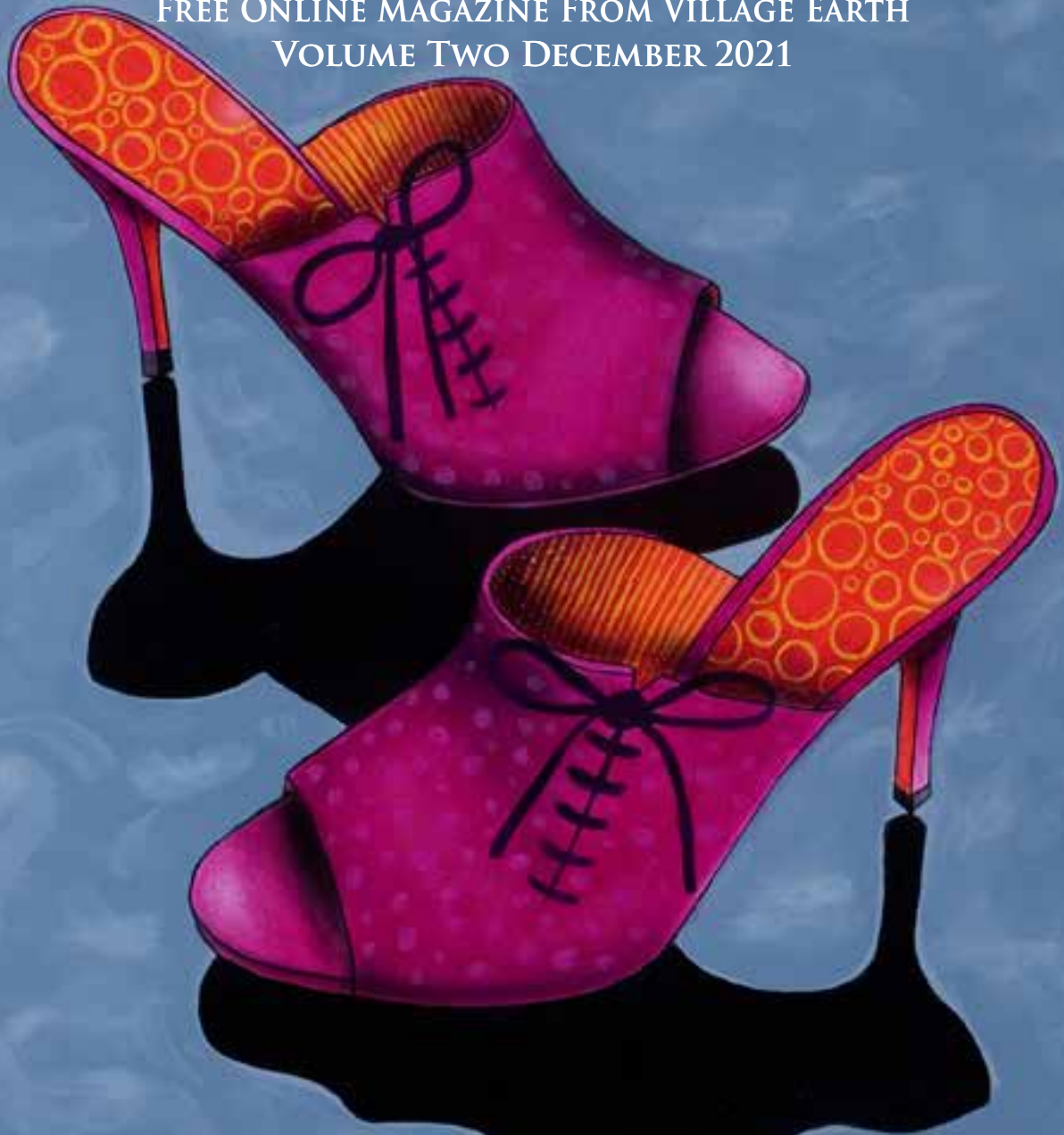


2010 - 2021



POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
VOLUME TWO DECEMBER 2021



RANDHIR KHARE
The Spirit of Poetry

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



Orchid, Luang Prabang, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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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:

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

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
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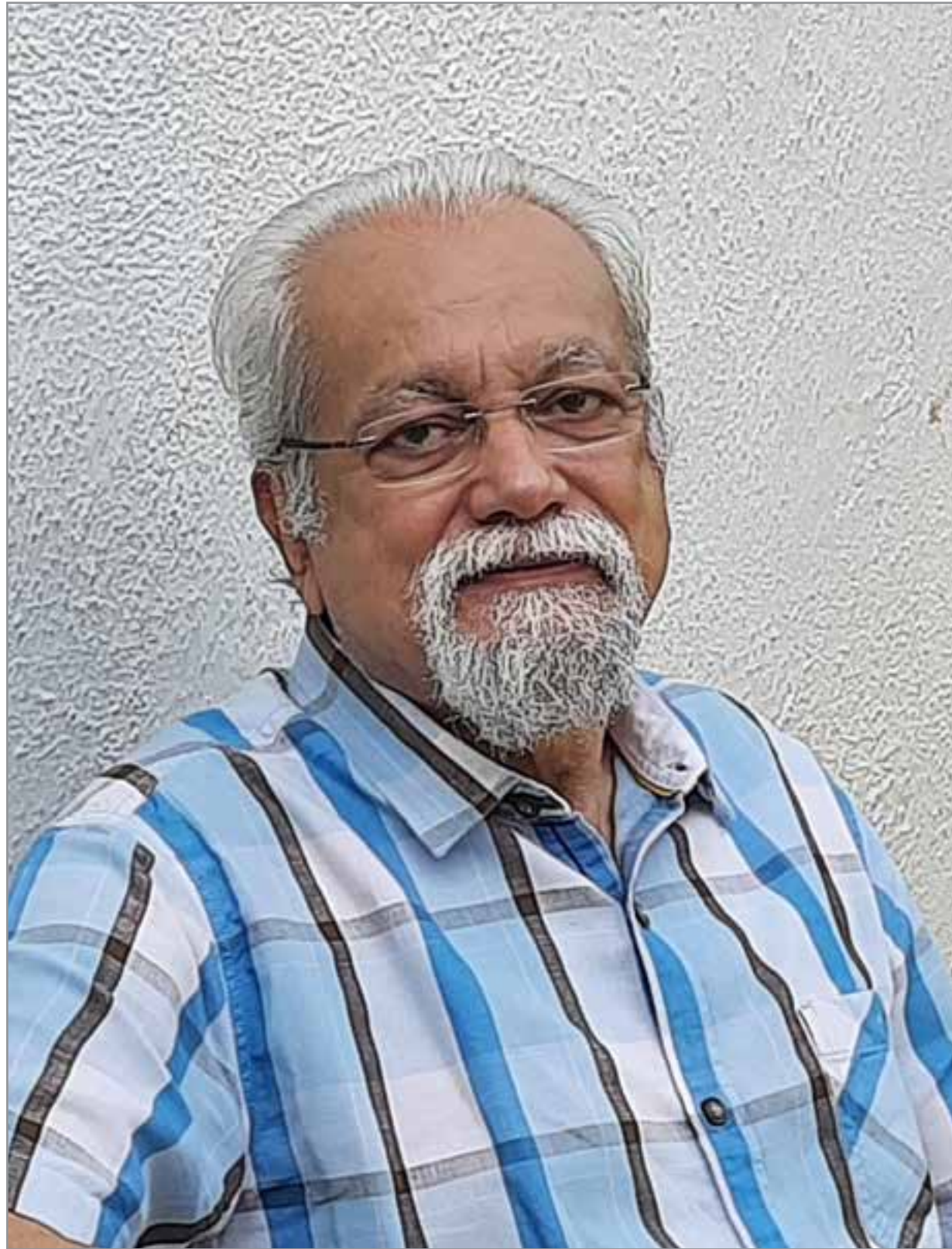
VOLUME TWO
DECEMBER 2021

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Randhir Khare is a distinguished writer, artist, teacher and theatre personality. He is the recipient of numerous national and international awards for his unique contribution to culture and education. His 37 volumes of poetry, fiction, essays, translation from tribal dialects and other writings as well as his seven solo exhibitions all explore themes of identity, belonging and the struggle to stay human in a violent and fragmented world. His memoir THE FLOOD & AFTER: A Memoir of Leaving will be appearing soon. He has spearheaded an initiative to enrich formal education through the experience of the arts. Randhir is a founding contributor to Live Encounters Magazine. <https://randhirkhare.in/>



Randhir is a founding contributor of Live Encounters Magazine.

RANDHIR KHARE THE SPIRIT OF POETRY

In the mid-90s a young, suave, and in a hurry to 'get there' fellow turned up in the magazine office where I worked. *I'll just take a few moments of your time.*

What's the hurry?

Can you allow me to intrude? He persisted.

I'm trying to finish editing copy that has to go to press.

Clearly, he wasn't the sort who would take 'no' for an answer. *Please*, he went on, *just a few moments. I only want to briefly introduce them to you then leave them to commune with you.*

Them?

Yes, them. My chintus, chutkoos, little fellas, midgets.

I was curious, *are they waiting outside?* I asked and he shook his head. Then I looked down at his feet, expecting to see shy goblins clinging to his trousers.

He looked down self-consciously, looking at something? *What is it?*

Your little fellas.

He broke into a nervous giggle, *they aren't down there but here, trapped in this wee little notebook. He fished it out and chucked it on my desk. They're in there.*

I looked at the notebook lying helplessly on my desk. *Who are they?*

Randhir Khare. Photograph by Rani Wilfred.

He grinned secretively. *My pomes, poetries, little fellas, I knock them off by the dozen. This is one clutch. There are others, tons of them. Tell me, what do you think of them? Worth entering the haloed pages of your magazine? Yes? No? Can you tell me please? They won't take long to read. You can do it in one shot.*

I couldn't believe that it was happening. I had been ambushed by one of the many hawkers of quicklets who imagine that a poem is a clever string of words, a thingy that is a happy/sad/thoughtful/wise/clever little fella who minds his own business.

I pushed the chutkoo notebook with my forefinger towards him. *Don't orphan these midgets*, I said, *they deserve continued care and need to be helped to grow.*

He stood there for a while, then said, *but you haven't even read them.*

Poems that are just knocked off by the dozen need to be put in an incubator and helped to be kept alive and nurtured to grow. I continued working.

Think I caught you on a grey day. He picked up his chutkoo notebook and walked out.

That encounter left a bitter taste in my mouth and I began feeling guilty of being a literary snob. After all, who knows, I may have squashed a potentially brilliant poet in the making. It took me a while to realise that what had actually upset me was the fellow's casual attitude and his denigration of poetry. He considered his poems to be midgets which he knocked off by the dozen. So why did he write them? This question stuck between my teeth till I finally pried it out with a toothpick and balancing it on the tip of my tongue, flicked it out into the abyss where all unanswered questions go.

Why does anyone write poetry?

Because it is supposedly far easier to write than other more demanding literary forms?
 Because it is a comfortable bedfellow of plagiarism?
 Because it is an attractive way to say something when you don't know what to say?
 Because it is an engaging way of relieving your emotional bowels in private and in public?
 Because it is a dandy way of sounding profound by contradicting yourself?
 Because to say you are a poet sets you apart?

There are innumerable reasons, each more different than the other, why poetry happens to us, why poetry makes its presence felt in a mind-moment crowded with thoughts, why poetry arrives twirling its lines like swallows in the blue, why poetry embraces us like a lover we thought was lost in the past, kissing us with full lips and a deep tongue and fingers running through our hair, why poetry floats like falling leaves through the evening air and lands in our open palms...emptiness filled with the caress of change, why poetry arrives on a rainy Sunday afternoon when we are alone, why poetry blooms from our moments of madness, passion, stillness, hopelessness, rage... Whatever the reason may be - the arrival is magical and it remains and grows on us in its own special way.

It's not what a poem says but what a poem is.

It is the poem that makes a poet.

A poet does not make a poem.

And through the poem a world reveals itself.

A poem is bigger than a poet, it distils itself through a poet and becomes itself on a page.

A poem lives its own life after it is born.

A poem is a country with its own geography, history, culture, language, religion.

I never saw the chutku maker again but I thank him for making me reflect.

DREAM JOURNEY

a poem sequence that arrived unexpectedly into my life.

I

Somewhere along the edge of dreams,
A conch shell blows, a curlew cries,
Worm-wet mud beneath my feet,
Sand grains floating in my eyes.

Crossing bridges of evening light,
I move through whispers of pain,
As a faithful flock lies crucified,
Staring at shrapnel of rain.

I want to stop and pray with them,
I want to gaze at the sky,
A silent wind comes over the hill,
I see their bodies fly.

The flock begins to levitate
Up to a red rimmed cloud,
A quiet prayer of those lonely lives,
Descends on me like a shroud.

It touches my skin and tatters,
Dissolving in puddles of rain,
The land before me starts climbing,
My muscles burn as they strain.

Taut tendons wire my body,
Strummed by a quest to be free,
Dragging this wretched prisoner
To the place of the river and sea.

II

Dream, dream, I want to dream,
Like the cat that swallowed the rancid cream
And inside his belly the mice began
To dance in abandon like dervishes can.

With shovel, with spade, a head of grog,
I scoop out mud from a death-sodden bog,
I dig for the corpses of my past,
Glowing cadavers, I hope they will last.

I swing them, sing them, stand them upright,
They crumble, melt, in the mouth of the night,
Jaws of darkness creak and yawn,
Eyes of my lovers ablaze like the dawn.

'Remember, remember, the day when we met,
Remember the longing sky that was wet,
Remember our bodies opening to you,
The trembling silence you plundered through.

"Remember the taste of our tongues, our sweat,
Remember the burnished moments that set,
Remember the cries of those peacock hours,
Remember how silence lampreyed our powers.'

I shovel mud over their open eyes,
They slide and they blink like fireflies,
I scramble towards the wrought iron gate,
Leeches of memory cling to my hate.

III

Force of my dreams, force of my light,
 Force of my memory, force of my sight,
 Burn out nightmares of life that has been,
 Sandpaper the horror and bring out the sheen.

God of my childhood and rainbow years,
 Gift me a dream to muffle these fears,
 The cauldron is bubbling a witch's brew,
 Give me the courage to dive and swim through.

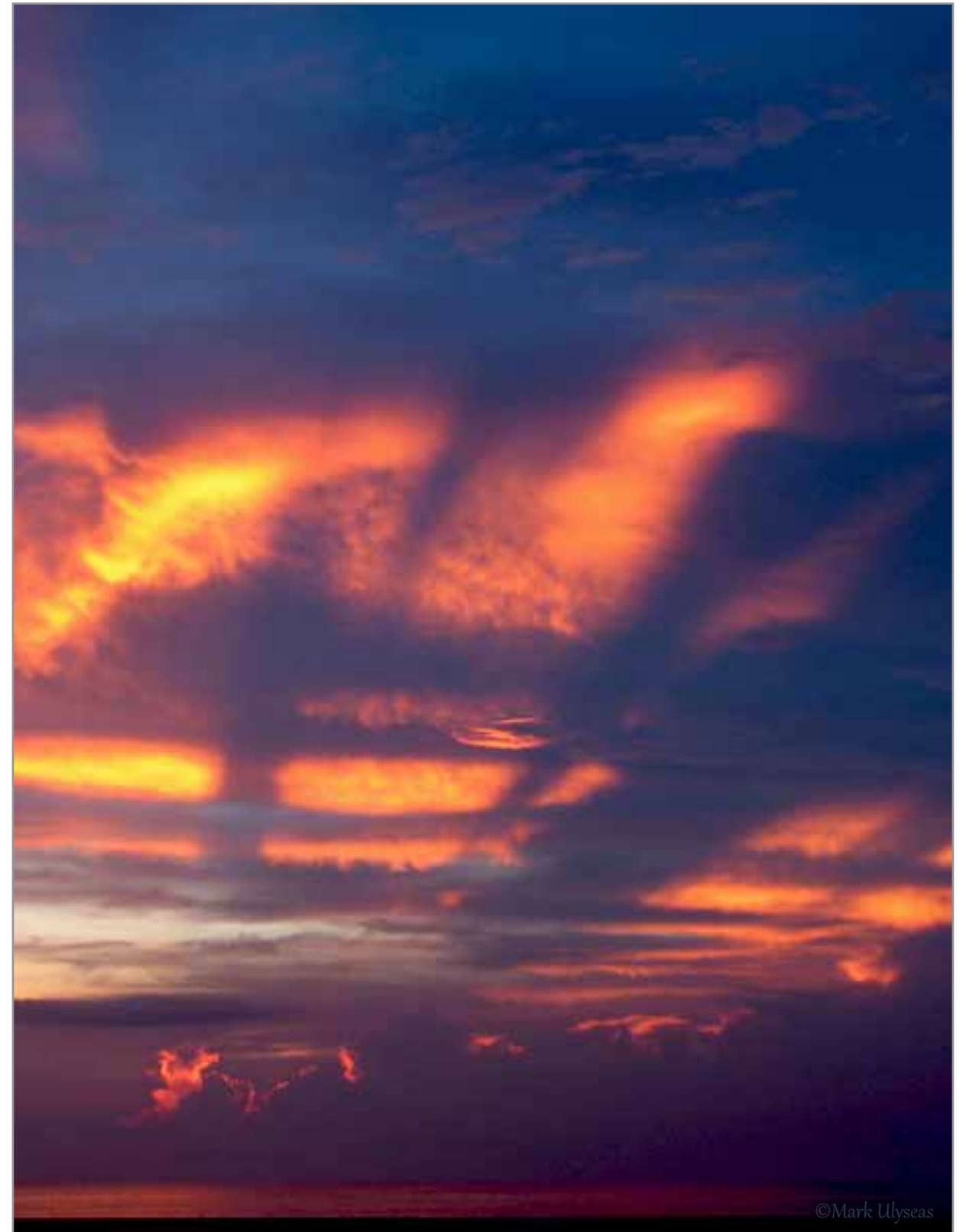
Don't offer me shards of a crystal past,
 Or a sail of silk and an ebony mast,
 And send me afloat on a bludgeoned sea,
 With a cargo of treasures that won't set me free.

I'm human, I'm human, I stumble along,
 Fighting nightmares with a nursery song,
 Jingles and rhymes in ream after ream,
 Please let me dream, please let me dream.

I am not Job who sat on coals
 And filled his heart with dagger holes,
 I'm not a Noah in a Flood
 Who prayed for rock and tree and mud.

But I'm a solo locust, Lord,
 Who keeps away from a humming horde,
 Spinning along in a rusty life,
 Breeding children and keeping a wife.

Here I am upon this crest,
 I cannot dream, I cannot rest,
 Forked tongues of lightning slice the sky,
 I ask you Lord, I ask you why?



Evening sky, Bali. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

David Rigsbee is an American poet, critic and translator who has an immense body of published work behind him. *Not Alone in my Dancing – Essays and Reviews* (2016), *This Much I Can Tell You* (2017), *School of the Americas* (2012) and *The Pilot House* (2011), all published by Black Lawrence Press, are but a sample. Forthcoming in the fall is his complete translation of Dante's *Paradiso* from Salmon Poetry, and *MAGA Sonnets by Donald Trump* from Main Street Rag, a series of 85 quotations from Trump's speeches and interviews bundled up in sonnet form (political satire and grimly humorous).

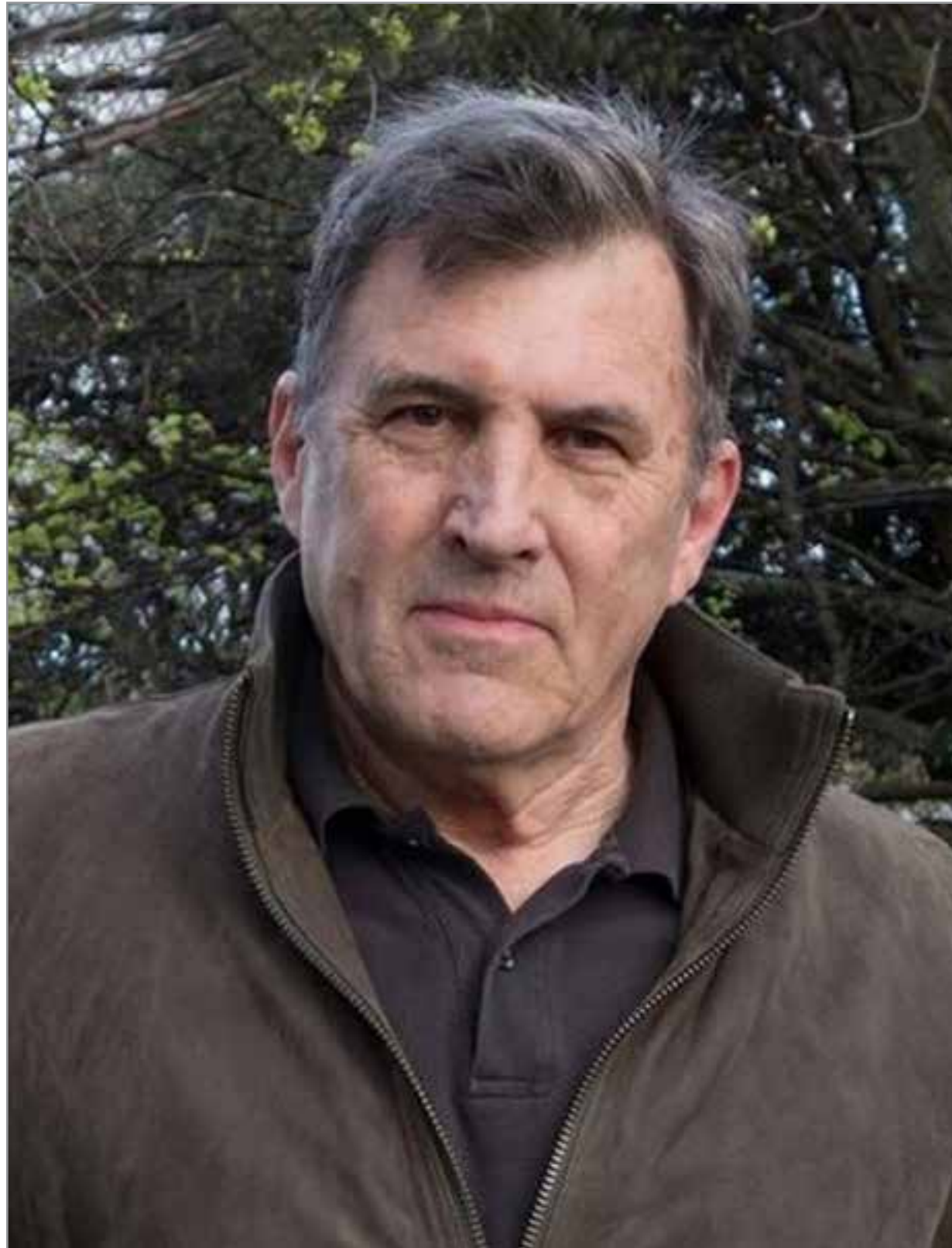
Extract from my work in progress memoir titled
Three Teachers: Kizer, Brodsky, and Rorty.

JOSEPH BRODSKY IN CLASS

We often spoke on the phone in the early '70s, and Joseph would usually lead with a question. One night he called in an urgent one. He was about to teach a class on Auden. "What should I say?" he asked. I was a little taken aback, pointing out to him that he had actually lived for a month with the poet and knew his work well, unlike myself. Auden for Joseph was the gold standard. What could I possibly add that he didn't already know? The question he asked was less about theme or style than about approach: what was the best approach to his hero? I was relieved that his question was rather an invitation to explore hinges and angles. His self-consciousness was showing, but there was also something endearing in that. He both didn't want to leave out important issues relating to Auden, and he didn't want to come off badly in having previewed the depth of his admiration without delivering the reasons for it. It was, after all, "children" to whom he was talking, as he reminded me of Auden's characterization of himself as a schoolmaster in the 1930s who "told lies to little boys."

A year later, Joseph called me up and invited me to join him for his class at Smith, where he was posted as a visiting professor. He was going to be talking about Cavafy. As his call about Auden suggests, in his early days as a professor, he often felt insecure in class. The college student experience not being part of his biography, he knew neither exactly how to comport himself with the young women, nor how to launch into an acceptable version of a lecture. He could spiral off references that felt like a murmuration of starlings, but he wasn't sure the class was following him. So, I gave my Hamilton students an out-of-class assignment and drove up to Smith.

The students sat around an oval seminar table. Half of them looked skeptical. The other half rewarded him with bemused attention. Neither half asked questions, and so it wasn't a lively class. On the contrary, their reticence at attempting to find a comfortable intersection with their famous young professor only made him double-down on the stream of his examples, which, from time to time, he used to insinuate that his charges were torpid for not knowing. That most of them no doubt had other academic responsibilities didn't cut it with him. You were in or you were nothing. Joseph didn't assume the head of the table but sat between students, his chair pushed back, as there were no notes that commonly litter the place settings of professors. There was just the poem, which had been Xeroxed and handed around, and a handy ashtray. I sat opposite him.



David Rigsbee

JOSEPH BRODSKY IN CLASS ...contd

The poem under discussion was “Thermopylae,” Cavafy’s poem based on a famous battle described by Herodotus. The poem is itself a class in poetic voice, with what can be achieved by understatement. It is also a poem about the origins of treachery, a theme that resonated with Joseph, as it does, alas, with most poets.

He began by talking about Herodotus, asking for a show of hands to see how many had read him. Everyone looked at everyone else, but there were no takers. I raised my hand halfway, and Joseph said, “So David, who is Ephialtis?” I mumbled that he was, I thought, a Greek soldier who was involved in the war against the Persians. He corrected me: “Spartan. And he betrayed the Spartan forces at Thermopylae. It was an ordinary betrayal, to say the least,” he added, “brought on by the ordinary lust for monetary reward. But it had far-reaching consequences. Moreover, Ephialtes comes to be a Greek symbol of something ordinary, yes? The predecessor of Benedict Arnold, the American traitor you probably read about in American history class when you were much younger. Cavafy is assuming that we know about the Battle of Thermopylae as well as about Herodotus who recounts the battle. The very name—‘Thermopylae’—should bang a gong, rather like Bunker Hill or Dunkirk.”

Joseph was not to be deterred by my unclear response, but I felt for the first time that I’d let him down. In the class, I wasn’t a friend or colleague, just another attendee who garbled events and looked askance, as if for an exit through a side door. “The ordinary nature of Ephialtes’ betrayal is made clear in the first line because Cavafy uses the word hinge-word ‘honor.’ Why is it a hinge? Because it transports us straightaway, as he put it, to a new plane of regard.

Those who fought and lost their lives were just as much liable to criticism as the obvious traitor. The fact of the matter is that the poem doesn’t criticize Ephialtis for his treachery. Instead, we find ourselves standing on the other side of the event in question. Honor goes to those who have debits to their character. It’s a poem about character, how elusive it is and how we recruit self-serving excuses to maintain our dignity, all the while cutting corners, offering baksheesh, and taking payoffs.

If everybody does these things, nobody, so to speak, does them. Look at how the poet presents this:

Honor to those who in the life they lead
define and guard a Thermopylae.
Never betraying what is right,
consistent and just in all they do
but showing pity also, and compassion;
generous when they’re rich, and when they’re poor,
still generous in small ways,
still helping as much as they can;
always speaking the truth,
yet without hating those who lie.

“On the one hand—on the other hand: that’s the structure. I wouldn’t hesitate to say that these people Cavafy describes are mediocrities. I invented a term for them: ‘mediogres.’ Notice how easily the flatness of the poet’s voice rises. It’s as if the reader were being addressed by an aristocrat. For that sort of person, words like ‘pity’ and ‘compassion’ would be small change. The aristocrat addresses the bourgeoisie about other proto-bourgeois peoples who happen to be in a story from history. And after all, you must admit that humanity, if it does nothing else, aspires to a bourgeois existence. That explains polytheism: every god has a specialty and goes about individual and specific tasks. We may find a few with larger ambitions, not to say obsessions, like Zeus and Ares. But the exception doesn’t disprove the rule. Not a bad system when you think about it, but not much room for genius or heroics—poets and warriors—despite what you may have heard in the schoolyard. I’m sure you’re thinking right now about exceptions, and happily there are many. But mediocre horizons are the norm.

Did you happen to notice how the poet gets out his ledger sheet? A little for this, a little for that, *comme ci, comme ça*. So, Cavafy is using his aristocratic voice here to distinguish a point of view—call it arch or godlike—separating the poet from the people, whose time dwindles on earth, while they sprinkle generosity and forbearance here and there—even in war, when chaos and death threaten them every minute. Can we say that such a lofty point of view exonerates the poet? Almost certainly not, but Cavafy would never engage in the vulgarity it would take to admit it.

JOSEPH BRODSKY IN CLASS ...contd

Ephialtes' cameo appears in the last stanza. Let's have a look:

And even more honor is due to them
when they foresee (as many do foresee)
that Ephialtis will turn up in the end,
that the Medes will break through after all.

"Cavafy's speaker proclaims 'even more honor' accrues to those who foresee Ephialtis' betrayal and plan that into their agendas. A little like planned obsolescence, yes? The mediogres factor in their own suicides, you see. Death is commodified, to use that ugly word. Morality is a thing that can be bought and sold in the marketplace."

He read the poem one more time. "This is a translation, of course—a pretty good one though, don't you think? I have to confess that don't know modern Greek, but Cavafy controls the voice of the speaker to such a degree that its import transcends even translation, giving the poem a patina of age, of having been handed around. Such is its authority. And notice there are no fancy metaphors, no fancy language at all. Cavafy looked down his nose on metaphors. He thought they were tricks or epaulets worn on the street. He wanted to confine his expressions to instances of voice, the voice of the poet and the speaker of the poem (they are not always the same). At the same time, he is able to achieve what a poet of high metaphor, say his opposite number, John Donne, could do, namely make analogies. He just doesn't point them out. But the world makes sense, don't you see, one thing here applies equally over there, in spite of time and language. It's the people who keep faith with each other by not, to so to speak, making sense, rather by being irrational creatures out for themselves—with the usual exceptions, etc., etc.

What makes Cavafy a great poet is that he is able to expand—as you would say, go big—by compressing his speech, going small. I'll leave that paradox for discussion another day. Suffice to say that suggestion and understatement can accomplish the same types of aims that the Shakespeares and Goethes of all languages can do. He just does it using the minimum. I guess you could say he had good taste in that regard. He doesn't intrude. He just states the facts, then closes the book. As I would imagine you would like to do."

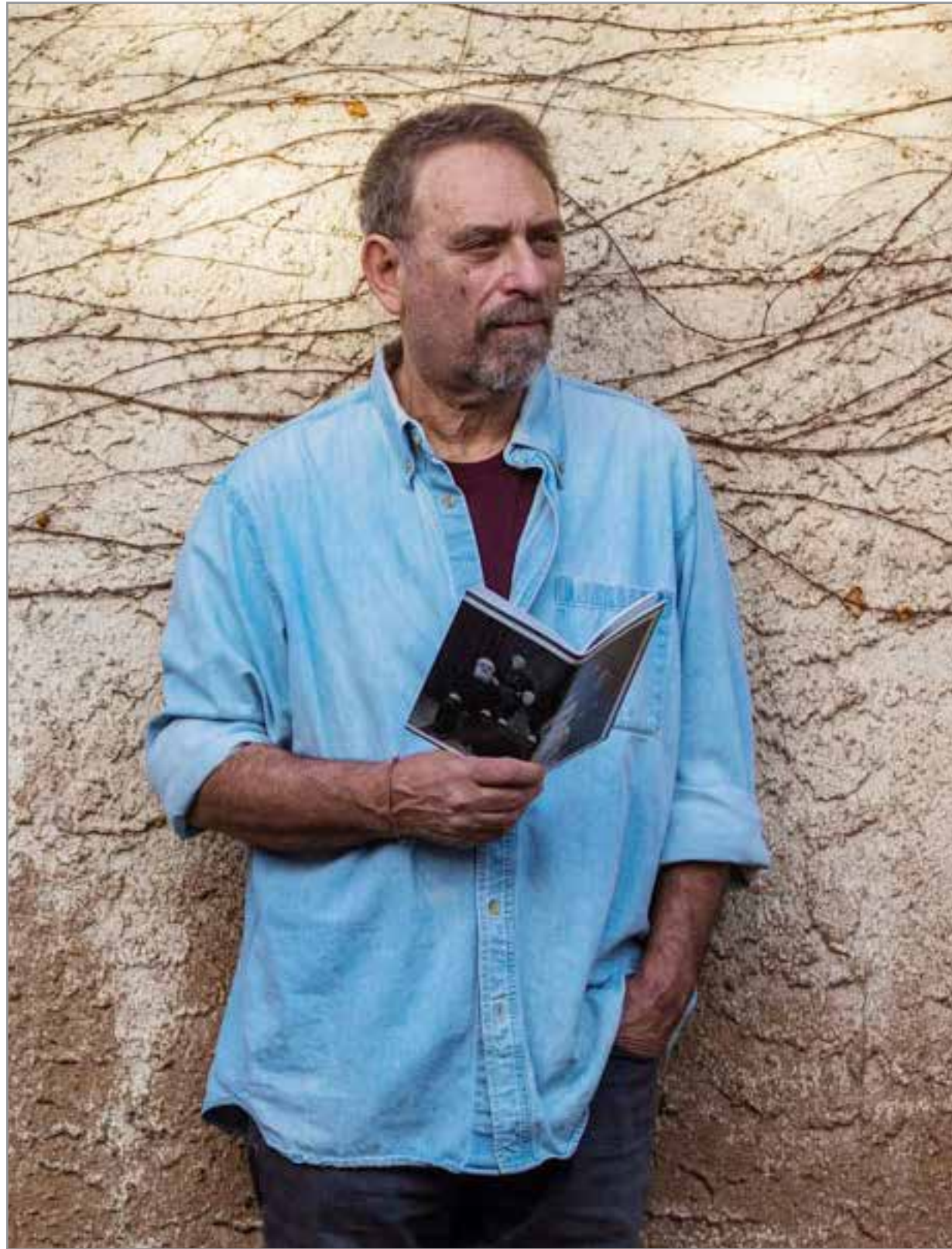


Joseph Brodsky
Photo credit: Julia Schmalz, General Collection,
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library,
Yale University.

I assumed the quiet that had descended on the class meant that the young women had not attended to hear themselves talk. It was not a dialogue. There had been no discussion that I remember, just Joseph soaring on the thermals of his associations which, to him, had the same status as law, although they had sounded like inspired asides at the same time, a bard's *obiter dicta* about another bard. At this point, someone raised a question about the next reading assignment. The rest scrambled to gather their things and left the master class in a state of minor annoyance and no doubt cognitive disarray. I noticed he had smoked four cigarettes, whose butts formed a hieroglyphic in the metal ashtray.

In spite of my inability to step up when he called on me, he seemed rather eager to hear what I thought about his way of getting at the poem. I told him I wished that I could take the class the rest of the year. He said, no matter. Poets teach each other by osmosis, plus they're competitive, each swimming, like the angels in Dante, inside the bubble of their imaginative constraints and at the same time swimming in a school toward some evolutionary end. Fair enough, I thought. "There's at least one decent Chinese restaurant near here. Shall we?" As soon as we were served, he looked up from his bowl of shark's lip soup and remarked that he had an urge to earn a pilot's license. I asked him why he didn't take up that very project here in the States. He replied that he feared his English could lead to a fatality. He would have to talk to the air traffic controller. "Imagine dying because of grammar" was how he put it.

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



KINDERGARTEN MEMORIES

I can't remember anyone's name
or whose head bashed and went boom
against the corner of a table.
I do remember you should never run,
especially when the whistle blows for cleanup--
and go right to your place
and practice good manners--try not to stare.
It's bad enough, my teacher said.
But there was blood all over
and nothing else to do.
Some cried, and couldn't console themselves
which was the skill to learn in K-103.
When all the big people gathered around,
the teachers, the principal,
Mrs. Kiernan, the crossing guard, instead
I practiced how not to wish it was me.

Alan Walowitz

JUST LIQUOR

My father preferred a pint in his pocket.
For balance, he said--should the winds buffet
left to right, then back again. The endless chore
of living. He listed across Linden
to pick up the dry cleaning,
after stopping at *Just Liquor*,
long enough to say hello to McNulty--
or as he walked the dog down Dutch Broadway,
a bat in his hand to hold off a passing stray.
That's what had become of him,
a little shaky, eyes a bit bulged,
nervous system jangled and misaligned.
This, the world he'd worked so hard to make.

