

2010 - 2022



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
FEBRUARY 2022

A vibrant, abstract landscape painting. A large, dark tree trunk stands in the center, with its branches spreading out. The foliage is rendered in a mix of bright yellow, orange, and red, suggesting autumn. The background is a swirling mix of blue, purple, and green, with white, star-like speckles scattered throughout, giving it a dreamlike, ethereal quality. The overall composition is rich in color and texture.

NOEL MONAHAN HEADING TO MAYNOOTH

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



Raindrops on a canna lily. 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).

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

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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



NOEL MONAHAN HEADING TO MAYNOOTH

We gathered at the Quays in Dublin, awaiting our bus. Route 66 travelled through Lucan, Leixlip and final destination was Maynooth. Many of us were making the journey for the first time and we stared at the leaves floating down the river Liffey rather than make eye contact with each other. The 66 bus finally arrived and we stacked our big cases in the luggage compartment. An elderly lady complained to the driver:

Them young fellows going to be priests are holding us all up.

We hailed from all corners of Ireland, from the drumlins of Cavan and Monaghan, the dry stone walls of Mayo and Galway. Students from Derry seemed to know each other and had more to say. The babble of different accents from different dioceses was confusing. By the time the bus reached Leixlip we had settled down and some of us began to talk about the little events in our lives: the schools we attended, football matches, a book or two one enjoyed reading. This time the bus went all the way up to the gates of the college, a special favour, compliments of the bus driver. We dragged our cases past the Geraldine Castle and walked in the direction of Stoyte House. We were met and welcomed by senior clerics. Friendly faces asked reasonable questions:

And your name is?

And your diocese is?

Noel Monahan

A litany of diocesan place names ensued. Kilmore, Clogher, Ossory, Ardagh and Clonmacnoise ...

Take a left and you'll arrive at Rhetoric House. You can't miss it.

It's the building with red ivy climbing the walls. You'll be told more there.

The whole place seemed enormous. On the outside it was larger than any village, more the size of a country town with chapels and squares and houses. Huge blocks of houses: Stoyte House, Logic House, Dunboyne House, Rhetoric House, New House... These great buildings lay between beautifully manicured garden squares. We strolled through a garden of rose climbers and flowering shrubs behind Logic House, safe in the imaginative world of our newly found vocation. It all seemed like Eden that evening.

After supper we were summoned to the chapel. We sat there in silence. Homesickness was beginning to strike for the first time. The Junior Dean congratulated us on our undertaking of a difficult journey in life. He talked about detachment from home, how we must face the loneliness and separation. But he assured us we were not entering this world all by ourselves. Our Guardian Angels were guiding us there.

The routine began the following morning. The Gun Bell rang out a six o'clock call. Bleary eyed, we made our way to The Junior Chapel for Laudes, a morning hymn of praise.

It wasn't all prayer. Each diocese had a gathering space called a "Pause". Here we were given tips on survival tactics by Senior Clerics. We soon became fluent in the inside lingo: "Chubs", "Logs" and "BAs" – 1st. Years – 2nd. Years- and BA Year. And there were other novelties. We were wearing our priestly garments for the first time. Our days were full of swinging thuribles, candle-light and Gregorian chant. It was all consuming. A way of life that had instant appeal for us but it was early days yet.

And there was academic excitement about studying for an arts degree. The College had a lively creative atmosphere. We had a Literary and Debating Society, a Philosophical Society... I saw a student production of Beckett's "Waiting For Godot" in The Aula Maxima. And the canonical figures of literature awaited us: Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre and Camus.

But all the initial excitement slowly faded. Each evening hidden away in my room I had time to reflect. The community life was losing its hold on me. I was beginning to question a world of posturing for the priesthood. Listening to the trains passing in the night I pondered the big questions: Did I really want to take up residence in some parochial house in some remote parish? What was really calling me? Was I in search of instant respectability and a steady job?

Maynooth was a safe house to rest in after the Leaving Certificate. Everything was provided for us. We had the best of food. We were protected by big walls from the outside world. We were training to become princes of the church.

I felt pampered there. Surrounded by quiet and peacefulness, I longed for the irreverence of youth. I needed to break free and find excitement in a world where anything and everything happens. I longed for a world of t-shirts and jeans. I imagined myself with a rucksack and guitar heading for Route 66 again. But this time it would take me to Los Angeles, the city of angels.

Matthew Graham is the author of four collections of poetry, most recently *The Geography of Home* from the Galileo Press, and is the recipient of awards and fellowships from the Academy of American Poets, Pushcart, the Indiana Arts Commission and the Vermont Studio Center. Graham is a Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Southern Indiana and is the current State Poet Laureate of Indiana.



BEGINNING WITH A LINE FROM WENDEL BERRY

--- from *The Indiana Series*

For Connie Weinzapfel

"I come into the presence of still water,"

A hidden eddy of the Ohio where the October breeze
Drops sycamore leaves,
Small, questioning upturned hands,
Into my waiting hands. The dry cat tails,
Marsh milk weed and Indian Grass
Rattle among the bones of the shoreline. Geese
In the distance leave with their repeating cries.
Another autumn in a long line
Of many autumns spreads like wood smoke
Along the water. Closure is a word
I prefer to use for windows, curtains,
Doors, and not for reluctant understandings.
Yet, the storm clouds building now
Over the far Kentucky shore, suggest
A kind of closure – a need for rain,
Solitude, a need to realize
That the closing down of every wild garden,
No matter how remote or fragile,
Contains its own insoluble redemption.

Matthew Graham

ENDING WITH A VARIATION ON THE LAST LINE JOHN ASHBERRY EVER WROTE

My grandmother came from the holy land
Of western New York State
Where she spent summers on an uncle's orchard –
A navy-blue whisper
Among the Empires, Cortlands and Northern Spies
Of the early 1920's --
Before returning each year
To the immigrant avenues, the slack-jawed
Smell of cabbage in the tenement hallways
And the black snow, the imminent black snow
Of Buffalo.
She never lost her Canadian vowels,
Her fear of street cars or love of dray horses,
Even when I last saw her
Singing hymns in a shared room
Of a nursing home
And accusing the staff of stealing her money,
Her plastic rosary,
Her favorite straw hat --
The one with the sun flowers.
No talk then of a husband or daughters,
A life lived.
Just a weak rage against nothing, from nowhere.

"As if nothing was evil, exactly, or not".

