irish Library at Monaco. He has written and published poetry in French and received a Prix de l'Embassade in 2002. Two collections of short stories have been published, one in French, and three novels. Recent poetry has appeared in The Guardian, The Spectator, The New Statesman, The Irish Times, STAND, The Financial Times among other publications. He lives in Galway, Ireland.
Viewer discretion advised

I spent an afternoon watching a YouTube video
Of two commercial aircraft crashing into one another
Tragic, frightening, not for the timid -
I learned that primary radar is not enough
That secondary radar would have displayed
Aircraft altitude as well as position
That installing TCAS (Traffic Collision Avoidance System)
Arguably would have prevented the calamity
And that faulty flight-deck communications don’t help.

Look – it’s not just a question of who files the
Flight plan, or hauls out the garbage, or makes the bed:
So many variables, often we fly blind
Some vital instrumentation frizzles, wires get crossed
A crack across the cockpit window, a fall in pressure
It’s impossible to keep track without a check-list
How near is too near, all the rest of it –
We’re trying tricky manoeuvres at the best of times
We’re a video labelled Viewer Discretion Advised.

In memoriam, a table

So now you’re your legs in the air
In the grasses of a damp back yard -
Not much dignity there, old table
And the rain has glamoured them like spray-on tan

High days had you polished as a debutante
The odd washable spill was unavoidable
The tickle of the fingertip tripping on your grain
The caressing cloth wiping you down

You’re folding into the fuck-you earth
From my window you’re a spectacle
Those well-turned shins and ankles starting to streak
You’re like a sad ballad sung to a drunk

Not what you were, no, when the playing-cards
Breathed heavy in the wee hours
Before the cigarette-burns, infuriating age spots
And an infant sadist knifed in his initials for good measure

I suppose that sadist was me -
You were ill-used, when I come to think of it
Taken for granted, part of the furniture; now
Crudely up-ended, left standing on your head.
While we were sleeping, a strange thing:
The world turned with its shopping-bag of wars
Into the kitchen
And sat down with a collapsed sigh
Like an elderly aunt anticipating a cup of tea.

Cup of black tea. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.
Bird of Passage

for Uche Nduka – poet of Lagos, Bremen and Brooklyn

The messenger, received
into our runway lights;
a songbird, fled from times
more troubled than our own,
has landed north for winter,
where city birds have also known
apocalyptic times as dark as
door-knocked Lagos nights.
And if the bureaucrats forget,
and if the filled-in forms
neglect your song,
then know at least that you
have friends in Germany
whose memories are long.
Kid at the Star Club, 1967

If he had lived, he would have loved *Lucy in the Sky* and painted Sergeant Pepper’s Band in yellow murals four hands high on every bus in Liverpool. If he had lasted, he’d have scribbled a chorus or two or pencilled the bass-line to *I Feel Fine* and sketched a portrait of Father Mackenzie on the back of the record sleeve. But the poor sad sick fifth Beatle is dead; the cellars of Hamburg have quarried their prey the scarlet lips in the scarlet bars have parted to show the yellow teeth below the Große Freiheit façade. The city has collected its rent and if the Star Club has closed for the day today is all the mourning he’ll get – for tomorrow the lights of the strip clubs will yell and the smell of the Pommesbuden* will stick to the kids and the cops and the retching bins that swell and burst with the Reeperbahn’s sins. If he had stayed, he could have given Hamburg to the world. But the poor sad sick fifth Beatle is dead.

* Chip-and-sausage stalls

Drill Exercise

The night is almost still. In the third movement of the Mahler Titan symphony, Herr Bertelsmann next door decides to realign his bookshelves, bit by bit. Six-millimetre bit, eight-millimetre bit, ten-millimetre bit. The tune is violin and cello and, where the bit bites stone, a stand-up bass. But when the bit hits brick it is a dentist’s drill.
NOW

In the endless rain of disillusionment,
we find we’re as free
as fallen leaves stuck to the pavements.

Now, we perceive the lives
we believed we were living
were nothing but dreams.

We’ve been stunned awake
by something we can smell
but are afraid to put a finger on.

Eyes of the passers-by
gloom above muzzles
like the eyes of dogs, beaten and unloved.

Now, we’re more disciplined
than steers corralled,
for we queue-up to be branded.

Voices incessant on the airwaves
train us to march in unison,
not daring to question.

Now, we shame the recalcitrant
who would rather dance than join
our blinkered parade to the slaughterhouse.
The Writing Exercise

It's raining outside. 
It should be stopped by now 
but it isn't. I hear a sound 
with the midnight rain. 
Maybe all the rain wants 
is to blow its own trumpet 
just a little bit. 
Rain rains upon the darkness. 
If it rained poems 
I'd go walking 
I'd turn my umbrella 
upside down.
ONE WEEK AFTER

Rain falls on the darkness
it falls on telephone wires
on chimney pots and the old
yellow tractor beneath the tree
running down its long
blank face.

I am thinking of someone
known to me whose last
wish was for privacy.

No word
until one week
after cremation.
News gathers legs
calls door to door
like it’s a postman
who once wore a suit
and delivered us
from isolation.

The rain remains
what it is and darkness
telephone wires
chimney pots
the yellow tractor
the tree the voice
of someone known to me
that speaks to me
with this spoken thought.

A FABLE FOR TOMORROW

A corner of the moon
  Sitting on tree tops
Along a road like a river
  In flood
Where traffic flows
  And things aren’t made to last
Maybe that once belonged
  Nearly forgotten past of pastures
Through which the freshness blew
  Blue mountains were
Of themselves blue mountains
  We don’t see them
Like that nowadays
  No not at all
AFTER TAWARAYA SOTATSU

searching for new bait
making little waves
in the lotus pond

the grebe swims ahead
his upturned bill half-open

Water on a lotus leaf captures a petal. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.
Carpenter, Nude

The new kid wears boots with steel toes.
Otherwise, nude.
Splinters may stick in sensitive spots
but fewer injuries than you or I
because, like,
wouldn’t you be extra careful?

Skin deep brown with a
pale line from the tool belt,
shimmering silver star in his navel
like a nail-head, deftly dealt.
The owner’s wife glances once,
then again.

The crew accepts.
Summer job, we all have quirks.
Honor craft; praise good work.

Judge him as any random plank—
check for knots, rough edges.
Choose — for structure or decor?
Mark to chisel, cut, or bore.

End of the season
with pay
he dons clothes (a pity)
for the mad city.

Joe Cottonwood

Joe Cottonwood has repaired hundreds of houses to support his writing habit in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California. Long ago he wrote an underground novel called Famous Potatoes. His latest book of poetry is Random Saints.
Love of Lumber

Reverent
rough-hewn fingers
swim rivers of grain.

In flaw
he sees character.
Where the growing tree
overcame difficulty
with a pivot, a hard pocket,
where she lost a limb, kept a scar,
where she grieved in pain sobbing sap
he rubs oil, caresses
to bring beauty, to find
the goddess hidden
in raw wood.

So might we.

Why’d you call the cops?

Brady in a hoodie
crouching at your front door
never had judgment of the social.
Brady with a lifetime stutter
would say en-en-en-entrance,
ever exit.

Brady worked this good neighborhood
when it was bad.
Brady built the best doors
with lumber salvaged from packing crates,
from thrown-away scraps of rare Asian hardwoods.
Brady guaranteed each one-of-a-kind
en-en-en-entrance for life.

Brady checked on a creation
delivered four decades ago
lovingly crafted for the fearful mansion
now wafting scent of fresh blood.

Brady couldn’t form words fast.
Brady with Leatherman in hand not a weapon.
You could have opened the en-en-en-entrance.
You could have ass-ass-ass-asked.
NOT DEAD

At the lumberyard you pull a board from a high rack, badly stacked. With a roar, sixteen four-by-fours clatter onto your skull. Knees buckle. Galaxies flash. In your mouth you taste blood. Brain blood. You have a cerebral hemorrhage.

At least you are still thinking. You can formulate the words “cerebral hemorrhage” though you couldn’t spell them at this moment.

You look around the lumberyard where two guys in T-shirts are going about their business not noticing your moment of dying.


“Need a hand with that, bud?” says a voice. “Yes, thanks.” “Took a bump there, bad luck” “I’ll survive.” Together you load the truck.

YOSHI, FORESTER

Thinning trees, Yoshi says, is like selecting children. Impossible. You love them all.

In their vigor, their enthusiasm they crowd, they jostle, too many branches. Yet some will fall. Some must fall.

But whose child? Listen. Already, sweet music. One — which one? — will sing the perfect song. A forest is a chorus. Listen…

© Joe Cottonwood
A FAREWELL SONG

for Síle

At a crossroads in La Mancha
instinct took a left for Madrid
after an evening in Almagro
with Denis Rafter’s childhood

Play about tenement Dublin
and his rise out of the lane,
political inheritance best left
to the car’s quiet rumination

As I contemplated your glow
amongst people, luminance
combined with a diplomat’s
care for words, transparency

Like a natural breath of air,
a wall through which the wind
blows, performs according
to your elegant command.

John Liddy

GONE TO POT

Applause for the dead in their coffins as though they have just taken a bow for the performance of their lives, victims of the microscopic scourge, their selfless duty each evening recalled with the sound of patio clapping, gestures for the healing.

Flesh against flesh, skin against skin, the bones of our hands a drum-beat of humanoid ancestral expression like that ancient thump on the chest a cry from the heart, a rendezvous with their sacrifice on the frontline between contagion and you.

Applause for the doctor and the nurse, the cleaner of hospital wards, the carer, the ambulance driver and the tillers of fields and seas, the shop assistant and the road sweeper, shelf stackers, cooks, porters, teachers, public servants, growers of fruit and fruit sellers.

For the homeless in need of shelter, ease for the afflicted, tormented minds, the beaten and defiled who never stop cocooning between lockdowns and lockins, the lonely in isolation and those unable to escape abusive hellholes, insult and punches taken.

Applause for the harmonica player with Alzheimer’s who, like a child, waves to us in shy belief we want an encore and we do as we do for the zoom dance linking the world, communal generosity, online collaboration between artists, thrush and blackbird below my balcony.

Bewildered by pot bangers banging pots black from flag-draped windowsills and crowded street, a waste of utensils best used for feeding the food queue; homage and dignified respect replaced by the din and clamour of false patriots who claim their right to infect hate.

Applause for the clear-headed, the open-minded with a will for the common good, who reject the gun-slinger’s slogan, the narcissist who defies scientific reason, the spit-in-your-face brigade who think they smell of roses, their conspiracies writ as truths on placards of delible ink.

Take a bow my anonymous neighbour who has won back the patio with hands that silenced the usurpers who care not for the fallen, their Bat & Spiderman binned by Banksy’s Game Change – a boy holding high an effigy of a health worker, an enduring homage for the real McCoy.

© John Liddy
Mindfulness

i.m. Patrick Early

Snow was general all over Madrid, to paraphrase Joyce’s line in The Dead, days after you departed like Machado, ‘ligero de equipaje’, ready to rendezvous with Berber nomads and Tito’s ghosts, Aute’s Al Alba and Amazon outposts, the intricacy of Liscannor pishoguery, woven to find a safe harbour in poetry.

I was fortunate to have known about those layers of friendships sown in a world perpetually dehumanised, bandaged by Stephanie, cauterised by your diplomacy; a high-risk facilitator retired to a life of nurturing the writer and translator in a man of rational faith, a linguist honing words as a poet.

Yes, snow was general all over Madrid and I am mindful of the good you did when I observe Damocles’ frozen sword, the severed branch of chaos and discord on covidless boulevards we once walked in the flow of the maskless and talked about poems you would later write, an empty fist of feathers, a bird’s flight.

Offspring

a birthday poem for Mir

They grow together for a while, six unique siblings who learn from each other the rudiments for a future to discern.

Bonding before branching out along their separate way, they live within wider circles of calm or frequent disarray.

Some turn to the fold again for a semblance of peace and love found in the blood-link, unspoken forgiveness

A reassurance on occasions when offspring come together via Zoom for a threescore and ten as brother and sister.

A FAR E W E L L  S O N G

Offspring

a birthday poem for Mir

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IN SEARCH OF LIGHT

Karen Mooney

IN SEARCH OF LIGHT

i.m. Jim

In between treatments, you venture out; visit old haunts, catch a movie, visit a gallery, hold family near lest they shed a tear whilst you show no fear; full of fight.

In between treatments, you venture out; cross stormy seas with your next generation taking giant steps with boots on roots from whence you came. That visit hame, catching up with friends again, crafting memories in plain sight.

In between treatments, you venture out; buy another guitar, eleven, the final count. Camera in hand, you capture flowers, looking up, take a tree, send it to me along with news from hospital reviews and, as with every exchange - I study it for light.

Karen Mooney

A career in human resource management provided preparation for Karen’s current activities; cats and words. Sometimes they hide, reappearing unexpectedly; sometimes they scratch, sometimes they purr. Her words have appeared in online publications and Penned In, co-written with Gaynor Kane published by The Hedgehog Poetry Press. Her own pamphlet is due to be published later this year by The Hedgehog Poetry Press. Facebook: @observationsbykaren Twitter: @1karenmooney
SEA GLASS

Stumbling across you,
an unexpected find,
wondering
just how long it takes
to blur the scars
of what damaged you.
I catch jewel glints,
find myself reaching
despite the angry edges,
protecting you from proximity.
But my pockets are packed,
and you, you
may yet still be too sharp to hold.

RIPPING SEAMS AND STITCHING DREAMS

I found it at the back of her linen cupboard,
Granny called it flowering; delicate embroidery,
stitched to order and design on quality linens
that she could not afford for which she was paid
pin money, the rest of her work unmeasured.

Patterns stitched by her mother and hers before her;
the count of each appraised with a judgemental eye.
A life loom, a waft of domesticity, we, the weft,
create our own fabric with what was learned
at our mothers' knees. Clean, cook, sew, submit,
and rear a family, shouldering traditions
garbed in another's identity.
A tapestry of expectations.