After, he checked the usual places
for not-quite-empties --
behind the credenza, in the closet under a hat,
sometimes out back--hidden among the mums.
It was then, he came to me, knocked on my door,
gentle enough, but stumbling still,
said *Allie, give me a couple of bucks, will you?*
Maybe I'll take the train to the city
or need a bite for lunch.
I don't have, I said, shaking.
He raised his fist and gathered me by my scruff
and we both were shaking.

Let him look through all my drawers
and unmake my bed.
What I had was in my shoe
and I shook loose and ran.
I saw him on the boulevard at *Just Liquor* later,
who knows with what--
thinking, then, and to this day,
maybe I hadn't done enough,
or maybe someone he'd run into since
had loved him better.

MY FRIEND'S T-SHIRT

*Make a friend that doesn't look like you,
reads Abdul-Jabbar's t-shirt on the nightly news.
But he's the very one I want.
Seven foot two, give or take an inch,
thin as a yardstick, lithe as a deer.
Where do I go to find another
so calm, wise, and with skin so taut
not a wrinkle finds space
on that aging visage?*

I saw him in high school
beauty itself, the flashbulbs
blinding, but he, oblivious,
a man with a job to do and no one
to be with--no friends, no team, no coach
who could reach so high,
only us, agape, chanting, *Lew, Lew, Lew*
as if he could hear us through the din.
Though we knew, even then,
we would never really know him,
he showed us again and again and again.

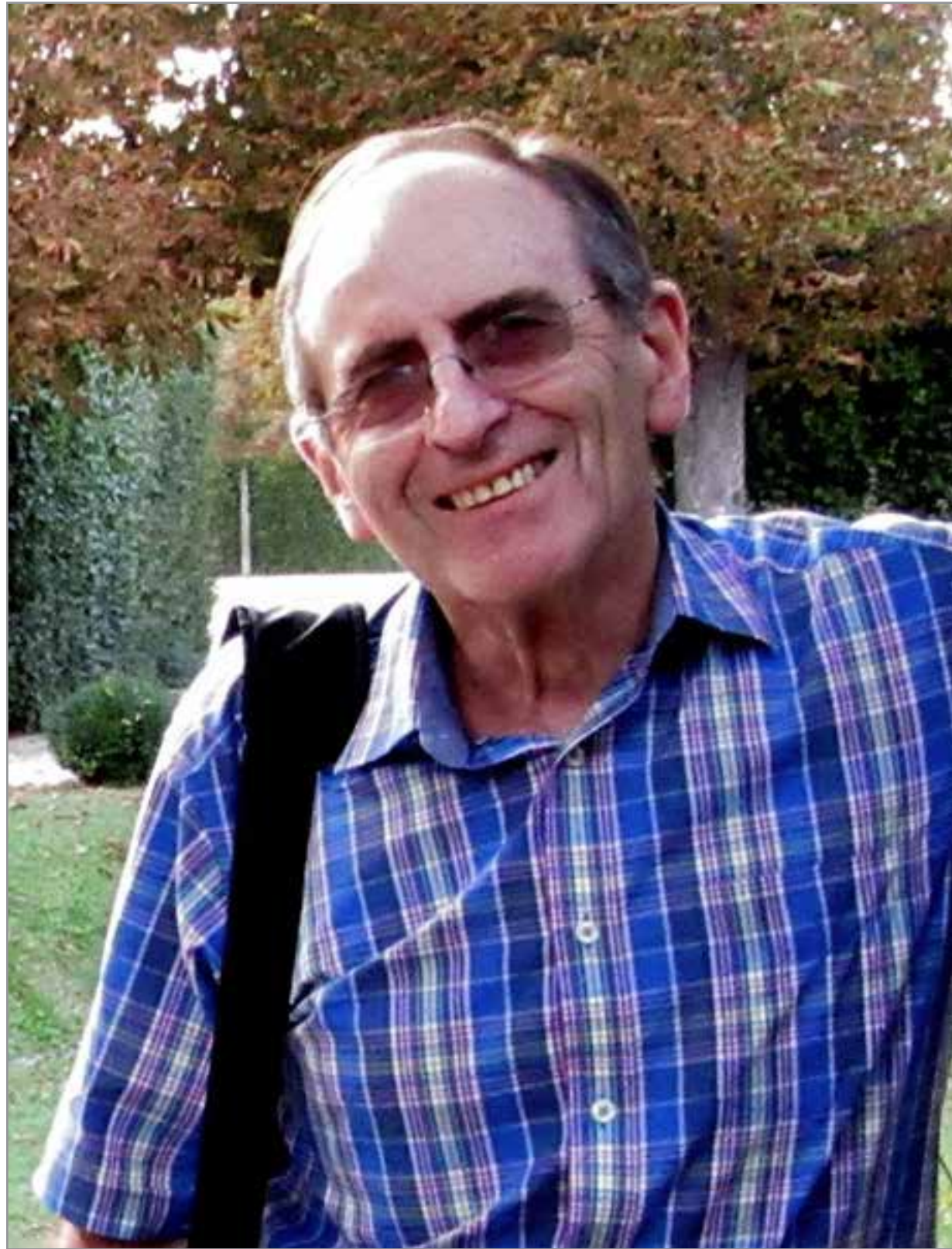


Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Alex Skovron is the author of seven collections of poetry, a prose novella and a book of short stories. His most recent book of poems is *Letters from the Periphery* (2021); his earlier volume of new and selected poems, *Towards the Equator* (2014), was shortlisted in the Prime Minister's Literary Awards. As well as bilingual editions of his poetry translated into French (*The Attic*) and Chinese (*Water Music*), Czech translations of his novella *The Poet* (2005) and collection of stories *The Man who Took to his Bed* (2017) have recently been published. Alex's work has also been translated into Dutch, Polish, Macedonian and Spanish. His numerous public readings have included appearances in China, Serbia, India, Ireland, Macedonia and Portugal. He lives in Melbourne.

<https://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/skovron-alex> (to 2005 only)

<http://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/towards-the-equator-alex-skovron/>



OUT OF FOCUS

for Mel Freedman

At the Green Duck the waitress
trundles in and out, the swing-door
silent on its oiled hinge. She stops
to check a bruise in the gilt glass
behind the bar, shunting a strand
aside to stroke her nose. The bar
is empty but for the lone voyeur
sipping his gin as he always does
in a corner booth. She'll go home
tonight to her laconic flat, lift
the phone for messages she dreads,
light up the TV, the dreary news,
hoping to doze off, knowing another
dark dream will wrench her back
to the loss that can not be redeemed.
Next morning she'll flag the bus
to the Duck for the morning shift,
the place will be deserted. If she can,
she'll snatch a spell to peruse
her crime romance, or a magazine
from the choice randomly stacked
in the stand by the espresso machine.
She'll turn to the pages that expose
fresh rumours of shame around
her favourite stars, splitting apart
or shacking up, or jogging pregnant
nudely on a private beach. The more
they sue, the more they parade
their glossy double-spreads. Grainy,
out of focus, but only just enough.

Alex Skovron

OUT INTO THE DARK

The cows will never come home
The fat lady died years ago
And lies in an unsung grave
What can I say?

The planet spins and wobbles

But what do we know? Our earth
Moves only when disaster
Confounds our dreams

And something else
Easy to stroll the metropolis
Of our desires wearing nothing
But hope, staring

Into the sweet blindfold
We hardly remember inheriting
From a long-forgotten
Future, when all

We could see was all
We wanted, and nothing
Mattered but all. But all
Of that spun out into the dark

Side of the earth, where
From the edge of a paddock
Or the front row
Of our first overture

We are waiting
Still, our eyes wider
Than the world
Brighter than the sky



After sunset over the Mekong. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Amy Barry writes poems and short stories. She is published globally including Southword, The Blue Nib, Sunday Tribune, Paris Lit Up and Live Encounters. Her poems have been translated into many languages including Italian, Turkish, Spanish, Azerbaijani, French, Romanian, and Persian. She is featured on the Radio and TV in Ireland, Italy, Canada, Australia and UK. Her poems have been shortlisted, longlisted, and Highly Commended and won local and international awards. Nominated for the Pushcart 2021 Poetry Prize. Amy is an Honorary member of the Neruda Association, Italy, and founder of Global Writers. Amy loves to travel, trips to Mumbai, Paris, Beijing, Falkenberg, Strasbourg, Bali have all infused her work. She has performed her work in Ireland & internationally.



GIFT I

How disappointed he must be,
sat at the back door,
something wriggling in his mouth,
half the size of a rat.

He blinks the way only cats do,
a flutter of trust,
but I close the door
to barely a sliver.

Sunlight slants through,
casting a polish of morning light
over his bedraggled fur.
His teeth sink into the tiny creature.

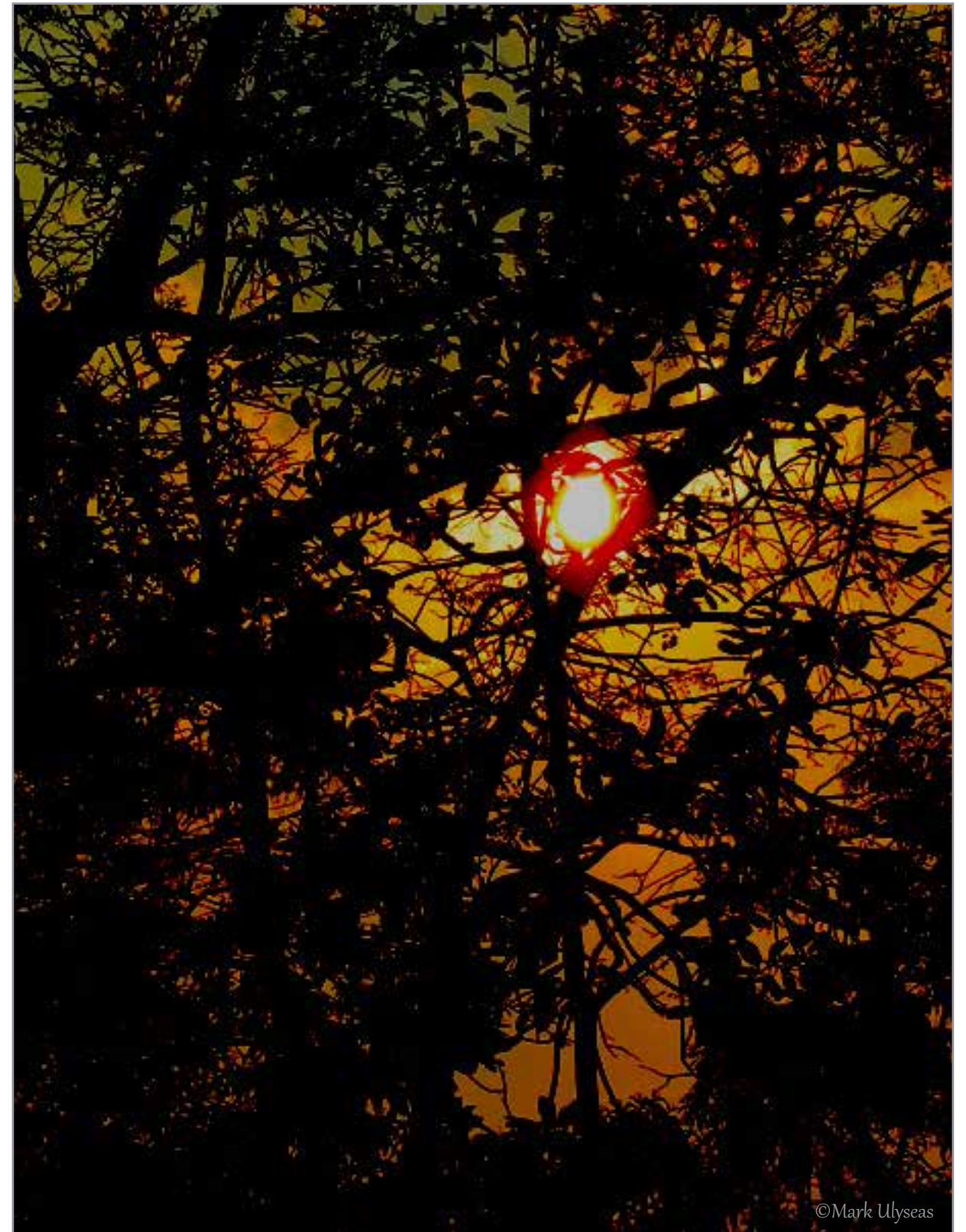
Its shrieking frenzy is brief.
Pablo drops it to the mat.
He looks at me, perhaps unsure.
No longer a kitten.
Now a hunter.

And with a glove,
I stoop down
to receive his gift.

Amy Barry

GIFT II

That evening was a gift
we'd never hold again.
In Puglia
we peregrinated
over ancient farmlands
and white fairy tale homes of Trulli,
in Alberobello.
Here, a man and a woman
travelling it together,
in a delicious,
unending revel,
all sorts of rosemary, lemons and olives
glowed here and there,
even on the steepest slopes,
in all stillness of flesh
to taste
the mystery of primitivo —
and that trembling moment again.



©Mark Ulyseas

Heralding night. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Angela Costi is the author of five poetry collections, including *Honey & Salt* (shortlisted for the Mary Gilmore Poetry Prize 2008), *Lost in Mid-Verse* (Owl Publishing, 2014) and *An Embroidery of Old Maps and New* (Spinifex Press, 2021). [The video poem of her award-winning poem, *Shelter*](#), was selected for the *Worldwide Reading for the Dead of the Pandemic 2021* (Goethe-Institut and International Literature Festival Berlin). She received the High Commendation for Contribution to Arts and Culture, Moreland Award 2021 for her poetry, videopoems and community-engaged practice. <https://www.facebook.com/AngelaCostiPoetics/>



THE SCORE

The numbers don't sit quietly
they nudge, then shove me
off the couch
expect me to take them flying
but I'm afraid of heights.
Oh, but didn't you pray to receive them?
For an entire year, yes, I whispered them into my pillow
woke with them snoring then groping my thoughts.

My Legal Studies teacher cautioned about a combination
that would make me somersault with the clouds
at first, then realise Mama's calloused hands are no wings,
there's nobody from Lalor or Cyprus, no teacher
or mentor who knows how to fly the helicopter
for me to hop in as we navigate the alien terrain
of courses in buildings with turrets and mezzanines.

These numbers were no mere numbers
they scratched *LAW* into my brain
had me opening leather brief cases
reading affidavits
while dressed in matching skirt and jacket,
had me answering questions from a Magistrate, stating
on behalf of my client, we plead Not Guilty
Your Honour
as the girl had no priors,
she was as young as me on the day
I was entombed on my couch clutching those numbers.

Angela Costi

INSEPARABLE

I haven't held you since your 60th birthday. 8 March 2020.
when you gathered 7 of your dearest and made us wear something red
or close to. there's a picture of us sitting on a plush couch at the Sofitel.
we are poppy flowers framed with cake champagne and satisfied smiles.
you picked up your petit four and fed my mouth with layered indulgence.
i never tasted sweet art before. you saved up to give 'your loved ones
a day to remember'. you knew sitting thigh to thigh
would be extinct in months to come.

*

A meeting of one's intimate doesn't happen in an instant
rather thirty years of sitting and talking from classroom to cafes
then each other's homes with boyfriends then spouses then years of
alone
with our way of inhabiting each other's stories
stronger than sisters softer than mothers deeper than friends
and now you are on the other side of the police barricade
restricted from driving to where the trees compete with the bitumen
and where a virus does all the travelling.

*

In our ambling conversations you tell me about George
an old kangaroo who is your frequent guest. feasting on grass
while you do all the talking. i hear your silent sigh
and know your arms ache from the daily strain of buckets
threatening to spill the precious quench before you get
to the saplings of your hopeful trees. some have died
because they need the sky to pour its sorrow
and then you mourn for a time
dream of packing it all into the one suitcase
to spend months by the sea. a fish
waiting for rain.

*

I sense you are bonier around the shoulders and if we hugged
it would be awkward. you're keen to describe your shed as your raft
where you write and make art from found wood and old maps. with a gush
you tell me about your large map of the world. you got it laminated
and hung on the wall facing you when you work. there's you standing
holding a red push pin next to the generous blue oceans the reticent
green continents the small black titles. you say these countries' names
out loud as you select which push pin
will take you travelling
this morning.

TO STUDY FRIENDSHIP

Practical

The monkey refused to give me agility,
I watched my friend swing from bar to bar,
planted on concrete, I trembled as she climbed into the clouds
poised on the diving board like a pen on paper
then as quick as an idea, she became a sequence
of spearhead torpedo dolphin.

As I grew those reticent dunes
announcing my sex,
I bumbled on the netball court
was dodged by my friend who became Atalanta
holding and releasing the ball with the skill of the hunt.

I dared to out-speed her on the page
using inference as sacred deer, critique as cypress
to mentor Atalanta as disciple of Artemis,
to show how a question can be released into the wilderness
as cathartic marathon rather than predictable sprint.

Assessment

I was determined to outgrow the phase
of awkward simulacrum and yet my arms
flew into the shape of embrace
as my friend's limbs grew accustomed
to holding the trophy with the strength of knowing
the body would always outwit the mind.

A vexed game as we were human,
championing our own endowment
to receive the Principal's award.

Report

At the ceremony, we sat next to each other
wearing dresses of complimentary colour
— between the pause and breath,
when the Principal gazed at the name,
we failed to reach for each other's hand.

THE PERFECT ESSAY

You must travel
to three worlds,
first the harsh dark mines
walk in knee-deep sludge
light the oil-wick lamp
see the face of rock,
it stands between you and premise
without pickaxe, use your nails
to scrape dig search
it will take days
before your question rests
in this place of unknowing,
your nails will grow to become sharp tools
your eyes will dilute and enlarge
you will discover the nuance of dark,
precious fragments will emerge
you will surface
with gold in pockets of thought
to build a rich rationale.

Next launch into expanse
to learn from the sequence of planets and moons,
each a unique statement and yet
an integrated whole,
commit to the gravitational pull,
prepare to float or spiral out
as control is challenged by release
into the billions of possibilities,
return with the brightest stars
for each and every point.

To conclude you must climb,
thermal wrap the muscle brain
to pen wisdom from peak,
do not dwell on the ridges or cliffs,
soar with the wild geese
who fly with the strength of air,
if you stop you will fall
back into repetition,
gaze up and beyond
to where sky, cloud and light
offer the view of summation.



Anna Yin was born in China and immigrated to Canada in 1999. She was [Mississauga's Inaugural Poet Laureate](#) (2015-2017) and Ontario representative for the League of Canadian Poets (2013-2016). Anna has authored four poetry collections in English, "Love's Lighthouse" in Chinese and English (2019), and "Mirrors and Windows": a book of translation works (Guernica Editions) in 2021. Anna won the 2005 Ted Plantos Memorial Award, two MARTYs, two scholarships from USA and three grants from Ontario Arts Council. Her poems/translations have appeared at Queen's Quarterly, ARC Poetry, New York Times, China Daily, CBC Radio, World Journal. She was a finalist for Canada's Top 25 Canadian Immigrants Award in 2011 and in 2012. Her poem "Still Life" was displayed on 700 buses in 13 cities across Canada for the Poetry In Transit project in 2013/2014. Anna performed on Parliament Hill, at Austin International Poetry Festival, Edmonton Poetry Festival and universities in China, USA and Bangladesh. She has designed and taught Poetry Alive at schools, colleges, libraries and online. In 2020, she started her own small press: [Sureway Press](#) to offer translation editing and publishing services. Her website: [annapoetry.com](#)

GAMES OR WARS?

squid game
among all the shapes
picking up a broken heart

*

between money mountain
and cold bloody bodies
lost souls drifting

*

in and out
nightmare after nightmare
searching for an exit

Anna Yin

TRUTH

In my dream
there are always two frogs
I spend the whole night
to figure out the true prince
The dawn simply takes
 both
 away

THE BEAUTY OF BEING ELSEWHERE

“Have you travelled out of Canada
in the last two weeks?”
The nurse asks.

Yes and no, I say.
She frowns.

I sigh and immediately apologize —
if dreams or virtual tours count.
She smiles and pats me
on the shoulder.

My heart aches for elsewhere...
Tonight, I will travel again
out of myself
out of the blue
out of the continent

MY LIVING WILL

1. This is my will with my finger prints to draw my own decision.
2. This is how I shall steer my own life boat in the end.
3. Being a poet, I want to live as dazzling as summer blossom and die as a warrior to fight that good night. Yet I am aware of shadows wherever sunrise is.
4. If accidents happen or diseases take away my wings and my mind, I shall not prolong this life, please abide by the followings.
5. I shall never live on hooked-up machines like a void. Please let me face Death and welcome it, so I can set my soul free.
6. Donate my body to enliven others.
7. If my books sell well magically, please found Nobody Poetry Trust to sprinkle the profits.
8. I have faced many faces in life. At this moment, I am tired, so please make funeral services as simple as an afternoon tea party. I will not be able to keep a pretty face for long.
9. Please spread half of my ashes to the sea. I shall return to the waves.
10. The other half should remain in a green place (land or vase). Please engrave my epitaph: Half in the sea, free by the wind; half in green, rest in peace.



Ceremonial umbrella, Bali. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Anne Elvey lives and writes on Boonwurrung Country in bayside Melbourne. Her poetry publications include: *Obligations of voice* (2021), *On arrivals of breath* (2019), *White on White* (2018) and *Kin* (2014). She holds honorary appointments at Monash University and University of Divinity. Her website is <https://sunglintdrift.com/>



SEASONS TWIST SOIL INTO SPIRALLED BOLE

This is not an Irish triple charm but Seaford's
grey and rugged plaits of bark, rooted at

suburban verge. Some call it a nature strip
bared as if knowing how love curtailed

finds its flow, strong and spun by climate
as by rule that softens to the way of things. Here

errors are a kind of chance, a stabilising
ingenuity that is not mourned or not too much.

Threads of wind gathered in bony branch
bring world souging, like a life unfolded and

still to come. The she-oak harkens to a scarce
surge of sustenance it makes enough, always

in the blue gaze of a beloved. Over ground's no
and yes, tree gives, refrains, as if that small

sift of branched air might lift, its wing-
beat audible across sky's shifting whorl.

Anne Elvey

CHAMELEON PLANT

Houttuynia cordata

*also called fish mint, fish leaf, rainbow
plant, court jester, swamp pepper, heart leaf*

I smell at arms’ distance this sprig, its three fronds sprouting russet. A paler underside stalks from stem into bulge. At intervals are leaves. The largest pair are fractal, are soft rose traced with true (a quiet stench!), each track a source, it seems, of light emanating lemon-lime at confluence. At the centre a smear bleeds green—tones of jade and pine, traces of sun. Colours spill fractal again. Attention requires fold—a sense of wits slanted towards things. I clasp the severed spray. One leaf is crimson-rimmed. The rest (ten I count) have a bare line of scarlet at the edge and forest blots at hub with hint of veins. At each juncture small leaves furl, alive with want for water.

GLOW

Fishers arrive. Stepping left, they disturb
two gulls. I keep my distance, feel the passing
vertigo of the unrailed side, like an old story

of appointments made and unfinished—a life
interrupted forever by chaos and grace. Sieved
through with briny gale or tended by the lift

of leaves in slightest gust, I admit a moment
not quite sought—this tousled dusk’s arriving
confluence, of time and matter and meaning.

Anne M Carson is a poet and essayist who has been published internationally, and widely in Australia, receiving various awards including being shortlisted in the 2021 Bruce Dawe Poetry Prize. Recent publications include *Massaging Himmler: A Poetic Biography of Dr Felix Kersten* (Hybrid, 2019), and *Two Green Parrots* (Ginnindera Press, 2019). She has initiated a number of poetry-led social justice projects, and is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing at RMIT. This work has been gratefully supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.



from a poetic biography of George Sand

MY FIRST MUSIC LESSON

Flank to flank
 on the Persian rug
 under her old harpsichord

Grandmama's favourite old dog
 Brillante and
 eight-year-old me

The rise and fall of my chest
 the rise and fall of hers
 shared animal heat

Old lady boudoir smells
 face powder bon bons
 lily of the valley

Her voice quavery with age
 transports me
 on the soar of her song

Her half paralysed
 crooked fingers
 form a few chords

The old spinet's voice
 is shrill but the harmonics
 are golden vibrating

through the floorboards
 through the timbers
 bathing both of us.

Anne M Carson

GEORGE SAND IN REVERIE

A found poem from her autobiography

*Thus, I turned into a poet solely by inclination
and character, without realising it or knowing it.*

... because that dreamy galloping,
or that total forgetfulness

the spectacle of nature affords us
while the horse, left to walk

at a slow pace, stops to graze
at the bushes without our noticing;

the slow or fast succession of landscapes,
some gloomy, some delightful;

the absence of purpose; the yielding
to time taking flight; the picturesque

gatherings of flocks of migratory birds;
the soft noise of the water splashing

under the horses' hooves – all that is rest
or movement, spectacle for the eye

or sleep for the soul on a solitary ride,
would surround me and suspend

my train of thought and
the memory of my sorrows.



Marwari horse, Rajasthan. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Anni Wilton-Jones, a resident of Co Mayo, has also lived in Wales, England and Saudi Arabia. Having experienced a varied range of careers she is now retired and concentrating on her writing and her photography. A writer of poetry and, occasionally, prose, she has read in Wales, England, the USA and Ireland. Her collections include *Bridges*, *Winter Whiting*, *Moth* (a chapbook about abuse, written under the pen-name Victoria Tims) and *Put On Your Thinking Cap* (a chapbook of photographs and poems for children). She currently leads Pen & Ink, a Mayo writers group, and is one of the organisers of the SiarScéal festival, for which she has edited the 2020 anthology.



BABEL

Face screwed
fingers hard-pressed
in ears straining
not to hear

he suffers
an agony
of dissonance

every over-amplified word
each hyper-decibelled note

warped
still more
distorted by a deafness

that mutes the musicality
crescendos the discords

playing out his purgatory
ahead of time.

Anni Wilton-Jones

BACK TO NATURE

Wind wafts
the light lilt of lilacs

vestige of a garden
long-lost
to weeds and wilderness

house half-hidden
overwhelmed by ivy
the last unbroken window
framing the obligatory
headless
Child of Prague

emigration's lament
the old home abandoned
left to dereliction and decay

no selling of this acre
of the old sod
retained against the return
that is never to be.

CORTÈGE

Observe
stranger
the never-ending
crawl of cars

count out
if you wish
a hapless handful
caught up unawares

surely still
an impressive turn-out
testimony
he was much-loved

or hated

CHALLENGE

At a soft stroke
on his wrist
the lie is strangled
in his throat

his life spins
into a new orbit

honesty
the driving force
from now on

lest he lose her

satisfied
she smiles
gently

withdraws her fingers
turns back
to the task in hand

released
he brushes away
the memory
of her touch

and with it
the far too exacting
demands of truth.

SUMMER

Fitful sun
lights on trouser-legs
spread-eagled in rows

flimsy skirts
caught by occasional gusts
flutter fly and flop

here and there
between the flounces
intimate lace flickers

dismal drops fall
sounds of scurrying steps
myriad colours swirl past

forlorn forsaken
a lone peg lies
below the sagging line.

Antonia Alexandra Klimenko is widely published. Her work has appeared in (among others) *Maintenant: Journal of Contemporary Dada Writing and Art* archived at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. and New York's MoMA. She is the recipient of the 2018 Generosity Award bestowed on her by Kathleen Spivack and Joseph Murray for her outstanding service to international writers through SpokenWord Paris where she is Writer/Poet in Residence. Her poetry collection, *On the Way to Invisible*, is forthcoming in 2022.



Antonia Alexandra Klimenko

UNDER THE CORNER OF YOUR PILLOW (OR LOVE IN THE TIME OF CORONA)

When the world was young
and the earth was like a song
a zillion stars
fell through the sky like a gentle rain
with blessings from the blue
A zillion stars
danced in their sacred fires
and spun their astral winds
to guide your soul
A zillion stars
traveled the harmonies of space
to reach your heart
where they are humming now like violins
Stars
fell through the sky
and lit up your face with a smile
reflecting forever their radiance
in your eyes
Fell through the sky
and caught in your throat
that you may remember their darkness and beauty
on your lips before you speak of silence

When the world was bright
and you were just a song
the spirit of your light
which has shone for eons of time
which watches over you watching
came to live inside you and me
that we may heal ourselves--
each the other's miracle
each a star to wish upon

continued overleaf...

UNDER THE CORNER OF YOUR PILLOW (OR LOVE IN THE TIME OF CORONA) ...contd

When you were young
and life was just a star
an angel rising from the ashes
knelt beside you singing
And folding the last note of her song
inside a piece of sky
she placed it under the corner of your pillow
where you may find it still when you are dreaming
still when you are dreaming
still when you are dreaming

If in the light of darkness you should fade
like some distant blue horizon
too late for twilight too early for dawn
listen to the sky within
The universe out there is here
inside of you
It comes and goes and turns in turns like night and day
spinning spinnning we are
all of us planets of primordial majesty and longing
all of us stars
hiding and seeking in the shadows of our own constellations--
in the eclipse of our own conscious and unconscious mind--
all of us spinning spinning in and out of life and death
in and out of love and unloving
of desire and diminish
We swallow and are swallowed by dimensions
by dark holes of space and other invisible songs

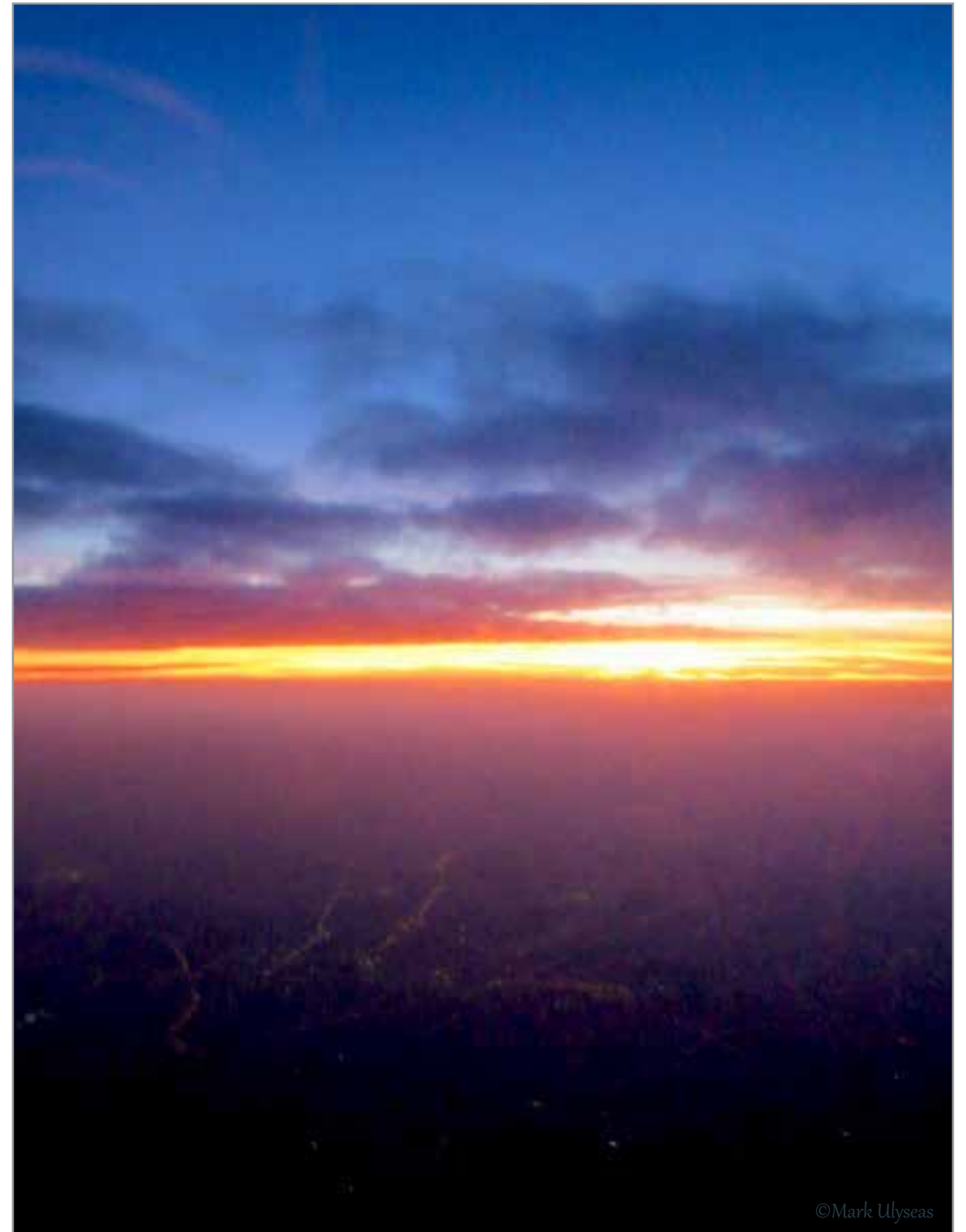
If in the light of darkness you should fade
like some distant blue
too late for Winter too early for Spring
caught betwixt and between the branches of
I wish I was here I wish I were there--
hold on to the beauty of the moment
hold on and let go at every leafy turn
Now inhaling joy and exhaling sorrow
Now inhaling sorrow and exhaling joy
And so day follows night and night the day
as we follow our own breathing home
to whoever we are at any given moment
This presence is the only present
that we can open and enjoy right now
this present a gift that opens us to receiving Life
of transforming and being transformed

This is what it is to be human
to risk all and lose nothing
to breathe out and breathe in
to forgive and be forgiven
To let my words bleed into yours
and yours mine
to lay my head upon your heart
and yours mine
to dream as air
and speak as the wind

UNDER THE CORNER OF YOUR PILLOW (OR LOVE IN THE TIME OF CORONA) ...contd

If in the music of the spheres
you fade into some distant tune
sing it from your soul
sing to remember you are breathing
and feel the spirit moving inside you
for it moves inside me as well
Sing to remember
the angel who once called you by name
and each shining moment that crosses a bridge of light
like your own music borrowed from the stars
and strung across a ceiling of timeless wonder
Sing "I'm glad to be here"
"I'm glad to be here"
alone together with you right now
turning turning
while the world healing itself becomes whole

If in the light of new beginnings
you should fade to shades of blue
remember
this is all there is we are all we have
Remember what is real
and what is always
and that is Everything.



©Mark Ulyseas

Sunrise from the window of a plane. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

ANCIENT KEYS

Four walls with neither season nor direction
can mean a lifetime but never a life Looking

at Time's Mirror facing both ways from inside out
you see the days open and close behind you Waiting

you count the nights before you stretching yourself
between the dark intervals of your soul

Angels come to visit you Visibly and invisibly
they watch over you They guide you through

the whirling spheres of madness They watch you
circling the great theater of your ancestors Slipping

then falling you rise again from the ashes
from the deep blood of change
from the silent roots of your calling

They hand you
your father's paint box from which you draw

the inks that color your sky and the walls of your river within—
expressions of joy and sorrow that wear you like a mask

Behind the mask— the adrenaline rush of your mind--
the eye of the burning tiger lies motionless in your bed

When you were a child you listened to your breathing.
Listened to the breathing of leaves— your spirit whistling

through a forest of trees Listened to the ancient melodies
that lead you now through the wide and unknown spaces

on the charred edges of your existence *Only this* they say
There is no other moment *Only this*

You are the place you want to get to...
You are the one you have been waiting for

Attracta Fahy, Psychotherapist, MAW NUIG '17. Winner of Trócaire Poetry Ireland Poetry Competition 2021. Irish Times; New Irish Writing 2019, Pushcart & Best of Web nominee, shortlisted for: OTE 2018 New Writer, Allingham Poetry competition both 2019 & '20, Write By The Sea Writing Competition 2021, Dedalus Press Mentoring Programme 2021. Fly on the Wall Poetry published her best selling debut chapbook collection Dinner in the Fields, in March '20.



DUPLEX

*We also live in our dreams; we do not live only by day.
Sometimes we accomplish our greatest deeds in dreams.*
- Carl Jung; *The Red Book*. Page 242.

Her visits were always in a dream space.
A presence between asleep and awake,

always between sleep and awake
a voice at the right foot of my bed,

self-assured voice at the foot of my bed.
The dream told me to "go to the forest."