BEGINNING WITH A LINE FROM JEAN TOOMER

"I identified with my whole sense so intensely that I lost my own identity."

One Hundred and Eleventh and Amsterdam Avenue
Seethed in the shadows of St. John the Divine's Cathedral.

During those disappeared days of 1978
Most misunderstandings were a menudo of desire and hate.

There was always some drama on the Broadway train.
There was always some hustle on Broadway in the rain.

Oh, three-card monte outside bodegas of disrepair.
Oh, gypsy cabs cruising the boundries of despair.

Oh, police locks and exhaust and window grates.
Oh, store front churches and laundry and rusted fire escapes.

The ghost of Mario Bauzá blowing Tangá in the West End Café –
Sometimes I'd linger, staying out of the way.

Sometimes I'd linger until the bleak break of day.

BEGINNING WITH A LINE FROM DONALD JUSTICE

"Soon now the war will shutter the grand hotels."

War touched my shoulder once
In 1972, and then moved on,
Not in need of my service at that late time.
But it did not touch the grand hotels –
The Concord, the Neville, the Pines –
Where I spent my early youth washing dishes,
Bussing tables, trimming the yews
Lining the curved drives leading
To the canopy-shaded porticos
Where I parked and returned
The monstrous Lincolns and Cadillacs
(owned by fathers whose sons
Would never go to war)
Of the time.

It was time that shuttered the grand hotels,
And cheap airfare to Cancun and Jamaica.
They nestle into the Catskills now
All war zones. Ruin porn.
They are slowly embraced by sumac, wild roses
And grape vines as are those times
Of tennis courts I never played,
Olympic pools I never swam,
Echoes of a fox trot I once heard
But never knew the steps to dance to
In the right time.

BEGINNING WITH A LINE FROM ROBERTSON JEFFERS AND ENDING WITH A LINE FROM ROBERT FROST

-- from The Pandemic Series

*"It is bitter earnestness
That makes beauty."*

When I tire of Whitman
I return to Jeffers and Frost,
Two bitter old men who found beauty
Piling up stones on opposite coasts
With three thousand miles of failed earnestness
Between them.
They knew madness can seep through a family
Like water through stones,
The way the madness of a nation
Can seep out from the Heartland,
Though who is to say where the heart really is?
To seek beauty now is to look to the sky
Scarred less and less by transcontinental vapor trails.
To find beauty now is to imagine a continent,
As blind and bewildered as this one,
Pushing back out, starting over at the edges
Of where it all began and ended.
Where two old men stand
Arms crossed and nodding
And where water waits.

*"Here are your waters and your watering place.
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion."*

Jeannine M. Pitas is a teacher, writer, and Spanish-English literary translator living in Iowa, where she teaches at the University of Dubuque. Her first book of poetry, *Things Seen and Unseen*, was published by Mosaic Press in 2019. Her essays and articles have appeared recently in *U.S. Catholic*, *National Catholic Reporter*, and *The Christian Century*. She is the translator or co-translator of eight books in translation, primarily Uruguayan and Argentine poets. She contributes to the Catholic blog Vox Nova. Her website is <https://www.jeanninemariepitas.com/>



URUGUAYAN POETS LIVE FOREVER

On the gray days
in the dark nights
I like to think about 90-year-old Selva Casal
sitting in her wheelchair and writing poems about justice
or making abstract sketches
while her 92-year-old husband Arturo does her makeup.
“She paints pictures and I paint her!” he quips.

On those mornings
when it’s hard to get out of bed
I like to think about Circe Maia, another nonagenarian
singing as she works in her garden.
If you make the trip up from Montevideo to Tacuarembó
she’ll offer you tea, homemade *biscochos*,
quince preserves – *dulce de membrillo*
show you her nasturtiums, her lavender,
her violets.

At one poetry event at the Decorative Arts Museum
a car pulled right up to the door,
and we thought it was for 98-year-old Ida Vitale
instead, a middle-aged man emerged
and like a sprite
Ida came bouncing past us all
from somewhere else.

continued overleaf..

Jeannine M. Pitas. Photo credit: Bob Felderman

URUGUAYAN POETS LIVE FOREVER *contd...*

Not for these women a death by binge drinking -
 not for them a head stuck in the oven
 or a late-night wade into a lake, pockets filled with stones.
 Not for them any membership in the 27 Club
 shared by Janis, Jimi, and their own Delmira Agustini -
 "la nena," murdered by her husband in 1914.

Delmira, who sought to hold God's head in her hands
 who imagined Leda's Swan covered in blood
 who exhorted her sister souls - "Never look back!"
 They didn't.

Circe, Selva, and Ida
 insists on living
 as they cook, paint, drink tea
 defend convicts, denounce dictators, go into exile
 lose children, lose loves, but keep their lives
 for as long as they can.

OUTSIDE THE CHAPEL

Loyola University Chicago

I walk beside a lake
 so big one might think it's the sea
 but no
 it's only a lake

I stand outside the chapel
 and wish to go in
 and light a candle
 beside Our Lady of Guadalupe
 or her Polish doppelganger,
 Our Lady of Czestochowa

and imagine that flames burn their way
 into a parallel universe
 where nineteen-year-old-you
 sat in that same chapel, reading Kierkegaard,
 Merton, Dorothy Day
 never got buried
 by the weight of your own mind

you grew up to be an actor
 or musician
 who met me, fell in love, and started
 a homeless shelter
 while playing Beatles songs at wineries
 and visiting a different country each summer

continued overleaf...

OUTSIDE THE CHAPEL *contd...*

but in this universe
you're not talking to me
and I go to meetings
where I read lists of clichés:

*let go and let God
easy does it
focus on yourself, not the addict
you didn't cause it
can't control it
can't cure it*

it would make a better story
if I could go and light that candle
but there's a wedding taking place
go figure

I can love you as much as I want,
but I can't set myself on a pedestal
as the madonna who will heal you
I can pray for you wherever I want
but I can't light the candle
whose flame comes from another place

I'm left with a chapel
I can't get into
a lake that looks like the sea
but isn't

a fantasy left behind
like a discarded church bulletin

a candle I didn't manage to light
and this poem

TO THE POLAR VORTEX

January 2019

I know your coldness covers ceaseless movement –
beneath your drifts
of restless snow, inside your ice globes
that turn berries into belated
Christmas ornaments.

Ground me, please,
in giving.