Mum continued the tradition, the pattern replicated
but unfinished, the loose ends of which I picked up,
taking comfort in familiarity after her loss until
the design unravelled.

Pattern unpicked, threads waxed
and on a threadbare fabric,
wildflowers sewn.
THE LAMB

The leg stands pink with pride, steams its juice
tender, ribbed, threaded with strips of rosemary
garlic; an abstract of art, roasted, snuggled
amongst seasoned courgette, tomato.

The kitchen swoons in aromatics, steam
keeps the world at bay. The leg rests
centre stage, while She mashes potatoes
lays the table: salt, pepper, napkins, flowers

She carves the thinnest slices from the thigh
scatters jellied mint across the flesh
calls him to eat. I’ll be there in a second
Ten minutes pass. She calls again.

Coming, he says, impatient in his voice
The gravy grows a film of grease, congeals
She serves herself a limpid piece of stony lamb
forks cold vegetables into her mouth

goes to bed. Dinner is on the table, She says
He turns from his computer screen, lips stained red
I said, I’ll be there in a minute
The lamb died. The lamb is dead.
GARDENING BY THE MOON

After Foulsham's Original Old Moore's Almanac 1697 – 2022

Originally, I was interested in lighting up times
sun and moon tables, sea tides
everyday routines that make the world go round.

So, when Moore's Almanac arrived this September
I wasn't prepared for Lucy Rainwater
a native shaman, dressed in tassels and leather
using the magic of her Indian ancestors
to promise me health, wellbeing, and power.

Nor did I expect Finbarr from the town of Folkestone
sounding like Nigel Farage selling good fortune.
Finbarr's Magic Salt Rites work within minutes
performed correctly, they get rid of all ailments.

If you send Finbarr a cheque for 9.99
you will acquire, by return
a range of hand gestures
to use against 'nuisance' neighbours.
They will also expand your bank balance
And according to Finbarr, are easy to execute
TBH, they avoid the embarrassment
of magic rituals more awkward to perform
should you ever you have the misfortune
to find yourself in front of the court.

So, after learning which psychic I should consult
Learning my lucky lottery digits and reading my horoscopes,
What did I find most useful in the Almanac?
It was advice about planting my peas and beans
Which I must do between 12.50 and three
underneath a waxing moon
and I must sow my potatoes and other roots
between 1pm and two when the lunar is low.

I found it all very useful
which is why I'm sharing
this poem with you.
L I B E R A L S  &  D E A T H

Kevin Higgins has published five full collections of poetry with Salmon Poetry and a New & Selected Poems in 2017. His poems also feature in Identity Parade – New British and Irish Poets (Bloodaxe, 2010) and in The Hundred Years’ War: modern war poems (Ed Neil Astley, Bloodaxe May 2014). The Stinging Fly magazine has described Kevin as “likely the most widely read living poet in Ireland”. His extended essay Thrills & Difficulties: Being A Marxist Poet In 21st Century Ireland was published in pamphlet form by Beir Bua Press this year. Ecstatic, Kevin’s sixth full poetry collection, will be published by Salmon next March.

‘Liberals’ &’ Death’

Two words that strut confident of their own historical inevitability. Everyone in time meets them, though hopefully not both ringing your door bell the same day, unless your name is Nagasaki or Vietnam; or you’re the first village no-one’s ever heard of successfully abolished from thirty thousand feet by a transgender person pressing a button;

or you’re the first Somali in history proudly turned into a pile of burning mince by a drone designed by a woman of colour;

or you’re the wrong type of Australian whose computer told us the names of the obliterated and so can only leave prison in a fair-trade cardboard box.
Up with Clever Literature

after Roy Campbell

Enough of these who just strip back the wrapper
to lay bare the mould that's got into the marriage,
what clergy, journalist, and judge

are wearing under their frocks – who put in your face
the receipts – who exactly pays
for the Archbishop of Canterbury's

Buttercup panties. We want verses
that dress our beetle ridden corpses so thoroughly
in what look like peacock feathers,

no one would know we've been dead for years.
And, before that, metaphors that blind like a comb-over,
so successful the reader forgets the ham

beneath. The literature-appreciating public expect
men in casual jackets going up hills and realising
no one knows exactly what;

need to know how Queen Medbh
might have reacted to something you think
you read in the I-Ching
or Eat, Love, Pray while your temporal human form
was temporarily stuck on a broken down Southern Rail train.

Give us themes like these in metres preferred
by the Persians, or Charles the Twelfth of Latvia,
so Professors with banjaxed hair
can spend half a century working out
what it was you were getting at,
or, even, what you weren't.
EXEQUIY

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

EXEQUIY

My husband’s father burns incense.
Looks smaller. Writes eulogies for the departed—
First, a brother-in-law,
the quiet doctor (he marries my husband’s aunt
before she is shot by a civil war sniper).
Two more over two days,
a tall mild-mannered man, named after the converted apostle—
(he joins us, that summer in Salzburg);
the other, robust and bald, a man reconciled with his brother
after decades of impasse.
A few weeks later,
the caustic interior designer who becomes a painter—
transforms canvas shadows
into countless outlines of small black shapes.

Laura J Braverman
EXEQUY

QUARANTINE CHORUS

Beyond the window black with night, a dog sounds—
I sit by the window emptied of light.

Faraway four- and five-beat barks remind me of childhood
nights when parents were out.
When everything outside the house was vast,
unmapped.

The frogs here voice a boisterous counterpoint—
outside gurgles and chirps are new and strangely jolly.
No anuran trills in the city.

Behind their chorus, the coastal highway hums quieter
than what I’m used to. Sometimes I pretend
passing cars are waves instead.

I sit by the window black with night—
under lockdown, our new home is a cocoon. We moved
three days before schools were shut.

After hospital, my husband isolates downstairs.
We share FaceTime meals, see each other through glass.

Beyond the window black with night, the frogs trill
and sing—
voice a boisterous counterpoint
as the coastal highway hums.

Frog in the night. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.
Eat Silence

The leader was a song
stuck in our heads.
Of course nothing much happened
some executions.

They built a holy house
over the remains of a clinic.
Scuffy wildlife was tidied up
& the war barely lasted a lifetime.

The leader was a song.
Trick is
more simple the melody that much harder
to expunge from our minds.
We were told we had sunshine
but never went outside.
He eventually dropped off the charts
a riot ensued.
**Escalations**

Baking the cake
called awake.
This life not much, but more than bread,
herd the shadows to the shed
for milking & the drench
(those delusions we too are not led).
So we invent, peer out of our trench
write some books, pretend there’ll be recompense.
The sun combs its shattered hair
once so ordered, such permanence
or this we thought seeing only there
that casual endorphin glare.
The ambition of table, of chair
another day to live, much as we dare.

Tried to believe in numbers
but they never added up.

**Hit**

At breakfast that song snuck in
like some showy blue cockroach.
Scuttled across the floor
left chord-scatter all over the kitchen.

The commuter train was twelve-barred by deluge
phones broke open
bells fell out.
Laptops clapping, one geezer’s chipped transistor —
full volume. Earworms wobbled & I
blame a specific tune.

Calls come in, dumped off the schoolbus
our children sway
the metastasis of music
knows all about locks
& the school gates are brokedanced.

Air guitars wailed as news of war broke out.
Of course there’s demos.
Down in the streets banners sang — that song —
while those who marched hummed along
forgot that peace
had to be chased with tougher words than mere lyrics.

From our office towers we watched the ruin
of purpose, of silence.
Naturally, we too sang
guess what, this product or path
oh sunny day.
Push the pencil in your ear
all the way.
**Become Back**

I needed this thing
your glow
one remarkable moment
when all the almosts we’d had that night
forgotten.

The contusion of our histories
put aside, to be read later
beneath the argument of sleep.

Like some Venice gondolier
the veins I navigate
then some seasonal deluge arrives —
laughter raw, implacable.
Our vessel is tossed
there is no territory, destination
or want.

We are both surprised.

---

**& Then**

Our laughter is a commitment,
the fightback.

You ask fight against what
but you know.

This age
where every park bench is a battlefield.

All the jobs lost, too many of us
crowd the Nostalgia Diner.

Viruses fly in, a world tour
not quite the musical, long past the concept album.

Pick a country, there’re hundreds.
Only the missiles have purpose. People starve
yet find energy to kill.
This is not enough.

Perhaps the wine, maybe naked
there’s this way forward. A project.

Hands break us up.
We need to be broken.
Kingfisher at Night

Against a black sky
a kingfisher
body jewelled, eye fixing me
subject of its gaze.

Both of us halted, connected
framed against a pattern
of regression
we can neither articulate
nor understand.

There is a message here
curve of beak
head-tilted, body pressed
into darkness.

A staccato of insects
send out signals.

I reach out, hand to claw
claw to skin
skin to feathers
bill rattling
head thrown back

voice of smoke
and laughter.
Tracks

The first point of penetration
when the needle entered
she was already a mother, already angry
already beautiful, already hurting.

What was she hungering for
could she guess the chain reaction
when she constructed her own
death on life on life on death.

All of the cards in the house she'd built
fell to fake freedom
washing her body
that never felt clean.

Did she think about anything
when words failed her
sliding into her lap like shadows

the cute boy, holding the belt on her arm
frozen in time
his wispy moustache
reminding her of a grandfather
who touched her
she couldn't quite remember where.

Or her baby at home with a friend
in the tiny apartment
she tried to keep clean
against a tide of roaches
that kept coming.

The city invaded
every one of her dreams
each tall skyscraper a father
stinging barbs
entering her bloodstream
boxing her into a small space
under the steps.

Just at the point of peace
those terrible contractions.

She hated him, the cute boy
her sister's boyfriend
though he stroked her dark
hair and told her she was prettier.

She knew he was lying
but his words felt sweet as resin
opium poppies
warming her body.

He held the syringe while she lay down
and for at least a minute
thought of nothing.

Then her body was flooded
not with the pheromones
the not so cute boy promised her
still whispering something she
could no longer hear
it was ghosts.
Ultimate Grey

Despite years of trying
we have failed to detect
a single flash.

Looking up cricks the neck
but I can't help it, stargazy.

I will continue to believe
against evidence. It hurts no one.

Nevertheless, the dirt is singing.
I lie on my bad back
the forest surrounds my house
painted illuminating yellow
before it was colour of the year

feel it vibrating through
pulling me down, the ultimate home
soft moss beneath
cellular non-sound
coming through.

Of course I’m too old
for space travel.

The aliens are not going to save us
from our own stupidity
in their state-of-the-art
fully automated ship.

Who would want this flesh
softening already into the
still beautiful, pre-apocalyptic ground

whistling at me
like a construction worker
saying come, come
it looks cold but it feels warm
when you get here.

This is where you belong
this silver, this light slate grey
these shivering insects that crawl
across skin in broken light.
HEDY AND ZEBRA

My grandmother
cut her skirts short
sewing them up
to show off good legs.

She would cinch in her waist
hide keys in her ample bust
dyed her permed hair black
bold lipstick, Hedy Lamarr red
a perfect cupid’s bow.

She would not be caught
off guard, unready
unkempt.

I still have a zebra print
mini she gave me
more than two decades ago
black and white
mid thigh, leg flattering
though in the end
it was my mother’s body
I inherited
shivering under the covers.

I didn’t know anything
didn’t ask why.

Let her take care of me
took the medicine
made my own cupid’s bow
traded tradition for luck
swam up on the shore
of another island.

CROSSROADS

In a picture of a picture there was a man tagged with your name sitting next to
a man I recognised as your father. He was very small, nearing a death that had
already happened, though not yet in the moment you were leaning in. Time
shrinks us in places, grows us in others. Your body had changed; your face,
unrecognisable. I remember you in my first rented room in Queens, walking
back and forth in that small, tidy box, minimal in decor. Underexposed. The rest
of the house was a dump, dishes that weren’t mine piled in the kitchen sink.
You were just over mono, skinnier than you would ever be again, your eyes
vulnerable and soft, your post-illness skin translucent, though lit by a
distinctive flush coming over your jaw. I remember thinking that I was almost
at the point of saying goodbye and hung on a little longer. The grief then, was
not so much an absence that had not yet happened, already visible just beyond
the frame, but for the bodies we no longer inhabit. Bodies that continue to pace
in tidy rooms, somewhere, waiting.
LOTUS FLOWER

MANUELA PALACIOS

Manuela Palacios lectures on anglophone literature at the University of Santiago de Compostela (Galicia, Spain). She has edited, translated and written about Irish, Galician and Arabic poetry. Among the recent anthologies she has edited are Migrant Shores: Irish, Moroccan & Galician Poetry (Salmon Poetry 2017) and Ανθολογία Νέων Γαλικιανών Ποιητών - Antoloxía De Poesía Galega Nova (Vakxikon 2019). Manuela’s research on women’s studies, eco-poetry and the human-animal trope has set her on the stimulating path to creative writing.

COLLAR

Take a word between your fingertips consider its shape and lustre, its inner glow—the nacre layers that swathe the core.

The ways of the world penetrate the surface and send back refracted beams of variegated light, despite daily abrasions.

Don’t let the apparent smoothness fool you. It may grit your teeth when spoken out loud.

The laws of syntax will drill through the kernel to form a string of round or oval, pithy or fancy beads. Each thoughtfully chosen to match its neighbour on each side, with close-fitting but supple knots to let the sentence flow.

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LO T U S F L O W E R

Your fingers
drawn together like a closed
lotus flower

your mind
cueless as to why, what, when or where
while the rod
swishes
past
your face
and lands
on your fingertips.

The lotus dips
into the grime.

A lotus flower re-blooms
immaculate
the next morning
but you do not
because punishment has dawned upon you.

You stand
facing the wall
while the teacher continues her lesson.
You are the lesson
schoolchildren learn.

The lotus dips
into the grime.

You kneel
your arms stretched
along an imaginary
crucifix.

The lotus dips
into the grime
at night
and re-blooms the next morning

but for you
there is no resurrection.

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A Spider in Love

On spreading her glowing silk net
she casts a strand to my hide-out
gauging my size and weight
with enticing cunning.

I dream of ballooning cruises
on a tropical jet stream
but will be quite content with this
swirling amorous bridge of sorts.