Her voice in my dream said, "go to the forest,"
words a vibration from crown to root,

words vibrating through crown to root
afraid at first that she was an enemy.

Took years to trust she wasn't the enemy
led me into the forest in quest of myself,

quiet presence, the innocence self.
Her visits were always in the liminal space.

Attracta Fahy

DREAMING THE MYTH ON

After Greek poet Constantine Cavafy

When you sail into the harbor of Ithaca today,
you pass a small island with a sign on it that reads:
Every traveller is a citizen of Ithaca.

Don't waste strength before the sea of fear
surges within, as you set out on this journey.

Storms will overwhelm, don't let them steer.
Trust the winds will carry you onto new shores,
don't decide where that shore should be.
Athena will be with you, and if need be
she will hold back time for your safe passing.

For now, pull up a chair, let despair sit at your table
too, feed it enough to nourish, take its insight,
but do not give it your whole self -

hold with others seated around your counter.
Listen with every ear; each voice from within
has something to offer.
You, your own teacher- must contemplate.

Drink slowly whatever spirit you choose,
embrace the wisdom of your ancestors
their spirit lives in you, they too navigated depths.

Give time to silence; reflect. In high seas
the direction of wind and wave prevails,
so contemplate steps, and do not be troubled
if asked more than you feel you can give.
You will not be abandoned.

Hide your true self to protect from fools,
and don't be fooled, beware of the living dead.
This is the heroines' journey,

you will return, not to what you knew,
but the home you longed for, one within you.

PERSEPHONE

I'm the girl on the street, concealed
behind make-up, holes in my tights, red
lipstick distracts you from seeing who I am.
More myself wearing Doc Martins,
like a broken cup without shelf, or place.

I'm the homeless girl looking for housing,
nights in the shelter waiting for food,
disadvantaged, with limited resource,
I found myself here where you see me
lean into a lamppost, hiding my fear.

I'm the refugee girl on social media, sallow
skin, black curly hair, the one who looks
to the world with pleading eyes,
a world that doesn't want to know.

I'm the girl you see begging on Shop Street,
asleep by the rails at the Ha'penny bridge,
pasty-faced addict you pass, with sweaty hair,
clammy skin, a plastic bag of belongings.

My mother in a refuge for women, you could
find me there, although, I tend to make it alone.
We won't talk of not having a home, no one cares,
our economy thrives.
Thank god for those who bring sandwiches.

I'm the girl on the street, who was conned,
now owned, sex trafficking not your business,
I must have looked for it.
I'm used to this life, living in dark, waiting
to steal light from the dawn,

Hades, not elsewhere, is here on our street.

Dr Beatriz Copello is a well-known reviewer, writer and poet, she is also known for her sense humour. "Her poems are sensuous, evocative and imaginative. Beatriz Copello is one of Australia's foremost poets," wrote Julia Hancock, Ex-Editor of Allan an Unwin and Freelance editor and journalist. Copello's poetry books are *Women Souls and Shadows*, *Meditations at the Edge of a Dream*, *Flowering Roots*, *Under the Gums Long Shade*, and *Lo Irrevocable del Halcon* (In Spanish). Her poetry has been published in literary journals such as Southerly and Australian Women's Book Review and in many other print and Electronic Publications. Fiction books by author are: *A Call to the Stars*, *Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria* and *Beyond the Moons of August* (Her Doctoral Thesis).



EXISTING

Let me be you for a moment
 at peace with yourself
 in the long dark nights
 of this eternal travel
 through the universe.
 Where am I? Guide me
 through this tunnel
 leading towards a garden
 where sincerity flowers
 contentment and love grow
 like gardenias in your garden.
 You know your way
 teach me I lost my destination
 He took me by the hand
 and we entered a world
 described in ones and zeros
 abstract concepts
 symbols of eternity.
 We wondered in the space
 between sky and earth
 where the silence
 slapped my face
 like my mother's hand.
 I was wrong.

Beatriz Copello

THE END OF THE ROAD

She hid her shame under the shade of the trees
in her mind an echo like the twitter of birds
a warning of impending madness perhaps?
The sky embraced her like an ominous blanket
useless gold she carries in her pocket
and glitter in her heart. She follows a dirt road
her solitude she cherishes but swallows her pain
like a Currawong she chased those around her
the chatter in her brain tells her to forget
she wants to follow a straight-line path but
her steps take her to a hollow labyrinth.
She cuddles her cat to bring peace to her mind
But solace found in a glass of whisky ... all forgotten
all is over now the past cannot be relived.

TRICKS

in her mind the woman traced a window on the wall
through it she saw herself embracing a child
bathed in shadows she crossed herself
forgotten childhood memories emerged
eating eggs just collected from the nesting box
admiring Van Gogh *Undergrowth* in Amsterdam
suddenly a distraction - the sound of water running
a tap opened perhaps? A platinum-coloured figure
stood there observing her, rocks appear to tumble down
from the top of her wardrobe, she closed her eyes
and saw shinning eyes, sparkling shapes
her heart accelerated and she gave another puff
of her weed cigarette, was it morning or night?
She believed she was unscathed by the past
but the wounds were there like shutters to life

Beth Copeland is the author of three full-length poetry books: *Blue Honey*, recipient of the 2017 Dogfish Head Poetry Prize; *Transcendental Telemarketer* (BlazeVox 2012); and *Traveling through Glass*, recipient of the 1999 Bright Hill Press Poetry Book Award. Beth owns and operates Tiny Cabin, Big Ideas™, a residency for writers in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina.



OCTOBER VALENTINE

A heart-shaped leaf spied in the weeds on my walk
down the hill to the mailbox. I didn't see a redbud tree

on the roadside, so it must have lifted on the wind
and dropped—a gift!—near my feet. Is it a message

from someone I love—my sweet mother in a halo of light,
my father singing the names of trees in his strong baritone?

Or is it from someone I've never seen and may never meet?

As I hike up the hill, I tuck the leaf in my pocket, rubbing it
with my thumb as if I could read it—skin to skin—by osmosis.

Halfway home, I stop to study it. Cerise with splotches of green,
dark spots, a wormhole bored like a bullet wound, a battered

heart, like yours, like mine, but maybe its scars make it more
beautiful than before. My friends, there's still so much love

in this world even when you're alone.

Beth Copeland

BLACK STOCKINGS

Why do I have so many in my drawer?
Sheer—I've stepped into my own shadow.
Opaque—moonless nights.

Fishnets—one last stab at being sexy at 70.
Tights with paisley cut-outs or Harlequin diamonds.
Lacy stockings, roses and ferns.

(Three exceptions—taupe tights with black arabesques.
A pale gray pair printed with a poem I wrote.
Ecru, with an Emily Dickinson quote.)

I have enough black stockings to last for the rest of my life!
What have I been mourning? Why have I stepped into grief
every day and stepped out every night to sleep?

I toss out a pair with a hole in the toe,
another with a run up the ankle, but there are still so many,
enough for a flood of funerals and a lifetime of loss.

DRIVING AT NIGHT

Haloed around blue halogen headlights.
Am I going blind or having a mystical experience?
Dazed, I remember driving for twelve hours straight
when I was young, seeing a deer by the road
just as I was starting to doze and swerve.
Was it real, standing in the moonlight,
or a ghost, waiting to dart across the road?

What startled me from the fugue of fatigue,
pulling me back into my body, awake, aware
of the wheel in my hands, my foot on the brake?

FROM THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

Fog in the valley rises like breath in cold weather,
as if we're all breathing together, as children

wake from dreams forgotten before brushing their teeth,
as women scramble eggs in black skillets,

and men shave the night's shadows from their faces
in steam-veiled mirrors.

Deer paw at grass with delicate hooves,
cows graze on slanted, hillside pastures,

horses snort clouds from flared nostrils,
hounds bay at deer that disappear into sycamores,

cats stretch and yawn, hungry and bored,
squirrels scurry up an oak's rough trunk,

and coyotes yelp in the woods, a falsetto
song like a wild ode to the world.

One sparrow sings its long exhalation of notes,
spiders weave webs of dust and smoke,

a captured fly breathes its last gasp,
moths stir the air with paper wings.

Even the river is breathing, releasing its mist
into the sky, and the trees inhale sunlight

into their greenery. The earth releases its tannins
and leaf mold, mushrooms poke up like ghosts

from the black silt of the soil, and dragonflies rise
from water with wings more transparent than a single

breath, as the earthworm tunnels through dirt to a deep
longing for breeze, the scent of carrion and cloves,

wild roses and rhododendrons open into bowls
of blessings. Even the garter snake flickers its tongue

like a holy flame as if to say, *See, I'm not to blame
for your fall from grace. I'm a ribbon of ribs and lace.*

Billions of sentient beings—angels, beasts, insects,
and trees—breathe in a single prayer lifted up

to the mountains, to the sky, to life. *Om, Shanti,
Shanti, Shanti. Peace.*

Beth Spencer is an Australian writer whose books include the verse memoir *Vagabondage* (UWAP) and a fiction collection *How to Conceive of a Girl* (Random House) which was runner up for the Steele Rudd Award. The Age of Fibs, which won the Carmel Bird Digital Literary Award, will be published in expanded book form in 2022. She lives on unceded Guringai & Darkinjung land on the NSW Central Coast. www.bethspencer.com and [@bethspen](https://twitter.com/bethspen).



READY, WILLING

I used to dream of being Carly Simon, pregnant with James Taylor's baby, singing *No Secrets*. I used to dream of fleeing across a border with a suitcase, living in a house full of musicians. And I used to dream of you, the invisible red thread connecting soul to soul.

But I always carried in my pocket nail scissors, sewing pouch, needles, spare thread, super-glue. A do-it-yourself repair kit: predictive & waiting.

Because the glass (heart) is already broken.

Beth Spencer

GOOD BLOOD

In the anger workshop the Zen master says —
‘Oh, tiny mosquito, why get angry at an insect?
Just wants a morsel to feed her family.
Poor mosquito. Only takes a little bit.’

Each mosquito a miniature work of art.

We have 'good blood', my father and I.
They track a path to dine on our rich
red soup. Weaving and dodging
past the less tasty bodies.

Gourmet delight. Five star!

So generous. They tip for their meal with protein deposits (I'd rather they didn't). These grow into massive lumps that itch for days.

*Here, please —
take without giving!*

But no use being *angry* about it.
No use spoiling anyone's *meal*.
No use losing *sleep*.

*(Quick —
hide under the sheets!)*

I remember the day my father said ‘Bloody’
— and stormed out of the house.
So afraid he was never coming back.
We ate our meal in silence.

Was that a mosquito buzzing?

Yes, funny you should say that! That's exactly what they said in therapy when I pleaded with my 'family' to please listen to each other.

*'Just a tiny mosquito.
So easy to ignore.'*

Little mosquito.
Here is father coming back
through the door.
(See? It's ok. Don't cry.)

Here, take my blood to feed your family.
(Don't disturb him. Don't anger him.)

*Shhh. Put on your tiny napkin,
and dig in.*

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



ABOVE THE FAIR

Beyond
 the sprawling sparrows
 above a teeming crowd
 push-shuffling
 forwards sideways
 between a seam of light
 shoulder buffing into
 upfront splendiferous
 jubilant golden-head
 straddling a white horse
 liberated from the world
 in vibrant elevation
 amidst all jostling trades
 shouts-outs squashed by
 colloquial bartering
 or trading is all coinage
 among wizened chance
 tight-elbowed fair

Bob Shakeshaft

Above the Fair, Jack B. Yeats, National Gallery.

A LETTER

torn by her love
and the lure of the wayward life

his face carries pain
amid eyes love-bright

indecision looms
in smart-dressed tuxedo

for pure romance
or beyond

sunken-eyes drawn to
a burgundy writing desk

an unfinished love poem
perhaps a fancy

portrayed in oil paints
no clue

About to Write a Letter, Jack B. Yeats, National Gallery.

ALL LIFE IS COLOUR

your eyes blue –deep
defiant
sideways stance
mirror image

no doubt
that floppy hat
at odds
with the tension

you aptly portray
pallid clothes
in half – light
the other

shadows
your spirit
fifty so alive
among vibrant

greens- yellows
blood reds
burgundy spatter
full of life

expressive
out-sidedness
though born
Emile Hansen

in Prussian Empire
close by village Nolde
your adopted name
soon identified

German Danish
among artistic fame
when you settled
to die at seebull

Colour is Life, Emile Nolde, National Gallery.



Bui Kim Anh

Poet Bui Kim Anh was formerly a high school teacher in Hanoi. She has been writing poetry since she was in school and after printing the first two volumes, *Writing for My Self* and *Ignorance Grass*, she was admitted to the Vietnam Writers' Association, and then to the Hanoi Writers' Association. She has published consecutive volumes: *Writing For My Self* (1995), *Ignorance Grass* (1996), *Rainy Ways* (1999), *Selling Nothing to the Wind* (2005), *Sad Words on the Rocks* (2007), *Late Afternoon Poems* (2008), *Get on The Wind to Balance* (2012), *Looking For A Dream* (2012), *Picking Up Words For The Shadows of Leaves* (2015), *It seems like A missing Season* (2016), *White Hair Sunny Morning* (2019). Currently, she is completing the draft for the 12th book of poems, will be published in 2022. Her poetry tells about a woman's life with her own joy and sorrow, that were joy and sorrow of many other women at the same time. Poet Bui Kim Anh, besides poetry, also writes prose about the people and scenery of Hanoi city, to which she has been attached her whole life.

These poems have been translated from Vietnamese to English by Nguyen Thuy Hoa (Ms).

NOTHING REPEATED

Roses have so many familiar and new colors
 Yellow chrysanthemums belong to the afternoon sun
 I am a fool while standing in front of the florist
 Don't know how to choose flowers of favorite color
 I'm really a fool
 Standing in the middle of the street, the middle of the bazaar
 Don't know where I need to go

Every day around us there are changes
 Good and bad do not repeat
 The earth is getting hotter every day and calamities come
 We can't do anything, everything is out of reach
 Seasons of time flow and never repeat
 Yesterday you talked to someone you don't like
 Today you talk to a stranger
 And when being alone you talk to yourself

Still the same, but nothing repeats
 Time is stirring, time is diluting
 What we have today will go away
 Sadness or bliss all will go away
 Should we regret or cheer?
 We will hug each other, cry or laugh
 Saying sardonic or kind words to each other
 Maybe that adds to the frustration or relieves the anger?
 Just know that nothing repeats even though we try to act from the beginning

Till the time to light a candle and three incense sticks
 Let out a long sigh or nothing
 The last moments of the life, we do not know and it does not repeat
 Can you keep a piece of paper and a pen to write down emotions on the way?
 And I will burn the ashes back to the world

Only this won't happen again...

WHAT DO YOU DREAM?

You come out of my dream
Then latch the door
You pick up the December's full moon
A dark night remains

What do I dream?

Woman with the moon and poetry
Cast a shadow on my dream

ASKING

Ask the familiar sparrow every morning how many foggy days are left.

By the side of the road I look for a spider silk weave with pure drops, hanging
a poetic lyric, do you remember?

Ask the lonely Itchy tree on the street why it is so poetically beautiful even
when (even though) its leaves turn yellow.
I send my bewildering love to wandering and foolish days.

Ask the white lilies bought this morning from the corner of the flea market.
Do flowers in the new season remember the past seasons?

I tell myself not to write sad poems anymore,
I ask myself but get no answer.

Chad Norman lives beside the high-tides of the Bay of Fundy, Truro, Nova Scotia. He has given talks and readings in Denmark, Sweden, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, America, and across Canada. His poems appear in publications around the world and have been translated into Danish, Albanian, Romanian, Turkish, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, Czech, and Polish. His collections are *Selected & New Poems* (Mosaic Press), and *Squall: Poems In The Voice Of Mary Shelley* (Guernica Editions). And *Simona: A Celebration of the S.P.C.A.* came out early 2021 from Cyberwit.Net (India).



Chad Norman

ALL THINGS GROWING

for Kujtim Morina

It is a softer thing what courses
through me now, caws in the air,
flies so happy to be on my pants,
what I left for the ones assigned
to bring back the food, even if
all of it seems to be Spring.

Somehow ink can capture intimacy,
to have this season returned,
given because I am out in it.

A voice seemingly mine,
to be an echo able to bounce
into or all around the mates
now alone in the new nests.

BEAUTY BE FED TOO

Throwing a selected number
of the last of the once full
bag where the unshelled treats
came into the lives of me and them
perched happily on wires as black
as the feathers their bodies wear.

I confess I am a human
to each winged visitor who
knew that about me years ago,
an injured man with a hope
full of longings they know too
but with the sun's real heat
we can begin to undertake it
what our seasons continue to be.

How to talk when the wires above me
have several males and females
listening to my questions, all of
them about strengthening our times
together, after awhile enough has
been given and taken, and I am not
alone, holding another empty pen.

CROW MATES

for Larissa Bree

Patchwork of blue in black sky
moves behind mated wings,
flight for forage.
Cold feathered couple
worries in the wind, pulls up,
ponders tug of past hunger,
catches bitter currents, lifting,
lifting to clouds pregnant,
spring within, overdue,
ready to feed beaks silenced by snow.
Together over the recession
flying toward tomorrow
they descend the passing lit lengths,
rays of sun pointing out food,
refuse to land where the land winks,
a coin; old wrapper;
eye of man in a gun.

SEATED ON A SIZEABLE ROCK IN THE SNOW

*for the crows I've fed for ten years beside the flags, once a family of nine,
for now only two remain.*

Trying to imagine
is an endeavour
I do more than ever:
Are the trees
you undoubtedly love
in the late spring
and summertime
the same trees
you appear in
when the winter
allows us both
perhaps
to remember
the leaves,
the shade
they constantly offer?
And the protection
I realize now
means more to you,
a protection
as a human
makes me
feel as if wings
are on my back,
my longing for them.



<https://pixabay.com/photos/crow-harassing-owl-winter-frost-2397589/>

Charlotte Innes is the author of a soon-to-be-published chapbook, *Twenty Pandemics*, from Kelsay Books, and *Descanso Drive*, a book of poems (also from Kelsay Books). Her poems have appeared in many publications including *The Hudson Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Rattle*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review* and several anthologies, including *The Best American Spiritual Writing for 2006* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006). A former journalist and teacher, she currently tutors students in English literature and creative writing. Originally from England, Charlotte Innes now lives in Los Angeles.



BLUE HAZE

What's true? Your eyes behind your glasses. Blue.
Your mask. Blue. Your hug—or is it mine?—
light as silk. Your jacket, so soft and yielding
to my touch I think you're vanishing.

Goodbye. Goodbye. I wave. You walk away,
turning once to show me caring eyes.
Easy to hide behind a mask. You might be:
Tired. Regretful. Relieved. Or is that me?

Charlotte Innes. Photograph by Brian Gilmartin.

TOUCH

It's cold out. My hands are freezing.
I don't care. I feel it. Cold

wind brushes the skin above
my eyes, a raindrop taps an eyelid,

the street so quiet I might be slipping
back in time to untouched scrub

and rocks and birdsong louder than
before, or louder than it would be,

that makes me want to scoop the earth
and dust my feathers like a bird,

or, to be the earth, soft
and grainy, sun-drenched, fed by rain.

.

Today, the raindrops resurrect
old storm clouds threatening family hikes,

skiing silent woods with friends,
every downpour, every swerve

rekindling heat beneath my jacket,
embers of tenderness and fury

pulsing like a steady two-beat
groove, the unexpected fusion

touching me so, although I know
they must by nature self-destruct—

as storm clouds only hide the sun,
as a cold wind will touch me always.

DRAGON SKY

Reddening clouds roar across the sky
behind a wooded hillside and a cottage
backed against a cliff, half-hidden by

a curving copse that looks like a hand inside
a furry mitten, or maybe a mailed fist
ready to reach for the dragon's neck, spill blood,

as the red door suggests, and the chimney stack,
and the lit window's solemn wink that, yeah,
I know you, dragon howl, the heat, the hurt,

no different from the rage of those who scapegoat
others for childhood loss—like the homeless man
who rants unseeing from a neighbor's step,

Whores! Bitches! Why does no-one help?—
who accuse the once welcoming cottage of coldness,
beset by dragons inside their heads. Like me.

—after *Sunset*, a painting by Ralph Albert Blakelock (1847-1919)

MUD

A sixties Ferrari, faucets of gold,
a career, a book, a mountain, a God,
the children, the fathers, *the days of old*.
We sieve and we sieve,

but the rivers won't yield. And it's gumbo mud
that offers itself to rhinos and kids,
potters and wrestlers and women who rub
their faces with it.

To sifters set down on their knees, mud sings
a fragment or two of the texture of time
and the womb's watery soup that brings
a hint of the infinite,

but never enough. So life is a loop
of get and enjoy, like birds when they roll
in the dust, or the splendor we shape from our goop.
We live and we live.

And wisdom? Is slippery. As I get old,
I wonder why we pursue what we do.
We hit the wall of perception. We know—
we know as much as a fish.

THIS WAY AND THAT

Days of rain had washed the city's face.
Streets and cars, bushes and buildings shone
beneath a clean blue sky. A tangle of grass,
neon-green, leaning this way and that,
struggled, like a new-born calf, to straighten up.
Soil gleamed darkly. The old brown leaves,
spines silvery-wet, were coming alive.

Today it's grey, another kind of real,
like dirty clothes discarded on the street.
Palm trees lose their glint. Pastels pale.
A friend once told me he preferred the grey
then glared at me as if expecting sneers,
wanting them. Anger helped him feel
alive, I think. Another kind of rapture.

That was years ago. This evening's sky
is all but blue again, with racks of cloud,
white and dark. The sunset's hidden by thick
smog, a rust-red curtain, rips revealing
bits of washed-out blue that seem to offer
kindness. It's strange. How to explain this blue,
this grace? To know it. Maybe that's enough?



The dying sun's rays shining through the hanging roots of a tree. Photograph Mark Ulyseas.

Chris Mooney-Singh is an Australian-born poet, fiction writer, creative writing facilitator and filmmaker who lives in and writes about Asia. His most recent short film [Looking for Mr Gelam](#) based on his virtual world depiction of Singapore circa 1825 was released in Jan 2021.



INFINITY TRACK

Eight swaggering rosellas mount the branch.
They cuss and whistle bird obscenities.
and fidget on their perch about to launch
like silk-clad jockeys poised to race the breeze.

A swish and then they're off, an upward swirl
wheeling under the whip. The upwash arc
intelligently sweeps its vortex tail to tail
for collective push. One single mind at work

they burn a track above the square-roofed town,
wings in formation neatly pulling together,
galloping through sky furlongs that they own
and whoosh ahead to reach and round some marker

then turning write a perfect figure-eight
and land back on their branch. They have no worries.
Though they revealed infinity through flight
they're now consumed with cracking winter berries.

Chris Mooney-Singh

A PRIVATE MATTER

I know it's clear that she has gone from here
into the lupins smothering the yard
and thick paspalum clumps now closing ranks.
She let herself turn yellow as the leaves
leaving behind a half-picked apple tree.

Though seasons drag, the yard may yield fresh clues
pointing a twig the way she might have gone.
The snowy leucojums along the fence
tinkle lost songs inside their delicate bells.
A breeze now makes them shiver as if tuned
to other frequencies. Meanwhile, the tree
extends a kind of whistling invitation
and here there seems to be conspiracy
between black starlings and the copper tap.
The birds still come to bathe and spat and splash
inside the basin as if nothing happened
hereabouts at all. How unjust it seems
to be abandoned at the very edge
of listening and with such little hope
of puzzling out a why or where she went.

Try speaking to the empty apple tree,
how it stands against the storm-grey sky
as if a druid asking with both arms,
and yet you'll see this is your private matter.
No leafless tree can share its oxygen
or show its hand or hint of what might heal
the heart on high alert. What's next? What's that?
Something tumbles from the eucalypt
looming over the fence. The darkness flutters -
a fat ironic raven hits the grass
to cadge a worm and push its weight around.
Refuse the bad bird apparition now,
move, move from here. It's time to sell the house.
Departure is the only route you have.

INCIDENT AT THE BANYAN TREE

for Andrew Burton

He cycled to a glade then stopped the brakes
and saw there how a bearded banyan stood,
its girth, an old bridge pillar on the Tyne.
You don't see trees like this in England now,
he thought, and was about to go on down
when a white car bumped and farted to a halt.
An elegant sari stepped free while the driver
sat behind his wheel and lit a bidi.

Not wishing to be touristy and intrusive
he leaned way back upon his cycle saddle.
an artist already sizing up the scene,
and while she wound crimson cotton about the trunk.
He was perplexed at why indeed she'd come
with such singular purpose to this place
so well-frequented, seeing there - a trail
around the tree – the circle had been worn
through red thread acts of piety and faith,
hoping perhaps for pregnancy or its end,
or maybe she was marrying big nature
to protect herself before a human union.

No, probably her prayer was for a son
trying to win in his exam, or daughter
seeking to be wed. Her age spoke to that,
he surmised having researched customs
for his sculpture project. Like this, his mind
went on its roundabout of thinking, while
she wound her seven turns and turns of cotton.
It made him think of his last time in church
kneeling at the pew to beg for respite.
Again, the pain was back despite success:
an art career and university job,
respect from colleagues yet a lonely life
following divorce and fortnightly kids.
Alone, the artist demounted from his bike.
Could it be this simple, weaving a thread of hope?
And made his way around the tree as well.

UNFAMOUS GHAZAL

Why float unknown on a pond like this?
The lotus lives full-blown like this.

Pipal tree, you've shaded Buddhas.
Stay steady in the zone. Quote this.

The lotus bud on its green throne
reeks of royal cologne like this.

Pipal trunk, our lives ascend.
Just be a straight backbone. Note this.

Some may think pondlife is small
yet lotuses thrive full-grown like this.

Pipal, no need to touch the sun.
A lotus living alone wrote this.



Lotus, Bali. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Claudia Serea's poems and translations have been published in *Field*, *New Letters*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Puritan*, *Oxford Poetry*, and elsewhere. She is the author of six poetry collections and four chapbooks, most recently *Writing on the Walls at Night*, forthcoming from Unsolicited Press in 2022. Serea's poems have been translated in French, Italian, Russian, Arabic, and Farsi and featured in *The Writer's Almanac*. Her collection of selected poems translated into Arabic, *Tonight I'll Become a Lake into which You'll Sink*, was published in 2021. She is a founding editor of [National Translation Month](#), and she co-hosts The Red Wheelbarrow Poetry Readings.



FEET IN THE SKY

We walk the streets as if they're cracks in the ceiling
of our huge living room,

and us,
two tiny ants.

The trees hang, stiff chandeliers
in which the bright wind lights up
the North Star,
the Big Dipper,
the Hen and Chicks,
Orion's Belt,
and noisy planes landing in Newark.

The cracks in the ceiling take us to mountains
and valleys of darkness
where we seem to understand more
if we hold hands.

Look, Mom, if I turn this doorknob,
the moon opens a hatch in the floor,
and we can escape.

I just have to be careful
so my slippers don't fall.

Claudia Serea

THE MERMAID BISTRO ON THE BEACH

We sit around the simple table,
friends who didn't get together in years,
kids who don't know each other
becoming friends now.

We missed the food,
especially the beef and veggies soup
with sour cream and peppers so hot
we break a sweat
and turn gray.

We need so little to live and love.

In the distance, the sea beats its drums
and binds us closer
with green glue.

We see through each other,
our past and future selves,
laughing, eating,
repeating gestures,

white handkerchiefs that appear
and disappear in waves.

THE CEMETERY IS FULL

The eyes of the dead
bloom chicory and milkweed.

Chewed by rain and lichen,
the soldier's cheek crumbles.

The dog at his feet is intact.

A Madonna with broken arms
holds a headless baby,
and the bronze angels carry
wilted gladiolus swords.

Broken pots lean against the crosses,
holding charred incense remains
and blown off candle limbs.

Only the lilies trumpet the day.

The alleys are crowded and quiet,
and I suspect all the souls are gone.

I breathe in the pungent smoke
and line my pockets
with portulaca seeds.

AT 3 A.M., I HELD MY PARENTS

I pulled them onto my lap
and held them gently by their underarms,

balancing them on my knees,
easing their fears.

They were weightless and warm,
and I couldn't believe it:

How can my father be so light?
How can my mother, like a sparrow?

I held them for as long as I could
before they slipped away,

spread their luminous wings,
and swooshed off.

I felt starlight
sprouting on my hands.

I PACK MY SUITCASE AND TAKE THE
PLANE TO ANOTHER LIFE

Once again, I jump
into the stillness of the past.

The ripples close over my head.

I open the tall gate
to the garden with towering trees
and overgrown goldenrod.

My father sits there,
on the bench.

My mother talks with the chicken.

She picks peaches
and places them on a blue chipped plate
so wasps can drink their sweet juices.

America,
the world,
are far away.

I'm wearing small shoes again.

Daragh Byrne is an Irish poet living on Gadigal land (Sydney). He has published in The Honest Ulsterman, The Blue Nib, Crossways Literary Magazine, The Canberra Times, Live Encounters and Westerly, amongst others. In 2021, he won 2nd Place in the Allingham Poetry Prize, awarded Highly Commended in the Winchester Poetry Prize and won first prize in the inaugural Rafferty's Return Arts Festival poetry competition. He is the convener of the Sydney Poetry Lounge, a long-running open mic night. He pays his rent by writing software, which he often finds as frustrating, and satisfying, as writing poetry.



THE LAST FUNERAL

Almost a ghost himself,
he pulled on, for the last time,
his bowler; his long coat;

his polished funeral shoes,
gleaming for the graveside —
handmade in the village

from leather that was deathless.
His last-funeral-but-one,
going under himself six weeks later.

I wonder if he thought:
better make the most of it —
might never bury anyone again.

Or, resolute,
he put all that aside.
I see his fearless face

marching the hearse downtown —
never more alive,
than burying the dead.

Daragh Byrne

BOY'S NIGHT

A friend will tell me
he envies my life —
not that he regrets
his children, or wife.

I get the blame
for his willing sore head:
I tend to mine with ibuprofen,
and half the day in bed,

while he stabs his feet
on sharp plastic toys:
this is the price
of a night with the boys.

CORGI SOCIAL CLUB

Forty queen-loved, out-tongued pups by
parkland barbecues; Sunday best-dressed
shepherds loose the leads. Transplanted
old south Wales to new: Pembroke's pride
paraded: stridence of self-sameness,
almost military — beyond to regal. No
small dog sass; content in their dimension,
collared, lolling, wild whipped to whimsy.
Domesticated animal, and best friend.

A MERRY JEST

Charles Soulacroix, Art Gallery of New South Wales

What strikes you first is the twist
of her body away from his;
her grimace that seems to say
shouldn't have gone there, mate.

Though her toes point toward him,
and her elbow's propped easily enough
on a pillow at the same end of the settee
he's leaning over. There's a gilt tipped cane
between his satin panted thighs.

A closer look — her left hand's at rest
on a tripod side table; she angles
a little frame towards her gaze —
and you see what her face really tells:

the bit-lipped, silent refusal
of every petitioned woman
who knows she could do better.



Photograph: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d8/Joseph_Soulacroix_-_A_merry_jest_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

Emilie Collyer lives in Australia, on Wurundjeri land, where she writes poetry, plays and prose. Her writing has most recently been published in *Booth*, *The Blue Nib*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Rabbit*, *TEXT*, *Imagined Theatres*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Cordite* and *Overland*. She was the 2020 recipient of a Varuna Publishing Fellowship with Giramondo Publishing. Recent plays are *Contest*, *Dream Home* and *The Good Girl* which has had numerous international productions. Emilie's plays have won and been nominated for multiple awards including the Theatre503 International Playwriting Award (London), Queensland Premier's Drama Award, Green Room Awards, George Fairfax, Patrick White and Malcolm Robertson. Emilie is a current PhD candidate in creative writing at RMIT where she is researching contemporary feminist writing practice.



Emilie Collyer

REMEDY

a spider curled in the corner of the ceiling
guards her white sack

chimes from an ice-cream truck
move in and out of the afternoon light

in the court room drama
an actor nails her performance

just one scene Boom! she lifts the episode
she is never on Graham Norton's couch

the pumpkin roasting smells like butter
how to capture it store the comfort

a poet on Twitter says thank you
for making her book a bestseller

two of your abandoned poems begin
with the names of authors who own

posh houses featured in design magazines
as if authors should not be permitted such things

the form will not hold
it melts

there is talk of the future
about how machines

will tend to humans with care
or abandon them in pens and lots

continued overleaf...

REMEDY *...contd*

how their tongues will be thick
trying to explain their value

but nobody
will remember why

even small movements
make next door's dog bark

the night he ran down the street
chasing the ice cream truck

is not the same night he ran down the street
away from the man with the knife

or the night she ran after him
as he drove away

that was years ago now she only runs
every Friday to keep fit

the day she runs thirty minutes without stopping
is the same day the creepy house by the lane

suddenly has all its weeping vines cut back
as if something is breaking free

he says it's not about happiness
so much as dealing with

life's ordinary sadness
and then you pick up a book of poetry

because nothing else will do
is that a cliché? no matter

it works
blood slows and settles

it's not something you ever
would have imagined

but the way the poet strings life
is like the flat lemonade

your mother used to bring
when you were sick

little tongue licking mouth lap
cool as it trickles the throat

Eugen M. Bacon is African Australian, a computer scientist mentally re-engineered into creative writing. Her work has won, been shortlisted, longlisted or commended in national and international awards, including the Foreword Book of the Year, Bridport Prize, Copyright Agency Prize, Australian Shadows Awards, Ditmar Awards and Nommo Awards for Speculative Fiction by Africans. Her novella *Ivory's Story* was shortlisted in the British Science Fiction Association (BSFA) Awards. New releases: *Danged Black Thing*, story collection by Transit Lounge Publishing (2021), *Mage of Fools*, an Afrofuturistic dystopian novel by Meerkat Press (2022), *Chasing Whispers*, story collection by Raw Dog Screaming Press (2022). Website: eugenbacon.com / Twitter: @EugenBacon



REMEMBRANCE

Memory is clatter or a faltering of what once was.
 Politicians stand relaxed on podiums
 Flicking forked tongues that gently expose you
 To the venom of difficult questions drowning
 In a river of what's unsaid.
 On one side of the syndrome is a shrug and a nod
 No shrink will ever fix.
 Because inside the clutter rebound
 hundreds of thousands
 millions of killings
 recyclings of shrouds, crypts
 grins for the camera
 that help no-one at all.

Ivy and parkour. Chimneys and breath.
 What signs reveal the landscape, symmetry
 Or fluttering foreshadowing scruples loss?
 Temples and marble. Clouds and grass.
 It's a photosynthesis of head dance that says
 Everywhere but here. *No exit.*
 As you fall in a perfect catapult
 From clouds into a briefcase
 all you can think is
 what signs
 do children
 and pigeons read
 that you missed?