I break off a twig
of last year's mistakes
and place it in my pocket.

Please take me to a snow-covered
wood, then teach me to glide
on a frozen lake
the way I never could as a kid
without falling.

Last year I fell six times
on ice and concrete, skinned
my knees bright red. Please give me
the wisdom those scars failed to bring.

Or if that's too much, share the turquoise
mittens Ben made me, crocheting for three full days
two Christmases ago. I lost them
on the subway. Let them be found
by the one who needs them most.

continued overleaf...

TO THE POLAR VORTEX *contd...*

By your giving, may some grace return
six months from now, pouring water
on summer's dryness. Let me distribute
your gifts and your stories

of a cold light that can't be extinguished
of mercy that thaws and abounds
in melting snow.

MADONNA OF THE TWO SCARS

Our Lady of Częstochowa

The legend says
Saint Luke painted your icon:
Czarna Madonna, Black Madonna
with the Child in your arms.

Hodogetria, she who points the way
to the jeweled boy
a slim hand indicates him, not you
the source of our salvation.

It's said you reached *Jasna Góra* – Bright
Mountain – because there the horses
carrying you from one lord to another refused
to go on. You chose Poland as your first home.

At so many altars I've knelt before you
and more than your royal robe of *fleur-de-lis*
more than your jewels, your dark hands, your baby
it's your scars that command my gaze -

Two sharp slashes down your right cheek.
They say it was a Hussite warrior
bent on abducting you
who made those two scrapes, started

on a third, then dropped dead.
Two hundred years later, they say
your wounded face held off a Swedish invasion
and you were crowned Poland's true queen.

continued overleaf...

MADONNA OF THE TWO SCARS *contd...*

At nine, in the church my great-uncle founded
for your nation's immigrant children
I sang to you and your re-formed country
just three years free of Soviet rule.

I sang and watched the dampening eyes
of Poland's first freely elected leader in fifty years
as he, on his state visit to the US, also kneeled
before your image.

You try to point to your Son.
Insisting that he, not you, is the Way.
But I can't tear my gaze
from those two sharp slashes

no art restorer could remove.
As a child I was told
to gesture as you do, indicating
others as the sign of salvation.

Lowering my head,
I pointed all around me,
but couldn't stop wishing
for my own bronze halo.

As my father insisted -
"You have to be more humble,"
I still dreamed of roses
placed at my feet.

As I staved off the Hussite, the Swede,
I still wondered why
after hundreds of years
a woman must be damaged

to be seen.

A GIFT FROM HEPHAESTUS

On Leaving Greece

I watched Thasos shrink in the distance as the ferry moved farther away.
Soon, it was another layer of lush hills blended with the landscape.
I didn't want to sleep on the bus, didn't want to miss the chance
to watch green holly bushes and olive groves recede. But still I dozed. Later,
at a rest stop, heavy with the smell of powdered sugar, sweet *loukomi*.
I wanted to carry that smell, along with the sharp, clear aroma of *ouzo*,
the prickly green holly, pink mimosa flowers. But I couldn't keep them.

Now, the smell is of seaweed as I lie on a beach outside Thessaloniki.
Mt. Olympus peers out at me from under rain. Does one of the deities notice me
searching? Maybe Hephaestus, the carpenter and blacksmith god, maker of
Achilles' shield, trapper of his adulterous wife in chains. I can almost see him,
looking my way and scowling. He knows I'm going back to piles
of unpaid bills, ungraded student essays, two lovers I still can't choose
between, anxious parents who wonder why I've not called. To-do lists kept

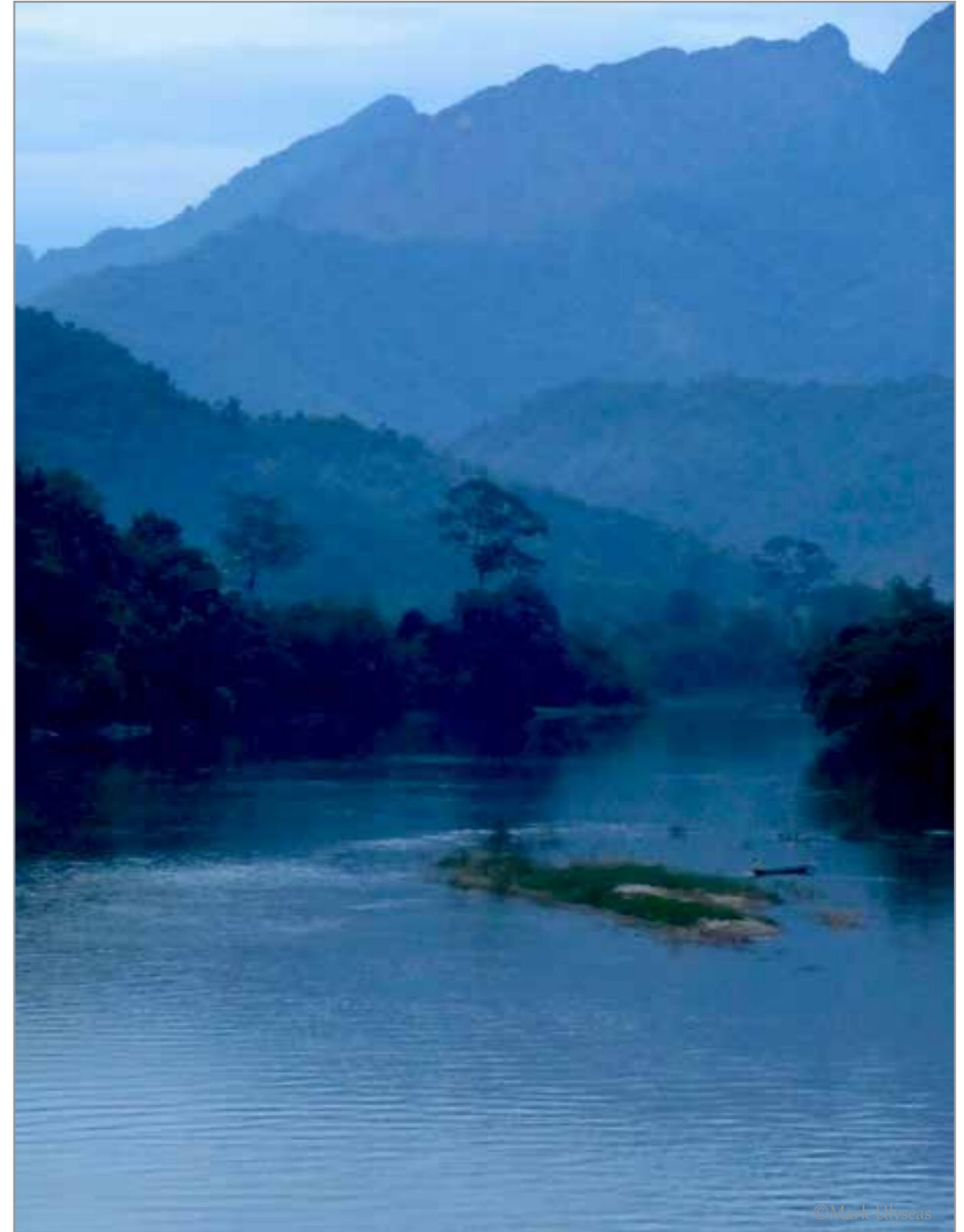
for years with unrealized ambitions: write the novel, learn Arabic, read
St. Teresa's *Interior Castle*, Hofstadter's *Godel, Escher, Bach*.
Clouds caress the tip of Olympus. The waves wash my feet. Sea, hills, sky,
various shades of blue. Maybe Hephaestus is calmer now. Maybe he's not
making me a chain or a chair I won't rise from. He smells of petroleum and water.
Could he be making me an airplane? Surely he knows how to do that now,
build a vessel I can use to return to this place where I am no one's