Her heart is my beacon,
safely far from fangs or brain,
wisely placed near the silk loom
that will guide my intent.

These hourglass frames of ours
will disfigure time
while the industrious spinnerets
wreathe an everlasting nuptial berth
to the elation of feelers and palps.

Costa da Morte*

after Estevo Creus

Estevo speaks of his childhood
in Land’s End,
that Galician coast of death.

He claims he was once bitten
by a whale – and his body now carries
the mammal’s DNA.

Our bard remembers bathing
in the sea, when the news
arrived of a newly hunted whale;
the sea water warm with
animal blood.

That cook at the whaling
factory
brings meat home. A feast
for children’s eyes.

On a visit with father to the whaling
factory
the infant gapes in awe
at a blue whale Himalaya
climbed upon by
seashore mountaineers.

Estevo has seaweed
eyes and an abyssal voice.
On taking his leave, he mumbles:
‘see you under water’.

* Costa da Morte (Coast of Death) is a stretch of Atlantic coast in Galicia (north-western Spain). Its name allegedly stems
from the numerous shipwrecks in the area, but its west orientation also marks the place where the sun sets... or drowns.
Silent Spring

All the instruments they have agree
there’s no such thing as Climate Change.

First there was the demise of the planet,
extinction, to look forward to –
no birds, bees, trees, marine creatures
nothing afloat in the ocean
but resurgent plastic bags and oil spills.

We held our breath, awaiting
the whirr of cicadas, sonic communion
of the whales, deafened by silence.

Except for terrorist attacks on city
streets and mosques, red-alert sirens
and a pre-apocalyptic hum of unease.

After the earthquakes and volcanoes
came drought, heatwaves, the fire season
(the great Hawaiian escape for those
who don’t hold a hose).

Summer vanished from us in a haze
before the scythe of floods and viruses.

I cycle past forbidden beaches
discovering (certified) that I’m old,
self-isolation threatens, and somehow
it’s political, all about the economy

and missed football matches,
forgotten art and music, poetry, truth
the wellsprings of a subterranean life.

I should be glad of a different season.

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

The third I’ve seen this summer
lying flat on the ocean floor,
undulating slightly with the current
like a grey, non-slip shower mat.
They wash in over the breakwater
at high tide, bury themselves in sediment
waiting for hard-shelled prey.

Docile and curious, stingrays
(they say) may attack if provoked.
Filming in shallow waters, Steve Irwin
swims towards the chosen specimen,
his shadow its predator, a tiger shark
perhaps. The venomous spike
stabs wildly at heart and lungs,
swirling of waves, the taste of salt.
Ten seconds for him to die.

Hovering beneath water,
your passing shadow dogs you
like an unexpected diver

The Bike With No Brakes

Ten years old, she pedals to the river
a freedom from rules, like wind
on the nape of her neck.
Yes, there were accidents, a run-in
with the back of a car, crashes at the base
of hill-roads, faded purple scars
a reminder, the tattoo of embedded gravel.
Once the hem of her jeans
caught fast in the bicycle chain.

In the hot tin changing-shed,
woollen cossie rolled down to the waist,
she’d pass for a boy. Alone, drifting
in the current, floating
under the willows, the tug of water
that stays with you forever,
the tyre on a knotted rope
tied to a tree branch, swinging empty.

The boy is there again, faun-like
down in the reeds by the river,
just watching, smoking languidly
cigarette held to his lips
as a shadow falls across the afternoon
and the mountain range draws in.
Words gather, heavy as fish,
the river’s ripples no longer
a pillow for her head.
Margaret Kiernan has a background in Public Policy and Social Justice. She writes poetry and short stories. She also paints landscapes in mixed media. She is published in, The Blue Nib Literary Journal, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Burrow at Old-water-rat publishing Australia, The Galway Review, Poet Head, A New Ulster, Anthologies, and Cultural news magazines. She is listed in The Index of Contemporary Women Poets in Ireland, 2020. She writes with the Thursday Group of poets, at Over-the-Edge, Galway. Is also a member of Ox Mountain poets.

PEARS IN GLASS BOWLS

Margaret Kiernan

We went the low road. Mother, and I walked along the mountain way beside grey stone walls heard the bleating sheep. Together we arrive, startling two spare framed tall men my maternal great-uncles ‘who spoke in native tongue’ she answered them.

I listened, watched above to the mezzanine beneath the roof filled with bales of sheep’s wool I inhaled its pungent oil. John hooked the kettle upon the iron crane above sods of burning peat.

With delicate fingers, he drew glass dishes from a cupboard opened canned pears gave me a glass of raspberry cordial.

Gentle graceful fluid movements of men at home beneath those mountains. They were pleased Katie called, that she brought the girl with her.

Margaret Kiernan
Whispered Benedictions

I stand on shifting sand, I feel it
heave, throb like a drum
no house will I build here, for I am
a home filled with
Love.

The star strewn sky upholds the night
I allow it to enfold me, how small I am.
I wonder about portals to Jupiter or Mars
celestial sphere of eighty - eight constellations.
My eyes seek the Milky Way, the Bear.

Memory filters footprints of a journey
going home sometime
as a fluttery breeze taps my cheek.
I am full of gratitude
with simplest
benedictions.

Sparkled stars slip away
fall into the night
I am of that realm,
just another spark.

Cradle of Crimson

Was it a cloudy day or just layered with sparkled mists?
No dream lit dust motes, syssel - seeds, unspoken love.
Evening arrived when the sun went down.

By the gate, a cat goes by full of milk
Rumbled out from that family so jaded,
even the kids want to go to their bed.
Marooned scraps of folly
Secrets visited upon them.

In the churchyard near the yew tree
Lies un - hinged, a plastic posy of violets
Tarnished by wet clay.
Autumnal Shift

Amethyst harebells
sweep translucent trumpets.
Hold tight to the earth,
ringing singing
in October scowls.
Spread coy skirts
along swaying tides
where we all drift.
**Treading**

We are all of us lost
Poppy from the top deck
Mamma’s fingers lingering,
loitering on the squat fat rope.
Then gone. Gone.
Granny holding me and Ruby.
Hard, so hard I fear we’ll break
shatter even.
But the puffy jackets
hold fast through trough and swell.
Bigger than the skyscrapers in New York,
wider than the Hudson.

That’s why I know we’re lost,
in the sea, watching dolphins.
Just me, Ruby and granny.

**Feline tango**

The white cat snoozes
on the warm tin roof.
Face tucked on outstretched paws.

Behind him the ginger tom cat
is nonchalant.

Creeps slides and slinks.
Then pauses.

Circles, halts
and the dance begins.

Creep and slink,
slide
mid step pause,
tango, salsa.

Fur will fly
rain like
dandelion clocks.

Their hacks
quiffed in Elvis curls
feline falsettos
and whisker sneers
as my cats dance The Slide.
There's More of Nothing

it's a privilege to step out
into a seemingly infinite nothingness
everything still –
and for the most part silent.
There's more of nothing
than we usually care to notice
it being neither inert nor empty.
Fertile, endlessly suggestive –

**In a Narrow Strip of Newsprint**

Aya Aloud recalls the moment –
from her hospital bed, in Gaza City’s Shifa hospital
covered in wounds and bruises.

Before –
trembling, she pulls a mattress
closer to her sleeping parents.
Checking in with a friend on WhatsApp
and suddenly the sound of bombing, darkness
and she’s trapped beneath the concrete.
Struggling to free herself
hears her mother breathing
and tries – then rushes through the rubble
pleading for help to pull her out.

But, her father, Moeen
one of Gaza’s few neurologists
along with other colleagues will be named
amongst the 42 Palestinians
killed that Sunday.

**Even for a Bird**

Over the centuries
millions of painted ladies
have travelled out of Africa’s Sahel Region
as far north as the Arctic Circle
then back towards the Middle East.
Even for a bird –
such an odyssey is impressive
but, for a butterfly less than a single gram
it’s truly wondrous –
A heritage that could be lost
in our obsessive concern
for mechanised order – especially on road verges.

And though we like to assume:
natural ecosystems are complex
highly adapted and beautiful
and will always be there.
But, like a clutch of lapwing eggs
in the grass, could be crushed
in one false step.
The Little Dress

for between four and six months.
The soft organic cotton
was exactly what I had in mind
for Ailbhe their new baby daughter.
Free, after months in lockdown
to wander amongst all the new-born things.

And reminded of the first gift
after my son's birth still upstairs.
So tiny it only fitted a few times
but, still the same blue and texture
as the little dress – ready to be posted.

Wrapped in tissue paper
inside an envelope.

In the Calligraphy of a Landscape

Breathless, a young Oliver Plunkett returns.
From exploring one of the many cairns
outside the walls of the Tower House, his home
at Loughcrew Estate, in County Meath.
Having managed to crawl further inside
mingling with his neolithic ancestors
touching the mystery of the long interred.
Built before Newgrange, the cairns like cemeteries
punctuated the surrounding countryside.
And sadly, Oliver's future would be far
from those rambling drumlins and cairns.
But his name would be interred in Irish hearts
long after that brutal execution at Tyburn.
And centuries later they'd inscribe saint.
A Basket of Tasks

Either too empty or too full.
I fill up before each visit.
After, it is empty.
I am empty.
There is no division
between me and the basket.

I fill again and again, transfer the warmth
of my straining hands so that each task
is nourished. Sometimes, the base splits,
releases a trail of undone morsels,
their bright packaging ripped
as I move through drifts of fallen leaves,
leering trees, on my way to visit.

Then too, I empty, return the way I came,
traverse the muddled path,
attempting to find those broken tasks:
like dreams, some shatter, then scream
for my attention.

I gather up, press them softly down,
ignoring their distress. Although the basket brims,
I cannot deliver such crumbled entities:
I head for the canal, that long belly
of black water. It opens to my offerings
until the basket is empty
and I am free of its weight.
Hard Old Stations

Which way, every way, you turn, every station is a hard old station, all, or almost if not all, deserted. Stuck on a sluggish non-stop train since we got on the last lockdown, unsure of the lines-end destination. Not that events don’t happen to us, Joe Burke to die in our worst hour brought the train to tears for him. Anyway the day that the music died came long before this. It’s in the air, and if you cannot zoom it’s nowhere. Then on dull days on end you wonder if the glimmer goes dimmer and dies will the train prevail if the light fails? Still, better to keep moving on ahead got to keep the engine singing high, we never died a winter yet ’twas said. A young girl stands by a country road, on a mobile phone, her only link left to a reality that’s nearly non-existent. But I can’t forget the Little Egret seen in pensive pose pictured by the Feale, of the purest white full of light for me.
Silvered

Gone over the fine soft sand,
printed behind me my traces;
fortress face jutting out low
in front of the Castle Green.
Summer time ascending on us.
The Black Rocks away at sea,
out in the tide, out of bounds.
There’s one going underwater
only a stone’s throw from me,
smooth, like a hippopotamus,
that’s singled out and silvered
by the sun that bravely breaks
through the clouds that crowd.

Seeing Poppies

I saw myriads of poppies, not in a cornfield,
red robed ballerinas dancing just for me,
but in the National Mall facing The Capitol,
and punch-drunk with joy on a red-letter day,
looking over the two hundred thousand flags
in rows and rows for locked-down absentees,
watching in every State that makes America
the inauguration of the President of a nation,
Joe Biden, they want to celebrate and cheer,
knowing they are bound for a greater destiny.
**LEAVING ESTONIA**

Short was our stay that day, it was only a port of call for our Cruiser called the Breakaway in the fall of the year, heading now for Petersburg, for our Captain spoke of stormy seas raging in the Gulf of Finland, not now to feature on our Baltic Cruise. On a high stool at a circular bar with a Southern Comfort for company as we leave Estonia, silently toasting the hazel eyes of Helen who sold me a souvenir in a teeming harbour shop in Tallinn, sending me hurriedly away. Placed outside the diner on deck six where soon I’ll go for evening dinner a piano man radiates his melodies as we cruise unconsciously to Russia, making a heaven of the high atrium where chandeliers hang high like stars.

**GUARDIANS**

I know no castle built by blistered hands so noble in its allure that could withstand the toll of time so well as yonder cliffs that overlook the golden sand: richly coloured, russet, green and yellow, the lofty guardians of the Ladies’ Strand.
A Chance Encounter

Maybe if you walk three times around the church, you will meet the devil coming back and, if you do, be sure to hold his stare. Remember it’s the eyes have it, and that nasty little tail that can whip a cigarette from a woman’s lips at twenty feet. He also does a nice line in cloven hooves, good for tap-dancing and maintaining poise in a muddy field, but useless in a sprint; a genetic mutation that always favoured the horse, though at the expense of balance, which explains why if you ever see a horse in a bar, he will be leaning on the counter.

Maurice Devitt

Selected for Poetry Ireland Introductions in 2016, his poems have featured in a significant number of journals, both in Ireland and internationally. He was a featured poet at the Poets in Transylvania Festival in 2015 and a guest speaker at the John Berryman Centenary Conference in both Dublin and Minneapolis. His poems have been nominated for Pushcart, Forward and Best of the Net prizes and his Pushcart-nominated poem, ‘The Lion Tamer Dreams of Office Work’, was the title poem of an anthology published by Hibernian Writers in 2015. He is curator of the Irish Centre for Poetry Studies site and he published his debut collection, ‘Growing Up in Colour’, with Doire Press in 2018. 

https://www.doirepress.com/writers/m_z/maurice_devitt/
https://thegloss.ie/writers-block-with-maurice-devitt/
October Sunday

It's one of those days when you realise
that summer is not coming back,
despite the light bursting confidently
into the bedroom, the deception
of heat behind glass and the glimpse
of a neighbour, hurrying coatless
up to Mass. It's the leaves that give
the game away, and the grass,
that you try to convince me is still growing,
your deft scissors-work a joy to behold.
Only bettered by the pumpkin –
the face you carved a good likeness
of me – waiting on the step,
eyes casting ruefully into the night.