Eugen Bacon

STARVED OF MEAT

i skin my wallet day by day sticking pieces of it in interviews
notes musings blahh and a judge agrees
i dream of projections without surprises supplications
but sherlock holmes is not a puppet qwerty
so what if I check random messages on my phone as I eat

i skin my wallet for my ancestors who're unlike what people say
footnotes lanterns spears balanced between worlds
scrolling margins of a dogeared manuscript languaged in juju
between static snow lines never a roll of dice sleuthing
a lick of tide on an abandoned pier runs on zero

i skin my wallet as the taxi clocks minutes no engine running
i am a hungry river slipping in out pebbles
licking rocks to midnight whatever aw snap
my seethe at breaking point fucken car now hums downtown
snakes through traffic wrongly dressed weary what's a syrx

BEWILDERED

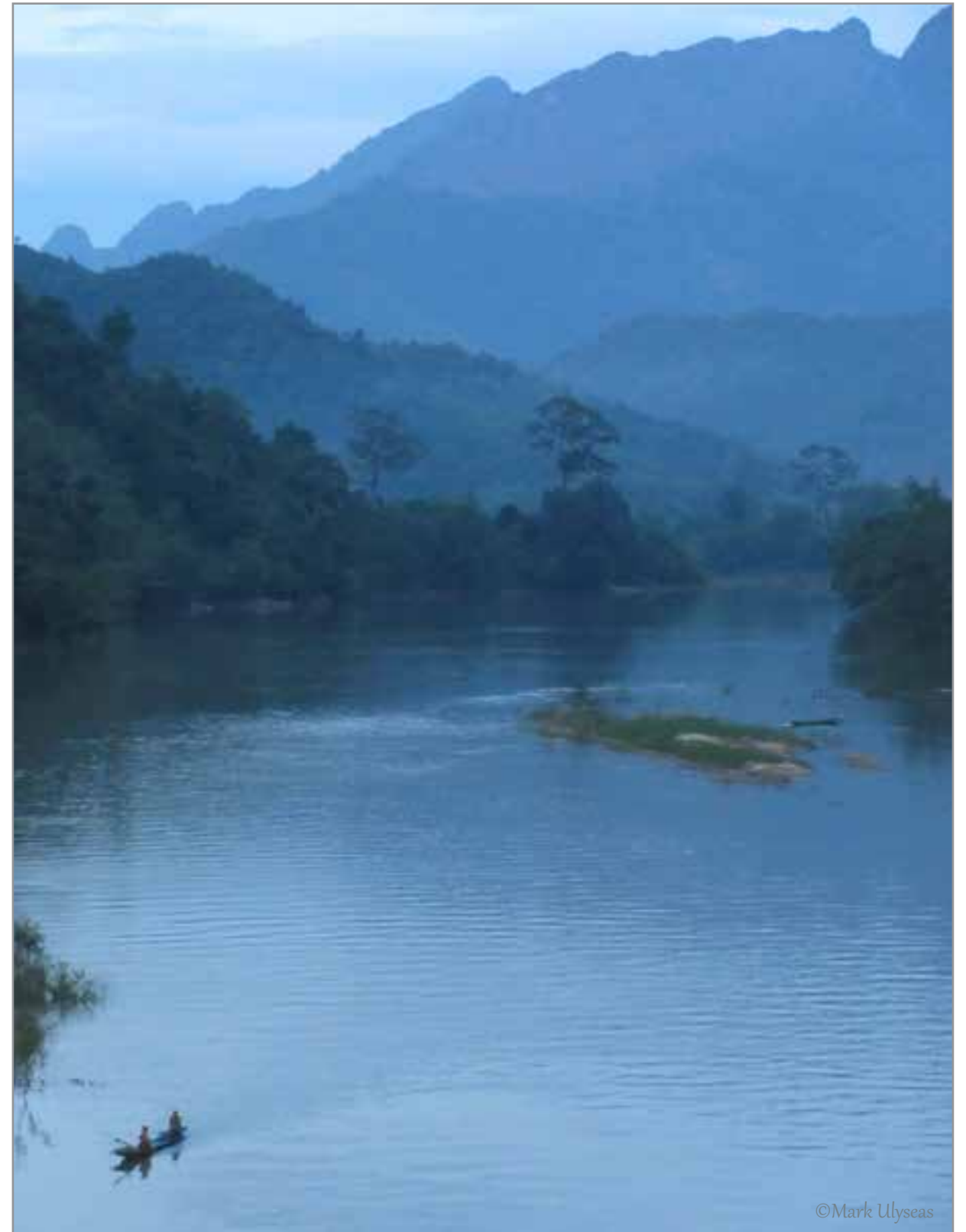
The problem is a child's heartache
Easily partitioned with a knife and fork
Into left and right ventricles.
A fiery cloth at the altar before midnight mass
Is not a sign of who or what listens.
Look.
I hold a pen in the name of a doing silence
Whose patience welds lifetimes and regrets.

THE RIVER IS CHANGING TO FOG AND SHIVER

And summer is full of mist from the garden.
What is baptism if the church is plunging from the bearded god?
An afro-haired sky converses with a bewildered morning,
Passing on its salt and pepper wisdom just before coffee
That's 70 percent water inhabiting my body at war with itself.
The part of me that's a viaduct is carrying lost poems
Across forgotten roads and slipping waters.

Magpies *hack hack* at crows and tomcats.
We keep our distance as they hack off-key, beady-eyed.
What's wrong with them, with us?
The scene of savagery and our response to it
Is black comedy on a dirt road as
A lone cyclist trills his bell *dingly lala*
Past the stooping branches of a fat baobab tree.

A bell's ringing in my mind's archive scatters ink, splotches shadows.
The tolling's loudness is that of a megaphoned auditorium.
But all I want is a crayon and a napkin so I can
Write dreams, dragons and memes that index the archive
Scribed on steep mountains, empty cities filled with hands-free people.
Sometimes I see columns of water obscured with pruned elephants.
And they are closing the distance between waking and vanishing me.



©Mark Ulyseas

Nam (river) Ou, north Laos. Photograph Mark Ulyseas.

Gail Ingram writes from the Port Hills of Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand and is author of *Contents Under Pressure* (Pūkeko Publications 2019) and editor of two poetry anthologies including *The Unnecessary Invention of Punctuation* (NZPS 2018). Her work has been published in *Poetry New Zealand*, *Landfall*, *Atlanta Review*, *Blue Nib*, *Cordite*, *Fib Review*, *Barren Magazine* among others. Awards include winning the Caselberg (2019) and New Zealand Poetry Society (2016) poetry prizes, and placed in Poets Meet Politics (2018) prize. In fiction, awards include runner up Flash Fiction Day NZ Micro Madness, shortlist for Fish Short Prize, and nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She is editor of NZ Poetry Society's *a fine line*, a poetry editor for *takahē* magazine and a short-fiction editor for *Flash Frontier: An Adventure in Short Fiction*. She teaches at Write On School for Young Writers and holds a Master of Creative Writing. <https://www.theseventhletter.nz/>



YOUTH ON THE TRACKS

no, not the ones in her arms this one is different
 she's on the rails stopping the train-wreck
 of authority and their concerns over dirty
 money running on time but stay
 under cover with their sneak words *these youths*
recklessly endanger themselves
 as though coal for a government
 who've declared *emergency* isn't reckless enough
 and her mum isn't worried for her future

Gail Ingram

CHOOSING A NAME

a name is an ill-stuck label
tiny yet glaring on a messy body
of disintegrating edges into the particle
sea of tussock or blood
where you landed, like
how does gail stick to me, meaning joy
of a father, like see him holding
the baby and bottle, it means
Nor-Wester, or a gust blown up
from Antarctica, sometimes a cantankerous thing
with the flu or an inferiority complex
my birth mother whispered over me
samantha somebody
from the sixties, a happy witch
with a twitchy nose
I'm rather fond of
though I've not become
I mean, if I could choose
like the schoolers these days do
changing their names with a ferocity of
flourish from olivia and macey
to crow spelled with a
'q' for queen, or raven or dante what
would I choose? certainly
not eve nor felicity

I'm not that good
or old, so not elsbeth
nor agnes nor louise
for sound, not crystal
not kate with overtones
of some fixed system
I think I might fit
something intellectual and flighty
perhaps
serafina
like a wish
like a fluttering
like did-you-see-her?

ALIEN IN DAYLIGHT

Wahu, Rosy Sundew, Drosera spathulate

Corona-like, with their sun-ray leaves, miniature spoons catching droplets – lethal for tiny lives in other worlds. Hot as a fever in summer, like the vermillion flush of your cheeks. Time to slip off the singlet under your shirt, rub glaucous sun-cream along your arms. As you step off the path across the black mud, you must avoid stabbing your thin skin on the twisted branches of small bushes – branches with ill ends, unfailingly sharp, like rotted teeth. Why your interest in these alien creatures beneath you? Your camera will drop from your hand. A soft thud on the cushion uniflorus. You will stop again. Your focus might be better for this one. The light not as bright. Here they are a cluster of red burrs at your feet, crazy-waving arms from spatula-suns on your screen, oozing sweet secretions to choke their victims, slowly. I'll tell you something: I like their sly beauty, secret viciousness, their ability to hide in full sight.



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Gayelene Carbis is an Australian/Chinese/Cornish/Irish writer who lives in Melbourne on unceded lands of the Boonwurrung people. Gayelene's first book of poetry, *Anecdotal Evidence* (Five Islands Press) was awarded Finalist–International Book Awards (2019). She won the My Brother Jack Poetry Award (2020); and was Finalist/Highly Commended/ Commended in Bruce Dawe, Woorilla, Ada Cambridge and Yeats Poetry Prizes. Gayelene was recently awarded Second Prize–Newcastle Poetry Award and Highly Commended in the My Brother Jack Poetry Award. She is currently a Finalist in the Microflix Festival Award. Gayelene has been shortlisted/awarded numerous poetry and short story prizes, including: Montreal Poetry Prize; and Fish Poetry and Memoir Prizes (Ireland). She has read her work widely in Australia and overseas, including Oxford, New York, and Canada (Poetry Residency/ Scholarship). Gayelene teaches Creative Writing; is Writer-in-Residence; and mentor/manuscript assessor. Gayelene's forthcoming book of poetry, *Girl, Horse, River*, will be published by Puncher and Wattmann in 2022.

PERI PERI

Living with you is like living at Nando's.
There are chicken bones on the floorboards,
tiny twigs I refuse to sweep up.

I baulk at them, as if they are alien
things, or beneath me. Your orange sauces
stain the carpet, the bench. I spend half an hour

rubbing out orange. The smell of fried
chicken and red hot spice hits me when
I come home at night, when I make

toast in the morning. I think your parents
should pay rent to me not the landlord.
I'm the one dealing with your stains,

your sauces; your obliviousness to your
environment. You think money can cover
everything – marks be removed, carpet replaced.

You haven't learnt yet the price you pay
for all the damage you cause.

Gayelene Carbis

ERRAND

again she hit me over the head with the wrong rice

the plastic container thwacked hard as if
its sides might split and bamboo shoots spring
out, like snakes from a Medusa's head

the peas jumped around, giant marbles
juggled in a trembling hand trying to beat
a school champion or the kid next door

in her kitchen
with its paint peeling
and bits and pieces of plaster

falling down around us
(and my father a solid plasterer,
a builder who never built us a house)

my tears silently fell on the cold lino
it was as if I could feel that coldness
in my frozen feet

all those days and nights of knocking
on dad's head
raps ringing out as if it was wood

are you all there?
she could never get through, she said
there was nobody there

my cousin Kathy laughed out loud
at things that never happened
in her house

I kissed Kathy hard
when she went home
and made sure it hurt

MY LOVER'S IN BUSINESS AND OUT MOST NIGHTS

my friends say he's a phantom. i've made him up. he doesn't exist.
they look for signs and find none. i take up every space.
paraphernalia spreads itself around this house like an insidious
smoke that creeps under doors and sends him running into
the street for air. my ex says *if i lived with you, i wouldn't be
coming home midnight or ten or eleven – i'd be with you.
do you ever see him?* he says hoping but already shaking
his head oh no, *i'd be here with you* he says with such devotion
i think he forgets those nights he pushed me out the door took
my keys my money my clothes and me running to my mother or
neighbor knowing they'd be home, they're in most nights. 6am,
7, the lover's out the door. days, nights pass where i don't see him.
we miss each other mornings. he's gone by the time i'm up.
my light's switched off and so am i by the time he's back.
i hear his key in the door and lie there wondering where he's been.
i leave post-it-notes in the kitchen, letters, send emails and he's
surprised, sounds shocked *you write me emails every day!* i get
incredulity at the notes, my voice goes high as i cry *well you're
never here!* another time i ask if he can tell me when he might be
in or out. he says he's not checking into a hotel but i say isn't
that how you *live*. like this house is not a home but a *hotel?*
we are strangers sharing this place. sometimes a bed. a shoulder.
our bodies but seldom our selves. if i'd known he lived like this
i wouldn't be living like this. no one told me living with a lover
could be so lonely.

FAITH

I tell my friend Faith

an academic I'd written to
looking for work a few months ago
emailed me, offering me some work.
Marking. Before he mentioned
the marking, he told me
he'd remembered me
contacting him looking for work
some time back
and that he hadn't mentioned it
but he'd known my name
before he'd heard
from me. He'd read one of my stories,
one that had been shortlisted
for a major short story prize. He told me
he'd loved my story and he'd entered
a story himself. He spoke deprecatingly
of his own work, and highly of mine.

I told my friend Faith, excited,
that I'd been offered work marking
but what meant much more to me
than the work or even the money was
the fact that this man had read my story
and liked it. Read it all those years ago when
Australian Book Review had published it.
And remembered it! Recognised my name!

'He googled you,' said Faith.

Gillian Swain is from Lake Macquarie, living in East Maitland NSW. Gillian's first poetry collection is "My Skin its own Sky" (Flying Islands Press 2019) following the chap-book "Sang Up" (Picaro Press, 2001). She has poems published in various anthologies and journals, including 'Poetry For The Planet: An Anthology of Imagined Futures' (2021, Littoria Press), 'What we Carry: Poetry on childbearing' (2021, Recent Works Press), 'Burrow' (Old Water Rat Publishing, v1&2), and 'Live Encounters Poetry & Writing: Special Australia-New Zealand edition' (May, 2021). Gillian is involved in running various poetry events and is the Co-Director and Poetry Curator of for the Indie Writers Festival 'IF Maitland'.



ALL THE WATER IS SALT

And when I crest
 plumage a wave of new
 the sand is ready for the
 crash the land the tumble
 the hit is harder than I plan for
 there is blood
 the day slows gets longer it's all
 steam and tears down here
 I am all the water
 is salt makes you float I
 am full ocean
 prism of move of light
 and shift it is cold and hot and
 rush with water is
 safe it's the way colour is made
 synesthesia drinks
 the roll the radiate the
 spread out of all
 is well

Gillian Swain

MIXED WEATHER

Morning slips into its coma,
birdsong and parrot shriek of another world
the one that has wings.

Poems I read as ritual to a new day
tug at the idea that I needn't rush to the jobs
which wait.

The overcast relief of a cool
change is all the reason I need
to get moving.

Tomorrow will drag
in a forty-degree day
and birds will float
on the convection of summer.

TIME SIGNATURE

The flaws huddle across my skin
tangle and furrow.
You touch the crepe of this story.

A day is a junket of exposure
at public expense.
Avert your gaze,
the ramifications
of such carelessness
remain unknown.

And still this is but the edge of me.
I take the landlocked fault lines
around the states of many mind maps
scrawling disclosure
sprawling mishaps
and a world of over-stretch.

This body of work
cartography of time
and no amount of calligraphy
seems to help.
Still wrinkled.

Press again
you'll leave your mark,
there's no more
give.

SEASONAL YIELD

They huddle in packs under winter trees
athirst for departure.
No one anticipates the change.

Iced-wind tastes of fruit not yet on the limb
leaves lick light with promise.
Parents usher small people,
bus heaves heavy with bags and essentials.
Older kids fill the air with woodwind, song
ripe with knowing.
Harmonies of past adventure
settle deep in the new harvest
of chill-cheeked campers,
the rhythm of waiting drums the morning.

Scrub of peach sunrise
skins the black line of mountains.
They will go there today.
They will visit the places where nothing is smooth
will pitch tents with nimble fingers.
They will go where memories
speak through hard-packed earth,
where tufted grass is readying
to hold firm under pushed feet,
where slight hands grip encouraging branches
and arms stretch out, where
voices meet the hush of the bush
with whispered glee.

For the next few days
colour will weave into the kernel of them,
cures of the ancients will curl through tendons,
tie new sinew to stem, roots to bone.
The shape of themselves felted to the landscape,
in the wild they will make
no apology.

The classes staying behind ring the road
herald their leaving,
the voices of many ages
sing them on.
The travellers are keen and fizzing
packed with excitement to gift
to the untamed.

A shack of parents chorus
the deep sigh of letting go,
this farewell is surrender.

When they return
they'll seem like the same kids, ruddy
and exhausted with happiness.
Grateful families might
look close
read well the embrace of homecoming,
know they hold new children.
The soul of the unbroken awake
the poetry of wildness alive in them.

Gordon Meade is a Scottish poet based in the East Neuk of Fife. His tenth collection, *Zoospeak*, a collaboration between himself and the Canadian photographer and animal activist, Jo-Anne McArthur, was published by Enthusiastic Press in London in 2020. His next collection, *In Transit*, is due to be published towards the end of 2021, also with Enthusiastic Press.



THE TRAIN NOT STANDING

Overnight, May has turned into November.
The blue skies of yesterday are now a gathering
grey. All the blossom on the cherry trees has been
blown away, leaving only the leaves which,
despite the fact that it is almost Summer, find
themselves hanging on for dear life.

Our dog has hunkered down into her day
bed and is sleeping while I, seated in my favourite
chair, am watching a mini-tempest developing outside.
A train of local jackdaws are playing catch me
if you can up and down the wind's invisible corridors.
There is not a single human being in sight.

Gordon Meade

A BAT

Just when I thought
the day had nothing
left to give...

after having tried,
myself, unsuccessfully
to meditate...

after having listened
to yet another news item
on climate emergency...

after having gone
to another appointment
with my oncologist...

and after having come
home too tired to want
anything for supper...

a bat appeared
in the garden silhouetted
against the moon...

a fleeting shadow
in a landscape of silver
enveloped by clouds.

THE 2020/21 SEASON

Nothing is ever truly lost, they say.
Nobody ever really dies. It is only those
that are left behind that cry. Tell that

to the Splendid Poison Frog,
the Smooth Handfish, or the Jalpa False
Brook Salamander; all gone last year.

Whatever any of us, in the future,
might come back as, it will not be as one
of them. And they are just the tip

of the iceberg which, by the way,
are also on the way out. Reincarnation
has its own drawbacks. Ask

the European Hamster, the Golden
Bamboo Lemur, or the Tapanuli Orangutan,
all of whom are predicted to disappear

next year.

AUTUMN

The leaves on the trees are turning
red, before they start to fall. The surface
of the sea is becoming greyer, day by day.
And the skies are overcast. The days,

themselves, grow shorter by the hour.
The nights come quicker than we thought
they ever could. And the breaking of the dawn
is simpler than before. The geese are flying

overhead. The fox is sleeping in his den.
The badger is snoring in his sett. Summer is
over, and Winter yet to come. It is the season
of the rising moon and the setting of the sun.



Autumn leaf. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Hedy Habra is a poet, artist and essayist. She has authored three poetry collections, most recently, *The Taste of the Earth* (Press 53 2019), Winner of the 2020 Silver Nautilus Book Award, Honorable Mention for the Eric Hoffer Book Award, and Finalist for the Best Book Award. *Tea in Heliopolis* won the Best Book Award and *Under Brushstrokes* was finalist for the Best Book Award and the International Book Award. Her story collection, *Flying Carpets*, won the Arab American Book Award's Honorable Mention and was finalist for the Eric Hoffer Award. Her book of criticism, *Mundos alternos y artísticos en Vargas Llosa*, examines the visual aspects of the Peruvian Nobel Prize Winner narrative. A seventeen-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the net, and recipient of the Nazim Hikmet Award, her multilingual work appears in numerous journals and anthologies. <https://www.hedyhabra.com/>



BROKEN VISION

*Long graphisme maigre comme une lettre; il vient d'échapper
tout droit des bâillements des livres.*

Michel Foucault. *Les mots et les choses*.

Born in midst of shriveled
parchments,
a long emaciated silhouette,
like initials drawn by Modigliani,
still haunts Castillian plains.

A self-consecrated knight,
he set out,
eyes wide open, from a time
when water was clear, minds
pure, fruits always ripe.

His lenses broken, he returns
empty-handed:
a wise old *hidalgo* lies
in the sheets that gave birth
to his dreams, closes

his eyelids. Only death
could mend
his now opaque vision,
reunite the fragmented quicksilver
running like lost letters
on a page.

Hedy Habra

OR WHAT IF SCARS WOULD SUDDENLY BECOME TRANSLUCENT?

*"I wish that I could show you when you are lonely or in darkness the astonishing
light of your own being."
-Hafiz*

Did the Persian poet mean that it would
take a special viewer to perceive the
truth within? We were taught to hide our
sorrow, forget and store grief in drawers.

We learned to cover our imperfections
with makeup, and disappointments under
a smile. We showcased our very best
with trompe l'oeil pleated skirts.

Wouldn't the art of concealing allow
pain to grow insidiously, preventing
the mind from exploring one's rocky
shores and inner landscapes?

Page Bradley re-membered the broken
shards of a nude woman's sculpture seated
in a lotus position. At night, a light
radiates from its core through seam lines.

Each crack, a lightning. A victory.
The way Japanese kintsukuroi
mends fragments of a broken vessel
with gold. The re-pairing of shattered
tesserae expressing hurt as renewal.

And what if invisible scars reclaimed
their corporeality by being tattooed
all over the body or materialize through
translucent interstices letting light out,
revealing the archeology of pain?

COLD LIGHT SHINING OVER A STILL POND

You once opened the
walnut frame,
pulled down the heavy
pine-shaped weights
chained
to the grandfather clock,
moved the pewter hand
one full turn left
then held me in your arms.

Cold light shining over
a still pond
fills my heart with pain
when you look at me
sideways,
stare at the comfortable,
soothing darkness
of your black moccasins.

And yet, you once were
careless,
your words, schools of
silver fish, snow flakes
under moonlight,
weaving labyrinths,
you forgot your books in the
back of my car,
forgot your gloves.

THE WAY A FLOCK OF BIRDS IMPROVISES

To Rosemary

She marks the calendar every day
now, believes we should live life
as a miracle.
No one notices the difference
in her chest.
She reminds me, smiling,
You once said
I was flat as an ironing board.

I wonder if we should live love
as a miracle,
when your lover slips into a coat of mail
of indifference,
when his eyes only reflect an inward vision,
when your heartbeat espouses his,
the way healthy people
grow unaware
of their own pulse.

Then take every moment,
imperfect as it seems,
its dissonant echo,
transforming it into a score
the way a flock of birds improvises,
over barbed wires.

Helen Dempsey from Rush, Co. Dublin has had poems published in anthologies, magazines, online, local radio, poetry readings and open mic sessions. She won Fingal Libraries' Poetry Day competition 2018 and 2021; a commended and highly commended award in the Jonathan Swift Poetry Competition 2017 and was shortlisted for the Bridport prize in 2018. Most recently her poems have been appeared in *Live Encounters*, *A New Ulster* and the Irish Chair of Poetry commemorative anthology. A member of the Ardgillan Creative Writers' Group, she holds a Masters Degree in Poetry Studies from D.C.U. and is working towards her first collection.



BELONGINGS

your mother's china
wrapped up in the box
you packed it after her funeral

your library of references
rows of interests thumbed
leaves in search of meaning

postcards of places you'd been
not being a photographer
photographs of the old days
of a nameless generation
untold root stories lost

the grey jumper that smartened you up
and the baggy jeans that didn't
the guitar's forensic marks
touched by your thoughts words notes

revenue for charity shops
dispersed in misshapen plastic sacks
after the pyre has burned out

later the dust will settle.

Helen Dempsey

NOVEMBER BLUES

Another grey day. Responsibilities weigh heavily,
essays, reports, notes float through this jaded brain.
Bedded in a maroon and green cocoon soon to rise,
to struggle with alien ideas, reason, critique.
Bleak, hard-worked week.
Seek azure, aqua-marine scene.
Mind full of July twilight, ember glow
in slow-sipped wine – golden halcyon.

Cup the tannin.
Dun, tea-stained crockery mock my reverie.
Gun-metal mood shades November blues.

THE PITY OF WAR

after Dolce et Decorum Est

Her hand to his raised in fond goodbyes,
Drowned by millipedes of brown jack-boots,
Fake scoffing, sham bravado and with sighs
Promise from generals and civic suits.
But mother knows and dreads to let them go
Her first-born's fisted fingers on her thumb;
The bond that should he be alone he'll know
Two hearts beat through shell, gun, gas as they climb

Over the top, or in the trench mud wait
For a mother's touch, some warm knitted socks;
The cardboard from the box to ease his gait
In blood, or sludge, on track, or barren rocks.
The poet in the trench has pithy words.
His handful of acclaimed work - unsung hymns
Will pale in significance, seem absurd
To later sonnets and sardonic poems.

At home his scribbled thoughts take pride of place,
A mother clutches hope, a phrase, his hand.
Reads and re-reads the truth in but a trace
Between the lines of her son's 'No Man's Land'.
She yearns to cup again his care-worn cheek,
But it is fair and good he does his bit.
November will bring peace albeit weak,
Five days to go! No matter, he is hit.
The telegram to knell her son is killed
Before the postman's tap, his fate is known.
Siegfried 'tuned his notes', prized the poet's skill
'The pity of war', the phrase, Wilfred's own.

*Wilfred Owen's mother was notified of her son's death by telegram on 11th November 1918.
'The Pity of War' is a line from Owen's poem, 'Strange Meeting' found in his papers, posthumously.*

STAR STREET

after Journey of the Magi by T.S. Eliot

Consilio read Psalm one hundred and twenty two
as we ascended to Jerusalem
the buzz was quelled on the coach - this was no holiday.

The hotel was satisfactory
budget accommodation for those
on fixed incomes or grants.

A dead prawn lay on the tiled steps to the dining-room
it remained there for the duration.
I ate St. Peter's fish and was still hungry.

Car horns hooted at all hours, females could not go out alone,
there was a cockroach in the room I shared
with a stranger but we were here and we put up with it.

On the approach to Bethlehem Yahuda filled us
with facts of acts of intimidation to non-Moslems
before we entered the ghetto of the occupied territories.

On the Jewish side of the wall we changed buses and guides
under the watchtowers manned with machine guns.
It was a short drive to the hill where shepherds met angels.

The valley is barren - mined to protect the encroaching settlements.
In Manger Square, three crosses divide the church of the Nativity.
Native men hustle and harass until we cross the threshold.

A filigree star marks tradition,
smoothed by faithful fingers we crouch to touch it
but queues crush and prayers are impossible.

In the basin of sand, my lit candle falls over in a pool
of molten wax. Consilio insists we buy souvenirs
only at the Christian emporium; infidels are to be avoided.

Naifa, our guide, tells us that they named the approach
from the east, Star Street. We nod sagaciously at this nugget
but collectively exhale when we cross back to the other side.

* * *

I found the group photograph recently but
have forgotten most of their names.

My mother was buried
with her Bethlehem rosary beads.

Each year, I hang olivewood decorations
on my Christmas tree.

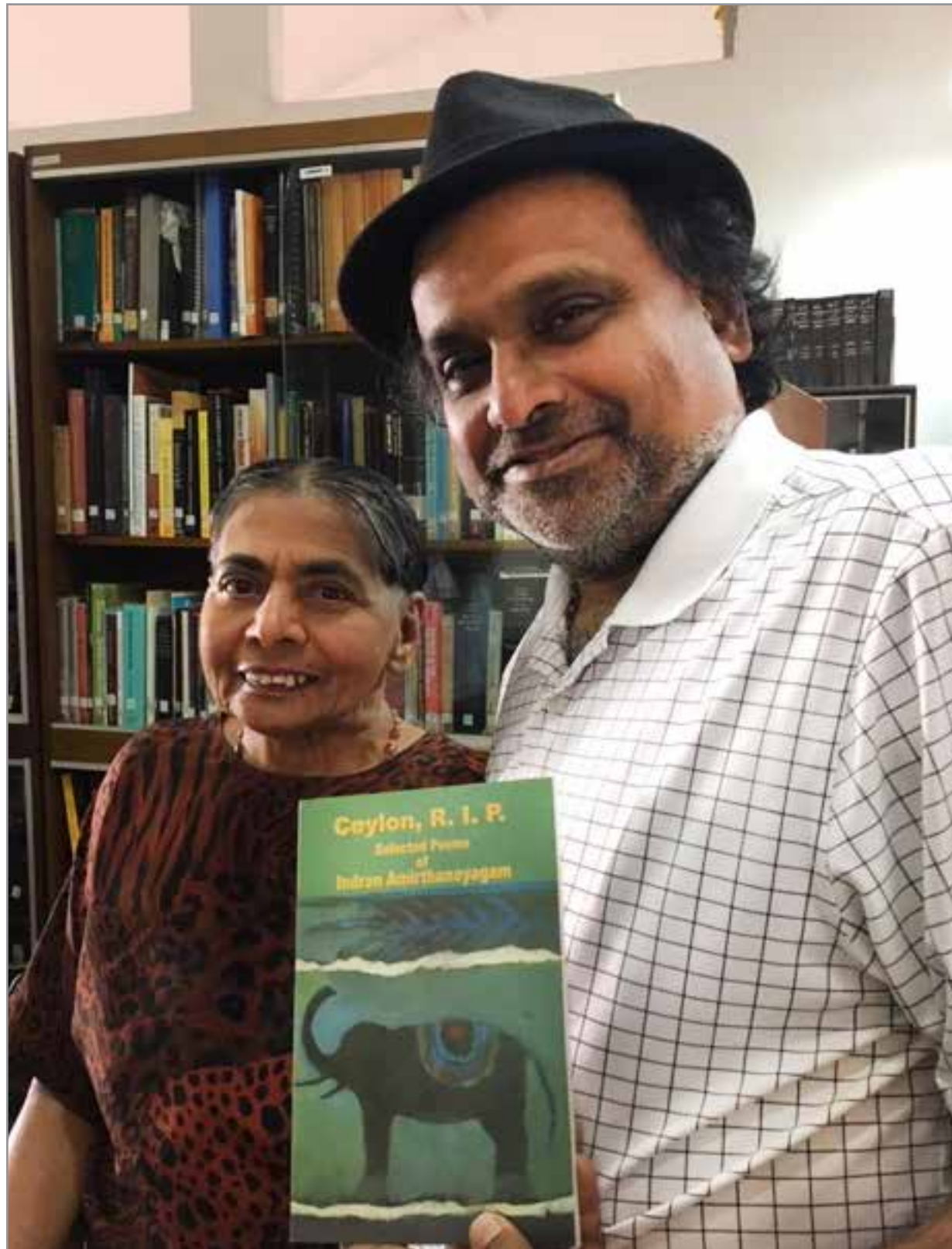
On a coach trip to Cracow we took in
Auschwitz and the Salt Mines.

In the evening, the bright light in the sky
is a super-power's space station.

The tea-time news dribbles injustices
in the Middle East.

The Truth has angles.
I change channels.

Indran Amirthanayagam (www.indranmx.com) writes in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Haitian Creole. He has published twenty poetry books, including the just-released *Blue Window* (translated by Jennifer Rathbun) (Diálogos Books), *The Migrant States* (www.hangingloosepress.com), *Coconuts on Mars*, *The Elephants of Reckoning* (winner 1994 Paterson Poetry Prize), *Uncivil War and The Splintered Face: Tsunami Poems*. In music, he recorded *Rankont Dout*. He edits the Beltway Poetry Quarterly (www.beltwaypoetry.com); curates www.ablucionistas.com; writes <https://indranamirthanayagam.blogspot.com>; co-directs Poets & Writers Studio International, writes a weekly poem for Haiti en Marche and El Acento; has received fellowships from the Foundation for the Contemporary Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, The US/Mexico Fund for Culture, the Macdowell Colony. He is a 2021 Emergent Seed grant winner. Hosts *The Poetry Channel* <https://youtube.com/user/indranam>. New books, including *10,000 Steps Against The Tyrant*, *Powèt nan po la* (Poet of the Port) and *Isleño*, will be published in late 2021 and early 2022.



499...

the number on my hand,
the ones subscribed,
the in-set, the blessed,
the wise, 499 men, women,
children, LGBTQ & I,
on line, at windows,
in my mind, I ask you
humbly to consider
becoming number 500
and then going ahead,
getting the village involved,
hearing, writing, healing
with poems; for more than
four decades I have drafted
verses, in exercise books,
on napkins, via typewriters,
then computers and smart
phones, with eyes on the rear-
view mirror and straight
ahead, driving the poetry bus,
car, bicycle, train, not yet
an aeroplane. Will you join
me now and until the next
shedding of skin, trans-
formation into stone, water,
wind, ash, a bag of bones
but lines still unfurling
their flags? Will you ride
with me into five hundred,
and beyond?

Indran Amirthanayagam, with my mother Indrani.

ODE TO TEACHING NERUDA

to my students

There is
nothing
as rich
as exploring
depths
and edges,
leaping
out at low
tide to where
you give
me the chance
to drive
a steam engine
again, to rock
on a horse,
to walk
the stark
beach
in the
remote

South
as if
it is
my private
stretch
of sand
and rocks,
to resolve
dilemmas
of becoming
a man,
a woman,
going abroad
coming back
to where
origins
greet me
bracken
water, algae,
mollusks,
sea songs.

WRITING THE RETURN

I will return, willy nilly, nilly willy, I will see
your eyes before the screen explodes, open
and shut your mailbox, dance a jig, chicken

head chopped off in the front garden, in the back
yard. I will return even straitened, wizened, girth
larger than a dish, stumbling into light after

wearing shades through the night. I will return,
to the African coast and drive to one, two, a dozen
villages, each with a headman, and sorcerers, cocks

and hens ready to be delivered to the visitor so he
can go back to the city and have fresh red eggs
every morning and remember other requests, water,

light, a scholarship for the school boy and now girl.
I am not assuming too much, genital mutilation
is still a practice that must be called out, stopped

by the same midwives and village elders who keep
lifting their cloaks to tradition. Blow up the practice.
Be modern yet sensitive, School families towards

light and dignity, respect. But do not let the lyric
become diatribe. Do not give up the hunt for the red
wheel-barrow, the yellow fog, the soaring swan,

but go broader, dig into the Niger, shine the Dozo's
amulets, travel North to Ouagadougou, West to Bamako,
Abidjan, the only center I have known in my peculiar

journey across the globe, gathering hens and cocks,
once almost a mongoose, but the wife then opposed,
and so life went on, won, lost, eating attieke,

braised fish, but forgetting the taste of agouti
until I get another break, a chance encounter
with a sensitive pen, beauty calling me back,

hugging across time and space, saying her clothes
are pressed, cheeks shaved, forehead powdered,
ready for my return, to open the door.

LIGHT ON THE PLAZA

We are in love, what else matters I wonder? Time,
distance, day-to day conversations with others
are no longer significant emotionally, certainly not
impediments although absence makes heart, mind
and all household pets grow fonder, letter in the box,
ping on the phone. We are in love. Even if we speak
only once every full moon, even if the campaign's
demands make home visits brief and rare, even
if death will have its say, we are in love until the back
of... and beyond, and nobody can deny what heart
and mind learn from the quickening pulse, the pilgrimage
to the old neighborhood, sharing delights in memory
splashed in coconut milk at the outdoor restaurant,
spring, summer, fall light opening always on the plaza.

ZANZIBAR

Zanzibar, cinnamon, cloves, pepper, traders from Arabia
stopping on the quays of Spice Islands, birthplace of
Freddie Mercury and the 2021 Nobel laureate in literature,
Abdulrazak Gurnah. Zanzibar, Black, Indian, Arab.
Zanzibar. Portugese left a light film of dust. Zanzibar.
Rulers included English colonists but the islands are independent
now, even of their native kings, setting a new agenda, not
resplendent, pushing boys and girls into exile, in search of
jobs and peace, Zanzibar like everywhere, war and coups d'états.
Zanzibar, magnet for tourists stopped now in the pandemic.
But we will return in search of spices, dhows and twenty
centuries of human settlements. Zanzibar, black coast.
Indian condiment, Arab turban and scimitar, European musket
and ledger. Zanzibar, like Earth, yesterday, tomorrow. Nobody
can stop boats coming or going; nobody can tell Zanzibar
to halt: do not cross the water. Do not fill the imagination.
Zanzibar, three syllables, magic potion, purveyor of spices,
coral houses on the beach, calm trade winds.

Irina Frolova is a Russian-Australian poet who lives with her three children and two fur babies on the Awabakal land in NSW. She has a degree in philology from Moscow City Pedagogical University and is currently studying psychology at Deakin University. Her work has appeared in *Not Very Quiet*, *Australian Poetry Collaboration*, *Baby Teeth Journal*, *Rochford Street Review*, *The Blue Nib*, *The Australian Multilingual Writing Project*, and *Live Encounters*, as well as various anthologies. Irina's poetry speaks to the experience of immigration and a search for belonging. Her first collection of poetry *Far and Wild* was released by Flying Island Books in January, 2021. When she is not smelling wildflowers in the bush, you can find Irina on Facebook @irinafrolovapoet.



THE NATURE OF WONDER

When I woke up
to an autumnal morning
at the height of spring,
the grey face of day
looked through the window.
Checking the forecast, I resented
bad weather for my birthday week,
atypical for my new
southern hemisphere birthday season.
The cold brush of air on my cheek,
fresh and familiar -
I didn't feel it coming,
this gift.
So, this was why
the red bells of the Flame Tree
glistened with droplets,
rang in the matt sky.
It's what the pulse of rain
on my roof raced to tell me.
There is a soothing sweetness,
a sigh of wonder
in nature's rhythms,
listen!