continued overleaf...

A GIFT FROM HEPHAESTUS *contd...*

daughter or teacher or beloved, where velvet sands embrace me, where my body can touch its salty primal home. But no. When he descends the mountain, stands on the beach before me, the gift he offers is small: a metal box with a stone from Olympus. "Add a stone from every beach you walk on, every mountain you climb. As you fill it the box will expand; there will always be enough room. Place in it the most shining amethysts, calcite, marble, quartz, maybe even a diamond someday. It will get heavier; the weight may make

your shoulders slump. But with each stone your strength will increase. In every room where you rest, take these gems and set them before you; I promise to make them gleam. There will be many beaches, many hills, many rooms. Some day, when the box's weight becomes too much, come back to Olympus and return it to me. Many fires will have ravished this landscape by then, but tough saplings will sprout in burnt wood's place; you will return to find these hills green. May the journey be long; may the day be far off. I wish you a lifetime of the most brilliant jewels."



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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



A MEDITATION

Dogs barking in the hour after midnight, it could be someone trying to steal your car. Driven by this and other less conscious fears, you stare out into the tree-bluster and the cloud-shift and there it is, untouched, unmoving, your car. Grey in the lost light.

But this is not the only fear that assails you, no. Others scratch and creep upwards, from the groin to the heart, etching out a timidity you wouldn't have believe you possessed. There are fears of dying, of terminal illness, of medical tests that prove disastrous; many things, even the loss of your lover, the loss of money, the house.

So many that they surge towards the overwhelming. In the kitchen, cigarettes and a mug of tea; leave the lights off, there's something protective about the dark. Yes, it creates dangerous shadows, but generally it's a bit like pulling a blanket over your head. You can hardly keep awake, but you can't sleep.

Will you have a heart attack? In this silence?

You are familiar with nights such as this, early hours such as these, their impromptu terrors. A valium would help, or maybe two, so that the effect of being gently immunized against the world would last over through the start of the following waking day. At the back of your mind, or perhaps at the back of your soul, the doubt about it all, years of writing and nothing to show for it, the utter uselessness of a poem.

The hours are indifferent and you spend too many of them like this.

Fred Johnston

WHEN AT SUDDEN WATER

*"This creed of the desert seemed inexpressible in words,
and indeed in thought."*

- T.E. Lawrence

When at sudden water
Two men got down from horses
Ignored us, laid out prayer mats
Rinsed hands and feet in
The flesh-warm pool and prayed

We were stunned enough by the beauty and stillness
Of their being present, the water, sand, the horses idle
Two jezails snug in tasselled sheaths off the saddles
The almost-whisper of the prayers, a breath, a breathing

When they were gone in some
Impossible direction (a compass point in the heart)
The stillness was mute, hot
A void unfillable –
We climb in to our outrageous gorgon vehicle and go.

IMPRINT

I knew her leaning in soft rain
On the railings of St Stephen's Green

On green weekend afternoons
With Breton pipers busking in a row

Under the scratch of grey cloud
Creasing the roof of the Hellfire Club –

A handful of history between
The river and the shuttered offices

And the Georgian basements
Where in basement night we learned to sing.

There we were in our elegance
In our mood of art and politics, pinned

Between the music and State
Overthrow, announcements of discussion

And the fear of sin. A condom
In its wrap imprinted on a jeans' pocket

Never used, just as all our love
Was nothing but an outline under sheets:

Or a girl in light, against the railings
In the rain, untouched by wilding weather.

FIRST ALLEGIANCE

*"I lived at home. Time passed. A grown man,
I was soon a child again, with a child's need to be loved.
I saw the world through a child's eyes and grew afraid of it."*

- Martin Schlessler: *Poetry and Anger*

And when I had made my first allegiance
to lies, poetry came -

rolling off my nib
like promises off a whore's tongue

you mark the first leaf of the fall
the brown, the gold

and pass into a winter of illusion -
I sit at my mother's table, a man of forty

with my wife at my side, buttering
schemes and stratagems

and we are like a scene from Chekov
or, more aptly, Ibsen; perhaps

a couple of frames from a Bergman film:
poetry is what we maim with,

it is all we have in the cold kitchen,
while the leaves, brown, gold, descend

beyond the window and rest on the
doorstep like footprints.

CAIRO

The sort of thing that fascinates a child
Is, for example, my uncle Walter's sola topee
(Solar, mangled the impatient Brits)
Which dulled the Egyptian sun on his head
But did little for his toes, which froze by night.

It floated around my child's head, yet
It's batteredness made me a Tommy in full kit.

Where, then, Egypt? Where Cairo?
A child does not know. The topee
Did not convey that sort of knowledge.
It saved him for a featureless housing-estate
In Birmingham - a desert by other means.

My uncle limped for want of his toes
You could spot him in the pub by the lopsided
Rhythm, track him through the crowd
By the trickle of sand trailing out of his
Trousers leg. Drunk enough, he'd head for Cairo.