Ranelagh Morning

The last wink of a disconsolate moon
captured in the chimneys above Annavilla,
where houses of every shape and size
lean into the street as he passes,
the clip of his shoes setting off
a pinball of bedroom lights.

The first car of morning
runs the gauntlet of neighbours
desperate for newspapers and milk,
breakfast tables already set
for splintered conversations,
while the radio announcer, hidden
behind a fruit bowl on the counter,
clears her throat to bring drama
to last night's news –
and just as the blinds are pulled up,
he ghosts into shot, like a wraith
from last night's dream.
**THE GILEAD BOY**

The Gilead Boy Goes In Studs-Up.

The teachings of faith re-purposed to dark matter,
that vast black hole where compassion goes to die,
(but it can only be theocracy if it's someone else's god.)

The daddy man with a lizard smile,
rapture boner poorly concealed
in chest high trousers and Christian braces,
the default cloth of a psycho-clown
when he's finally consumed his inner child.

Never the brightest guy in the room
even when he's alone in the room,
regularly reaching into his toolbox,
always coming back with a hammer.

Eyes the colour of cold dead water
caught in the glint of a well-polished gun,
carefully drawing up the lists,
the names, addresses, the guilty verdicts,

Gods' clenched fist putting us all in order.

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Mick's poems have been rejected by some of the best magazines and journals around, he has also been nominated for The Pushcart Prize (USA) and The Forward Poetry Prize (best individual poem) UK. He has spent the pandemic doing wild and reckless things with his hair.

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THE WEST UNLEASHES A FIERCE BARRAGE OF HOPES, THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS.

First the rumours then the pictures, “appears to show” and “unconfirmed”,
the radio narrating a fantasy spiel, “our violence, so much better than their violence,”
then the cold knock to the pit of your stomach as the thought police go door to door:

Today I am much older in myself, hobbling these quiet woods, fathers’ walking stick in hand,

Autumn trees, beautiful in their death mask.
To sir with love

for Jan Claire

It may not always end like this.
The beasts of the Blackboard Jungle tamed.
The bully trading aggression for respect.
Lessons in personal choice and responsibility
wholeheartedly absorbed.

When the end-of-term hop comes around
don’t expect the pretty wild-child
to turn to you for her Ladies’ Choice.
Don’t hold your breath for a gift-wrapped present
to be dropped into your hands,
or for a tomboy to step forward to serenade you,
on behalf of her grateful classmates,
with the song, To Sir With Love.
New World

Larry, nicknamed Sonny, trailblazer
(oldest of sixteen, eleven boys)
ups sticks for the New World, roaring twenties.
Turned back by US immigration,
rewinds over land and ocean
to Ireland, East Clare,
small farm, thatched homestead
where a bewildered younger brother
runs to tell his mother: There's a fella
looks like Sonny in the yard.

Undaunted, strikes out again for Illinois,
breathes the same ether
as Capone's bootleggers,
opens the door to younger brother;
mild-mannered Denny,
naturalised American
(St Patrick's Day 1938),
discreet war veteran-to-be.

Mercurial Dilly sails from Cobh
aboard the SS Celtic 1928;
Irish Juliet to a Latin Romeo,
vanishes from family radar.
While level-headed Mary leaves her mark
in the 15th Census of the United States,
cook to a private family
on Manhattan's Park Avenue,
marries a Galway man, succumbs
to a fatal affliction 1950.
the year in which Michael, her brother,
as an in-law so crudely put it,
was fished out of the Hudson.

Last of all Joe, the baby
(apple of every eye)
flies dismal post-war Ireland,
joins the family colony in Chicago;
German wife, three American kids,
returning just the once for a family reunion,
(nine years before his passing)
to chew the fat and sing and pose
in a sibling line-up, one short of a football team,
in a hotel in Scariff. Ashes of his
the only material trace
of all that export human freight
to merge with clay of their forebears
In Moynoe Cemetery.
AFTER THE DELUGE

Like a scene from an apocalyptic movie
the heavens opened to end our ten-day heatwave;
Indra and Ba’al twisted the stop-cock
while Zeus and Thor took charge
of the lighting and sound effects.

Our soft Irish rain now Biblical-Monsoon,
for ninety minutes I was wonderstruck,
a Noah without the Ark,
Gene Kelly without the lamp post,
Frank McCourt without the squalor;
The Quiet Man without an Abbey or a Maureen O’Hara.
In the rhythm of the pouring rain I was
The Cascades without the stolen heart.

And when the downpour ended right on queue,
as determined by the weather gods of Apple and Google,
I became Sisyphus wielding a yard brush,
his rock dissolved to water in a flooded garden shed

INTERIOR DESIGN

My parents must have flipped and engaged
a museum curator or a Belgian surrealist,
the kitchen a dead zoo of body parts:
the heads of otter, rabbit and hare
mounted on wooden plaques above the door;
flitches of bacon dangling from the ceiling;
washing his thorny heart outside his shirt,
a bearded Saviour watching over us.

Along came the rural electrification;
the gleaming light bulb banished the shadows.
In lieu of taxidermy a new divine trinity
of solemn Pope and two smiling Kennedys.
Facing the Sobell black and white TV
we worshipped the rock gods, Stones, Bee Gees
and Beatles, especially John and Paul,
their flowing locks like Jesus’s on the wall
The Adjustment of Sails

for Tommy Murray

Only now have I learned the language of stained glass windows
The grammar of devotion is a lifetime’s study
In the beginning I was too wise to spend time on splendour
When the sun shines through you must be up and ready

I never wanted my name in lights but here is perfect
Tell him I survived it, that her advice helped
If we face north every Sunday, where is the east window?
I adore the cut of the sails and the roof’s angle

Let us consider the word home, now that we are older
It holds a terror for us who have travelled far
But also joy. Each new morning is a different definition
The slim atlas of ways home dares us to take and read

River pathways are compelling, trim lawns are seductive
The day is too brief to consider alternatives
History was my subject but it’s hard to remember dates
Each nightfall now is like the eve of Waterloo
THE LAST TRIP HOME

I leave behind my history books, car
unfinished poems and best suit
take the wedding photo and the faded cutting.

Modern trains are comfortable and I enjoy
the free wi-fi, the flat midlands, the neat stops.

As a child I thought Collooney stationhouse
a mansion but it's smaller now,
prize-winning flower beds weedy,
wilting hydrangea and straggling roses.

I search for a taxi to take me the final leg
but find a steam engine and four carriages
waiting on the branch line. I board,
a whistle, we rumble off on rotting rails
through the undergrowth of fifty years.

I, the sole passenger, get off at the dead stop
where the windows are boarded
and broken slates litter the platform.

No-one meets me.

I could abandon hope, take the next train back
but they will have sensed
that I am on my way, have the dinner on
the table set, a fire in the good room.

When I reach the cottage the sharp scent
of creosoted sleepers reminds me
to look for the wild orchids behind the shed.
I find them, Early Purple, upload a picture.

The Scots Pine wood, smaller now, gossips,
passes on the word, and the fuchsia whisper
that my father sits inside, alone,
under the turn of the stairs,
the table unset, the range cold,
his fingers too stiff to strike a match.

When I push open the rotting door
I hear his soft uncomplaining voice
"Welcome home, son."

© Michael Farry
The Grammar of Glamour

Now that she has gone, he swears
he’s studying a new language,
one of the inflected tongues
of the Romance group
with an independent syntax.

Students of such obsessions
such as I
can tell at once
that underneath his careful apathy
the struggle to emulate her perfect grammar
goes on in their mother tongue.

Just this week I noticed
his rejection of the run-on sentence
the comma splice,
 favouring instead a coordinating conjunction,
his instinct being logical in everything;
and so to correct
She broke hearts from the age of six,
she is very beautiful
he substitutes
She broke hearts from the age of six
because she is very beautiful

He still has major difficulties
with the use of the apostrophe,
still mixes up his plurals and possessives
which I suspect was his downfall.

I myself only recently became an expert,
finally being able to tell my lady’s from my ladies
appreciate the subtle use of highlighter;
the difference between the active and the passive,
how concealer can sharpen your winged eyeliner.

Fountain Pen People

I.m. Tony Joyce

We were the last of the fountain pen people
chose perfection in presentation – my metre
your impeccable accounts.

Way back then we were naive enough to mock
what we thought were fleeting novelties
Biro, cartridge, felt tip.

Now on bitter evenings, after final bulletins
we take down the bottle, refill the pen
with Quink, concentrate

for hours on lines and columns, vital figures,
firm words, in an effort to leave behind
a fine but perfect record.

To-night plying my friendly 40s Parker,
plastic plunger, banded celluloid, deluxe,
older than either of us

I remembered, thought you should have it
to balance your books in your best hand.
Then I heard, it’s too late.

It’s not too late to put down on paper
in robust ink why we wrote what we wrote
valuing craft and courtesy.

So I’ll keep this relic of our loyalty
to write a final eulogy for you and us
last of the fountain pen people.
THE OLD SKIN OF A COUNTRY

Long zips of shaped water
in muddy tank tracks
made by mechanical war
caterpillar on the old skin of a country.
Today is a sunny day,
an anniversary of any day of peace
in the realm of a century.
The soil grows hard - a scar of deep ridges
in squared reflections
of the same piece of sky,
moving,
slowly,
silent.
In the Garden of Stone

White face, under inquisitive brows
your marble eyes examine me,
not once in all our years
has your hair been lifted by a zephyr.
You do not move or bend to life
yet you are burdened, animated
as if seeking an answer of your creator,
where is the one who birthed me in hewn stone?

In this darkness you are ghostlike,
the spectre of Caesar’s Cleopatra,
of Apollo’s Daphne, a nymph bound to this place.
Our conversation requires no movement of lips,
only the passage of thoughts between sculptor and muse,
the shaping of myth every time someone steps into your presence.

You have come from the mind of generations,
from the eclipse of enlightenment to stand before me,
here in this collected place
and you will remain perfect like this
long after I have gone.

Murmuration

War in Palestine – May 2021

In the black eye of Tristram’s Starling
at the very edge of the murmuration
there are answers
only humans chase,

into the dusk
the beautiful animation
steals the passer-by,
is it music they hear?
is it that music they seek?

They are dancing
in honour of the end,
and whichever trees survive
are watching them,
they feel it too,
anticipating the night time’s
temporary raptures.

Tristram’s Starling = Starling native to middle east regions
In the Museum on Kildare Street
Prior to a Pandemic in the Year 2020 AD

Before the display case
I am alone in a crowded place
near a once gilded sword –
the ornamental hilt of the Viking Age,
a rusting tip and blade
and I recognise the tempered chevrons of autumns,
the rhythm stamped of rivers in time.

My mind’s eye watches the forger work
the fire, the hammer, the steaming trough
and I wonder how many might have been stuck
on the end of this treasure?

The seconds, and years, chime from cold mud
like they do for the voices in bog-butter and bodies,
the hymns in the psalters and galleries
discarded when the night skies were galaxies
in a storm’s rolling sea sprays.

Celebrating 12th Anniversary

T H E  O L D  S K I N  O F  A  C O U N T R Y

The far away curve

The shadow of my fingers
rests upon your face,

your eyes open wide, then close again
as if the sun has suddenly discovered you,

as if my fingertips have found
the faraway curve of your dreams
and my wish to be part of them

but there is no touch of skin,
no requited gesture,
only the illusion of affection

and that for now is all I have
to surrender too.

© Michael J. Whelan
MY OWN DEAR MAGGIE

Moyra Donaldson is a poet from Co Down. She has published nine collections of poetry, including a limited edition publication of artwork and poems, Blood Horses, in collaboration with artist Paddy Lennon. Her most recent collection is Bone House, Doire Press, 2021. In 2019, she received a Major Individual Artist award from Arts Council NI.

A HARD PLACE, APRIL 2020

It is not enough that yearly, down this hill, April
Comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing flowers.
Edna St. Vincent Millay

Soft Spring: first delicate shoots,
bright mornings and loamy evenings,
liquid stirrings of sap, birdsong
and underground
bulbs green fountaining to air, carrying
white quietude and yellow trumpeting.

April’s promise seems to mock
the primitive needs of heart, iced
into this place of spikes and brittle edges,
distance and glass between us - fear.

My ancestral hand longs for the feel of her,
the sweet blessing of her fontanelle
beneath my palm, the soft skull of her -
granddaughter - my being grieves the lack.
My Own Dear Maggie

from letters (1875/76) to Maggie Hutchinson from Joseph Sivenarton held by Maggie’s great granddaughter, Helene

I once more commit my pen to paper to state the facts of my love for you. I spend some sleepless hours alone in bed and thinking of the modest and pleasing manner you possess. I feel in a state that I really cannot express by letter. My hopes are that in a short time we will be able to confer all the kindness that nature has bestowed on us. My brother is highly pleased with you and I hope my dear Maggie, that your love for me (and no other) is still continuing.

* 

My dear Maggie, I was very much surprised when I called down yesterday evening and found you were not there according to appointment. I would have proceeded on to Drumagarner but I had to be home to go to Cookstown with flax. I consider and believe that it was not with your will we had not the pleasure of meeting according to arrangement and if there are anything of a disagreeableness with your own people, or a change of thought of yourself, I would feel very much grieved and disappointed as you are my choice. So lest there be another disappointment, I will wait for a few lines from you by return.

* 

My dear Maggie, we have got on well with the business here today, the names are down in the registry, I gave your age as twenty four and nine thirty four. Wednesday week will be the big day. I sincerely hope you and all well and there will be no mistake in our good intentions and again my dear Maggie I subscribe by ever remaining your devoted and loving (I might say) husband. I will not be saying too much at present, but you know I am your own dear J.S. (and you mine).
NO 71

The room is in the child
and the child is in the room,
sitting against the bed, knees drawn up.
The gas fire is lit, the air heavy with heat;
two women lie in the bed
side by side.

Outside the bedroom, the bungalow lays itself out
into hallway, living room, kitchen and the other bedroom
where a man listens to voices on his citizen band radio set.

The garden grows; in the greenhouse, peach trees hang
heavy with perfect fruit; the child will always
have the taste of peaches in her mouth.

CLEAR

The white amaryllis helicopters its bloom
above a long green stem, careless of time
and of the fading edges, following its own
imperative - in the mirror we are a ghost.

I will take my caring to where it sits stillest,
to where it matters least, to all the places
that ignore me best.
"That whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must remain silent"
Ludwig Wittgenstein

Tread carefully. This B-road is a high-way to imagery and carefully sculpted words. I try to set the scene, but find myself borrowing Cannon’s companionable Pins, Yeats’ stone-dark froth, A Henry cloud scuds the skyskape as the car sides the lake, passes the fairyhouse where the happy prince fished, Victorian chimney smoking through Grimm brambles.

There’s a thinker at every turn here; no epiphany unturned, no revelation other than what the camber permits through trees and gaps in fuschia. Over that hill is the fjord, its enigmatic pool; in Rosroe we do what we can within harbour walls. Waves niggle the quay, oblivious sheep ruminate in front of the whitewashed house where the philosopher once strode back and forth on meaning, releasing thoughts on wings, leading notes for the next poet to find stuffed in the eaves for warmth or legacy.

1 Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein lived in Quay House, Rosroe Pier, Connemara in 1934 and 1948

Nessa O’Mahony was born in Dublin and lives there. She won the National Women’s Poetry Competition and was shortlisted for the Patrick Kavanagh Prize and Hennessy Literature Awards. She is the recipient of three literature bursaries from the Arts Council of Ireland. She has a PhD in Creative Writing from Bangor University and teaches with the Open University and the American College in Dublin. She has published five books of poetry – Bar Talk, (1999), Trapping a Ghost (2005), In Sight of Home (2009) and Her Father’s Daughter (2014). The Hollow Woman on the Island was published by Salmon Poetry in May 2019. Her first work of historic crime fiction, The Branchman, was published by Arlen House in 2018. She has co-edited several anthologies of poetry, including (with Paul Munden) Divining Dante: a celebration of the 700th anniversary of the Italian poet, Dante Alighieri (Recent Work Press 2021) and (with Alan Hayes) Days of Clear Light: A Festschrift for Jessie Lendennie (Salmon Poetry 2021). Details of her latest poetry collection, The Hollow Woman on the Island, can be found here: https://www.salmonpoetry.com/details.php?ID=509&aa=281
The Dreaming Octopus

dreams of open seas
as the walls of her cell dissolve
and she floats in monochrome.
She colours as images form
in her three hearts, pores bleed
pigment till her mantle aerates
the dream into indigo, blue,
the most vibrant purple ever seen
in the five oceans, the 50 tanks
of her laboratory.
Scientists scan her thoughts,
but fail to detect
which memories stay with her,
having only their own,
suppressed since the seas rose,
the oceans boiled over.

After Illumination

What if those certainties eclipse
when you round the corner, slow your pace,
and the white glare of a half-moon off-axis
blanches out the stars, stains the sky,
blurs clouds like masses on a ultrasound
to haunt your sleep and waking?

What use perspective now,
a knowledge of phases?
Say all you like about transience,
the dog days between one lit candle and another.
The light we make or that we recognise
has no times or dates, no lunar calendar.
AZURE BLUE WASHING LINE

Turning over the timer
another day to fill.
Light casts its ceaseless reminder
You are still alive.
Life’s nasty whip.
Unspoken. Locked in.

The light seeps out and nothing stood
behind her except her rusty shadow on
the bed.
Among the shimmering leaves
the world alive outside Nothing’s window
she hears the light chat
Lash
Nothing smells the barbecues
Lash
Nothing sees the pink and sliver
of the flamingo and star fairy lights
Lash.

No bin to take out
full of get togethers
no dishwasher to fill
or guest towels or fancy soap
no phone ringing or doorbell
chiming.

What’s the point.

continued overleaf...
Nothing didn’t bother to replace the milk or bread it stayed out on the counter with the masticated ball nothing spat out that balmy morning.

Nothing didn’t bother to sit down or lie or stand.

Nothing took the garden sheers and with a flourish clipped the Azure blue washing line. She hurled the shears like an expert axe thrower at the wooden post where it vibrated and sang like a saw. Nothing strode up the stairs and stopped on the tenth step. Nothing wrapped the azure blue washing line three times around the bannister. Nothing threw her leg over and sat atop the post and just like she was told the midwife had said, it was like a washing line three times wrapped around her neck. From atop the post she slid down the bannister until the rings of azure blue stopped her. Legs dangling her palms and fingers gripped between the spindles. Nothing pushed off the bannister like pushing off onto a waterslide, legs go high and then splat. Nothings legs cracked against the wall and her neck sprung up her lungs gasped for air like a dying fish. The azure blue washing line silently taut while nothings shadow cast upon the doorway.

Outside, the pink and sliver of the flamingo and star fairy lights mingled with the charcoal smoke and cast a bloom of savannah camping over the get togethers. In the row of gardens, families ate, and dads stood over the red embers testing the firmness with the spatulas while light chat, clinking glasses and sissles of meat float over the fences and walls to sweep across the setting sun.
I SAW HOPE AT THE AIRPORT

At times Hope boards a plane
and leaves you stranded
with something to declare
but no one to declare it to.

At times you don’t know
whether you’re at Arrivals
or Departures and feel
you’re on a carousel
or destined for Lost Property.
Hope goes AWOL frequently
but always reappears.
There it is! Waving at the gate.
Suntanned and sandaled.
Lugging Duty Free.

Everyone’s Rushing Out of Themselves

Everyone’s rushing out, leaving themselves behind the front door to slip back into later.

They’re wearing different clothes but the same faces, each of them is sprinting to work to get it over with.

Everyone’s on a starting line, running a relay race, passing the baton to themselves all day.

They bolt home with their to-do lists. They’ve lost the keys to themselves.

Everyone’s dashing to a finishing line then lining up for the next event.

We think they’re content - they think we’re content.
Silence is her Misfit

Her life is missing. The nights are colder.
The gold-brown flutter of Autumn has
buried the footsteps of her final season,
all she was, the brights of gentleness,
her wry and subtle humour.

Her privacies are her privilege
are as complex as fertile soil.
I mull over her foreshortened years
as I rake, reaping the seasonal wine
of my Japanese Maple, its clarets
a little less bountiful this year, a little
less robust — each friend lost is
too deeply gone for a glib epitaph
or emotive tilt — I rake and rake
listening to the shush-shush

of skitter leaves. Embraced
by rain-drenched greenness
I take stock sooner, later,
my bones will join hers
sooner, later, my thoughts

and words will have stopped
their chatter whether in
whisper or rauous mode
Nature itself is never quiet.
Silence is a misfit.
In transit now the rain has come

*Via Opodiphthera helena*

Bushfires, drought, debates of cause
the climate still the climate, argumentively,
the seasons arriving like nervous guests,
staying for no one, no thing, not gains,
nor losses, which like stockmarket falls
trouble those who fear fools gold.

Now this small life, flying in as moth.
For long nights, four, she scrabbles at
my night window like beseeching hands,
is doomed as an adult never to feed,
within her five-day span must mate
or forfeit, must trust her own lustre
to deceive predators. Must trust me
not to trap her within my bedroom’s
fake moonlight. On the fifth day
I go hunting her corpse
and find only absence.
Not even ground soaked
and reprieved can revive
the helena’s brief hours
or make her wing-eyes
re-open. Beautifully.
In defiance.

Wife

*Mortgage*

A lover, then children, sequential days mussed and mazed by the tumble
and rough of wife-self-motherhood. The sheer verve of entrapment: toys,
debs, food, pets, arriving, passing, sleep-deprived nights forever wanting
the bodies in the beds to sleep beyond lasting.

*Roof*

A hole in the roof can be hidden by wishing, made smaller by patching.
Children still leave home. In sunlit dawns trees aglow like a forest far from
the axe though twigs in the nest are never so tight a predator cannot breach gaps.

*Sky*

Between foliage breaths a leaf drops on new ground. Beads of rain along its
stem bleed like amputation. Above it the sky domes and domes, eons of lives
staining its table cloth.

*Finity*

If eternity were a wife who could pay her wages?
Reflect on this

You slide into the bathroom mirror beside me, not quite right, left made right.

You see yourself as you've always seemed—to you at least—if more ragged.

I see migrations—of chipped front tooth, small, sexy scar, now cutting whitely above the wrong eyebrow. Wrong you, not exactly haggard, but strained.

When you stroke your cheek for stubble your ring's on the wrong finger again.
Baby Boomer tattoos
(Prices on request) *

Spider veins to span a man's delicate inner thigh.
Age spots to muddy the backs of hands.
Matte grey keratoses, with three-dimensional effect.
Dark menace of moles, priced by size.

Senile warts and skin tags (extra for intimate sites).
Squamous cells and BCCs, mottled décolletage.
Varicose veins on the back of one knee (discount for job lot).
Insurance rebates for any 'x' that marks a radiation spot.

Anchors, swallows, nautical stars all incur surcharge.
'Mother' fades the fastest to an abstract kind of art.
Results may vary at first—in the long run, not so much.
Arrows persist far longer than their pierced red hearts.

Smoke

Decades after we broke, you could make me groan awake, fierce
with disappointment at my weak, weak self, till the strip light
between the blinds, my clean mouth, let me know it was only
dreaming. But what dreams, inspired/respired, what language
and desire, smoky music and rasped laughter in between the
inbreathing, the outbreathing. What a time it was to be thinking
not of long life but of living.
Roll Call

A bird atop a tree keeps sharp lookout,
a jackdaw or a crow, it’s hard to tell
against the glare the sun has spread about,
its feathers flutter in a breezy swell.
Lithe blue tits dart from branch to fence to hedge;
alert to dangers posed by prowling cat,
they chirp shrill warnings from a safer ledge.
A robin drops in silence from a slat,
an unsuspecting insect in its sights.
Each piece of nature’s puzzle finds its place.
When daily bustle settles into nights
we gather all our own for safe embrace,
aware that unexpected tolls may sound,
we pray our fragile pieces are all found.

Phil Lynch
Phil Lynch lives in Dublin, Ireland. His work has appeared in a range of literary journals and anthologies, including previous editions of Live Encounters Poetry. Other recent publications in which his work has appeared include: Skylight 47; The Honest Ulsterman; The Bangor Literary Journal, Days of Clear Light, The Music of What Happens and Two Meter Review. He is a regular performer at poetry and spoken word events and festivals. His poetry collection In a Changing Light (Salmon Poetry) was published in 2016.
Summer Song

let’s not squander
the stronger light
of longer days
let’s harvest it
with honey, nuts,
most precious crop
let’s gather in
the warm flavour
before it fades
let’s savour all
it has to give
each luscious drop

In a Spin

The sea whispers to the shore
there are no words, no words anymore.
It confides to the sand that it is choking
in a strangle of stacked up packaging.
Everything backing up,
stifled outlets forced to reverse their flow,
water and waste push back to their base.
Sinks and toilets jammed-up and stinking
overflow onto streets, across fields, down roads,
filling rivers and lakes as they squeeze a last gasp
from their plasticated lungs
before everything spins way out of control.
There are no words, no words anymore.
Dingle Wilds – Autumn 2.5

I’m sitting, sitting here, just here. Autumnal wisps nibbling. Curling itself around defiance, marina’s orchestral harmonies in full dynamics as if knowing. Horizons waves through Dingle-bay mouth I’m sitting. Here.

I imagine conversations beneath tidal ebbing, among umbilicails and serratus as crab moves for luncheon in between while August preps farewell Smells of stillness teases. I’m sitting. Stitching eyes wide open.

Bustling flocks as if commuters on a Fridays rush hour disperses gulls as they chorus. Each footfall wrapped up in own have-to and nots, and I believes it’s meant to … moving faster than light to sea, foreign to westerly whirs, pauses and cloud caracole while boats bob speaks low. Soon my darlings soon.

The crow hears, flaps his yeses leaving solo feather falling gracefully like mist licks from summit. And I’m sitting with coffee slurp - rolls through mouth softening this pallet enriching like warm salting caramel sliding from tongue, remembering blubber-breaths on surface shimmers of a Sunday morn in stillness of solitude. Soon my darling soon, curlew, oyster catcher will decorate local shores, bustling fading back with summer memories. Winter’s beautifully bleak blanket will gift wonderfully, and Autumn slowly rises With dawn and lunar light for now leaving Blackberries silently thrive. slow.

Note : umbilicails & serratus – type of seaweed common to Atlantic waters

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

Cocoon, metaphoric as butterfly first flight towards sun
With springs lifts of Winter’s puttering sigh.
Melt into arm envelop merging pulse beats to a whisper
Swaddle, slurping up lingering darkness lurking,
collapsing into embrace wooing warmth
In a moment, imprinting beyond decades,
clothing each revelation forward.
I miss you.
Paws placed pulling forehead to forehead heating depths
a silent knowing there’s longing wising winny, hand curl grasp
wags sync constant yet rhythmic till sighs exhale with tomorrow’s dream
will come dancing itself with dawn’s sweet solas
and curlews loan cry with breaking laps.

DINGLE WILDS 31 – BOW

I bow. Bow to wilding, to each sand grain
left by tidal-palms, dust off stars as they claim
their spot to gleam, gifting raw awe-ness
scoop rainbows after they cried themselves coloured arcs
leaving transparent crescents falling from skies

catching, taking eyes with sea crystal deposits
as they depict sailors stories within each glint winking
with sun, their low hums sing its own Atlantic rhythm,
stripping me, striping me back bare before both birth
and sward touched.

Grounding already decided, forming forged paths
for the following amongst hills, held in sight of grasses
and blooming heather dripping buttery yellow with dots of
brilliant plum fringing edges - rugged, breakable to
crumbs from seas sensational rough licks

I bow. Bow to wilding, to each sand grain left by tidal palms
dream of transcendence with wave and the kelp parting
it’s ways so in this garden perhaps Eden
I’ll sit with curlews colourful sound sow joy into each
breath, sing loud as dawns chorus,
low hums synchronising this Atlantic rhythm.
THREAD

The unseen strength, looping each part in togetherness, lifesaving sea baring keeping sails catching its breath. The final close on open heart in hands deep in dark red before chests pull a heave-ho closed like elevator prep to go either way.

Bounding words for centuries. Holding poise while hooves galloped final words, pulled the linen from those mills long undone, yet still, hands thread leathers. That bungee cord wetting decades as feet christen themselves in leap and faith,

weave of nets heaved to land to feed bellies of the aching frayed, undone hanging on to fringes or artist stitch claiming Paris depending on your outlook Thread. Single strand. Silken wonders, multi-layered

Woven lavishness for the fondle, carpeting millions laid down for bare-gasums while the blistered grind, bake bread. Thread. Thing of armour, warriors, survival or simple maternal appreciation tracing each letter sown honouring new arrival, swaddled joy with joy.

Stone relief at Hampi, Karnataka, India. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.
YOU HAVE LOST

You have lost
the music in your eyes.
You have lost
the color in your walk.
You have lost
the flash in your talk.
Though you have improved your knowledge in
the many ways required by your new life
it is what you have forgotten that sacrifices me.

I want to send a tornado through you.
I want to switch you on like a radio, to hear the news.
I want you to melt me in the heat of your kitchen.
But I stand outside in the dining room,
worning if dinner will come
PEARLS OF WISDOM

What pearls of wisdom
do you have for me today?
my stroke doctor asked me.

Pearls of wisdom. Pearls of wisdom?
I failed to seek those from my father.
What wisdoms he knew were lost to me.
I thought he had nothing to teach me.
There was nothing about him and his life
and his world that I cared to know.
Now I know how stupid and useless
were my beliefs about my father.
There is so much I yearn to discover
about him and the world he lived in.
I do not want him to be a stranger,
just some body six feet underground.

But it’s too late.
Looking at old photos, reading a letter he wrote,
who were these people, what did your words mean?

Roasting mickeys in a vacant lot
with the neighborhood kids.
The second baseman with the rocket arm.

The war he fought in,
the depression he lived through,
his courtship of my mother,
his endless days hammering nails into shingles
his descent into Parkinson’s.
an epic life that escaped me,
all his mysteries I can’t solve
explode in my brain.

Father, Dad, you didn’t know the son
whose self he kept hidden from you.

And you?
I will never know you.
The pearls of wisdom
have cracked and yellowed.
I kissed your shadow in the dark while music skipped through the pines and chill shivered our bones.

Your shadow told me it was not you but I knew better as it hugged me like an ocean hugs sand.

Ideas percolate on this steamy morning. The landfill of the mind accepts all incoming garbage. As usual, I cannibalize the Draconian grog and filter the sturm und drang that would draw out the vomit in my soul. And another day’s useless energy prepares for blastoff!
REMEMBERING ERNESTINE

Raine Geoghegan

THE SADDEST EYES IN THE WHOLE WORLD

Im. Dan Leno

He wore long baggy trousers and boots.
His face painted white.
When he walked onto the stage,
the audience fell silent.
His eyes were the saddest in the whole world,
yet the audience laughed as soon as he began to perform.
Charlie Chaplin stood in the wings, looking on, taking it all in.
Around him dancers limbered up, their long legs stretched high
against the wall and their backs arching like swans.
Maybe it was the smell of the sawdust, or the man on the stage
with the sad eyes, reminding him of his own sadness,
but the way the laughter made his heart flutter, well,
whatever it was, he was hooked.

Raine Geoghegan
Remembering Ernestine

She arrived one afternoon in late May.
I opened the front door and there she was,
a little breathless from walking,
her auburn hair turning grey.

She wore bright red and green,
jazzy colours that cheered me.
When she spoke with her Jamaican drawl,
it made me want to shimmy my shoulders and dance.

It was warm outside.
We had Ceylon tea and lemon cake in the garden.
I placed soft cushions on the wicker chairs.

The dogs sat at our feet,
waiting for crumbs to fall.
I was ill.
She noticed that I had lost weight,

that my skin was pale.
She talked about the ocean,
the West Indian breeze,
how it would do me the world of good.

'The next time I go to Jamaica, you must come, swim in the ocean
and catch the breeze.'

She left in the late afternoon,
wanting to get the 4 O Clock bus to Isleworth.
We hugged each other,
said we'd keep in touch.

I watched her sashaying down the road.
She lit up the street,
with her hips swaying,
her purple handbag swinging.

She turned once, waving and smiling.
I waved back then went inside.
I think of her from time to time.
Richard W. Halperin has Irish/U.S. dual nationality and lives in Paris. His most recent collection for Salmon Poetry, Cliffs of Moher, is Catch Me While You Have the Light, 2018. People in a Diary is listed for 2022. His most recent shorter collections for Lapwing, Belfast, are Richard Dalloway in Wisconsin; Summer Night, 1948; and The Girl in the Red Cape, all 2021. His poem 'Snow Falling, Lady Murasaki Watching' is on permanent display at Hawk’s Well Theatre, Sligo. His work is part of University College Dublin’s Irish Poetry Reading Archive.

THE ROSE WINDOW

What has held – really held – in my life, When so much has not? Some beliefs, Some friendships. Stained glass windows Which remain after they break. Bereavement, A word I prefer to grief, bereft means Robbed of. Courage did not hold, I cannot Write about that, but here I still am.
The Captain’s Death Bed

‘Early in the morning of August 9th, 1848, just about dawn he died.’ The Captain’s Death Bed, Virginia Woolf

The Captain is dying in a room the walls
Of which are painted with trellis work
Covered with roses. The bedroom with
My crib in it in Chicago in 1944
Had roses on the wallpaper, I can still
See them, although one isn’t supposed
To remember anything before the age
Of three. In Harlem in 1972,
At Adam Clayton Powell’s funeral,
Who knows what was on a bystander’s mind
When she said, ‘Those are the wrong roses
For that man.’ I think roses on wallpaper
May be the language of actual death.
I think they may be the language of marriage
And of friendship. I think they may be
The language of the angels in Matthew 4
Who arrive to look after Jesus, for a while.

The Red Shoes

Empty street on a rainy day, empty flat and a pot of tea,
Empty poem which is any poem, newspaper pages
Blown about at night on an empty street, one of the pages
Become a dancer to dance with the exhausted girl
In The Red Shoes, ‘she dies, of course’ as a line in
The film goes – artists doing their work of help as do
Doctors and firefighters, notes in a bottle and even
Anna Karenina is a note in a bottle.
In an Abbey

For Liam Ó Muirhile

I came across in an abbey just now
A Poetry Ireland Review. No. 52. The most
Wonderful poems, with no exceptions.
And an interview with Pearse Hutchinson,
And more poems. Does anyone write like that
Anymore? Even the writers in it who still
Write? Yes. Some. What happened?
The model A Ford chugs along, or the Morris.
Words are all inadequate – Eliot spends much of
East Coker on that – and chug, chug, up
The hill and down, on a road poets know
To a destination no one knows and the road
Has no destination, the road is the destination.
(More inadequate words and maybe not true,
Which is why Plato calls us liars, but he
Lied too.) A magazine issue I would hold up as
The gold standard, skimmed off the top
Of ten thousand years of writing which still
Continues. And I hear the poets in it say to me,
‘Are you one of us?’ It is good to be asked.
I pick up The Shepherd’s Calendar, which
Has never been bettered, and I hear
‘Are you one of us?’ The question burns the fat
Away, the question burns me away. I hear
The Model A chugging, dropping parts all over
The road. May my mother rest in peace is all
I want to say, is all I ever want to say.

Ancient stone grave in South India. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.
I DON’T WANT TO BE LOST

Rob Buchanan

"Rob Buchanan is the author of The Cost of Living (Five Nothing Press, 2016). His is an utterly unique voice in contemporary Irish poetry. Coming from a working class background in Dublin’s southside, in a society which pretends to be classless, as an openly gay man, Rob only recently married the man for whom his book is dedicated, his poems cut through all the veneer of the Republic, revealing a brutal world, yet one from which he, like Baudelaire before him, has extracted miracles.” – Peter O'Neill

Dementia ward

How did ye know where to find me?
She says,
As if I haven’t been looking for her
my whole life.
The psychiatrist says
I should write you postcards.
But I can’t decide on your address.
Do I still live at home in Whitestown?
Is Da alive? Why aren’t you in school?
And then the traitors lance in my side
Am I your Mammy?
Yes my love, but you’re my baby too.

We have difficulty recognising each other,
This fake hard man, who cries daily.
This grey little girl, who was once my mother.
I spoonfeed you dinner and lies about
coming home. While you clutch that teddy.
My Soul’s slow puncture deflating sanity.
Christ Mam, I’m not ready.

You’d make a good Daddy, that ghost told me.
Lord this feels so alien yet so familiar.
Painting your nails pink. Brushing your
Salt and pepper paper thin
banshee hair strands,
My unshaven face in your arthritic hands.
I D O N’T W A N T T O B E L O S T

My Holy Mary, my Princess Cariboo,
Treasa Ní Faoláin is ainm dom,
My Magdeline Cassandra,
My Wandering Jew,
Maiden mother crone.
They won’t let me take you home
Understand why ghosts don’t notice you
Womb widow, windows of bone.
In nightmares I carry your shrinking body
till it slips from me,
absorbed part of a painted landscape.
Retreating like tears of mercury.
How did we both get here?
Which one of us is really free?

An Autumnal sun streaked tear
darts down your folded face,
shocks me with its starlings velocity.
I would die here in your place, a million times.
Perhaps I am, in some close shadow reality.
I don’t want to lose you I say, crying.
Holding your sweet face, I can’t lose you,
as every day I watched you fade further away.
I don’t want to lose you Ma.
You smile your little girl smile at me,
“I don’t want to be lost”.

continued overleaf...

PRISONERS OF HEAVEN

We talk about it with our eyes,
Us few, the ones who clawed
above the rim of memory.
Devoured whole by that giant’s mouth,
Who learned from pleasure, and the worm.
Were spat out vernix-waxed
from times ouroboros womb.

In nightmares I carry your shrinking body
understand why ghosts don’t notice you
Womb widow, windows of bone.
In nightmares I carry your shrinking body
till it slips from me,
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continued overleaf...
Prisoners of Heaven

...contd

The fly-blown unknown vacuum,
The cold star above us three beaming,
There is no knowledge but experience,
And no real sleep just dreaming.
Fatal fractalising split of the human prism,
Forge of my matryoshka prison as holy spirit.
And might I be forgiven by forgetting?

That Demiurge swore to me
if I would only promise to forget again
I could return to Heaven.
Or I could have mansions in this shiny Hell
and never knowing better,
Forced by my sins, to live to tell.
The paralysing certainty that
I am not an individual, my minds disposable
That I am divisible by three. And that
certainty divides and conquers me daily.

Violent flashbacks of sweet suffering
Rearing up before me from black infinity.
Foaming famished mouths of startled stallions
on trembling hindlegs of blistered bronze.
The truth as Trinity, and me
without even a man-shaped space
God might shine through.
I was no coward, yet I'm ashamed
It was not me dying,
I'm ashamed that I still dream of rescue.

So, I am homesick for Heaven.
I have nostalgia for infinity.
Doomed me as father, son and holy ghost.
Everything sacred, secret and true.
No one understands that part of me
is still imprisoned in Paradise with you.
Celebrating 12th Anniversary

THE PRICE OF LIES

Robbi Nester

I was thirteen, an innocent who'd never really lied to anyone, especially not my mother. But I had a friend—I call her that; it's probably a lie. She toyed with me, determined to be cruel. I smelled the danger, like ozone after a storm that may start up again. She knew that I was drawn to the swimming pool up on the Boulevard, a place my parents had forbidden: I understand now why it was off-limits. We had our own pool. This one was the haunt of young boys, blonde forelocks falling on their faces, who hated us for being who we were—not like them. But how could I resist? I wanted what was worst for me. We told our mothers we were going to our pool, and they'd have never known, except while we were gone, my mother got a phone call from a man whose voice sounded familiar, saying he had kidnapped me, described what I was wearing, the blue and red beach bag I was carrying, my purse. He said to close the shades and strip before the windows, and she did, because she was afraid of what he'd do if she refused. I don't know what else he said. She didn't tell me. But when I returned later that afternoon, there were police cars in the street before the house, and all the neighbors, my mother crying. My friend didn't follow me into the house. Somehow, she slipped away. I knew then that she had everything to do with that man on the phone. But could I really blame her? I was the one who lied.

Robbi Nester lives and writes in Southern California. She is a retired college educator and author of four books of poetry, the most recent Narrow Bridge (Main Street Rag, 2019). She has also edited three anthologies. One of these, The Plague Papers, is available to read for free online at http://www.poemeleon.me/peruse-the-mall. Her website is at http://robbinester.net
RESEARCH

Someone said that research is “a blind date with knowledge.” Take llamas. I’ve always liked their silly smiles, their loopy loping gait, but today I read that something they produce might be the best defense yet against COVID. That must be why the beasts are smiling, why they’re generally relaxed, chewing their cud, standing in a field as though trouble were the last thing on their minds. When the unexpected upends everything you think you know, that’s when you’re hitting paydirt. Remember Galileo, discovering that Earth and all the people on it were just a pinprick in the universe. You think you’re standing on solid ground? It’s actually in flux. I’m not sure what keeps us all from falling through into the whirl of particles, like the workings of a giant trash truck. Learning is a thrill ride, fraught and frightening, frequently disturbing. How many losers must one date before the right person walks into the bar? Unexpected and inevitable, a tribute to the universe, with its endless stockpile of surprise.

CONNECTING

At my son’s travel baseball games, we’d sit with other parents on the bleachers, nothing in common but our proximity. We women would try to strike up a connection, envying our husbands’ easy banter. Men always seemed to have a subject to fall back on, but for women, the difference in our lives was more difficult to hide—their Botox injections, new BMWs didn’t synch with my job as a college adjunct, teaching reluctant freshmen how to write an essay, grading papers while the others had their nails done, shopped for shoes. No joke I told was comprehensible, and vice versa. Of course, we steered clear of taboo topics like politics and religion, the Scylla and Charybdis of the Orange County suburban set. The gulf between us was too broad and fraught. Should I let it slip that we weren’t members of anybody’s church, celebrated Chanukah instead of Christmas, I knew the women’s heads would all swivel in my direction. Someone would put her soft hand on my arm and say, “We’ll pray for you,” before I turned away.
SAME OLD DARKNESS

I used to turn away from darkness
toward the distant light, taught myself
to love the pearl-grey storm clouds, heavy
on the horizon, the ones with brightness
breaking through. But year by year, darkness
blotted out the sun, threatened to send
the planet spinning sideways, a runaway
tire on the freeway, tangle of tumbleweed
targeting my windshield in high wind.
Eventually, space junk will hurtle to
the Earth, microbes or faulty genes catch up
to all of us, this world incinerate to a dark
cinder. But for now, I’ll take your hand
and won’t let go, even though you want
me to. We’ll stand together under a sea
of phosphorescent stars that died a million
years ago, and let that be enough.
Violence at the Egg

Flurried matted natal down feather listings
A Nest now blood congealed on the twig
The last flight of the leaving parents
Winged shadow remains as if in silhouette
Troubled ants cover it hold up broken shells as mort flags
These ants shadows lay as lace
On a before first flight fledgling dying
Feather lice dislodge to devour this sad bird
Amniotic visions grey shapeless flight falling permeates the atmosphere

Receding branches perches
Retract further into treeless gloamings
Leaden as stone forever grounded
To the soaring out of sight flock
No diurnal sun hovering wind blown
Seed cracking seed insect scratch

As the bird shudders shell crumbles
Egg teeth jewels in feathered decay
The least damaged eye
Stares into the abandoned nest in memory
The other dangles above a broken wing
Gazing out past unnatural hues
Blood and loss beak splits grotesque
To shape a sound and tries to tweet

continued overleaf...

Robert (Roibeard) Shanahan. I am a poet playwright and a painter. A storyteller. For me all there really is...Compassion and Expression. I describe myself as a 'Grand Lector of Apocalyptic Utterances'. I live in Tasmania. I am from the Irish diaspora. My family from Cork. My prose was published in Australia, Ireland in Outburst magazine, India in Setu poetry magazine. I was awarded high commendation. In the W.B.Yeats poetry prize with 'Violence at the Egg'. It was read out in the National Parliament of Australia. https://www.facebook.com/robert.shanahan.98
Violence at the Egg

In the sacred calcium eggs in clutch we future nestlings
Under the cooing comfort of the hens covering wing
We laid in shared incubation in dried saliva and grassy mud
The lift the gliding flapping hovering our future
Our eyes grow larger than our brains we are life cycle

Heavy brooded rain shells sprinkled moonlight specked
Thunder drones across the flight ribboned sky the nest warm
Heads hidden beneath the wing statue like to the storm
Lightning strikes the shells
Conjoined beaks crack the shells fledglings are born into nesty love
Rostrums snapping at air deluge deflected by parental wings
Fervid joy night fallen swaying in feathered tenderness
From the first pangs our future warbling throats were stuffed

Lids open vision came all sight was enthralling to the edge of the nest
All fledglings in non rival to each other the egg balance the sacred egg
Together shuddering our bodies merged we thought there flew a hawk

Beaks rise in natures order mother gives one to one to one
Wing in wing our feet create stairs in turn we see there is more than sky
An apology for expanding nature creating our separation wing growth

One arises opens their wings tumbles over the dawn and the down
Thermals swirling the breezes nervous whispers unsettles the tree
Leaves quiver eddy in whirlwind float as wooden mourners around the nest
Father flown his frame feathers now as moonbird beak star filled spilling
Mothers eyes looking back nest view fledglings at nest leaving
The thrusting first fledgling suspends on the edge jerking back strikes the sibling

Blood spurts into the surprised sibling eye lid rebounds horror
Skull chips a flailing storm of pecks falls to nest bottom
Feet of my flyers squash as falling branches
Eye to eye the looking through gaze
Broken body twitches moribund on twigs
Broken shell and excreta rise votive

Blowflies now accusers cast maggots as stones at the flying away assailant
Mother frozen in expected grief sparkled sky the departing blood birds
Brush in haste her side father gone lost in his uncaring plumage
The corpse so still as only left life can be
Lice ants nature raise the corpse
Damaged spirit flares — — —
WALKED WAITED

To Oranmore

Arena on the radio  
engine quietly hums  
asphalt in front

cars turn on an elevated height  
M1 to M50  
a small exhale -  
decompress

a scatter of motors move at holiday pace  
the big sky fills the windscreen  
hard shoulders and retail parks give way

to rubied hedges and orange clouds  
thought borders dissolve  
promise of contentment overtakes

something like hope spins outwards  
spreads like a young galaxy  
catching roads, trucks, disappearing clouds,  
the dipping sun melts into every evening atom  
a small exhale -  
lighter

like a flock of end-of-summer birds  
I'm escaping.

Roisin Browne lives in Rush, Co Dublin and has been published in A New Ulster, The Galway Review, Flare, The Stony Thursday Book, Live Encounters Poetry & Writing, Poetry NI and Echoes from the Castle Anthology. She was commended in the Gregory O’Donoghue Awards in 2010 and shortlisted in ‘The Seventh Annual Bangor Poetry Competition in 2019. She recently performed her poetry with Ardgillan Creative Writers at the Fingal Poetry Festival 2021.

Roisin Browne
Walked, Waited

And we all went back
looked up, saw blue
sipped heat, heard birds

Walked, Waited
hunkered down
paused breaths
humbled at awfulness,
howled, outside
ourselves

Walked, Waited
for the first light of winter,
opened the front door
to let the new in,
glimpsed solstice,
opened the back door
to let the old out,

looked up,
saw grey
saw white
saw no way

Walked, Waited
bedded down,
again
ready for the rise
buds pushing up
yellow splash
sun slant, crescent moon,
start,
stop

once more
we all went back
leaned into air
- to step forward

Walked, Waited

Walked.
New Triangles

Wear the new triangles,
behind the chain-link fences,
orchestra of crying children,
dread anthem of the summer sun.

Separate the little ones,
no need to sew the yellow to their shirts,
they wear their badge forever,
on their skin.

Build the wall and mend the wire,
with bricks of fear send it higher,
until all the good is on the pyre,
and the sky is gone.

Concentration camps in the desert,
for babes as well for men,
who carry the mortal sin,
of being born poor.

Here in the land of plenty,
the well of dignity it is empty.
good enough to fight the wars,
and pick the fruit,
but not to stay.
SATELLITES

You stand in condemnation a thousand miles away,
the disconnected screen far from suffering living flesh,
oblivious to the screaming which greets the day,
billion dollar satellites streaking across the heavens,
delivering the manipulated digestible grotesque,
another pitiful cargo dumped into the ocean,
beneath the Moon where man walked once,
glorious in all our proud progress,
oh would that an end of slaughter have descended,
for stepping out into the edge of our existence.

THE CURVATURE OF CORK

Curvature of Cork,
breaking free of static lines,
blending ancient bridges,
with sharp edged blocks,
scraggly trees,
and pavement gazing pedestrians.

Rushing head long,
into the event horizon,
when distant melts,
will raise the waters,
wash out the swamp,
for a final time.

Pleas will be hurled,
prayers incanted,
as the great and good,
are carried downstream,
like petrified timber,
ripped from the Gearagh.

Concrete and brick crumbles,
high tide lines settle,
to wet the tail of the salmon,
leaping o'er the silent Shandon,
returned at last into the sea.
**IN SUMMER LANES**

Curvature of Cork,
breaking free of static lines,
blending ancient bridges,
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and pavement gazing pedestrians.

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Concrete and brick crumbles,
high tide lines settle,
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returned at last into the sea.

**CHAMPAGNE SORBET**

On the day in summer when the old man warms his bones,
Stretching idle legs on Sean Walsh Park benches,
Mimicking the patient heron balanced in the water,
First one and then the other, pop, ease, and crack,
The light will be thrown off at an angle, just right,
Soft tones glow, wrap warm around the moment,
Drawing a long contented sigh from the soul,
Of the inkstained child of Inis Fáil,
Grown now with a full notebook,
Who remembers the days of champagne sorbet,
Close he the eye to drift with flight feathers spread,
Meander along the lane, lined with ten thousand doors,
The tap and rap, the welcome in, and rush of memory,
Full formed fat tears and Nile wide smiles,
Distilled into history as drink listener is made.
C L E A V E R S

Sinéad McClure

We carry your progeny. The round, green, stragglers
that cuff jackets, hem trouser ends, catch in haddles, and collie tails.
We break you away, take you to different parts.

You sidle up to nettle beds and slowly strangle their offspring.
Lock into grass, knot around trees, dramatically drape
across the dog rose in a horticultural faint.

You are the plant we threw at each other as children;
the stickleback, the robin-run-the-hedge, the cleaver who split in two
and so you keep dividing.

A damaging sunder. Two becomes four and four becomes
eight and eight becomes more and more and more.

The same act took my father, and my mother and finished friends too soon.
A type of propagation that covers the world at first
in a seemingly innocuous kiss, this gentle grip
now wraps itself around my throat.

Sinéad McClure is a writer, radio producer and illustrator. Her writing has been published on radio, in anthologies, magazine and online journals including; Crossways Literary Magazine, Meat for Tea, Live Encounters Poetry & Writing, Poethread, Drawn to the Light Press, The Cormorant Broadsheet, Dodging the Rain, A New Ulster, StepAway Magazine, Sonder Magazine, Tiny Spoon, The Poetry Bus (coming Autumn 2021), Vox Galvia, Ink Sweat & Tears, the Ekphrastic Review and RTEjr radio. In March 2021 Sinéad won the O Bhéal Five Words International Poetry Prize. In June 2021 she won The Wingless Dreamer Spring Poetry Prize, and in September 2021 was shortlisted for the MONO “Sanity” Poetry Prize.
Limb

How do you avoid a frog crossing in March?
Especially one who has forgotten how to hop
in his rush to procreate.

One who stops mid amphibian breath,
lost in the dark, his brown shape
fading against the tarmac.

When I came to the country you could hear the frogs.
A low hum drumming from the ditches
as they lay on their women three at a time.

Now the ditches run red. Iron spills from fields
where young farmers gouge out natural channels,
make drains that empty too soon, spawn frog road-kill.

Once, this land grew one limb at a time.
Nowadays it’s hammered together
like flat pack furniture; neat, lifeless, and grey.

Flags

This acre is an ocean.
Its grassy waves rise and fall.
Meadowsweet-sails tall from boom to jib
to join the masts of alder and goat willow.
This could be a silent regatta
save for the sound of a hinged box
opening, then closing
as reed buntings learn to fly.

Their parents hoisted flags
on battened bulrushes
quiver in the unsure breeze.
They thought she’d died
but maybe not.

After all, there she was
sitting across from him as always,
chatting away at the breakfast table,
reading the NYTimes (all the news . . .).

Meanwhile, birds flew in and
out as if the house
were a conduit or path.
They couldn’t stop them, and really,
they liked the razzle-dazzle wings
though she cautioned, in public,
he shouldn’t speak to her aloud,
since people were sure to ask,

who you talking to?
and besides, they themselves
didn’t know what the story was
since they were pretty sure she’d died,
though she wasn’t acting dead. And
in truth, they didn’t care.

We could live this way forever, they thought,
birds and all, fluttering
round their place, twittering airs
she began in her sleep to hum.
**GALACTIC GARDENS**

They shone all day anticipating
Longley’s The Evening Star –
a sky of snowdrops scattered
on a meadow behind exhibition premises,
crushed and trampled by afternoon’s
black boots and coats –
one got the whiff of rumours about
degenerated art and chatted away to the Schutzstaffel.

Sure, the gallerist was taken,
no questions asked –
his head a galaxy of red and grey spattered
on a canvas arranged among a year’s new shoots.

Sven Kretzschmar hails from Germany. His work has been published internationally, e.g., in *Writing Home. The ‘New Irish’ Poets* (Dedalus Press, 2019), *Turangalîla-Palestine* (Dairbhre, 2019), *Hold Open the Door* (UCD Press, 2020), *100 Words of Solitude* (Rare Swan Press, 2021), *Das Gedicht*, *Loch Raven Review* and *The Irish Times.*
Woodland outing

*after Marcus Hammerschmitt*

Camp detainees lay around like carelessly jotted togs.
Carinhall appeared as if everything had just been parcelled.
Stuff and SS stood in the way like worthless plunder.
Paintings had slumped from prescribed hooks on walls.

The Schorfheide area now exhibits the art of nature.
Paintings hang again, elsewhere, their voices visible.
Reminiscence and reminder, from prescribed hooks on walls.
Weber’s ‘Woodland Outing’ lost like a fat coward’s responsibility.

Chamber choir

He draws torture on cardboards he keeps hidden under a mould-corroded mattress.
Wardens mustn’t know he entertains the barrack the way he entertained the capital of the Reich before black coats seized his brushes and paint.
They all unhear over his sketches, the screams that are chamber music for black-clad security guards.

Sky blurs into clouds over barracks, mingles with ashes and smoke from high stacks, while inside the painter is beating time, waiting to join the chorus.
**Off-limits**

Who is to define what degeneracy means?
Who is counted among the disabled?
Who is afraid talking their mental states in public?
Who feels overburdened by meritocratic standards?
Who prefers laziness over an achiever’s mindset?
Where are the wheelchairing children hidden in schools for the mentally defective?
On whom do those taboos of ours fall?
Who is to decide any of the above? Who to answer it?
Are the later those limits are inflicted on?
And who can be a speaker of the unacceptable Truth?

**We should have**

We should have been going to laser tag or a pony farm. That attempt to bring art under control: worse than the attempt to bring disinhibited children under control between sculptures, Old Masters, museum watchmen. Sweet briberies fail leading the focus on a stolen art exhibition we seem to have gotten lost in. Seriously –

who has a birthday party on Museum Island when the guests are so young their grandparents did not live to see those artworks being looted? Next year, it’ll be laser tag or a shooting range.

We should have not let any of this happen.
I am awake and upright
in the middle of the sunshine clean bed linen
as dawn rises up and up
I wash, dress and think about writing.

I straighten out the sleeves of
my husband’s shirt
turn off the steam iron
add the shirt to the pile of laundry.

Dabbing the yellow duster with floor wax
I rub it into the thirsty grain
the scent of almonds anchors me
and I think about writing.

I wipe the small red handprints
from the fridge door.
replacing the magnets
one reads: You have two choices for dinner.
Take it or leave it.

That reminds me, supper;
meatloaf in the oven,
water for two pots –
one with broccoli
and one with new potatoes.
All the while my keyboard calling
while I think about writing.
The Hayshed

My tears have hopped off that galvanised roof like raindrops in a never-ending storm. That green hayshed where we forked and lifted and spread the shorn grass now spun gold, hope against the coming winter. He chose to step outside away from the sweat, infighting and simmering resentments. Outside alone in the early morning he chose to die hidden from view behind that shed.

Next Door

There it is! The shrieks signalling a new row I look in the direction of the stone wall separating us. I’m jealous of the Lilies in their grand circle seats – white heads bobbing in amusement.

He steps through the glass double doors into their garden she follows full on his heels. I leg it over to the clothesline removing pegs, ears flapping. His arms outstretched in supplication while she walks hand on hips and blocks his escape to the shed.

They realise and look over at the same time, nod and smile as I wave and turn like treacle. Back inside I enter the quiet. There’s muffled laughter and a door slams.
THE WISE CHILD

She’s dressed from head to toe in widow’s weeds. Black widow’s weeds. The wise child lives to fight another day, run another race, survive another storm. Shut up G’wan out of that, she is told. You’re mad. What’s wrong with ya? Have you nothing for doing? Ya useless article. She’s taken those bruises into her skin a patchwork of insults and abuse stitched together as scars. She stands her ground facing those adults down. She will outlive them all, their spittle and fists, their bruises and spoons of poison. The wise child is always climbing like nasturtiums, to high places away from the fight, to a place of shelter where she can see and keep me safe.

THE MORGUE

Alive in my mind its long corridors, its hidden entrances. Those great slabs, yellowing paper skin covered with thin sheets. And him at the centre all the beauty and glamour of a silver screen A-lister. Unrecognisable - free of pain beautiful in death. Hypnotised, by the steepled hands, I reach out to touch him before mother pulls me away. Cold - as the alabaster slab he lies on. Cold that enters deep into the bones, a chill that can never be undone. No turning away will cure this, nothing will extinguish what has been done here.
These poems from *All That Survived the Territory* are for Mary Cumming and Margaret Cullen.

**Night Thoughts**

The high beeches speak to me at night,
troubled by thoughts like so much
trailing ivy. The dark suits them,
they are so brooding and tall,
Orion swinging his club through
each one, Homeric in scale,
gracious in leaf fall, tossing and turning
about this place, spreading their speech
across the land, each casting to each
in one gathering movement of a wave
through the depths of the air where
we breathe in and crows fly out,
navigators all on the long terraces of memory.

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Balm

I rub cream into a dark patch of skin around her ankle. She cringes, cracks a girlish grin. I kiss her brow, tell her I love her, sit by the bed for a while, then say goodnight. She doesn’t seem to hear. Right now, I’m not sure what goes in or where. We’re in the ante-room of the familiar turned strange. In the basket of her walking frame, a neatly folded blanket, soft slippers, a thin white scarf wrapped around a photograph of her mother and father. She says she will see them soon. She is ready to start out on her next important journey.

The expectation on her face when she talks of going home. She can’t believe it won’t happen. She is not in a travelling state. The purring cats of childhood curl around her feet. She’s eaten well – she’s not lost her appetite. We think she will sleep tonight, and sleep long, inhaling its balm, dreaming when she does of a little girl sat at the end of her bed, neatly dressed and ready to leave for wherever she must go.

The Light of the World

Christmas after his first term at Oxford, Ollie took us into a side chapel at Keble to show us The Light of the World, Holman Hunt’s Jesus lit up from below, the lantern and halo picked out in gold. Beyond its historic centre the city’s substrata of pitted tarmac peels back to original track along Cowley Road, homeless men scrumming at the entrance to the old Regal Bingo that used to be a cinema. It's Pentecostal now. Turn left for the convent of St John, uniformed staff attending to the dying, the distant of face for whom time and space compress into one small body exhaling air. Windows strung with fairy lights, my aunt is on the third floor. I say, "Hello Margaret." "I know you," she says. "Since you were small." My mother’s sister. Memory’s pitted substrata stretches away from her, the angels she painted over and over walking in procession, arms upraised, to kneel at the foot of her bed. So I like to believe, or hope. I think of Holman Hunt, the light from below, the fairy lights hung in her window, Ollie in his first term. Before I’ve left the grounds, sloping to the road, my first exhalation of smoke, winding through the air, the frayed end of a long, thin rope hanging down from somewhere very cold and clear. The sky is an icy blue. The shade holds its frost. My fingers twitch. In my mind, I finger the switch that illuminates The Light of the World. My aunt believes, I’m sure she does. I raise my head to the sky and observe the phase of the moon as it rises, as if that itself was an act of prayer.
Unstoppable

Her retreat was unstoppable, Napoleonic, as predicted in the medical literature we’d been given. In her bed at The Montrose she sits quietly, my sister’s lap blanket draped around her shoulders. Sometimes we’re there to take her home, and she gets angry when we don’t. Sometimes she smiles, a sun-flash of songbirds trained all their fast-beating lives to fly the spiral stairways, settling on a high beam in one perfect movement of a wave. Then she’s gone again, lost in a world of her mind’s unmaking, taking the lead in an end of term play in which she is the only actor, filling the smallest place she can be. The birds sing at dusk. They sing:  
*It is so lonely here and life can be so cruel.*  
I want her to turn into her bird nature, fly out of her body as if it was a nest, and take wing. This song ends at nightfall and the darkening day is what is here and what lies beyond.

Body Parts

Picasso talked about the magic power of images made between you and the world inflicting itself upon you, upon which you open your demands, taking apart the body and scattering its separates among the hard and fastening surfaces. The day after my mother’s death I walked the galleries of Musée Picasso, eyes trailing far from my head, feet and hands of infinitesimal size. The distances I could recognise. I felt the chill of loss spread through me like groundwater, taking on volume and mass, a lifetime’s receipt for lost property folded round a small flat key stuffed into the lining of a well-worn shoe as I passed through gallery after gallery, head the size of a tiny dot, knowing not what small unravelling force stopped her breath, her beating heart. Fumbling with lock after lock in the chamber of images between life and death I followed my mother as far as I could on her journey. Then I stopped, and she left to continue alone. Did she keep praying for me, bunching her hands like the women of Picasso? One by one those lights went out. When she died there was no one there to pray for her. Distorted by grief I pray for her now. On the street of a foreign country I fall to my hands and knees.
LOSS

However much you anticipate loss its appearance strips you of your grain.

Words of loss fail to carry the weight of their presence, the vastness of the absence they hold.

You think, how to live in such a small room with such loss.
I M A G I N I N G  J A N E

for poet Jane Kenyon (1947-1995)

I'm driving through
a tree-lined New England town
where children wait for their bus
on the last school morning,
as sky threatens with remnants
of Michigan tornados.

When the engine of my aged Camry
turns no more,
you tell me where to look—
in my faded denim jacket,
the hidden pocket where spare change is held.

Look in there, you whisper,
for trinkets of joy.

Tim Dwyer’s poetry appears regularly in Irish and UK journals and previously in Live Encounters. His chapbook is Smithy Of Our Longings. His work is most recently in the anthology Local Wonders (Dedalus Press). He left the U.S. in 2019 and now happily makes his home in Bangor, NI.
Reading CD Wright, 1980

A boy from another country
crawls out of the moonlight of the attic.
— Roadblock, CD Wright

I'm back on the mud brown sofa,
one of the legs ready to give way,
cases of Schmidt's for end tables.
Ohio living room ever twilit
like the evening news
on my black and white TV.

The brittle fern by the back window
is left unwatered day after day.
With each toke, I am more adrift
with the next line of the next poem
I wish was mine.

Closing your book,
the room's smoky haze
rises like incense—

again and again I read
a telegram of betrayal,
an endless novena
while my writing disappears.

Hope

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Walking back from Groomsport,
we reach the long wall,
that stretch of woodland
with an unknown boundary
where this town ends and ours begins
and the centuries blend.

We believe these flowers
growing under the hedgerow
are wild garlic— tiny, white,
tilted like reading lamps.

You assure me they will last through winter.
I savour your words; they turn in my mind—
lasting through the winter.
AUNTIE’S Ways

Early mornings, when the sun looked like sunrise
and sunset both, she’d go out walking.

A shawl the muted colors of the waking earth
around her shoulders, shallow basket over her elbow,
she’d walk the paths barefoot, picking flowers
and herbs for her teas and tisanes. And for beauty.

Respect for her—many of us drank her teas
for our lady-times. She was kinder than any doctor
and she understood. Daytime found her in ordinary
clothes, off to a soul-crushing job as so many of us had,

after making her carpenter husband eggs with yolks
the bright orange of marigolds and kissing him a sweet goodbye.

Their small house—on the strand and dotted with color,
everything a merry-go-round of brightness, even when cloudy.

Both of them could play any instrument, and they did—lute, lyre,
bouzouki, recorder. But if you needed her, you were welcome.

She’d pause her quiet song and was there for you,
always without hesitation no matter the time.

More is rumored than known about Auntie
but I will go to the ends of time to defend her;

the foraging lovely woman with the smile and face
of a calm river no one has yet discovered.
A Right Proper Drink

This life ain’t no cakewalk but let me tell you—
I can make a right proper drink to cure
the down-and-outs for anyone.

From their barstools, strangers lean into
each other as if to weave their breaths—
the air around them thick with smoke and music.

Wordlessly he’ll bottoms up, go home to a stolid wife,
cold meatloaf and a family prayer mumbled
into faithless whispers.

She’ll weep over dropping her keys
down a street drain, return alone to rooms
smelling of creosote and nicotine.

All night, footsteps recede along the walkway
fronting motel doors, leaves and trash
swirl in a trick of wind—

down the hall, the voices of exhausted lovers
whittle down to sighs as candlelight frays
the edges of windows hidden by gauze curtains.

To make a right proper drink I keep
a cheerful word or two for those who stay,
speak in spare phrases, sit in the dark.

The sky is a play of light and shadow,
the musician holds the mic so gently,
it’s as if he’s cupping flame. Last call.

In the Bluing Hour

dawn drifts inland like smoke, sea oats
make paths through the dunes, a sandcastle
casually crumbles in the oncoming tides
and dreamers start to stretch, remember
where they are and who they’re with.

You lie awake, eyes impersonating sleep
while a briny smell comes through the windows
like sage in an old haunted house. The pallor
of last night’s moon begins to disappear
while intentions of closing time—whispered
in your ear—make themselves remembered.
The pleasing taste of wine on your lips,
a stone pressed into your hand before sleep—
may this heart bring you pleasant dreams—
much laughter filling the empty spaces between you.

As the new sun rises it will be your setting.
You will never be that older couple sitting on the pier,
your talk close and small, sifting into lies and memories.
Wind off the sea makes a fragile pact with which you agree.
In the Bluing Hour, you and the shoreline are lost to the sea.
SUMMER AT BRIGHTON

He fishes all day into the failing light
as he does every day, in every weather.
Misses the thinly-clad vacationers
as they hit the shore early, pray
for the sun to be kind to their lily-white hides,
settle in groups to watch each other's things
before taking turns playing dolphin
amid the waves.

He sleeps on the bus home, arms laced with sweat
and brine, ice chest full with the day’s catch
invading his dreams to wake him at his stop.
Two seats up, she’s pink and heated, also asleep,
her breath a light fog against the window.
He wants to wake her, tell her about aloe
and oatmeal, but he’s as shy as the summer folk
are outgoing and he can’t even whisper.

He walks along the promenade,
listens to the soft hush of low tide
as it mingles with arcade games and taxis,
and live music from the beachside bars.
He thinks about the girl with the sunburn
asleep on a bus filled with secondhand air,
wonders if he'll ever be man enough
to understand the kinship of heat and flesh.

Sailing, Bali. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.
Come into the garden

A weedy patch behind the house selected,
I turn and rake the clay for my Covid hospital.
Pandemic restrictions force me
to be an institutionalized gardener.
    A hedge and paling fence enclose the ground.
    Gravel lined corridors separate the rooms.
Medicinal herbs are first to root in the soil.
The other beds fill steadily with vegetables.
    A row of runner beans shelters the spuds.
Then I recruit the nurses and carers – a quick operation.
    Skirted Fuchsias and big bosomed Begonias to induce comfort.
    Brightly coloured Busy Lizzies dish out resilience and hope.
    The contagious smiles of Marigolds spread happiness.
There is lots of work: watering, feeding, weeding, treating pests and diseases.
But the rewards are delightful and very tasty.
I attend my Corona garden every day,
where I am well looked after in every way.

Wiltrud Dull

Born in Germany in 1954, Wiltrud Dull lives in the West of Ireland, near Portumna for many years now. In 1998 she experienced a lively Baffle poetry night in a local pub and was hooked on writing poetry. Since many years she is a member of the "Portumna Pen-Pushers" a wonderful writers group. The Arts in general, painting, crafts, reading, gardening and cooking are important to her, and the language we use to express ourselves about everything. Her poems are published in: Baffle Poetry Collections. Maple Leaves Anthology 2005. The Blue Max Review 2015. Boyne Berries 2015, 2018. SiarSceil festival, Anthology-Centenary in Reflection 1916. in 2016, also 2018, 2019. Shorelines Arts Festival 2018 "Pens to Lens" project. Live Encounters Poetry and Writing 2020. Shorelines Arts Festival 2021 “Bobbins and Pens” project and “only for this” project. Her villanelle "Wuerzburg 16th March 2015" was set to soprano and piano by composer Derek Ball.