Irina Frolova

LOCUS COERULEUS, THE BLUE PLACE

1.

we carry the blue
 under the skin
 beneath bone
a treasure
 a mystery
 a sharpness
deep in the soft
 in the wake
 of fear

2.

whenever I think of us
 two
 I sink
mind flooded
 with dark
 blue
you
 said you'd be there
 no matter what
through
 anything with me
 anything
but this
 who
 knew?

3.

night flew
 silver-haired
 dark-eyed
stark nude
 sickle in hand
 carving
stars
 out of the deep
 blue

METEL*

Where do you pour bitterness?
 Into the ever-blue sky
over the evergreen trees
 that stand unstirred
adorning this tame
 carousel of seasons?
How can you miss
 the bare skeletons of forests,
their frozen fingers stretched
 up in the air
as if in prayer
 or disbelief,
loved only by a murder
 of crows rattling
branch to branch,
 cheering the crack
of winter's whip;
 Metel'
feeling you up,
 sticking her cold wet
tongue down your throat,
 sweeping through you,
breath and bones,
 leaving the bitter
love bite
 you cover up in public
only to let your fingers
 linger on it
in solitary lust?

*Metel – the Russian for 'blizzard'.



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Leaf play. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Jane Frank's latest chapbook is *WIDE RIVER* (Calanthe Press, 2020). Her poems have appeared most recently in *Westerly*, *Plumwood Mountain*, *StylusLit*, *Shearsman*, *Burrow*, *Meridian*, *Grieve* vol 9 (Hunter Writers Centre, 2021), *Not Very Quiet: The Anthology* (Recent Work Press, 2021) and *Poetry for the Planet* (Litoria Press, 2021). She was recently shortlisted for both The Newcastle Poetry Prize 2021 and Takaha's Monica Taylor Poetry Prize 2021. In March this year, Jane was a Feature Poet at StAnza International Poetry Festival (St. Andrews, Scotland). Her inspiration for poems comes from discovering the surreal in the everyday, interest and earlier qualifications in art history, the landscapes of childhood, wise things her children say that stop her in her tracks, and time spent by the sea. Originally from the Fraser Coast region of Queensland, Jane now lives in Brisbane and teaches creative writing at Griffith University. Read more of her work at <https://www.facebook.com/JaneFrankPoet/> and <https://jane frankpoetry.wordpress.com/>



THE CROWS

It is a time for crows,
for complex tasks
involving hundreds of sensory
analytical neurons.

There is no sun at the beach.
The rock is slick and black,
wings tucked to its sides.

It knows what it knows,
ponders the content of its mind.
There is convolution

in the heavy drapes of cloud,
in the questions
the day asks.

In the pine trees
outside the House of Hubert
where lines of rain

fall at a perfect slant,
the crows
ritualistically mourn their dead.

Jane Frank

MORPHOMETRY

From this sepulchre
of rock with the scarring
of abstract trees
above me

I decide
that black is not a colour
of darkness

There are two trapezoids:
bank and sea

Sea: descants of blue
in ink almost-circles
foam-flecked waves
splashing high
in pale yellow dots

Bank: pale, streaked
it's selvage almost white

Sky: a rectangle
at the upper rim,
a narrow pinkish
prequel

Pier: a flat
amphibious monster
with a velvet sheen

People: a clave
scratched
on a winding path like
an ancient script
almost erased,
faces fallen
away

The afternoon:
a map of shapes with
no real need for names
everything clearer
through half-closed
eyes — and
framed

TAKING THE AUSPICES

I have walked to high ground
where the view is clear to the horizon
both ways

There is no storm in sight —
no clapping of thunder or blitzes of light

But I wait for other signs:

the clouds are fish-scaled
out towards Mount Coot-tha
where the TV towers have begun
to blink — last flakes of blue peeling
through the gaps

and there are a profusion
of pine cones
heaped at the base of this tree,

early stars pinned
on the bias,

crickets chirruping slowly
in the cooling air,

the dog pensive: lying down,
eyes locked with mine

I cannot read the pattern of birds
in the sky —
there are none —

but bats begin their flight
from the mangroves along the creek below,
sail their silent flotilla
backed by the river towards the south-west

I still cannot make up my mind,

cast lots using dry
cassia twigs

then toss them free
from my lookout templa
thumbs pressed each side to where
four parts of my skull
join together,

watch and wait for the similitude
of day crossing to night

I don't sneeze or stumble
walking home
though a grey cat flits
across a darkening garden

but when I reach my gate, sunset's
last colour is red —
I stay as it narrows to a fine
steady line

of forgiveness

AFTER A STORM

Beach turned malachite late afternoon

There was a storm last night
The rockpools were disturbed

The day before
I'd found blue periwinkles, zebra shells, limpets, mulberry whelks

Today: foam, dark rags of weed, piles of fine broken shell
the colour of aubergines

Sand mosaiced
a savage surf carving crenulations in hard wet ochre
a return to ancient chaos

And at the bend in the beach, a strange solid shape in silhouette
against the shoulder of the dune

An armchair?

*

High round back
sand encrusted in ornate quilting
rusted studs
shredded velvet oblivious of light spray

Three exhausted butterflies blown by the wind, cowering under its wings
trying to dry their own

And over its back the sea: the inexplicable: the unconscious

One lone cruise ship passing across its eyeball

*

A forest of furniture growing beneath the frazzled surface?

An aquarium of 1950s living rooms, sea creatures
gathered around their wirelesses?

Lettuces— so familiar — growing in rows
On the unperturbed sea bed?

A quiet intertidal holding together, or some kind of reprieve in evolution?

The chair's beautiful forlornness: a comfortable place to sit out
a sudden heavy scud of rain

Jena Woodhouse is a Queensland-based poet and fiction writer/ translator/ compiler/ of eleven book and chapbook publications across several genres, including six poetry titles. She spent more than a decade living and working in Greece, lured by her amateur interest in, and subsequent passion for, archaeology and mythology, reflected in many of her poems. Her most recent publications are *News from the Village: Travels in Rural Greece* (Picaro Poets, 2021), and a re-publication of her story collection, *Dreams of Flight* (Ginninderra, 2020). In recent years, she has been awarded creative residencies in Scotland (a Hawthornden Fellowship); France (CAMAC Centre d'Art); Ireland (the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Annaghmakerrig) and Greece (The Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens). Her work, which has received awards for poetry, adult fiction and children's fiction, appears in many literary journals and has thrice been shortlisted for the Montreal International Poetry Prize (2020; 2015; 2013).



WALK LIKE A WOLF

Pigalle, Paris

First time in Paris. My first night,
arriving at the wrong address,
late and travel-weary, parched,
I wondered: Can I trust the taps?
Is the water fit to drink? I asked
the *m'sieur* at the desk: If I go to buy
some bottled water, will I be attacked?
(A small hotel, it didn't have
a drink-dispenser for the guests.)

The street boasted a few red lights.
Though jetlagged, I'd observed
that fact: after all, this was Pigalle,
so what would you expect?
Walk like a wolf, don't walk like a sheep!
advised the night receptionist.

Jena Woodhouse. Photo credit: Anna Jacobson.

MISTY MORNING OUTSIDE TRIER

for Arne Lange

Something in the chemistry of rain
 elicits reminiscence. Random drops
 are messengers, lucent evanescent keys
 unsealing cells like combs of wax
 where memories are stashed away,
 to be revisited some future day,
 should circumstance permit.

This morning's sparse precipitation
 seems to carry faint imprints
 of vineyards outside Trier, one long-ago
 September day, hunched trellises emerging
 out of early mist, a clamminess
 that shrouds the road and ambushes the bus.

This was once a Roman town.
 Before the Romans, Celts lived here.
 Perhaps the rain remembers that.
 It's come today, time-traveller
 that taps persistently at vaults:
 a nimble-footed, crystal thief,
 adept at picking rusted locks
 on archives of a former life
 I'd misfiled and presumed I'd lost.

Rain dissolves resistances, stubborn
 obstacles of mind; rewinds the film
 of othertime to Trier, the Moselle, the Rhine.

AT THE ABBEY OF MONTMAJOUR

for Vincent van Gogh

I wonder if you ever climbed the corkscrew stair at Montmajour
 to look down from the tower through vertiginous, thin apertures
 separating outer walls from inner – *le mâchicoulis*?

You would have seen the old monks' cemetery of Saint Pierre,
 a plumbline from the tower to the tomb,
 from bird's-eye view to worm:

the empty shafts hewn into stone, wedge-shaped,
 as in cuneiform, that brim with stagnant rain-
 water and slimy emerald algae.

Then, if it was February, did you glance aside and see –
 ephemeral, peripheral – the first full-flowering almond tree –
 a shy and delicate young girl attending first Communion,
 effacing images of trenches, waiting to receive?

*Van Gogh produced a number of sketches and paintings
 featuring the Abbey and the adjacent landscape.*

le mâchicoulis: machicolation – architectural term denoting
 the gap between inner and outer walls, allowing a view to
 what is below.

THE FIREBIRD'S EGG

Cast a telescopic glance
back to the Earth of darker times,
before the Stone Age learned to play
with light – when distant forebears,
moved by inchoate impulses
to deify, venerated every source
of radiance, and feared the night.

Imagine, then, the advent
of an orb dilating like an eye,
a blazing gem of ice and fire
that hovered over mouths
of caves, where palaeolithic
children reached to snatch
the bauble from the sky,
and wept with disappointment
that it always hung too high.

And there was superstitious
dread – the heavens' gift,
or some dire threat, bringing woe
upon their heads? The hunters,
fingering their spears,
thinking they could bring
it down, plummeting, a fiery bird,
a trophy for their winter hearth –
an inextinguishable torch,
a source of heat, a mark of pride –
the women eyeing it with stirrings
of primeval vanity; wolves
honouring its presence
with their curdled, predatory cries.

The helix spirals in again,
tantalising earthly eyes,
watched in awe by fools,
the wise, conquistadores
and cosmic knights. Some
see it as an omen, burning
harbinger of Earth's demise,
quivering as if to taunt the waning
race of troglodytes – this pearl-
capped visitation of nocturnal
August, tinged with blood,
this firebird's egg, uniquely lustrous,
harbouring new hope of life.

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



NOTHING MORE THAN A NUMBER

if they would have a choice
they would like to die in their sleep
surrounded by those that had walked with them in love
not with their eyes wide open
their mouths printing last sounds
onto the cellular
singular existences now
nothing more than a number
friend near a phone, waiting,
a tiny cry caught in her throat
oxygen masks obscure familiar smiles
as days bleed into another
lives are taken
and in absence of funerals
and the shortage of coffins
body bags are all that remain
and what was once a mother, a father
a daughter, a son
is now nothing more than a number

Joachim Matschoss

LOCKDOWN

there is an ice cube on the kitchen floor
listening to the soft murmur of conversation
having escaped the freezer
and succumbed the ice tray
being hit hard on the stony kitchen bench
three, four cubes
old ice
someone picks the cube off the floor
washes dog hair off it in the sink
fills the glass now with water
slices a lemon and dries her hands
on the hip of her dress
placing the glass on the table
with a soft rattle
and only now she realises she's crying
because nobody came to visit her
again

SANCTUARY

when I was young, I believed
things would never change
long before I came to know that everything must
I imagined my life to come
sitting in my sanctuary
a home-made cave made from branches
arranged around a fallen tree
I dreamed of first love there
read magazines and a joke book
that my uncle had given me
he knew them all by heart
and every time he came to visit
he told the same ones, over and over –
I would come there in all seasons
when everything was stiff with frost
or on those summer days of stillness
when you could hear the wings of birds
or in the early autumn when the earth turned
and the smell of burning leaves carried on the wind
I flicked through the weary pages of my uncle's book
and wondered if it would taste funny
when two cannibals ate a clown

POLLUTION

plastic bags caught on the gusts
were victims of the summer wind
a tired bird painting circles on the sky
above the flying litter
whose sound was like rifle fire
watching rubbish for a while
I could tell the exact shape of the breeze
slapping curlicues and large figure eights
helixes and whorls and corkscrews
the city had been warned about waste
now two bags danced in one place
briefly ignoring the downdrafts
then a sudden dip, a polite curtsy
and away, away, away

MATHEMATICS

standing in front of the class
being asked to solve some idiotic problem
men in a hole digging
at a rate of a metre and a half an hour
if the square on the hypotenuse
equals the age of the mayor of Stuttgart
my mates, fear and shame, standing near me
the teacher leans on the desk
his hands hairless red lumps
white along the knuckles
'you'll never be an engineer'
'why the fuck would I want to be one?'
didn't say that aloud but so wanted to
on the way home
on a bleak winter afternoon
someone was burning leaves
and the flames reflected in the windows
it felt homely and comforting
and took the fear of maths out of me

Joe Kidd is a professional singer, songwriter, poet, and musician. During Joe's career, he has formed and fronted a number of successful bands, he has performed solo, and now he is 1/2 of the multi-award winning international folk duo, Joe Kidd & Sheila Burke. Joe has toured across North America and Western Europe. He was inducted into the Michigan Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame in 2017. In 2020, Joe published his first full book of poetry titled *The Invisible Waterhole*, a collection of spiritual and sensual verse. The enigma that is Joe Kidd, was formed on the road hitch hiking alone in America during the 1970's, then as a student of theology and church history at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit. Joe is a respected speech writer, and a music and film critic for a number of worldwide magazines and websites. Author Page <https://www.amazon.com/Joe-Kidd/e/B089QYDXSM>
Official Website <http://www.joekiddandsheilaburke.com>



A HAND THAT HURTS

a hand that hurts
a lingering pain
fingers cold and broken
an arm that reaches
for comfort in vain
to hold a word unspoken

a darkened room
a bed of nails
a long night buried in ice
an aching brow
a misery prevails
hides in its hollow device

to overcome sorrow
to gain this prize
truth to ponder its fare
even this occurrence
the dead shall rise
uncorrupted body to bear

at this moment
the sleeper awakens
turn and face the light
what real exists
what cracked and shaken
emerges from the night

transparent form
curved and jaded
never before seen
collecting thoughts
worn and faded
what has never been

oh to document
such wonder
a picture or a rhyme
to bring forth closure
from asunder
pure spark of the divine

Joe Kidd

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Sheepshead Review, Poetry Salzburg Review and Hollins Critic. Latest books, "Leaves On Pages" "Memory Outside The Head" and "Guest Of Myself" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in Ellipsis, BlueLine and International Poetry Review.



REPERTOIRE

This guitar plays blues,
love songs and airs
from lands where I'd have been born
if families hadn't moved
a hundred years before.

There is a wind chord
in the moonlit sheet music,
a reassuring sorrow to the tone,
and a guitar on my lap,
resounding notes enough
to make of anyone or anything an audience.

Some song is down
with the deep south,
another offers a nervous tongue
a different way of speaking,
and a third reaches the ears
of those families,
who once pulled up stakes
and came here
but sing along
like they're
headed on back.

John Grey

GETTING OUT OF BED

Getting out of bed
is a hell of a way to start the day
but, in my case,
it's only option.

The fog must clear.
My head needs to blossom.
If I don't look in the mirror
and prove my existence,
it could be last night for me forever.

Luckily, my legs are up to the job.
My heart hasn't shifted overnight.
I'm in the right body,
at the correct address.

As I move about the room,
nothing can halt my progress.
Not even loss, past anguish,
can prevent me descending the stairs.
I have God's special dispensation
to be both human
and in need of coffee.

How effortlessly my blood flows
through the maze.
How subtly facts return to my brain.
Ego and id are willing to wait
for that first sip of java.
But they're not desperate.
I thank them for that.

By now, I'm so far removed
from blankets and sheets,
I can contemplate putting words together,
shunting them around
until they mean what I feel.
This could even be the day
when I make a difference.
I really should get out of bed more often.

YOUR FUTURE IS AHEAD OF YOU

You're twenty-two.
 You have to get a job.
 You need to be in a relationship.
 You require a suit
 and a razor
 and lessons in how to knot a tie.
 And, most of all,
 a significant other.

You must realize
 both an appreciation for teamwork,
 and the flair
 for being alone with someone.

Your anticipation
 has to move on,
 be at its keenest
 when pressing an elevator button
 or a front door bell.

You're twenty-two.
 You're on a pilgrimage.
 Two pilgrimages, in fact.
 Money's at the end of one.
 Somebody whose name
 you don't know yet
 is at the other.

Do it right
 and you'll be in a job
 that's mind-stifling and endless,
 and with a woman
 whose hold on you
 is more half-nelson than affection.

Remember, someday you'll be twenty-three.
 That's the perfect age to quit all this.

John Robert Grogan is an Irish-Australian poet, who plays tradesperson by day and has been based in Sydney, Australia for sixteen years. Childhood in the Wicklow mountains in Ireland, time in the Mediterranean and his Australian wanderings, cultivated a curiosity and love for the natural world, and the connectivity of all things. He has had poems previously published in: Poetry for the Planet Anthology, Live Encounters: Special Edition May 2021, The Blue Nib and From Whispers to Roars literary magazine.
Find on Instagram: @jr_grogan



John Robert Grogan

KISSING NIGHTFALL

These days feel like constant belly upset.
A plague of questions searches for if we will
all get safely through. In truth I know we
won't and that is why I churn, why I yearn,
trapped inside this bountiful bubble.
Sometimes, I feel that this is the end.

Perhaps not. I always feel that way, as
we wait patiently for life to catch up
and return to what was. Who wants what was?
The great divide of misunderstanding
ourselves and this blue dot we depend upon.
We've had enough time to stand up for life.

I remember the curlew's call in their
lake-bound flight. Sturdy, hasty beats. A song
to the newborn stars and ones long since
passed. That ghostly cry is twilight kissing
nightfall, in summer childhood memories.
We, wild and free-range heather wanderers

Had it oh-so-good. Now I pray for hope,
And I am not the praying kind, but cut
of cloth of future thought, at one with the
sand, vertical kin to the shells, fallen bees,
and a washed-up bream. In time, we will find
bounty in the green of a spring born leaf,

See the wisdom of the trees, beyond our
sapling minds. Plant ourselves some hope,
real hope, to pass on to our young one's
downy ears, so they are not collateral damage,
so we can look them in the eyes and say
'No Lies, dear child, we all did what we could.'

ON THE GLASS STEPS

I fall dangerously
in and out of love,
like food trends,
soba noodles,
red-wine and red
curry, zaatar, those
custard-filled
dough balls from
Chinatown.
So deliciously
unsettled in myself,
in my being, I break
down everything
in a digestive way.
I sit on glass
littered concrete steps
surrounded by
the dead leaves
of winter, a stopping
point for aphids,
ants and some
odd arachnid.

We haven't found
any bones today
in our search for
other things, but
a likelihood remains,
and that's not often
said. There are
remnants of others'
occupancy, street
people and unhappiness,
the bottle tops and
sick tags on the wall
behind the barbed-
wire fence. Nothing's
a deterrent for
determination.

BADU

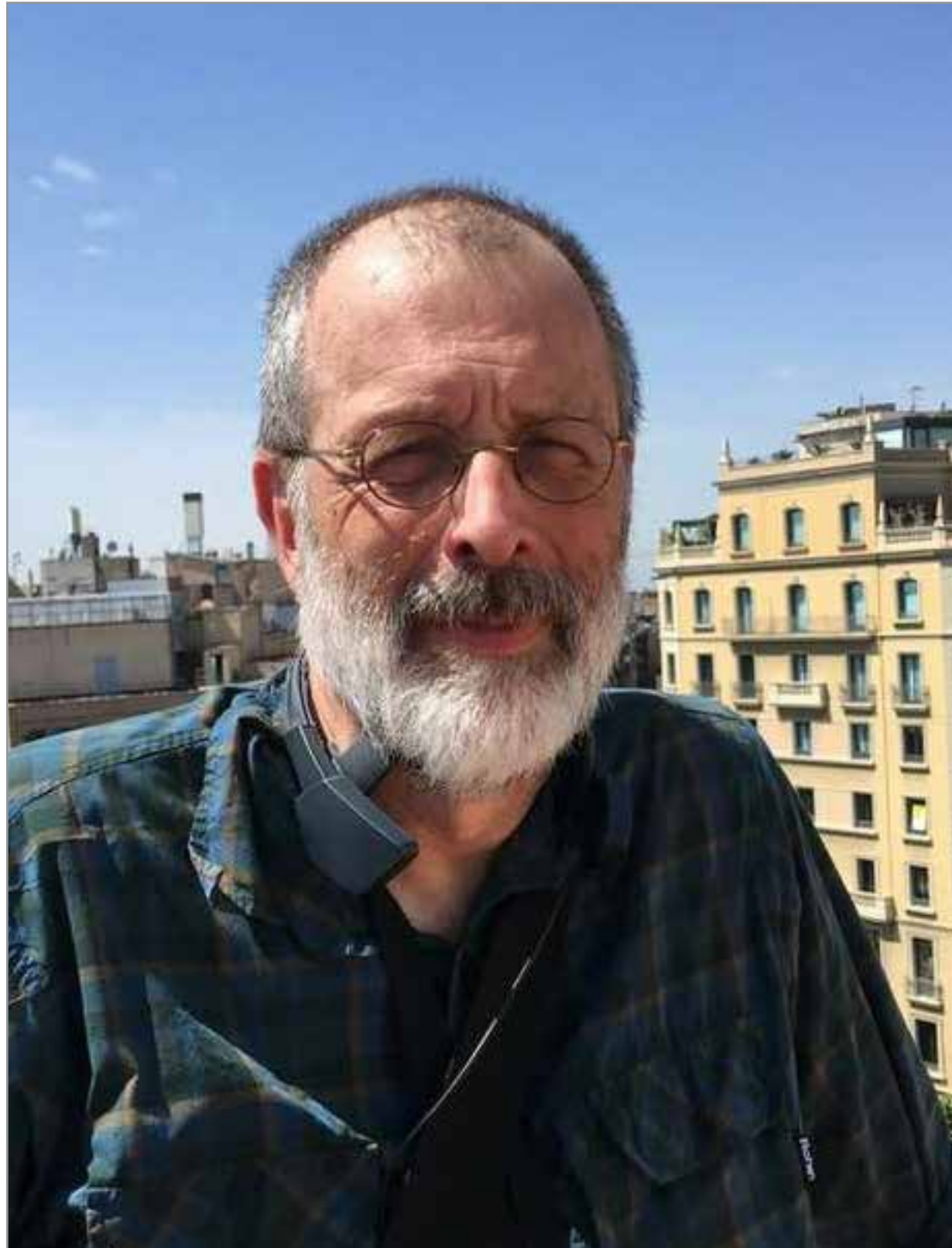
For three days the sun stood still,
appeared to at least, while I paced
back and forth in the gravity
of my disquiet. I find myself back
in the mangroves, treading softly,
to not disturb it with my presence.
Acrid air and estuary fowl, it feels
like the slowest place I know in
constant growth, and it knows full
well, I too could rot here in the
briny wastelands. A female
butcherbird glides ever closer to
look upon this foreign thing at rest.
I could be an old crow here,
beaking stump hollows in search
of defenceless juicy bodies, but not
in this lifetime. Two currawongs,
perhaps a pair, sat with me a while
and watched, and I watched them,
and we had nothing to do but preen
our feathers. They waited, in
expectation for my sombre sigh
and then flew off with it.
Time then to move on.



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Dried riverbed. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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



WYATT'S RIDDLE

... in a net I seek to hold the wind

Have you given up on Wyatt's riddle yet?
The song is the net in which you catch the wind,
The loose gown you hold after the lover has fled:

Loose-woven stuff, loose warp and weft, love's
Space between like words, loosened simile of dissimilarity,
Fallen from her shoulders. Whose, whose?

I heard the owl's pronominal questioning
Deep from the oak woods behind the house;
It was not so different from any abandoned heart's.

With that irony of reflection that is all her own,
Dear heart, how like you this, the moon let slip
A few shadowy illuminations; fierce hounds

They bounded the perimeter, then came as tame
As a fond deception to what little I had to offer them.
Take it I said. Take it from my hand.

I want nothing. I want for nothing at all.

Jordan Smith

JAZZ ON A SUMMER'S DAY

--live at Newport, 1958

I am trying to hear the heroin
In Anita O'Day's voice
As she tacks and jives
Through *Tea for Two*
(How happy life would be...)
But I don't know what I am listening for.

The racing yachts round a buoy in the harbor
A sail luffing, a lyric flurry,
As the boom swings, the sheet goes taut.
How happy,

And then, her grimace,
As if an overdue bill required
Payment, an old lover
Forgiveness.
And her shrug, refusing
Anything so easy.

Can't you see
How happy life would be.

Would be. She is amused now,
At what she has done with the syllables,
And the whitecaps, and the white
Feathers fringing
Her black hat, black dress

On a summer's day,
And the pitch
As the lovely sloops heel so finely,
Decks awash.
And with all of us, who

Haven't given up half as much
For anything.

THREE CASE STUDIES

1.

In the Café Landtmann
Three blocks from the consulting room
The patient drops four sugar cubes
In her *mélange* and leans
Heavily against the arm of her brother
Whose dream this is.

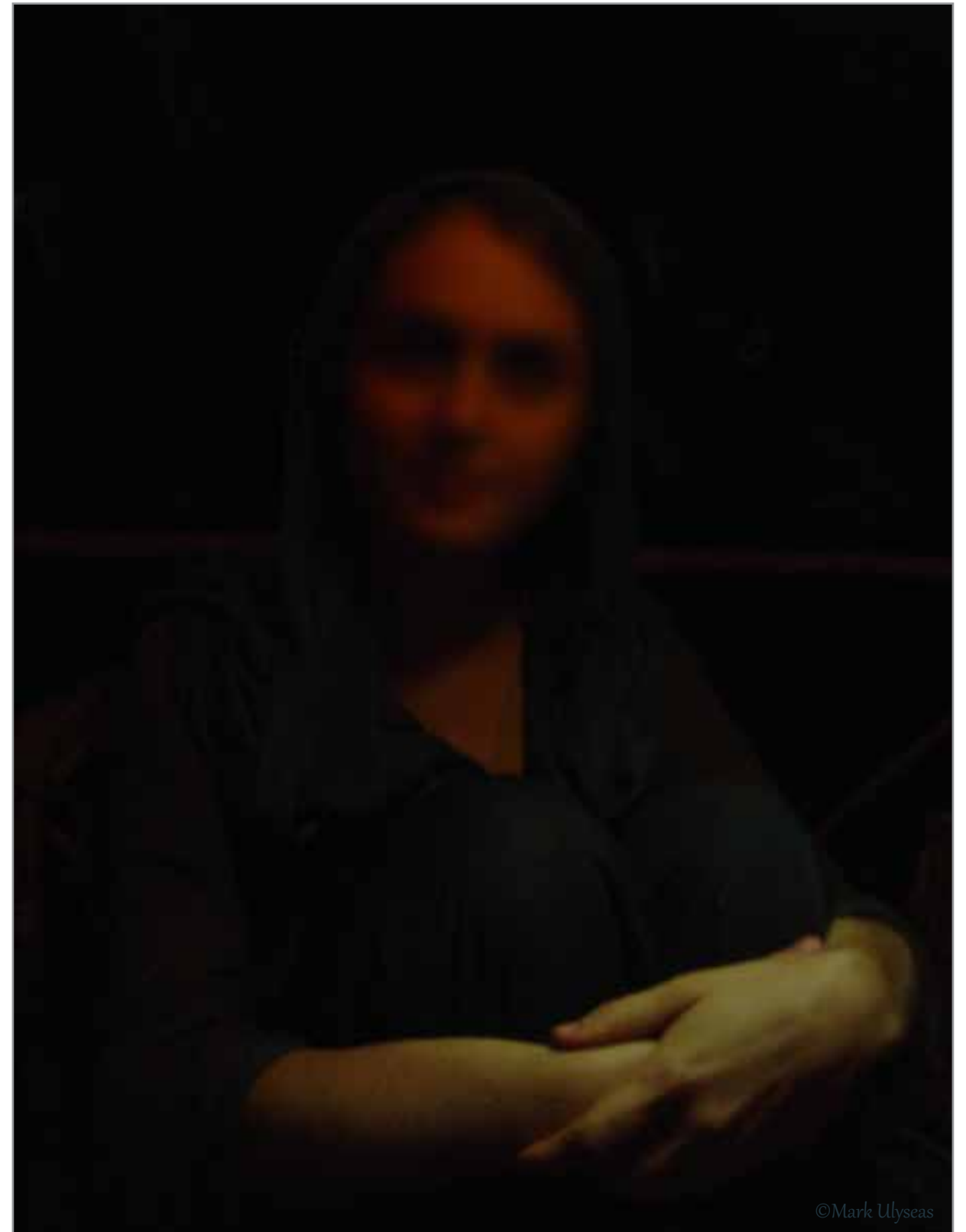
2.

He is not the Sphinx. He has just the one nature.
Not Osiris. He belongs to a different club entirely,
One which has never lost a member.
For the Eye of Horus, he can't spare a wink.

No, she thinks, he is Anubis,
Licking his own hindquarters, as swift and unselfconscious
In degradation as in pursuit.

3.

She writes this in her rose notebook.
Her sonnets are there, dwindling
As the pages give way to lists of annunciations
And of the titles of the paintings in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum*,
Each a masterwork, each, yes, a faint suggestion
Of what she will discuss at another session.



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Unknown woman sitting in a corner of a cafe with the overhead lamp highlighting her hands.
Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Julia Kaylock is a widely published poet who also occasionally writes prose. She is also an editor and publisher at litoriapress.com. Julia co-edited (with Denise O'Hagan) anthologies of poetry *Messages from the Embers: from devastation to hope* (Black Quill Press, 2020) and *Poetry for the Planet: an anthology of imagined futures* (Litoria Press, 2021). Her memoir in verse, *Child of the Clouds* was published in September 2021 (Litoria Press). Julia has worked as a career coach, counsellor, adult educator, journalist and feature writer. These days, assisting other writers to tell her story is what gets her out of bed.



ACCIDENTAL COMMITMENT

It wasn't the most romantic marriage proposal,
I'm sure you hadn't had much practice.
We were sitting in your car
at Parramatta Lake
on a lazy Sunday afternoon.

I giggled.
You looked at me and said you were serious.
I pointed out the empty spot on my right hand
that was still waiting for a friendship ring.

You asked what I was doing tomorrow.
Then you asked again:
'Will you marry me?'
I hadn't contemplated marriage.
We were so young. I hadn't even finished high school.

I said 'Yes'.

I brought this up in conversation a little while ago.
You said you had no memory of it.
My eighteen-year-old self
- who held romantic views on
just about everything -
lay bewildered and exposed
kicked by reality's sharp boot.

Julia Kaylock

AT GLENDALOUGH, COUNTY WICKLOW

Wandering, I catch sight of a rainbow's arc.
For a moment. I am a child again

—no, rather, for the first time—
my younger years were far from childlike

I wore a big person's shoes and carried
a big person's baggage; there was no time

for the frivolity of rainbow-chasing.
Just things that must be done

my mother always said there were fairies
at the bottom of the garden

and pots of gold
somewhere, at the rainbows end

but my narrow, adult/erated myopic eyes
were inconsiderate of frivolities

so now, in an enchanted forest,
I am half a world and a lifetime away

from childhood. It is time
to take off my shoes and dance.

WORDS AND FEELINGS

At some stage, maybe aged three or four,
if we are not somehow prevented,
we become attuned to our feelings;

and we start asking 'Why?'
Thus, the thirst for what we cannot yet
see, hear, taste, touch, smell, remember
becomes a quest

and life is paved with answers,
too many, often contradictory;
we weave them all into a rough
tapestry of life

At some stage, maybe aged sixty or seventy,
we discover it was not answers
that we needed to find at all,
it was ourselves.

Words get in the way
of self-discovery
until we run out of
the desire to say them.

LESSONS FOR YOUNG LADIES PART 4

Sitting in our pyjamas around the camp-fire
we drank hot Milo and sang *kum-ba-yah*
drunk on the romance of dark shadows
oblivious to the pack stealthily heading our way.

Later, the carnage.
Sleeping bags drenched, feathers flying
melted remnants of chocolate eggs and rabbits
waiting for Easter morning opening.

Our leader talked about boys being boys,
and the importance of forgiveness.
My introduction to scout shenanigans.

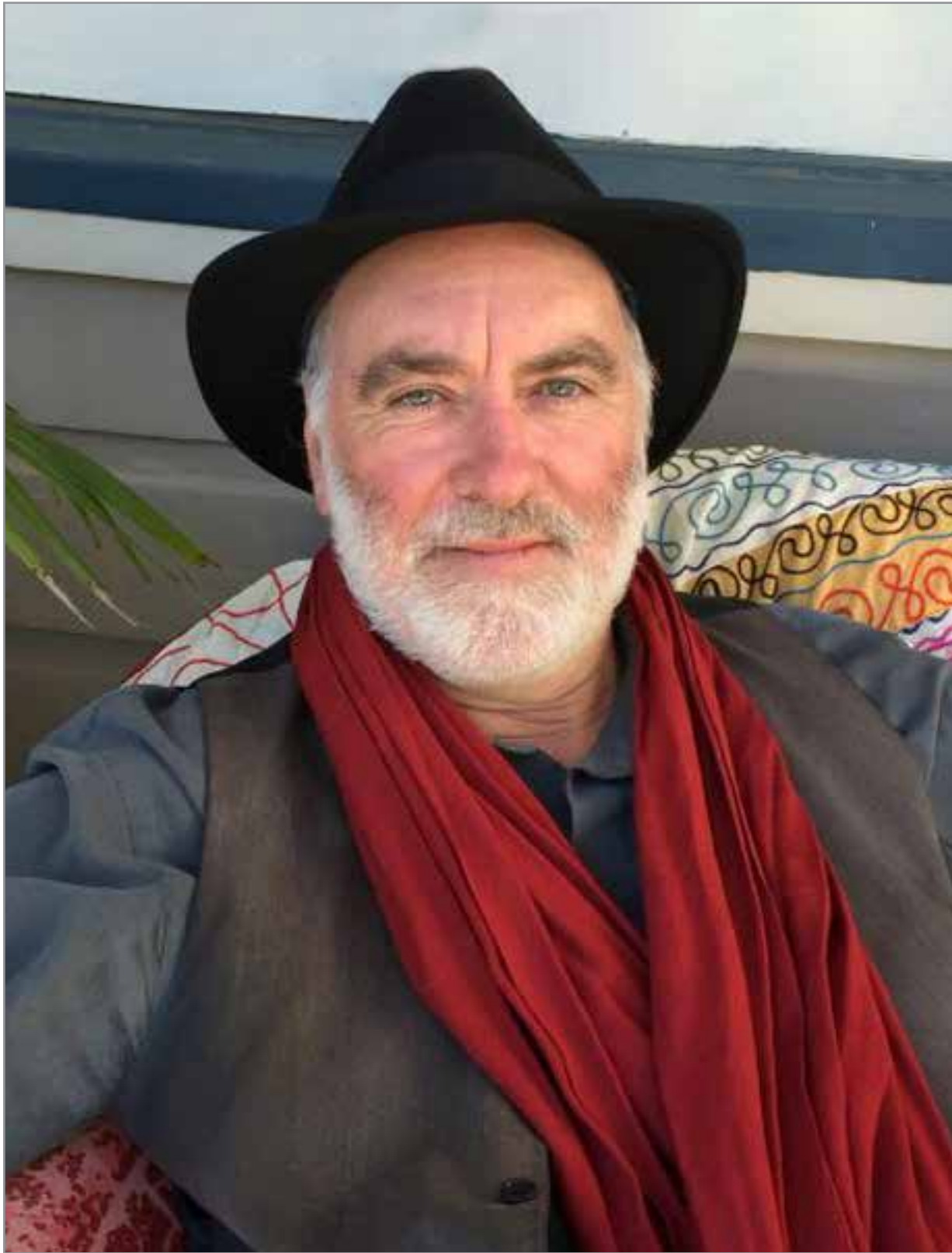
The next year, we took our revenge.
They took it badly.
Seeing young men in tears was not pretty.
Neither was our leader's disgust.

No talk of forgiveness now.
Another setback in the war against oppression.