Gaynor Kane is from Belfast, Northern Ireland. She came to writing late, after finishing a degree with a creative writing module. Her full collection, *Venus in Pink Marble* was released on her 50th birthday in 2020, published by the Hedgehog Poetry Press. She has three other publications, from the same press: a micro collection, *Circling the Sun* (2018), about the early aviatrixes; a chapbook, *Memory Forest* (2019), about burial rituals and last wishes; and a co-authored chapbook of pandemic poetry *Penned In* along with Karen Mooney (2020). Her forthcoming chapbook of love poems *Eight Types of Love* is due to be published in Summer 2022. Her poems have earned places in several competitions. She has been guest editor of the Bangor Literary journal and has also performed at several festivals, including the Belfast Book Festival, Stendhal Music and Arts Festival and Cheltenham Poetry Festival.



Gaynor Kane

MOVEMENTS IN LANDSCAPE

Rural landscape frozen hard, crackled
blue and white glazed delftware scene,
rutted tracks now iced streams. Paperwhite
fields, fleece hedgerows, pearl pathways,
crystal droplets, hoarfrost on windows
like albino peacock tail-feathers.

Crows in branches, calling notes,
quavers and crotchets that create
song with movement, beaks to the bark.
Bare trees lining the track
limbs within limbs until the vanishing point
like starving matryoshkas.

A solitary red doll-shape wrapped tight,
a boy approaching, wearily, shoulders hunched
cradling the bundle. He carefully unwraps it,
places a burnished black violin under his chin,
taller now, grinning, rejuvenated as
low winter sun reflects on polished spruce;

cut on the quarter, from a tree grown
at high altitudes after the dormant months,
timber branded with forest tiger stripes.
Poitr reads the music of the landscape;
the five barred gates, staves with
ornated hinges like music clefts.

As the boy moves the bow back and forth
(made from two hundred straight
hairs off a loyal Mongolian horse)
he magics an incantation; an oratorio.
Soprano strings carrying cherub's
melodies, on a capricious wind.

SINGING TO THE COWS

Once upon a time
there was a girl called Ronja.
Meaning *God's joyful song*.

She was a herder and her cows loved her because she sang to them.
In the morning, she called them together with an aubade.
The herd followed her into the parlour where she sang
each a milking melody. The milk was pure and as sweet
as honey from the bees on the wild-flower meadow. In the evening,
she would hum a lullaby as the sun set behind the hills
and the embroidered blanket of sky covered them in darkness.

They would sleep thinking of Ronja while ruminating
on yesterday's cud, occasionally some mellow moos
would escape as they sang her songs in their dreams.

But Ronja got winter weary and for a week
she didn't have the energy for music.
They were running out of milk and butter
and she had forgotten the words of the churning song.
The heifers had round bellies the size of the sun,
their brown eyes like stagnant wells,
ears twitching as they longed
for her to release a birthing song.

Her grandfather sat her down. *Ronja*, he said,
you must return to the music,
please find it in you to try.
It doesn't matter if the notes aren't perfect.

*Grandfather, I haven't the heart,
the winter was so long and dark.
I will wait for spring.*

But, my child, he soothed
Spring doesn't happen
because the sun rises in the sky,
it happens because the earth
is sung to.

N.B. The phrase in bold italics was found in an article 'Farmer Explains Why You Should Sing to Cows',
written by Justin Isherwood, at *Wisconsin Life*, published on 16.12.2015
<https://wisconsinlife.org/story/farmer-explains-why-you-should-sing-to-cows/>

GRIEF

Sometimes sorrow is like a middle-of-the-night
sleepwalk down an unlit corridor, every door is open;
all the rooms are lit by a blinking fluorescent tube
and contain the opposite of what you are searching for.
Holding your breath, hands tighten around your neck.

Other times, it's a lorryload of workmen disturbing your peace
on a Saturday afternoon. Hammer-jacking tarmac from the patch
of road marked with the yellow spray-painted square.
A breath-taking keening from a gulp of magpies
as they fly away like newspaper headlines.

Or you are a swimmer, flailing arms and legs, out of depth
in an October sea, trying to catch memories.
Question mark waves making you gasp for breath?
Exclamation marks of hail stabbing skin!
A storm whips up a wailing horizon. You drown.



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Poet, writer and artist Greta Sykes has published her work in many anthologies. She is a member of London Voices Poetry Group and also produces art work for them. Her new volume of poetry called 'The Shipping News and Other Poems' came out in August 2016. The German translation of her book 'Under charred skies' has now been published in Germany under the title 'Unter verbranntem Himmel' by Eulenspiegel Verlag. She is the chair of the Socialist History Society and has organised joint poetry events for them at the Poetry Café. She is a trained child psychologist and has taught at the Institute of Education, London University, where she is now an associate researcher. Her particular focus is now on women's emancipation and antiquity.
<https://www.gretasykes.com/>



IF I'M LUCKY

Like early humans
 Sharpened flints in their hands,
 carved the meaning of their lives in runes,
 icons and images on walls or rock,
 some in caves in the dark, inspired by
 fear, hunger and cold,
 I draw at night my fears into a dream
 And walk on ridges close to the abyss,
 Wondering how to escape.
 Waiting for the train to take me home.
 If I'm lucky I fly and meet the migrating barnacle geese
 On their way south.

Dr Greta Sykes

BRONZE GOLD LAMPIONS

Bronze gold lamps tremble
In this light morning wind.
I watch the sickle of the moon
Falling into the ribbon of white cloud
And stars.
I stand, a stone sculpture, transfixed
At the window,
Watching the shadows of leaves
As if alive, shift and dance on the
Glistening street below.
A woman has found peace and calm
At last. They speak to me loudly
Without sound. They speak of love and the living.
I merge into their will to live and persist.
It is night and cold and I return to bed
To continue the dream of the gold
Bronze lanterns.

THE GINGKO BILOBA

In the street the slender Ginkgo
Biloba tree reaches to the sky.
A yellow torch in the night. It spills
Its gold in heart-shaped leaves
On the pavement under the watchful eyes
Of the moon. The fox furtively hurries
Through the silent street.
I take out my velvet purse and
Put golden heart-shaped leaves
and the moon inside it
to look at in my dream sleep.

