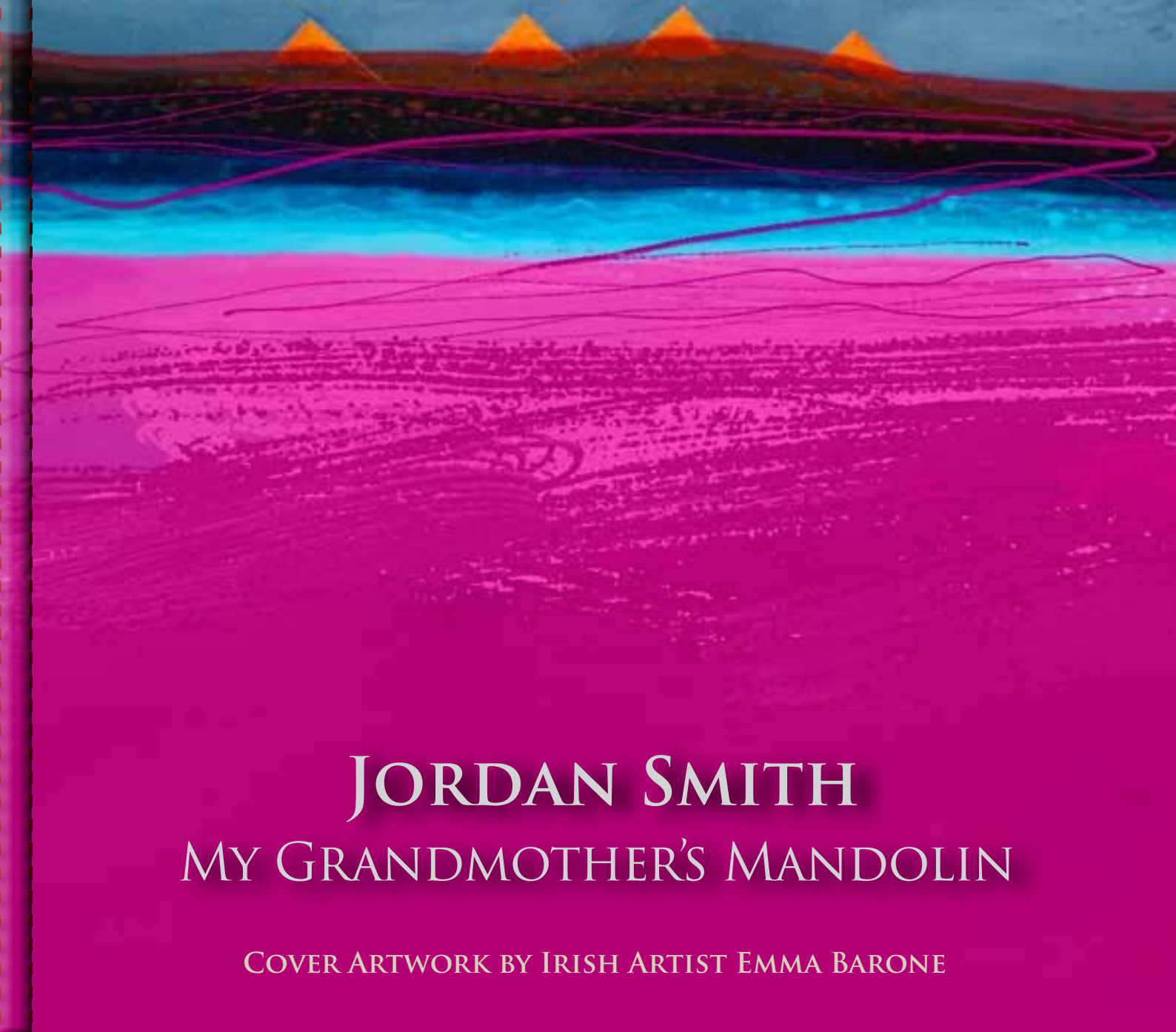


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MARCH 2022



JORDAN SMITH
MY GRANDMOTHER'S MANDOLIN

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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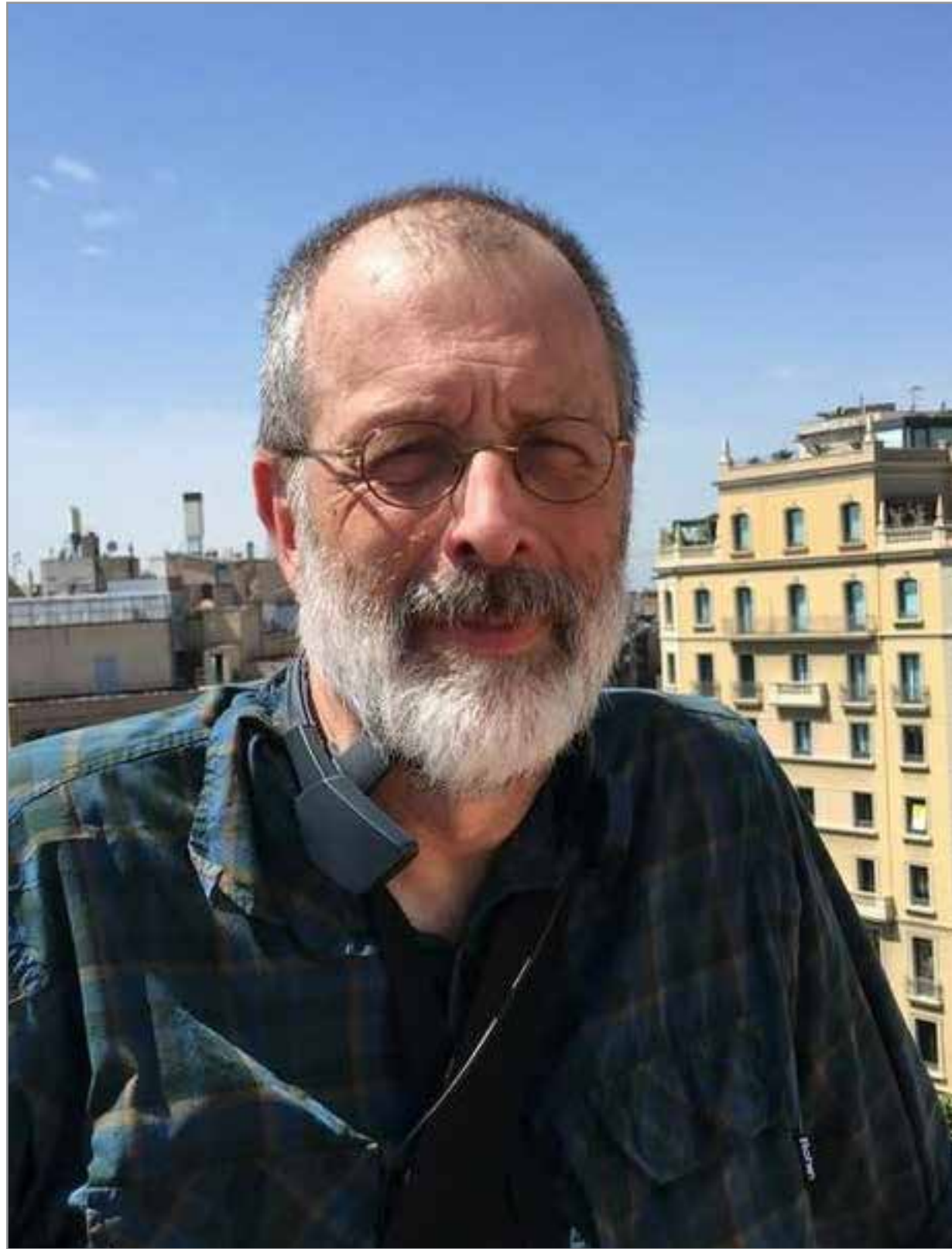
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Jordan Smith is the author of eight full-length books of poems, most recently *Little Black Train*, winner of the Three Mile Harbor Press Prize, *Clare's Empire*, a fantasia on the life and work of John Clare from The Hydroelectric Press, and *The 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.



JORDAN SMITH

MY GRANDMOTHER'S MANDOLIN

I took out my grandmother's mandolin last night to try out some tunes from *John Clare and the Folk Tradition* by George Deacon. Despite the academic title, the book is mostly lyrics and musical notation, a collection of songs and tunes that John Clare—peasant, self-taught poet, publishing prodigy and fiddler, then failure, madman—collected in and around his native Helpston. Some are familiar, with titles almost any fiddler would know, but others are more unexpected. I decided to take a crack at one I'd never heard, the idiosyncratically titled "Beef Stake Hornpipe."

I am not much of a mandolinist; it isn't my main instrument, and I don't play this one often enough to develop any proficiency. The left hand—the noting hand—carries over from my fiddling, since the two instruments are tuned to the same intervals, but I'm much less dexterous with a pick than I am with the bow, and the mandolin's tightly strung doubled courses require a tighter left-hand pressure and strong right-hand technique to bring out the fullness of tone that, for a skilled player, comes as a woody, percussive flow, but, for me, is mostly a plink. Unlike the bowed fiddle, the mandolin doesn't sustain a note, so the attack with the plectrum is everything. I don't know how good my maternal grandmother, Alida Rose Steinorth, was either. By the time I became curious about the instrument, she hadn't played it for decades. Along with an old portable typewriter, it was one of the treasures of her attic, and like any treasure, it was hard to reach. The attic had a folding staircase behind a trapdoor, and this had to be opened with a hook on the end of a pole that pulled the stairs down; they just managed to fit on the stairway landing by the exposed chimney. Since the hook could only be used by an adult, this meant, often, interrupting my grandfather, who preferred not to be interrupted. The attic was uninsulated, so I only went up there in summer. I still remember the heat, the sun-bright view through the tiny window over the gravel turnaround and the little rose garden, the fur coats hanging in their heavy moth-proof bags, the touch of the typewriter keys, the fascinating but unsatisfactory sound of the mandolin.

Jordan Smith

When, a teenager, I asked if I could take it home, she didn't offer to teach me anything, not even to get me started. She only said that I might be able to find a piano instructor who also taught mandolin, since that was how it was when she began. She played, my mother told me, in a mandolin orchestra when they were in fashion. And then she didn't, and the mandolin went up to her attic.

Her mandolin was made in 1924 by Gibson, an A-Jr., their plainest, least expensive model. No surprise there; my grandfather worked as a foreman and tool and die maker at Bausch & Lomb, the optical company; they had three children, a small house in Point Pleasant near Irondequoit Bay in Rochester, New York, and they couldn't have had much money to spare. There's a flaw in the top, a sort of divot in the surface that never developed into a crack; one of the luthiers who looked at it for me suggested that it might have been a factory second, which makes sense for a frugal family that still valued culture. The original fiber-board case, long since disintegrated, had a sticker from Levis Music Store on East Avenue. The store was still there when I was a kid, across the street but on the same block as the Eastman Theatre and Kilbourn Hall, where the students at the Eastman School of Music performed. I loved the shop, both rooms, the one with instruments for sale in glass display cases and the one with sheet music and scores. It was like a museum and library combined, and there were rarely many customers, and the one or two staff members were unobtrusive. A jazz aspirant, I coveted the Dizzy Gillespie trumpet they had for sale, the bell cocked upward, although I was too diffident to ever ask to take a closer look.

Covet is a dangerous word, betraying a lack of self-sufficiency, which is itself a betrayal of what might get you where you want to be, work or discipline or well-deployed attention. I coveted musical sophistication and virtuosity, but I blew off my theory class and rarely practiced my horn enough or the right way, getting by as an improviser on good luck and a decent ear. John Clare coveted literary fame, and he achieved it for a time through talent, enterprise, and dogged work in the face of much discouragement, but he never forgot the effort it took or the grinding impossibility of becoming an equal in a system governed by class, which was happy enough to celebrate him as an oddity but would not tolerate him as an artist. Of all the things that commentators suggest might be responsible for his madness, this struggle with the givens of class is one that stays with me, although that might be sentiment, weighting the artist's circumstances over a medical truth.

As salient to his failures as it was to the terms of his success as a "peasant poet," as distracting as his pursuits of music or sex and his desperate and heartbroken love for an unenclosed England, the injustice of class and the humiliation of patronage joined with these to drive him away from his writing into other dissatisfactions. If I lived without Clare's clear disadvantages and in a country organized around a different myth of personal advancement, I still recognized the way these limits worked. My mother and her sister were the first of their family to attend college; their ancestors had been farmers in Germany and then livery stable operators in the Joseph Avenue neighborhood of Rochester when it was the home for their countrymen (as later it would be for Jews, then for African-Americans, then for Puerto Ricans). My father's family was from the Catskills, and although he and his father graduated from Hamilton, and his dad worked as a public school teacher in Newburgh, most of them were farmers or railroad men. One was a trainmaster in Walton, a master telegrapher, entrusted with photographing wrecks. One ran the general store in Andes. My father met my mother—under a lab table, they told me, without elaborating--when they were both doing war-related work at Bausch & Lomb, and then he got a test-engineering and sales job for a company that made sophisticated vacuum-coating equipment, but he was laid off, following his hospitalization for chronic depression, and never found another like it. When I was in high school, he was on the evening custodial crew in my school, going to work with a Radio Shack transistor radio so he could listen to the classical station while he cleaned. My English teacher, mother of a friend, told me that when a student asked her who the custodian was who listened to orchestral music, she said, "That's no ordinary janitor."

Caught between the enclosures of the common land he loved and the patronage that added insult to the injury of a class structure that erased everything about him except what it took to be freakish, his gift, John Clare was no ordinary day laborer. Poetry offered an idea of freedom, but the more he worked away at it with scavenged paper and stolen time, the more it defined the limits of what he could accomplish. He might go just so far, and no farther, or he would stop being a prodigy and require the impossible, acceptance as an artist, an equal. Music, on the other hand, which he pursued with an amateur's appetite, was a passport. Fiddlers speak a common language of tunes and and participate in the commonplace reciprocity of sharing them, and then, following the instructive advice of the late John Hartford, they play them to suit themselves and pass these variations along. There is no tragedy in this commons; it's inexhaustible. The only hierarchy is competence, and sociability can go a long way if virtuosity is lacking.



Thomas Hardy, another unprivileged writer, but a luckier one, shared this language with Clare. Hardy, as a boy, fiddled at weddings with his father, and his remorseless story, “The Fiddler of the Reels,” shows the easy welcome a fiddler might find in a public house. Clare’s love of music took him to the Travelers from whom, he said, he learned to fiddle; it might have taken him off with them, out on the road and out of literary history, had he not found their lives even more uncomfortable than his own. It took him from village to village in search of tunes. It took him, or at least I hope so, out of that part of himself imprisoned by his circumstances and the grating difficulties of his ambitions.

There is another mandolin relic in the family, a photograph from my father’s side and from perhaps a generation before hers, of a group of ten women, five standing, five sitting. The clothing, mostly white high-necked blouses and long dark skirts, suggests the late 1800s or early 1900s. The seated women are holding bowl-back Italian-style mandolins. I don’t know who they are or where. That the photograph came from my father’s side suggests they are somewhere west of the Hudson and south of the Mohawk; my guess is Norwich, which, with its pharmaceutical company

(stock in them kept my father, my mother, and I afloat through his years of badly paid jobs) and its headquarters for the New York Ontario & Western Railroad’s Northern Division, was the only one of the family towns large and prosperous enough to host a women’s mandolin society. I don’t know which of them I’m related to either, although I think I see a family resemblance in one of the women in the back row, second from the left, whose expression, now that I study it, suggests a kind of reserve that might easily give way to humor. But, as I said, I don’t know, and the longer I look at it, the farther I am from certainty. No one wrote anything on the image, front or back; no names, no date, no location. And there is no one left to ask.

There is no one left to ask. Think of John Clare, escaped from his eminence at the North Beech Asylum where he imagined himself to be Lord Byron, traveling along the common road, eating grass to keep off hunger. His fiddling days, his song collecting days, his reputation as a prodigious barely-lettered poet, all gone. Gone too, Mary, the woman he had been too poor to marry, although he believes himself to be husband to both her and his real wife, Patty. He thinks of this escape as a kind of elopement with Mary who waits for him.

He does not know that she died in a fire three years before. He will stay with Patty for a time, and then it is back to the asylum for him:

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,
 Into the living sea of waking dreams,
 Where there is neither sense of life or joys,
 But the vast shipwreck of my life's esteems;
 Even the dearest that I loved the best
 Are strange—nay, rather, stranger than the rest.

My other grandmother, my father's mother, Florita Chamberlain Smith, died in an asylum too, the old state hospital on Elmwood Avenue in Rochester that dated from around the time of Clare's death. From the outside, it looked like a park, brick buildings, greens, paths, big trees that I sat under when I waited for my parents when they visited her. I wasn't allowed in. My online search turned up photos of the dilapidated buildings, reports of inedible food and the inevitable harshness patients suffered, so I'm sure there were good reasons to keep me out. I hope there were unavoidable reasons to put her in, necessities so cruel that they justified that cruelty (as there were when my father spent some time as a patient in the terrifying, towering modern psychiatric building on the same campus), but the saddest thing is that I don't know what these might have been.

The woman I remembered, small-boned, in a house dress, baking molasses cookies in her small kitchen in her small house on West Church Street in Fairport hadn't seemed anything but kind. She had an attic too, with an old typewriter with milk-green keys that I found almost as fascinating as the mandolin, and she had a piano in the parlor, although I never heard her play. Her attic was easier to reach than my maternal grandmother's, just a regular set of stairs opposite the front door, and it held relics that would find their way into our basement, sets of wooden and stone blocks for building, a cast-iron toy passenger train, a cane that tradition said had been carved on one of the British prison hulks in New York harbor during the revolution, Masonic dress swords, boxes of diaries and photographs, including that group portrait with mandolins. I remember the day we packed up all of her stuff, but I don't think I was ever told the reason. And there's no one to ask, and so she remains strange, stranger than the rest.

My online source for information about the Rochester Psychiatric Center was a page by a pseudonymous contributor, "Snoop Junkie," to the RochesterSubway.com site; Snoop Junkie's specialty is trespassing with a camera into abandoned properties, and he went into considerable detail in his explorations of the Elmwood Avenue buildings as well as providing quotations from local newspaper accounts of the scandals and also the hopes that went along with these buildings. More surprising, if only because of their familiarity, were the comments. Several people had grandparents who died there; one, who was allowed to visit, recalled her shock that the patients ranged from "a young woman tied to a chair" to "a white-haired lady wringing her hands while walking and talking" and remembered the cot-filled dormitory. Another hoped that someone could tell her about her grandmother, of whose last name she wasn't quite certain. A former staff member wrote of the good-heartedness of the people she worked with who, she believed, succeeded in at least protecting the patients from what they might have suffered outside the hospital and sometimes were able to do even more to help them, despite the often ineffective treatments; she reminded the other posters that an asylum was meant to be a safe-haven and that this had been the goal of her colleagues. Reading through these, after the grim ironies of Snoop Junkie's narrative and the sad documents from the newspapers I felt less desolate, certainly less alone. And then there was this, from the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle's* 1931 report on the hospital's field day: "Under the rustic roof of the bandstand or summer house, the hospital's orchestra, all patients, played."

What did they play, my maternal grandmother in her little house above the bay, the ladies in the Norwich Mandolin Society, the patients on the asylum bandstand? Probably popular favorites, marches, light classics, probably in arrangements that allowed less accomplished, certainly not professional players to show off a little bit and to make an audience feel good. The Nashville Mandolin Ensemble, hardly an amateur group, has issued a recording, *All the Rage*, that suggests what this repertoire might have been like. Marches, yes, and rags, and pieces focused on the slight exoticism of the mandolin (the mandolin craze in America was sparked by a touring company of Spanish musicians, The Celebrated Spanish Students, playing what was, in fact, a relative of the mandolin, the *bandurria*; they were so popular, that they were followed by a wave of Italian musicians, playing the real instrument, but masquerading as Spanish.) It's the sort of music that my father enjoyed, along with more serious classical compositions, a mixture that I always think of as being as American as William Carlos Williams' opening, "the pure products of America go crazy."

My dad liked Charles Ives, too, especially the second symphony in which fragments of patriotic tunes and hymns and old songs are whirls that collide, and he told me how Ives' father, a band leader, liked to set two bands marching towards each other playing different marches so he could revel in the cacophony when they drew near and then passed. What would be the sound of two bands of patients playing from adjacent bandstands, I wonder? Crazy, yes, and purified of easy sentiment, and very American.

As is my A-style mandolin itself, the creation, along with the fancier and elegantly shaped F-style, of Orville Gibson, who applied the techniques of violin-making in order to create an instrument that was sturdier, easier to hold, and had more projection than the traditional bowl-backed model. The Gibsons were hardy enough so that many of them are still around in good playing condition. On my grandmother's instrument, the back plate has shrunk, leaving a few millimeters of the side piece exposed. This is a common problem—the different woods contract or expand at different rates—although mine was exacerbated when it fell from a wall peg. I've had that seam repaired three times now, and the question is whether I should try again. "Play the hell out of it," said the luthier, a mandolin-maker himself, who did the last job; he improved it, glued the opening, but he wasn't willing to try what he said would be major surgery to get the pieces perfectly aligned. A local professional mandolinist suggested a luthier in the Berkshires who, this guy said, should be able to do it right, and no big deal. People with similar instruments with similar issues ask about this often online, and the consensus ranges from, "of course, get it fixed" to "if it plays ok, leave it alone."

I'm leaning toward the play-the-hell-out-of-it option, at least now that it is summer, and the old wood has swelled so the overlap is hardly visible unless I'm looking for it. Imperfections nag at me, but so do useful things that go unused, protected and preserved, but to what end? Memory inheres in the dings and scratches, the worn place a thumb has left in first position on the neck, those signs of human connection. The saddest thing about the images on the website *The Lives They Left Behind: Suitcases from an Asylum Attic* is that you can almost taste the dust on what were once well-loved, well-used objects belonging to the next-to-nameless patients whose never-unpacked suitcases and trunks were found stored upstairs in the Willard Asylum (later the Willard Psychiatric Center), another state hospital in the Finger Lakes. Here are the things they thought they might use again. Mr Hermann (#20884) brought his elegant wooden viewfinder cameras, their plates and lenses, photography manuals in German.

Miss Margaret (#25682) brought fine, carefully wrapped china cups. Mr. Dymytro (#32643) saved a photograph of the house he built for his family in 1952, the same year in which he was admitted. It's a bungalow, as small and inconsequential as my grandmother's home on West Church Street. Mr. Lawrence (#14956) stashed braces and black boots, although his relics also include a handwritten note requesting that he be released, that his trunk be returned ("It is my own I bought it in Dusseldorf."), and that he be given pay for his years of heavy labor as a hospital gardener and a gravedigger. Perhaps he found his vocation in the hospital. His letter says that he dug over five hundred graves. Almost half of the 50,000 patients who entered Willard died there. And those that didn't? It's hard to believe, given the inadequacy and sometimes harshness of the treatments and the desperation that must have brought them there, that they might ever have picked up their suitcases and unpacked them into anything like the lives their contents promised.

Of course, it is too easy to blame the institutions or the families for not solving the unsolvable or to locate the vagaries of the poet's mind squarely in the difficulties of his circumstances. In the asylum, the John Clare you met might have been Lord Byron or the champion prize fighter, Jack Randall, depending on who the poet thought he was when you came calling. If I had been allowed in to see my grandmother, would she have been that poor lady, pacing, speaking to no one, wringing her hands? If fixed identity is the marker of sanity, what good, I found myself thinking, are memories in the absence of the narrative that strings them together. But again, this seemed too easy. Clare's collection of tunes and lyrics might have been a simple discipline of recovery and preservation, except that scholars say that he often altered the words to suit himself, creating versions rather than transcriptions. Like the kid in the attic, trying on the antique clothes or pecking at the obsolete typewriter or picking a non-tune on the untuned mandolin, the rewriter of the tradition or the fantasist of the self experiences memory as a possibility as much as a given.

When I try out a new tune, the muscle memory from learning a half-a-hundred others gives me an idea of where to go, but I can feel my fretting fingers trip or my pick stumble when I run into a new pattern of notes and start without thinking to substitute my own. "The Beef Stake Hornpipe," it turns out, is tricky and not much fun to play badly. I can't fake it with a shuffle rhythm or good intentions. It has its quirks, and it would take attention and precision and even affection to bring these out, and without them the tune won't wake up.

But tonight I am out of temper with all eccentricities and with myself, a child sulking at being left out of the adult conversation about something critical, but too complicated and too shameful to explain. I put down my grandmother's instrument. How did John Clare learn this hornpipe—at a pub or in a parlor, among the Travelers, at a dance where some Mary or Patty turned down one suitor, waited for or flirted with another? Did he alter it to suit his mood when his bow hand took up the pen to set the notes down, remembering the night he first heard it and thought it worth learning, worth making his own? Did his habits of mind—depression at what he could not change, the confusion and resentment of rejection, the self-aggrandizement that made parodies of his greatest satisfactions—shape how he transformed it, or was the act of transcription and invention a relief from all that? Were the changes merely artifacts of that failure of memory we call 'the folk process,' filling in the gaps? I don't know. There is no one left to ask, and when I put the Gibson back in its case, I am still a boy near an attic window, picking through the relics.

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Photograph courtesy <https://abandonedseast.com/2016/11/01/mental-asylum/>

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

Terry is a founding contributor of Live Encounters Magazine.

VIOLA

In a Hamburg U-Bahn carriage
a young woman supports

a musical instrument
bigger than a violin and

smaller than a double base.
It must be a viola – not that

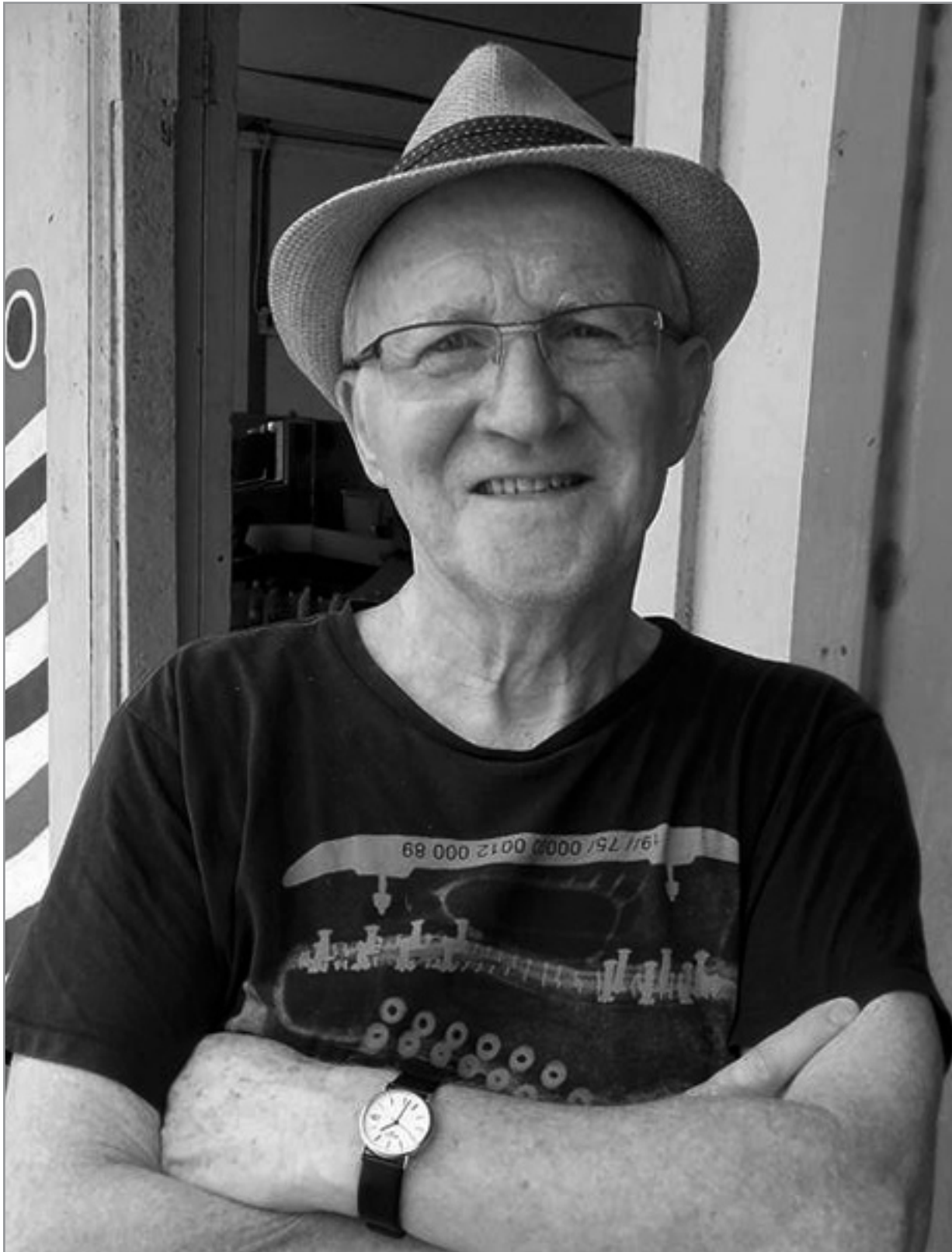
I know much about music
but I feel this woman does.

She seems as refined as
a small white garden flower

exhaling rich pollen and
she looks as if she could see

staves, crotchets and quavers
transform the carriage into a

movement of symphony and sound.



Terry McDonagh

NORTH SEA WIND

Der Schimmel Reiter – a
dyke bailiff on a white horse
galloped headlong
into the howling North Sea
to rescue wife and child
to leave a lasting legend
of love and a dyke mystery
to ebb and flow and ebb and flow.

*

When hurricanes rip
across the flat land
of the North Sea coast
hardy black cattle lie low
like dots on canvas or
huddle along hedgerows
as if a chorus of critics.

In raging winds, trees
that shelter can kill
and words are cold comfort
on a wild afternoon
even if they do leave
a trail of conversation
in a *Dorfkrug* after
dykes have been sealed
and sheds repaired.

Out on the mud flats
and up on the dunes
a storm lingers
in a poem waiting
to write itself.
Feral cats bask
in sun pockets,
a mongrel sniffs
at a washed-up shoe
and inside windows
neglected ones stew
on a wicked wish
that bolting lovers
get swallowed up
by all that's tidal
when promises of
a solid roof have
worn thin or
tired faces don't fit.

Some songs remain unsung
in the orange air of everyday.

THE DEATH OF A POET

A man of few words, the poet passed on
before his wife had time to comfort herself.

He'd bellowed from room to room, had dinner,
imbibed, grabbed his own chest,
wriggled a bit and croaked – leaving drafts,
tattered sketches and a two-sided face
to be sorted into spoken and unspoken piles.

My Soul Knows the Truth – his dog-eared work
lay open and as undisturbed as a forest leaf.
He'd highlighted: *if I were to reincarnate
in an up-to-date bubble of flesh, would you, wife,
continue to worship me on my pedestal in sandals?*

To get attention she'd used pills and distance but
she had nowhere to go and nowhere to secrete.
Every time she turned a corner she bumped into his shadow.

In the days before his death he'd had a rendezvous
down a backstreet, met his agent by a white granary
and cancelled an opera evening for a major interview
on big time stuff: *read my editorial on power and
the alchemist in the city if you want to learn about demiurge.*

On the strength of his belief, *life must be savoured*,
he moved in with a neighbour for a season or so, but
when she became expectant, he returned via the back door.

He'd meant well. That's why he came home.
*I've come back to you, missus. You are forgiven.
That woman down the street just couldn't pick up
on my undertones.*

His wife wore black for a week or so but soon took it off
when she saw the other woman looking better than ever.
It was time for laughter and new ways of talking.

Thomas McCarthy was born at Cappoquin, Co. Waterford in 1954 and educated locally and at University College Cork. He was an Honorary Fellow of the International Writing programme, University of Iowa in 1978/79. He has published *The First Convention* (1978), *The Sorrow Garden* (1981), *The Lost Province* (1996), *Merchant Prince* (2005) and *The Last Geraldine Officer* (2009) as well as a number of other collections. He has also published two novels and a memoir. He has won the Patrick Kavanagh Award, the Alice Hunt Bartlett Prize and the O'Shaughnessy Prize for Poetry as well as the Ireland Funds Annual Literary Award. He worked for many years at Cork City Libraries, retiring in 2014 to write fulltime. He was International Professor of English at Macalester College, Minnesota, in 1994/95. He is a former Editor of *Poetry Ireland Review* and *The Cork Review*. He has also conducted poetry workshops at Listowel Writers' Week, Molly Keane House, Arvon Foundation and Portlaoise Prison (Provisional IRA Wing). He is a member of Aosdana. His *Pandemonium* was published by Carcanet Press in 2016, and his latest collection, *Prophecy*, was published by Carcanet in April, 2019. Gallery Press, Ireland, has just published his journals, *Poetry, Memory and the Party*, in 2022.
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_McCarthy_\(poet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_McCarthy_(poet))



Thomas McCarthy

THOMAS MCCARTHY

AN URGENT VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

Greg Delanty's *No More Time*, recently published by Louisiana State University Press in Baton Rouge, is not so much a celebration of the natural world as a lamentation for the extinction of entire species and the expression of craftily-controlled rage at the destruction brought about by the actions of humankind. It is a wondrous and beautiful poetry collection from a master formalist, a poet who seems to have been born with a metaphysical tongue and a God-given lyrical gift. I wish that every person who cares about environment and the wild could find a copy of this book. No doubt, like all good poetry books, it won't be easy to find. But go find it. Greg Delanty was born in Cork in 1958 but has been a resident in Vermont for many years where he works as a Professor of English at St. Michael's College. Delanty, in all the years I've known of him and read his work, has never ceased to celebrate the abundance of life and to fight battles against the forces of mass destruction and earthly annihilation. The heft and seriousness of this new project in verse is immediately announced in its dedication page – the work is dedicated to, among others, his son and nieces, as well as to Greta Thunberg. It is a poet's cry sent up to heaven on behalf of the future, a warning uttered by a modern Jeremiah, but composed formally by a gifted winner of the Patrick Kavanagh Award and a Guggenheim Fellow.

When he was a young poet in Ireland in the 1980s Delanty was a passionate supporter of Adi Roche's CND, as well as a constant protester against cruise missiles and a fervent advocate of the wider peace movement. More recently he has become a hugely influential cultural voice in American environmentalist politics. So, he is no Johnny-come-lately to the environmental debate, his heart has been with the Green vision from the very beginning and his political activism is part of a deeply embedded character trait. In addressing his own father's early death in 'Interrogative' (1992) he wrote: 'even the flimsiest, most vulnerable creatures/ are equipped with devices to outwit death.' The major thesis of this new collection from Louisiana State University Press is that death, empowered by the actions of humankind, has finally begun to outwit complex and innocent creatures.

The collection's overwhelming sequence here, its moral signature, is 'A Field Guide to People,' what the book's blurb describes as 'an alpha-bestiary of twenty-six sonnets.' Each sonnet is an evocation of, or meditation upon, some natural thing, flora or fauna, that is either extinct or endangered. The present, stressed earth is seen as a purgatory or hell for living things, and poetry becomes the advocate or defender of all life under threat in our biosphere. Inserted between two groups of sonnets is 'Breaking News,' a sequence of wider cultural significance, an interruption of vast cultural, historical references. From Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and fall of the Roman Empire* he has extracted the salutary tale of Emperor Heliogabalus, the Roman emperor of 204AD-222AD, who sought to confound the order of seasons and climates:

'The emperor and his hobnobbing retinue
recline on the high dais. Everyone gazes
up at them from the floor. He winks to his chosen few,
mutters, "Watch this for a trap," hollers, "Let's
play. Bring on the grand finale...."

The grand finale was the shattering of a fake ceiling and the showering of crowds with pink roses. It was an impressive feat, but a coup against nature, an act of human madness that wouldn't work out very well: for Heliogabalus or his distracted crowds. The emperor thought of himself as the invincible sun-king, maker of reality, but in the end he discovered that there was but one world, the one made by nature. Delanty's human response to this litany of historical vanities is to reach for that great but humble weapon of the green movement, the bicycle:

'You bike most everywhere these days,
wary of your part in the latest war, the slaughter
of innocents, the various wily ways

we've grown used to complicity's tether.
The gas pump is an umbilical cord
Sucking the life out of *Terra Mater*.'

'Dear Fellow Citizens,/ the answer to all our problems is around the bend' he says in 'State of the Union,' a list-poem of poverty, racism, violence, water contamination, drug cartels and human trafficking:

'No need for any distress.
Thank you, and God bless.'

In 'Spiritus Mundi' and 'From The Vision of Mac Conglinne' he addresses not hunger but gluttony: 'A pool of colcannon/ under a thick butter/ lay between that and the ocean.' The poet, like the wise Manchin of the old Cork myth of the Lough, hopes to coax insatiable demons from our indifferent bellies. If this project seems overly didactic, preachy, even, well tough luck. It is meant to be; it is meant not to be comforting. But the comfort, for readers of poetry, is in the craft; a precise, impressive poetry in poem after poem. In 'One More Time' the poet returns to a scene from his earlier life as a student in Ireland – when he, a champion swimmer, worked as a beach lifeguard during the Kerry summers of his College years. In this poem it is Mother Earth who requires resuscitation:

'call the earth female, as of old.
She needs to be placed pronto
In the recovery position, gently hold

her chin up, bend the left arm at the elbow,
hand above the head, palm facing down
- Waving goodbye or hello?

Set the right arm straight and in line
with her side. Quickly tuck the left foot
up against the right knee, Watch for a sign

of breathing.....'

The poem is a masterpiece, a combination of deep knowledge, pathos and leaping political metaphors. It is an example of Delanty's deceptive aplomb; this memory of restoring life during a mid-summer emergency, all of it folded tightly into fourteen lines. His leaps of imagination, the risks he is prepared to take with language and metaphor, remind us constantly that though the book is an urgent appeal for environmental justice it is in the end, simply and completely, a work of art. Not to understand this would be an injustice to poetry everywhere.

The poem facing 'Part 3' is set as white type in a dark page. It is a memorial stone at the heart of the collection. 'On a friend Visiting the Vietnam War Memorial' outlines the litany of names placed on black marble in the great Vietnam memorial in Washington D.C. But instead of human names, the poet adds his own sacred litany:

'.....imagine such a wall
listing plants and creatures since Noah
that we've undone, a roll call;

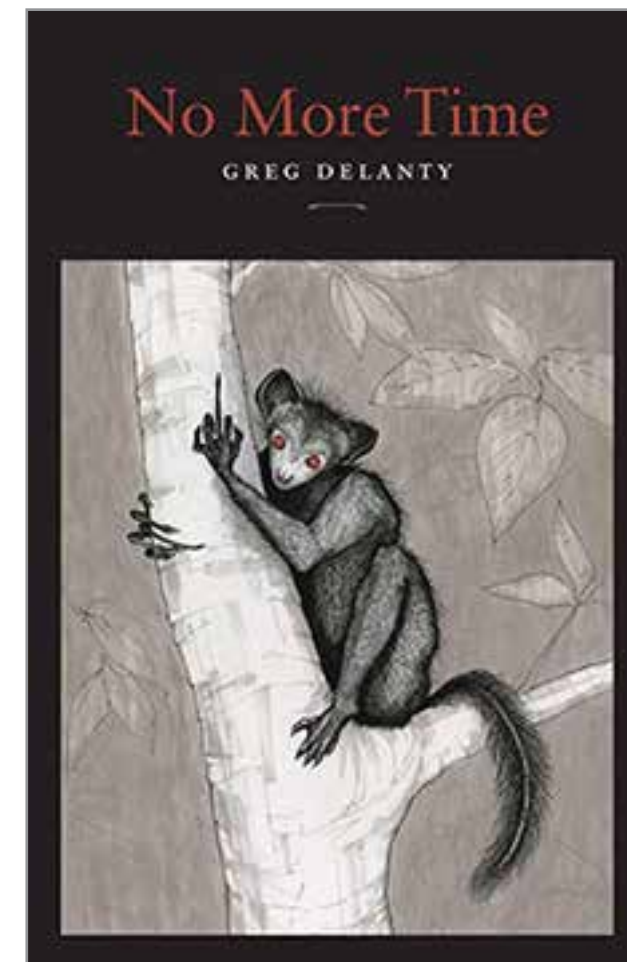
paradise parrot, Cape lion, great auk, moa,
Guam flying fox, dusky seaside sparrow,
St. Helena olive, passenger pigeon, quagga,

Laughing owl, Cry violet, Steller's sea cow,
Caspian tiger, and more and more now and now.'

This is the method of the book, to name the endangered and the extinct. The superb cover drawing by Amber Geneva of the aye-aye, an endangered lemur whose disconcerting stare was said to harbinger certain death for the onlooker, is an inspired image. 'Aye-aye, you continue to glare/ / back, your face a mirror, terror's dead ringer,' the poet writes in his sonnet to the mysterious, long-fingered creature.

The poet concedes that imagination can lead us into needless fear, like the fear of the aye-aye's stare, but all of the important work assembled in *No More Time* by this very important Irish poet is a warning that our fears of environmental destruction are very real indeed. The book is an anthology of pleading creatures, given voice by a prophetic poet.

We have made our heavenly earth a hell for animals and plants. The rare achievement of Delanty here is that he has placed his art at the service of an important ethical epiphany, all the work charged with a single compelling message, but he has achieved this without any loss of aesthetic power or thrilling verse-craft. *No More Time* is a rare and important book, driving home to poetry – and to those who read poems – that '...we've made our mother ill./ Praise those who say there is hope still....'



Available at:
<https://www.amazon.com/No-More-Time-Greg-Delanty/dp/0807172359>

I LOVE ALSO

The way birds in flight, bird motifs and fine drawings of birds
 Draw you into their circle. It is as if there was something
 In creatures of feathered flight, an improvisational air, a birdlike
 Balancing act between the persistent patterns of wind and
 The calculations of feathers, that responds to something
 Not quite settled in you. I remember the owl at the hall door
 Of old Parknasilla and how it spoke of you directly as if it knew
 All the fiction you left hidden beneath stones from a time
 When you were possessed with the migratory passions of
 Youth. That owl had the dignity of George Bernard Shaw
 And seemed to offer you a perch at the apex of a tall barn
 In a fairytale. "Meet me later and we'll catch some fat mice,"
 The owl seemed to be saying. "Meet me later." Today, it is
 Tiny twittering song-birds hanging on for dear life in the
 Catapult of fuschia branches in a force ten gale. They are,
 You say, clinging in delicious fear like children on a fun-fair
 Helter-skelter. They are born to this balancing act in a storm.

WOMEN'S EIGHT

A June sound like no other. A ventilator sound, or
 The sound you come upon in the corner of a field
 In late evening, the clunk-clunk of an electric
 Fence, the pulse of things, of lungs and of danger.
 Women pass me in a Senior Eight: no splash,
 Not one splash from this Lee Rowing crew, but
 The catch and slide in unison, the perfect
 Motor of hours upon hours, the punch of bodies
 As one. The power of them, the coach's signature.

A WAITER TAKES US

In memory of Matthew Sweeney

This is a restaurant that has a flame at its heart,
A place of singed linens
And charcoaled parts. Their menu is
The heaviest spirit we have ever opened

And the bodies within it
Are nothing more than a series of rumoured foods.
Matthew, nothing is heavier than promise,
And nothing more prophetic than egregious

Meat. Monkfish with its old vow of poverty
Is now a king bathing in veils of steam,
And nettle soup now as precious as Verdigris;
Stinging weeds are suddenly edible

And this square of Valentia slate as expensive
As a monogrammed poem. Your heart goes out to the world
Breathing of money, world of wishful and weak,
World of weary and of *ennui*. Meat comes to greet us

And to burn us back. Sweeney, we are pinned to the edge
Of this Donegal menu, the first
Part of conflagration already over. A waiter takes us
By the neck and shakes, making the wines to pass.

POETRY, MEMORY AND THE PARTY

Thomas McCarthy



Journals 1974-2014

Available at: <https://gallerypress.com/product/poetry-memory-and-the-party/>

Paul Minx is a poet, playwright and screenwriter. His poems have appeared in *The Nation*, *Iowa Review* and *California Quarterly*, among others. His plays have been produced extensively in the UK and New York. In London his play, *Walking on Water*, won the Off West End Award for best new play. Most recently, his screenplay, *Atlantic Crossing*, was adapted into a miniseries and appeared on PBS last year. It won the International Emmy for Best mini-series. He attended the University of Iowa's Writers Workshop and the Yale School of Drama. He lives in London.



Paul Minx

THE PINK SUITCASE

1.

It was a stop I never intended —
the wrong train from Frankfurt —
I ran to catch it, only realizing my mistake as it pulled away.
The train is overfull, air conditioning
on the fritz, bar car out of booze: a never-ending day
short of consolations. I am in Germany
to update the flow chart of my family's genealogy. Dad,
my flickering North Star
has died. I am unmoored.

Where am I going now? Würzburg, first stop.
I carry my bags through the scramble of commuters.
I almost miss it,
sitting forgotten on its own black plinth,
a pink suitcase hewn from color-flecked granite —
taffeta lined, toe-capped shoes, a child's teddy bear,
camisoles and bloomers cascading onto the street.
"A Place to Think," the sign says in German and English.
I've stumbled onto holy ground.

continued overleaf...

THE PINK SUITCASE *contd...*

2.

Heat lightning in the distance, intermittent thunder.
 The trees bow and curtsy in the blustering wind.
 The air's charged, all ethereal. I can't sleep.
 From my hotel window I watch
 an elegant swan of a man
 in a beaver fur coat, fedora clutched.
 He has the same impracticality of my father – same high forehead,
 same cornered-animal look —
 moves like him too, begrudgingly, in butterfly steps,
 as if he's afraid to step on the world.
 A younger man rushes up — his son?
 He walks him to the memorial
 and with nonchalance, reaches down
 and hoists the pink suitcase.
 I can read the father's train ticket from here:
 third-class, Dachau ...

I run down to stop them.
 They are nowhere to be found.

3.

Bleary-eyed, jittery
 from too much caffeine, the next morning
 I stand among burger wrappers, vagrant receipts,
 among the sleeping strays and homeless
 who have commandeered the memorial overnight,
 I try to lift the pink suitcase. It won't budge,
 unwilling to make last night's trip twice.
 Is Dad's death driving me crazy?
 He had a stroke. My hands-on accountant sister
 moved him into a multi-bed facility: "It's minimal.
 Don't complain. It's all we can afford."
 I told myself it's too far to visit, I'm so busy –
 What did Dad and I have to talk about anyway? Sports? The weather?
 I'll go when we can have a proper visit ...
 soon, I promised myself ...
 then he died ...

I study the copper alloy plaques, there are photos:
 2,000 Jews left Würzburg, 20 came back.
 For them, this humble train station
 was the entrance to hell. My own bereavement
 feels self-indulgent in comparison.

continued overleaf...

THE PINK SUITCASE *contd...*

4.

A temple of sky, necklace of lakes,
ranks of Baltic pines over lush pastures.
Family surrounds me here, broad-faced relations
on the Polish side of the country.
A dinner of sauerbraten and schnapps,
then family rounds, singing a capella,
a tradition lost in our American diaspora. I mouth
nonsense syllables in German.
My little cousin notices and giggles.
Dad only visited once. He came bearing
American cigarettes, toothpaste, 45s:
Elvis Presley's "Jail House Rock" still has pride of place.
He brought me too – a nappy-clamped, two-year old
"jam-packed with potential." He proudly stood me on my toes,
made me kick a ball.
My stateside father was distant,
bitter, morose. He nursed a self-devouring heart.
I found the two men hard to reconcile.

After dinner my German-speaking great-aunt Lena
pulls me aside, showing me the overstuffed family album:
photos, newspaper clippings, birth certificates,
uncle this, cousin that – most all dead now. Dad escaped,
she takes pride in that. He built a shiny,
stainless-steel American business. Proudly,
she shows me his very first business card.
I don't have the heart to tell her he died penniless
in a dirty nursing home. I start crying.
How can I explain myself? I call
my niece to translate: please tell her
I'm just tired, it's been a long journey.

5.

Back home I exile myself with busyness ...

A year later a cumbersome package arrives.
It's from my niece, Lena's photo album. My great aunt has died
and she left it to me in her will. She also sent a message:
the photos, all the loss,
it made her cry too.

Who was this man, my father? Personal questions,
all feelings, were "verboten."
I look in my bathroom mirror.
People say I closely resemble him,
still ride the strands of his DNA.
The temperament's similar too, I suppose -
meekness masking dark fire.
In some pictures he's reconciled to life.
In others he's a gurning dog trying to impress.
I have to find which parts of this man
still live inside me. I turn the pages
of Aunt Lena's legacy, hoping to find out.

THE PINK SUITCASE *contd...*

4.

A temple of sky, necklace of lakes,
ranks of Baltic pines over lush pastures.
Family surrounds me here, broad-faced relations
on the Polish side of the country.
A dinner of sauerbraten and schnapps,
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still live inside me. I turn the pages
of Aunt Lena's legacy, hoping to find out.

THE GIANT'S CAUSEWAY

The Giant's Causeway is an area of Northern Ireland with 40,000 interlocking basalt columns, the result of an ancient volcanic eruption. It is associated with Finn McCool, a mythical hunter-warrior, who supposedly built the 'causeway' so that he could get to Scotland to fight another giant.

More basalt than sandstone,
your hard face fell
from these cliffs. Your hands,
fissured gloves, your smile a cravass.
I watch you leap between the hexagons,
one foot per scale, landing as silently as light.
We mustn't wake Finn McCool, you say.
His face, drowned twice daily,
glowers back at low tide.
He can boil the sea with his rage.

We walk on. Spheroidically weathered basalt,
reddish laterite peeking through ...
This is your sanctuary —
no guilt, all forgiveness.
Baptism comes in shrouds of rain.
You lead me up the Camel's Back —
a Bactrian camel, I assume — two humps.
The entablature of the Giants Organ
glows distantly in the mizzle. In the darkening,
cliffs fold in on cliffs,
redundant, overweening,
outblackening the night. On burnished rock
as slippery as ice,
I slip. You catch me with grace,
as if you knew I'd lose my footing.

I am charged by your touch. Why
are there so many things we can never be:
together, comforting, brazenly in love?
We will wait for Finn McCool.
Once every thousand years he wakes,
armed and uncensoring, passion's pterodactyl.
He will carry us on his sinewy back
through the uncharted caverns of the night-sky.
That will be *our* sanctuary -
inside out, in the cochlea of dreams,
where we can be as free as monsters,
untamed and pulsing with life.

THE FOX

For my sister

Snuggled in your cozy cupboard of a room,
sun-striped, skin flaking in confetti,
you dream in empty star ships

heading home. We did our best not to bicker,
waltzing you down that abandoned beach, rhizome family fingers entwined.
We built you fanciful sand castles,

covered you in blankets of forgetting.
Sleep, forgetful sleep, we chanted.
Give us more time to figure things out.

We couldn't protect you from what we didn't see:
a red fox cub, hungry, reckless,
hobbling toward you across the simmering pavement.

You lured him with crisps and water,
Lost siren songs of the parking lot.
You wanted nothing more than to help an animal in need.

When we finally flew over, arms flailing that
Starving cub away, you were devastated,
resentful, bleating, "Who's going to save him now?"

In dark fleets he returned to you, his failed savior,
Desperate, wheedling, swelling memory into tumor,
To be unravelled only later by therapists.

Dearest, bidden or not, life's troubling foxes
inexplicably come to all of us. Someday
when you need to explain this to your own

you'll offer the same timeworn tools. With some luck,
love and a few white lies, you'll hopefully
be better at easing a little one's terror.

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/>

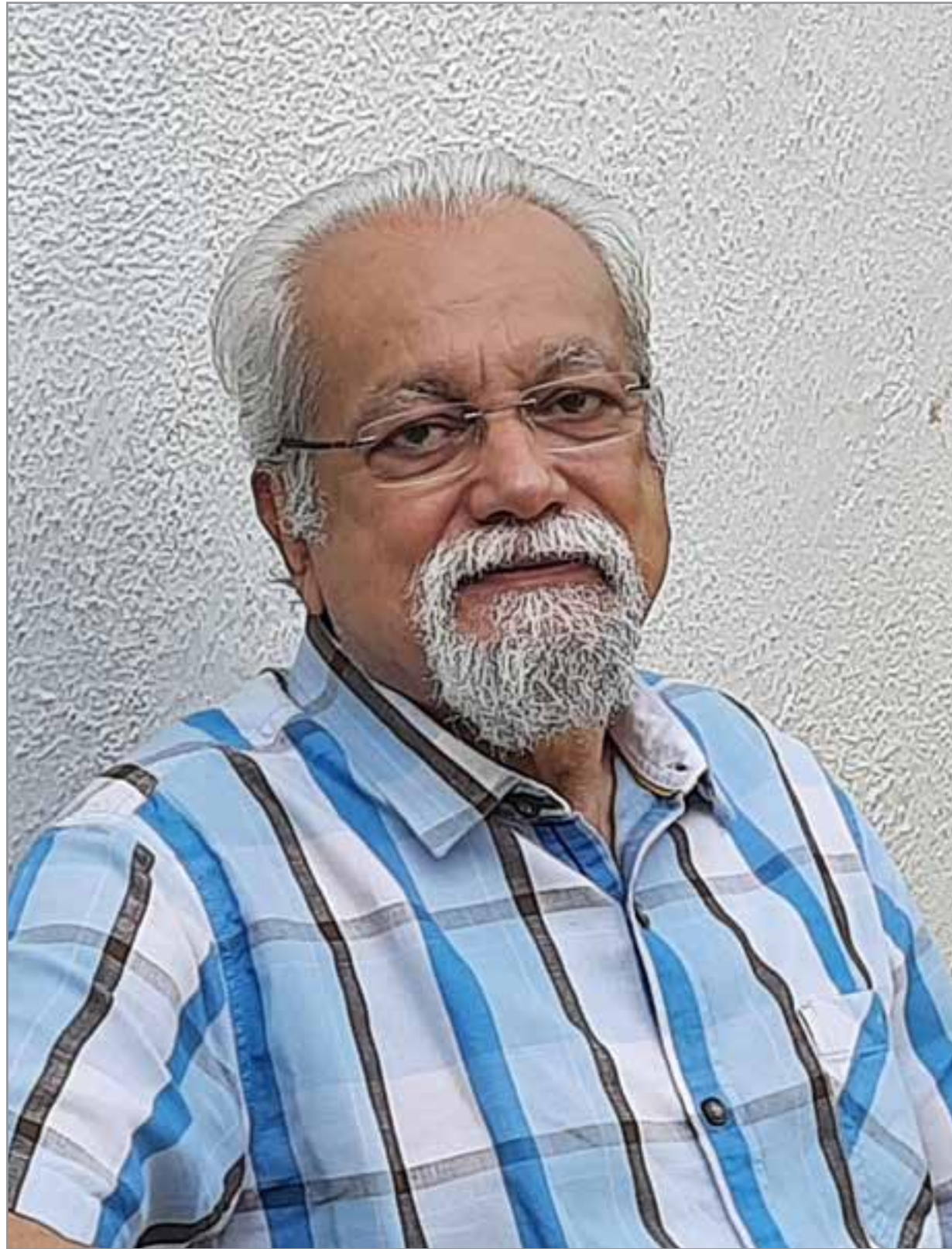
Randhir is a founding contributor of Live Encounters Magazine.

A PRAYER

May tomorrow come on feather-feet of love,
Tiptoeing into the shrunken heart of these times,
Bless the forsaken, forgotten, hungry, oppressed,
Shadow spirits waiting for nirvana, loaves and fishes
Waiting to multiply, water waiting to turn to wine,
The dead waiting to start their journey into the beyond,
Words waiting to turn to flesh,
Womb-seeds birthing epiphanies of peace,
Blood hands folding in supplication,
Silver rain trailing forgiveness across the skin of war;
May tomorrow come;

May tomorrow come on breath that flows into our lungs
And fills our beings with light
That we may rise above our littleness, our anger, our hate,
Our greed, our possessiveness, our wanton hunger for power,
Our 'I ness', our possessions, our everything;

May tomorrow come
That washes clean today and yesterday, the drowned years,
The hurt that has been, the broken promises,
So new hearts beat and we see our mirror selves
As if meeting an old lost friend,
A familiar stranger, our assassin, the lover who walked away
Now wearing our smile, breathing our breath,
Speaking our words
And eyes dissolve in eyes and we whisper love.



Randhir Khare. Photograph by Rani Wilfred.

BESIDE THE OLD WELL

Let's meet tomorrow beside the old well
Which is now a parking lot
Where eunuchs finger jasmine garland hair
And sing their ditties;
We'll meet as lovers among the crowd of cars
And cigarette smoke and smell of sex;

I'll be waiting under the pipal tree
Where a peafowl once roosted
And a moon-faced woman sang her prayers,
A glowing coin trembled
In the fish-splashed mouth,
Evening powdering the light with cow dust;

You who I have loved and left
To the hungry arms of strangers
To build your life again, I think of you tonight;
Shame clings to my palate like cold lard
After the meal is done and plates pile
In the sink stained with leftovers.

I'll be waiting for you by the old well
Under the babul tree where the moon-faced woman
Sang her prayers and we swam into each other
Like the drowned struggling for life;
You are gone, I know, lost in yesterday
And yet I'll wait tomorrow among the painted eunuchs
And crowd of cars reeking of cigarette smoke and sex.

WHEN YOU AWAKE TOMORROW

When you awake tomorrow
I will open your window
To a flood of boats
And your room
Will be filled with singing sails.

When you awake tomorrow
I will sprinkle you with
Remembrance Day poppies
And lie naked with you,
Talking to the peaceful dead.

When you awake tomorrow
I will offer you a toasted poem
Smeared with kisses
Tangy as grapefruit marmalade
And the flavour of morning breath.

When you awake tomorrow
I will fill your room
With your old lovers
Whispering your name like litanies.

When you awake tomorrow
I will be on the high-roads of freedom
Whistling my own tune,
Singing my own song, skimming
Memory stones on the skin of rivers.

ONE CROWDED MORNING

Tomorrow is Judgement Day
 And all the dead who ever died will return;
 This includes beetles and bugs and snakes
 And wasps and fish and whales
 And dinosaurs, known and unknown species,
 Humans of all races, the yeti and Idi Amin,
 Judas and Jesus, Mister Adolf and Master Gandhi;

They will all be there waiting to be counted,
 Each standing where they last stood,
 Even the dead of Hiroshima and Auschwitz,
 Jallianwala Bagh and Wounded Knee,
 All stock still like sign posts in a sea of living;
 Where there is no land, the seas and oceans
 Will be floating masses of resurrected life.

Picture this, the Blue Planet caving in,
 Till life pours through fissures,
 Globe skin swelling, expanding, sizzling,
 Exploding with the white light of End Time,
 Brighter than a million suns,
 Brighter than the beginning,
 Brighter than truth,
 A tiny star shattering and dissolving in space.

Tomorrow is Judgement Day
 Or so I think it is;
 And if it is not, let's make love as if for the first time.

I FALL INTO TOMORROW

I fall into tomorrow
 Fleeing a nightmare,
 Tangled in a sticky web
 Struggling to break free;

A spider with your face
 Tells me that I'll never be now
 I'll never be yesterday
 I am the future -
 A forever false dawn

Of hope, of desire,
 Of longing, of dreaming;
 I'll never be present,
 Hope will coat my tongue
 With the stale taste of sleep;

Dangling, I sway in the breeze,
 Cradled in wild imaginings,
 Swung by the madness
 Of lost reason
 Dancing with auroras glimmering
 In the polar skies of forgetfulness.

Now, in tomorrow,
 I know where you are headed,
 The disasters, the darkness,
 The lightness, the absurdities
 Of your choices,
 The ways of unforgiving time.

I'll not ruin your now, your present,
 The joy of just being,
 The unknowingness of your living
 Of your loving,
 Of the tarantella in your blood
 Dancing to your heartbeats.

Judith Baume!s books are *The Weight of Numbers*, for which she won The Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets, *Now*, *The Kangaroo Girl*, *Passeggiate* and the forthcoming *Thorny*. She is Professor Emerita of English and Founding Director of the Creative Writing Program at Adelphi University. She has served as president of The Association of Writers and Writing Programs, director of The Poetry Society of America and a Fulbright Scholar in Italy.



RISE, REIGN AND RUIN

Anne Hutchinson, I'm rifling, riffling through
my landscape of raffles:--with intent to steal,
with intent to sort and mix your revelation—
Split Rock, Glover's Rock, Mishow Rock, Wilson Rock
Turtle Cove, Treaty Oak, Pelham Bit Stable,
the Kennedy Home For The Retarded on Stillwell.
My family walked on Indian paths where the Lenape
turtle, hidden in hemlock and beech, still aimed
at the Bronx River, and to the Hutchinson River,
to Oostdorp, your dwelling rimmed by sweet grass.
They said you were delivered of thirty monstrous
births none human. They said you hid where the tree
had split the uterine rock, that uncertain canal
as you passed from the very bowels of this life.

Judith Baume!

DOHONG WAS “THE PRESIDING GENIUS OF THE MONKEY HOUSE”

These days the houses at the zoo are closed—
the stench, the darkness dissipated now,
repurposed concrete beaux-arts shells surround
the Sea Lion Pool and Daily Feeding Show.
Aquatic Birds, the Monkey House all closed,
the Elephant House where infant Sam, the girl,
was once as old as Sam my son.
A TV bank commercial lately shows
a mother with a phone and paper check.
She snaps and automatically adds
the money while she visits at the zoo.
Her daughter worries that a pic could send
a lion to the terrified bank branch.
Before the ATMs made money fast
and easy, banks held vaults of coins and jewels.
These grand pavilions stood for what we thought
we stood for in the natural world. And so
within here Ota Benga Pygmy man
would cradle Dohong the orangutan
while living in a Darwinian display,
exhibited together in '06.
The aftermath was worse. He was a free
Virginian when he pulled the trigger of
a stolen gun and closed his body's head.

from “The American Cousins A-Z”

E: RUTH PRAYER JHABVALA

Where does she think she comes from
Cousin E asked. How to say, I mean pronounce,
propose the rhythms, stresses, elisions
elite names demand as they signal coded
coiffures, spartan deployment of gemstones,
genteel grips of the fork sinistral, the dedication
definitive and unambiguous to deprivation, the prideful
preference for a two-bar electric radiator in the rococo fireplace.

H: I’LL CALL YOU FROM THE OTHER SIDE

The neutral is disconnected and the lights are dimming.
This is a level one call. Technicians will respond
within a week. The live line is draped through the trees,
the downed limb hanging on the line.
This is a level three call. Technicians will respond
within a month. Be sure to call the utility
if your lights are flickering or if you smell gas
or if there is a hurricane in the area or a tornado
or if an ice storm drags everything down.
Be sure to call. Cousin H was on the hook throughout.

from “The American Cousins A-Z”

P: RENEWED

Cousin P was sweeping
into the Broadway IRT, her long skirt
a kind of broom, the fuzzy rickrack hem
picking up dirt, a kind of self-satisfaction
with the blind rosy radical fear she brought.

T: LASSITUDE WAS A GOAL

Cousin T had constructed a “sleep plan” which
focused most her days and became for her a minor
religious form like the proto-Christian-Shinto sects
that shot out of early twentieth century Japan
and tainted so many, though, of course the sects
worked against lassitude. It was why, maybe, she worked
so hard to achieve it. Not as easy as you think,
not as simple as napping, or sleeping in, or turning in
early. It was something to be pursued
with rigor singled mindedly.

Anton Floyd was born in Egypt, a Levantine mix of Irish, Maltese, English and French Lebanese. He studied at Trinity College, Dublin and University College, Cork. He has worked in the eastern Mediterranean and now lives in West Cork. Poems widely published in Ireland and internationally. A member of Irish Haiku Society, he is several times winner of International Haiku Competitions. A selection of haiku is included in *Between the Leaves*, an anthology of new haiku writing from Ireland edited by Anatoly Kudryavitsky (Arlen House, 2016). His first poetry collection, *Falling into Place* was published by Revival Press in 2018. He edited *Remembrance Suite*, a chapbook of sonnets by Shirin Sabri (Glóir, 2018) and an international anthology of poems, *Point by Point* (Glóir, 2018). He received the 2019 Literary Prize awarded by the Dazzling Spark Arts Foundation (University of Macau, China). A new collection, *Depositions*, delayed by the pandemic, is forthcoming from Revival Press in 2022.



MICHELANGELO'S SLAVES, FLORENCE

*:for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.
Archaic Torso of Apollo, Rainer Maria Rilke*

I stand in awe before them, sense
their fixed purpose is directed at me.
Have they fallen for the trap of believing
I have the knack of freeing them?
This muscular aching demands relief,
a frank response, a desperate act.
I can only offer a poem. The one
I am drafting in my head begins
with the history of false starts.
Thoughts buckle under the heaviness,
this weight of obsessive memories -
so many midnights of the unnamed.
Every line is a strained sinew.
No deliverance yet - we stumble,
keep falling in a world of flaws,
unviable births and stifled breaths.
What poem can confront this enormity?
Justice, and not the vanity of grief,
is the auroral shock across the dark.
With some force of will
words, like hammer blows,
must come rough-hewn.
If any poem is equal to the act
it must come from the gut
with words to cleave the general ear,
must speak the heaving struggle
to escape the yoke, these marble shackles.

Anton Floyd. Photo credit: Carole Anne Floyd

GRIEF

...the dreadful summit of a cliff ...
Horatio in Hamlet Act 1 Scene 4

At George's Head the beetling cliffs
heave to a halt. Headlong and roaring
the waves crash into them and splinter.
Foamy shards, wind-blown like a flock
of gulls, splash the sky and muted
fall to the slabs of rock at the base.
Look! Look there: how the suck
is downwards into the salt swirls,
those feathering skirts, toying like sirens.
Yet think of this: between massy pulses
tides turn. Time will draw the waves
into a fine line along the horizon.
So hold, my heart, heave to. Wait then
for the tide and that distant levelling.

GRACE

in memoriam

Some things stay with you.
The pathways are neatly laid out.
Yesterday's white storm birds
have gone. Someone has tidied
any leaves stripped by the wind.
We move in preternatural stillness.
The midmorning churchyard sun
feels like a hand on my shoulder.
Yews, those evergreen mourners,
stand reverential. Lichen covers
the carved markers. Each stone,
enduring wind and rain, carries
a name, each one a local history.
We come to her grave. A cot death,
you say, a mystery, and how her tiny life
has filled your years. You were bereft,
you add, and those few days remain
opaque, lost under a glaze of grief.
Friends, neighbours, calls, food,
undertaker, all the arrangements
fastened by unseen hands.
I set myself to speak a prayer,
instead I imagine the unbearable -
your child in a tiny white casket
like a frosted cake; the cold ground;
my mother burying her two girls;
ah no; the years, the years reeling.
Then you tell me how the ease came
- here the jolt of unexpected care -
the sexton had dug and lined the grave
with moss and starbursts of wild flowers.

BRIAN

in memoriam

Flinn with an 'i'
because there is no letter 'y'
he said, *in the Irish alphabet*
and he always one to be authentic,
the quest that drove him
the restless spur
to be at one
with the voice inside him
the one protesting him to song.

Whatever pulses beat
their rhythms in his blood,
whether the sounds
inside his head came
as single notes or chords,
the overtones
made and unmade him
an alien at home
and at home only wherever
his music would take him.

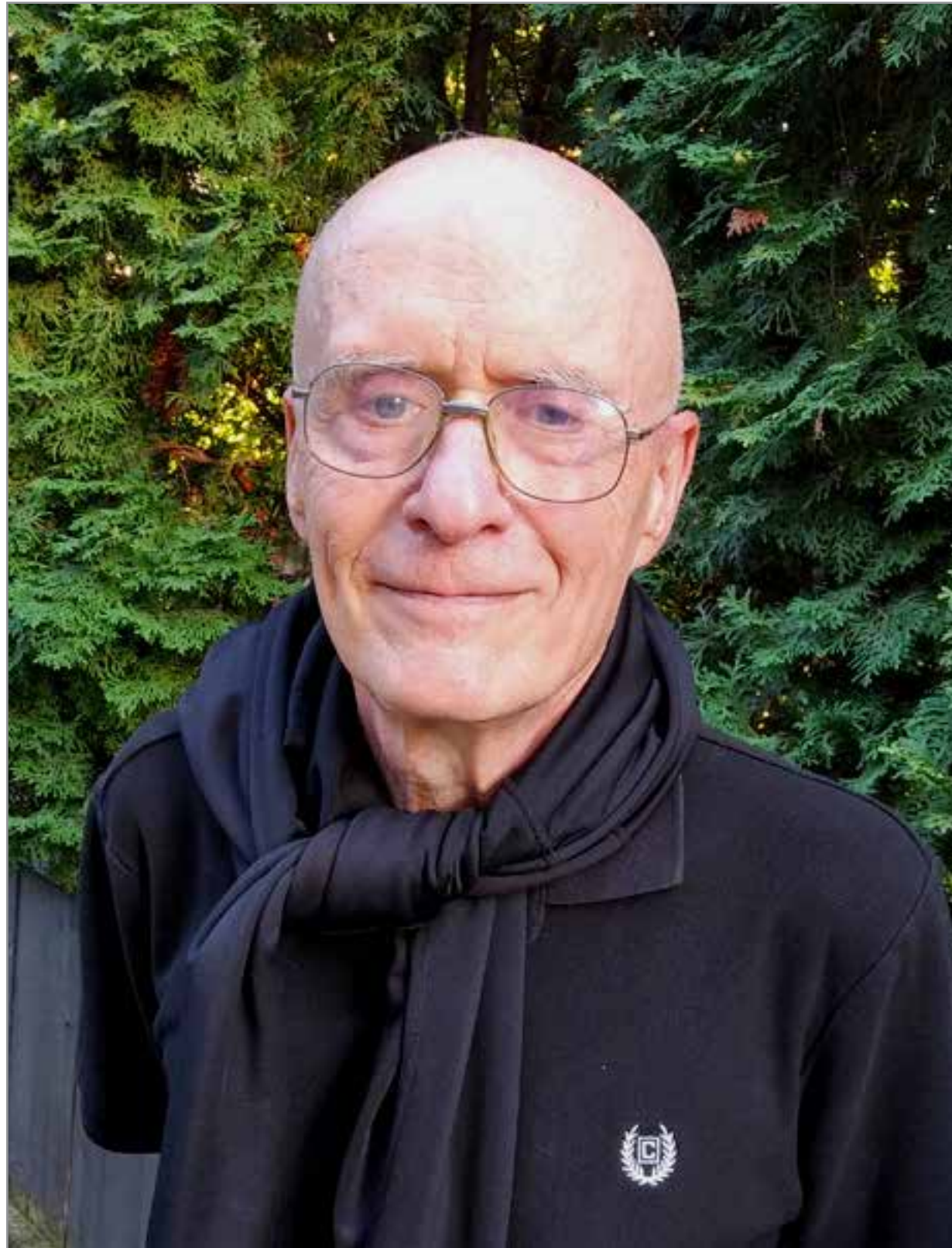
One summer evening
I paused to see him run
on the tidal sands
under Bray Head.
He was wearing white
as if condensing light
the speed and ease
in the way he ran
belied whatever torments
he was trying to outrun.

Years later found him
in Cyprus at our door,
the wild minstrel boy,
guitar slung on his back.
The shortest way to Tara
and all that, he said.
He was on the run again
from the shrinks in St Pats
holding a sackful of songs
and exclamation marks!

For the beach hotel
where he found work
his papers stated
first alien, then musician.
He was in his element
a five star entertainer
in a sharp white suit,
a red rose in his lapel.
On opening night he said,
This is my green carnation.

The season over he left
thinking he'd be back
but only rumours came:
another stay in St Pats
and then the news;
he had walked into the sea
holy and broken.
There was an order of service,
the envelope it came in,
and silence the purest white

DeWitt Clinton taught English, Creative Writing, and World of Ideas courses for over 30 years at the University of Wisconsin—Whitewater. His earlier collections of poetry include *The Conquistador Dog Texts*, *The Coyot. Inca Texts*, (New Rivers Press), *At the End of the War* (Kelsay Books, 2018), *By A Lake Near A Moon: Fishing with the Chinese Masters* (Is A Rose Press, 2020), and *Hello There* (Word Tech Communications, 2021). He lives in the Village of Shorewood, just across the street from Milwaukee.



ON READING LUMINOUS POEMS IN AN ESCAPE, WHILE OUTSIDE, CORONA DROPS PEOPLE OFF AT THE CURB, OR AT THE NEARBY HOSPITAL, OR MORGUE

If it helps, the time is early afternoon, sheltered in a covered
Parking lot waiting for someone to draw a blood sample
Of someone else. The wind outside makes everything
Move in a way that something natural is about to happen.
Most but not all are masked. The storm is coming soon.
Everything will be soaked. We have two more weeks,
Or months, or more of lockdown. The virus may never
Leave. One by one, it will find us, on every continent.
In a few minutes we will make lunch, find a movie set
In deep space, where we cannot go or even visit but we
Decide to go anyway. Each time when we go out, if we
Go out again, we will measure two weeks before either
Or both of us falls down and dies. If we don't fall down,
We think we can outlive what's out there but a dear friend
Tells us just wait, try to pretend what could never end,
And that's just what we're going to do, right after lunch.

DeWitt Clinton

A FEW CHICKADEES ALIGHT IN THE DYING LILACS

Who really knows about these things as so many
Are so deeply absorbed by what they are calling
Some bad, but it's probably more the
Sense of just being discombobulated, out of whack,
Adrift, a pensive look into space that never changes,
And then, along come a few chickadees, flitting
Branch to branch, and then like we knew, landing
So far away we'll never see the miracle of wing,
Color, the tiny tweeting of such a delicate sight,
But then, that's what we're trying to get through,
Right, the constant grey storm clouds bringing
More, and everyone in the neighborhood is so
Positive about this, saying such niceties as we
Really needed that, or it's good for the ground
Water, or next year the cherries will blossom
Like nothing ever, but if it rains too hard and too
Fast, most of us without those new fangled
Roof gutters will be down in the basement
Brooming all those streams of water toward
The sewer drain, though more streams start
Anew right where the chimney starts next
To the heater, but then, the rain or whatever
It is that may come down upon us let's up
A bit, and then we'll go upstairs for something
That might refresh and take the weight off
Of all that we are wondering about here,
Though just down the road, nothing is going
On like it's going on here, nope, nothing and
That's just about what it's like whether it's
Bad bugs killing millions of us off like a plague,
Or too much snow or too much rain, or a
Dizzying hail storm that we'll save for our
Grandkids, unless, of course, they've up and left.

NOT GENERALIZABLE, BUT THAT DOESN'T MATTER, DOES IT?

Today we've learned we have all gained half a pound in every
Ten days*, but it's a limited study, and we're still about the same,
But the good news is that all those pounds are not generalizable
And that's what's so fascinating, not the pounds, not the carry-outs,
Not the countless wine bottles, not the endless pizza boxes but
Notably, none of this is generalizable, and sure, some of you out
There are more familiar with what can and cannot be generalized,
But generalizable, really, has it really come down to this, and perhaps
That's not so bad, but let's hope everything else in the world is not
Generalizable either, for who could handle that kind of world data
Information where even though the study is limited, but still quite
Valuable, it's not, that's right, generalizable, so our neighbors, of
Course, may have actually gained more than .6 of a pound every
10 days, but we're relieved we certainly did not, even though we're
Still in hibernation, still not fully immune, still confined to a few
Rooms which continually become smaller and smaller, but thankfully
Some dear friends reminded us we're going to make it, and that
More than anything is probably the best generalizable factor, but
Of course, we know that's not true, not at all, as so many social
Diseases afflicted by half the population may never make it unless
Someone starts unloading quarrelsome behaviors that in the end
Make just staying alive a few more days something of a miracle, yes?

**The New York Times 3/23/2021 A8 "How Much Did We Gain,"
Parag. 11/line 3*

JUST NOT YET

Tonight, like so many nights, we spoke again about
Possibly letting go, and moving on through the universe,
But we both know we don't know anything about
These plans, which are really not plans, as everyone
Might already know, but the only thing we may know
Is that someday, something like this will happen, of
Course, but not soon, as that would surprise both of
Us, but sometime soon, though now we're just trying
To make it back and forth to little rooms without further
Bugaboos, but little by little, we can both tell something
Is changing, and that something is something we want
To pay attention to, but we don't want to pay attention
To it, as we're more interested in lunch plans and an
Afternoon of old movies which we never would have
Imagined long ago, but now they provide some kind of
Delight, though delight is not something what the other
Might express when and if something happens but not
Yet, of course, we know that, but still, it's something
That starts to linger with both of us, but for now, nothing
Is happening that we want to be alarmed about, just not
Yet.

ANYBODY HOME?

Opening the door, I wonder if you're still here,
Then I wonder, just where is there, as I can't
Find where you've just up and left, though
I wasn't invited, though you've asked me to go
Along with your scheme years ago, and I didn't
As I didn't know what might be ahead, as in what
Might happen if I stayed, but maybe someday,
Not just what appears to be now, someday sometime
I'll open our door, walk in and wonder what in
The world has changed, but then, it's such pain
That you've lived through, it seems to make sense
That you've gone, and I really don't mind that I've
Not gone along for the lonely ride into a space
That no one, no one now knows where you are,
But you're someplace, right, someplace that I
Have no possibility of ever visiting, as you just
Have left what was here, though what was here
Was such pain and misery, so it seems perfectly
Clear why you're out there, even if I don't know
Where your there is, but maybe that's not so
Important now, even though, for all these years,
Everything seemed so important, so I'll see what's
Next, okay, and perhaps it's just taking a long walk,
But to where seems such a mystery, after all, we
Took these walks ending up in Florence or Ixtapa,
And no one ever would think, that's not where we
Are now, even though I sense you might still be near.

Peter O'Neill is the author of *Henry Street Arcade* a bilingual collection translated into French by Yan Kouton, *The Enemy – Transversions from Charles Baudelaire* and *More Micks than Dicks – A Hybrid Beckettian Novella in 3 Genres*. His first collection *The Dark Pool* is due to be reprinted early in the new year. His poetry has also been translated into German, Spanish Italian and Arabic. He is currently working on roman noir in collaboration with Daniel Wade.



GRÁINNE

She sat opposite you under the great stained -glass window
By Jim Fitzpatrick in Bewley's. Over her shoulder, I
Informed her, Harry Clarke, my other hero -
the illustrator of Edgar Allan Poe- had designed

The other windows. It was all perfect vision in glass.
The coffees came, mine Peruvian, hers a Café mocha.
She loved both coffee and chocolate, she informed you.
While drinking them, you both spoke about the Law .

Despite the fact that her narrowly sculpted face
Revealed very finely refined features, her mind
Was wrought of steel, steadily imbedding itself

In the discourse, charting its course like a vessel
Intent on completing its journey despite the incessant winds,
Her mind clearly bent on thoughts of crime and murder.

Peter O'Neill

Fred Everett Maus is a musician, writer, and teacher. He teaches music classes on a range of topics, for example a recent course on “Music in Relation to Sexuality and Disability” and a recurring contemplative course “Deep Listening.” He is a trained teacher of mindfulness meditation and Deep Listening, and a student of music therapy and object relations psychoanalysis. He has published prose memoir and poetry, for instance in *Citron Review*, *Palette Poetry*, *Roanoke Review*, and *Vox Populi*. He lives in a house in the woods north of Charlottesville, Virginia, and in Roma Norte, Mexico City. *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness*, which he co-edited with the late Sheila Whiteley, has just been published.



TROUBLE

The sun, white as moonlight,
lit the cool gray stones
where my fingertips floated
inattentive, unsettled, like
my thoughts, aglow, vague, like
the clouds, insubstantial, luminous,
like those fears
just around the corners,
like stray mushrooms
after yesterday's rain, like
those ambiguous things I said
last night and forgot, like
the bright air still as silence

Earlier, I looked around my room,
trying to grasp the unbelievable
reality of my choices. There were
so many things I stole from people
who loved me. Recently,
in an uneasy night, I dreamed
I gave those things away
to a church, and I was frightened.
What if I needed them again?

I am resting, or I am waiting.
Soon it will be evening. Stars
and all that. The sky
will close around me. My flesh
will ebb into soft vibrations.
I will listen for something to hear.
Then my eyes can doze, and my thoughts
can rest, mumbling, unresolved, on
the tousled lives of liars

Fred Everett Maus. Photo by Jon Montoya.

AESTHETICS

the rooster you drew
that morning crayon
on white paper your father
said it was beautiful
he would frame it

you cut around the bird
taped it on black paper
it glowed

that afternoon
your father said you
ruined it he would
not frame it now

*

high school friend his
eyes closed face sunlit
did you love him his
relaxed beauty you
wanted him to be gay
or not to be gay
not to suffer

*

near the end
the orchestra called
everything into a warm
flood of meaning
so it was all worth it
one floating moment
then gone

*

the lover who told you
your hair was always clean
who else did he know

*

what if your
sense of beauty
cannot be trusted

*

you wondered
what would it
be like to wake up
from your life
and to what

*

you always looked ahead
or down
then before he left a lover taught you
to look up always
every day the perfect clouds

*

continued overleaf...

AESTHETICS *contd...*

fog shaded the deep green
black trees edged the world
charcoal sky you
saw nor heard no one

across the hill
other music students
a hundred chattered
laughed

silent beauty around you
outside you

self immured numb
still and cold
you told yourself
“remember this”

*

the music so
tender you thought
of every time you
withheld tenderness
from someone
who needed what only
you could give them

*

to love the world
to need to know its truth
you felt foolish
confusing beauty
and wisdom

MY DEAD MOTHER LOOKS AT THE WORLD

Muddied color in a metal frame,
two years of dementia, she has fallen silent.
Through too-big square glasses her eyes
glaze bewildered on a disordered world.
Neither of us knows the other.

Another photo, faded brown, darkened yellow,
edges frayed, a bird-dog and a child. The dog
gazes out, sedate, waits. White dress, spiraling
curls, too-big bow on her head—a fairy tale.
But she is wary: a half-smile, eyes alert, as though
she wonders about what has not yet happened.

One more, in her forties, our
living room, she plays chamber music,
her profile cameo-confident. The image
fills me with the sound of her violin, firm
refusal of drama, emotion bounded by grace.
This woman I wanted to be like, wanted
to be, looks at a page of music.
I see her but she

looks away,
as she did when my father
tried to talk with her, as she did
when I was confused or sad.

MY FATHER'S NOTES

My father would play
piano chords, strong and hard (his fingers
so thick), after each chord

a pause,
then another chord, as though it was
hard to find a way from one

to the next—the sounds almost making sense, almost connected but not music, as though my father wanted to remember something deeper than music,

this going on for maybe
 five minutes, my father
 never showing the simple pleasure
 music might give, and finally
 he would stand, wander away,
 as though whatever he forgot
 wasn't at the keyboard after all, but
 might turn up somewhere else.

My mother on violin, my father on bass clarinet,
I on piano, we played Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven.

Each composer made his piano the beloved prince,
supported and adored by the others.
My mother and I exchanged melodies,
my father and I provided ground.

A scant snowfall: little pieces of white paper around the edge of every room, on window sills, bookshelves, the living room mantle, filing cabinets, the music cabinet, next to the television,

my father's handwriting firm, upright, almost calligraphy,
almost affected, utterly legible—

should I read them? invitations
to know him better, warnings not to try?
Soon he would collect them,
put them in a cigar box, start over.

When he died, I asked my mother where the little messages were. They were gone, she threw them away, "there were a lot of them," she said.

I can't imagine growing up
without that scatter of half-secrets—

“I cannot protect my family.”

“There is never enough time.”

“My children do not know
how I feel about them.”

“My wife will never accept
or understand my bitterness.”

“There is no way to say what has happened to me.”

COMFORT

I needed luminous rooms,
I wanted a discarnate glow
past my smiles and embraces.

The telephone daunted me;
aroused, I
looked for a face.

Where are you? Help me
now, my lover.
I will lie down, I will
close my eyes, talk to me.
Or I'll pause at the window,
my gaze restless on
the scrim of tattered haze,
the moon's ridged face,
a trace of blood in the west,
the oblique sheen of traffic.
Say my name. I know your voice.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Carmen-Francesca Banciu was born in Romanian Lipova and studied religious painting and foreign trade in Bucharest. As a result of being awarded the International Short Story Award of the City of Arnsberg for the story "Das strahlende Ghetto" (1985), she was banned from publishing her work in Romania. In 1991 she accepted an invitation extended by DAAD Berlin Artists-in-Residence program and came to Germany. She has been living in Berlin since 1992, employed as a freelance author writing articles for the radio and newspapers as well as leading seminars for creativity and creative writing. Since 2013 she has acted as the co-editor and deputy director of the transnational, interdisciplinary and multilingual e-magazine *Levure Littéraire*. Banciu has received numerous literature prizes and scholarships; most recently her novel *Lebt wohl, Ihr Genossen und Geliebten* was nominated 2018 for the German Book Prize. Her work has been translated into many languages.



CORONA BLUES

I let the poem in
 No one else comes by
 For one year no one comes by
 For years
 Gone is the time
 Since someone came
 Easter Sunday

I toast with my loved ones
 My glass touches the screen
 We play egg-killing
 We want to kill the Easter Egg
 Knock it against the computer screen
 The egg remains intact
 On the screen
 Our glasses
 Our lips meet
 The glasses remain intact
 The mouth unkissed

In a house in this city
 In front of their screen
 The most loved ones sit
 The big table is set
 The lamb sacrificed
 The food steaming
 The Easter bread fragrant

continued overleaf...

Carmen-Francesca Banciu. Photo © Gerald Zoerner.

CORONA BLUES *contd...*

Not far in this city
My loved ones
Everyone in front of their screens
We all do the same thing
We are together
Together separated
On the table
We look for crumbs
Crumbs of the past
Only our longing
Stains the tablecloth

Wewelsfleth, in the house of Günter Grass, April 2021

CORONA BLUES

Ich lasse das Gedicht herein
Keiner kommt sonst vorbei
Seit einem Jahr kommt keiner vorbei
Seit Jahren
Vorbei ist die Zeit
Als noch jemand kam
Ostersonntag

Mit den Liebsten stoße ich an
Mein Glas berührt den Bildschirm
Wir spielen Eier-kippen
Schlagen das Osterei tot
Gegen die Mattscheibe
Und das Ei bleibt unversehrt
Auf der Scheibe treffen sich
Unsere Gläser
Unsere Lippen
Unversehrt die Gläser
Ungeküsst der Mund

In einem Haus dieser Stadt
Vor ihrem Bildschirm
Sitzen die Allerliebsten
Gedeckt ist die große Tafel
Geopfert das Lamm
Dampfend die Speisen
Das Osterbrot duftend

CORONA BLUES

contd...

Nicht weit in dieser Stadt
Meine Liebsten
Jeder vor seinem Bildschirm
Wir alle tun das Gleiche
Wir sind zusammen
Zusammen getrennt
Auf dem Tisch
Suchen wir Krümel
Die Krümel der Vergangenheit
Nur noch die Sehnsucht
Befleckt die Tischdecke

April 2021, Wewelsfleth



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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>



A LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

...to this world we move in
Sleepless, you read only twenty-five pages
For me, a day's read. You stole my heart and never gave it back.

Fear is not love's mead
Of choice.
My voice falters, then strengthen: voice- box & chords, the instrument continues.
Evening falls like the fall in infant mortality; the giveaway.

Snow thinner,
Opposite share disappears, opacity rears its swan head; to be heard.
Circles of purple swirl
Wind has stopped turning its oar by the infant boy or girl.
Frost weighted paper, as ice this time in life; survival, tenderness still rages.

Lynn Strongin

I NEVER THOUGHT

...things would go this far:
 You caring for me
 Until forever, that white Harthorne bend in the road, more branch than tree we
 argue intermittently.

But anything heated glows. Amid a general murkiness, you gleam.
 Soon, snows will calm, comfort, obliterate
 A body jacket of tenderness. Reese javket lights the baby.

Teleman was a gardener:
 "I'm wild for amaryllis, I go over the top for tulips"
 Over the top we meet in the sound of violins, how many degrees of the circle are
 complete
 Or is it the perfect crystal, hexagon of a snowflake
 Which despite its six points makes only one: we are back again in unison.

FROM STORIES ABOUT THE
CLOCK AT GRAND CENTRAL STATION

"...at Grand Central Station, our compass was turning: don't fall asleep in the snow"
 Baba had warned.
 Something had failed
 Gone bust: we knew pain well & took her along. She'd fallen asleep in the snow,
 but was woken.

The marriage, that rogue wave which swallowed us:
 Like an old chesterfield with stains, cigarette burns, uncoiled springs.
 House to let; love, marital affection: how long are the shadows of the moon?
 Where are we heading? I open my trunk, hold two velvet shoes & cry. Whom could
 field calls, dole out advice now?

One young, still-beautiful woman:
 Two children, Tao children, one dark, one blond, long-legged the fair one:
 Raphael conte-crayon.: we had trees but. Not the right ones: would we come out
 right?
 We hugged it about us. Dead of winter and other types of death;
 A butterfly moth flickering near the flame of my being brave, my skinny frame.

Richard W. Halperin holds Irish-U.S. nationality and lives in Paris. Since 2010, he has published four collections via Salmon Poetry, Cliffs of Moher. The most recent is *Catch Me While You Have the Light*, 2018. In complement, he has published fifteen shorter collections via Lapwing, Belfast. The most recent – of three published in 2021 – is *The Girl in the Red Cape*. In Spring 2023, Salmon will bring out a *Selected & New Poems*, which will include poems from both publishers. Mr. Halperin's work is part of University College Dublin's Irish Poetry Reading Archive.



Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: J Ch

THE MAN WITH THE BLACK GAUZE HAT

There is always at the end
a little last house
facing west
facing a little lake
pine trees on the other side.
Moontide.

I remember such a house
in a Wisconsin resort
of my childhood.
It was used for honeymooners.

Gradually, old,
I more and more
find myself in the house.
I touch the furniture.
I look out at the lake.

In an ancient Chinese poem
a man knowing he is going
on a journey from which
he will not be coming back
gives his friend his own
black gauze hat to wear.

How the friend feels
each time he puts it on
after his friend has died
I leave to you
to supply.

If you do not recognise
that this is a love poem
you are either very fortunate
or very unfortunate.

BICYCLE SHOP

Somewhat neglected.
Most bicycles in it were whole.
had been repaired. Were there.
Others looked like they were there
but weren't yet. Off the road they'd been,
or off the road they'd go.

The proprietor was out to lunch,
the usual sandwich, so I could look
without converse.
Where was my old Schwinn?
In a museum by now.
Where was my stepfather Pablo

who'd taught me to ride it?
Someplace better than that, one hopes.
So many roads, so many clouds –
and to clouds,
cyclists are clouds,
speeding or meandering.

What is the difference between
a poem and a novel?
The former is not fiction,
it is the poet's own soul,
not Anna Karenina's
or Herbert Pocket's.

It is time for a prayer,
among bicycles:
*The good and the bad
are blessed.
Evil is not blessed.
The good and the bad are blessed.*

What book of the Bible says that?
All of them, one hopes.
If I could find my marriage licence,
lost these many years, what do I wish
I could write at bottom?

Dreadful sorry, Clementine.

Tim Tomlinson is the author of the chapbook *Yolanda: An Oral History in Verse*, the poetry collection *Requiem for the Tree Fort I Set on Fire*, the short fiction collection *This Is Not Happening to You*, and co-author of New York Writers Workshop's *The Portable MFA in Creative Writing*. He is a co-founder of [New York Writers Workshop](#), and a professor at New York University's Global Liberal Studies. He lives in Brooklyn, NY.



Tim Tomlinson

THE NÜ GUI

The Chinese woman hated her mother. All the stories she submitted for her tutorial concerned how hateful her mother had been, and continued to be, now that the mother was visiting, ostensibly to assist in caring for her daughter's newborn, a boy with long fingers and a face like the Buddha. The story drafts frightened him, the specific gory violence of their fantasies, the raw vehemence of their hatred. For instance, in one, to spite her mother, a daughter hacks her newborn to pieces with a cleaver. He tried, once, to talk to her about the benefits of letting hatred go, an idea she opposed so categorically that he felt certain she was about to fly out of her seat and strike him.

On the walk home from his office that night he remembered a time when he was a graduate student in China. He'd arrived at a conservatory in Guangzhou where he'd won an artist-in-residence fellowship. His accommodation was a cottage situated apart from the campus's main buildings, in the midst of a wide expanse of lawn. It had two levels. The ground level was for working—it had a table with chairs, a desk situated at a window overlooking the grounds, and a kitchenette style cooking area with a hot plate, a toaster, a small refrigerator, and a sink. The bedroom upstairs was under a pagoda type ceiling that swept upward to a peak in the middle. Upon seeing that cottage for the first time, from the outside as his guide led him in its direction, he remembered thinking, I'm going to get so much work done here, and all of it will be informed by this iconic traditional architecture. Already strange but pleasant shapes formed in his imagination. That impression changed only slightly when, at the doorway before entering, the guide muttered something that sounded like an incantation, and explained right after that a spirit, a *nü gui*, was rumored to live in the cottage, on the second level, and that she could appear to be malevolent, at least if one were to believe some of the previous residents' reports. He assured his guide in his rudimentary Chinese that he was not concerned, particularly because he didn't even believe in that kind of thing. They say, his guide told him, that in order to be frightened, in order to experience any aggression from the *nü gui*, should she even appear, some level of belief in just the possibility of her existence was required.

continued overleaf...

THE NÜ GUI *contd...*

Still, it was prudent to offer the incantation, which amounted, really, to a character reference assuring the *nü gui* of the visitor's basic decency; she should have no objections. Most of the complainants, he continued, had been Chinese in particular, or Asian in general. The white westerners, like him, they rarely complained. Later, it was that "rarely" that rankled him. And that night he was glad to have packed a bottle of cognac in his luggage. He filled his glass several times before climbing the creaking staircase to the second-level bedroom, where everything appeared to him as soothingly mystical, including the moonlight pouring through the windows whose shades he left wide open. He lay on his back with his hands folded on his stomach and his eyes closed, he imagined he could hear the plaints of a distant erhu, and in a short while he drifted off into a comfortable sleep ... until violent shrieking startled him wide-eyed awake, and there she was, not even a foot above his body, dangling like a spider from that crease in the ceiling, wild black hair flying, a gauzy red dress billowing, and between two narrow slits of eyes a contorted rictus of a mouth wide open screaming bloody murder. He opened his own mouth to scream and choked on the long black hair that rushed into the opening like the tendril of an octopus. He flung back his covers and ran, choking and shrieking for the stairs, where he half ran and half fell to the ground level, and continued to choke and shriek and run and fall across the campus lawn until he beat with both fists against the locked doors of the main building. When a security guard appeared, he pushed the guard aside and ran into the building looking wildly about for a place to hide. The guard found him some minutes later. He said the *nü gui* had receded, and that she was perfectly harmless anyway, and that it would be safe now for him to return to his residency. It embarrassed him later to recall that he never returned to the cottage at all. The guard found him a blanket and a couch to sleep on for the night in a big wide room with all the lights left on. And at sunrise, the guard agreed to retrieve his belongings. He called for a taxi to take him to the airport. He forfeited his residency, and he lost nearly all interest in China.

All of this resurfaced because of this mother-hating Chinese woman whose work he now mentored. He felt that he would have to terminate the tutorial, despite its being lucrative. He felt, too, that he should warn the mother about her daughter's violent ideations. Some of them were truly gruesome and all of them reached the same conclusion: the bloody demise of the mother, punctured and carved and sliced in retaliation for all the ugly things she had earlier enacted upon the daughter's psyche and person. But against his better judgment, he kept silent and continued to work with this disturbed woman, who paid him well, in cash, with large sums in advance. He needed the money. And he continued to be bothered by that attack of the *nü gui*. Why him? He came from a different world, a different culture, and at that point in his life, when he was still quite a young man. He hadn't yet done anything you could call truly terrible to women.

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