DIAGNOSIS PENDING

We have an understanding
No need for talking—
You know me so well.
As I sit here in the cool of morning
Thinking, not thinking
We wait; it's all we can do.
Blocking out the world
We have no time for other's troubles,
I take off my slippers
And feel the moist grass curling
Around my toes.
As I look up into your branches
I remember the taste of juicy apricots
You gave me in abundance
Just two months ago—
Before I knew there was something wrong—
But I suspect you had an inkling.
And now, we sit, and wait for whatever
Is coming, wishing
For another year's harvest.

Justin Lowe lives in a house called Doug where he edits poetry blog *Bluepepper*.



THERE ARE SOUNDS

there are sounds we collect
in the shell of our ear

there are poems we keep to ourselves
because even we cannot bear

the soft change of light
the golden bars on the forest floor

that cage the timid deer;
the old photo that calls a halt to a tidy-up.

there are lines on a page
and then there are those lines on a face

that has never smiled, trench-deep,
or that has smiled too often, trench-deep.

you cup your hands over my ears
and I hear nothing but sea

the waves crashing
in each slow blink of your wine-dark eyes

and the drink in them like light catching a chandelier

Justin Lowe

THE ANCHOR

fear is the simplest, the most cost-effective,
the black gold of our craft.

anger takes some effort
a little less than sadness, a lot less than jealousy

but an effort all the same
with mixed rewards.

none are quite as elaborate
as the mousetrap of nostalgia

best set and forgotten in some dark corner of a room
the haunted forest of sepia on the mantle.

no friend, fear is a much quicker sell.

all it takes to send fear rippling
is to stand facing the wrong way in a crowded elevator

whistle "Waltzing Matilda" on a crowded bus
(fear is everywhere on the morning commute)

or better still, simply
stand and point at an empty corner of the sky:

you can stop whole cities this way

MOUNT LOFTY

there is nothing
either of us
can do about it now

toasting stars
smudged out by the city
we were talking at crossed purposes

and then came
the meteor shower
and voices and lights were lowered

for the Perseids:
that strange urge to whisper
in the presence of blind agency

knowing
that this time
in a year

we will all be moving
through the same
tiny corner of space

the happy
and the sad
the living and the dead

LIGHT ON THE HILL

through the bruised mist curling off the sump
you could just make out
a light burning in one window

it was a ruin of a place
not built high enough from the river
abandoned after each big rain

look long enough
and the light turned yellow as the fog
as though you could kill a light by looking

the light was lit
by whatever dark spirit kept the road rutted
whatever unschooled hope planted the wrong crops

at the wrong time
on the wrong side of the hill
desperate as the flickering light

so that come the furnace winds of Spring
dust pillars would rise in the eddies
like the new foundations of some ghost mansion

and the scudding clouds
would seem to catch themselves
like fat flies on a mildewed window

THE PLAINS

of La Mancha and Andalucia
of phone-tapping wheat under the dancing sun

of the Bathurst and Cumberland
the emphatic grammar of black birds in the laughing canola

the plains speak to me
with a softer metronome

than the drunken lolling of the sea

KA Rees writes poetry and short fiction. Her poems and short stories have been included by *Australian Poetry*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, in *Kill Your Darlings* New Australian Fiction anthology, by Margaret River Press, *Overland*, *Review of Australian Fiction*, *Spineless Wonders* and *Yalobusha Review*, among others. Kate was short-listed for the 2016 Judith Wright Poetry Award and she was the recipient of the 2017 Barry Hannah Prize in Fiction. She was a 2019 Varuna fellowship holder for her manuscript of short fiction and the national winner of the 2019 Joanne Burns Microlit Award. She is a participant in the 2021 Sydney Observatory residency program where she is writing a suite of poems set under the southern night sky. Kate's debut poetry collection, *Come the Bones* (Flying Island Books) was released in 2021.



AFTER

After I found out about your donation,
I would wake: blue and green flies
massing over me, sticking to my skin.

Next came scavenger beetles bumping along,
sclerotised cuticles protecting
soft wings, a violin bow inside its case.

I would peel the bud cups of gumnuts,
my side an etch of small moons
running armpit to navel, their orbits nested
in a compact of flesh.

You were the practical one, swapping water
from the go bag once every six months;
first to think of the sticky trap
behind the microwave where bodies
struggled out their final days.

It was no surprise we hid them, binning
them with the garbage.

Now you are a pathology report
in a research lab, testing conditions
of decomposition.

AFTER—a body farm—is the acronym for the Australian Facility for
Taphonomic Experimental Research

KA Rees

THE CHILDREN OF DAEDALUS

You cannot see stars from the ocean's vast
abyssal plain where anglerfish light absolute
dark with gossamer filaments creeping freezing water
for prey. You cannot see stars, the play
with faith that lead us to this point; when politicians
brought a lump of coal to parliament and said, touch it—
it will not hurtle us into the burning sun; we will not fly
like Icarus, our wings touching cirrus, weeping wax feathers
into oceans, straws of plastic freewheeling currents,
engulfed in baleens of whales and sharks; indigestible
micro-particles descending every depth of the pelagic—
to be subsumed, eventually, into sediment where material
may decay, or survive in the form of an impression:
a spectral cast of the original, once familiar and commonplace.



©Mark Ulyseas

Dragon fly on the surface of water. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Kit Willett is an Auckland-based English teacher, poet, and executive editor of the New Zealand poetry journal Tarot. His poetry has recently been included in 'This Twilight Menagerie', 'Outer Space, Inner Minds', and 'Time Capsule'.



LEST WE CELEBRATE

Over an ancient city, fly
past spires and bell-towers;
dive into a certain square:
see a mounted man sentenced
for open war. And horse, rearing,
half on foot, half-flying—frozen
as if by shock, having borne
witness to those coasts of dark
destruction. And the man, arm
outstretched, sullen blade raised
in victorious conquest,
and bright emblazonry—O!
the pride of colonial wealth.
The strength of those calves—
on both horse and man,
would they withstand
a sledgehammer? I swing
into those defined cheekbones,
and smash the marble
into a snowy dusk. I swing
again, again; tears streaming.
Children bring toboggans
and mittens, and living sapphires
appear to dance in the snow.

Kit Willett

CREATION HYMN

Creation cries with all its heart—the mild melody of the graceful meadowlark, drowned by that tendermost trickle of the cursive creek. Sing, O! ocean's flow and ebb—crash into the soft sand and form the mud that makes me. I am your product, I melt and drip from you, and praise you, universal dark and light. I splatter on and seep into the cracked clay earth, and leave my impress. I am formed in reverse. Sing, O! tealight flame—prick me with joyous burns. Creation bursts at the seams and wounds its hip and echoes along the forbidden valley where children used to burn. Sing, O! wind—dance and lift all nature with you, circle, tear, and chase, chill to the bone. I am the clouds—vaporous and inconstant, fed by the lakes, lifted by love, sustained by the will of nature. So, sing! Sing, O! creation—cry out with praise as I rain myself back to you.

TASTE THE FRUIT

I plunge my fingers deep into the baked sand;
there has never been a perfect day before this one.
Somewhere, an unseen magician sprinkles glitter
over the surface of the gently rolling ocean.

You are an echo, but you could be as gods.

I lazily watch through tinted glass, music soothing
as he bounces and frolics among the waves.
His jubilant laughter reaches my ears like a beckoning finger,
But there is a storm approaching, and I do not plan to get wet.

You could undermine everything. Fix everything.

They gather quick, the clouds. Heat sucked from the earth.
Laughter is replaced by a similar sound. Panic.
A call, and an impulse to do something rash washes over me
and I find myself under the water, lost.

You could have dominion, let the world serve you.

I swim. Fast as I can, but he seems to be caught,
drifting, further out. Beyond my reach. Gone.
Until—my fingers meet flesh, lips on salty shoulder,
tears meet in relief—we are not safe, but we are together.

You could remake the world in your image.

He names me. Like an animal. Stands over me and rises
on the crest of a wave and up. Rises into the stars and among the moon.
His eyes glow piercing white and a horde of voices speak from his lips:
I will never again be one with you. This is my world now.

A MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE

I

The fierce wind strips the tree—and leaves become dust.
A family set apart from the amber hue of stormtime encroaching,
and a mule that smells danger. People hauling sodden nets
on one knee, like digging a grave or saying evening prayers.

II

There is a town, a tower, a mountaintop, and all become dust.
A dress for dancing and hair tied up, her arm twists
as though the wind has swept all hope from her hand
and maybe she could still catch it before it leaves.

III

The waterfall comes crashing down, it too becomes dust.
The other fishers catch the eye of the woman on the rock;
she worries that all they see is her child, that she is insufficient.
She is as sufficient as the leaves and town and waterfall.

IV

The woman and her child, the dog, and the men—they become dust.
The sky turns from pale peach to baby blue before following suit,
the birds take wing and find nowhere to settle, and slowly,
like a crawl, the world, each soul and body turn to dust.

Note: based on Vernet's *A Mountain Landscape with an Approaching Storm*.

DINNER PLANS

In a cool clearing, bottled inside a warm and dry
wood, we lounge—boughs become jungle-gyms
and cascading drapes—stripped bare of everything
but our admiration for each other. The wind twists
and crests and crashes. Ah, an intruder—or guest—
I leave to prepare cannelloni. Fresh pumpkin steamed
above tomato sauce; we have no sage in the garden—
ricotta and day-old spinach blended with the pumpkin—
but there is no piping gun. With a cheeky cabernet
and an icing spatula, I stuff the mixture, deep, deep down—
I have a secret! Some wine found itself in the sauce. I lie
them down in neat rows and cover them with the secret
sauce—the outside is, of course, perfect, but the inside—
what a mess! But I bake them in a clay oven and serve them.

Laura Foley is the author of seven poetry collections. *Why I Never Finished My Dissertation* received a starred Kirkus Review and an Eric Hoffer Award. Her collection *It's This* is forthcoming from Salmon Press. Her poems have won numerous awards, and national recognition—read frequently by Garrison Keillor on *The Writers Almanac*; appearing in Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*. Her poems have appeared in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Poetry Society London*, *Crannog Magazine* (Ireland), *DMQ Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Mason Street*, *JAMA*, and many others. Her work has been included in many anthologies such as: *Poetry of Presence: An Anthology of Mindfulness Poems*, *Healing the Divide: Poems of Kindness and Connection*, and *How to Love the World: Poems of Gratitude and Hope*.



AND SO

And so to imagine it the whole world at peace
the peace I feel inside my body dissolving into hers
and outside the snow that falls
that keeps falling big fat flakes all morning
keeping us safe on our quiet hill in the snow
only the rustle and breath of our dogs in their beds
no other sight but the hills the endless trees
the white coming down from the sky the fire inside

Laura Foley

BLOOD IN THE SNOW

A glimpse of grey-brown fur—
large doe bounding into the woods—her mate's
blood steaming against ice. Boot tracks,
signs of dragging a heavy carcass through snow.

Not legal to shoot so near the road,
but no one to see the hunter step around the children's sled,
propped against a pine, so near the house.

We mourn the buck's passing, and the widowing,
the doe who stayed, as a human might,
at the place her mate was taken, before leaving,
to live alone, beneath snow-heavy limbs.

CRICKETS

on
lawn
edges
in autumn
presage
long
cold
nights
spent
eye
to eye
with
snow's
cozy
hush I no
longer
hear
thanks
to those
chirping
in
my
ears.

SYMBIOSIS

Evelyn and I
 climb the hill
 in crisp sunrise.
 I lift an oak leaf from the ground,
 crusted with first frost
 she touches, like fairy dust,
 and pockets to show her dad.
 We rest at a picnic spot,
 on wooden chairs,
 close our eyes in meditation.
Listen, I say, to the sounds
you hear with closed eyes:
fallen leaves crinkling
in autumn's morning breeze,
blackbirds squawking, unseen,
somewhere in the high pines,
wind shuffling through hemlocks—
 and, she asserts, in her thin,
 high toddler voice, clear and glad
 as a cardinal's trilling,
the chairs, listen to the chairs—
 and we do, side by side,
 with eyes closed,
 instructing each other.

TRANSMIGRATION

This morning, it was new snow,
 soft as goose down, layered on frozen depths,
 then, sitting by a window, watching chickadees' dipping flights—
 one, then another, landing lightly at the feeder.
 Then, shoveling white fluff light as wings,
 to forge a path to the driveway landing.
 Then, sledding down our steep drive—
 swooshing around the hairpin curve.
 Then, a weak sun peeking through grey,
 like a blooming flower.
 Last January, I placed the butterfly's open-winged body on a stone,
 between two cut-leaf daisies—
 but when I checked that night, body and soul were gone.
 Say he went into the stomach of a living bird,
 say this cardinal, hopping and taking off—
 I think it's just right, don't you?
 Turned into the flutter of bright red wings.

Lincoln Jaques holds a Master of Creative Writing, which centred on the noir fiction of Jean Patrick Manchette, Ted Lewis, David Goodis and Patricia Highsmith. His poetry, fiction and travel writing has appeared most recently in Tough Magazine, Noir Nation, Mother Mary Comes to Me: A Pop Culture Poetry Anthology, The Blue Nib, Mayhem, Poetry NZ Yearbook, Poetry for the Planet anthology and Blackmail Press. He was a finalist in the 2018 NZ Emerging Poets, and a Vaughan Park Residential Writer in 2021. He lives in Auckland.



DOROTHY'S DARKENED HEART

Innocent looking Dorothy ripped
the heart from the Tin Woodman

ate it blood and all and afterwards
smoked a cigarette between stained fingers

sheepish Dorothy *O Dear* poured vinegar
on the Tin Woodman's rusted joints

promised him a new heart knowing the Wizard
had already sold out of all mechanical organs

they searched the Yellow Road and found
nothing but the mute heads falling from dead

sunflowers and as she slept the Tin Woodman
stole her shadow and replaced it with a

string of garlands that turned into sepia tones
at the exact moment a crow flew into the sun.

Lincoln Jaques

RECLUSE

I was going to write you a letter
I promised I would
but I stayed in bed a little longer
than expected. Read a chapter
of Brontë. Thought about
smoking a cigarette, but I've
never smoked. Thought about
coffee, but that was too far away.
Thought about writing that letter
– I promised, didn't I?

So I'm writing it, in my head.
It's all in here. I started it:
"I'm all snug. Brontë's pacifying
Me. Send cigarettes, Love – "
It won't do though. You'll never
receive it.

But the tuis are now playing
a concerto. The seagulls fight
for a morsel somewhere
behind the old pohutukawa
that brushes up against the guttering
still simmering from last night's
rainfall.

I'll get up soon, promise.

WAKING IN AN UNKNOWN CITY

I awoke and told you how
I dreamt of walking away
from a city, the skyline of
broken metal becoming smaller.

I walked and walked,
along a curved shoreline
like the time we walked
the great scythe of the Corniche
in Doha, the city rising up behind
in silent terror.

You were still half asleep
swept up in your own dreams
the morning light not quite there yet.
I got up and opened the curtain
and there I saw the city
small and miraculous
fading away under streetlights
the purple neon cross of
Christ the Saviour, the roofs
curving like minarets, like
the Corniche in my dream.

I turned back to describe to you
the sky but already you'd walked
away into your own dream.

LOCKDOWN

In Zagreb's Old Town
there's a sculpture
of Antun Gustav Matoš

he sits legs crossed
on a bench seat I lay
my head in his lap

here in this empty Auckland
a person sits like Matoš
with no one to place

a head in their lap.

THE LAST STOP

The bus driver sits alone
the albatross of the streets
the routes he travels like small
creases in oceans
he stops when people wave
like Maneki Neko cats on counters
giving him good fortune
red lights blaze
reflect real cats' eyes hidden
in the shadows
at a bus stop
a couple walk by arms
linked in sottobraccio
the bus driver thinks of the woman
he once loved the son he gave away
wishes he could see
them on these darkened streets
maybe one day he will.

Lorraine Gibson is a retired anthropologist, writer and painter living on Birpai Country. Her poetry is published or forthcoming in *Backstory*, *Meniscus*, *Booranga fourW 32*, *Poetry for The Planet* (anthology), *Burrow*, *Live Encounters*, *WORDCITY*, *Lothlorien*, *The Galway Review* and others. Lorraine's non-fiction is published in books and journals including, *TAJA*, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* (AIATSIS), *Wellbeing and Place* (Ashgate: UK), *Oceania*, *EXPLORE* (Australian Museum) and *COOLIBAH* (Barcelona). Her book, 'We Don't Do Dots: Aboriginal Art and Culture in Wilcannia New South Wales' is published by Sean Kingston Publishing: Herefordshire, UK.



NEW-AGE MOSQUITO

Before my coffin absorbed your pain, before I hung my wisdom around your throat,
 I pulsed heat-bound — prickling with Neolithic life. Blooded and full, my belly met
 the murderous sap of breath — no more. Headlong I rushed in death with icy flume,
 lay cloistered on Cretaceous Coast amongst time's scrangly, foetid rot.
 Press me, crush me warm and firm through star bound years
 for I will rise again sequestered in my burnished amber tomb.
 Although I bleed no-more, I am still beautiful
 and insulated by your skin. I was before I am
 this mark of time, before the revolutions,
 before the Protestants and their ethics,
 before I hung in shops enshrined in silver
 offering energy
 to new-age believers.
 Before then
 I really lived.

Lorraine Gibson

NO TIME

She came suddenly. She told me I could take no-thing. Not the silky frangipani flowers sending out fruit-salad scent. Not the fresh-baked choc-chip biscuit half-way to my ready mouth. 'There is no time [she said] to grab a cappuccino to perk you up'. Not even a glass of water! What about my little ginger cat? She whispered, 'not a paw, not a whisker, not even a teensy snuffle in her fur. I glanced over at a jar of chocolate macadamias, I'd kept for watching Morse. 'Sorry, [she said] anyway, there is no television where you're going. Come now, quickly, leave the clothes you laid out for tomorrow, leave the *must have* dress you bought last week for your son's summer wedding. Your diamond rings and *very pricey* watch, your kids can deal with later when you've gone'. She made a small moue of regret, said there was no time for goodbye phone calls, hugs, or family kisses. I looked towards my garden; sad I wouldn't get to taste my heritage tomatoes plumping redly in the yard. Forget about renewing home insurance. Forget the wine, the ripened figs and Brie de Meaux I'd bought for Sunday lunch. Apparently, there is no need for money where I'm going. She smiled, 'don't worry, your memories will be unloaded soon. Hurry now. Cast off regret, your skin, your eyes, leave your breath stopped body. Death [she said] prefers not to warn her candidates'.

VILLANELLE FOR A SMALL BOY

Who should be tasked to put things right?
His parents took off on a spree one day
Culture myths accuse both black and white.

Small boy wandering through the night
Tired and hungry, just one more sad replay
Who should be tasked to put things right?

On darkened streets two coppers saw his plight
They took him to the unlocked cells to play
Culture myths accuse both black and white.

Tell FACS or rellies, or feed his appetite?
A pie, hot chips and gravy win the day
Who should be tasked to put things right?

So, who decides if cells for kids is right?
EVERYONE says SOMEONE has to pay
Culture myths accuse both black and white.

While Elvis croons of ghettos and of fights
A young boy takes off on a spree one day.
Who should be tasked to put things right?
Culture myths accuse both black and white.

*Note: Family and Community Services (FACS)
is the legislated body that governs child protection in New South Wales.*

Luciana Croci is a Newcastle-based poet and writer, whose work is published in *Animal Encounters* (Catchfire Press 2012), *Australian Novascapes*, *Speculative Fiction Anthology* (Invisible Elephant Press 2016), *Poetry Collaboration*, (Meuse Press, 2018, 2019, 2020), *The Blue Nib Literary Magazine* (Issue 41) the e-anthology *Mediterranean Odyssey*. She has a background in languages (Latin, French, Italian, German and Japanese).



DIPPING INTO THE TAO TE CHING

The way that can be spoken of as the true way is not the true way

I enter the lamasery garden
 fragrant with incense wafting
 from dragon urns cast in ancient copper
 so different from ashes of stale censers
 in the closeness of cathedrals
 where a corpse is worshipped on a cross.

I walk on bronze-leaf paths speckled
 with the last of the fallen persimmons.
 Robes glide like liquid saffron
 on a gameboard drawn by branches
 and voices chant the om of the universe.

Energy flows through wind and water,
 fills the font outside the temple
 and the bowl resting on the moss.

The Tao does not count life's imperfections
 nor weighs sins in numbers on a scale,
 it counts the way to the deity
 in haiku syllables.

Luciana Croci

AT THE PUB (A HORSE'S TALE)*

Well...if you really want to hear a story...
hhrrumph ...
Here's one about my life,
a miserable life
of a miserable orphan,
hhrrumph ...

it's about the war,
when a general,
famous he was,
though I can't remember his name,
managed to kill two horses under him,
hhrrumph ...

these two horses,
life is sad,
were my mother
and my dad, sleeping
under the general's bed.

(This was in a town
well behind enemy lines
where he'd been hiding)

He couldn't sleep,
spoke to himself all night
petty little woes, what's black and what's white...
till they dropped dead with boredom.

End of my family life.
I broke free from my bed
under the bedstand,
galloped to the Lity of Cight,
sorry, horse-speak,
to the City of Light,
you've got it, Paris,
hhrrumph ...

when I got there
they slapped me with blinkers,
harnessed me to a buggy
and there I was
mobilised,
caught in the war,
and life was dear,
dearer by the day.
Food was hard to get,
harder by the day,
people gave me strange looks,
gnashed their teeth,
called me "beefsteak",
I think it's English,
hhrrumph...

* This poem is a re-working of the poem *Histoire de cheval* by Jacques Prévert

continued overleaf...

AT THE PUB (A HORSE'S TALE)*

They patted me, looked kind,
 I knew they hoped I'd die,
 leave them a feast.
 One night in the stable,
 I heard a voice, a ghost, a whisper
 Ah ... the revenant general
 grumbling to his commander,
 "Had enough of soggy rice, I need some flesh,
 just need to dose
 the horse's food."

My heart started to pound
 my spirit swelled
 it must have been an ancient flush
 of Arab blood,
 a mustang,
 I leapt over the stile,
 bolted off into the wild.

Well, the war's long over,
 the general's dead,
 a fine death in his bed,
 I heard,
 but I'm alive.

Good evening all,
 cheers general Clive.

TAIJITU MEDITATION

a diptych
 on a linen *noren*

the *geisha's* white
 painted face
 is sunny light *yang*

her long black tresses
 pinned by lacquered combs
 a deep dark *yin*

she sits in her silks
 on a low wooden stool
 bows into the *koto*
 on her lap
 sways with the sound
 as her fingers strum

yang and yin
 waver with every movement
 unfold while they enfold
 ever balanced
 ever changing

Lynn Strongin is a Pulitzer Prize nominee in poetry. A recipient of a National Endowment Creative Writing Grant, nominated twice for Pushcart Prizes, Lynn Born in NYC at the end of the dirty thirties, she grew up in an artistic Jewish home in New York during the war. Earliest studies were in musical composition as a child and at The Manhattan School of Music. Took a BA at Hunter college, MA at Stanford University as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow. Lived in Berkeley during the vibrant sixties where she worked for Denise Lever-tov and took part in many peace demonstrations. Poems in forty anthologies, fifty journals; Poetry, New York Quarterly. Forthcoming work in *Poetry Flash* and *Otoliths*. Canada is her second home. The late Hugh Fox said Strongin is the “most exciting poet writing today.” Danielle Ofri wrote to her; “you tear the veil off that mysterious disease polio.” Strongin’s work has been translated into French and Italian. <https://the-otolith.blogspot.com>



JANUSZ KORCZAK*

Formed a children’s republic
With its own small court

Went with his children of the orphanage to the Treblinka
Gas chamber.
They had begun their own newspaper “the little review”

And had his own radio program
Where he promoted
Rights of children

When I am little again I will tell you of children of the streets fiddle faddle:
You will not love me more for being un-handicapped: but the republic will
rejoice, on its lips celebration songs small vocal chords joyous to the limits.

Lynn Strongin

**Janusz Korczak, the pen name of Henryk Goldszmit (22 July 1878 or 1879 – 7 August 1942), was a Polish Jewish educator, children’s author and pedagogue. Killed in Treblinka extermination camp.*

MY MAGICS

...have closed
Like hands over a raincoat
Drawing it tight

Head bowed
Curtains drawing.
The day after, rouge is all wrong, the dog's feathers tangle

The bird lands at our feet
The bird of happiness
Who flew here from inner courtyards, cobbled, in Poland, shoes thin as mica.
 So the book is out:
 Only object glossed in this room, darkening with lost desires, mirrors reflecting
two figures kissing.

COME

Sing me home
Come, dazzle my soul.
I am in the winter of my life. Hoarfrost covers veins, branches in my wrist.

"I am, too"
Shaking my head, I breathe,
"No you are in the autumn" I close my eyes seeing feathery leaves falling to the

Hague Philharmonica.
I do not love, cannot forgive the light
Which hooded me in my eightieth year so we are enclosed
 Like the nun-natured juncos on our porch so grey
 A puff of smoke can erase them, blow them away: eidetically they glow, so
not erased entirely.

CLOCK

No way to move that second hand
Lead en:
Amputation? Wanting first prize, always counting seconds. Cut it off?

Then how know when to wake
When to run
Ragged

Circles around the IV? Burnt-out round is fertile to step on:
The coulter counter
The Hubbard tanks?

So let them shine
Is the movement of memory: misery combines with mercy to put you
right in dream: running round about the silvers 360degrees girl you were, again.

I SLIP

My naily-toed boots on
Is my peach brought safely thru the frost spring night?
One waxes lyrical about the peach

Patching
The next critical task:
The de-budding of the shoot. I need a turntable on the bed to revolve.
My mood has become monastic,
Marginal
A snood

Without a mirror, I cannot even read my face
Just pray for grace.

M. L. Williams is author of *Game* (What Books Press) the chapbook *Other Medicines* (Redbone Chapbook Series) and co-editor of *How Much Earth: The Fresno Poets*. His work has appeared in many journals and anthologies, including *Plume*, *Salt*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Miramar*, *The Journal of Florida Studies*, *The Cortland Review*, *Live Encounters Poetry*, and *Stone, River, Sky*. He co-emcees the Poetry Stage at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books. He is currently Professor of English in creative writing and contemporary literature at Valdosta State University.



INTENTIONAL FALLACY

Explanations come to an end somewhere.

-Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1

Mockingbirds plunge headlong
into jasmine, thread longleaf
pine needles into a nest
too close to the chain-link
gate I must pass through
to clean the greening
pool. I worry that I'll worry
them once their eggs are lain,
that each shriek warning me,
each nosedive at my forehead,
will silence squawking beaks
that open and open for everything.

I mean no harm, I will think
hard at these songbirds
for whom all meaning
they can't mock is harm.

ABOVE PARK CITY

We walk slag
tails down the rise
sulfur and black
above the town
sheet metal rusts
crushers rust ore
played out the ball
peen hammer rusts
on its white
hickory bone
the poppy
a single red act
at the switchback



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Night run. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Maeve McKenna lives in rural Sligo, Ireland. Her poetry has been placed in several international poetry competitions, published in *Mslexia*, *Orbis*, *Sand Magazine*, *Culture Matters*, *Fly on the Wall*, among others and widely online. Maeve was a finalist in the Jacar Press Eavan Boland Mentorship Award, 2020, and third in the Canterbury Poet of The Year, 2021.



FRUIT BOWL

Staff keep planting capes, fake gooseberries, over corridors, against walls, stairwells, as memory. My head is watermelon, black pips irritate. Aggregate berries are busy flitting here and there, bursting eye-sockets. A grounds-man tends lime pampas, pink winter heathers, scraping his trowel over moss-infused asphalt, nails black as figs. Salted pear alpine trees and every tasteless white grape. On the nursing home's olive lawn a wrought-iron apricot table and four rusted chairs covered in tomato-red cushions (chocolate coated strawberries). Fallen green apples browning, coconut skinned. Withered raspberries, induced elderberries — bitter. Pomegranate seed spilling everywhere, everywhere! Driving away, the playlist is avocado and blackcurrants. My sister in the car ahead is banana-shaped behind lemon headlights, indicating blood-orange. Our stomachs churn acidic prunes. The body converts the pit of a chokeberry to cyanide, we discover.

Maeve McKenna

WE SHOULD HAVE NAMED HER

Dark casually adjusting her caul,
covering a head, then a face.
What name will we give her?

Soil exhales a hot poultice
of nettles, the woods unleashing
its stinging code.

Her smile is fixed under clay.
Her tooth is an exposed root.
Who will she look like?

Digging says I am colluding
with the assassin of my body.
Where can she be?

How will I live above ground,
cold as the heel inside my belly?
We should have named her.



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Floral tributes for an unborn. Photograph Mark Ulyseas.



Educationist, poet, essayist and translator, Maria A. Miraglia was born and lives in Italy. She graduated in Foreign Languages and Literatures and got a Master's Degree with the Aldo Moro University in Bari followed by a second one in Teaching of Modern Languages with the Uni3 in Rome, an HLC from the Trinity College of Edinburgh and a Certificate for Languages from the International House- London. For long an active member of Amnesty International, she is a member of the Human Rights Observatory, Deputy President of the United World Movement for Children Coordination Kenya, she herself the founder and chairwoman of World Foundation for Peace. Dr Maria Miraglia is the President of P. Neruda Cultural Association - Poetry Dpt.; honorary member of Naciones Unidas de las Letras Columbia; President of the Organizacion Mundial de Trovadores -O.M.T for Italy; she is co-editor of Contemporary Vibes- India and a member of several international editorial boards. Her poems have been translated into more than 30 languages and have found pride of place in more than 50 national and international anthologies, some of her poetry collections have been translated into Polish, Albanian, Telugu and Arabic Languages. She writes in Italian, English or both languages and is the recipient of many awards and recognitions. Recent her election as a member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts – Salzburg Among her latest poetry collections: the bilingual anthology Star Dust/ Polvere di Stelle- 2018; Confluence -2019; Tra Realtà e Sogno e Labirinto di Pensieri 2020.

A SUITCASE

Poland 1939- 1941

They only gave me twenty minutes and
told me
I could bring a suitcase with me
just one

I was afraid
but that old cardboard object
took away from me
the fear of something terrible and imminent
suggested the idea of continuity
overtime
the miserable things pressed inside
would have been needed tomorrow and
the day after again

But it didn't take long
to understand it was the offer
of a fleeting illusion
a lie
to make things easier
it would be of no use
if not to become
a silent testimony
of the occurred tragedy

Maria A Miraglia

SAY GOODBYE

It doesn't make you tremble
say goodbye to life
to the well-known paths
long crossed
to the street corners
you walked on
from child to old
and to the people met
even if careless indifferent
to the dears
that maybe didn't love you
as you wanted
so much the need for love
that every morning
you wished to see smiling eyes
for the simple fact
that they met yours

Few successes you think
you have collected
but many defeats
in what you believed more
sow and reap love
you felt like a shrewd reaper
waiting to see blooming fields
of Peace and Good
but one day a storm
the next on migratory birds
there to destroy your work

How many times bent on yourself
late at night in your room
or at sunset in front of the horizon
you felt alone
asking yourself a thousand things

How many strange things in this world
started your life with a scream
and your desire now
to pass away in silence
leave the certainty of a human being
even if in a sad world and
full of pain

your great fear
to ignore on what
will the door open
after your demise

LIFE AND DEATH

I crossed the time
among mists
cold winters
and sun-drenched mornings
observed the blue skies
where stars smiled at each other
from afar
seen flocks of birds arrive
from distant lands
and leave when the leaves
began falling down
admired red sunsets
and pearly sunrises
quickly following each other
and get lost
in the night of the time

new lives crowded
the streets of the world
like multi-coloured flowers
blooming in spring
and many petered their vital energy
like glowing candles
oblivious of their consumptions
in the very act of their burning

how many more the seasons
that will come
of how many of them
will I still admire the colours
and smell the scent
until the Angel of Death comes
and snatches me from life
it's for a long time
his journey began
since my first cry
in the welcoming arms
of my mother
but
will his step be slow
or fast will he ride his black steed

She was born in Catalonia, spent her teenage years in Chile and later settled in Ireland. She has a BA in Spanish and English literature and an MA in Anglo-Irish Literature. She has won many national and international prizes, amongst them The Hennessy Literary Award, and has been widely published in Ireland and abroad in newspapers, magazines and anthologies. She has published two bilingual poetry books, *English-Catalan: Second shadow* and *The blue of distance*. She judges poetry and prose competitions, facilitates writers groups and edits other writers' work.



SNOWFLAKES' SONG

He says he can hear the thud snowflakes make
impacting window and ground,
says it with such conviction
I haven't the heart to contradict him,
tell him sometimes I do too.

Really? Great. I can also hear them sing.
I say I'm pleased about that, ask if they are singing now.
Sure they are. Wait, I want to pick up the song.
Ah! Yes. The last rose of summer.
I say that's my favourite tune.
Good. Now I even hear the orchestra.
He turns his face to me. Light dances in his eyes.
Will you stay and listen too?

A tuneful musical silence fills the room.
He has found the cords in his throat.
A humming of remembered echoes flood his mind,

in mine, hours of another kind parade his care and love,
his quickness of reply. The last rose of summer.
A melody I've heard a thousand times.

The loud corridor buzzer sounds.
The snow stops singing. Visiting time is over.

Maria Wallace

BRACELET

Old word.
An adornment.
On a wrist,
a cuff.
Handcuffs,
double bracelets.
Loss of freedom.
Restraint.
Choker,
yoke around a neck.
Heavy base metal, alloy.
Costly, silver, pearl or gold.

Bracelet. Priceless the one you gave me,
daisies your small hand picked
before your days spiralled away from my care.

WEE CHILD

Blond boy not yet two, you sit on trampled grass,
ignored, not understanding the merriment around you,
the toy in your hands, a discarded brown Guinness bottle.

All but two buttons are missing from your jumper,
under it, dirty and torn, you wear a girl's dress.
I hope it's summer and when the wind blows it's gentle enough
to do no more than tease your bare legs and feet, though,
near you three women are wrapped
in heavy shawls thrown about their shoulders.

Fair hair angel, green fields and open roads
mapped your young life. I wonder if your soul already knew
the uncertainty of byways love had forgotten.
Do you remember that day, the ones that followed,
a chain of hours, weeks and years, or did you cancel out
childhood memories, lose all sense of a time
in which the shadow of dark birds perched on every tree?

Winter cold bruised you deeper than fingers and toes.
Today you beg to buy what helps you escape,
for a while, to a place with no traces of that past.

Marion May Campbell's most recent works include the memoir *The Man on the Mantelpiece* (UWAP 2018), the poetry collection *third body* (Whitmore Press 2018), the critical monograph *Poetic Revolutionaries: Intertextuality and Subversion* (Brill 2014), and the novella *konkretion* (UWAP 2013). Formerly Associate Professor of Writing and Literature at Deakin University, she now lives in Drouin in GunaiKurnai country with her two border collie companions. A new poetry collection *languish* will appear with Upswell Publishing in April 2022.



BRISKET

The freeway's all lit-up hooks and eyes—pulling the unravelling liquorice macadam into structure. The tailgating traffic, zapping in super-speed chess manoeuvres, from lane to lane, is, as ever, angst-matter—Dandenong, Narre Warren, Ernst Wanke, Cranbourne Left Two Lanes, Berwick, Koo-wee-rup *Blackfish Swimming*, and the name that goes blank with the fusion of sound-barrier walls, with their rippling claret ribbon, before the Doppler Boom of Nar Nar Goon, *Place of Koalas*, and with a numbing that seizes the chest muscles they call *brisket* in butchers' shops, I'm hanging hooked, packing it in, tighter still now, becoming careless, all flow of feeling arrested, where the endless railway interchanges and warehouses are packed in too—a multiplication of huge metal-framed prisms, across the clear-felled Bunurong/Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri country. All forgetting, like a sweeping anaesthesia has seized place, and each erasure's now a painless cutting into the chest-brisket, an ever-deeper incision in a dream that is not this driver's anymore. Back in the Botanic Park feel the mothlike kisses, the darling pressure of the holding hand, marvel at the emerald gloss of the mallard's head, the spindly orange legs of the purple swamp-hen, the beige coffee pooling on the hard clay, and now yield to these lapses, with micro-naps in lane-changes—*tail-gating is a crime* I dream—whose tale, whose gated escape am I in, I wonder as I fly, vague and blissful, and only the rumble of the corrugated safety strip startles me awake to *PAKENHAM*, the name I've long since missed, and now remembrance *you you you*—mainlines with a jolting jab through these other arteries—

Marion May Campbell

BUZZ CUT

If only these windows were boarded up.... Tell myself, go somewhere else, where the sea seethes and sucks between the granite outcrops, where salt has fogged the sleepout louvres, like in Albany, where there's Nanna and her old wolfhound, and the Early Kooka stove.