VERMILLION ROSES

It was time to wait for her.
The cut grass smell filled the air
With freshness and expectancy.
A blackbird's tune trailed from a roof,
And my heart calmed into trance.
The branches of the cedar
Lifted as if starting to dance
Calendulas glowed,
A church bell struck ten.
There was stillness.
The clouds had torn open
To reveal the distant blue.
I looked straight west.
He came with a bunch of vermillion roses,
Dressed in azure.
The evening embraced me
With velvet arms.

READING DR. ZHIVAGO

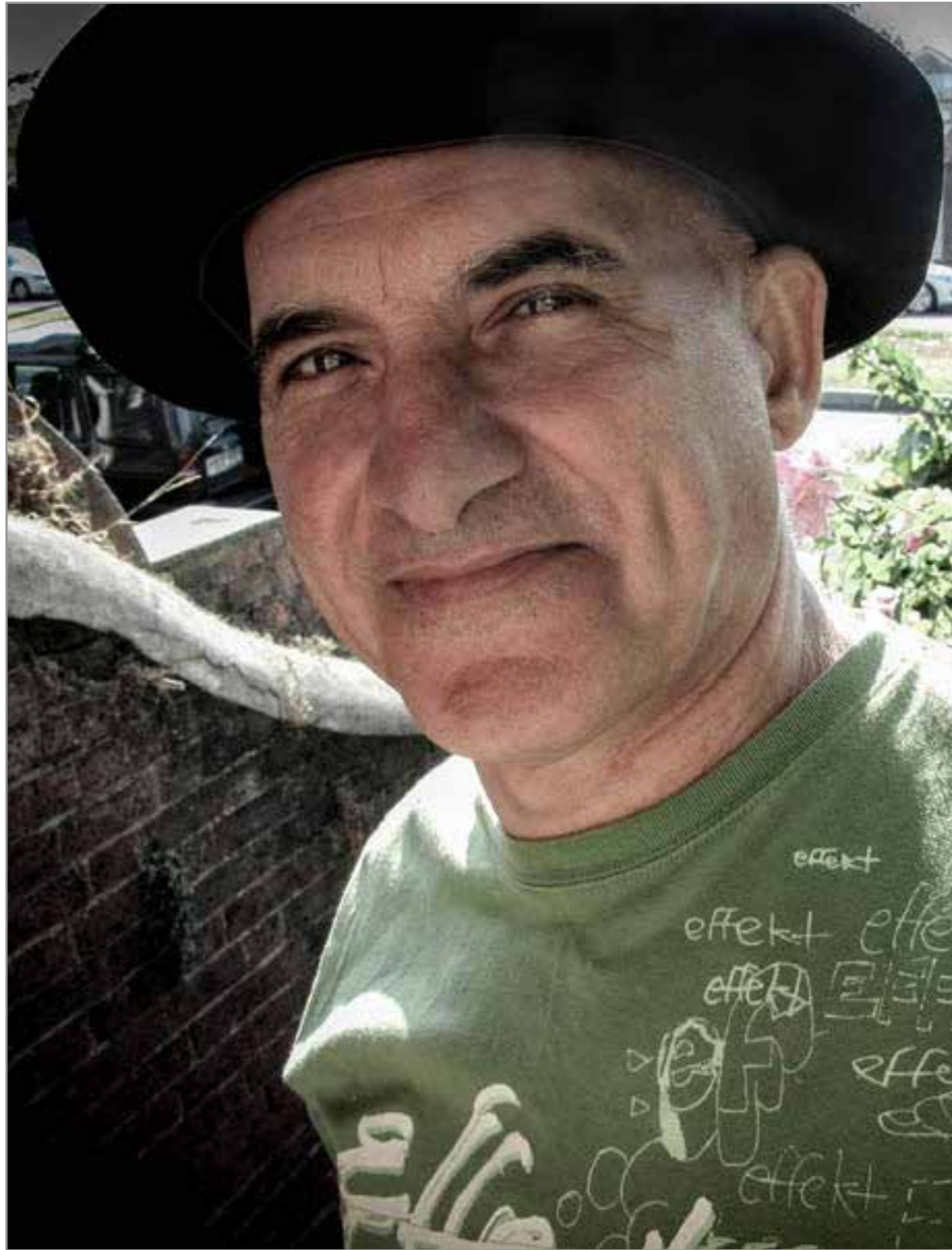
The Reds and the Whites
In the Siberian forest.
Woolly snowflakes
Crystal snowflakes, pure
And like glass.
Hearsay and naysayers,
Rumours, whispers and potatoes
Buried deep underground.
But the Reds were victorious.
Since then, the bitter
Medicine of the Bolshevik
Victory
Has to be swallowed
Every day.

MY FIRST BREATH

When I screamed my first breath
In the war charred hospital
When mother and I choked
On fire and smoke
I felt yearning for love.
On my first school days
I waited eagerly
To be instructed in love.
I fell in love with the alphabet.
My tender feelings for classmates
Were roughed in storms of
Jealousy.
I was longing for comradeship.
At night I read books
About the magic of love.
How Dante loved Beatrice.
How Isolde loved Tristan.
By day I searched for the
Science of love.
pheromones and oxytocin.
During drunken nights
I harvested kisses
In a field of strawberries.

I grew love hands to hold you with
And love legs to climb on you,
My eyes misty with love,
My voice cooing
Like a dove.
At times my lips were dry from
Yearning, but did not give up.
The more I loved the more
Love turned up.
I found it in the bus driver's smile
Recognising me.
I found it in the star shaped maple leaves
That fell like gold from the sky.
I found it in the woman holding her baby
Who smiled at me walking by
And in the small green shoots growing out of
The seeds I planted.
As long as I breathe I shall breathe love.

Composer and poet. Born in the USA. Australian citizen. Highly Commended 2020 ACU Poetry Prize. Short List 2020 & 2014 Newcastle Poetry Prize. Shortlist 2019, 2018, 2017 & 2014 University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's Poetry Prize. Winner of 2017 University of Canberra Health Poetry Prize. Selected for Best Australian Poems 2015 & 2014.



THEATRE OF WAR

Let's grow manioc plant all over the bomb craters and make them green.
- Pham Sang

The one-liners of Bob Hope, and cleavage of Jill St John, break up the tiers of G.I.s who rise to standing ovation - months of fear and homesickness, relieved temporarily, by moments under bright generator lights.

Directly below *Củ Chi* camp ground, in the hollowed out tunnel cavern, a small cadre of North Vietnamese guerillas are entertained by the five minute sketches, of playwright *Pham Sang*, no room for standing, single wick oil lamps doused at each interval, sing-a-longs discouraged to conserve oxygen.

The Hope entourage of leggy Gold Digger showgirls, Les Brown and His Band of Renown, airlift out next morning in a specially fitted B-52.

On far outskirts of the camp perimeter, in open air, the *Pham Sang* troupe continue a series of concerts, now on wood-planked stages, in the natural amphitheater pits, of thirty-foot B-52 bomb craters. Far from American ears, the singing is loud, heartfelt love songs, politically-tinged:
*I love you I miss you and wait for you,
liberation fighter, let us fight the enemy together.*

GREEN IDYLL

Poet, reader, acolyte of Amor,
look down now upon this human clamor,
the eternal clash, of nature and man,
of body and soul, of blood and the land.

Loud voices here echo loud voices past,
again raised in anger, passion, and cast
in frenzied fury, of religious-speak.
The green-eyed falcon, tethered to the sleek

and shadowy hand, of privilege and might,
commanding the field, with keen focused sight,
once loosed, aloft, murders all in the wood,
hunger sated, then returns to the hood.

Then how to go forward, how to reflect
on that entrusted to us, to protect
heirs, our future, with measured sanity,
without slip, or tilt, into vanity,

or chaos, where other noble souls fell,
corrupted, poisoned (no doubt, meaning well,)
by compromise, Aphrodisian hour -
the twin inheritances of power.

Witness the Volk, the Aztec Calpulli,
Khmer Collective, Russian Kolkhozy.
In search of simple, natural talents
for ourselves, the earth, in pleasing balance.

How shall we proceed otherwise from those
who came before us and what they proposed?
What wiser principles will guide us, when
government pulpits are ours to command?

We look to the sun, and the wind, to heal
us, from coal and oil, a lofty ideal,
but how is that vision to be enforced,
appointed, by Law, to shepherd the course,

when entrusted with the same pointing guns,
once held by those that have been overcome?
And how will transgressors, of new Green Laws,
be punished when they deviate from Cause -

by solar-powered prisons, corrections,
biodynamic lethal injections?
We imagine a dazzling green splendor -
but let us recall darker green rendered,

by those who once dreamt quite similar dreams
to us; also green nightmares, and the schemes,
the cruel, inhuman, frightening mistakes,
long shadows, from which we're barely awake.

Let us proceed, poet, reader, at last,
looking down, as we must, surveying vast
hourglass sand, and those promises past,
never forgetting that we were not cast

as first to look through the Emerald Glass,
and, God-willing, we will not be the last.

AND EVER SHALL BE

The fireworks cosmos is spinning,
will Mars be sanctuary -
our souls to mend?

*As it was in the beginning,
is now and ever shall be,
world without end.*

The virus appears winning -
(does life depend on the bee?)
can we defend?

*As it was in the beginning,
is now and ever shall be,
world without end.*

Is AI praying or sinning,
who, or what, will hear our plea -
our next Godsend?

*As it was in the beginning,
is now and ever shall be,
world without end.*

If breathable air is thinning,
(did we evolve from the sea?)
can humans bend?

*As it was in the beginning,
is now and ever shall be,
world without end.*

Some claim the fabric's unpinning -
the dinosaur- or the flea.
Then how? Or when?

*As it was in the beginning,
is now and ever shall be,
world without end.*

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.



John Grey

CONTRARY

That's the girl I remember,
the one so often told
that sugar wasn't good for her
which only made her heap more and more
of those white crystals into her cup of tea.

She was even scolded
for being too young to drink tea
but I can remember her
playing with those soggy bags
like a grownup
before she was a teenager.
The astringency didn't seem to bother her.
In fact, I do believe she welcomed it.
The taste was grownup.
She longed to become that taste.

She's drinking coffee now
and seated opposite me
in a small café.
I tell her she should cut down
on the caffeine and the sweet stuff.
At least, I tell her inwardly.
She hears anyhow,
which is why she goes back
for another cup
and she twists open
one tiny sugar packet at a time
like some bad kid
breaking the necks of sparrows.

continued overleaf...

CONTRARY *contd...*

We dated for a while.
 Her contrariness was sexy at first
 but, ultimately, frustrating, unrewarding.
 How many times can a guy
 pull a woman back from a cliff's edge
 or hide her uppers and her downers
 or tell her to slow down
 when he was white-faced beside her in the car,
 gripping the sides of the seat.

We've kept in touch
 but only because I never said we should.
 And she's still here, still alive,
 living single,
 enjoying the thrill
 of chasing happiness away.

She calls me old-fashioned
 for having a house, a wife,
 a steady job,
 for being what she calls "settled."
 If I were her,
 I'd immediately cease being
 all of those things.
 But I'm not.
 So I remain settled even when we part.

She says she doesn't know
 what the future holds for her.
 The future doesn't say.
 In her case, if it did,
 it wouldn't be the future.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND

The intrinsic
 properties of love
 are not clear -

I love
 how they
 morph a feeling
 from the physical
 to the spiritual -

love
 never explains itself -

the more
 it grows in intensity
 the less I can
 formulate a thought -

by the time
 we start to get serious
 I am completely
 out of understanding -

it's not so much
 your company I crave
 I just need someone
 to get back to me.

WE BIRDS OF WINTER

In January, rooms smell of pine elixirs.
Windows are scrubbed clean on one side,
ice over on the other. I keep busy in
modest ways. Outside, ravens
are dragged into my frame by the
contrasting whiteness of snow.

I write some, to others, to myself.
I bake cookies, make cider. Is that
a stray grackle out there? What's
it doing this far north? It mourns
a cornfield desecrated by cold.

The ravens are better prepared.
Carrion sees them through. Their big
dark eyes know there will be dead.

I step outside with the trash at dusk,
shock the birds into filling the sky
like dabs of dull color
against blood-soaked horizon.

Only the ravens remain grounded.
They're smart enough to think
they know what they're dealing with in me.

Gray light, shadow, a pickup in the wind.
slow my appetite for daytime tasks.
These black birds retreat to thick wood roosts.
In harsh worlds,
we are of the same survival.
The room with the electric light,
the branch, the squeeze of satin feathered bodies...
all under siege.

Then, when the temperature is low enough,
something kicks in.
A heartbeat always.
A radiator if available.

BODIES WHEN WE MEET

The place is crowded.
The doctor's office always runs behind.
Every chair is occupied.
Old people mostly
some attached to cylinders
of oxygen,
others complaining of the temperature
in the waiting room,
all on that tumbrel of old age
and hoping for a stay of execution.

I flip through Time,
Sports Illustrated,
avoid the healthy lifestyle magazine.
Yes, I'm sure there's things
I'm doing wrong
but I prefer they be kept a secret from me.
I'm here for my yearly physical.
It's a trial by poking and prodding,
listening while I breathe deep
and gulp even deeper.
There's no such defense as double jeopardy.
I could be innocent of all charges this year
but guilty the next.

The nurse appears in the doorway.
She calls out a name. It isn't mine.
A man in his eighties
creaks to his feet,
creeps in her direction.
The others look disgusted.
Sickness doesn't keep them waiting.
Why should the doctor?

I brought a book with me
but I can't read it.
In such a place,
I am virtually all body.
There's no room left for a mind.
Then someone I know walks in.
Our faces light up to see one another.
Our arteries don't.

Richard W. Halperin has Irish/U.S. dual nationality and lives in Paris. He has published four collections via Salmon Poetry, *Cliffs of Moher*, the most recent of which is *Catch Me While You Have the Light*, 2018; *Selected and New Poems* is listed for Spring 2023. In complement, he has published fifteen shorter collections via Lapwing Publications, Belfast, the most recent of which is *The Girl in the Red Cape*, 2021. The present poems are taken from a sketchbook *People in a Diary*, named after S.N. Behrman's 1972 memoirs (Little, Brown, & Co.) which Mr. Halperin calls 'one of my *compagnons de route*'.



PEOPLE IN A DIARY

For S.N. Behrman

On the train. The man seated next to me
is alertly typing. We pass a glade of young trees.
In the scheme of things, each one a life.
Garbo's face as Anna Karenina passes through
my mind. I open a letter from New York:
The Little Foxes – Lillian Hellman; language –
is in for a long run. Certain delights. They arrive
of themselves. People in a diary which I have
no need to write. I can face my newspaper now –
we'll forget about whom the first page is about.
Positive things bob in the light. Dickens
was nearly killed in a train crash, pages of
Our Mutual Friend went flying out of his hands.
He never was the same after it. Nothing is ever
the same after anything.

Richard W. Halperin

AGRICOLAE, AGRICOLARUM

i.m. Macdara Woods

What now? Meaning, what today?
Gratitude: for such poetry, his.
For conversations, ours, we talking
in admiration of Ovid,
especially of Ovid old and exiled,
or of recent contemporaries, Tennessee,
his vulnerability, his poetry.

Walking like children
in the forest of Latin and Greek,
of exile,
of marvellous things.

FOR JOHN GIBSON

I can never again go to Lourdes with
my friend John Gibson. He died.
I was not there for that. I was informed.
And there it is. Death. Whenever I want
to meet up with him again,
that large saintly Cork and Ross man,
I walk into a post. I go this way and that,
but each time I walk into the same post. Death.
A poem can go around a post. Thus, this.

THE WRITING OF A LETTER IN A HOSTEL IN A MOUNTAIN PASS AT NIGHT

The moon is a companion.
My pen glides across the page.
The letter may never be read,
may never be delivered.
But for now, happiness.
A good letter. Not about me,
not about him. Not about the weather.
'Is it to Derry?' someone asks.
'I don't know a Derry,' I say.
I don't mind the interruption.
I do not know where I am going
tomorrow. But I have this night.
I am not dead yet. My brain
is not-bad tonight. My brain
is not-bad.

RIVER JORDAN

Is the river Jordan water or blood?

Patrick Pye once gave me
One of his little drawings,
the baptism of Christ.

To it he added, for me,
a stroke of pure red to the water.
With this I could not cope.
When I got home, I destroyed the drawing.

Forgive me, Patrick.
I was not as old as you were then,
as I am now.

Vinny Glynn-Steed is an award-winning poet from Galway. Placed 2nd in the 2017 Westport Arts Festival competition and winner of the 2020 Allingham poetry competition, Vinny has poems published both abroad and at home. A former pushcart nominee, Vinny has published work online and in journals such as Ofi Press magazine, Parhelion, Mediterranean poetry, Crannog, Boyne Berries, Cinammon Press anthology, Windows anthology, Bangor journal to name but a few. His debut chapbook *Catching Air* was published by Maytree Press in December 2020.

One particular famine story tells of a 'curiosity,' namely a young boy, completely naked, found running in the snow from Galway to Clifden in search of work as a chimney sweep...



I. DISCOVERY

They will come across the one-room cabin
with its stone-walled plot and turf neatly stacked.
They will hear their songs and prayers,
and on the wind
curses in a foreign tongue.

Down by the water
they will find some floundering
forgotten joke
at the bottom of their canoe.

Beside this, in the sea-weed
gathered for kelp burning,
they will uncover their stories furled
and ready for another night's unpacking.

Vinny Glynn-Steed

II. LANGUAGE

Your curses are those of youthful ignorance
of the pain of youth
of the birthing of fox cubs
you are blind to this putrid landscape
naked to its plight
and yet you run snow deep
until your feet are fish
deadened on tenterhooks
the long-forgotten memory of your muscle.

III. MOVEMENT

And what of the muscle of a salmon come to spawn?
Where her waters whisper, survive! survive!
Deep in crimson rock pools where we find no nourishment.
Or the sinews of a ten-year-old child
never having memorised a game
nor the facial complexities required
to crack a smile.
*The painstaking memory of muscle
are his footprints in the snow,
the struggle of words on a page.*

IV. PROMISES

You know of words
of books that speak of ribcages as a prison
of the songbirds inside waiting to be released.
Yet your frost harbours no euphoria
only the supine
spindles of crows' legs
and you hear dead voices
whispering along hallways of antiquity
resonate through mammoth green mountains
and in bone.
*We are safe now in our knowledge,
We hope.*

V. DETERMINATION

They might find you in a place that know no solace
deep in the mountains
where light is the umbilical cord to your thoughts
or face down on a higher plain
in feverish exaltation for Gods that keep your belly swollen.
They might see you in the distance running
your contorted body
shimmering in winter's afternoon mirage
as if four legs brush this sacred snow
and how the glimmer of your golden tail held-high
is a fist raised against this barbaric sky.

2010 - 2022



POETRY & WRITING

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