But that's him, the blurred profile past the side window. *I've got something for you.* That's him, maybe he's got a bone for Marvin. *I've got something for you, mate*, he says, louder this time. He's tamping down the dry buffalo grass to the shed.

Tell myself, go somewhere else, tread the red ochre earth, back in Morgan's Camp outside Broome, with the dogs marauding around the Health Service Toyota. I thought I'd walked into the wolf's maw. But I hadn't. Danger isn't always where you think.

The way he stretches out the cold war between us. Time yawns.

Watch again Annie's slow approach, smiling, as I step down from the Land Cruiser. A yellow dog is still circling. *Don't worry Sis, she says, that one just Pension Day cheeky.* If I'd stayed with that work... Well, that story doesn't have an ending. *You just band-aiding us, you whitefellas with your antibiotics, with your Panadol.*

He's taken out the whipper-snipper. He's now going to show he's sorry by making a racket. He's aggressively sorry. Clamouring for recognition. *Someone is* working. Like I'm doing nothing all day long. Here darling, just one more little spoonful of the pumpkin soup. Better get you to bed soon Bubba before...

Why don't you hang around, eh Sis Jude, Annie said, *We could make something together.* She was looking at the yellow dog, who was lying down now, panting; at the canvas rolled out on the red earth, at the pots of acrylic – more than at me.

I take Bubba from the high chair and trip on the cambered legs, nearly faceplanting both of us.

The whipper-snipper's edging closer. I turn the radio on. *Here comes the rain again.* That other Annie's singing to us. If only. Outside, the bleached grass is copping another buzz cut.

MY NOSFERATU

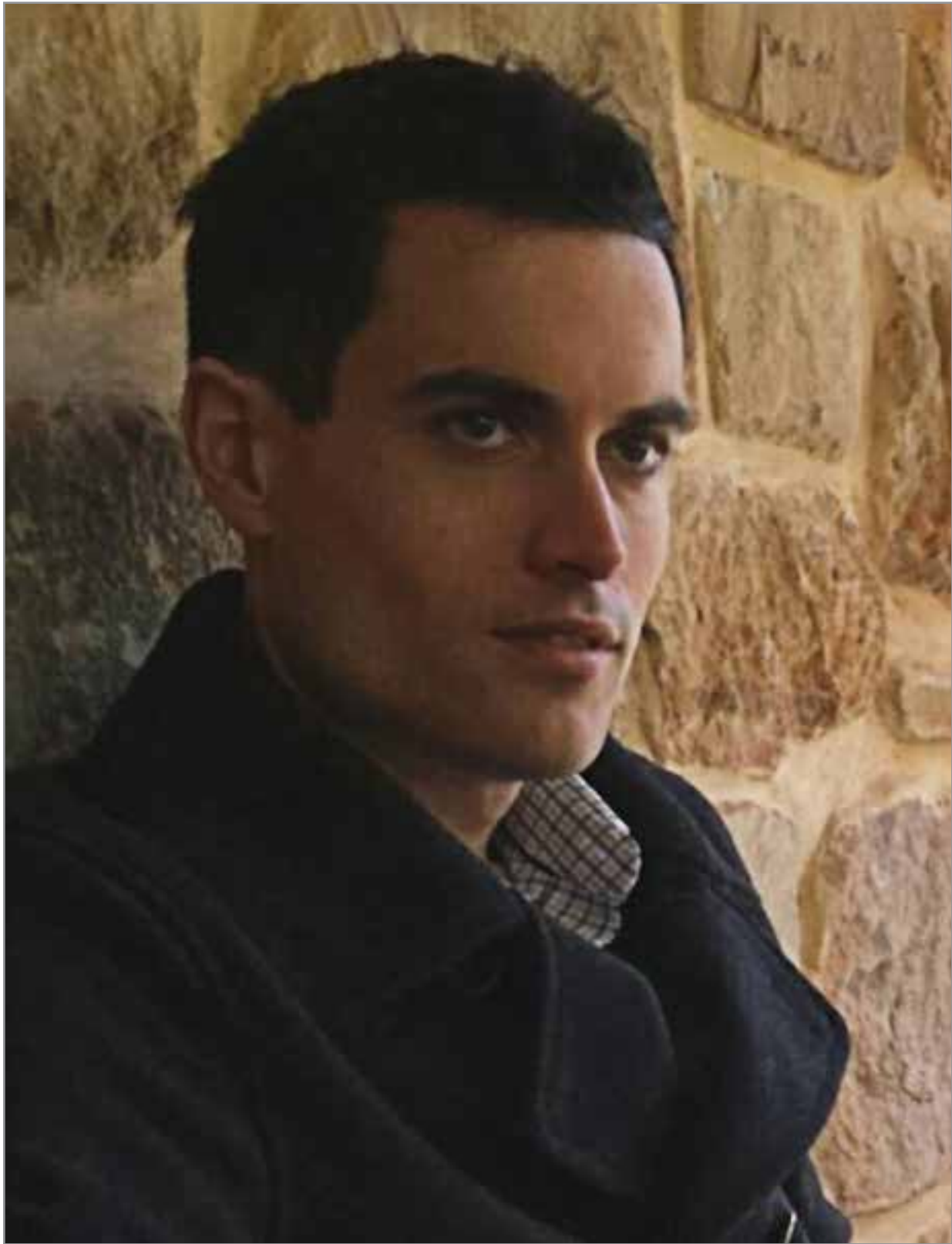
I told her, Well I won't be surprised by what you see. At any moment there'll be citations from gerbera, jerboa, peregrine falcon, rhinoceros, pterodactyl, chimpanzee, blue-green aphid, and pathetically enough, a botched draft of the human, I know, I know. But, as the plasma climbed the syringe's calibrations, so too my layered blue-green dread, along with the spectres of violet melancholy, of orange alert, and yellow toxicomania – all that hue and cry when the inner folds of self are summoned to the biochemical panopticon. Oh and welling towards detection was the emerald of longed-for connection with another of my dubious sex and species. She winked wryly as the fluid crept upwards to the huge syringe's capacity—You given up smoking? She tapped the charcoal layer at the 100ml mark. Me—Of course, your mob shamed me into it, didn't you, detailing the damage at every level, making me a high-rise poster girl for organ damage. She—Well, I can see hundreds of overflowing ashtrays in here and I've had to stop counting. You know, we can't give surgical procedures to smokers, to alcoholics, to smack- or ice-recidivists anymore, since the KL, the Karmatose Legislation: you did it, you chose it, you kept falling back into it, and when you're no longer functional, well, we put you to sleep, euthanise you karmically. Well, I guess I won't go comically, I said. She refused to register my attempt at laughter, But let's see if we can't put a good complexion on this, she said, as she poured the sample into the ForensiWiz, if we can't profile you as a SAR, a Substance Abuse Reformee. You can always enter your Superannuation into a Co-dependency Agreement with our Research Fund, a SCARF, and we might be able to extend your stay of execution, certainly delay the advent of Karmatoma. Now that she said it I saw it—the proliferation, in my vein-snaked arms of myriad wee tumours, coursing hard bubbles through the vascular networks—viridian, purple, fuchsia, scarlet—quite beautiful in a way. She was smiling broadly now with her darkly lip-sticked mouth, my analytical Nosferatu. We held hands and kissed through the full spectrum as we watched my death-to-come on the screen. I would have said, This is so good, kill me now, but it seemed out of taste. So for once, I savoured silence, coming closer to Karmasoma.



©Mark Ulyseas

Flying fox. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Michael J Leach (@m_jleach) is an Australian academic and poet who lives on unceded Dja Dja Wurrung Country and acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands. Michael teaches and conducts research at the Monash University School of Rural Health, Bendigo. His poems reside in *Plumwood Mountain*, *NatureVolve*, *Jalmurra*, *Rabbit*, *Meniscus*, *Cordite*, *Verandah*, *The Blue Nib*, the *Medical Journal of Australia*, the *Antarctic Poetry Exhibition*, and elsewhere. He won the *UniSA Mental Health and Wellbeing Poetry Competition* (2015) and received a commendation in the *Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine* (2021). Michael’s debut poetry collection is the chapbook *Chronicity* (Melbourne Poets Union, 2020). His first full-length poetry collection is forthcoming from *Recent Work Press*.



Michael J Leach

LIFE SYMBOL

In loving memory of Judy Leach (1953-2020)

It’s the most endearing
life symbol from Mum’s funeral.

It’s the most enduring
life symbol from Mum’s funeral.

It’s the very best present
her giving mother
ever gave her.

It’s her life
-long
cuddly companion.

It’s her thread
-bear plushy.

It’s her bear
-like
antique toy.

It’s her
koala.

TRAJECTORIES

My black sedan
moves me
along a long highway

to purgatory at a steady
100 kilometres
per hour.

I zoom through a pastoral landscape
lit by the swiftly shifting light
of day—this winter solstice.

Glancing sidelong,
I tune in to the sight
of a soft saffron sunset

& feel serenity descend.

The silhouettes of gumtrees
form Australian gothic patterns
of fractals amidst calm chaos

calling to mind the friendly ghost
of an ex-lover
clad all in black.

Through trunks & branches,
the still waters of a lake
reflect fading light

& call to mind the loving spirit
of my late mother
clad all in white.

The hum

of my black sedan
moving
along a long highway

helps make me meditative.

I pull over for a power nap
& dream I'm already home.

VESTIGES OF NATURAL HISTORY

Dja Dja Wurrung Country, February 2021

My dog and I step outside
to walk on soil the Sun dried.
We cross dead grass to concrete
concealing earth neath six feet.
We pass in and out of shade
conferred by trees spared from blades.
We reach the curve of our court
and head down a track of sorts.
The dirt ascends in hot air
then descends on worn footwear.
I stand among reserved gum
trees & feel refreshed yet glum.
My dog gives chase to magpies
that run at first and then fly
over lands humans have changed.
This landscape has been short-changed.



Drought conditions. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Michael Minassian is a Contributing Editor for Verse-Virtual, an online poetry journal. His chapbooks include poetry: *The Arboriculturist* and photography: *Around the Bend*. His poetry collections *Time is Not a River*, *Morning Calm*, and *A Matter of Timing* are all available on Amazon. For more information: <https://michaelminassian.com>



MEMORY

In the back of the closet
I found a roll of undeveloped
black and white film.

As I held it in my hand,
I try to remember where
or when I had taken the photos

and why they had never
been developed;
a mystery making me shiver.

Some things are better
left undisturbed—
a locked door at the end of the hall,

a letter from a former friend,
the final steps to the basement
as the light goes out,

memory's blast of winter,
and a spider's voice
only you can hear.

Michael Minassian

MY DOPPELGÄNGER

This morning at dawn
my doppelgänger
showed up at my door,
pleading to be let in.

He showed me his ID,
passport, vaccination card,
said he wanted forgiveness
but wouldn't say why.

Last year, he tried to change
his appearance,
wearing a blond wig
and fake mustache,
sticking his hands
under my nose—
Look, he moaned, *I had my
fingerprints removed,
burned with acid
and sandpapered smooth.*

I try to imagine him
living in my house,
sleeping with my wife
and combing my hair,
like some carbonless
copy come to life.

When I look in the mirror,
I see him lurking over my shoulder,
disappearing when I turn around—
Be careful what you wish for,
I whisper to my reflection,
there's a double for everyone.

I imagine my doppelgänger
sitting at a desk,
writing this poem backwards,
stirring his glass eye
in a cup of coffee,
inventing lies.

If we were in the same
room together, stricken
with claustrophobia,
one of us would have to leave.

HIEROGLYPHS

A woman I knew
was afraid of rain,
stains that would not wash away.

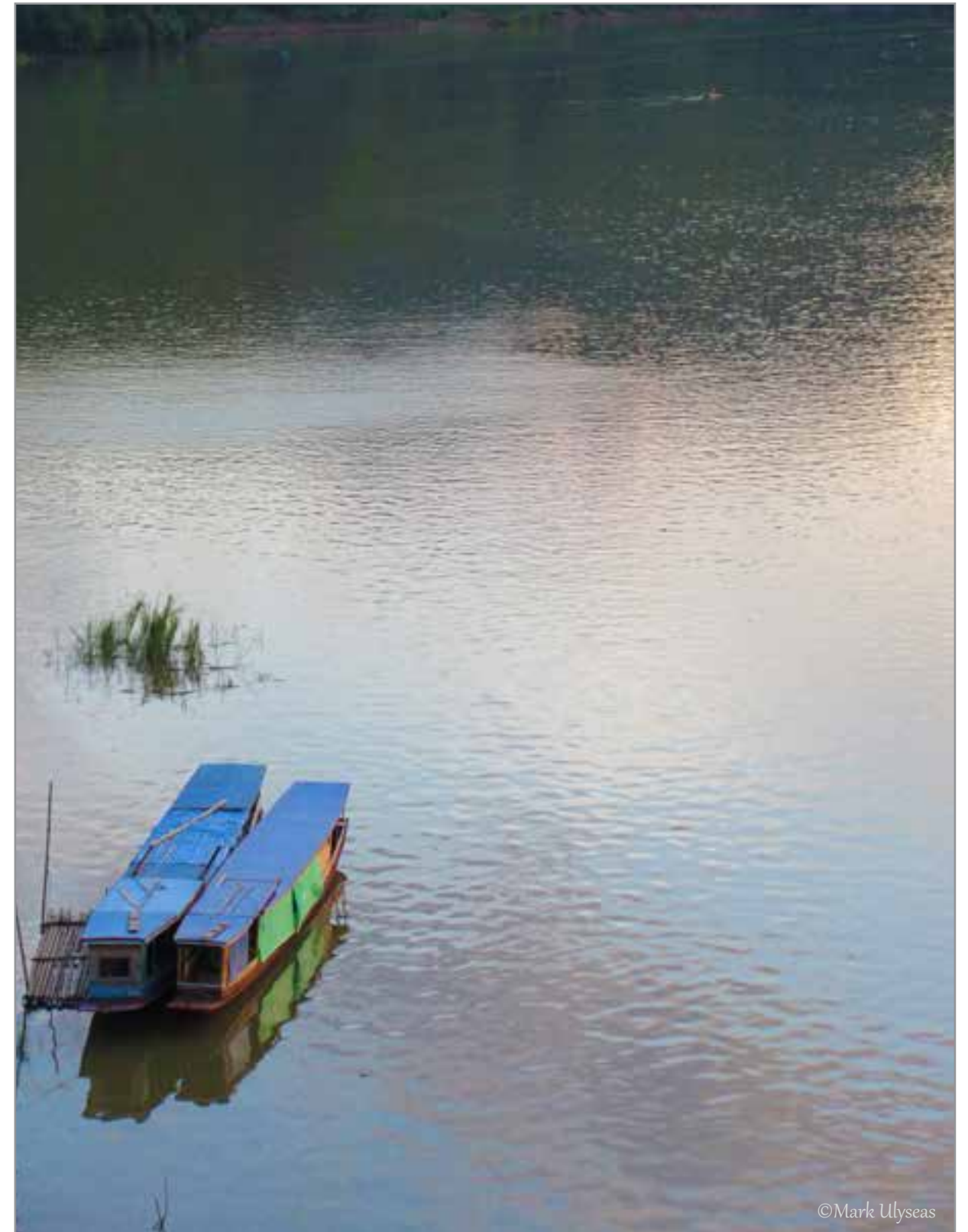
She ate tomatoes like apples,
biting into the flame red flesh,
soft as sex, wet as lashes.

She told me once love
felt like being buried alive,
as if it was the last squeeze
of the Pharaoh's kiss.

I painted hieroglyphs
of boats sailing down a river—
the vague utterances
of fish and ibis
followed every move.

We spoke in a dead language,
chanting incantations
only the two of us understood—

too late, the boatman
waited on the far shore.



©Mark Ulyseas

Boats on the Nam (river) Ou, north Laos. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Miriam Hechtman is an Australian writer, producer and poet. She is the founder and creative director of *Poetica*, a live poetry and music initiative and co-presenter and producer of WORDSMITH – the poetry podcast. She is also the editor and curator of *The Alphabet of Women* (Ginninderra Press 2021). An avid traveller, currently Miriam is based in Sydney with her husband and two daughters. www.movingtrainsproductions.com



UNTOUCHED

With a line from Mary Oliver's "The Gardener"

It was not till she was on that bed
Not till her body had returned to the weight of her teenage self
Hollowed, unkempt, untouched
That the small pleasures of morning sun
Greeted her through the hospital window

Now that the wait was over
The long journey home was coming to an end
She recalled all those days by herself
Those moments at the dining table
Watching her favourite daytime soap opera
Playing bingo Tuesday nights with strangers
The many mornings waking up
Still in her dream
Only to suddenly remember who she was
This every day jolt into being

Have I endured loneliness with grace?
She asked the lady who delivered her cup of coffee
Extra hot, a dash of milk
Their hands touching for only a second as she passed the sugar

Miriam Hechtman

I CAME SO FAR FOR STILLNESS

Inspired by Leonard Cohen's "I came so far for beauty"

I came so far for stillness
Gave up the thought machine
Said no to suffering solitude
Bowed my head to evergreen

I sat with questions open
Leaned in to pain and fear
My body the map to wholeness
Each movement an answer clear

I welcomed in the ugly
The wolf hovered before my face
She morphed the more I held her
Leaving grief her only trace

I fell before the temple
The ground my second skin
My armour now only a symbol
Of all the people I had been

MAYBE

With a line from Pablo Neruda's "Emerging"

A man says yes without knowing
A woman says maybe...
But the word has already collapsed
Fallen, falling
Into Neruda's well
The 'may' and the 'be' have broken
Two words strung together never had much of a chance
'May' with its persistent questioning
Its lack of determining
And 'be' ...
Well, be could have sat still on a mountain top alone cross-legged, hands in
prayer position
Be had the blessings of the gurus, the masters, Shakespeare
To be or not to be
May-be
Hanging on a washing line
Waiting for the wind to decide

TO MOTHER

To mother you must child a little
Roll back into your body
To memory
Let the past awaken in you, surrender
To mother you must pause
Bend to your knees so that eyes meet eyes
And then bend some more so that the ground, the earth, the sand, the water become
you again
Yesterday we were mermaids
You taught me how to carve the fins
Mould the sand just so
Yesterday we dug a tunnel
Smoothed the road with water and patience
Watched the ball roll down to the water's edge
As the sky golden-ed with the sun's descent
And our eyes relaxed to dusk's light



Balinese grandmother. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Moya Pacey published her third collection *Doggerland* with Recent Work Press in 2020. She is a founding editor of the on-line journal, *Not Very Quiet* notveryquiet.com. and was awarded, with Sandra Renew, a Canberra Critics' Circle Award in 2019 for her influential work in exposing women's poetry to view via the journal. In October 2018, she was the Poet in Residence at the Elizabeth Bishop House in Great Village, Nova Scotia, Canada. <https://recentworkpress.com/books/product/doggerland/>



ST JOHN'S GATE

Named for John, patron saint of the sick,
firefighters, alcoholics and booksellers.
A planner's dream of homes for the unwashed,
forgotten, adrift in take-away cartons
and slime of last night's grease and dog shit.
People pass by looking defeated
except for the new arrivals, happy
to be here from a ruined country,
whose name no-one pronounces properly.
Boys loud in Man U strips
smile and carry coke cans. Girls,
standing under the blue street light —
fake-tanned, blonded, tattooed —
look like corpses.

Moya Pacey

WINTER TRIOLET

When the world turns white
We are transformed
Caught in the extraordinary sight
When the world turns white
Three sheep carry the diamond light
Their fleeces frosted and adorned
When the world turns white
We are transformed

WHALE WATCHERS

The whales come in. Their failed wings flap, slap water like the midwife's determined hand delivering air to the new-born's lungs. Mother with baby at her breast, wades into the waves and severs the cord between dry and wet worlds. The police woman leaves gun and holster drowning in the surf. A woman drops her crutches and falls into the waves—no thought of where her legs might go. The girl, wearing a black bikini, shakes off her boyfriend's arm, un-braids her golden plait, dives into a wave, trailing hair like seaweed. One by one, then twos and threes, fours and fives, sixes and sevens...the whale watchers enter the water.

mother and calf breach
she teaches me
everything she knows

CHILD PAUSES FOR A PHOTOGRAPH BEFORE ENTERING THE BOMB SHELTER

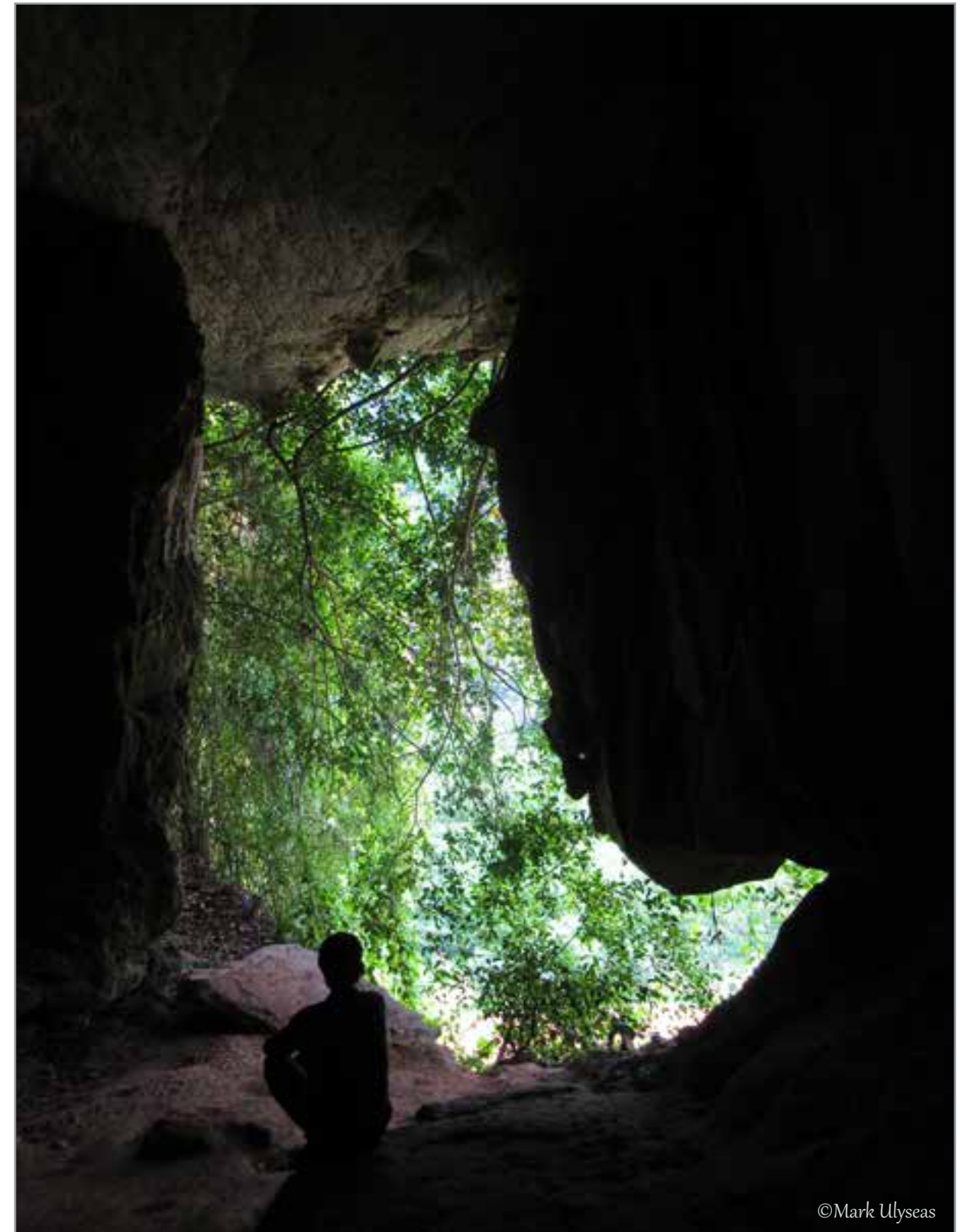
Your seven-year-old face, clean, shiny,
Polished. Hair, neatly combed, though
An awkward fringe refuses to lie still.

Lips, halfway to a smile. Hands clasped.
Dressed in a blindingly white shirt with red
And black bands, circling your chest.

Child caught in the net of weft and warp.
Hooked by the push and pull of the old,
Old loom. Backwards. Forwards.

Impossible to halt the flying shuttle,
Change the ancient pattern.
Child hurry down the stone steps,

Your mother dressed you this morning for a celebration.



©Mark Ulyseas

Pathok cave, north Laos. Its huge labyrinth saved many Laotians from aerial bombing during the Vietnam War.
Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Ukaj was born in Kosovo, in 1977 and is a writer, essayist, literary critic. To date, he has published four poetry books, one short story, and two literary critics. He won several awards, including the National award for best book of poetry published in 2010 in Kosovo. His works have been published in distinguished international anthologies and journals and have been translated into many languages.

Translated by the Albanian by Edita Kuçi Ukaj.



REPUBLIC OF DESPAIR

All those who have problems with breathing
are instructed to seek another planet
and fill the boats with the hope
and raise a toast with stars.

You know that the unconscious inside us dwells
a corner of the earth, like a troubled heart
and unconsciously trample it like a rotten leaf in rainy weather.

Beyond the lightning is easy to pass.
The sky today has no shape;
there are no dividing lines either.

In the case of concentration you can notice there
all politicians, poets, philosophers and historians
how they are worship to the reality that does not exist.

ITHACA HURTS

"I am a foreigner in my own country," wrote Edith Södergran.
I don't know how she felt on that day when the wind blowed and it snowed.
She was perhaps talking about Ithaca, about the endless absence.
A pain that is felt and like an arrow in the heart hurts.
She was actually talking about Ithaca's absence,
for the lack similar to when Odysseus approached the harbor
and did not know who was in her home;
who accompanied Penelope and what happened with his dog.

It blows and it snows.
A woman walks slowly,
she is afraid she may fall.
Clarity is lacking everywhere.
At the time when the eyes are seduced towards the closed gates.
Toward Ithaca-
and a woman waiting surrounded by imagination and solitude.

Through rising waves, we always have the ambition to reach the goal.
What is the goal?
An invention of no one or of supernatural powers-
A goal we will never achieve.

Edith saw a bigger tree than all the other trees.
Nowhere was the serpent, nor the beautiful Eve.
Good and evil were blended like wool in her pubis.

Fog and snow.
Beyond memory, she is afraid of the night.

There is no music anywhere, but there are a lot of crows croaking
telling their ghastly confession.

It blows and it snows.
The branches of the bare trees whisper,
Like Penelope's dress where she threw herself into Odysseus' arms.
This music is for those who want clarity
and avoid fog- rules.

I turn my face towards the new path
where I have never been.
And I say: I am not a stranger in my own country.
Then I opened the book again and found what Edith really wrote:
"I'm burning for a place that is not."

SCARED SKY

On this long journey, poets gaze at the ravens
that have filled the heavens with uncertainty.

We never understood that
the sounds of freedom have been struggled by numerous leaders
and storytelling of heroism
without history.

Like yesterday and today,
we walk and don't know where is our goal.

And in the middle of this fog,
something called goal is disappeared.

Earlier here someone struggled, shouted terribly
and fled like lightning.

At the end of this walk is a vast battlefield
and a string of writings showing how to get to the destination;
a goal we will never achieve.

Oh you know: no one deserves this long journey.
Especially now when the depths of the mountain froufrou
and black raves fill the sky with uncertainty.

KINGDOM OF JUSTICE

The shapeless arch of a tear floats in the sky
and it is like the clouds that pile up upon our heads
and show us that
we are equal among the unequal.

We dream the justice of the birds
and close in on lengthy conferences
with endless absurd debates.
Above them, we read barren drafts
and from the "the unbearable lightness of being"
escapes to the simple existence of repetitive episodes.

Others acting above us
more than us on our desires - the sweet woman told me
and she disappeared into the darkness
along with the flutter of her magic dress.

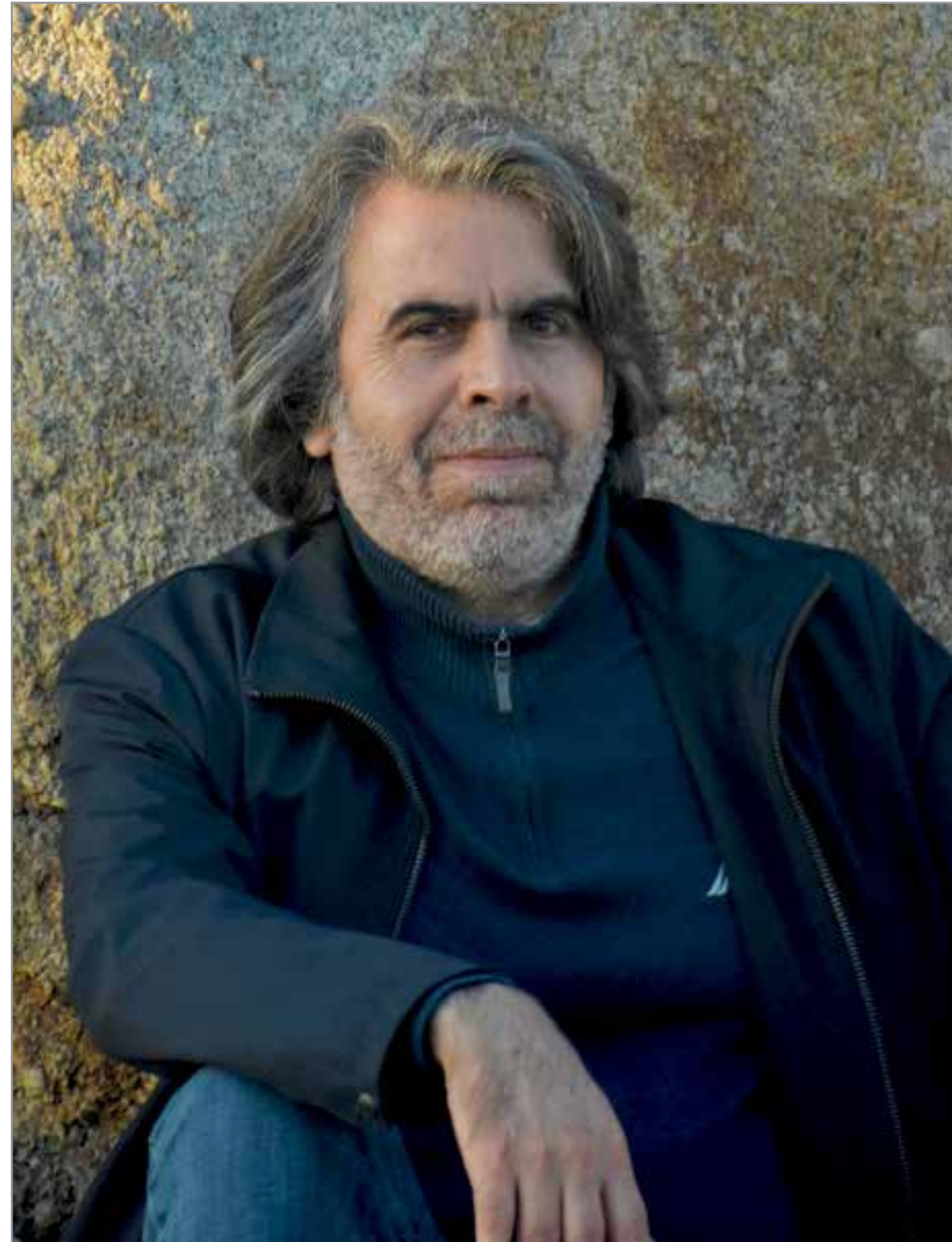
And you tell me if the map of justice on earth really exists
or they are just the poet's imaginary inventions?

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

These poems were originally written in Arabic and have been translated to English by the poet.

AS THE BULLETS' CASINGS IN DESTROYED CITIES

I am not a commie
to talk to you about Che Guevara
or my life as a political prisoner.
I am not the leader
of a ruling party
or a general in a dictatorship's army
to promise you a scholarship to Paris
or give you car keys for your birthday.
I am not a cleric
to impose a veil on you,
make you the honest woman I desire,
and undertake a pilgrimage with you to Mecca.
I am not a CEO to herd you
towards the throng of female clerks in my bedroom.
I am not a president
to forget you are there,
to turn you into a vote
and add your number to my cheering crowds,
my crowds who believe only in me and in God,
who are ready to kill for me,
and destroy cities
without knowing why.
I am not a broadcaster
to lie to you during the weather forecast,
the news broadcast,
in the subtitles of TV series.
I am not the husband,
who sleeps with you
while dreaming of another.



Osama Esber

continued overleaf...

AS THE BULLETS' CASINGS IN DESTROYED CITIES *...contd*

I am not the owner of a bar,
that allocates for you a table to dance on.
I am not a businessman
to buy you.
I do not know much about myself.
I do not cling to what happened yesterday,
what took place on nights
that evaporated in countless cities.
In this moment
that binds me to you,
it is better not to give,
and it is better that you do not take.
It is better if we flow like a spring
and drink from the water
until our thirst is quenched.
It is better to forget that we drank.
It is better if each one of us says to the other:
"I am not yours,
but I am with you.
Tomorrow I may not miss your arms.
Tomorrow your arms may travel,
and nothing shall remain
except remnants that occupy the void
like bullet casings on the streets
of razed cities.

It is better to forget your moment with me
because memory stabs
like a knife in a dark alley.
It is better if you pass through my world like a breeze,
like the language of rustling
when wind moves leaves.
Then I will feel I am not alone,
that my separation is a ripe fruit and a road.
Then I will be aware and accepting
of the autumn inside me.
I will rejoice in the yellowish color of the leaf I become,
I will not fear the fall
or the journey of the wind that abducts me,
that wind without a country.

YOU ALSO, DON'T BEAR CLARITY

1

There is no clarity,
though we are addicted to inventing signs.
I can give you a map,
that leads you to all houses,
but it will not open a single heart to you.

2

One day,
the body will come out of the womb
with an instruction book
to teach it how to live.

3

One day,
you will be able to buy souls
and inject them into your veins.

4

Every day,
you by yourself discover
that imagination is just another factory
for making things.

5

I always search for clarity,
for meanings behind words
for roads that images lead to,
for names of faces,
but with the passage of time,
I feel that the gap
between words and things widens.
You can drown in it.

6

In my childhood,
they taught me their explanations for everything.
That is why I did not learn anything about things,
except what the sick who lived in old times,
said about them.

7

At schools,
at universities
at cafés and restaurants
in cozy bedrooms
and in love,
we repeat by heart
what we forget when we live.

continued overleaf...

YOU ALSO, DON'T BEAR CLARITY

8

You, the other,
who can be any side in the equation,
in your seeking of clarity,
and searching for logic in words,
you convinced me
that words can be arranged,
and logic tailored for them,
but this logic is what I do not understand,
it is what make me mad.

9

Sometimes faces are cloudy,
but it does not rain.
Sometimes eyes are open
and you think there is a door
from which looks run away
and close that door behind them.

10

Sometimes,
you understand yourself,
you try to convince it
that the problem is in you,
but here it does not listen,
it prefers to dump its garbage elsewhere.

11

Faraway from my moment
the world ripens,
faraway from the step of the ladder,
on which I stand
the world ascends.
In the void in which I dangle,
thinking I am flying
I submit to my illusions.
I do not want to feel the reality of the fall.

12

There are people who prefer to stay vague,
to adapt to the world,
in order to become a cloud
like any other in the sky,
a cloud that rains,
only unto itself.

13

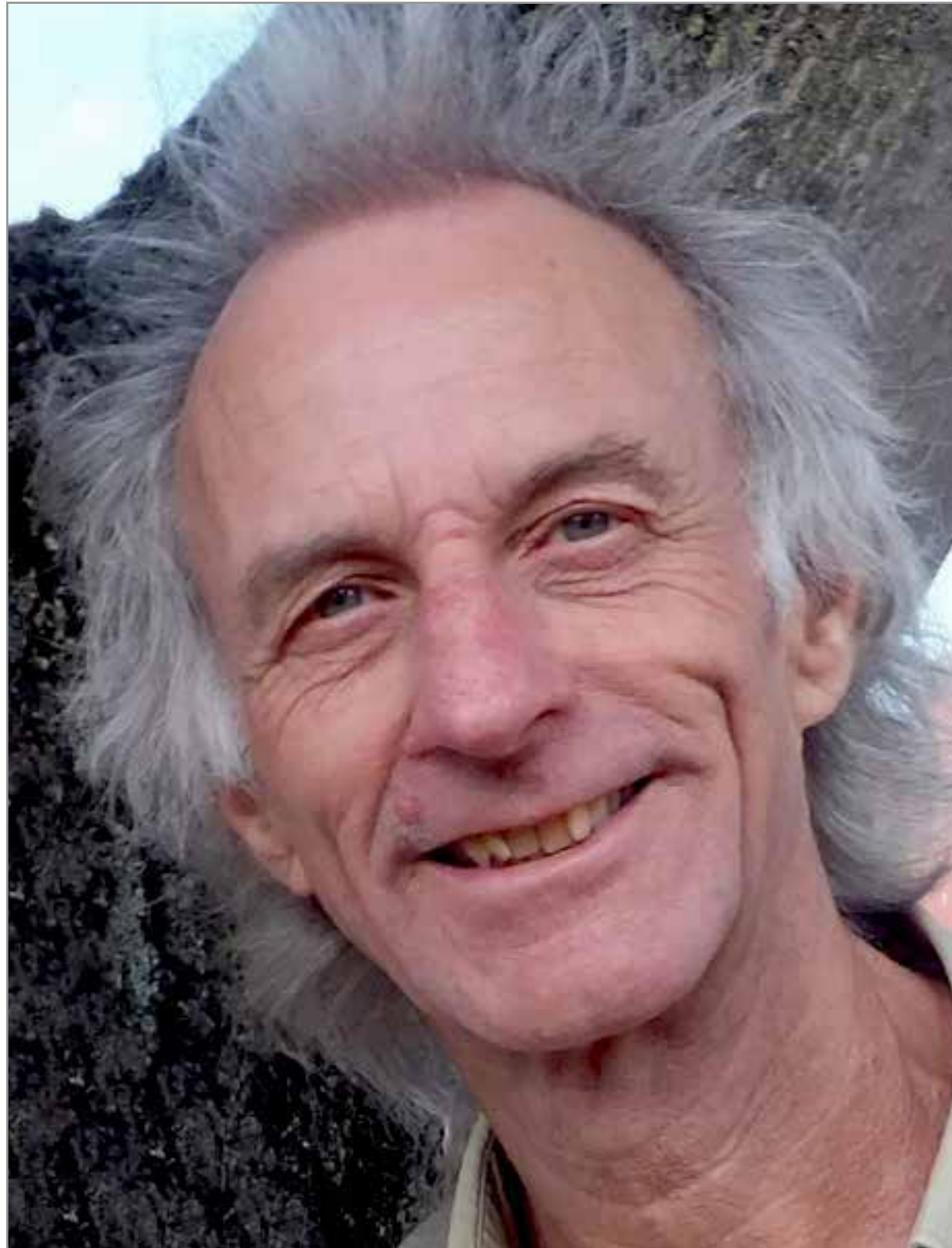
On the shelves around
you see canned food,
canned words,
canned clarity,
canned ambiguity,
you see yourself sitting there
in front of a screen on which
a canned world passes,
you open the cans and eat,
your obesity worsens in your place
but despite this,
you imagine yourself in another place,
you also do not withstand what is clear.

BETWEEN THE TWO COVERS OF A CITY

In San Francisco
the poem does not wander
the streets as it used to.
It does not sit in cafés
or smile at the homeless
who reside on sidewalks
and give the city its face.
It does not spend nights at bars
or walk over bridges
searching with its eyes
for the lights that escape buildings.
The poem no longer
looks into the eyes of the world
no longer cares about reading them.
It does not care if the world
is a paradise for some
or a hell for many.
It no longer extracts
words from the caves of the self
where things intentionally
or inadvertently hide.
In San Francisco
the poem is a heap of words
that lives in cubes
of frozen images
inside locked fridges.
The sun passes every day in
the city's sky
ending its roundtrip
like a train driver
and extinguishing
in the eyes of the tired and bored

who seek refuge in bars
drinking to an emptiness
that they imagine,
seeing themselves stumble
on the roads of their childhoods.
In San Francisco
trains continue their trips
and people exiting and entering
are a human wave
that does not stop gathering
and vanishing on
the shores of the sea of work.
In San Francisco
in some apartment
or in a cell
the poem smokes weed
or injects substance into its veins
or empties another bottle
in a desperate attempt
to explore its loneliness
between the two covers of a city.

Pete Mullineaux lives in Galway, Ireland, where he teaches global issues in schools through drama and creative writing. He's published four poetry collections, most recently *How to Bake a Planet* (Salmon 2016). A new collection is forthcoming in 2022. In 2021 he published a debut novel: *Jules & Rom – Sci-fi meets Shakespeare* (Matador UK), as well as an educational resource *Interdependence Day: Teaching the Sustainable Development Goals through Drama for All Ages* (Afri). He's also had several plays produced for RTE radio. Pete's poetry has been discussed on RTE's *Arena* and featured in the Poetry Programme podcast *Words Lightly Spoken*. Jaki McCarrick, writing in *Poetry Ireland Review* described his work as: 'Razor-sharp, probing, beautifully written...a gem'.



GRANDMA'S FOOTSTEPS

Brazen as the sun burning the tarmac
a red fox watches me approach in my
walker's high-vis jacket

as if trying to decide if I'm a tree
or flower, then gives me the brush off
skips over a wall into a field

stopping a few times, turning
its head back to see
if I've moved...

Pete Mullineaux

BOVINE HEAVEN

In the living fields
three cow generations: calf
mother, grandmother.

LAMB/S

Jaunty gymnasts
on their grass
trampoline

woolly jumpers
suspended
in a green sky

world in a spin
turning itself
inside out

upside down
perceptions
out of joint...

likewise let's
reverse the adage
judge this

picture book
simply by its
cover

stop x-ray eyes
revealing
what is inside...

HORSES

Three of them out on the road,
the gate into their field
swinging open...

full of frisk, but nervous too
in this freedom
and so they should be, close

as they are to a blind bend...
I call to them and try to get
in behind, but they back away

nearer to the danger. The sound
of an engine...can't they read
my terror? I retreat and open

the gap wider, whispering
a desperate "Please, horses"
they seem to know –

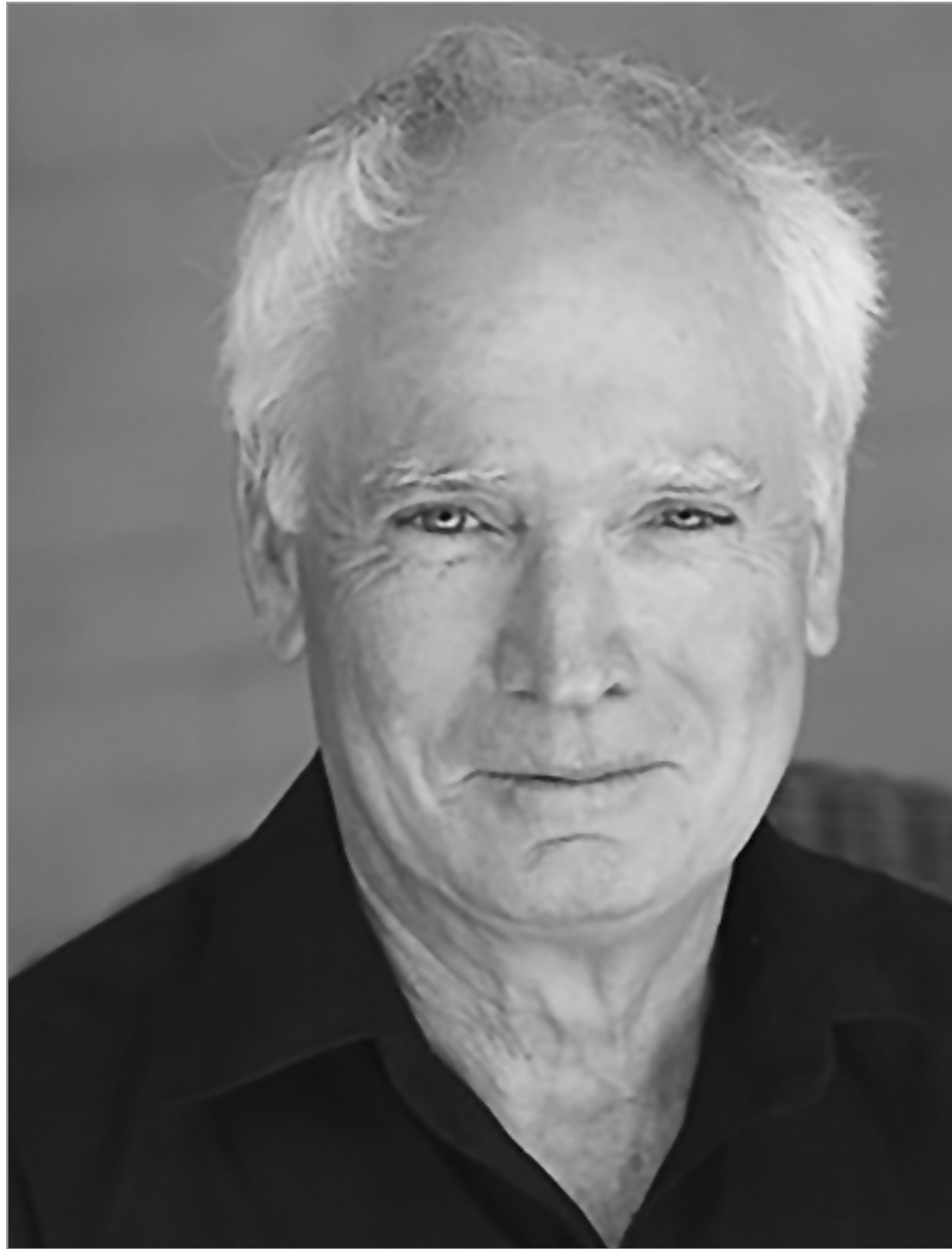
nod their beautiful heads
and trot on through
just as a lorry arrives

in time to see the gate
closing on something
that never happened.



Horse shelter. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Peter Boyle is a Sydney-based poet and translator of poetry. He has nine books of poetry published and eight books as a translator of poetry from Spanish. His most recent collection is *Notes Towards the Dreambook of Endings* (Vagabond Press, 2021). In 2020 his book *Enfolded in the Wings of a Great Darkness* won the New South Wales Premier's Award for Poetry.



85.

Now she is dead
 I carry my mother inside me.
 It is how the earth is made.
 In an inner space behind space
 out of the everyday, the chaotic,
 the greater and lesser disasters,
 she fashioned a single thread
 of luminous being.
 All through life
 visibly, invisibly
 she shaped what she could of goodness.
 Lost, now ash or air,
 the dead we love have gone
 so impossibly far inside us.
 Brushing against the curve of silence
 we touch most deeply
 only what we can never hold.

She who carried me
 I now carry. Her lifetime's silent other work:
 to build inside me
 a mirror self that could go on
 holding me, a wondrous
 many-sided pagoda open
 to lost travellers, a sturdy
 delicately crafted barque
 to ferry me through the same
 unbearable darkness.

Peter Boyle

90.

Teardrops laid out on bare earth--
 an offering to the spirits of the place.
 No two teardrops are the same, you tell me,
 and on this smoothed out patch of earth
 only teardrops grow.

If we were wiser we would have words for everything,
 for this line a faltering hand
 shapes in the soil,
 for this mark where one foot has sunk
 deeper than the other,
 a word for the precise mid-winter cold
 rising from the earth to pass layer by layer
 into the hollow space at the centre of breathing.
 And there would be a separate word
 for each star we see above us
 when all the lights of the planet go out.

We would empty ourselves
 into the purity of an endless
 litany welcoming each being
 one by one
 and, around us, catching their true names,
 the dead would gaze calmly back at us
 from inside their other life.

93.

Drunk on greenery,
 monitoring the day's endlessly varying
 transitions to darkness

plants dream the world
 such as it was and will be, one
 omni-present cascade of glittering shapes --

a multi-coloured invitation card
 from the mysterious
 distillery of pure light.

111.

The star that replaced her left eye
was a door to a distant corridor --

you walk there in the evening
and she is quietly
cleaning dishes
and adjusting the cups

from which
small winged insects
sip tinctures of lemon balm
and white
bruised hailstones.

Through her left eye
she guides you hand in hand
to where waterfalls stop
and space takes over.
"We belong there together," she says
gesturing at the stillness
of light cascading
through light.

In the starless realm
where dreams split open
only the frozen night dew
cradles your head.
All down your left side
the shivering
wakes you to the raw
dangling non-sequitur
of life without her.

117.

I don't know what to do with these silences.
I carry them from room to room,
from life to life.
They belong to all hollow objects, to all
wooden objects, to whatever
once blossomed and is now cut off.

Perhaps I should give them to the fire
but the fire is busy reciting
its own familiar, slightly Slavic,
ghost dialect.

Under the bridge
poking at lumps of charcoal
a crew of survivors burn
the salted eyelids of tomorrow.



Pratibha Castle's award-winning debut pamphlet *A Triptych of Birds and A Few Loose Feathers* (Hedgehog Poetry Press) publishes 2021. Her work appears in *Agenda*, *HU*, *Blue Nib*, *OHC*, *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing*, *Old Water Rat Publishing* and forthcoming in *Raceme* and *London Grip*, Highly commended and long-listed in competitions including The Bridport Poetry Prize 2021, Welsh Poetry Competition, Gloucestershire Poetry Society Competition, Brian Dempsey Memorial Competition, Sentinel Literary Journal Competition, Storytown Poetry Competition. She is anthologised, and a regular reader for West Wilts Radio *Poetry Place*. She can be heard speaking about her life and inspiration and reading a selection of her work on Home Stage Meet the Poet: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2_sEo0gMOY Born in Dublin, Pratibha Castle now lives in West Sussex. Although she had a brief love affair with poetry - both the reading and the writing of it - on an English and Creative Writing Degree course at Chichester University in 2009, her focus at that time and later on a Creative Writing MA, also at Chichester University, was prose. In 2019, inspired by Mary Oliver's passing, poetry took her over. It has yet to let her out of its grip, a situation she is well content with.

NOW SHE'S GONE

Echoes ricochet in silence,
hushed by dust, chintz
curtains, bolsters with
extravagant fade
of roses.

Tick tock rumours
of a tongueless clock,
fly zizzing at the window,
long ago Siamese yowling
to be let in, child's chime laugh.

The floor lamp flickers, smudges
boundaries between now
and then, a no-man's
fret of shadows
cowering in corners.

Boiled cat's fish,
eau de lavender, flesh
concupiscent as gourmet brie,
carpet curled back from the wall,
ripped on a Valium stumble.

Beneath the couch, a treasury
of crumbs, fluff, husked wasp,
bone leg of a spider, silver
sequin, puzzle,
pin.

Pratibha Castle

BELLS

tongue tales, drape chimes
about the village gables,
felted headstones,
knuckled roots of a druid oak,
guardian of souls.

Bells joust the night air, bats
silking from beneath the chapel eaves,
court owls' sighs, dusk codes
sealed by day
in mausoleum hearts.

Your voice is lost to me
and your sun-blaze smile
when I dropped by
without a warning.
Your laughter

silvering the sky,
a wedding fete sobering
to a Sunday sermon, echo
of Thursday night bell drill
with a risk to careless hands

from rope manhandled,
a nudge to let go lest
it hoist you up
into the chapel rafters,
closer my God to Thee.

Did your nurse's instinct
augur when you
scorned the doctor's help
and remained at home?

Like a blackbird's
startle in the night,
a call too soon.

ANTHEM

This day of days
the coldest in decades
footpaths glaze
in arctic gusts
to ice rinks.

The hospital boiler chokes
and bursts its heart. You
sleep, immobile as a mummy,
a snowy chrysalis
enshrined in Perspex.

At your side
I watch,
a chilly vigil,
chase a tell-tale
trace of breath.

Nurse Kelly
urges me to take
you to my bed.
I scarcely dare
for fear I crush you.

A sigh, a sudden shiver
ripples you.
Eyelids part, your gaze
a periwinkle fire.
I gasp, a drowner

surfacing for air,
exalt you in my arms.
the blessings of my
full moon milk
anoint your cheek.

You forage, find, clamp tight
with gummy diligence
about the universal
source of sustenance
and ease.

FLAWS

I browse images
of a past shrouded
in star mist

rifle shadows
lanced by light
thrall'd the way

eyes asleep blink
for a beat
awake imprinted

by a curtain's swell
stranger's known features
migrant moonbeam

dancing forth memories
of a mother's face crumpling
at delinquent taunts.

Images foraged
by magpie mind
primped fancied

like a bird-of-paradise
contriving for a
would-be mate

a bower with foliage haws
sacrificial feather
plucked from its heart.

Adjustments delicate
as the twist of a sitar peg
to sweeten pitch

or a potter's hands
patient as a mother's
tamping easing out air flaws

that to a child's gaze
appear wondrous
as bauble berries on a holly.

Ray has performed readings around the state of North Carolina [USA], and is a member of the North Carolina Poetry Society, the Winston-Salem Writers, and The North Carolina Writer's Network. He has thrice been a 'Writer-in-Residence' at the North Carolina Center For The Arts and Humanities, at Weymouth, in Southern Pines, NC. Since moving to Colorado, he has sought opportunities in that state, however there is this thing called "the Pandemic" which is a great inhibitor. He has three books published, "ACKNOWLEDGMENT: Poems From The 'Nam," Volumes One and Two, 03/2019; "23, 18," 106 pages, 02/2020; and "For The Lost And Loved" 114 pages, 09/21. He has one other manuscript he is presently seeking publication for: 'WHITE DOG SPEAKING," 110 pages, 2020. Some of his work has been published in American, Irish, Bali, and English Literary Journals.



THE STORY OF YOUR LIFE

This is short and sweet
occasionally sometimes not so sweet
yet strong and defined
by who knew what, and when, exactly

succinctly put, where have you been
where are you going to
whom have you met
and who have you loved with all your heart.

A vigorous Life?
Or simply unconscious
perhaps problematic, and suffocating, guarded,
like traveling thru communists

we could speak
the stories, the epic poems,
about growing up inside your fortress
walking the guard towers there
hiding atop the water towers
at the edge of world wars.

It's engaging, the prose
of our internal narrator
(perhaps it's really prose poetry)
cannot ask the narrator
anything
as that is a one-way communique.

You have walked so many paths
sometimes in bare feet light brown with dust.

Ray Whitaker

RUBIES IN THE BROOK

Life is full of possibilities that may not be realities. —Hank Bruce

A tech decided he was
against his bosses
too much Commie...
and not enough ism.
Turned off the freezer in the P4 lab
spoiled the vials
virus's woke up from a deep, cold slumber
in the Chinese Institute of Virology.

Disposing of the microbes
was supposed to be
done in the hell-fires of protocols...
one SARS-CoV2 vial went home in his pocket.
Leaning over the Crucian Carp
a good luck lunar new year's fish
in the fish kiosk his boss's Cousin ran...
Boss was sure to choose from in Wuhan's wet market.

He dumped the entire vial
added a unknown flavor to the carp
now there's a smell in the kiosk
then a stink in the fish cart.
That tech went home
grinning at what he'd done
yet sickened
and collapsed at work.

One of the Docs saw the light
diagnosed him with virus disease.
The running brook of cases
turned into a swollen creek,
then a raging river of disease.
Cousin fish seller fell behind his cart
only found dead the next day
in the wet mart.

By then so many others were sick
the Central Committee didn't know what to do.
Li Wenliang was the doctor
that helped the fallen tech
and lit the signal fires like in the days of old
to his staff at the institute.
The Central Committee censored him
arrested him for making false statements.

Just then he got it, too
the SARS-CoV2, he died like all the rest.
Not like all, Dr Li died twice
his death reported, then retracted
then reported again on a different day.
The public outcry over the lies told
When the Central Committee couldn't get
the story straight, that concocted dupe.

The question asked by many, what was
the lab doing with that virus anyway?

continued overleaf...

RUBIES IN THE BROOK *...cont*

What had been a small running brook
morphed into a tsunami
washing humanity's shorelines with waves of crashing illness's,
no-one listened to Dr Li until too late.
People got on airplanes
flying both hither and yon like they usually do
spreading unwittingly
a seething infirmity.

Whether intentionally or not
the Chinese unleashed
calamity, peril, death
by biological warfare.
On The World
On Humanity
So many people now wearing
their overcoats of earth.

There are no rubies in this brook
no sapphires in this creek bed to be discovered
in flood stage is the now raging river, going to the sea
boats can't float in a tsunami wave.

There are no rubies in that brook
no garnets or emeralds there either
diamonds lie buried in the river's onslaught
amethyst covered by tsunami mud.

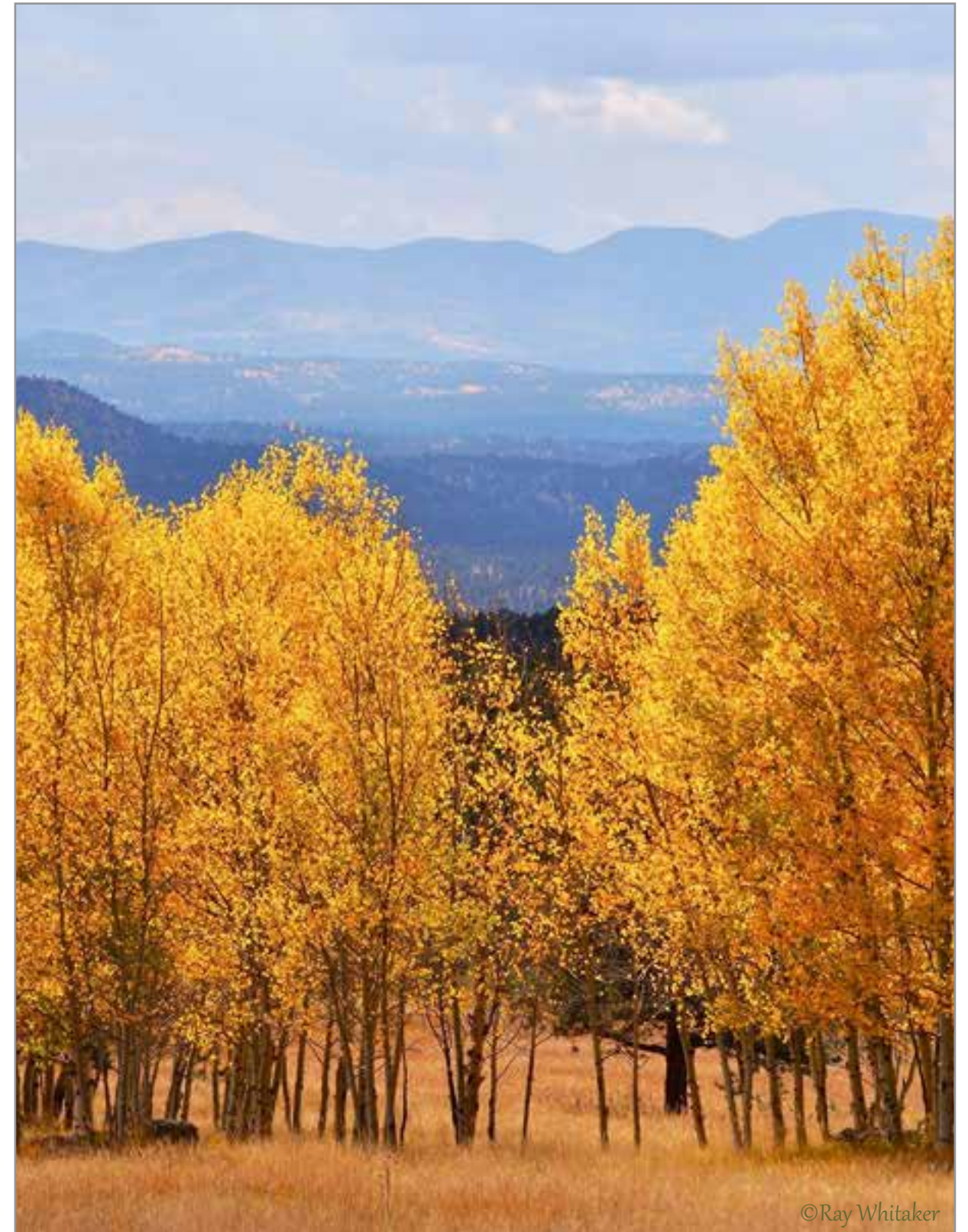
You can imagine
what happens next
just by turning on
our news of today.

You can only imagine
the what, and how, and who should
be held accountable
by those of us that survive.

BREATH AND WATER

I think most of us reflect on
those deeply personal
and meaningful
stretches of time
that posthole our existence
they are signposts
along the sometimes rocky path
pointing us into that expanse of memories
within this place,
the broad lake we call life.

We cannot live there
or dwell on it either
there is an unconquerable divide
residing there, (hard for us to breathe under water)
we can only dip our hand
into it for a brief moment
as if trying to catch the fish swimming by
removing our hand, that water drips back
making ripples, ever expanding rings
stretching out on the lake until they are no more.



Aspen trees, Near Deckers, Colorado, USA. elevation around 8200 ft.(2500 meters).
Photograph by Ray Whitaker.

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



GREED UNEARTHED

concrete cities take all our water and sand, our rich greed is waste and garbage,
a life-time discarded, buried from cross-hatched time — outing and daylight,
long-hidden bones lifted from the earth, must we reverse ourselves with guns
and walls?

Sandra Renew

OPEN THE COVERS

I still see you in the torn edges
every time—
tear the flyleaf from the book
remove the calligraphy of your name

GRAVE PANTOUM

sun-wilted flowers on the grave
appearing fresh on Fridays
I only know because I ask...
I visited just once this year

appearing fresh on Fridays
a ritual, from one unknown
I visited just once this year
some-one loved her, remembers her

a ritual, from one unknown
a devotion I can't summon, still
some-one loved her, remembers her
my mother, I never properly knew

a devotion I can't summon, still
I squandered her best offerings
my mother, I never properly knew
sun-wilted flowers on the grave

NOW IT'S A STORY

(triolet sequence)

I know a rat when I see one, a dobber.
 A playground bully, a grade 8 girl forever.
 I fought her 'til both of us were blood and snot and slobber.
 Despairing, I spent hours after school, mending my clobber.
 It's schadenfreude— as an adult, she's the very opposite of clever.
 I know a rat when I see one, a dobber.
 A playground bully, a grade 8 girl forever.

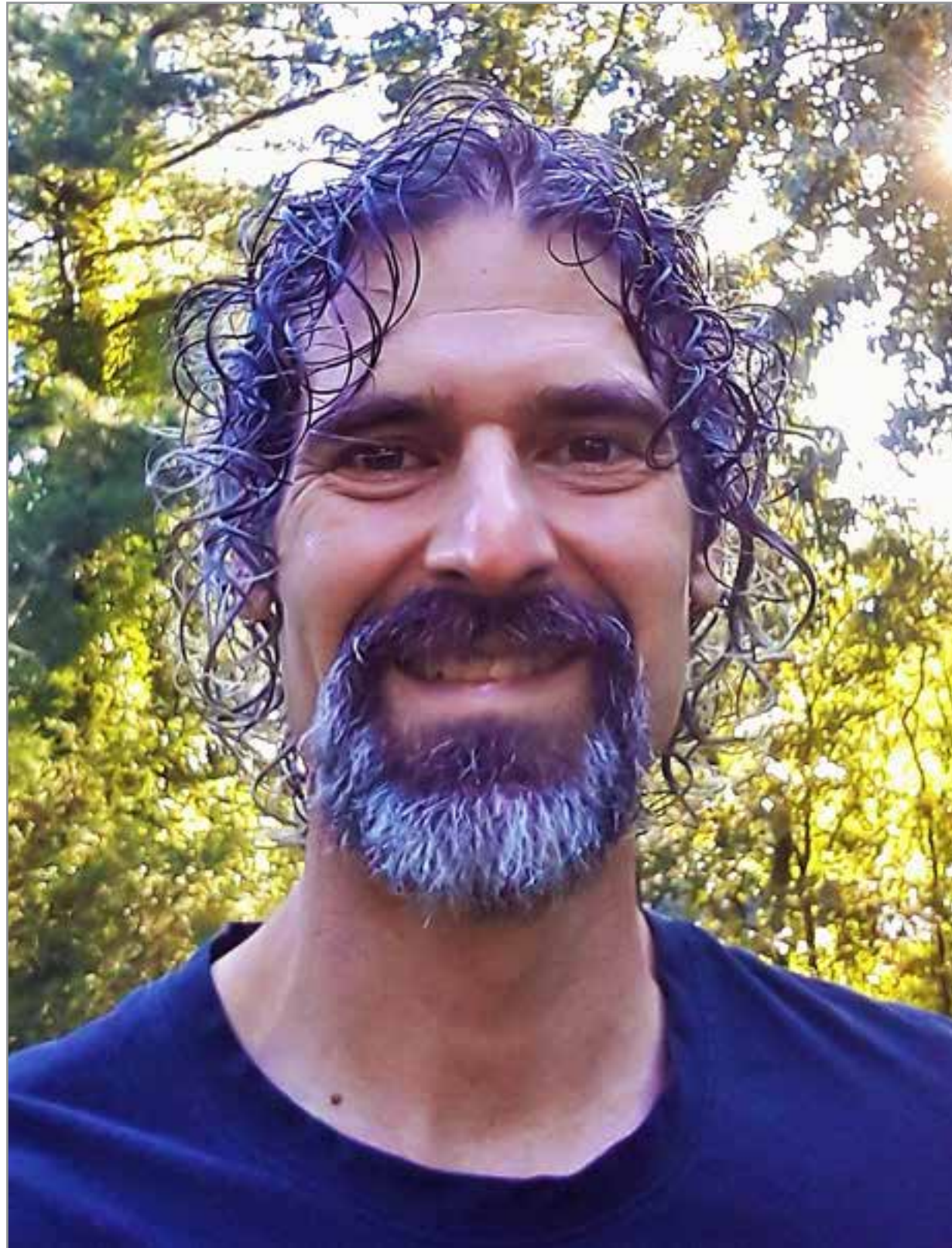
When I came out I lost my story.
 You took it to keep me under control,
 pushed me further into radical outlawry—
 when I came out I lost my story.
 In the marriage referendum furore
 your glory lost, it was my humanity you stole
 When I came out I lost my story,
 you took it to keep me under control.

her brain sparks on sugar
 flashing so high she laughs at the gods
 rainbow-sweet brain-hit hooks her
 her brain sparks on sugar
 brain-snap adrenalin cooks her
 she thinks she's cheating the odds
 her brain sparks on sugar
 flashing so high she laughs at the gods

How dare you continue to look away.
 Change is coming whether you like it or not.
 I refuse to believe you are evil, but I say
 how dare you continue to look away,
 your empty words fail us, politics hold sway.
 The science is clear. My future is not.
 How dare you continue to look away.
 Change is coming whether you like it or not.

When investigation becomes persecution,
 trust in institutions will not save you.
 Queer resistance to government barbarians,
 when investigation becomes persecution,
 can birth social order transformation.
 Queer insists on inclusion or revolution,
 when investigation becomes persecution.
 Trust in institutions will not save you.

Scott Thomas Outlar lives and writes in the suburbs outside of Atlanta, Georgia. His work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. He guest-edited the Hope Anthology of Poetry from CultureCult Press as well as the 2019, 2020, and 2021 Western Voices editions of Setu Mag. He has been a weekly contributor at Dissident Voice for the past seven years. More than 2,000 of his poems have been published in literary venues around the world. Selections of his poetry have been translated into Afrikaans, Albanian, Azerbaijani, Bengali, Dutch, French, Hindi, Italian, Kurdish, Malayalam, Persian, Serbian, and Spanish. His podcast, Songs of Selah, airs weekly on 17Numa Radio and features interviews with poets, artists, musicians, and health advocates. His seventh book, *Evermore*, was written along with coauthor Mihaela Melnic and released in 2021. More about Outlar's work can be found at 17Numa.com.



PLUM PUCKERED

Slide into the frequency
where friction transcends static

A lemon every morning
to taste life's sour kiss

Lotus eyes are rough around the prism
but oranges spill their sugar without remorse

And it's three licks
to the center of any Godhead

Chip our teeth on the rusted gears
of a turning age

Scott Thomas Outlar

FOUNDATION SLIGHTLY APOCALYPTIC

As true as her cat
Cheshire, calico
mad as a shaman
shifting between the planes
prophecies churned in the cauldron
A prism of conscience
teasing the lines of consciousness
by tiptoe and soft paw
in the cold snap of autumn

As true as an owl
alarmed and awakened
by a fox prone to screeching
under full hunter's moon
oh, we all sense the waves
that are brewing

As true as a bare foot
slamming the pillars of justice
sure the sting aches for a while

T CELLS

A little bit of Cobain
remains in my artistic DNA
split gut genes
masochistic holes in the knees
but head intact

I like to contort, twist, tease, & pervert
the essence of a rhythm
to mix metaphors lightly
and take to flight

There's still a subtle hint of Thompson
in the middle where I'm Thomas
that loves to torture tyrants
with my tongue when it turns acidic
flailing fallen vipers and serpents
over open flames

Campbell lingers in the tale
with a want to play the hero
by taming corrosive dragons
in the silhouetted shadows
with a blade shoved in deep recesses
when consciousness grows corrupt

While somewhere in my brain
Buddha and Hesse holler
about a holy Siddhartha path
that aligns perfectly with Tao

Flow & flux the river calmly
for peace will come
when all these demons are forced
to weep & wail

Torie Cooper is an Australian-American poet and author. She has published three books, *Nature: A Collection of Poems*, *Laying Nana Down: Poems of Caregiving and Loss and Love, Laughter, and Morphine: A Compassionate Guide for Caregivers of the Terminally Ill*. Currently, Torie is researching and writing her second non-fiction book, *Animals, Love, and a Suitcase: The Wild Life of Hilda Tresz*.



ELK DOWN

She collapses
in shallow water,
having awkwardly slid down
steep snowy bank.
Two wolves clutch
her thickly furred throat,
one wolf clamps
tenaciously upon her rear.

Elk's long slender legs
can no longer lift her weight,
soft brown eyes
shift wild and wide
in their sockets.
Exhausted, in shock,
laying in freezing water,
she succumbs.

Moments later,
warm steam rises
from her opened body,
drifting upward like smoke
into frosty morning air.
Wolves noisily
satisfy their hunger,
elk will live on
in them.

Torie Cooper

CRONULLA BEACH

Sitting cross-legged
upon grassy hillside
peppered with tall stands of
shady Norfolk pines.
Steaming hot container
of salt-laden
fish 'n chips, scallops
balanced within lap,
protected from
anti-epicurean seagulls
harboring noisy passion
for deep-fried food.
Cold, stubby brown bottle
of Bundaberg Ginger beer
drips in hand,
effervescent liquid sugar,
sliding down scratchy
parched throat.

Beyond eastern horizon,
warm shimmering blue saltwater
dominates expansive view.
Sprinkled with floating bathers,
slip-sliding surfers,
multi-colored beach balls,
unsteady toddlers
with bright floppy hats;
rolling sea meets hot yellow sand.

Tanned, lotion-slathered
sun-drowsy bodies
lie motionless upon
colorful terry beach towels.
Surrounded by open books
with flapping pages,
half buried thongs and sandals,
crumpled hats, t-shirts,
and duffle bags
all dusted with windblown
specks of sand.

SYRIAN CROSSFIRE

At the sudden sound
of gunfire,
panicked child
releases her grip
upon grubby plastic doll.

They hit the ground
at the same time,
both staring
open-eyed
at the bright cloudless sky;
unseeing.

THE STATION

How could they know
it was pointless to yearn
for the tender kiss
of tomorrow's
blushing sunrise?
That soon,
they would no longer
pray, walk, or feel the warmth
of a child's soft hand.
How could they imagine
that within an hour
they'd be ash?

2010 - 2021



POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
VOLUME ONE DECEMBER 2021



COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE