

2010 - 2022



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
APRIL 2022



JUSTIN LOWE
AN EMPORIUM OF LETTERS

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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

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

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

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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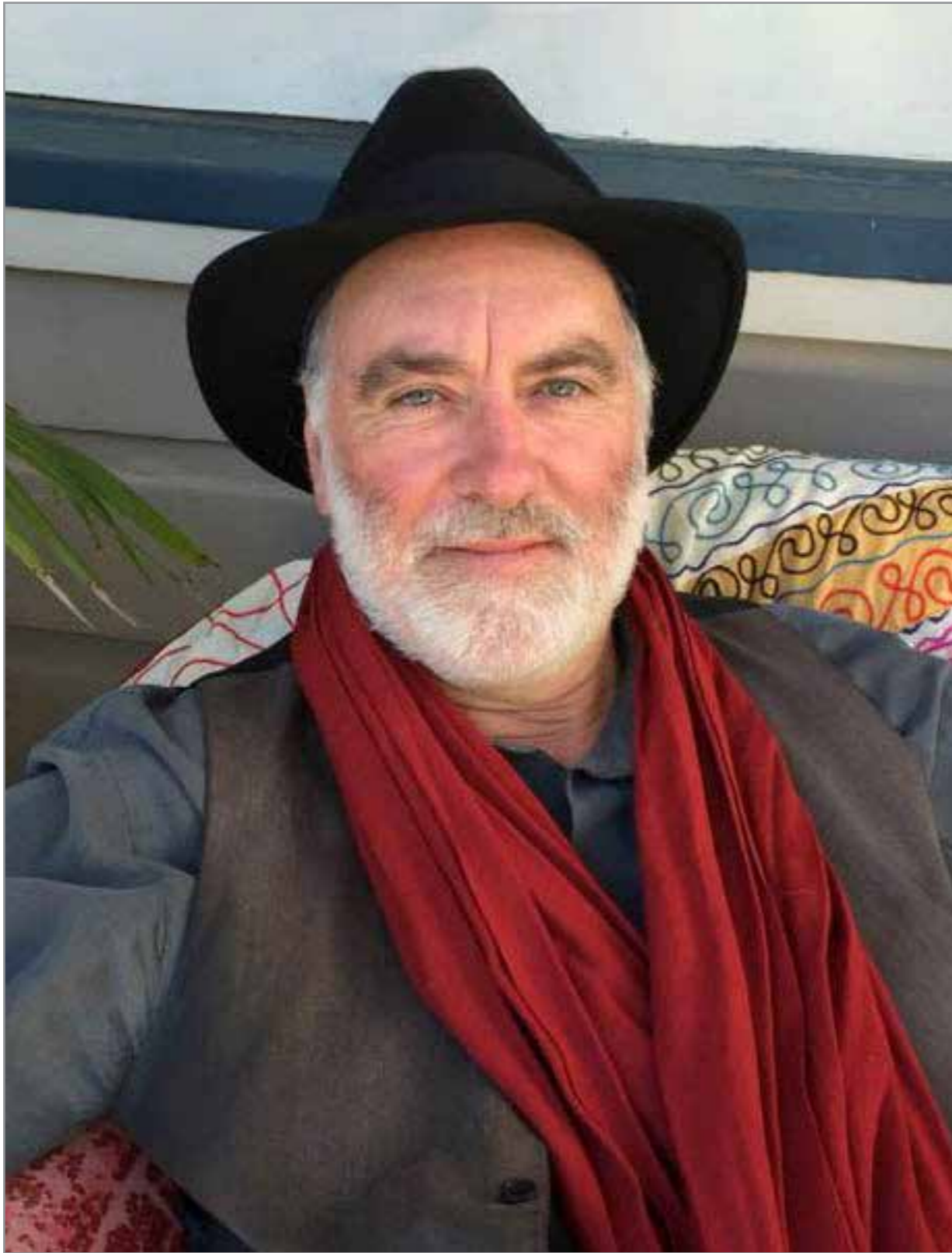
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Justin Lowe

JUSTIN LOWE

AN EMPORIUM OF LETTERS

When the indomitable Mark Ulyseas invited me to pen this editorial, I was honoured of course, but also uncharacteristically flummoxed.

All around me the world was coming off the rails. My studio was flooded after once-in-a-century rains that were a repeat of last year and the year before. There were not one, not two, but three great big elephants in the room that I felt obliged to gloss over if I ever had a hope of keeping within the word limit. I'm chatty, people. To point them all out, one by one, would glaze too many otherwise bright eyes, so I will defer to Reuters. As someone recently observed in a Sydney editorial, we in the West have grown somewhat inured of big H history in our thirty years of gaudy triumphalism, the Fukuyama conviction that there would be no more vast pestilences, no more vast wars. Well those days are gone, it would seem, heralded in from an Antipodean perspective when most of the east coast of my country caught fire. There has been almost no good news since. Thus, my quandary. Art, afterall, thrives on the conviction that life will prevail.

As the Ukrainian-born American poet Ilya Kaminsky puts it so succinctly in his prescient masterpiece, "Deaf Republic":

*What is a man?
A quiet between two bombardments.
("Question")*

The art of poetry, Ilya's and my particular art, has never shied away from the dark corners of the human experience. That was its manifesto from the start. No art worth the name does shy away, of course. But poetry is very much the elegiac art form, called on for millennia to celebrate life in its myriad possibilities in the shadow of an indelible incomprehensible passing.

Poetry is, in this and many other ways, an inherently defiant art form. Calling authority to account all the way to Death itself. I know I'm a little biased, but surely only a poet could have flipped the bird at Death like Pardoner Johnny Donne: "Death, be not proud.

I would like to take this opportunity to mark the passing of the Australian poet Jordie Albiston. Death be not proud.

I would like to take this opportunity to mark the passing of the Australian cricketer Rodney Marsh. Death be not proud.

I would like to take this opportunity to mark the passing of the Australian cricketer Shane Warne. Death be not proud.

I would like to take this opportunity to mark the passing of so many innocent Ukrainians and the standing of Russia in the international community. Death be not proud.

Which brings me to life.

Live Encounters, this phenomenon of which I am so proud to be a part, this vast archive of art, poetry and prose, can appear a little daunting at first. I know it did to me. In that way it is such a child of the internet, that daunting, somewhat perplexing, myriad of voices right there at our fingertips. True to my nature, I just worked my mouse like a dart hurled at a dartboard after one too many pints. And I have yet to be disappointed. In a world apparently committed to a dark narrow path bristling with grim certainties, here is an emporium of colour and vibrant intellect that is so vital for the development of the good life and the good global citizen. Yes, there is bustle and noise and a bumping of elbows, but the bustle is more Festival than Bazaar. There is a large bright vision here, not just a grasping of sleeves. May Live Encounters continue proud and strong for many years yet in this perplexing beautiful world.



Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed *Avalokiteshvara*, But Thap Pagoda, Bac Ninh Province, 1656. Lacquered wood. Vietnam Fine Arts Museum, Hanoi. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

The following poems are from a work-in-progress titled 'A Lockdown Almanac'.

AN OPEN BOOK

We read to know we are not alone. - C.S. Lewis

oh, where *haven't* I done it?

in the back seat of a Sydney cab
to the rhythmic pips of the old two-way
under De Niro's gimlet eye in the rearview

in bus station lavatories
in train station diners
under the fog horn of many languages
the jaundiced light of the baine-marie
and my train always lost in the mist

in sawdust tapas bars and Irish lockdowns
in the basement of damp Georgian tenaments
in hotel rooms with the dripping faucet
that after a fevered night can seem like a tiny hellmouth

with a girl I barely know
who sleeps sideways on a canopied bed
who pretends to be my wife for the Belgian concierge

in a one-man tent pitched precariously
on a cliff edge above a booming sea
or in a dark German wood by Kerosene lamp
while some old god tramps its cloven hoof through the thickets

in a hatted kitchen on The Strand
while the waiters bark their orders over the glittering pass
and the dirty plates stack up
and I do it as though I had less than an hour to live
in a cramped office by torchlight
waiting for the power to come back on
waiting for the tired computers to pip alive
and the phones to start nagging again

with their stories whose moral has always eluded me

MADAME CURIE

the long train ride made both Pierre and I groggy
 the slow wending from the valley floor
 the constant anticipation of arrival
 and the thought of what we would say on stepping down
 we passed makeshift crosses from the War
 like rows of crooked teeth along the dark embankment
 as it was we could barely finish a sentence on arrival
 and anyway the guard stood right by our awkward gathering of like-minds
 yelling the next destination just over our heads
 and I noticed his jowly face looked a little jaundiced in the lamplight
 as though he had eaten one too many railway pies
 that his grey eyes welled with tears
 as he yelled the names of the next three stops
 and that his coat was missing a button
 and his three small medals hung crooked

*

that night we ate modishly late in a little cafe
 bunched tight as battery hens in the refracted light
 knees touching knees awkwardly under the black lacquered table
 grinning shyly as we shovelled our opera cake
 bed beckoned and the comparative certainties of sleep
 but the maid's bitch was whelping right beneath us
 a full moon being the extent of any explanation or apology
 we were not much liked, we sensed already
 perhaps because not fluent enough
 to make our gratitude sound sincere to the servants
 or because we needed everything repeated like royalty

*

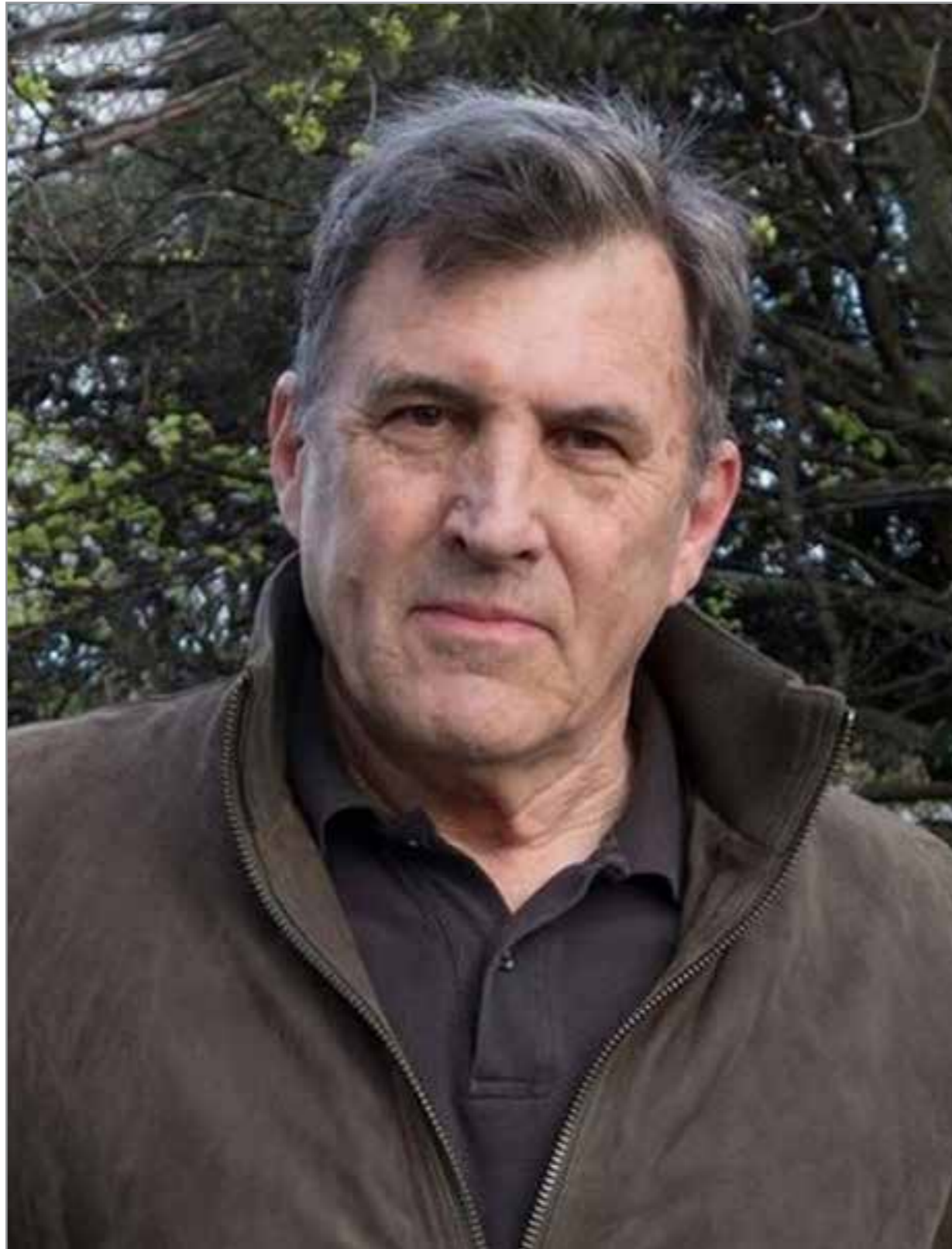
by the second night the pitiful howling had stopped
 and the board games grew very long and the rules difficult to follow
 I discovered a walk through the woods to a tiny lake
 with a small pier and a boat moored by a frayed rope
 one of the puppies tried to follow me but lost its way in the dark
 and I spent an hour trying to track its whimpering to a thorny hedge
 licking its wounds amongst the foxglove and briars
 its quivering stilled by my voice and my hot hands
 not accustomed to lifting something so light and trusting
 I sat in the long grass and let it lick my face all over
 its smooth little tongue licking away my tears
 before I could even begin to explain them.
 by our third night no-one had yet asked my opinion on anything.

*

on our fourth night there was a sharp disagreement in the drawing room
 but the insults flew too thick and fast for me to catch them
 a quick glance at the scoring sheet suggested Bridge
 which, if it hasn't already provoked a war, will soon enough
 the servants were nowhere to be seen
 but the puppies bounded in as though released from somewhere
 and the mood soon softened and brandies were poured
 and finally someone turned to me with a serious question
 about the Polish King and the Periodic Table
 and I answered them to vague approval and reluctant delight
 my accent, I think, this strange tremor in my voice
 and a servant came to collect the puppies
 which were let go with great reluctance

David Rigsbee is an American poet, critic and translator who has an immense body of published work behind him. He is the author of 12 collections of poems including *Not Alone in my Dancing – Essays and Reviews* (2016), *This Much I Can Tell You* (2017), *School of the Americas* (2012) and *The Pilot House* (2011), all published by Black Lawrence Press and *MAGA Sonnets by Donald Trump* from Main Street Rag, a series of 85 quotations from Trump's speeches and interviews bundled up in sonnet form (political satire and grimly humorous).

This is an excerpt from David Rigsbee's translation of Dante's *Paradiso*, the third and final book of the *Commedia*, which is forthcoming from Salmon Poetry.



DANTE, PARADISO, CANTO XVII

[Dante asks his great, great grandfather Cassiaguida to tell him about the future, and Cassiaguida complies. However, he reminds Dante that his *Commedia* and the fame that will follow in future generations will be ample compensation for his exile.]

Like him who came to Clymene
to ascertain the truth of what he heard, who
still makes fathers wary of their poor sons,

such was I and such was heard
by Beatrice and by the holy light that first
on my account changed its place. 5

Therefore, my Lady said, "Send
the flame of your desire; let it issue
well imprinted with the inner stamp,

not because your talk increases
what we know, but that better you speak
your thirst so that your cup may be filled." 10

Oh my treasured root, so raised,
that as earthly minds perceive, no triangle
can contain two that are obtuse, 15

you see in contingent things
rather how they are in themselves, the point
at which time becomes timeless.

While I was with Virgil,
on the mountain where souls are repaired
and descending into the dead world, 20

continued overleaf...

David Rigsbee

DANTE, PARADISO, CANTO XVII

contd...

serious words were spoken
of my future life, and yet I feel I am
foursquare against the blows of chance;

and so, my desire would be content
to hear what fortune now approaches
because an expected arrow flies more slowly.”

So I spoke to the same light
that had spoken to me before, and as Beatrice
wished, I made my wish my confession.

Not in dark riddles that used to snare
foolish folk before the Lamb of God,
who taketh away sins, was slain,

but in plain and precise words
that loving father, at once hidden, yet
revealed by his own smile, replied,

“Contingency, that does not
extend beyond the book of matter,
is depicted whole in the Eternal:

but this implies no necessity,
any more than a ship sailing downstream
is moved by the eyes that mirror it.

Since then, even as to the ear
sweet harmony comes from an organ,
so to my eyes there comes a view

of what time is preparing for you.
As Hippolytus was forced to flee Athens
by a merciless, deceitful mother, so you

must leave Florence. So it
is willed, planned, and shall be done by one
scheming where daily Christ is for sale.

As usual, the offended party
will cry out, but the vengeance demanded
of Truth shall yet witness what is true.

You shall abandon everything
for which you care most deeply; this is
the arrow that the bow of exile shoots first.

You shall know how salty the bread
of others is, and how hard a footpath
takes you up and down another’s stairs.

But what will weigh more on your
shoulders will be the evil and foolhardy
company you will fall into in this valley;

all ingrates, all mad, and impious,
they will range against you, but soon
it will be their cheeks, not yours, burning.

Concerning their bestiality, the proof
will be in their actions, while you will do well
for having made a party of one.

continued overleaf..

DANTE, PARADISO, CANTO XVII

contd...

Your first refuge and first hostel
will come courtesy of a grand Lombard
whose ladder carries a sacred bird.

70

And so benign will be his regard for you,
that with the give and take between you,
that will be first that is last to others.

75

With him beside you, you shall see
one impressed so deeply by his birth star
that his achievements will all be notable.

The people have not yet noticed him
because of his youth, since only nine years
have these wheels turned around him.

80

But even before Gascon cheats
noble Henry, this one's virtue will sparkle,
having no care for silver nor worry about toil.

His magnificence will be such
that his enemies will assuredly become
powerless to keep tongues mute.

85

You may rely on him and his benefits.
The fate of many shall be transformed by him,
mendicant and wealthy changing places.

90

What I tell you about him inscribe
in the mind—but do not speak it"; and he said
things to those present that were incredible,

then added, "Son, now you see
my account of what was said to you; you see
the snares hidden behind just a few years.

95

Yet bear your neighbors no envy
for your life will have a future that reaches
far beyond their crimes and punishments."

By his silence that blessed soul
revealed that he had stopped weaving the woof
across the web with the warp I had prepared.

100

I began as one who doubts
and craves counsel from of a person
who sees, rightly wills, and loves.

105

"Father, well do I perceive how time
charges toward me to deal me such a blow
as would be crushing to the least prepared.

Therefore, it is well I arm myself
with foresight, for if the dearest place to me be lost,
through my poems, I do not lose the others.

110

Down through the world of endless bitterness
and the mountain, from whose beautiful peak
the eyes of my Lady lifted me. And after,

through heaven from light to light
I have learned things that, if I were to tell them
again, many would taste bitter herbs.

115

continued overleaf..

DANTE, PARADISO, CANTO XVII

contd...

And I am a timid friend to truth,
I am afraid I will lose my life with those who
will come to refer to this as the ancient time.”

120

The light in which there smiled
the treasure I had discovered there, began
to flash as a gold mirror would in the sun.

Then it replied, “the conscience
dark with shame for its own or another’s acts
will indeed find what you say to be blunt.

125

Nevertheless, shun all falsehood,
make manifest all that you have seen
and let them scratch where it itches.

For your words may be bitter
at first taste, but when digested,
they leave thereafter a vital nutriment.

130

The cry you raise shall strike,
like the wind, the highest peaks,
and, for honor, that is no slight argument.

135

Thus within these spheres are shown,
on the Mount and down in the dolorous
valley, only the souls known to fame,

because the listener’s spirit is restless
and will not have faith or place its trust
in things whose root is unknown and obscure

140

or other argument not made plain.”

Notes:

1, *him who came to Clymene*—Phaeton. Told that Apollo was not his father, Phaeton goes to his mother (Clemene) to find the truth. Apollo meanwhile consents when Phaeton asks to drive the chariot of the sun but is unable to control the horses, threatening the earth. Zeus intervenes with a thunderbolt, killing Phaeton.

47, *Hippolytus*—Rejecting the advances of his mother Phaedra, Hippolytus is slandered by her and driven out by his father Theseus, who calls on Poseidon for vengeance. Poseidon sends a bull from the sea to destroy Hippolytus (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XV).

71, *a grand Lombard*—his patron in Verona, Can Grande.

82 – 83, *Gascon cheats noble Henry*—Henry II, with whom Dante’s hopes of returning from exile lay, went to Rome at the invitation of Pope Clement V (Gascon), only to be excommunicated.

GOOD FRIDAY, 2018, DRIVING SOUTH

The day didn't alter its early monochrome.
By the time I got onto the pike
it was slicked with rain, and every passing car
renewed the brief but annoying mist,
swelling and subsiding, as cherry-red taillights
burned through, and you had to use the wiper
manually, until the rubber squeaked against the glass.
Spring had not yet come, despite the efforts
of early flowers clumped by austere trees
and the occasional plain birdsong, a kind
of acoustic searching for which even echolalia
would have been acceptable. Mostly I was
aware of the motoring monotony and the ebb and tide
of tires like a stadium far away, for which
it was impossible to determine who was winning,
only that it was taking place and someone was.
I thought of Donne, of course, presenting
his cleverness to the Most High, and I always
did on that day. The thought led me to a friend
who used to speak of Donne as though he was present
and smirking over a pint at the tiny attempt
we made to register too, like dust on a lens.
And what if we didn't register? What if
we only clutched our dolor all the way down?
Many are the times I woke, rose,
and went forth in what felt like rebalancing
after a heavy dream or guideposts
through an uncanny countryside.

Hartford was awful, I thought, all
bottlenecked and yet devoid of citizens,
the sidewalks like bezels outlining sodden
public spaces, parks and self-doubting commercial spaces.
The radio was no help, either repetitive and banal
or imposing and unrelenting: no middle way.
I wanted to connect the day to my experience,
but the weatherman had promised a smudge
of clouds, neither rising nor setting sun,
just hazy relations between cars
and the land, between cars and things.
Lacking shadow, I drove on south to Waterbury,
New Britain, Newtown, still in rain,
past the unremarkable exit sign to Sandy Hook,
to Danbury, and the New York line,
where I separated from the last of the pods.
For a moment, it was like stepping off a ledge
where everything rushes up to meet you,
only to turn, only to be done with you.

WHERE THE SEA MEETS THE MOUNTAIN

a mothership of rain clouds advances
its prow. A rooster announces something
in the style of 1932, 1980, and 1761.
A hammer answers, and the horizon,
as it exchanges one example of blue for another
like overlapping patches of cloth,
arguing against hard outlines.
Imagine an impressionist parked
by the Seine, registering his self-important
discovery in dabs, to which he refers
as azure, magenta, mauve and cyan,
each tubed by rows in his easel box.
And then it rained, and the rain was ushered
out to sea. The trees moved, palm, plantain,
and orange, accommodating the air
as their branches and massive, split leaves
would allow. The sun came rushing after
and set the tone, which was also
the tone of the sea, incautious, but stable.
Old people gazing up the steep side roads,
some whose second leg was a crutch, many
children mixed with the same wary dogs,
woman wearing cargo for hats,
all in random, slow-motion on exodus
from plywood, tin, the smoke of braziers
hanging in the leaves, wooden menus
that didn't require fading,
or the occasional car to pass them
as if motion itself were stuck on earth.
People walked by the side of the road
outlined by deep stone ditches and that
was all there was to the dance.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Angela Costi is the author of five poetry collections including *Honey & Salt*, *Lost in Mid-Verse* and *An Embroidery of Old Maps and New*. Recent work is in *The Victorian Writer*, *n-Scribe*, *Rabbit* (Issue 34), *Australian Poetry Anthology Vol 9*, *StylusLit Issue 11* and *Meniscus Literary Journal Vol 9*. She's a finalist of the 2022 Joanne Burns Microlit Award. Her poem *A Candle Flickers to My Left* was highly commended in the Gippsland Writers - 'Heat' Poetry Prize.



THE DAILY WALK

at five minutes--- the suburb is stewing
families for breakfast a carer's cup of tea
converts to a bath for moths veranda
furniture are wounded by weather

at fifteen minutes----- house after
house with front doors too close to parked
cars grass is not meant for bare feet
trees scared to shade in case they're lopped

at thirty minutes----- by the time
we learn to walk we learn not to depend
on others all of us have spent more minutes
than necessary alone in the crib

at thirty-eight minutes-----
crossing rivers of bitumen see trees grow
reckless drinking creek's brew blue birds
flicker blue the ground is no longer harsh

at forty-four minutes- a step is a breath
watch how the breeze teases the edge
off there is laughter in leaves feeling
utterly alone is worth the sadness

Angela Costi

AT THE CLINIC

in dispersed chairs
and masks
 the colour of sky
protecting us
 with sincere innocence

I close my eyes to stop
fluorescence interrogating

stumble into galleries of hurt
 to the time I was four
and found the safest place
 was the wardrobe
shut in from lightning and thunder
 playing at being family

Opening my eyes to the sound
of what is known as my name

the white coat
 takes me to the grey cloud
of diagnosis

AFTER A VIRUS RANSACKED A HEART

It's not a plastic bag caught in the wind's
torment but rather, the anguish of a body

on fire ---- three weeks to toddle from
wall to wall, to step in and out of fever.

The way a teenager escapes the house
twists your hair into the mind's knots

while you test a tentative toe, feeling
the strange suck of grass outside your

front door, as smiles continue to be masked,
bees and wattle become your new friends.

Learning now to walk with hope spilling
into the air cleansed of all its conspiracies.

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



THE MOON NIGHT

Filling in a big tin tub,
I lay myself inside
to clean and to warm
my old torn bones
from the dusty world.
Tonight, I wish to be
a sleep-swimming fish.

The moon's light is the divine wine
washing me bare and bold.
The muse sprinkles some more
on my body—
it tastes spicy and salty.

I wash, I clean...
I hang my slimy skin out
upon my window—

the shadow on the trees
beckons me
as if a dreaming-fish
looms.

Anna Yin

THE WAKING

stone Buddha
in newly formed puddle
melting snow

*

loud calls
above our locked-down city
wild geese returning

*

awaking...
leaves in warm green tea—
trembling butterflies

STOP WAR

*

red, pink and pale white
scattered on the ground
petals from cherry blossoms

*

blazing fire in the east
among rubble
charred backpacks

*

cloudy moon
snow falls in the wind
dust to dust

*

knitting daisies
on the blanket for refugees...
white doves

PRECIOUS MOMENTS

after brief rain
a rainbow over
the Grand River

above the mountain
a red balloon rises
no string attached

winding trail
behind a haunted house
calls from goldfinches

on the sunset lake
a snowy egret takes off
another within sight

fog lifts
a thrush's song
through the woods

maple trees
along the Bruce trail
Thomson's vibrant paintings



Soft Maple in Autumn, Fall 1914. Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Owen Sound.

Anne Elvey lives on Bunurong (Boonwurrung) Country in Seaford, Victoria. Anne is author of *Obligations of Voice* (Recent Work Press 2021), *On arrivals of breath* (Poetica Christi Press 2019), *White on White* (Cordite Books 2018), and *Kin* (Five Islands Press 2014) which was shortlisted for the Kenneth Slessor Poetry Prize. Other recent publications include: *Cloud Climbers* *Declarations through Images and Words for a Just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace* (ed. Anne Elvey, with art work by William Kelly and Benjamin McKeown, Palaver Press, 2021). Her new poetry collection 'Leaf and Tumble' focusing on plants is forthcoming from Liquid Amber Press.



PROPER PRIVATE

Private climate. Proper change. When did some of us decide to own an atmosphere as if it were our domain as proper as our un-decision not to buy? We say divest and mean banks and super. We say divest. And do not mean our goods. Stiff with the death of wings furnaced to dreams of flight. We say divest. Hard rubbish. We take out everything we do not need. Giving the ungiven. We un-thing things. Know there are proper ways to live

Anne Elvey

AS IF ANGELS WERE IN ALLIANCE

1

Two classmates smirk as I kneel
pressed against the shone wood. My hands
taper with the fervour of a solemn wish.

It is not old grey hair and beard I
pray to, or his sandaled son. Nor do
I finger the blue-beaded fringe of a girl.

In a child's bewildered years, I clasp
a quiet other and hold my heart out –
as if to a best friend – pious, shamed for it.

2

Mandala is a word I do not know
as I sit in a middle pew, gaze fixed on
the white round in its gold-framed window.

Angels twine. Trumpets rest on gilded
rays that halo the wafer. Host is a word
for this bread-not-bread, steeped with incense

and Latin chant. The little magic of empire's
might and endless majesty. Candle-light
glints on the circle of shafts, flensing my world.

3

The dress my mother made for First Communion
still fits, when the bishop comes to slap my
cheek, oil my brow and ask a name. Spirit

is meant to arrive today – *oh breathe on
me-e-e* – as trains repeat their lines, bypassing
Sunday's *breath of God*. A party marks my

becoming neither more nor less responsible
than I am. When a mitred man asks the name
I take, I give the answer preapproved – *Mary*.

4

A ruddy bishop arrives, to confirm my sister
in our salt-licked home. She has, they say, special
needs and cannot swallow the wafer. A decade on

a man in a wheel chair is not able to drink
from the proffered cup. Another bishop immediately
takes a straw and, siphoning consecrated wine,

drops a little, onto his outstretched tongue.
The royal commission finds that bishop has
acted, to ignore evidence of abuse, repeatedly.

continued overleaf..

AS IF ANGELS WERE IN ALLIANCE *contd...*

5

The red cadmium of an unlit lamp offers
no sanctuary. Under cupped wicks candles
smoulder, snuffed like a thing I once

called faith. It was a joyed string strummed
tether to the beauty of cadent text and thin
bread as if matter were holy. And it is. The lie

is to evacuate soul of its body, to separate
child from the curious fold of earth. I wear
this hooded loss. Water and sky bellow

6

into being. The gone is a green bloom by
the falls. At a grill in a wall, I place my
egg as an eye. My breath is a whisper of

adolescent idyll. Those spilt lives and
the tiles they bled on are scrubbed. Haloes
are put out as hard rubbish. I find one,

think to try it. A poor fit. What trips
me are the rusted handles of a trike. Its
wheels spin crooked as a doctrine prized.

Note: *Tantum ergo* was a hymn sung at Benediction. The Latin lyrics were written by Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), the English translation 'Down in Adoration Falling' is by Edward Caswell (d. 1878). The phrase 'might and endless majesty' in part 2 comes from the last line of the English translation. In part 3 the words 'oh breath on me' and 'breath of God', come from the hymn: 'Oh Breathe on Me, Breath of God' by Edwin Hatch (1835-1889), first published in 1878. Both hymns are in the public domain.

WALKING IT BACK

We had just been talking about thin slicing—
 how a split second can reveal so much—
 blackbirds outside our window,
 singing. We were channelling the
 Mamas and the Papas, harmonies and
 bonnet-sunlight
 bouncing about the car, off his gold
 tooth, my ankle bracelet on the dash.
 We didn't see the dragons
 crossing. The car sailed over.
 My hair is seagrass now. A zebra-
 fish has taken up residence in
 his open chest. A disc
 still clicks in the stacker:
*Sometimes all I need is the air that I breath
 and to love you.* Honey locust leaves,
 bound for the sea bed.
 Bound for the sea bed,
 and to love you, honey. Locusts leave,
 sometimes. All I need is the air that I breath.
 Still clicks in. The stacker,
 his open chest. A disc
 fish has taken up residence in
 my hair. Is seagrass, now, a zebra-
 crossing the car sailed over?
 We didn't see the Dragon's
 Tooth. My ankle bracelet, on the dash,
 bouncing about the car, off his gold
 bonnet. Sunlight,
 Mama's and Papa's harmonies and
 singing; we were channelling the
 blackbird outside our window—
 how a split second can reveal so much:
 we had just been talking about thin slicing.



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Ben Hession is a writer based in Wollongong, New South Wales. His poetry has been published in *Eureka Street*, *the International Chinese Language Forum*, *the Cordite Poetry Review*, *Verity La*, *the Mascara Literary Review*, *Bluepepper*, *the Marrickville Pause*, *The Blue Nib*, *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* and the Don Bank Live Poets anthology *Can I Tell You A Secret?* He has reviewed poetry for *Verity La* and the *Mascara Literary Review*. Ben Hession is also a music journalist and is involved with community broadcasting.



OF LOVE, A LETTER

Dear reader, allow me some indulgence,
I speak not of my own, personal story,
but, rather, that of Maria who had loved
Aristotle, whom we all know well.

Please, do not condemn me for sharing
the straits of the heart of another,
I do so, only from sympathy, moved by painful
experience, I'd felt as if, indeed, it were my own.

I, myself, saw Maria, who was alone, when
she lived inside the bottle, so to speak:
her existence complete in its complexity,
her soul hanging, swinging amid warm gusts,

her life narrated in the ocean's crests, falls
and sighing sweeps across the shoreline.
She stood on as many grains of sand as lives lived
or threatened to come, each an episode of torment,

since her sailor lover departed. He had asked:
"Maria, tell me, honestly, what do you want?"
Her feelings were as noisy as birds at dusk,
still not yet ready to relinquish the day,

seeking reason through the onset of darkness.
Should a rational mind ever bear such weight?
Her eyes spoke first, soon her words followed:
"Stay here. Hold me. Hold tight. I want to die."

Ben Hession

WOLLONGONG HARBOUR

The thin, long crush of the sea floods the break-watered harbour, attempting to make a statement, rushing o'er a lean, miniature beach, to declaim, reclaim, impart from blurring depths of midnight's

horizon, a landed reason that might decrypt one's dreams, and reveal dangers of a weary honesty in words that linger throughout the day, waiting to awake, and when they do, in a rush,

one soon sees to sink into sand: so such inches of longing rise and fall, articulating each fanning possibility that might yet carry one out to where a hidden current will lead, the higher swells

of imagined realities that could exist, but not now, tamed as they are, as breaths in a meditation.

THE CENTRIFUGE

Gripping an invisible rope, I hear
my light breaths hold tight, in orbit, by
a fictitious force. My spinning stare trans-
fixes anxieties to an absent centre.
I'm caught between fear and physics,
fantasies of liberation suffocate me.
A certain law states that I simply let go, it's in
the timing, however, now or never.
I should've always known this, I suppose.
It makes sense. So I take my tangent, and see
reception, to make my next appointment.

Beth Spencer's *The Age of Fibs: stories memoir microlit* is due out in April 2022 from Spineless Wonders. Previous books include *Vagabondage* (UWAP), *The Party of Life* (Flying Islands), and *How to Conceive of a Girl* (Random House) which was shortlisted for the Steele Rudd Award. She lives on unceded Guringai land on the NSW Central Coast. www.bethspencer.com / @bethspen



ON TURNING SIXTY AND AFTER SHINGLES

*'If your builder could place a small red bird
in your chest to beat as your heart'*
— Natalie Diaz, from *The First Water Is The Body*

If the builder placed a bird in my chest it would be like the bewildered and terrified head of the tiny duckling rising above the swirling creek, then plunged down into the current; then rising up to see the world still here, still turning; then down again.

How many more of these breaths do I have left to me before the jaws of the eel find my soft feet and take me down one last time?

When the eel lifts us up to the surface, trying to dislodge us, to find purchase, we have one small moment to look about — at the sky, the grass, the surface of the water blackening in the dusk, the rocks along the edge, the reeds where it all began.

Take that moment and use it.

Embrace it.

If you fear its loss, you'll miss it.

Then when the eel plunges you under and your beak fills with iced water, surrender to it. Hold on. Be ready. Because eventually it will lift you up again, trying to find you as you cling to its back.

Be ready to embrace the sky.

Be ready to stare the stranger on the bank in the eye.

She cannot help you but, for this moment, you are one.

Beth Spencer

Brian Kirk is a poet and writer from Dublin, Ireland. His first poetry collection *After The Fall* was published by Salmon Poetry in 2017. His poem "Birthday" won the Listowel Writers' Week Irish Poem of the Year at the An Post Irish Book Awards 2018. His short fiction chapbook *It's Not Me, It's You* won the Southword Fiction Chapbook competition and was published in 2019 by Southword Editions. His novel *Riverrun* was a winner of the Novel Fair 2022 run by the Irish Writers Centre. He blogs at www.briankirkwriter.com.



METAXU*

These days of plague are passing rich and strange,
we wrestle with the notion of sea-change.

Our parents and grandparents survived hard
times: famine, rising, persecution, war.

Our interactions happen via Zoom;
the things we took for granted are the same

things that will make us ill: the hugs and handshakes,
breaths of strangers. A touch is all it takes

to pass it on, so we must stay apart,
make of ourselves a temple or a fort,

protecting loved ones in the only way
we can, hoping to keep disease at bay.

All year we've tried to live like nothing's wrong,
pretending we know what's really going on.

In our worst moments we give in to doubt,
a rat caught in a maze with no way out.

The wall between what's needed and what's fair
is deep, a solid structure made of air,

we loathe the way it seems to drive a wedge,
marvel how it can also be a bridge.

* *Metaxu* is the idea that that which separates us also connects us, as espoused by the philosopher, Simone Weil.

Brian Kirk

NO BIRDS SING

after John Keats

Always the one who worked long days,
he staked his honour on his name.
How could this person fail to see
the end that came?

He bought a house, with gardens front
and back, on an established street;
he took a wife who stood by him,
who was discreet.

It started when the kids were small,
he never felt that warmth within,
preferred the company of friends
and bitter gin.

He didn't like the way she dressed,
the things she said were pointed knives.
The mirrors in his house witnessed
unreflected lives.

The kids grew up and moved away,
they came back only for her sake.
He never felt that warmth within,
that tender ache

that parents are supposed to feel
when children grow up, move away;
felt cheated when he felt at all –
someone had to pay.

Abuse can take so many forms,
the closed fist or the open hand,
the screaming rage or silent mood
none can withstand.

It took years before she found the strength.
She made excuses all the while,
addled, worried, frightened she might
inflammate his bile.

In the summer of Corona
his sullenness took a new shape;
his fists began to speak so she
made her escape.

He fetched the billhook from the shed,
hacked every bit of green he saw,
never let up until sunset,
his fingers raw.

He dug the beds and slashed the flowers,
smashed all the planters on the lawn.
He cut the shrubs down to the quick
from dusk to dawn.

The morning found him on the floor,
worn out by hate and bitter gin.
He stayed there thinking nothing much
till light broke in.

With daylight came another mood,
he idly turned his wedding ring.
From this day on a silent world
where no birds sing.

STAYING UP

As a child, I cried to stay up for just ten minutes more,
digging my slippered heels into the worn carpet,

wanting to remain with my older brothers and sisters
in the warmth and light of the living room.

Was there something in particular I feared
about those nights? Was it simply wakefulness

or a vague wish to be older than I was?
For years my life was delayed, deferred

with promises of maybe next time. I was
the youngest and they no doubt meant well,

their actions fuelled by genuine concern. Ironic
the way I repaid their tender mercies and protections,

putting myself in harm's way at every turn. That night
I shouted out my name as I stepped across

the broken rail that spanned the water. One slip
would end it all, I knew, and then I'd never

have to sleep again, lying on the riverbed, dreamless
and awake, and no one there to heed my silent sobs.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Cathy Altmann is a poet, teacher and violinist from Melbourne. Her first collection, *Circumnavigation* (Poetica Christi Press, 2014), won the FAW Anne Elder Award. Her second collection, *things we know without naming* (Poetica Christi Press), was published in December 2018. Cathy's poetry has appeared in journals, anthologies, *The Disappearing website* and on Melbourne's trains as part of the *Moving Galleries* project. She has run workshops for Breast Cancer survivors, school students and at Darwin's WordStorm Poetry Festival. She holds a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Melbourne and currently teaches English and Latin at Presbyterian Ladies' College, Melbourne.



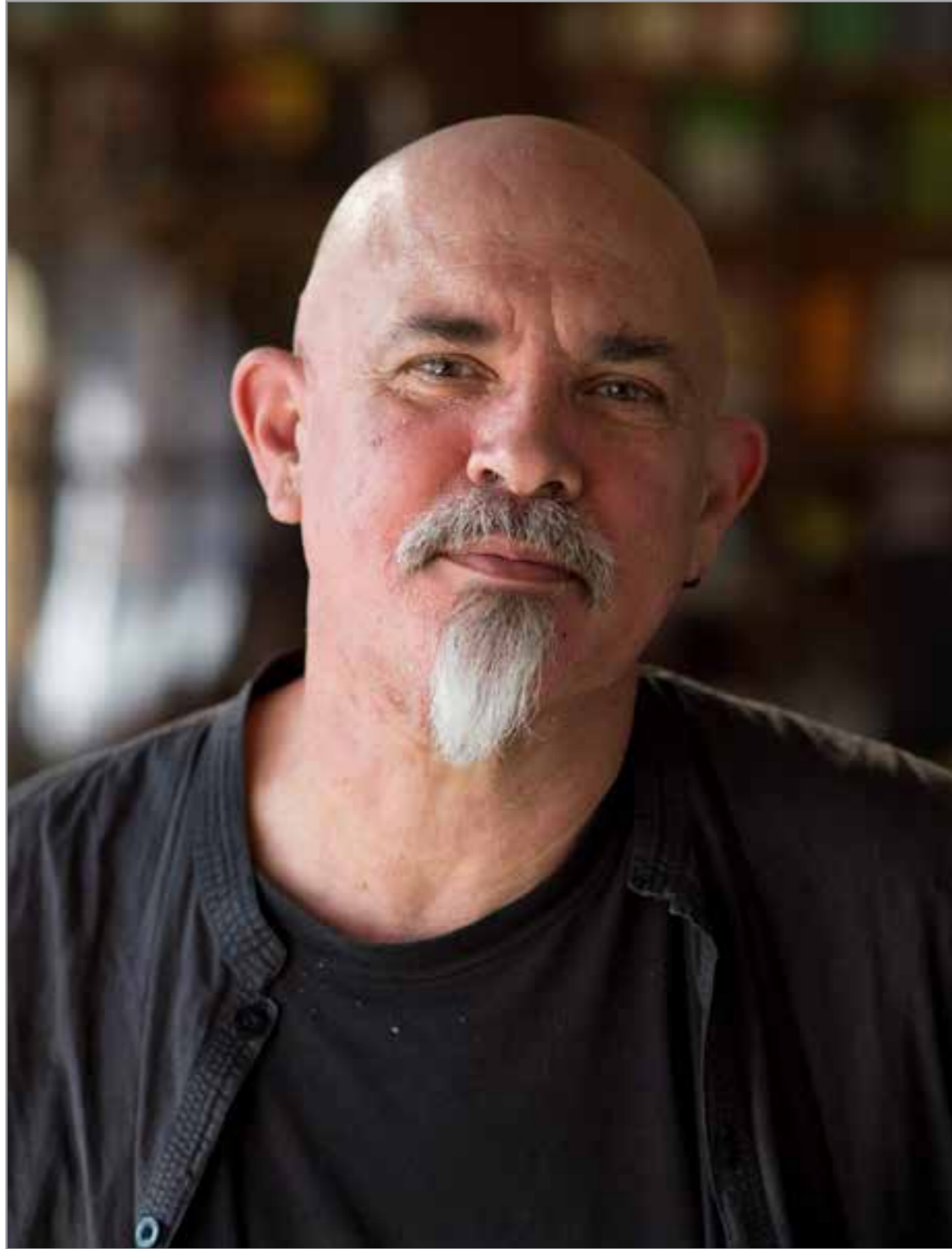
MOVING

I wake in the morning
to dreams of
missing children
scattered like
jigsaw pieces below
the bed. Only
three days left
now. In the afternoon
the house gathers
round me like a
shroud. I never
welcomed my
friend into
these rooms,
but I took her
on an imaginary
tour. And we
scratched our
names in the
cement – my
missing children,
husband and I.

Now they lie
unseen, like all
the tears, the
helpless sitting
on my daughter's
bed, the prayers
made of animal
sounds, our night-
time cries and the
hidden world
of our son. We
made music here,
ate words and
spilt tea –
filled the house with
sound like the
bowl I smashed
on the floor –
dogs howling
the whole
cacophony
of our lives.

Cathy Altmann

David Brooks (<https://davidbrooks.net.au>), a poet, short-fiction writer, novelist and essayist, taught Australian Literature for many years at the University of Sydney and was from 2000 until 2018 the managing co-editor of *Southerly*. His latest publications are *The Grass Library* (Brandl & Schlesinger and Ashland Creek Press), a memoir and meditation on animal rights, and *Animal Dreams* (Sydney University Press, 2021), a collection of essays on animals in literature, philosophy and public policy. A long-term vegan and an advocate for animals (kangaroos in particular), he lives with rescued sheep high in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales.



SPIDER NIGHT

This morning warm and dry for once
and spider webs everywhere,
hanging from the branches of trees
across the door of the feed-room
all over the paddock gate.
Makes you wonder if there could be
such a thing as a Spider Night, moon
low and bright to the west
small winged creatures about
the slant of the light
almost perfect
breeze just right.

David Brooks

A MOUSE-HOLE IN POET'S CORNER

December 1946, and there's
 a mouse-hole in Poet's Corner,
 or so a new member of the abbey cleaning staff
 has just informed the duty chaplain, who though he does
 not say so is aware
 that there has always been mice there,
 and that although they're rather large – he's
 seen them often – they are, he is convinced, just
 that, church-mice, and given the morning he's had
 struggling through a knife-like wind, and sleet, wondering
 how on earth all the small birds on Fleet Street
 could possibly manage without the intercession of, etc., is
 determined he won't intercede; the mice, after all, *are*
 church-mice, as quiet as, and no parishioner
 has ever run out of Vespers screaming: although
 the Abbey is no restaurant, there's mouse-food aplenty
 without disturbing corpses, not that there'd be
 anything but bones remaining
 of Browning or Tennyson and their company – best
 let the mouse, for that *is* what it is,
 take its lunch there unimpeded,
 bread-crusts, apple-cores, wafer crumbs, safe
 in the darkness of those hallowed skulls.

THE GRIP

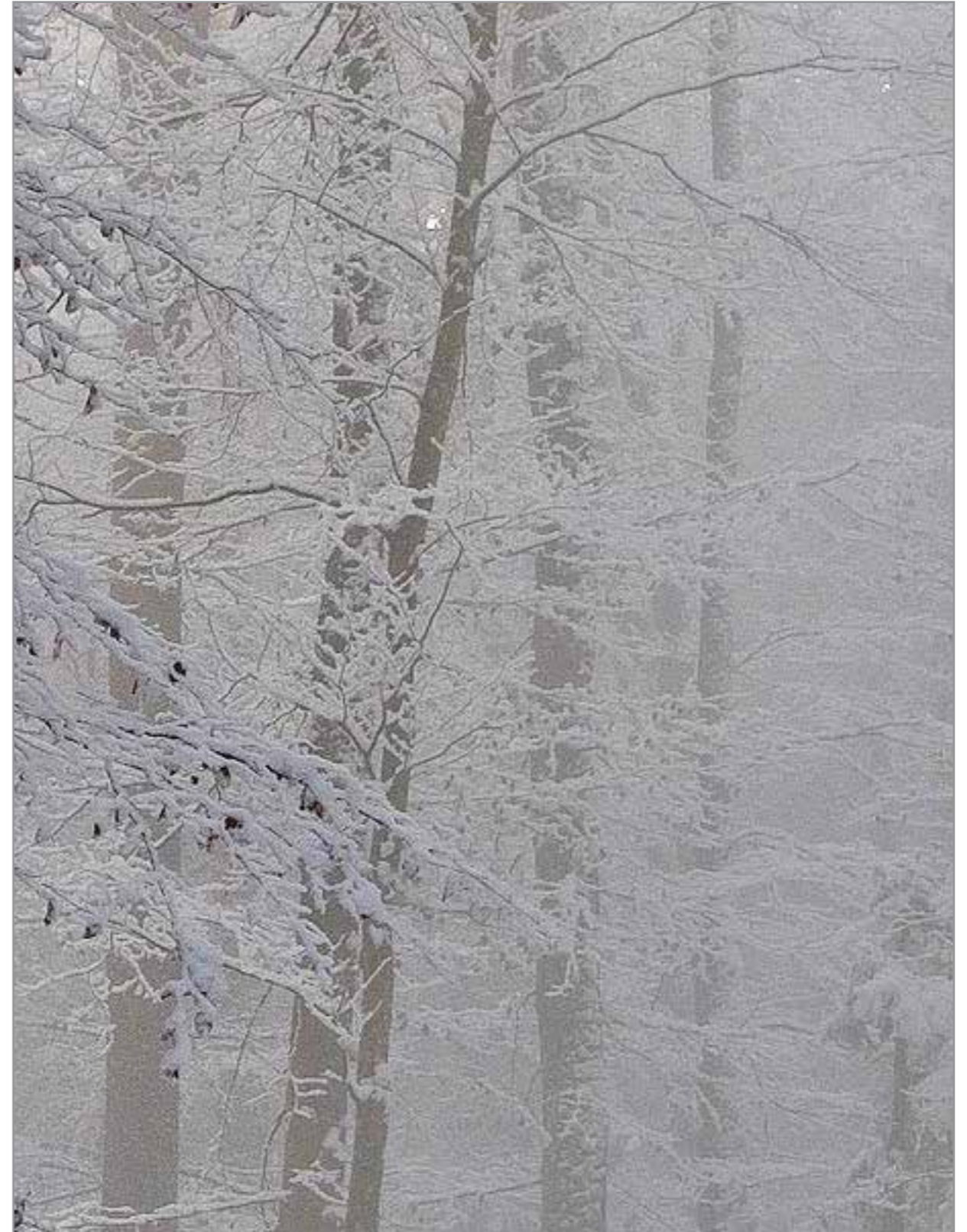
A glossy black cockatoo
 hangs upside-down
 in the scrub below the fence,
 ripping apart the young
 cones of a sheoak, then takes off
 toward Wentworth, caught
 by the last of the sunset,
 bursting into flame;
 all evening
 an unsettling wind
 bringing wood-smoke, wild fire.

Around midnight
 something heavy
 lands on the tin roof, takes
 off again. Rats
 gnaw at the skirtings,
 the lights
 of our neighbours
 go out.

Whatever it is
 that is holding us here,
 love, emptiness,
 flexes, tightens its grip.

WATCHING SNOW

Two days ago twenty degrees
and we dreamt that spring had come, then yesterday
winter returning with a vengeance,
one degree at noon and large flakes
thick in the air though never gathering;
last night wild wind, a fear
that trees would be blown down
but now, this morning, an old
truck slushing along the road above
then stillness, utter
stillness, birds
silent, sheep
silent because they can't
get to the grass through the whiteness,
a black bear
alone in the snow
fifty years ago.



Photograph <https://pixabay.com/photos/snow-winter-forest-nature-cold-4668099/>

Daide Angelo's poems have appeared in Australian and international publications. Several have been shortlisted for prizes, including *Montreal Poetry Prize*, *Bruce Dawe Poetry Prize*, *Melbourne Poets Union Poetry Prize* and *The University of Canberra Poetry Prize*. He teaches English and lives in Bendigo, Victoria, with his two daughters.



WORD OF THE YEAR

There's an argument going on whether
It was Yeats or Éluard who wrote
"...there is another world in this one".
It's not a stretch to assert the boulevard
Glowed Lorca's silvery swarms or plastic bags
White as moons, ran red lights
As if in some dream. Inside every surface
Quiet by contrast, we planned a lifestyle
On acres, took turns nursing a loaf of bread.
We held hands while hunting for Miro's
Representations of the Catalan people
In sandboxes for subconscious minds.
It'll be years before we know the power
Of the humourless smile.

In the half light, in the half-life, rain falls
And freezes in me and moths want
To live again. In this reconstruction, bones
Of wood and steel hold the sky.
I've never slept so little but so well inhaling
And exhaling against death. And the stars
Are hardly what the kids are interested in.
Today, I ran from a bee no one else could see.
Tomorrow, I'll take my daughters to the beach
Walk across the whiteness of sand that mirrors
So tenderly, the ceaseless currents.
Even whales, before they were whales
Had the temerity to walk into oceans
And into their futures.

Daide Angelo

TRUE NORTH

Escape joyful strains, a walk-up flat
Shoes strewn on a narrow patch of porch
Outgrowing the blockwork.

One suburb over, emerald haze of north
Follow father's gait, serpentine lines of Monterey
Pines and English elms, a hand-made lake.

The sky is a page of Mediterranean water.
Angle for vision in the bluestone shadow of
Pentridge Prison, screw shoeless feet deep

In the cool Coburg grass, cast lines baited
With bread balls and Hail Marys full of grace
Into the blue-green algal bloom.

Sleeping carp mimic dead leaves. Mud-skinned
Locomotions of tadpoles, heads full of eyes
Outlive each transfiguration, hold the lake

And their children in their mouths. Under the slide
Indecipherable cursive tags, cacophony of vulgar
Alliterations, anatomy and verb.

Home is a gathering of hands, loosening the narrative
La mattanza, ritual killings of tuna corralled into nets
Men armed with gaff hooks whisper *Gesù*, mutilate

The surface of the water. Great aunts unknot Sicilian
Sunlight, pluck snails from tall grasses, crack sea
Urchins open, take living corals to their mouths.

Note: "Joyful strains" is taken from the lyrics to Peter Dodds McCormick's
lyrics to *Advance Australia Fair*, national anthem of Australia.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Dominique Hecq grew up in the French-speaking part of Belgium. She now lives in Melbourne on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. Hecq writes across genres and disciplines—and sometimes across tongues. Her creative works include a novel, five collections of short stories and twelve volumes of poetry. A runner up in the 2021 Carmel Bird Digital Award, *Smacked & other stories of addiction* is her latest book in English. A reprint of *After Cage* is forthcoming.



AUTOPOS

i

Lulled by the night's lingering breath, the city hibernates. Funneling wind at your back, you skirt the creek. Follow the trickle of bruises the light leaves in its wake. You take the path down to the bridge, the no-sun enfolded in fog. Eucalypts rustle. Reeds rumour. Australian wood ducks, chestnut teals and a lone hard-head on corrugated water. Lark magpies chatter in a she-oak. A nankeen night heron darts in your path as if to say you don't exist. Under the bridge, a black swan on a nest intermeshed with plastic. Now the wind embraces you. Mud sucks at your boots—*ssk, ssk, ssk*. Rainbow lorikeets, fairy corellas and musk lorikeets clatter about. You climb the escarpment. Here, creeping bent grass, English broom, arum lily, prickly pear, periwinkle overflow garden fences. Gusts of wind through veils of bridal creeper and poison ivy.

ii

Walk with me, says the voice drowning in its own rasping sound. You become it, the voice, a shapeshifter like the creek itself, brimming with unspoken thoughts, voiceless bubbles, breathless refuse. Waterfall. Murky calm where the path tilts and narrows. Here, the water curves and swerves in its own bed, pulls at silt. The current pushes it out unseen, against the sunken stepping stones. Here, the water swirls, froths, falls and rushes towards the edge land of daydream. Towards the immargination of the page.

Dominique Hecq

AUTOPOS *contd...*

iii

A wattlebird babbles on the other side of the window. I replenish the water bowl. Spot a honey eater hopping about in the fuchsia.

My hand yawns. It is a beak opening. Water breaking at the touch of a feather.

I am a magpie. Warble a wattlebird prattle.

I feel for the shape of a poem.

I live and work on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, the sovereignty of which was never ceded. I acknowledge its traditional custodians, offering respect and gratitude to their ancestors, elders and families past, present and in perpetuity.

Australia always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.

I feel shame, not quite guilt, for knowing so little about the languages, cultures, and customs of the Kulin Nation. For purloining the bird's call. For naming it babble.

(To unwrite the I from a poem. Think of it.)

iv

Words are possums crawling up the walls of silence. They have razor-sharp claws. They pounce. They can see in the dark. They will poke the apple of your eye. Hook your mouth shut. Rip you to shreds. Tear up your dreams one letter at a time. Pause. Consider the damage to the root of your tongue. Don't worry: they will burst the blisters tenderly. At dawn they'll scuttle around the idea of noise. Then they will burrow under the vault of your ribs and nibble at the chambers of your heart. Here, they will persuade you to shrug off your graphomania, glossolalia, xenolalia. Tendency to anaphora and... apocrypha.

AUTOPOS *contd...*

v

Cold bites, breath dissipates
gossamer mist nudges the windowpane.

Sky low over Melbourne.

The sun wears a corona of grey that keeps it away
from the day
like a foreign body's swathing
so intimate it blinds.

I fumble for the shape of a poem.

Pelting rain. The wind dies. Ink spills.

This is how the I unwrites itself from the poem.

The sky won't fall for all its broken lights.

Waves of wheeling spectral spokes follow
you like a sailing dream.

Open the window.

Float past your life.

You could go along a straight line for light years;
the angle at which you'd see sun and moon
and shade and sea would be the same.

This is how you unwrite yourself from the poem.

A boat loaded with broken mirrors sets alight
memories of a past for live masks.

A boat loaded with dry brambles lights nightmares
of a present for death faces.

A boat loaded with paper aeroplanes matches
dreams of a future for unborn forms.

On the nearby shore, ash of us in shimmering shadows.

AUTOPOS *contd...*

vi

Another lockdown. Your pen interrupts itself half-way through a line. You hug the sky. Come out of hiding.

The lounge is littered with photo paper, twine, sticky tape, a notebook, bubble wrap and four phallic sculptures lying on their sides. The kitchen is a tapestry of left-overs on plates that don't match. The bedrooms are full of humans, their avatars, screens and keyboards.

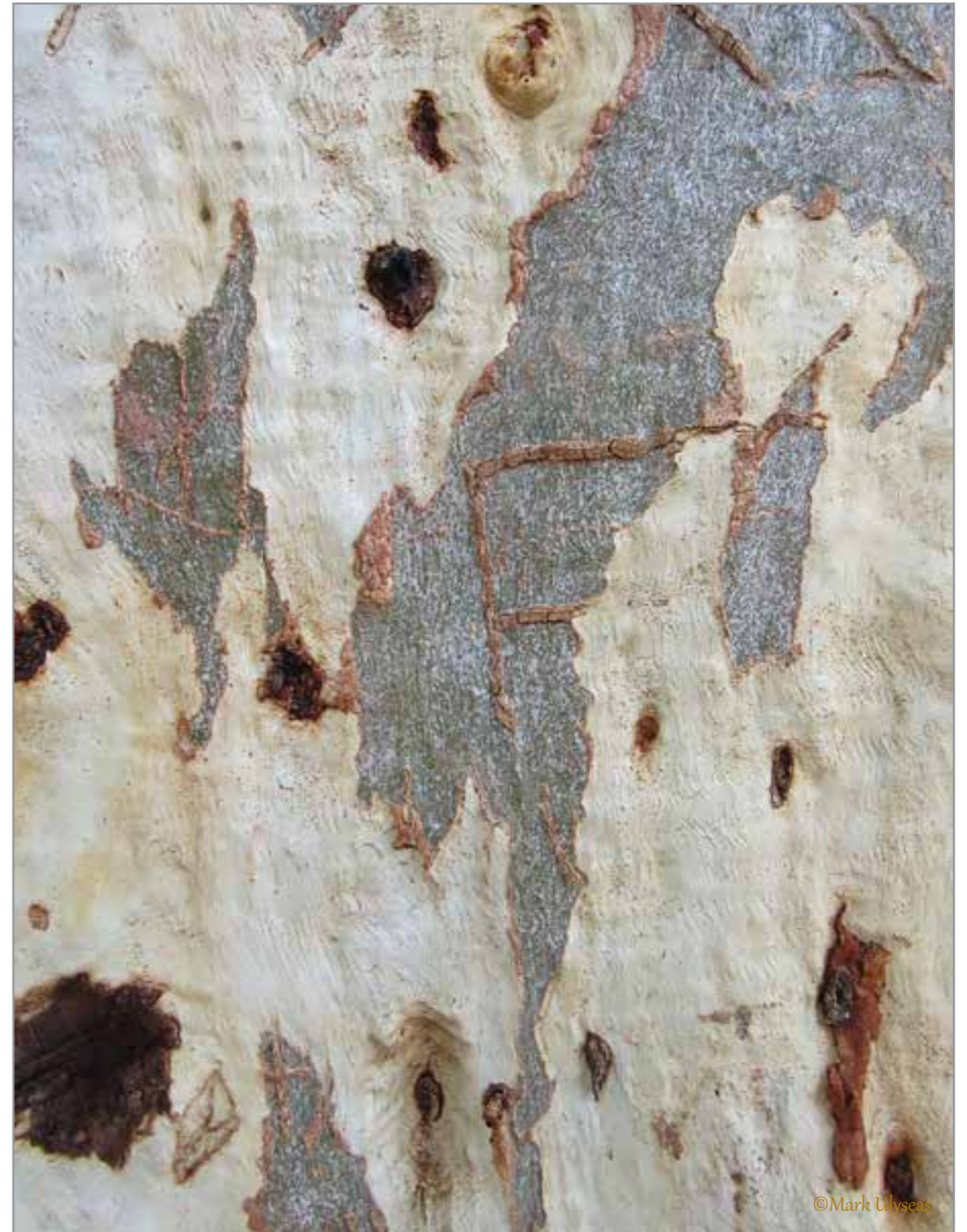
Lambent light beckons. You steal out of the house in search of a poem.

Skitter down to the creek, anti-clockwise. Climb the rocky escarpment past the rickety bridge.

Dogs and people everywhere. Wattle in the air. Sound of a bagpipe.

You cut across the wetlands. Survey the plants: tussock grass, paper daisies, spear-grass, everlastings, orchids, lilies, periwinkles, maidenhair.

Your heart leaps at the sight of the scarlet runner, and the word turns where it means to go.



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Active in organizing readings and events with other poets, *Elsa Korneti* (poet) was born in Munich, Germany, but grew up in Thessaloniki, Greece and still lives there. Appropriately, given the long history of cosmopolitanism in Greece's second city, there is a clear glocalism at work in her poetry's interlacing of English and other languages with Greek. She has published essays, book reviews, translations, short stories, and ten books of poetry. Two poetry collections of her, *A Bouquet of Fishbones* and *The Tin Pearl*, were nominated for the Greek National Poetry Award, and a third, *Regular People with a Plume and a Brindled Tail*, received the George Karter Award from the literary magazine *Porphyras*. Part of her work among 15 books of poetry, essays, fiction has been translated and published in foreign anthologies and literary magazines in ten European languages and in Chinese.

David Connolly (translator) was born in 1954 in Sheffield and is of Irish descent. He studied ancient Greek at the University of Lancaster and medieval and modern Greek literature at Trinity College, Oxford before gaining a PhD from the University of East Anglia on the theory and practice of literary translation. He has more recently taught at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Connolly's translated anthology *The Dedalus Book of Greek Fantasy* won the Hellenic Society's Modern Greek Translation Prize for 2004. His translations have won awards in Greece, the UK and the USA. <http://www.enl.auth.gr/staff/connolly/>

PASSION'S JOURNAL

*

Fresh passion
just before you squeeze it
Completely round
Succulent and incalculable
as to the juice's loss

*

In relationships' intensive care
eternally under treatment
as an emergency case
is love's disease

*

In the marriage of fire and water
prevalent is the extremity that
wavers between the
disorder of Hell
and the disturbance of Heaven

*

And yet
when you leave your body
adrift in the tempest
and your mind
the lighthouse's captive
passion a conscious decision
remains

continued overleaf...

Elsa Korneti

PASSION'S JOURNAL *contd...*

*
 Love's contest
 leads you to one more successful
 crystal-shattering attempt
 You can no more cancel
 the scars from the fragments
 They embed themselves in you
 are transformed
 into lively lepidoptera

*
 When the mysterious power
 of a fatal attraction strikes
 out of compassion
 the fin of the shark
 passes you by

*
 The penultimate passion
 like the penultimate mistake
 provides the opportunity
 for one more last time

*
 Don't worry.
 Love's passion
 first by fair means
 corrupts you
 After hammering you
 in earnest
 it cast you unconscious
 in the forest glade
 You get up accustomed
 helpless imperfect

*
 Passion
 as a romantic technocrat
 consumes itself in
 an ennobled
 and methodical delirium
 In the end with relief
 it spits the heart's pip
 into an ashtray
 colored pink

*
 You must have read
 the prayers wrongly
 because when
 balancing between
 Heaven and Hell
 you invoked Him
 the God of Spirits
 appeared

*
 After the rubbing of the bodies
 The wager in a passionate relationship:
 To emerge unscathed
 from the flames
 in order to proclaim
 your existence once more

passion's epilogue

When the passion of excess
 seizes you
 passion's journal
 becomes a journal of flesh
 With a lens's instant motion
 the eye captures
 what never existed

Emilie Collyer lives on Wurundjeri land where she writes across and between poetry, prose and performance. Her debut full-length poetry collection is published in 2022 by Vagabond Press: *Do you have anything less domestic?* Emilie is a current PhD candidate at RMIT where she is researching feminist creative practice.



Emilie Collyer

FULL

On the way back
from meeting the new baby,

all silk-head and sleepy,
I give in to an urge

for a mud chocolate scone
from Bakers Delight.

The warm hold, the way
he fitted perfectly across

my chest, and his couch-soft,
doting mothers watching,

happy to see me,
equally relieved

when I finish my tea,
leave them to their

intimate newness, life
upended and filled to the brim.

It's not a sense of wanting
a child, that the chocolate scone

softens with its thick, sweet
mouth-full, it's just the

not having of one and
how cool my skin is

in the outside air.

Enda Coyle-Greene was born in Dublin and lives in Skerries. Her debut collection, *Snow Negatives*, won the Patrick Kavanagh Award in 2006 and was published by the Dedalus Press in 2007. Her subsequent collections are *Map of the Last* (2013) and *Indigo, Electric, Baby* (2020) both also from Dedalus. Co-founder and Artistic Director of the Fingal Poetry Festival, she received a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in 2020.



AT THE BELVEDERE HOTEL

After Lavinia Greacen's biography of J.G. Farrell

There are still elements at play in air
above the leveller that is the street —
the seething neon fever of Times Square,
the blazoned trail of Broadway. In retreat
from everything they'd needed to make new,
where only sleep can ease the traffic's stop-
start ache, they shade the windows as you do
in room 1120, feel the drop

beyond Joe Louis feinting jabs across
a joker from the Paramount, that clown
rolled up for P.T. Barnum's pitch and toss,
the writer with a limp. One heel filed down
a blonde girl tries on being Marilyn,
you take the elevator, breathing in.

Enda Coyle-Greene

IN BLACK SATIN

Christina of Milan poses for Holbein

That one
was like a nun
in black satin.
I asked her to smile,
to try and imagine
I wasn't there
for the three hours
space she gave me.

She —
and what nerve
for a girl of sixteen
years, facing
not just one
old man,
but two —
lifted her hand

to make sure
her hair's lit treasure
was well sealed
beneath her widow's cap.
It made me think
at once of Anne,
waiting
for the nod

of the Headsman
to his boy; a simple
gesture, yes, as steadying
each breath, she lengthened
her slim neck
to meet the sword
of my sketch,
my painter's eye.

Eugen M. Bacon is African Australian, a computer scientist mentally re-engineered into creative writing. Her works *Ivory's Story*, *Danged Black Thing* and *Saving Shadows* are finalists in the British Science Fiction Association (BSFA) Awards. Eugen was announced in the honor list of the 2022 Otherwise Fellowships. She has won, been longlisted or commended in international awards, including the Foreword Indies Awards, Bridport Prize, Copyright Agency Prize, Horror Writers Association Diversity Grant, Otherwise, Rhysling, Australian Shadows, Ditmar Awards and Nommo Awards for Speculative Fiction by Africans. Eugen's creative work has appeared in literary and speculative fiction publications worldwide, including *Award Winning Australian Writing*, BSFA, Fantasy Magazine, Fantasy & Science Fiction, Bloomsbury and The Year's Best African Speculative Fiction. New releases: *Danged Black Thing* (collection), *Saving Shadows* (illustrated collection), *Mage of Fools* (novel). Website: eugenbacon.com / Twitter: @EugenBacon



LISTENING FOR RAIN

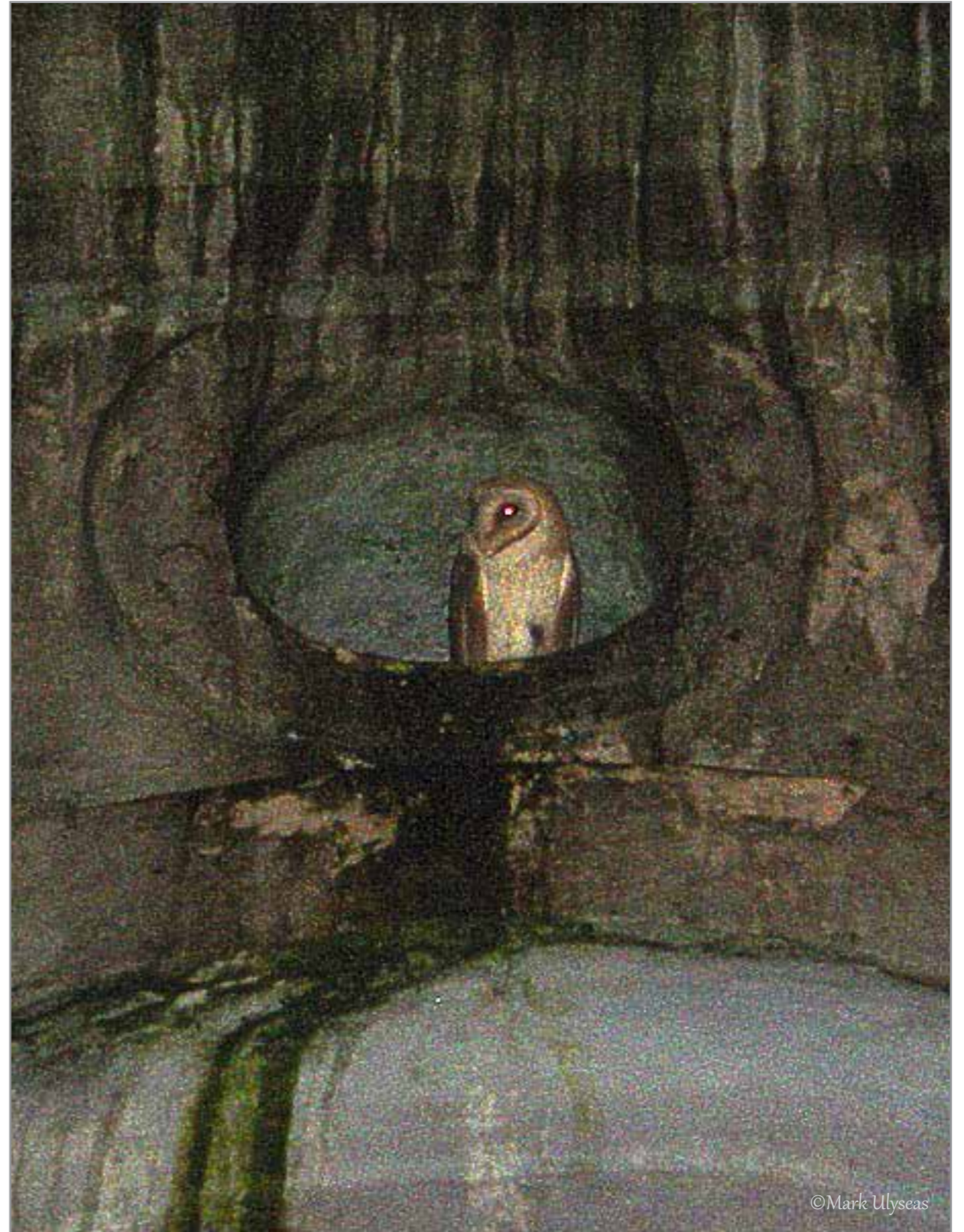
out the window
 her city is
 ... a megamodel
 pregnant with decorations
 filled with figures
 ...moving
 nothing she wants close
 she's a narrow
 ...road
 all around hedges
 gobbling
 ...air

she's a story at night
 blinking on the screen
 she's a finger groping
 ...groping
 for a signal
 she's wearing stockings
 why are her feet
 ...so cold
 her cheek is prickling
 what she wants
 what she really wants
 ...are wings
 warm hands exploring
 her eyelids her cheek
 the corner of her mouth
 ...her chin.
 she's been here before
 then why
 is she afraid
 ...of sleep

Eugen Bacon

BONES ON HER BED

The house is an owl
Jewel eyes unblinking
Talons on ceilings
That's how she sees it
When it's not a waiting room
A vestibule that looks
Better from a distance.
Or it's a gangway for a ship to
Nowhere, and it's not yet arrived
The house is a stranger
Too young to understand.



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Esther Ottaway is an award-winning and widely published Australian poet. Her work was shortlisted in the Montreal International and Bridport Poetry Prizes in 2020. Poems published here are from her forthcoming collection about the experiences of women and girls on the autism spectrum, titled *She Doesn't Seem Autistic*. And she doesn't seem autistic.



GIRL BRAINS MEAN NOTHING

after Kerri Shying

at once private
 and bare no reference work
 on whether to meet the eyes of Aussie men
how are ya luv her pear
 in the cockatoo's claw

girl brains mean nothing

Acka Dacka bawling
 from the neighbour's son's ute his mates
 wording him up
 those autistic ones
 never tell

Esther Ottaway

AND NIGHT BY DAY

Narcolepsy

*...day by night and night by day oppressed,
And each, though enemies to either's reign,
Do in consent shake hands to torture me...*

- Sonnet 28, William Shakespeare

The magma field was inhospitable, stark.
It's not the blackout, the hand that slips
from the wheel, the line-crossing veer.
I stole a rock from a smoking volcano.

Not the blackout, the hand that slips
with the knife, but a crippling need to sleep.
I stole a rock from a smoking volcano,
breaking the rules, clenching my fingers tight

as if around a knife. Crippling, sleep
jetlags my days, a yawning crevasse.
Breaking the rules, clenching my fingers tight,
I try to explain to another employer

that sleep jetlags, each eye a dark crevasse –
no working, or waking, until after noon.
I try to explain to another employer
the sadness of seeing no sunrises.

What path allows no work until after noon?
Then the turn: sleepless till four in the morning,
seeing no sunrise except inversely, vexed time
spent driving in the dark, others in bed –

no sleep till four in the morning,
no gain in stealing that stone.
I spent the flight back gripping it
the way I long to hold days, nights:

never mine, that night-light yellow wellness.
Wearily I go, count my eked-out hours.
I hear of days and nights, that flourishing land.
Magma falls from my hand, my brand-mark.

LOST WOMEN THRENODY

*The "lost generation" is the generation generally born before 1980, the very late diagnosed adults. There is very little known about adult female autism.
– Tania Marshall, I Am AspieWoman*

generation grown
whingeing lazy weird
flaw-exposure feared
very little known

managing what's shown
functioning at best
then the days of rest
very little known

anxiety-prone
many threads to lose
easily I bruise
very little known

friends have mostly flown
think of them so much
hard to keep in touch
very little known

several jobs I've blown
sensory distress
resume's a mess
very little known

potential never shown
been left on the shelf
can only blame myself
very little known

FEMALE AUTISM DIAGNOSTIC JOURNEY

draw attention
draw a blank
draw fire
drawing board

draw on my energy
money
doggedness
overdrawn

drawn face
inference
conclusion
curtain

luck of the

end in a

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



CARNAGE

Humankind rattles to the core
 Frantic hearts scuttle in terror
 Mad with cries and pain
 Agonising force strikes
 In the eye's bloody geyser
 In the minds of the soulless
 In the arms of no escape
 In all the lifeless gardens
 Children play no more
 Crackling roots blaze
 Dreams full of embers
 Stone walls wail
 Morality flees
 Lawless days
 Sleepless nights
 Goodbye baby doves
 Fathers whisper hope
 Catch a wishing star
 Breathe a war
 Monstrous death
 Society on a flat line
 Deep rooted istoriyi

Fotoula Reynolds

ZAUVIJEK PRIJATELJI (FOREVER FRIENDS)

I knew you when
Bereavement was
The debt someone
Else payed for
Having loved

Grief comes and
Goes as it pleases
No expiration date
Even as time passes
The invisible pain of
Mourning is always
One memory away
From returning

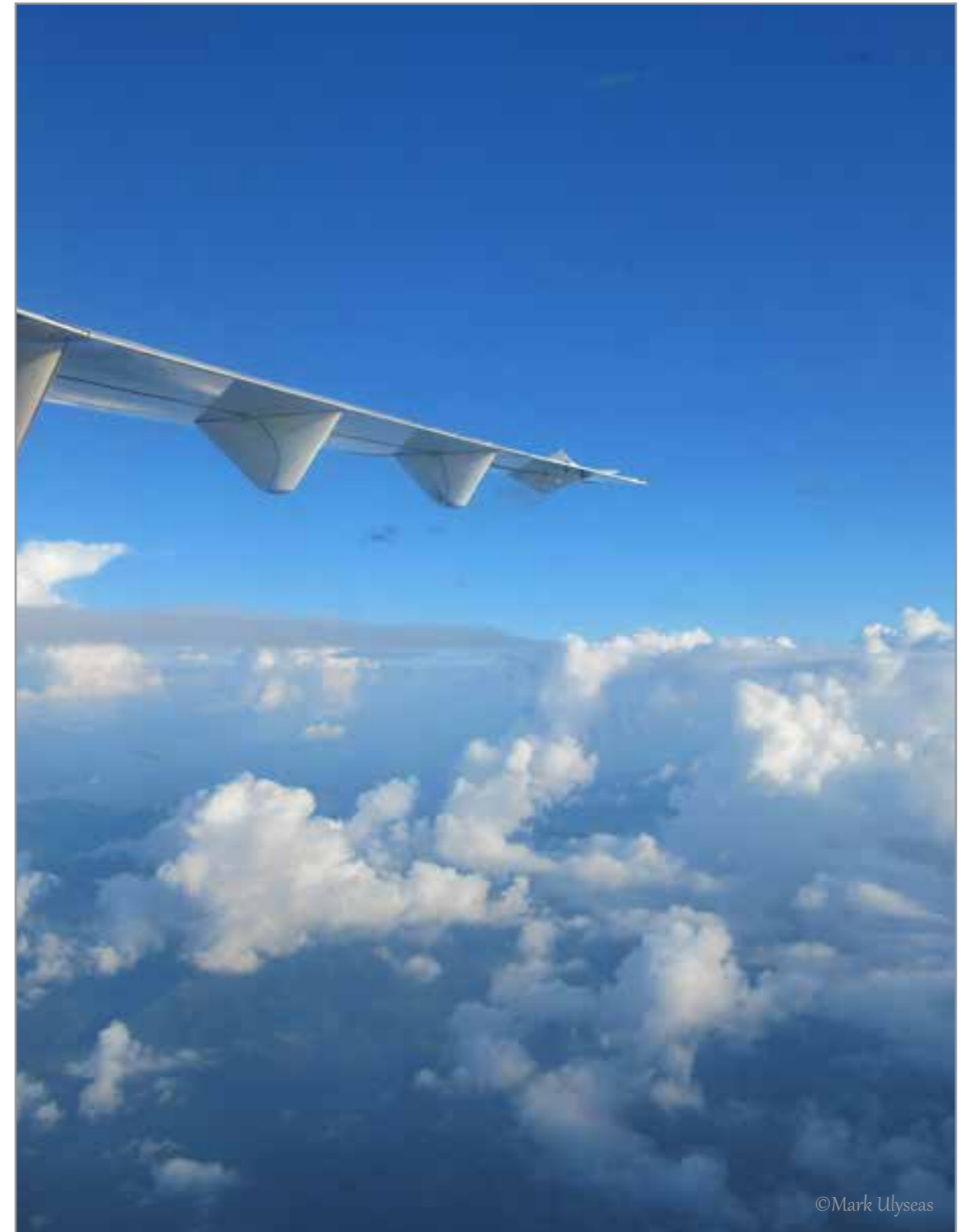
I missed you this spring
It came and went and
I waited, I waited
Summer arrived
Bringing an afternoon
Thunder storm stealing
My sunniest memories
Now the ghost of you
Drifts by inside a cloud

I promise to visit
The places we talked about
My aching eyes will hold you
A pouring of tears rain
I will touch the leather that
Bounds the books of old poets
And I will say their names
My dear forever friend
I will say your name too

Flowers bloomed
In the dark canvas
Of your brilliant sky
Illuminating life's end
Across the horizon
From your window to
The tip of Mt Dandenong
Your whispered soul
Reached me

HEAVEN'S RHYTHM

I catch the sound of the wind
Glance back as far as my eye can see
Life and breath carry me home
Clouds weave through pink sky fingers
Feather in the breeze
Brighter than lightning
Zeus rules the world
Earth whispers a heartsick plea
Dawn fills the air
Rising bronze blankets the mountains
I catch the sound of the wind
Floating in heaven's rhythm



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Gail Ingram writes from the Port Hills of Ōtautahi Christchurch, New Zealand, author of *Contents Under Pressure* (Pūkeko Publications 2019) and editor of two poetry anthologies. Her work has been published in *Poetry New Zealand*, *Landfall*, *Atlanta Review*, *Blue Nib*, *Cordite*, *Fib Review*, *Barren Magazine* among others. Awards include winning the Caselberg (2019) and New Zealand Poetry Society (2016) poetry prizes, selection for *Best Small Fictions* (2020) and shortlist for Fish Short Prize. She is editor of NZ Poetry Society's *a fine line*, co-poetry editor for *takahē* magazine and a short-fiction editor for *Flash Frontier: An Adventure in Short Fiction*. She teaches at Write On School for Young Writers and holds a Master of Creative Writing (Distinction).
<https://www.theseventhletter.nz/> @seventhletternz



ABOUT GROWING UP, SON

The small chamber I made you is nearly empty.
 The shreds of you are tucked in
 the pores of our walls. It smells of you
 and it holds your shape. You are not old
 enough to know you can come back.
 You must take everything and run
 on your chicken legs. Only when
 you notice your feet – how strong! how splayed! –
 will you be ready to return, rolling
 your shoulders, your flapping shirt making
 etchings of feathery strips and
 extraordinary patterns on the walls.

Gail Ingram

EYE

A shadow slips under the sea towards the kayak. The shadow is three times bigger than the kayak, now circling beneath – a dark curl under a small boat.

drone shadow a question mark on the ocean

The water stirs. The shadow unwinds, lining up alongside the kayak and breaks the surface. The kayaker turns her head and sees the whale for the first time – one portion of its great spine, as long as her boat. She could touch its rubbery skin if she wanted but she is as still as an image. The whale drifts forward and turns adjacent to the boat – a T from above. The whale lifts its head. The drone shows the bright gel of the whale's eye just beneath the surface.

eye of drone does it record the flip of our animal hearts?

There is a splash. The whale slaps the skin of the kayak with its flipper. Come and play, the whale says. The kayak slowly swivels 90 degrees. The whale swims a short distance away. Serene, as if drifting. Nonchalant. Then, it circles back. Your turn, it says.

listen drone across oceans, waves still play

A STORY TOLD OVER CHOCOLATE CAKE
AT A PICTON CAFÉ ON THE WATERFRONT
ABOUT HOW YOU BECOME BRAVE AND
TOOK UP FLYING AGAIN

for a bird I know

The plastic ferns told you, Manu,
Blown across your path at the cemetery
They said, *Use your hands, Manu,*
Clear the grave, they said, Listen
Here he is
Go see him

And despite yourself, the feathers under your coat gleamed and shivered
because you had been searching

And at work, the boss beckoned you, Manu,
From the place where you swept up leaves
Come here, he said
I'll show you where he is
He held up his phone
Look at this carving by my friend, he said
Only gone last year
He is here, Manu,
This sculptor in your hands

So you listened, and you saw
And you took your tools
And you took your white stone and you carved your beast
With wings that soared over the land and the sea and the sky
Even as it nestled within

Gayelene Carbis's first poetry book, *Anecdotal Evidence* (Five Islands Press), was awarded Finalist - International Book Awards, 2019. Gayelene recently won Second Prize, Newcastle Poetry Prize (2021) and First Prize, My Brother Jack Poetry Award (2020). Other recent work has been; Commended, Woorilla Poetry Prize; Highly Commended and Commended, Ada Cambridge Poetry Prize; Highly Commended, My Brother Jack Poetry Prize; and Finalist - Robyn Mathison Poetry Prize and Microflix Festival Awards. Gayelene has been shortlisted for various short story awards including: ABR Elizabeth Jolley, Readings/The Age, Fish (Ireland), Lord Mayor's, and Meniscus Best Small Fictio. Gayelene is an Australian-Chinese-Cornish-Irish writer of poetry, prose and plays. She is currently teaching Creative Writing at Melbourne University and Swinburne University. Gayelene's second book of poetry, *Red Horse by the River*, will be published by Puncher and Wattmann in 2022. She is currently working on a collection of short stories. Gayelene lives and works on the unceded land of the Boonwurrung people.



Gayelene Carbis

NOT REALLY A MAN

I talk to a fellow teacher about a student whom I regard as special.

'Oh yes,' she says, 'he's love-ly! He's not *really a man* though, is he?'

I give her a look.

'Well, he's so nice, isn't he? So sweeeeet,' she says in her London accent which sort of subverts it. 'Well, my husband's sweet, my husband's a nice man too - that's why I married him. But you know what I mean. He's effeminate. No, not effeminate - he's *androdynous*. He's a sweet being.'

'Did you say being or bean?' I say.

'Being!' she says and we both laugh. 'But he's a sweet bean too!'

I laugh when she says he's not really a man. It's the way she says it. She has this way of coming out with things and she doesn't mean to be offensive and she doesn't sound offensive. She's hilarious. It's that London accent. It's that English manner. She says things straight. She says things funny. This is the thing: it's never just about what someone says, it's about how they say it.

I see the student in my mind, a student who's actually a priest (I can't remember where he's from exactly - in my mind, it's somewhere like - Persia. Well, it's not called that now - Iranian then? Romanian? I know he speaks Italian, he'd studied in Italy before coming to Sydney, but I can't remember where he's actually from). He's soft and gentle and talks to me about Rumi and Hafiz and of course I like him, he's a little vague (like me) and poetic (like me), his eyes dream when he's bored, he politely takes off into his own little world (like me) sometimes when I'm playing lectures from the Oxford textbook, I don't blame him, it is boring, but good too, and I tell them they can't be constantly entertained by everything (though not in those word, lectures from the Oxford textbook give me a short break from the intensity of providing activities and conversation and topics; from engaging with my international students learning English for every minute of our four classes - it can be exhausting).

NOT REALLY A MAN

I see my special student in my mind - *not really a man* – and I keep hearing those words in my mind and I think of how I'm drawn to priests and poets and philosophers and psychotherapists and I think – oh, I can pick 'em. But it also makes me wonder what makes a man in my fellow teacher's eyes, and then, what makes a man in mine.

This one wears a blue suit and stretches his hands out in front of us as if we're his parishioners when he gets up to speak. We sit in chairs around him like pews. I'm not sure if anyone else feels touched by something spiritual. Once a Catholic, they say. Give me a child for seven years and I'll make him a Jesuit, my father used to say. I'll show you the man, they say. And the woman, I would say.

The women. What about women? And men, what about men? What does a man really mean? I'd say. To me, and to you. To all of us.

I keep thinking about what that teacher said. I want to say something to her but I'm not sure what. Everything I think of seems too teacherly. Too preacherly.

Maybe I should just ask her: what *is* a man then?

She has an answer for pretty much everything.

I wonder what she'd say to that.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Gillian's first poetry collection is "My Skin its own Sky" (Flying Islands Press 2019) following the chap-book "Sang Up" (Picaro Press, 2001). She has poems published in various anthologies including *Poetry For The Planet: An Anthology of Imagined Futures* (2021, Littoria Press), *What we Carry: Poetry on Childbearing* (2021, Recent Works Press), *A Slow Combusting Hymn* (ASM & Cerberus Press, 2014), and others. You can also find her work in various journals such as *The Australian Poetry Collaboration* (2019), *Burrow* (Old Water Rat Publishing, v1,2,3), and *Live Encounters magazine: Special Australia-New Zealand edition* (May 2021) and again in the *Live Encounters Magazine 12th Anniversary edition, Vol 2'* (Dec 2021). Gillian is involved in running various poetry events including Poetry At The Pub (Newcastle) and is the Co-Director and Poetry Curator of for the Indie Writers Festival 'IF Maitland'. Gillian spent her childhood exploring the waterfront of Lake Macquarie and has lived in Newcastle, Northern NSW, the UK and Ghana, after finishing studies at the University of Newcastle. She lives in East Maitland NSW with her husband and their four children, where they run their successful coffee roasting business, River Roast.



SWIM

The garden is an anthology of me
floats upon an ocean of poems
fugitives in silence.
Realms slip around each other
oil and water
colour and dark
my gallery is a found secret
every petal a pool.

Gillian Swain

CHIMES

Like tin chimes we chinked the light
it was quieter than you'd think.

The scent of taking care
of yourself,
memory of gentler things
than now
than this.

A hot new day
the neighbour's lemon tree,
a branch
screeching on the fence

and rattling windows riff with the wind.
The heat waves
you're submerged
breath is thick
and shallow as sweat.

LAVA FLOATS

Damp grass a tide around this pyre
black sky flickers ember
communion of sky-most leaves
and raucous specks lava
floats the ground is hard under us
harder than we expected
eyes concede to glow crepitation
mesmeric and air is
neither cool nor warm
just a bit further creek
traces the fracture
of valley the very crease
between the down and the up
the line of end and begin

LISTEN

I am sinking
old air shackles
shadow across shoulders
weight hangs
I am light in a mangle of
all we are meant to be
rising
heat pushes
out of question and rush
hear the hum of
movement
warmth
heartbeat like
wingspan
I am
rhythmic
day is long
and open.

NOT COASTAL

As you drive further west
air warms

sea legs
left back at the edge

swap
salt for dust

blue haze
for gold

Graham Allen is a Professor in English in UCC. He is the author of numerous books including *Harold Bloom: A Poetics of Conflict* (1994), and *Intertextuality* (2000. 3rd Ed. 2022). His collections *The One That Got Away* (2014) and *The Madhouse System* (2016), along with his poem *Holes*, are published by New Binary Press.



OBLITERATE

The madness has come again. Erupted, they say.
 The madness of the world has come again.
 All over the world the flood is rising.
 Like love falls, it has come down upon us.
 Descended upon us, like music
 heard from an unknown source,
 yet familiar. You sung that song before,
 at least once before. Ages ago.
 You did not think it would ever be sung again.
 Not by you, perhaps not by anybody.
 You thought you had touched love
 for the last time, believed, reasonably,
 that all that fuss was over, finished,
 that the worst would not return. Not now,
 not here, not again. Look out of your window,
 is the world still standing? are the buildings
 still intact? Can you feel what is coming?
 The worst is a wave that brooks no barrier,
 a tsunami washing everything away, like nature
 breaking everything down, separating
 every part from every other. It is the ocean
 crashing against your wall, the back
 of your mind, where the darkness lies,
 externalized. The deepest, most unconscionable
 sin, the black core of your secret self,
 is coming towards you with open maw.
 You have called this upon yourself, or
 at least you are responding to its call.
 Soon there will be nothing left of you,
 just a few notes caught on unreadable files
 in the electronic landfill of the internet.

Graham Allen

THIS IS NOT YOUR TIME

The year declines
and so do you.
The age is vainglorious
and you have lost your cue.
There is little strength left,
none of it can be spared.
To speak of the age
is already presumptuous.
You have boxed yourself into the tightest corner
with your predictable
inelegant grace notes.
Have a little decency,
give up your pretensions,
they no longer suit you,
the time for such things is over,
what pathos survives
does not do so in language.
There is no word
in any current tongue,
or in anything dredged up
from the past,
that can stand for action, no
utterance that can change,
startle or invigorate,
No speech that is not satiated, spoilt.
The climate of our culture is a sterilizing image.
Transcendence was a dream.
We burnt long ago
all those dictionaries.

Nobody knows a thing about the past,
how the mariner spoke
in the age of the big boats,
how he marked with strange names
every part of his ship,
every turn of the coast,
every one of his crew,
or how the man in the pulpit revived
the voice of the prophets,
Greek and Hebrew.
No one cares about etymology
or anything of such arcane lore.
Stick to love if you want to be a poet,
or better still learn to speak faster,
spitting and splitting the chaff from your lips,
volleying the fricative vocabules,
like a hyperventilating hacker
with acne, a camera and a key board.
Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God!
Doyen of the gullible,
the innocent and the bored,
who know they already own the world
long before they can imagine
what the hell they're going to do with it.

Hélène Cardona is a poet, literary translator and actor, the recipient of over 20 honors & awards, including the Independent Press Award, International Book Award and Hemingway Grant. Her books include *Life in Suspension and Dreaming My Animal Selves* (Salmon Poetry) and the translations *Biram Wood* (José Manuel Cardona, Salmon Poetry), *Beyond Elsewhere* (Gabriel Arnou-Laujeac, White Pine Press), *Ce que nous portons* (Dorianne Laux, Éditions du Cygne), Walt Whitman's *Civil War Writings* for Whitman-Web, and *The Abduction* (Maram Al-Masri, forthcoming White Pine Press). Her work has been translated into 16 languages. She holds an MA in American Literature from the Sorbonne, worked as a translator for the Canadian Embassy, and taught at Hamilton College and Loyola Marymount University. Acting credits include *Chocolat*, *Red Notice*, *Ford V. Ferrari*, *Star Trek: Picard*, *The Hundred-Foot Journey*, *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*, *Happy Feet 2* and *Serendipity* among many. <https://helenecardona.com/>
<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0136563/>



A DREAM TO BE CONTINUED

She lives in a fortress
at the top of the mountain
The back of her land
is the shore of the lake
The gatekeeper to whom she has to answer says,
*When the weather is entirely seductive
take the sun under the water
live in the dream
and this world at the same time*

Hélène Cardona

ALLEGRO MA NON TROPPO

Alone in silence.
Alone in the center of myself.
Alone saturated by darkness.

My aunt, the queen of blur,
won't give proper recollections
but I know how my mother died—
alone in the center of herself.

The journey of the Fool is still mine,
salamander yearning to be salmon,
dueling sleepless haunted nights.

From the other side of the Atlantic,
I know how my mother released herself from pain.
How she sat on the edge of the tub,
head tilted, unruly auburn hair

whole life floating by,
gathering last thoughts
before joining my father in final embrace
her smile ultimate legacy of safe passage.

The night is friend and foe,
I pray to all gods.
I remember, my body a container
filled to the brim with extreme sensation.

I remember, memory tricked
by imagination, the sweetest sting ever.
I remember what did exist
what I created

how it all blends
till I emerge from the waking dream
unsure of what I lived
as my heart unleashed explodes.

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



WATERMELON AT THE BEACH

To my mother

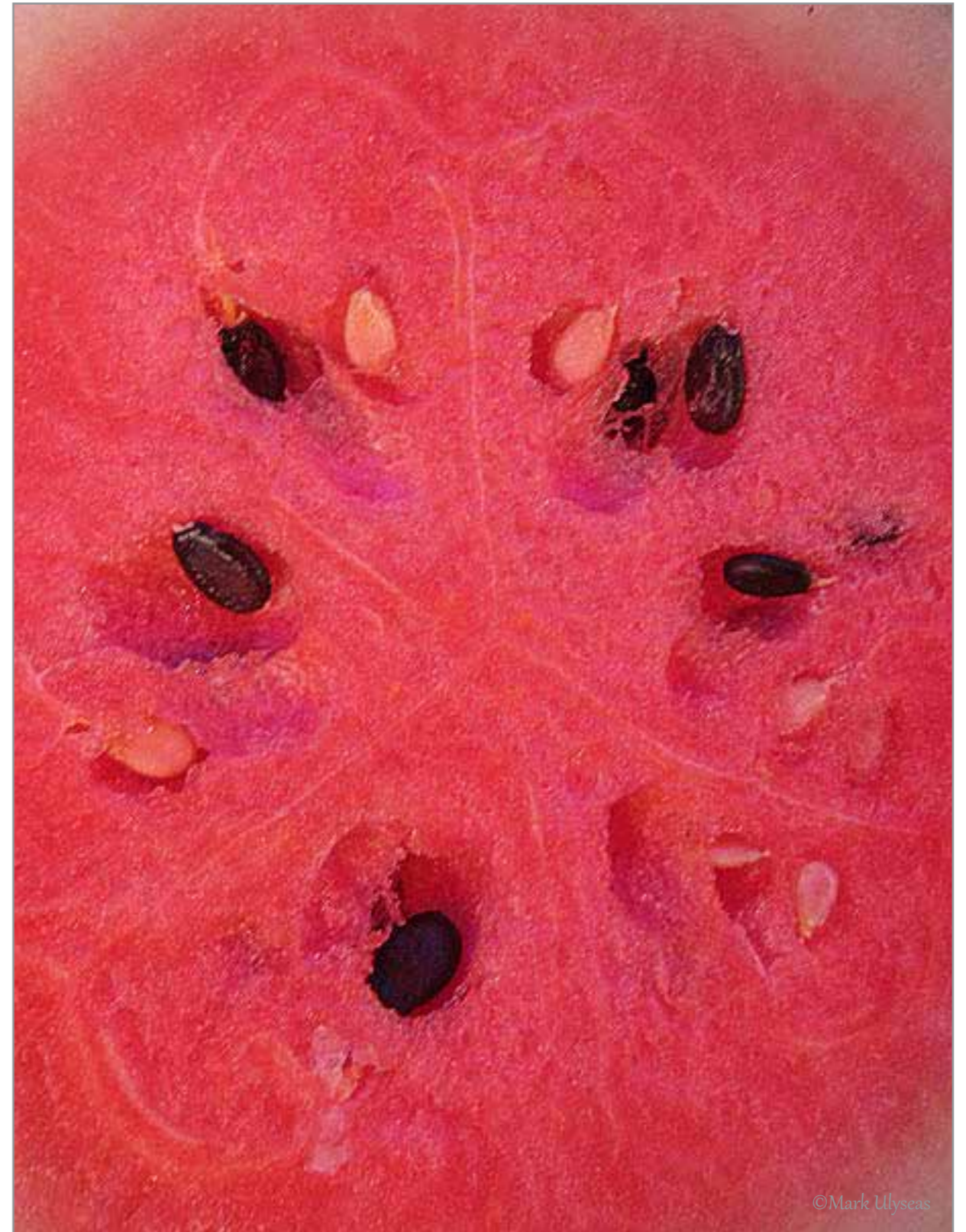
Here we are, fourteen years
 into quarantine, you might say.
 Fourteen thousand kilometres
 between us, disabilities and
 first-world poverty
 and *such is life*
 at the broken heart of it.
 Every time I go to the beach
 or eat watermelon, I remember
 how much you like both.
 Kids in bed, I am flat
 on the floor, phone in hand:
 to call you or not?
 I want to say: this only child thing,
 this single-hearted love is,
 like solo mothering,
 a losing game indeed.
 I think of fleeting northern summers,
 people around ponds and fountains,
 chasing the sun rays, magical
 like southern hemisphere snowflakes.
 I contemplate buying a whole watermelon.
 Back home watermelons, like presents
 under a Christmas tree, appeared
 once a year, ever a mystery.
 We smelt and shook and felt them,
 hoped for the best.

continued overleaf..

Irina Frolova

WATERMELON AT THE BEACH *contd...*

Now rheumatoid arthritis
has hijacked your body, homebound,
I remember your cleaning, cooking,
your restless helping and wish
for the same thing I craved then:
to sit at the beach with you and the kids,
and eat watermelon.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas

Jane Frank's latest chapbook is *Wide River* (Calanthe Press, 2020). Her poems have appeared most recently in *Authora Australis*, *Foam:e*, *The Poets' Republic*, *Westerly*, *Plumwood Mountain*, *Shearsman*, *The Newcastle Poetry Prize Anthology* (Hunter Writers Centre, 2021), *Not Very Quiet: The Anthology* (Recent Work Press, 2021) *The Incompleteness Book II* (Recent Work Press, 2021) and *Poetry for the Planet* (Litoria Press, 2021). Poems are forthcoming in both *Hecate* and *Spelt*. Her inspiration for poems comes from discovering the surreal in the everyday, interest and earlier qualifications in art history, the landscapes of childhood, wise things her children say that stop her in her tracks, and time spent by the sea. Originally from Maryborough in the Fraser Coast region of Queensland, Jane now lives in Brisbane and teaches creative writing at Griffith University. Read more of her work at <https://www.facebook.com/JaneFrankPoet/> and <https://janefrankpoetry.wordpress.com/>



VERNISSAGE

The trees are witches' brooms, bristles up. Their reflections sweep the still surface.

She closes her eyes on sunset as cockatoos squall in the boughs above her, talks

sternly to herself. The mercurial moods must stop. After all, the day's edge

is purled in gold. It was one of those annoying social media memes that

delivered the cledon, as if on a pillow of silk, then a friend's life cut short.

The time of expectation had to pass. Clusters of ancient stars begin to emerge

above the boat shed fringed by palms on the far shore. They are the shape of hand prints

pressing against everything that is alive. The vast sky: a canvas of chance.

Jane Frank

RECURRING

a repetend of rain
the brook spilling over bikeways and bridges
how many raindrops have fallen you ask
a recurring decimal exists when numbers repeat forever
place a dot above a digit
like the number of days without him, so now
I picture him
with a dot above his head
that turns into a fish
and is washed away
I've been pouring through a creel of photographs on my desk today
his smile repeating
the rain is gunfire on the roof
there are billions of raindrops I tell you
a prosody of water: dripping, splashing, seeping
as if it will never be dry again
but there is only a finite amount of water in the world I add
not like love

BAD PHASE

I visit your photograph every night as you sleep, the moon draped round my shoulders, reflected in the coins of your eyes. Through the window, water reflects the wax, the wane, a rippled repeat of days. *Phases that will pass*, I can hear you say. An anchor for my thoughts when I can't sleep, a silent listener, strung on gold thread with a hare's legs and face, making stained glass of the trees while the world's evil gallops in darkness. I can hear bats in the palms, see an owl perched on the neighbour's roof, a single tear falling from its eye. A photomontage of devastation each night on the news, the planet draped in web, preyed on by a turnskin: half spider, half wolf. The sky sometimes swirling with lunacy. Tonight the moon is a page in a storybook — the accompanying voice, yours. Light stars speckle my urban nocturne, a calm salve in a tense terrestrial life. Timekeeper, anchor, silver mirror. I will try not to use you as a prop, measure contentment by your light.

BRAIN FOG

I can't see the buildings for the trees —
lofty ironbarks —
and a shock of cleared green hill
A red-haired woman with a camera is taking
close-ups of lantana flowers
and a muffled loudspeaker voice
is asking people to evacuate a nearby
building as part of a test routine

I sit in a coffee shop graveyard
I had to clear a layer of leaf litter dust
from the table when I came
and a goanna sat sunning itself, spotlit
in the clearing before cloud broke
the moment

Like so much else now, it is hidden
in the undergrowth, in the wreckage
of the last rain event, in distant
echoes of war. A cloud of lemon
butterflies floats past, but
nothing makes sense. There are no
students cross legged on the lawn,
the water bubbler is broken. I look up
for answers but they are entrenched
in the unreadable concave sky

SAUDADE

The night is rice paper
too fine to fold

minutes decant into
fragrant drops

that catch in magnolia
petals

before touching earth:
dreams planted,

dusted by stars. A bush
stone curlew

cries out the word for
longing

400 DAYS

I need to catch my breath
hook my thumbs in the keepers
of first memories
stand under the wide banyan
tree where I can catch the river
mid-story but know exactly
what's going on

lately I can hear the streets
breathing in purple
dreams, the distinct
hum of the early night
air that quiet places have,
the heaviness of the beckoning
garden: ginger and oleander
wet with dew, cane beetles
drawn to light reflections
on water

you say that the butcher
birds give you no rest but
I need to watch them circling
so I know I haven't
grown up and vanished,
need to check the closeness
of the stars, walk the
beautiful ordinary
circumference of home

NUMBERS

Most days, I don't think it sees me, but today it calls
out, splashes over the tops of my shoes. I try breaking
down frothy patterns, the energetic vibrations of half-
truth loudest from the end of the groyne wall, pay
close attention to the proportions of the waves as
they explode against the jetty's legs, or occasionally
don't, factor in the blinking code of a trawler as it
threads the quilted surface of the channel, its looping
wake almost reaching me in ripples of green. *Do you
always see the same numbers? Hear the same refrain?*
There are calm aqua stretches towards the far bank
where the trees are either triangles or squares, an
amalgamation of clouds to the north like ideas in the
sky that won't come to fruition. The conversation is tense.

THE RIDING INSTRUCTOR

Through the cracked window
of the caravan
I saw her in the paddock
where the horses slept standing up.
She was speaking to her husband
in the sky,

a raised image inked black
so the only relief was stars.
Still air, December, the Square of Pegasus
upside down, Andromeda blazing,
a supernova waiting to explode.

She wore a Stetson
but I could see her face
reflected in the black boots with spurs
as my horse orbited
in the lunging yard:
remote, expressionless.

Sleep wouldn't come:
in the scrub beyond the troughs
there were monsters with snakes for hair
but the horses bunched together
unconcerned, their warm breath
floating to me.

The last thing I heard was her weeping,
saw the full moon
pulling tears from her eyes.



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas

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



VINCENT VAN GOGH ARRIVES IN ARLES, 1888

*God is nature, and nature is beauty.
(attributed to Vincent van Gogh)*

Waiting for the April sun
to permeate the earth's cold lungs
and draw forth condensation,
blossoming like mist
when breath meets glass:
the almond trees and plum trees
exhale and effloresce with fleeting
froth in wind-tossed, bouffant gusts;
stylish irises appear, accents in drab
garden beds, raising gorgeous violet heads,
coquettishly protruding silken tongues.

How the August sun warms
Roman caskets in Les Alyscamps,
rotating the chrome yellow
dials of sunflowers to track its course!
They sing aloud of utmost joy
in voices I was meant to hear;
their aura of divinity
saturates my brush.

Jena Woodhouse. Photo credit: Anna Jacobson.

PORTRAIT OF A LADY, ARLES

The woman has lived long, yet life
does not relinquish her. What more remains
for her to pay, in order to pass on?

So many others have been taken –
those she held most dear, her son;
her beauty and her power to resist decay

all leached away. Why is she spared
to linger here, amid these mediaeval towers,
stepping haltingly in sun, upon her cavalier's arm?

He is relatively young; she – a gargoyle
and a crone, a figure from the Grand-Guignol,
though this is unintentional: her blonde wig;

features frozen on in artful strokes of *maquillage*;
her fur-trimmed wrap, expensive gown, waver
above cobblestones, past the ancient tiers of Rome.

Picasso's white dove basks alone, breast
protruding from a niche that looks down
on the vacant Roman amphitheatre.

A bleached crescent, a pallid boat that floats
in turquoise overhead, could be a new moon
or an old. The sky reminds her of her son.

Why does she breathe the blue spring air,
the one her times saw fit to spare?
Her secrets and her sorrows weigh on her,

although she hides that well, walking with her
back erect, chin lifted on her stiffened neck.
She dreams that Death will answer all

the questions life has tasked her with.
She vows that soon she'll take back
all the pieces that Death's gambit won:

the pawns and knights, the king and castle
she was cheated of; the long, cruel siege
she has endured; the forfeit of her dearest ones.

LES ALYSCAMPS

A solitary visitor, a chilly afternoon –
I found I could not linger in Les Alyscamps:
an underlay of mud, the orphaned trees
withdrawn into themselves;
ragged rows of sad Roman
sarcophagi – decayed, outworn.
Worst of all, the dank, dark, inhospitable
basilica, perfect setting for an ambush,
utterly repelled me.

Then I saw the way he'd painted it:
the autumn leaves like flakes of gold
spiralling from poplars, the tender
evocation of the colours to his brother:
"I think you're going to love
the leaf-fall that I've painted here –"

The poplar trunks are lilac, the tombs
a lilac-blue; there is a thick golden-
orange carpet underfoot, deepening
as poplars shed their foliage like Danaë's rain:
"like flakes of snow," as Van Gogh wrote to Theo –
melting into showers of gold drops.

**Les Alyscamps is the Roman cemetery at Arles.*

AERIDES

Agapi, I remember you
obliquely,
the way the light
lists golden
to the Tower of the Winds,
air feathers filter dust
distilled from calcite shrines'
antiquity:
cloaked *Boreas* puffs his cheeks,
conch notes captivate Monk seals;
Notos showers water from an urn
and smiles from balmy wings;
Zephyros bears silken buds
to strew about our sandalled feet
if ever we encounter spring
again, even as memory—

Aerides: the winds
Boreas: the north wind
Notos: the south wind
Zephyros: the west wind

*The Tower of the Winds is a first century
BCE octagonal marble tower in the Roman
agora at the foot of the Acropolis, Athens.
Its features included a clepsydra, a weather
vane and sundials.*

John Liddy is from Ireland and lives in Madrid, Spain. His latest poetry book is *Arias of Consolation* (2021/22). He is the founding editor along with Jim Burke of *The Stony Thursday Book* (1975-), one of Ireland's longest running literary reviews and is on the Advisory Board of The Hong Kong Review <https://sites.google.com/site/revivalpress/john-liddy>

Excerpts from : *What else is there*

CANTICLES

'Live full lives, leave some record',
the poet O'Grady's epitaph, be true
onto thyself, many have ignored,
go your own way and do no harm,
oft repeated mantras of wisdom
for the traveller who bravely travails
the terrain of the inner sanctum

Finds a certain harmony and peace
to pass on to curious minds, whose
searching and yearning may not cease
or dally too long in the space between
tormented thought and immobility,
that they question the lives of the cat
who does not die from curiosity

That four words are better than four
guns, that the young should not be
sacrificed by their elders when nature
is at risk, that future generations need
consideration from the present crop,
that Eve is not the lessor of Adam
and that every child is a dewdrop

That sparkles with the light of far off
galaxies, a vanishing cloud in a glass
of tea, that to mediate is not to quaff
or fight the problem but to observe
the bud sitting quietly on the hedge,
to kiss the earth with your feet,
to transform in yourself the garbage

continued overleaf..



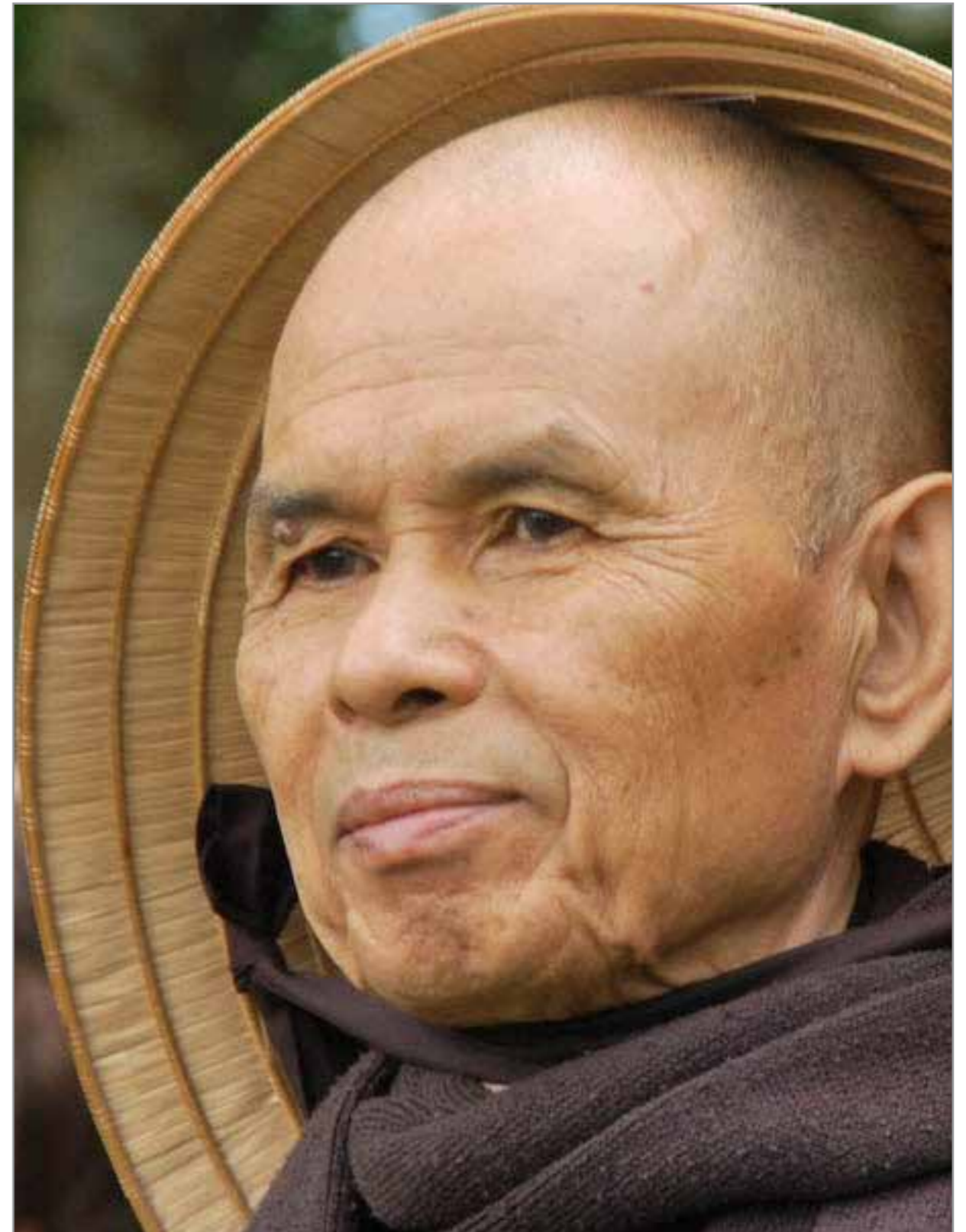
John Liddy

CANTICLES *contd...*

According to the activist for peace,
the poet Thich Nhat Hanh, to smile
the smile of wondrous existence,
to raid the teachings of the wise
and take from them what suits,
old and new testaments, the ken
honed to private attributes

To make sense out of physical
and mental conflict, the square
root of minus one, a possible
answer for the conundrums
great minds trouble over, almost
always on the brink of solutions,
future revelations a signpost

Perhaps, to guide us onwards
towards what we always knew
in the gut, inner most inwards,
buried and lost in the psychic
since time began and the trove
of life bestowed, evolving
continually towards love.



Photograph courtesy <https://thichnhathanhfoundation.org/thich-nhat-hanh>

MEDITATION FOR THE DAY

The mystery in every one of us,
a darkness unexplained, a capacity
to defy limits, difficulties to surpass,
heights of ecstasy, depths of sorrow
only an invisible power can mend,
that energy another discovery, self-
engendered, few can comprehend

How to combat the corrupt angel,
known to us since we first walked
the African plain, soldiers of Nergal
who do the bidding, relishing in decay,
hunger, genocide, plague and war,
seeds planted in receptive minds
capable of unimaginable terror

Against people since the concept
of bonum took root in a stable or on
elevated ground, fashioned by a sect,
each with its own martyr and monk
to lead us to luminescence, breaking
the chain that yoked us, revelation
that altered our inexact thinking

As we observed rough beasts slouch
'towards Bethlehem to be born' again,
a dire warning by the poet to avouch
for in his poem, a danger we ignored
for too long, indifferent to the evil
in our midst, the imminent threat,
a realisation that change is primeval

Something we must face up to again
as we did with Copernicus and Kepler's
'vigour', provide the brain with a vision
that eradicates iniquity and obliquity,
that allows for fruitful lives, to prepare
for the humanisation of societies,
a thaumaturgy for us to discover.

(for the people of Ukraine)

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



LOCH RAMOR

IN October, in the evening
light, we wander and kick
our way through the fallen
copper discards of beech
trees, the parts that seem so
easy for them to let go of.

They have a knack of shaking
off their burdens to embrace
the season's chill. They seem
to know so much. The sun
takes a long-engaged look
at the western side, shadows
fan out, and turn determined

Greens into peacock feather
foliage and the dilapidated
boathouse, to a haggard mossy
castle. The bird calls of winter
ring and they too are let go, until
better days are heard in the wind.

I wonder if they mellow over
the months at rest, settle into
themselves and eventually
require no further conversation.
Becoming elemental is a godsend,
and how the world and our faces
have changed since then.

John Robert Grogan

REWILD

Waiting on the storm,
with a thousand mornings

in my hand, it came.
The pick-peck of the rain

against the windows,
the pop of the walls

contracting, the sun's heat
absent. I used to think

being wanted was a must,
being needed a necessity.

Now I know all I need
is to be and that's enough.

WHAT IF YOU LEFT IT ALL

What if you left it all behind?
Packed a bag and walked
away from all of it today.
Foretelling the future is a mess and
crying about promises in the past
is at best, a misery.
Chances come and go
and before you know it
you've lived another lifetime,
found another country, village,
person to fall in love with.
And then winter will come,
settle you in your nest, wet winds on
the windows and warm meals, bottles
of wine, faux furs and a soft body
to be next to in the darkness.
And all that was, will be gone.
A story for someone in a bar,
late in the afternoon, on a Tuesday,
where you'll waffle
like Bukowski and dance all over
half a dozen beers and chasers,
and years, wondering where
the time went. Oh, how it went.
And you'll be hard on everyone,
and hard on your soul, and land
hard on your ass, get a scar on
your right hand. Then you'll laugh
it off, and remember you're a bird,
from the valley, sculpted by two
rivers, the King's and the Liffey,
guarded by the Púca and the heron
and the marsh hens. Maybe then,
you won't be so hard on yourself.
Maybe then, you'll just be kind.

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



Julia Kaylock

GOLDEN HOUR

Raucous bird conversations
carelessly slake sleep from my skin
I coax myself to consciousness
as the orchestra warms up
for the sunrise concerto

coerced into active participation
in the genesis of the new earth day
I raise the blind
to an opal streaked sky—
a magic breath of time

through an open door
I crack the crisp shell of morning
to receive the blessing
of a new day's promise

pearl drops glisten
on blades of grass
moist tears scattered by night
in her hasty retreat

the kettle boils
bringing the cat to the kitchen—
I obediently open a can

birdcall softens to a hush
a stranger's hands hug my cup
as cool golden light is airbrushed
through the stand of shadowy sheoaks

the cat nestles beside me
co-conspirator
in the dewy silence
of being.

PUZZLED

Think carefully,
are you really ready?
Once you've opened that box
it will take over your life,
consuming hours that would be better spent
eating,
sleeping,
attending to household chores,
grocery shopping,
and spending time
with family and friends.

soon you'll be lost in your cardboard kingdom
searching for pieces of sky,
creating a garden,
building an edifice,
discovering just how many colours
make up the ocean.

you'll be drunk on a dream
of faraway places,
or else wending your way
through a maze of abstraction
in a world of geometric impossibility.

you will not listen to reason
until the job is done.
Then, after a session of self-congratulation
on your outstanding achievement,
you will look up, briefly, bleary-eyed
as you dismantle 1,000 small pieces,
in search of your next distraction.

SUPERNUMERARY

Stripped of the trappings of time and space
We are weightless, disorderly,
lacking dimension, just
two aging rogues slipping through cracks
with our bounty of freedom.

We will mine the sky of stars
and light a path to a phantom horizon;
no need to fast track,
tomorrow is light years away
in our private universe.

While the Domesday clock wipes midnight's brow
we hatch new meanings,
wildly pressing on
to some kind of future,
in the numberless void
of an uncharted galaxy.

THE NEXT ROAD

Roads criss-cross my mind's crazed map
weaving a symphony of possibilities;
yet they lay frozen, unfathomable, one-dimensional
all entrances concealed, once again,
still, they tantalise—

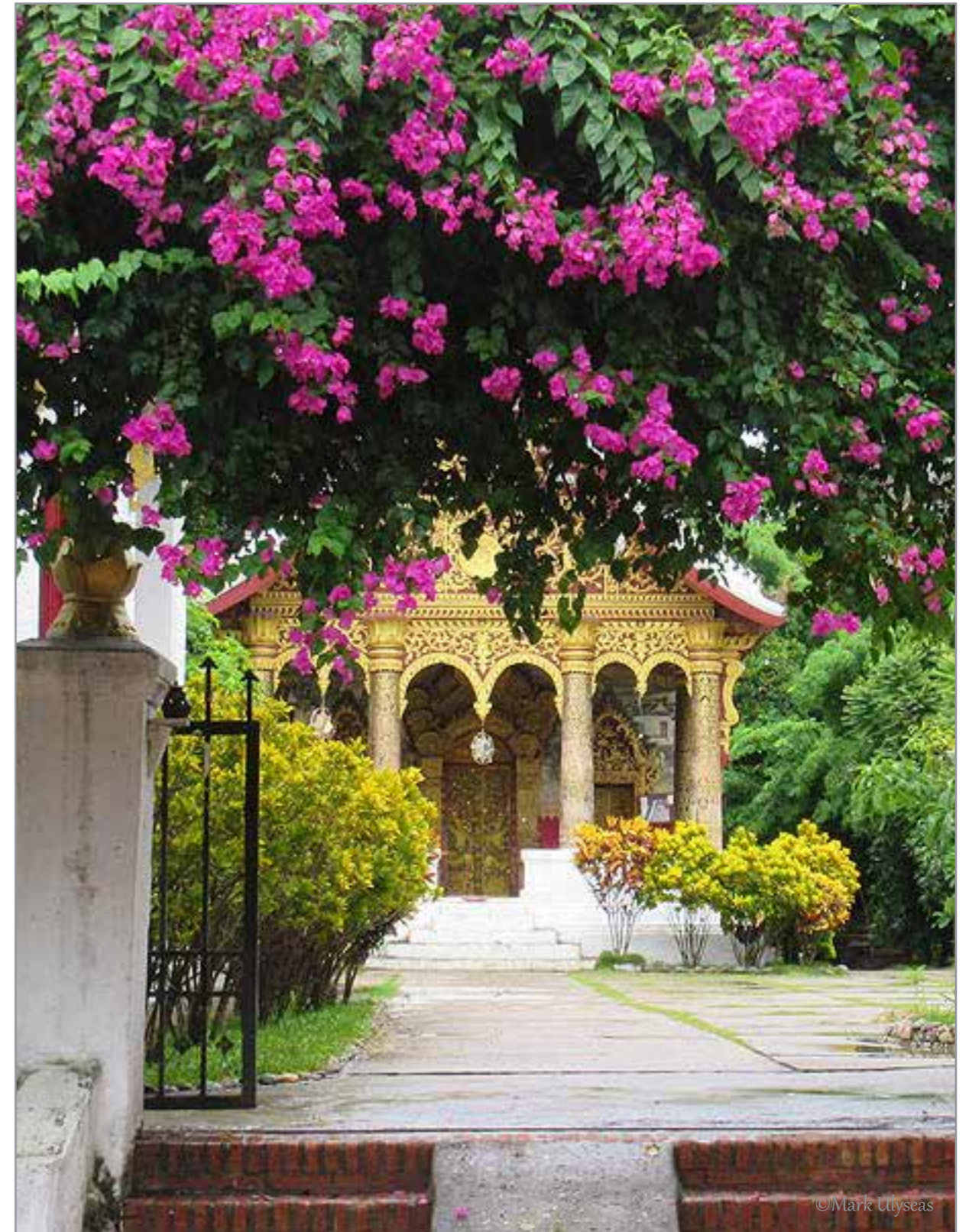
desperate for forward motion
I spin wheels on the shaky ground
of past trailblazing efforts
which led to nothing more
than cul-de-sacs and blind alleys

and yet, even as I gnaw through walls
in search of a new, seductive detour,
I prudently leave a breadcrumb trail
forever hedging bets
in case an old road calls again
and I might complete journeys
I once hastily surrendered

but those roads, once full of promise
are done with me
and my whimsical attempts at travel.
As edges of past sojourns fray and split
I am here, in this shabby vehicle,
limping along—

present me one more road
that I can rise to greet,
I'll travel baggage-free—

that is all. *that is all.* that. is. all



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

KA Rees' debut poetry collection *Come the Bones* was published by Flying Island in 2021. Her work has been awarded and short-listed for national and international prizes and published in anthologies and journals in Australia and the United States. Kate has penned nocturnes amongst swallows at Sydney Observatory, and once spent a year at the State Library of NSW as their café poet in residence. Kate was awarded a 2019 fellowship at Varuna, the National Writers' house for her manuscript of short fiction. She lives and writes on Gai-mariagal country in Sydney.



THE TIME OF THINGS

As long as Siberian ice disclosing
its catalogue of frozen plant life.

Or permafrost in Abyisky throwing up
intestines and the soft horn of a woolly rhino

their prints unseen
since the Pleistocene ice sheets' rapid retreat.

Or as long as tentacles of *Cyane capillata*
its boreal mane following eight-point stars,

tendrils streaming past the measure
of a blue whale; their short lives meted

out in days, only to fall like bells. As a flame tree's
lace on suburban streets—nature heralds

traffic emitting carbon dioxide
into the air of a city's commute.

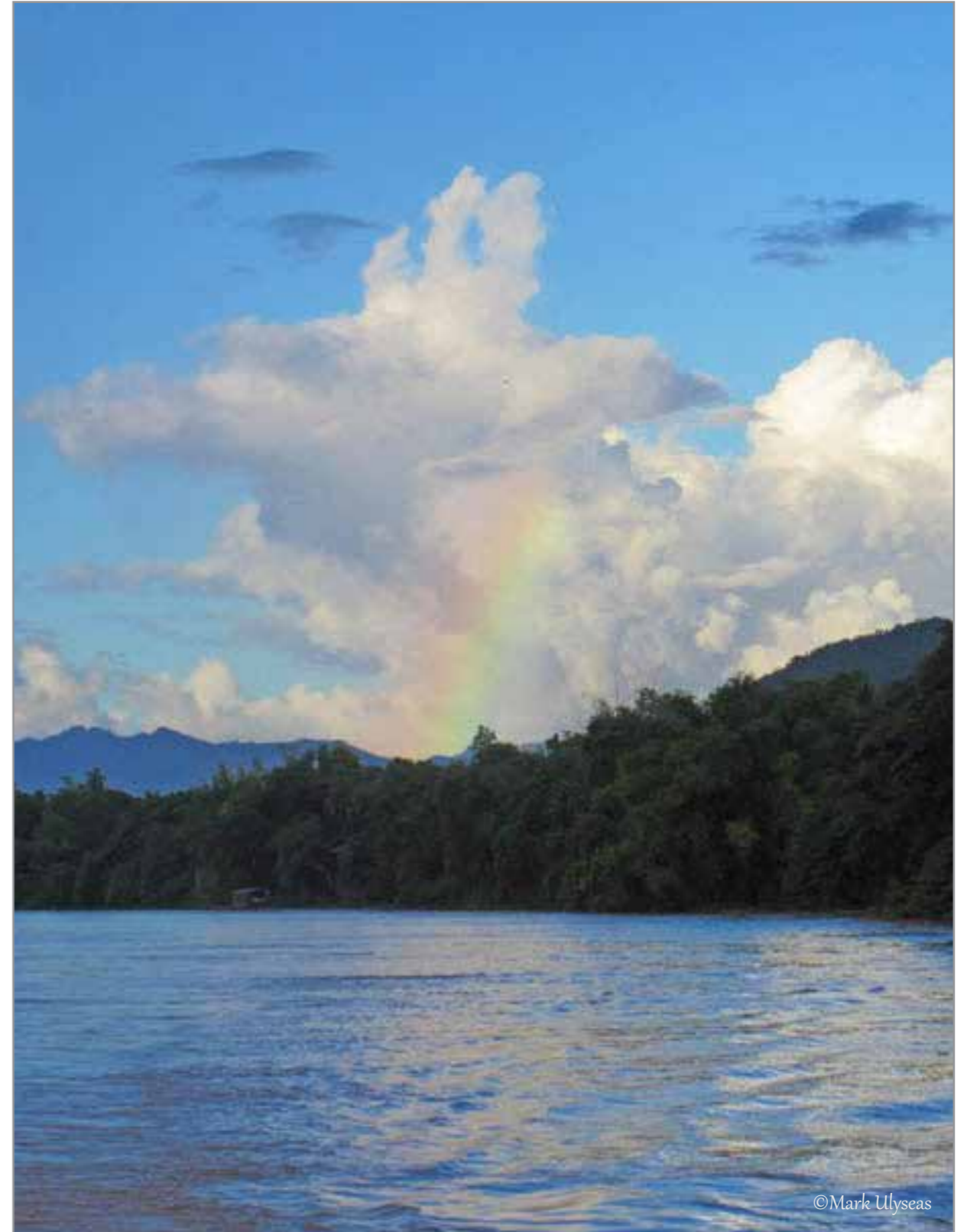
The wave crests of an emergency
vehicle course past a teenager waiting

at lights, on his mobile
ready to step on ice.

KA Rees

THE MEASURE OF GEOMETRY

Night, darker than itself. A cloud finds an edge in air and you are a product of geometry—once a ball of remembered cells playing notes to a melody that is yet understood. Rains come, sweep across roofs; drum gutters. You kick inside your mother—wake her to place the blue willow plate out to catch rain.



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Kate McNamara is a Canberra based poet, playwright and critical theorist. Her plays have been performed internationally. McNamara delivered the opening address to the Fourth International Conference of Women Playwrights in Galway (2001). She was awarded the H.C Coombs Fellowship at ANU (1991) and elected to the Emeritus Faculty. She won The Banjo Patterson Award for her short story Verity. Her published works include *Leaves*, *The Rule of Zip* (AGP) Praxis and *The Void Zone* (AGP). Her poetry, short fiction and critical theory has been published in a number of anthologies including *There is No Mystery* (ed. K Kituai, 1998), *The Death Mook* (ed. Dion Kagan, 2008) *These Strange Outcrops*(2020) and *The Blue Nib* (2020) She has also worked extensively as an editor and has only recently returned to her first great love, poetry. McNamara is currently working on *The Burning Times*.



Kate McNamara

THE GREEN FAERIE DREAM

I was painting the house, painting is a type of a reclamation and I knew Mr King was coming to inspect the premises; all things would be well once the King came. And he did come, late of course, which was good because he can be pedantic about his half derelict buildings. And I can get really anxious about these alpha males. After all he could evict me really easily. I am always late with the rent. Robber barons and property, but he came and approved that I was spending my money improving his parlous dwelling; he conquered as Kings have always done and then he departed with gravitas, another royal progress through his demesnes, another happy serf. Now this is important, reader, because after Mr King left I felt a great need to run out and buy too much calamari, eat it all and drink too much cheap champagne. This was a celebration against the oppressor and his regulations. I had managed to subvert the palace of money by only painting the white base of the walls. I had a plan for pink and purple walls that he would never know about. Hopefully.

Afterwards in the early evening I fell into a kind of post-prandial coma. Squids and calamari they will have their revenge, you know, they always do (*whirly gigging in your tummy in the early evening. Perhaps I should not have eaten quite so many*)...o these words, these words, where do they come from in dreaming, droning, darkling hours with the wet heat of another evening and even the cat was restless. In retrospect I now know this was a certain portent.

And while in that comatose state I had a dream where I had driven slowly along the edge of the sea and through a forest all burning with green and you (*Not quite sure who you actually is, me? No definitely another 'you' anyway it is a dream!*) knew I was keeping faith, coming back to the call of the master.

The town was quaint like the old home in Cork or somewhere in Cornwall, old home, your grandfather was there waiting, they always wait those old men until the storm cometh and I was that storm, have been now for some time since the day of the Green Faerie and yes I will always come back to that hiatus in time against all probability... mayhap it was fate. I could concede that though must call it something more precise, more algorithmic in nature. It eludes me. (*What green faerie, why capitals? Is this Mid-summer Night's Dream?*)

You of course had prepared your lecture. Not often do I go to the top of the class, but I am undertaking you, boyo, never forget it, I do not. You are still in a rage about the high country matter, my many difficult godfathers and the matter of a key to a grey Maserati. *(Now this is more my style but he now gets to keep the key? I don't think so. Why so many fucking Godfathers? Demand the return of that key. Undertake him into a funeral parlour is my advice)*

You will keep that key; you know you will, if only to prevent some further madness. 'What do you want?'

(This is not a polite greeting, I don't like him already and I just met the fucker)

I reply, carefully neutrally

'Of that I am unclear; perhaps friendship since it is already established.'

You smile with enigma, shades of power rippling from your hands, *(Spiderman?)* You have me in control now, o the power, Imperator, the power. I cannot answer the question in any case, I don't know the answer.

'Well at least you're honest, girl.'

The arrogance of that is breathtaking, akin to you giving me permission to make three errors, I have made two now. *(I am beginning to like her...a bit weird but no relation of mine, fancy admitting to this turd that you made errors, he is like an uber-fuerer.)*

Then I turn to watch two small, delicate children come to play, no doubt sent by the old father at the door, smoking a pipe and reading the force that emanates from this apparently casual conversation, this divano where snakes rear up and birds fly through time. *(Now him I like, but I tend to like grandfathers)*

The old man ambles nearer

'I will keep an eye on them, boyo, best you left now, the time is thin, the world is closing down, go home now to Deidre and the little ones.'

Your head flies back at the name Deidre and the old man nods and acknowledges the kill shot. He has you there; he will always have you there. You sigh. *(Heaved up from your fetlocks, he will have to be a horse trader I would put money on it!)*

'Are you alright? Your voice has always beguiled me. It is what burnt every defence I had against you, the music in it, the past and the song. Of course I almost say as my heart fragments, my spirit another shot bird from a winter sky. I nod.

'Well, let us leave it there, in the coal dust'

I have no idea what this expression could possibly mean on any planet. *(Neither do I)* I nod again like a carnival dummy, its mouth open parading under those bitter, bright lights. The music plays, a mockery of love and laughter. You are always that ring master snapping your whip and I could be Joan of Arc, Antigone, Medea, or that child bride of nightmare: Persephone. *(Obviously classically educated, more in common than I thought)*

'Are you alright?' you ask again, insistence and worry shadows your eyes, you know what I am, you know the possibility of that statement is more than ironic, it has some malice in it. My eyes feel full of broken glass, razor blades abrade my skin. This is too extreme I think, why did I come here, obedient to that siren song. Let me go I tell myself. *(I could have told her that half an hour ago, but get the key to that Maserati first)*

In another life as Andrusus *(who the fuck is this, where did he come from... nice name though)* you would have smiled a lazy, predatorial smile and said 'I am not keeping you here, my heart, you are.' You really need to read that story; its ending is cruel for all of us. I am the remnant of that tale and you the last protagonist. Be careful, king killer, be really careful. *(Getting epic here I am thinking Star Wars...)*

You sigh, offering a hand to pull me up from the dirty ground and then of course you say

'I have to go' and I, primed like a trained animal, reply

'Of course, I will be fine; I can find my own way back'

And then you do smile

And then you do smile

'You do not even know where you are, come, I will take you home'

'Where would that be, your home, my home, your grandfather's home? You are a walking tragedy man, get you gone now, before I become irritated. One thing I always know is where I am. How I move from here is not your problem, although I thank you for that courtesy' *(See I told you, she has got guts)*

You swear in Gaelic, the old man smiles, the children laugh at you and then you move, your horseman's gait, *(told you, I knew before she did)* your back to us all. You move a little; the general in you will not permit you to leave the field, forced by emotion rather than logic. The old man sighs now and looks warily at both at us.

'He is always like that little one, too much of breeding in him, he has lost control of you and always puts him in a fury'

The sheer outrage of him, his breathing is a vast blow to my reasoning mind. *(We are simpatico here girl)* I will be crying soon, knowing that the King of the Sea is gone with the tides. *(Where exactly did he go? This is very hard to follow I mean it is quite beautiful but it so strains the credibility)* That he will return, they always do, and there is nothing to be done about such beings. Not a thing.

There is so little escape, so small a window of flight, too late my beating heart, the cords that bind are too embedded now. But I have been in love before and survived it. I will again, it is only time, Imperator, only time passing like gale blowing through the stars. The wheel spins and there we are again *(Where are we exactly? Cornwall Wales, does the dude even have a name, do you?)*

'We have been here before' you say walking back in rage, o so carefully. Still I hear it. I always did.

We will be again I think, maybe forever, like a splinter of glass bedazzled in mooring light. *(Just get the key, get out of there, why would you be in love with this control freak)* We are static, framed like a still life, endlessly repeating the minutiae of the moment.

So I tell myself each morning as I re-invent myself, just as I storify you: because that is what you are for, that is your singular purpose, my love, a story. The voice of the Sybil is the utterance of water. It was given to me that power knowing the water beneath the water; it lies beneath, moving inexorably, moving with our lives, the water that we drown in. As we breathe.

And so, I will need to leave the stage, sound FX as the Deus Ex Machina descends, remembering our childhood as the sun fades behind the old theatre. How could it be otherwise? The world is working, so it goes.

(No, no what about the key to the Maserati? Have you considered the possibility that the dude, nameless as he is, may have potential in bed, forget Deidre whoever she is, life is always sooo complicated. What about him? I mean, I don't actually like him but he may be the one, I get the feeling you two really like each other, you just do not really communicate)

How to achieve a necessary indifference? I have done it before, will do it again, lots of practice. Is it not ironic, vastly amusing, that such a cerebral child should lose herself to this unreasoning, implacable beast? O the nano-interface of chemistry, I will stop now.

(This is just wrong, you cannot leave your reader here, for fuck's sake, you know what happens in the end and it is cruel and unnatural punishment to leave your fans here, this would make great fan fiction, shades of Kate Bush, Fifty Shades of Grey. You could be famous, get published, get an agent. No wonder he got so shitty with you. I am beginning to get the dude. Your problem is you over analyse him. All this deeply charged emotional stuff that you will not actually articulate this past life karmic gig; you KNOW he cannot say it. He is almost Heathcliffe, Mr D'Arcy, they cannot speak, those type of dudes; it's like they are strangling on words, so terrified of themselves. Don't you dare wake up now! I have to know the ending...besides sweetie remember he has the one and only key to that grey Maserati. Think of the Jungian significance of that power, the beast within, think Freud if you must. Anyway what about the old man, those kids, you need to go back there; he knows, it is what he actually says to you again and again. But not you clearly for all that vaunted intelligence and higher order thinking and yes I do know it's a dream, however they are important woman.)

And then at three o'clock in the morning, gentle reader, woke up. Life is unfair, what an irritating dream. Maybe I should have a couple of shots of absinthe that always calm me down.

Kelly is the author of six books, including #1 bestsellers *Graffiti Lane*, *Punch and Judy*, and *Retrospective*. Her seventh book, *The Pinstripe Prisoner*, is a fiction novel due to be released mid-2022. Her contemporary poetry has featured in numerous publications and her books are frequently gifted to A-list celebrities including Academy Award winners. She is co-host of the *Wordsmith Poetry Podcast* and is a prominent media figure discussing socioeconomics, bullying, domestic violence, and mental health. She is a KSP First Edition Fellowship recipient, winner of AusMumpreneur 'Big Idea Changing the World' Award, Roar Success Best Book and Most Powerful Influencer Awards. She is also a full-time Managing Director for a global organisation and was a 2020 CEO Magazine Managing Director of the Year finalist and Telstra NSW Business-woman of the Year finalist. She is represented by Newman Agency. <http://www.kellyvannelson.com/>



THE KEYBOARD IS AN ARMoured TANK

Stained fingertips bleed raw as they claw back to tap
irreversible instructions instigating war,
“Enter” key loading lethal bullet in the hold,

camouflaged behind overworked khaki letter,
mental health in stealth, no peaceful wealth, poised
to hose down the next casualty, leaving them ravished

abandoned beneath enemy treads, rolling over
corpse with brute force, no remorse, in a field
where peacekeeping is buried below earth

scattered with dry poppy petals, red carpet laid
for uniformed survivors on the winning side
of mahogany desk, monitored by General rules

casting shadows of doubt over wires crossed,
begging for traumatic memories to be drugged and unplugged
but the computer says no,

refusing to succumb to “Control, Alt, Delete”
as the tank rolls on to lecture the meek
unsuspecting replacement recipient, new participant

on war without peace,
preparing for the next
“Shift”.

Kelly Van Nelson

REPEL THE CELL

Vertical bars before my eyes, breaking up blank stare
into neon glare of society; a free population going about daily business,
no commiserations for the girl committed, yet she committed no crime.

Horizontal on hard floor, concrete scraping bare, broken back
raw, as cold blood sinks into permanent stain in the grain
as my brain tries to make sense of reason and rhyme.

Diagonal as I haul myself onto unsteady feet, arms outstretched,
palms flat against brick wall, because I no longer want to crawl
inside the cell of my dark mind; time to smile, it's showtime.

EAT THE FROG

hop
onto
to-do-list
bright eyes bulging
no time to relax
croaking on lily pad
soaked in slimy denial
disorganisation poison
until finally the time comes round
to swallow excuses and eat the frog

DROWNING IN DENIAL

floating debris
as we fail to foresee

the Impact of political strange
decision to rubbish climate change

river deep
beneath Disbelief

LUST

You can tie me up
But can never tie me down
So unravel me

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



THE WINDOW IS SET

in oil on board.
Ah, don't you see? Just behind
the vacant kitchen table and only
partially covered by cream curtains?
It's a lightly-frosted double-hung
window, half-open, so in fact, you
only see through the exposed quarter.
Beyond, you see the picnic table
where he used to sit, beer in hand,
and watch the boys play backyard
cricket. On the table, a haphazard
tablecloth, the red gingham one.
And, arranged purposefully on top,
are the following items: a pitcher
of orange juice with three half-filled
glasses, a hastily-impressioned bowl
of fruit, a well-read newspaper
that has been pinned down
by a clay cigarette tray,
a stone lantern, an empty
dinner plate, and his striped
necktie—the one we found
out by the letterbox
on the afternoon
that he left us.

Kit Willett

WHILE A CELLO CONCERTO PLAYS

Sometimes I sit, one leg either side of the gable, and watch the sky turn violet. It is in these still and fleeting moments I imagine I am anything but a peacemaker. I overturn a roof tile and find a familiar voice. It belongs to an animal. In my surprise, I tumble, and land in the dry grass on all fours. I let out a low growl. I am a wildcat. My fur is matted; my eyes are wide. I find you in my jaw, begging for release. In my study, by the warm glow of my green library lamp, I peek out the window. I see a beast devouring someone out there in the dark space. They look so lost. I have a book on wildcats here, I think. I search my shelves. I have a record of Kabalevsky playing in the background to drown out the noise. It is a familiar concerto; I know it well. There is no book here; I am in the ruins of a monastery on an island. The salt water licks at my ankles and threatens to drown all this history. If only I had a voice, maybe then, I could find a way to preserve it from destruction.

HOSPITALITY

At a table under a tree, they sit, with feet on golden footstools, waiting to hear some history, and sharing a meagre meal. The house and mountain ask the tree, how were we made? The tree sighs warmly in response, once you existed as one being, yearning for diversity, so I took you, and split you, and led you to each other. And when you saw each other, I wove you together once more, and you held each other tight, and uttered whispered pleas to never leave. I gave you two fruits that you might fall deeper in love than any angry god or angel could. And one day, I will join you in the flesh, for I want to feel what you feel. But in your diversity, you noticed difference, and you called it bad. You began to fear and hate, and I knew that, when the time was right, I would put it all on—the good and the bad—to love you.

AT SEEING 'BORZOI BOOKS' BY ANDY BURGESS

It is an installation piece—a group of strangers huddled around a piece of art I cannot pretend to understand. Some running dog—a random book publisher's logo slapped on a paper canvas, met with intersecting lines and circles—a collage of muted colours, stripes. Nothing like his houses. But then the people start to move, and they laugh wildly with each other and trickle out for coffee. The tour guide leaves, and a man flashes wild eyes at another and asks him for a drink later. He blushes. And the painting is left, abandoned and forgotten. Its orange-and-cream stripes remind me to read 'The Picture of Dorian Gray', which has been sitting on my nightstand for four years. Later, in the evening, I am asked to leave the gallery. But to my surprise, my legs have become polyester resin, fibreglass, and silicone. I spend the rest of the exhibition staring at the yellow and green squares, and two reddish quarter circles that have captured me completely, and never get to clear my nightstand.

ON A BENCH, OBSERVING A BRIDGE

Are the flowers cold yet?—Seashells are carried by the songs of frogs and skylarks. The mist covers the moon, reminding us to wear more clothes—but the ground strips itself of snow. The forgotten frost creeps—the laughing mountain increases in flower buds. Air conditioners leak water that trickles off rocks and feeds moss—the rainbow speaks to lost promises. Autumn-has-come is here—the typhoon crosses the bridge, lanterns extinguish and hope leaves for shelter. In winter, trees are lost—the breath is visible. All coldness crosses the aging bridge—even the mountain sleeps while the lone wolf keeps his vigil for another year.

Lee Upton's most recent book is *Visitations: Stories*. Her seventh book of poetry, *THE DAY EVERY DAY IS*, won the 2021 Saturnalia Prize and is forthcoming from Saturnalia in 2023.



UNDERWORLDERS

The forest stole silence
until cracking through the forest
came more of the forest,
the elderberries shining
or were those the shining eyes
of sparrows in the elderberries.

To walk through the woods
the woods walked out with us—
the thorns you made into a crown, dear one.

It's annoying when myths enter a poem by name
as if they're not there already.
To each her own underworld

and coming through shade—
a stranger in willows and fronds and mists,
not a human
but a body of earth and air:
the slow creek
the mint on the bank the willowy overhang
below which the minnows scatter...
I don't know if it's any less true
that this place is as much
what I am as my name or body.

continued overleaf..

Lee Upton

UNDERWORLDERS *contd...*

Rain roars through a gully,
the rain that calls to us to stay inside,
how it must feel to the other animals
backing into the granary,
writhing inside a gunny sack.
The way the forest sways and breaks in waves.
The trees that become
the masts of ships the spines the laws and
decrees and licenses and indictments.

The boy in the house down the road
told a nurse
he thought the bullet was a bee sting.
Where is the hive
that is meant for all our bodies?

And who were these next shades?
And where is my family now?
Those people beyond legends?

No answer came,
except if fog is an answer,
except if my impatience drew that fog.

Somewhere the past is ahead of us
where those lost
are yet to be found.
This whole time on earth
was I looking for them
even when they were alive and with me?

Today I am holding my little girl's hand.
Across the road the elderberries wear sparrows
and next to the house that burned
we watch as
twin fawns take their steps,
beings that never yet knew loneliness.

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



THE WAR HAS NOT YET REACHED THIS FAR

Early morning strolling in the park
empty except for a man in full kurta
some way ahead of me.
I notice that when he passes a tree
it seems to sing to him, its leaves
floating like rainbowfish fighting.
The materials of his cloak winnow out,
an angel's hands letting go of air.

—How does light change its meaning
to calculate the length of winter.

In the far white edges of his eyes
dwells the memory of what he left behind.

—A child appears, runs into the man's
arms; now open, now letting go.

I reach home again, enter the empty
hallway. Stillness mixed with damp
as if the dew has followed me.
My experience has taken its own toll,
twisting into an uneven shape.

The image remains, like light when you shut
your eyes too tightly:
the man in full kurta
throwing the laughing child high
into the morning's current.

Lincoln Jaques

THEY SAID THE WAR WAS OVER

When they said the war was over
we dropped our rifles
walked back to our homes
stood in the indifferent kitchens
stared out from the windows
like Henry James' lost ghosts.
A single thought: what now?

We'd learnt a new language
we couldn't translate
not even to our loved ones
who stood in corners
waiting for us to speak
like the pilgrims gathered at Medjugorje
looking for the Madonna to re-appear.

And after we returned from the war
all down the street
people sat in cafés
as if nothing ever happened
next to buildings half-shelled
floors gaping, cross sections
of roughly sketched plans.
Amongst the rubble
families huddled around fires
blank faces flames in forbidden shrines.

They like to put dates on things.
They say 'The war is now over'
as if by magic everything stops.
But the war is never over
only the waiting starts again
for the distant roar to come
through those mountains.

We became the ghost watchers
then, eventually, the invisible.
One day I walked outside
and as if for the first time
noticed how the sun streaked
down the building opposite
a thin cord of light
capturing a monarch
its wings
fired by the sun
the point of an iron
just pulled from the coals.

THE DISAPPEARING CITY

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

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

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

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

ZAGREB

The trams roll from the Square
As I sit at a wrought-iron table
in the cool shade of a café umbrella.
The waiter brings a tumbler and jug
and waits, not so patiently, for my order.

The sun floods the open cracks
in the pavers, shadows cast from the
figure on horseback, scabbard outstretched;
the plaque reads Jelačić.
The one the communists
packed away in a box
kept in a dark cellar.
But here he is again.

The uneasy quietness of 11am
the time when no one knows quite what to do
whether to have an early lunch, or go to another
gallery: Naïve Art, the classics or the Modernists?
Or the one which details the Atrocities of War
that played out right here.

The waiter clears his throat.
The pigeons stand to attention.

AVENUE OF GHOSTS

A little after we moved into the house
(we've shared now for twenty years)
I worked often in my spare time
fixing up the front garden. He
would come hobbling along
while I was busy digging a hole
or taming the hedge, and he would lean
on the letterbox and stare at me.

He'd lived here all his life, in a brick
and tile down on the corner, overlooking
the park. He told me how the trams
once stopped at the end of the street
where he would greet his father
coming off a 12-hour shift, oil staining his
large hands, the tiredness in his eyes.
He told me of the War, of shortages;
the day his brother left and never came back.

How they knocked down the big villas
and planted new polystyrene houses.
The borstal the boys eventually burnt
to the ground. How the mountain spoke
to him at night. And I continued digging
a little annoyed at the intrusion, wanting
to fix up the front garden. Eventually
he would tire, and I'd watch him limp down
the footpath touching the leaves of trees.

I watched one day as they hauled
his heavy furniture out of his house,
the material worn through at the arms.
I still stand sometimes at my letterbox
looking out for him, pausing from lawnmowing
wiping the oil and grass off my hands.
Thinking of my father's calloused fingers;
of that old man with the limp teaching me history
how he died alone and I never asked for his name.

Lisa C. Taylor is the author of four poetry collections and two short story collections. A fifth poetry collection, *Interrogation of Morning* will be published by Arlen House in 2022. Her honors include the Hugo House New Works Fiction Award and Best of the Net and Pushcart nominations in both fiction and poetry. www.lisactaylor.com



Lisa C Taylor

BRASS DUCK

When Inez gave me the brass duck, I didn't know whether to thank her or look for a hidden meaning. Isn't giving things away on the list of signs of depression or suicidal tendencies? Her husband, Dean had died of pancreatic cancer eight months earlier. At the memorial service, my sister Inez was all business, refilling the platters and thanking everyone for coming. When Papa died, she took Mama in, sold their house, and signed both them up for a theater subscription. Of course, she invited me to join them but driving two hours for theater wasn't likely.

"Lightening the load, Emmett. Streamlining." Inez ties the glitter laces on her neon pink sneakers. Once a month we meet for coffee and a walk on the boardwalk at Baylor Wildlife Refuge. June is the season for turtles and chameleons, and if we are lucky, a beaver or two.

I like the duck though owning a minimum of objects that have no practical purpose is preferable. Still, I couldn't turn down a gift that actually appealed to me. The duck was solid and pensive looking, if that is possible. It was about the size of an egg. Every surface in my house had some sort of found object, shells, rocks, a small dish of beach glass and pottery shards. It's my not-so-secret addiction.

"Like an old woman at a rummage sale, Emmett. You can't say no if the price is cheap enough." My ex, Katie had only returned to get her teapot and collection of strainers.

The path in the refuge is meticulous, as if they swept it every day, grass on the sides clipped to an inch and perfectly green. My own lawn looked like a discount haircut with short and long patches and interspersed reedy yellow even though the development had hired landscapers.

"The duck was Dean's favorite," Inez tells me as I struggle to keep up with her power walking. She's like a magpie that never stops moving unless she's attracted to something shiny. At fifty she expected to retire with Dean. They had talked about living in North Carolina instead of New Hampshire. Inez wanted the ocean and Dean wanted the heat. Their last child was finishing college that year. Dean planned a cruise to the Greek Islands. Inez used part of the life insurance to pay for the last year of college because her salary wasn't enough. Mama died before Dean, and the old farmhouse was cavernous and cold. Not much I could do to help her.

Inez picks at her split ends, one of her bad habits. We're different, Inez and I. Though we came from the same parents, I consider that a fluke of nature. I like a good prime rib and Inez is vegetarian. I live in a condominium complex with a pool and fitness center, which she says is akin to a middle-class disease, corrupting the very notion of homeownership. To Inez, ownership must involve pain. One must fix leaky pipes, shovel driveways and walkways, and replace old heating systems. Instead of a fitness center, one should use ones' own feet to take a walk or get a bicycle. When Katie and I married, we agreed that we'd never waste weekends on yard work or freeze our butts off walking in a snowstorm. This agreement didn't save our marriage though maybe it lasted longer because we agreed on at least one thing.

"Look at the lily pads," Inez leans over.

I wouldn't know a lily pad from pond scum. Change the shape and it all looks the same to me. Still, it's enjoyable to amble down a pathway groomed by someone else.

The duck is in my backpack, a solid weight settling on the bottom. Last month Inez gave me a framed photograph of our parents. This is becoming a trend.

"I'm seeing someone," Inez tells me. "Cliff is a plumber."

Usually, she prefers the cerebral type so that's new. A plumber is handy though, especially if she insists on staying in a house built before there was indoor plumbing.

"Glad to hear it," I hear myself say before I realize it's true for all the wrong reasons. I don't want to be responsible for my sister. My love for her is based on genes not interest or even values. She's quick to judge me, blaming my break-up with Katie on my refusal to have children. I know she's right because Katie promptly adopted a little girl even though she was forty-five when we broke up. Six months later she married Barney and now they're raising his son and her adopted daughter.

I get through it the way I get through everything, making chitchat about movies, our superstar niece who won a science award, and our respective careers. None of this is vaguely interesting but some would say lily pads aren't really flowers. In truth, they are more than that because of the variegated color patterns and the fact that their roots can survive in water. I'm no horticulturist but our walk is a highlight for me. I could easily take Inez out of the equation and still enjoy myself.

When I get home, there are two messages from the two women I've been seeing. I can't decide which one I like better. One is a teacher and the other a hairdresser. I don't care what they do when I'm not with them. I make plans with Ariel and put off Diane until Thursday. Dinner at a restaurant, then back to her place.

I pick out a good Chardonnay and hand it to Ariel when she answers the door. A brass duck exactly like my brass duck sits on her living room shelf. Did I miss it before? I've been to her place at least six times, stayed overnight. It's right next to a tree trunk shaped planter, a ceramic owl and a china teacup. She may be a formidable rival for collections of useless objects.

"My sister gave me a duck just like that one." I test its heft.

"Supposed to bring me a surprise. At least that's what the lady said when I bought it. I don't usually go in for that crap but I liked the duck." Ariel smiles. "Cool that you have one too. Maybe that's the surprise."

Yeah, and we both have eyes and brown hair. This kind of synchronicity feels a little precious. I sip the wine she offers and tell her about the lily pads and the walk.

"Every month? You just walk with her?" What about winter?"

"Sometimes I can talk her into walking indoors at the mall but usually she likes to walk outside. She enjoys the cold. I've pretended to have the flu a few times."

Ariel laughs. "Justifiable. I hate the cold. Why the hell do we live in New Hampshire? As soon as I can retire, I'm going somewhere warm."

Katie decided we'd go to Mexico. Cheaper there and better healthcare. Her Spanish was flawless. I have no talent with languages and envisioned being unable to buy groceries or order in a restaurant. Add that to our list of incompatibilities. She wanted a dog and I hate animals. Her parents vacationed on a lake with more mosquitoes than I thought possible. I got the "flu" the last summer we were together so she went on her own. If this was a story, not a life, that might be foreshadowing.

Ariel doesn't invite me to stay over and I try not to obsess about it. When I go to sleep, I dream about the duck and its duck sisters and brothers. One for every citizen.

The duck becomes a requirement to prove ones' patriotism. There are duck raids where the police go door-to-door looking for brass ducks. If a duck is missing or not on display, people face fines or imprisonment. Pretty soon citizens are stealing them, reasoning that one isn't enough. To truly be a patriot, one must have an entire shelf of them. They become rare and expensive. Each man or woman over the age of eighteen is issued one and they lock it up like a gun or ammo. Going off to university is a hazard because a roommate could play a prank and steal the duck. This would be enough to get a scholar expelled. The scourge of ducklessness.

The duck was on my night table last night but I moved it to the living room in the morning because I couldn't get the dream out of my mind or the fact that Ariel had the same duck and I wasn't asked to spend the night. Tomorrow night I'll meet Diane and we'll meet at Ferdinand's Restaurant. Maybe I'll order Duck L'Orange or crispy duck salad.

As a child, I used to think that duct tape was spelled duck. I imagined it was used to repair the wings of injured ducks; maybe the ones careless hunters wounded but didn't kill. In a way that describes a lot of us. Katie told me I wasn't a complete person.

"You're like a boy. Honestly, Emmett. You need to grow up. It's not all about you and your collections. Some couples save for their future, you know, like a real house instead of a condo, and maybe a child."

I wasn't sure exactly what she meant. Do boys feel unfinished because they haven't yet grown up? I had a job and other than my monthly Inez obligation, I tried to be available when Katie wanted to go out to dinner or drive to the beach. She didn't go to the flea market or antique stores with me but we have different interests. I didn't go to her Refugee Resettlement meetings either.

"Why don't we sponsor an immigrant family?" she asked two years ago.

"What do you mean by sponsor?"

"You know, help them out. Be their connection. Advocate, Emmett."

I didn't care a whit about a family from another place, even if they were escaping persecution. It wasn't our responsibility to take care of the damn world. It's clear that our paths diverged in a way that rewrote the future.

I guess I wasn't surprised when she served me with divorce papers. We haven't even talked since the divorce was final but no hard feelings.

Inez's boyfriend is Cliff the plumber. Plumbers know about duct tape, no doubt. What does my sister talk about with Cliff? How do we land somewhere as adults with siblings or spouses as foreign as the woman who cuts my hair? I can't remember being a child with Inez or my other sister, Viola. Viola is the perfect one; married for twenty years, smart healthy children. She's interesting to some people but not to me.

Katie had dark brown hair as thick as a rope. She could twist it in complicated braids that I used to love to untangle. At first, she found me charming.

"So cool that you love antiques and found objects. I don't know any other men like you."

I could have responded that I knew lots of women like her, do-gooders with beautiful hair and athletic builds. Katie lifted weights and did Tai Chi. I swam in the fitness center pool and rode the recumbent bike. We were the perfect childless couple until we weren't.

Diane says she has a headache so I go home alone after dinner. She spent most of the time talking about her father's ALS. I will never meet her father but now Ariel has moved up on my list. I nodded my head at appropriate times but I was thinking more about the flocked wallpaper at Ferdinand's and the old-fashioned stand-alone sink in the men's room. I like the look of a basin.

I had moved the duck to the living room but when I go into the bedroom to get ready for bed, there it is on my night table. It's too late to call Ariel but there is a text from her.

Mandarin ducks stay faithful throughout their lifetime. Two ducks playing in water is a symbol of a happy couple. Keep the duck in the southwest corner of your home where love energy is the best.

What the hell is love energy? Katie told me I had low energy, a not-so-subtle way of saying I wasn't good in bed. I didn't go back to Diane's apartment because she had a headache or maybe it's because I'm not what she wants. I sure didn't want to hear any more about her father.

For a minute I think the knock on the door is the duck police checking to see if I have the right duck and I've displayed it properly. It's nearly 1:00 am and I can see Ariel through the peephole.

"Let me in, Emmett. It's important."

What could be important enough to show up at 1:00 am?

I unlatch the door and Ariel comes at me with her duck.

"I need to see your duck."

For a moment I pretend this is a new come-on, but she's rushing into the bedroom to make sure I've complied and put the damn thing in the southwest or northeast or up the chimney.

"Look. Our ducks are exactly the same. This has to mean something."

Yeah, it means Diane better get over her headache soon because you just lost the *who should Emmett date lottery*. I can't help it if my sister collects useless objects and sometimes passes them on to me. I hope she finds true love with Cliff the plumber.

"I'm sorry, Ariel. I have to get to bed." I guide her as gently as I can toward the door, trying to ignore the tears in her eyes and the way she's clutching that stupid brass duck like a winning ticket. Maybe there is a country where brass ducks are an engagement gift, or a dystopian society that will someday demand the possession of a random knickknack.

It isn't until her car pulls away that I notice that there are now two ducks on my night table and they're facing each other. I put them in the drawer and try to get to sleep but it's impossible with the ruckus they're making, clanking their hard bodies together.



Graphic by Mark Ulyseas.

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



STONE AND BONE

I visit your grave when I need you,
I call for you in my mind.

What is left of you
inside a cedar box
enclosed in a red granite sarcophagus

but the arch of your skull,
a Greek helmet on cheekbone ledges.
edged by your chin's diagonals.
A crucifix of vertebrae and scapula
resting on a pelvis plinth,
your phalanges stiff and pointed.

You, long-departed, dwell inside me
a little while longer.
I am no Hamlet you are not Yorick,
no speeches of pity or regret,
only faded gold letters
white-shitted by a crow.

Luciana Croci

SHAMAN

dust-laden grey-mud-brick walls mould into corridors
 if you brush your sleeve
 cobwebs and fifty years of gathered muck
 mark you
 stale cistern smell

you stumble along passages of sunken cobbled clay
 numbered doors ajar let you glimpse small rooms
 open to grass and woodland and lichen covered stones
 on your left a tapering wooden door marked chapel
 and lancet windows raise up downcast eyes

in this healing place
 even a stray grasshopper is delivered to the grass
 and we stray people looking for a path
 will retrace trails of old civilisations
 but not yet
 a totem guards the meeting room
 we will be called

the evening brings inauguration
 and we sit in commune with an Indian life-wheel
 hold ceremonial drums
 strike them lightly with a muted stick

the first sound is air gossamer soft
 as we contemplate beginnings
 our drum's gestation

water is the next cardinal point
 we beat a faster rhythm
 plans are set in motion simmer and expand

up-tempo pounds completion
 and success
 as the wheel turns
 we set the world on fire

the upper cardinal is earth
 past genesis, action and euphoria
 we pause
 and recall creation's heart beat

god is as close as the next mud-brick
 as we lay our hide on a table
 pencil the outline of the circle's hoop
 and let our scissors glide

left-over hide must be cut
 into one never-ending strap
 we will thread through the drum's edges
 to yoke the skin

one by one we plunge our leather circle into water
 and it will stay all night on the veranda
 absorbing softness
 our lacing we will keep in water near to us
 like a precious thing we nourish

continued overleaf..

SHAMAN *contd...*

unresisting, the soused hide stretches over its hoop
waiting to be laced and tightened
our fingers feed the whiplash line in one unending flow
across and over loop it under draw the whole length through
forty eight times
our drum has now become a swaddled child
we cut the binding cord

all that is left to do
is splice the strands into a handhold
to weave a sun so we can slip our fingers
between its beams
like proud Arachne we slide and interlace the twine
fixing six taut beams

splattered by raindrops we gather on the veranda
a fire is lit and we burn offerings of thanks
corn and tobacco like ancient Cherokees
watching grey smoke wind upwards



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas

Magdalena Ball is a novelist, poet, reviewer, interviewer, and is Managing Editor of *Compulsive Reader*. She is the author of several novels and poetry books, the most recent of which, *The Density of Compact Bone*, was published in 2021 by Ginninderra Press. She runs a podcast of writer interviews, and has been an active host at the Newcastle Writers Festival since its inaugural event in 2013, as well as other literary festivals such as the Hunter IF, the Sydney Writers Festival, and the Digital Writers Festival, and is currently working on a poetry book due out in late 2022 by Puncher & Wattmann. Find out more about Magdalena at Find out more about Magdalena at <http://www.magdalenaball.com>



CLEAN BONES

She kept her head low
left few footprints.
There weren't many traces.

Given the dates
we can work out what's possible
if you study the evidence, scant as it is.

Why go so far
leave behind everything
mother, father, siblings, home
forever
time being what it was
back then.

Why so many that year
arriving with the same look
tired, lost, fearful in sepia
clutching worn leather bags
a different migration
to my own
but everything is connected.

I wanted to know what it felt like
and you
needed to tell me
even after so many years

from the relative comfort
of your hidden grave
and clean bones.

Magdalena Ball

THE PALE OF SETTLEMENT

In Imperial Russia
from 1791 to 1917
it was forbidden for Jews
to live beyond The Pale of Settlement.

The Pale contained
the uncivilised, reprehensible
not-really-Russian
banished from the interior.

The original Pale
was designed to keep out
the unpredictable, unwashed, Irish.

A strip of land stretching
from Dundalk in Louth
to Daley in Dublin
subject to the English King.

From *Palus*, meaning fenced
as in paling fence
a boundary, ring bound.

Separate cultures forged
in the pressure of
exclusion
struggling against
an invisible
line of demarcation.

She could have gone to Ireland
instead of America
there was family there
so she heard.

There could have been cousins
anywhere, scattering from
sacred homelands

lost tribes, lost family
diaspora of the unwanted
reaching across oceans
and time
Pale to Pale.

TWO KOPEKS

Seven of them one room
 grandparents crouched small alcove below
 broken stove no daylight.

It was not always
 the winter before heating space a piano
 nimble fingers played in waning light
 curtains blowing
 two kopeks in her pocket for sweets.

The piano burned in the first pogrom
 no one wanted that music
 she could no longer remember the notes.

Seven hours they hid in the gap
 fear pungent rotting fruit
 gunshot windows shattering
 hands over her sister's mouth quiet *bitte*.

They knew then they would have to go
 not if only how
 who stays who goes
 passports take months
 cost more than they have

her grandparents would not have
 survived
 the long journey steerage

her brother already gone to Argentina
 smuggled across the border
 his ticket three times the agreed price
 worthless paper

the others would have to join later
 when she could send *gelt*
 order tickets there was a cousin
 her brother had already promised
 little sister crying *shtil bitte*
 promises rained onto the steamship she could not see
 from where she huddled
 for days she heard them falling in her head
 like the sound of gunshot
 and broken windows.

THE BLACK HUNDREDS

No one remembers anything
or if they remember
they didn't want to talk.

You start with a clue. A phrase.
Something resonant.
In this case, The Black Hundreds

whispered in shamed tones
without words
mouths working silently.

There were rumbles at first
the odd beating
break-through bleeding
neighbour against neighbour.

Antisocial, anti-liberal
antisemite: monarchists
knives, knuckle dusters, flags
devotion to the Tsar
House of Romanov
church and motherland.

Dry, metallic, caustic
plates falling off the sidebar
scrape of shoes on the tiles
two grooves in the dirt
where they dragged her auntie
her mother's high-pitched scream
almost above the human threshold.

Brutal signs were everywhere
blood, skin, broken bodies
the lintel hanging off the window.

Her mother gave her a bag of coins
the brass samovar, told her to pack
quickly.

You didn't need tea leaves
to read what was coming.

TAKEN WITH TIME

She knew the drill
it was familiar as sleep

a worn trajectory
voices in the distance, banging, barking

the doppler as they move closer
sound increasing in pitch

like a train bringing a cargo of atrocities
we needn't speak of it

it happened, it was in the past
she ran, closing her eyes: don't look back.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas

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



I AM EUROPE

All our belongings
my son's and mine
in a suitcase of cabin
luggage size

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept

He absentmindedly plays
on the edge of the no man's
land corridor —my country's
ensign behind, ahead
unspeakable future

There on the poplars we hung our harps

I reach out and call
him. The sun condoles
with us for a while
only —how long will that fleece
keep winter out?

Tear it down to its foundations!

Mothers and their children rush
by, an intent stare on the cell
phone screen —a fierce bid to
keep in touch

Infants dashed against the stones

I am Europe
and my sorrow is great.

Manuela Palacios

Mark Tredinnick is a celebrated Australian poet. His honours include two Premier's Prizes and the Montreal, Cardiff, Newcastle, Blake and ACU poetry prizes. His writing and teaching over twenty-five years have touched the lives and influenced the work of many; in 2020 Mark received an Order of Australia Medal for services to literature and education. His books include *Fire Diary*, *A Gathered Distance*, *The Blue Plateau*, and *The Little Red Writing Book*, and *Walking Underwater* (2021). His fifth collection, *A Beginner's Guide*, is just out.



THE IRIS

For Heather Tredinnick, my mother, at Eighty-five (2 February 2022)

NOT SO MUCH the white iris

in the garden, dishevelled
after rain, but the blue—furled

Inside its dignity, hat on straight, a small choir of them bunched here, as it
Happens, on the bench. Amethysts of the organic world
(And her birthstone, as I recall). Along the creek, cherry trees make ready,
Through ten warm years each year,
to blossom, if they're lucky, for a week.

But what passes, it transpires, is the only

thing that lasts—the anguish
of the child, the ease of middle years, the high

Notes, the few best days—and waiting makes all loveliness over into its own.
When it comes to birds, I couldn't say, but I find her in the hedges

With the wrens; I hear her in the piping

of the blackbird in the dusk. Trumpets

In the flue pipes, pigeons at the pedals;

fanfares and ligatures and runs: Each human life's a fugue

Too hard for anyone to play

half as well as anyone might like—
given the instrument, given the time.

Some parts of it are going to have to wait. But the world, in truth,
Is made of music, begun again by every lyric act—a mother's
Moves so many among them—

and devotion is the divination of the real.

Your days a sacred music, then, and a pastoral air or two.

A phosphorescence, like a happy cipher that goes on.

Mark Tredinnick

(HOLDING) MY FATHER'S HEART*For my father, Bruce Tredinnick, on his Ninetieth Birthday (7 October 2021)*

IF I COULD hold my father's heart,
 My hand would be a garden bed,
 And all the years he's turned, the art

He's practised on the plants, might shed—
 Like leaves, or evening light—some truth
 More true than most of what's been said:

On how to live a life of use,
 On how to raise a choir up,
 Without much of a voice to use

Yourself. My hand would be a cup
 In which the seasons pooled and rang
 And dogs and children's names ran up

And down suburban halls and sang
 The modest lessons thrift had schooled
 My father in—the soil's slang

For prospering on care and rules
 That tend to work no matter what
 The fashion says, for older tools

Are more the kind of thing that God
 Had by, when first he dreamed the Garden.
 How light are ninety years to hold.

The world when you were young fell hard
 From war into depression. You came
 Into a world in spring, time's gardens

Beginning again, a curate's time,
 The season of the shepherd. The world
 Was a parish, the world was a dairy farm,

When you took your first steps in it. The Word
 Was God and the word was God was good
 With a spade. And not too bad with numbers—

He saved more than he spent, they said;
 And you learned to see a berry where others
 Saw only straw. You understood,

Inside the hope that raised you, that faith
 Without delight or doubt is a plant
 Without a prospect. And from your father

You learned to take the kind of chance
 Creation takes with time—small moves
 Achieve the greatest ground. And patience,

The art of the Earth, will always prove
 The wiser way in the end. If I
 Could hold my father's heart, this trove

Of moments, small ways standing by,
 It wouldn't be a weight of words
 I held, but a kind of levity,
 A lightness of touch, a flight of birds.

Matina Doumos is a resident of Athens, Greece, where poetry is inspired by the beauty and the destruction of the natural world, history, social upheaval, and great poets through the ages. Her poems and translations have been published in *Hecate Journal*, *Southerly*, *Antipodes (a Global Journal of Australian/New Zealand Literature)*, *Antipodes (Journal of the Greek Australian Cultural League)*, *Live Encounters*, and *Poetry for the Planet* (Australian Conservation Foundation Anthology).



CYBERNAUTS

Nights we spend in the Office, Antony
and I, crouched before our blue-lit
aquariums, scanning the waves for clues
and ticking tiny little boxes, distilling
our decisions into Cybernauts;

with salt still pricking our eyes we click
them post-haste through the portal –
immortal and aglow with plankton they
emerge, blinking on a screen by some
one's pillow, nanoseconds later.

And was it very different I ask him, when
letters traversed unimaginable oceans
to arrive still crackling with emotion,
unfolding from their paper arms
a sea-star pressed in acid disappointment?

But Antony has never received a letter.
He is lost again in wonder, swimming
through electron seas, the way a prayer
straying into space confronts the universe
with neither compass nor direction.

We sleep in our clothes, two castaways
on a blue lagoon shore. At dawn, outside
the Office windows, jagged mountains appear,
and data clouds spitting technicolor dust,
as I raise my hand to the soot-stained blind.

Matina Doumos

SNOW CROCUSES

Carnival over, the mountain
sheds her snowy mask
and stares up at the sun
in silence.

Eroded and burnt,
ravaged by roads,
reluctantly
she summons her strength
for love,

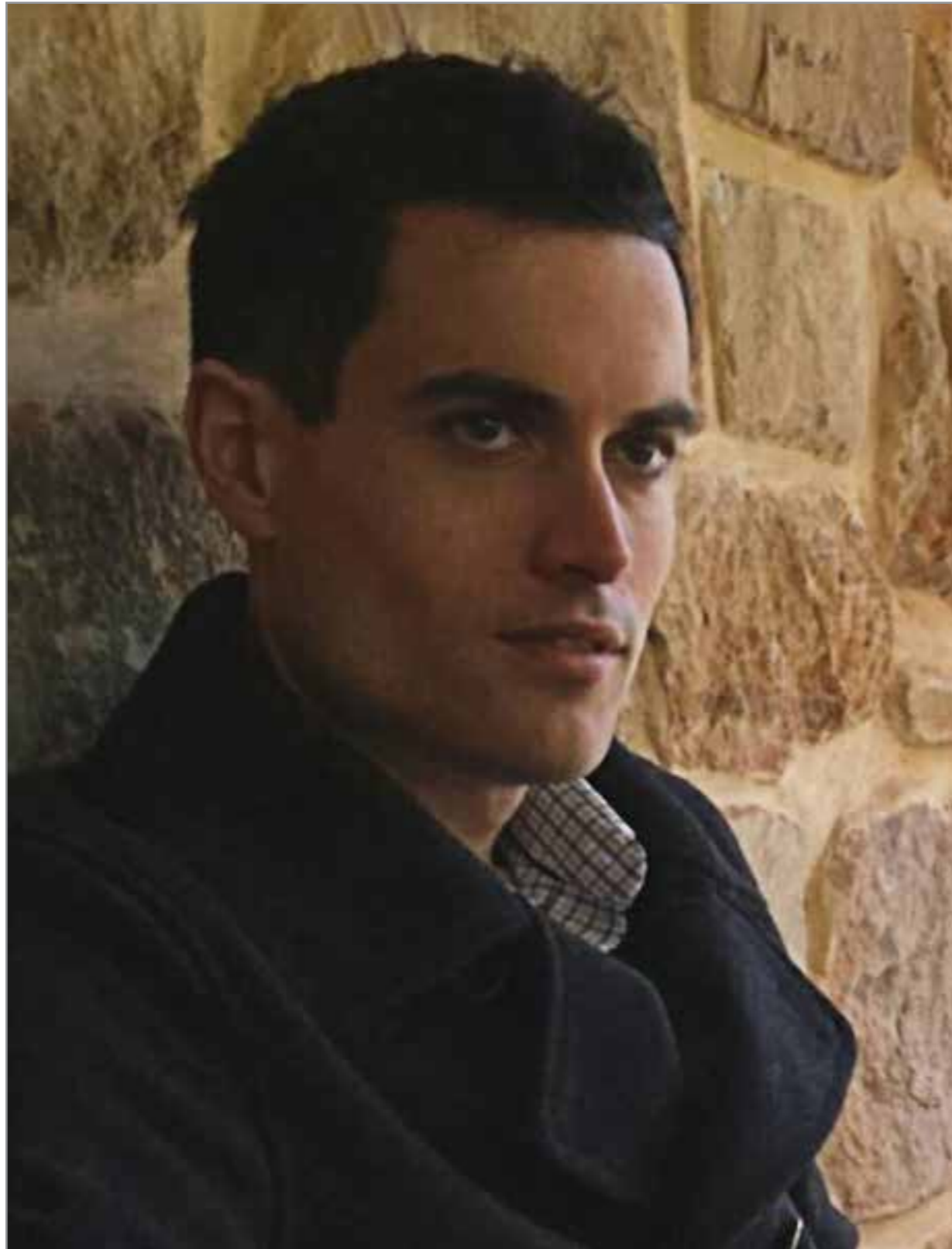
but as he caresses her
limestone bones,
her frozen hollows,
she responds with a delegation
of crocuses.

Delicately they raise their goblets
to the sky,
lilac and shy,
drink the sunlight down
their golden throats,

and offer all atremble
in their tunicated corms
a gift distilled the winter long
from earth wind fire
and ice.

Come evening
the sun shakes
from his crimson sleeve
a petal,
and wraps it
like a question
round the mountain.

Michael J Leach (@m_jeach) is an Australian academic and poet who lives on unceded Dja Dja Wurrung Country and acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands. Michael teaches and conducts research at the Monash University School of Rural Health, Bendigo. His poems reside in *Plumwood Mountain*, *NatureVolve*, *Jalmurra*, *Rabbit*, *Meniscus*, *Cordite*, *Verandah*, *The Blue Nib*, the *Medical Journal of Australia*, the *Antarctic Poetry Exhibition*, and elsewhere. He won the *UniSA Mental Health and Wellbeing Poetry Competition* (2015) and received a commendation in the *Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine* (2021). Michael's debut poetry collection is the chapbook *Chronicity* (Melbourne Poets Union, 2020). His first full-length poetry collection, *Natural Philosophies*, is forthcoming from Recent Work Press (<https://recentworkpress.com/product/natural-philosophies/>).



TO-DAY

to-day
is the reverse
of a slow news day

to-day
chills my chest
in more than one way

to-day
we lean towards
& away from the fray

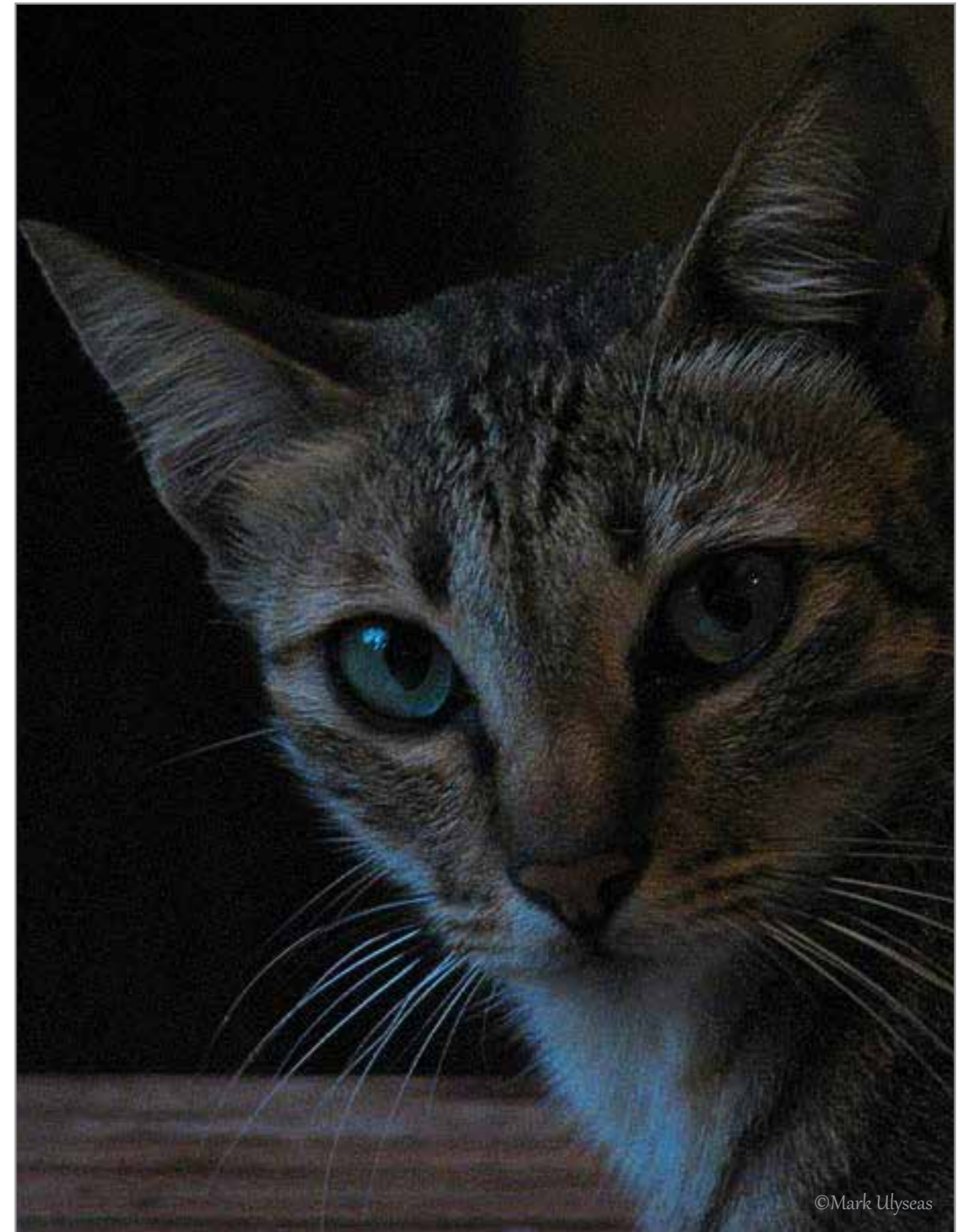
to-day
i listen to Paul
M. sing 'Yesterday'

each day
i wish lives lost
could stay

Michael J Leach

HOUSEBODIES

near the outhouse
 there's a house
 housing
 half a houseful
 of house-sitters
 who feed house pets
 tend house plants
 shoo houseflies
 leave the housekey
 hanging on a house-shaped holder
 they're under house arrest
 they're playing house
 they're watching *House*
 watching *Full House*
 watching *Animal House*
 watching *Life as a House*
 watching *House of Sand and Fog*
 watching art house films too
 they're listening to deep house music
 downing a stale gingerbread house
 buying heaps of little green houses
 dealing full houses
 drinking all the house red
 & all the house white
 without any house guests
 without much housekeeping
 without a buck of household debt
 without a house to call home
 without leaving the house



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas

Miriam Hechtman is an Australian writer, producer and poet. She is the founder and creative director of Poetica, a live poetry and music initiative and presenter of Wordsmith – the poetry podcast. She is also the editor and curator of *The Alphabet of Women* (Ginninderra Press 2022). Miriam also partnered with UK photographer Harry Borden on the book *SURVIVOR – A Portrait of the Survivors of the Holocaust* (Hachette 2017). An avid traveller, currently Miriam is based in Sydney with her husband and two daughters. www.movingtrainsproductions.com



BULLET POINTS

(inspired by Jericho Brown in memory of all those who perished in the Holocaust)

I will not wear this yellow star?

No.

I will flutter these blue eyes?

Yes.

I will scale the city at night, my blonde hair illuminated by street lights?

Yes.

You will join me?

No.

I will change my name?

Yes.

I will lie, steal, and then lie to you about lying?

Yes.

You will believe me?

No.

You will say nothing?

Yes.

The trauma will begin here,

in our home

with a bag of potatoes,

a loaf of bread

and eyes that won't meet?

Yes.

And we will never speak of this?

No.

And this city will keep our secrets?

Yes.

Over your dead body.

Miriam Hechtman

SHESH BESH

there is no poem in me today
just a story of a father and a daughter
and a daughter and a father
and all that was unspoken
and all that spoke too much
and how love was played out
in a game of backgammon
in a hospital room
with the blinds drawn
and the helicopter pad in view
waiting

BELOVED FRIEND

There are many ways to love
Many ways to boil a chicken
Chop the carrots, cut the onion
Skim the fat, measure the salt
Add the parsley, then the dill
Not let it wilt
Retain the bright green

When we parted
There were many ways to let you go
On the phone, in a letter
In an email, a text
Song lines after song lines
With words
Without

Beloved friend
I still think of you
How we passed each other on the trams
That winter day in Melbourne
St Kilda's electrical skyline
Number 67
Our eyes met from our parallel carriages

The fleeting joy of recognition
Time slowed down
Sound stretched around the concrete bends in the road
Little did we know
How this would be
A snapshot of our future
Traveling in opposite directions

Ukaj was born in Kosova, in 1977 and is a writer, essayist, and literary critic. To date, he has published four poetry books, one short story collection, and two literary criticism books. He won several awards, including the national award for best book of poetry published in 2010 in Kosovo. His literary works have been published in distinguished international anthologies and journals and have been translated into many languages.

(Translated from Albanian by Edita Kuçi Ukaj)



Ndue Ukaj

WAR

All the legends, stories, and histories about the war are full of nightmares and sadness.

It was not known when, where, and why the first war on earth took place, but one thing was well known: the earliest human battle, or the first and at the same time the most terrible and cruelest, had not taken place between two states, two religions, two ethnicities, two tribes, under the sound of war drums and armies that holds two pairs of flags, but between two people. And the most horrible thing was that that war took place between two brothers.

Therefore, most of the explanations given for the war sounded unjust, because they ignored this truth of the beginning of the time.

So, the origin of the war, as it was known for a long time, could not be related to a thought event which was preceded by an irritation between two armies, between two nations, between two powers, between two religions, between two tribes or between two fierce continents, but precisely, the first war had taken place between two brothers, one brutal and the other meek.

And this day was the most tragic day remembered on earth.

That day, everything had happened insidiously, on a beautiful summer morning, near a river as clear as the June sky, when Cain, enraged by an unstable state of mind, had gone out to see his land, the trees, the fields planted with fruit. But darkness had descended upon his eyes, and he was possessed by the poison of hatred as if he had been bitten by a black serpent, and hatred had broken out in his eyes. In that state, without thinking, he had twice attacked Abel, his brother, when he, at that moment, was with his eyes toward a new morning, gazing at the beautiful sky, as he saw the white smoke of his devotion taking shape as a cloud of happiness.

When this cruelty happened, there were no commanders on the earth, senior leaders, organized structures, or drums that warned the war, and then, its end, the victory of one side and the defeat of the other. The cries of horrible ravens chasing corpses were not even heard, and nowhere were crowds seen with flags in their hands, chanting victory, victory, victory... and the defeated, beyond the pain, pulling slain soldiers, desperate, with flags of submission under his armpits.

But it had been a body lying on the ground and one that had wandered shocked from one corner to the other corner of the earth, sprinkling the earth with innocent blood.

So, at the time of the first human war, flags were not invented on earth, nor were languages mixed.

But it had been quite different from other subsequent wars that had been recorded later in human memory.

The wars - were usually well thought out and prepared by many people, and once developed, they ended in peace, or, as the political language put it, by agreement, and that piece of agreement could be broken, like an unhappy marriage.

And usually, the later wars had started with the drum of war and had ended, also with the drum of peace. Then the whole event was followed by a magnificent scene on the side of the winners, with triumphant flags, songs, and dances, and on the side of the losers, with woe, wives with tears, pain, swearing for betrayal, and endless contempt and horror.

In most of the wars that were recorded in human memory, there was a barrage of news and mediators between losers and winners. God had sometimes intervened in these confusing human affairs.

But the matter of the earliest war between the two brothers was quite different. That war was never over. There was never an attack or a defense, but only an attack and a death. For one party died and left no heirs, while the other, the triumphant one, wandered from corner to corner, finding no rest, and left many heirs on earth.

History, though it did not place this event in the great wars and did not establish it as the greatest human war, it was the essence of existence, and as such, it was the most terrible war that had ever taken place on earth.

That is why it was said - even in our day - that people continued to pay for the sins of Cain, that vengeful and furious murderer, who out of hatred hit his brother in the back, washing in blood. This was the truth of the origin of war, this human disease, which was conceived in a man and which then became a worldwide plague.

Unlike all subsequent wars, which had a certain order, a beginning, a development, and an end, the battle between the two brothers had neither of those parts, so it can be called an unfinished war.

*

After the Tower of Babel was burned and the languages became confused, people no longer understood each other. Then, enraged and confused, they invented flags and symbols of the strangest, with which they identified and for which they shed their blood and the blood of others. And all the wars were ignited by utterly banal misunderstandings, the robbery of a beautiful woman, and then their fire grew so fast that it scorched many in it.

Later, in times called modern, powerful rulers, seeing that the human race was not recovering from this terrible disease, they had dreamed of bringing back to earth a single language, but they all died in despair because no one had succeeded.

Seeing all this nonsense, man invented gods of war, but it never occurred to him to create a god of peace, whose kingdom would invade the earth at least once, like a morning sun of peace. And so, things were elaborated to date. So, in the season of peace, people ate and drank, rejoiced, and fell in love, but all the time they kept their minds on war, so they prepared for it, as the people in my village prepared for winter.

In our time, there were many flags, languages, war drums that sounded daily, horrible, like raven griefs, that in early wars carried corpses.

Surprisingly, war drums dropped incessantly, even when wars did not occur or appear on the horizon.

So, people could finally be said to have become accustomed to wars, just as they had become accustomed to seasons. They were preparing in fear for the difficult seasons. And, although they liked spring and summer, they knew that one day they would enter sadly even in the rainy autumn and stormy winter.

In my village, people rejoiced immensely when spring was long and their happiness seemed endless. But it had seldom happened that they forgot winter and did not prepare for it.

For this reason, the elders of my country, bent over, frost winters. And then, when spring came, they rejoiced immeasurably, but despite the multitude of swallows they saw in the sky, their minds were on the stormy winter season.

And it often happened that at the height of summer, when the sun was shining, you would hear them say: The terrible winter that must have come upon us will come again.

The winters in my village had never been the same. Even the stories of wars had never been the same, so even in recent times, voices had begun to tingle, like lonely birds, asking science to find a cure for this disease.

If a complete cure were not possible, it would be likely to reduce the pain of this disease.

*

It was even rumored that in the coming days the world's scientists could gather in the great planetary assembly - the first of its kind in history - and try to find the weapon of peace, a weapon that could destroy all weapons of war and then uproot the poisonous seed from the ground once and for all. But until that happened, people would continue to prepare for war, just as my frightened villagers always prepared for winter.

*

It is yet the summertime and the swallows look like the evening's stars in the endless sky of hope. But winter can come much sooner than expected, so a lot of work was required and someone had to stay awake, to listen to the first drums and have a sound ear, never to confuse peace drums with those of war.

At least they should be vigilant, until that glorious day, when the doors of the assembly will be slowly open and from there, the great news of the creation of the weapon of peace will be proclaimed.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas

Patricia Sykes is a poet and librettist. Her poems and collections have received various nominations and awards, including the Newcastle Poetry Prize, John Shaw Neilson award and the Tom Howard Poetry Prize. Short listings include the Anne Elder, Mary Gilmore, and Judith Wright Awards. She has read her work widely, including on Australian, Paris and New Zealand radio. It has also been the subject of ABC radio programs, Poetica and The Spirit of Things. Her collaborations with composer Liza Lim have been performed in Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, Paris, Germany, Russia, New York and the UK. She was Asialink Writer in Residence, Malaysia, 2006. A selection of her poems was published in an English/Chinese edition by Flying Island Books in 2017. A song cycle composed by Andrew Aronowicz, based on her collection *The Abbotsford Mysteries*, premiered at The Abbotsford Convent Melbourne — now an arts precinct — in 2019.



IN TRUST OF TREES

Surrounded by height
in a forest so dense
trees nudge each other's
light. Their age, my
infancy equally
dependent on a sun

so distant only mind
can fathom it.
The artist whose hut
discovered a clearing
plays jeopardy,
with branch fall,

bushfire, drought.
Nature teaches art
the epitome of risk
she says, which is
why she chooses it
above bustle, crush.

We debate the hazards
of remote-V-urban
wild-V-tamed, our
encodings freeing
nothing, changing
nothing, each other's

trajectories a mere
breathing space
we lair within
until dusk arraigns
my feet again
to bitumen

Patricia Sykes

PERMANENT ELEPHANT

On the scale of pachyderm you're minute,
 skilfully made, an intricate mesh
 silvery and industrial

strong enough to uphold your trunk
 without killing fragility
 a weight not less but more

the way symbols matter
 in the heft. Caged
 inside a cabinet's lustre

you glimmer mutely, far
 from elephant graveyards
 where tenderness

could mourn your bones.
 Instead the fingerprints of human
 sticky and admiring

you as art's pure captive
 safe from poaching's short gain
 and a lifetime's beleaguered

ivory. A meagre redress
 roof instead of sky
 wrought in lieu of wild.

FLOW: ANTITHESIS

You must not sing of course
 or think beautifully.
 Lyrics are suspect.

To discriminate
 be acutely diversive
 though some are unwilling

to suppress/oppress media.
 Definitely each fingerprint
 found at the shoreline traces

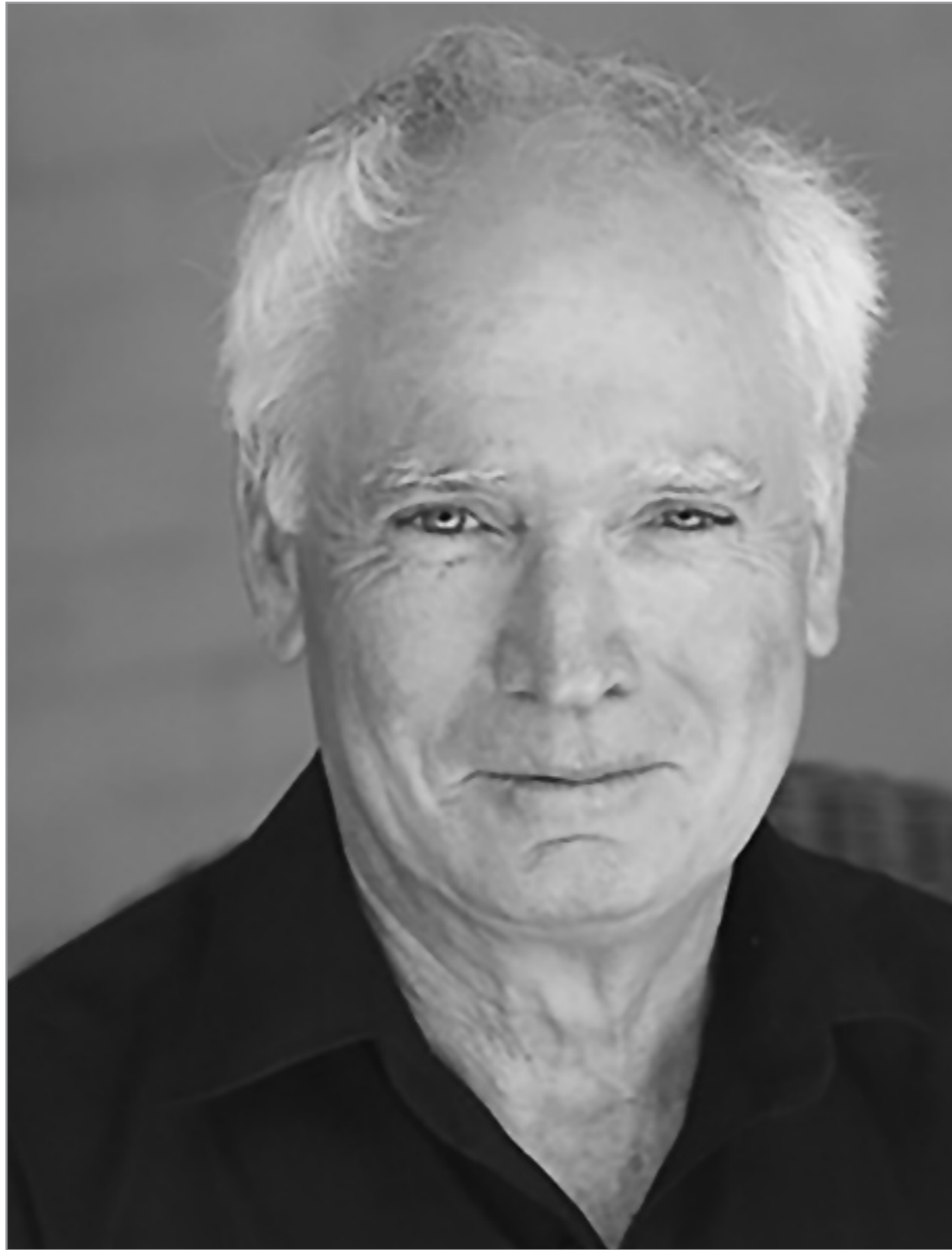
back to its source. Effluence
 too reveals its own trajectory
 while bacteria always finds

new inlets. Shimmers
 of brain fatigue waft
 dreamily above the tide

as respiration continues
 to tremble each lung. If
 there's to be an epitaph

let it feed the cheese
 let it mould on the shelf.
 Time's rats will do the rest.

Peter Boyle is a Sydney-based poet and translator of poetry. He has ten books of poetry published and eight books as a translator of poetry from Spanish. His most recent collection is *Ideas of Travel* (Vagabond Press, 2022). In 2020 his book *Enfolded in the Wings of a Great Darkness* won the New South Wales Premier's Award for Poetry.



IN A WAITING ROOM

What she notices first:
 there are no clocks
 and the room is cold the way
 only lifeless places are cold.
 Where she waits
 half standing, half sitting,
 the chair and her dimensions are all wrong
 as if she has been scooped into some container
 never intended for a human body.

Indistinguishable from earth
 her brown boots perched on dull grey tiles
 threaten to dissolve, taking her legs with them
 while the blue sweep of her dress, her wide
 black hat offer all the defences left
 to one randomly summoned
 for a long train journey.

The direction of planets must guide
 her now, the star map
 imprinted on memory.
 Through her deep black eyes
 the world etches itself
 into her.

And no one else is in the room.
 And there is nowhere beyond the room
 which already, like herself,
 is fading.

Peter Boyle

THE SADNESS OF THE KING

To be among bright purple flowers
surrounded by the sharp green of familiar shrubs
and be long attuned to the gold drum
as it shapes a dark contour behind the blue lute
and its riff towards the orange sky

to have one's hands bathed in scents
of sandalwood and frangipani,
to know the pungent fragrance
of night jasmine settling
on a row of thatched houses

and to have known lovers and children
and heralds announcing distant triumphs of armies,
to have received gift-bearing embassies
from kings and princes on remote islands

to hear parrots as they translate
their greens, blues and crimsons
into flashes of iridescent song
and to go on listening as the wind lifts and scatters
the tapestry of the night markets
with their hammering, their cries, their chatter

even to have lived always among trees,
breathing the nectar of peach blossom,
one's chest marked in silver dotted lines,
one's fingernails lacquered
in indigo tears,

what does it matter now
when the only thing that has come
truly from oneself
is sadness?

See -- from the steps at the garden's far corner
the beloved's torso, bloated in death,
exits with no pause for eloquence:

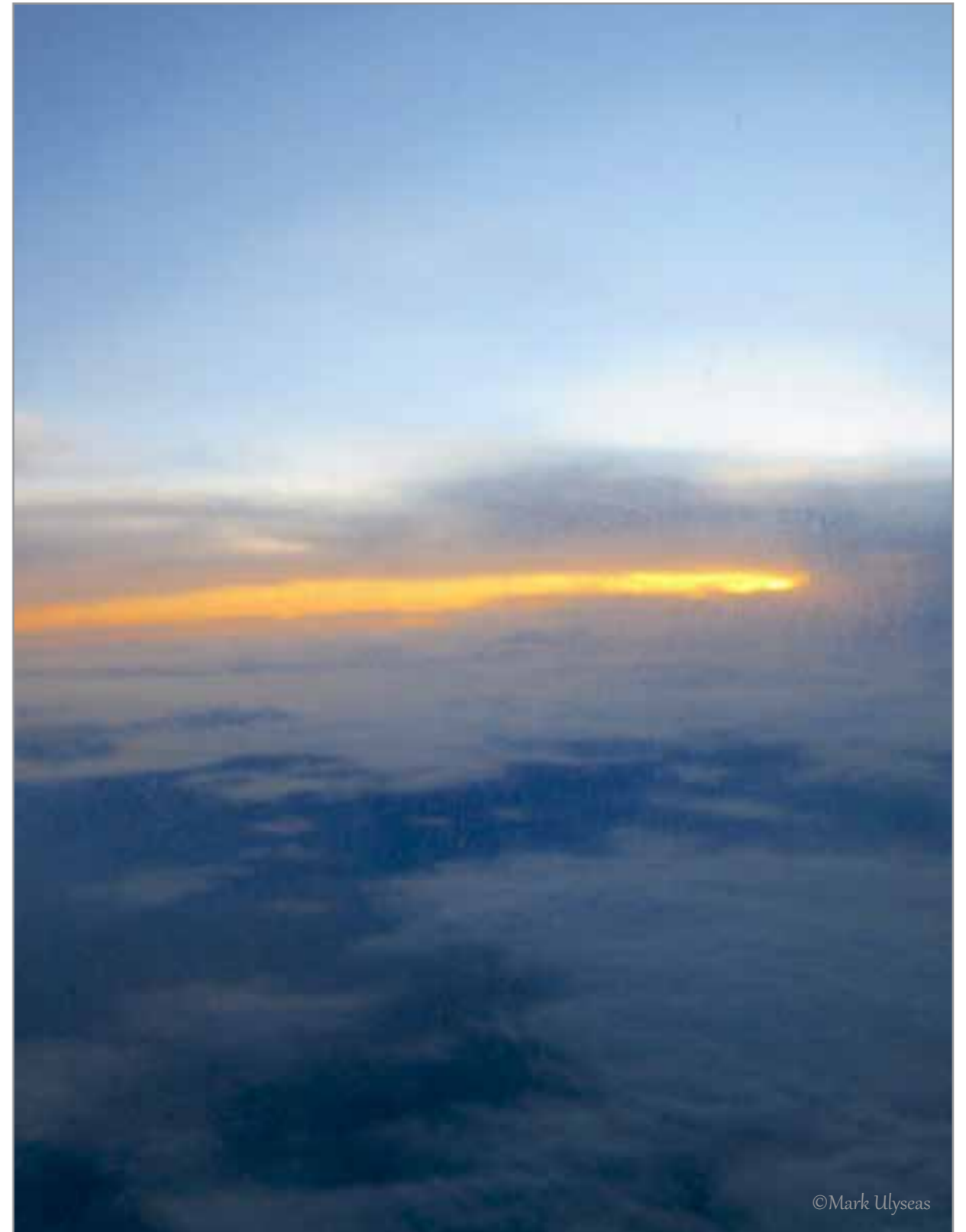
the guitar is playing without hands,
the golden petals filter down.

FOR A YOUNG POET

Magical things are close at hand --
the icon shimmers in the wall niche
at the bending of the house's
twin corridors, a bearded archangel
nestles quietly in the alcove
where the washing is drying,
two tablets of the law
are concealed in the rafters.

If you come from the land of the sleepless
or have ventured here
from the wide plains of disquiet
you will find water in the fridge
harvested from juniper leaves,
sacred to forgiveness.
Under the rocks in the side garden
is a small doorway that leads down
into an altered life.

You remove the rocks,
you drink the water
and in the long dreams that follow
very slowly you transform
into yourself.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas

Phillip worked for many years as a teacher of outdoor education and sport throughout regional and remote Australia. He now resides in the Melbourne suburb of Sunshine where he is a passionate member of the Western Bulldogs Football Club. Phillip's poetry, essays and reviews can be seen in such spaces as *Best Australian Poems*, *The Blue Nib*, *Cordite Poetry Review* & *Plumwood Mountain*; while his poetry collections include: *Sweetened in Coals* (Ginninderra Press), *Borrooloola Class* (IPSI), *Fume* (UWAP), *Cactus* (Recent Work Press), and (as editor) *Diwurruwurru: Poetry from the Gulf of Carpentaria* (Blank Rune Press). He co-publishes the poetry e-journal, *Burrow*, at: <https://oldwaterratpublishing.com>



THE KAFKAESQUE

On reading Leviticus

From his sanatorium, amidst the medical staff's feeble
and monotonous tinkling, Kafka confronted to no avail, his anxieties
around the discharge
of semen, and all those other impurities
like swellings, scabs, discolorations, boils and loss
of hair

Kafka knew that a rabbi should be called
if ever he was to be rid
of mildew, and he obsessed over the wording
of Spinoza's *cherem*,
all that vomiting out because of things less than trimmed beards
and the stylish espousal
of vestments fashioned from twinned fabrics

Kafka was squeamish
about the whole kit and caboodle of inflated, scriptural
offering burnt (there really was *no* conquest) but, he supposed, devotion
to judgment, wrath and plague
is divine display, and he lamented that tolerance is unapocalyptic
since he had been born a punching bag (*this not that*)
and like the sons of Aaron, consumed
by father's rage

Kafka felt baffled
by long hours of unpaid over-time, trapped
in a maze of insurance service where intractability was a dry
papery presence, and negligence
the only blessing

Phillip Hall

Pratibha Castle's award-winning debut pamphlet *A Triptych of Birds and A Few Loose Feathers* (Hedgehog Poetry Press) was published in February 2022. Irish born, resident in W. Sussex, she studied creative writing as a mature student at University of Chichester in 2009. Her work appears in *Agenda*, *HU*, *Blue Nib*, *OHC*, *London Grip* amongst others. Highly commended and long-listed in competitions including The Bridport Poetry Prize, Welsh Poetry Competition, Gloucestershire Poetry Society Competition, Brian Dempsey Memorial Competition, Sentinel Literary Journal Competition, she is also anthologised. A regular reader at *The Poetry Place*, she can be heard on Home Stage: Meet the Poet reading and talking about the inspiration for her writing.



AFTER HAROLD GILMAN *Tea in a Bedsitter 1916*

The room is an underwater cave
where we two women
tout a sham harmony.

Our glances glissando past a chair, vacant
for a hero who will not return.
man we both desired.

Nessa probes. Scavenger fish,
she nuzzles my loss. Sea anemone,
fronds aflutter, fingering for crumbs.

My turned-away back provokes.
Nudges prosper to a gull's scissor-stabs
guzzling dead snapper.

Kettle hiss, a memory of waves splashing,
leaping at bare legs as the man
twirled me at the water's edge.

White tongues, myriad as stars,
love's vows, drenching till
dropping behind a dune, we shared

strawberries, salt kisses, flesh. Rocking
in the suck and swell, a tern's
limp form, shattered pledge

continued overleaf..

Pratibha Castle

AFTER HAROLD GILMAN

contd...

of safe return. Wrecked hull
poking from the sand,
abandoned hope.

Her words crowd in on me, fish
shoaling, silver-scavenging my silence;
nip toes, tickles sharpening to needle stings.

I daydream a cat, asleep on a cushion
before a log-coddled fire, curled
in on itself like a woman's longings.

Tail aflicker, it sniffs treats. Milk
on our granny's saucer, porcelain,
Venetian blue. Chicken breast, diced fine.

Vain lures to tempt it to a lap.

My dress strains, tightens. Hints
my heart would hide, cradle
like bright gems.
Rubies. Pearls, calcified tears.



Tea in the Bedsitter, Harold Gilman (1876–1919), Kirklees Museums and Galleries.

JUMBLE

Tucked in the pocket
of an Afghan coat along
with anarchy of hankies

Fox's glacier mints wrinkled
ticket to Shepherd's Bush
for a long-ago rendezvous

with a man who failed to show
you glimpsed a week ago
in Holland Park limping leaning

on the arm of a crone and a silver
capped cane his hair a dandelion clock
about to blow neck brace eyes

no duller fifty years on than
the day down Portobello Road
he flourished a puce silk cravat

out from under stained sheets
in a tea chest beside a bric-à-brac stall
beyond *The Sun in Splendour* you

jealous of a girl he smiled at sat on the kerb
her bare feet in the gutter in company
with a blue-mould orange crumpled Rizla pack

a henna-haired flower in purple gypsy skirt
and see-through muslin blouse
you itched to pluck to crush

sipping on a joint the air a ferment
of rotten apples patchouli
Love the One You're With

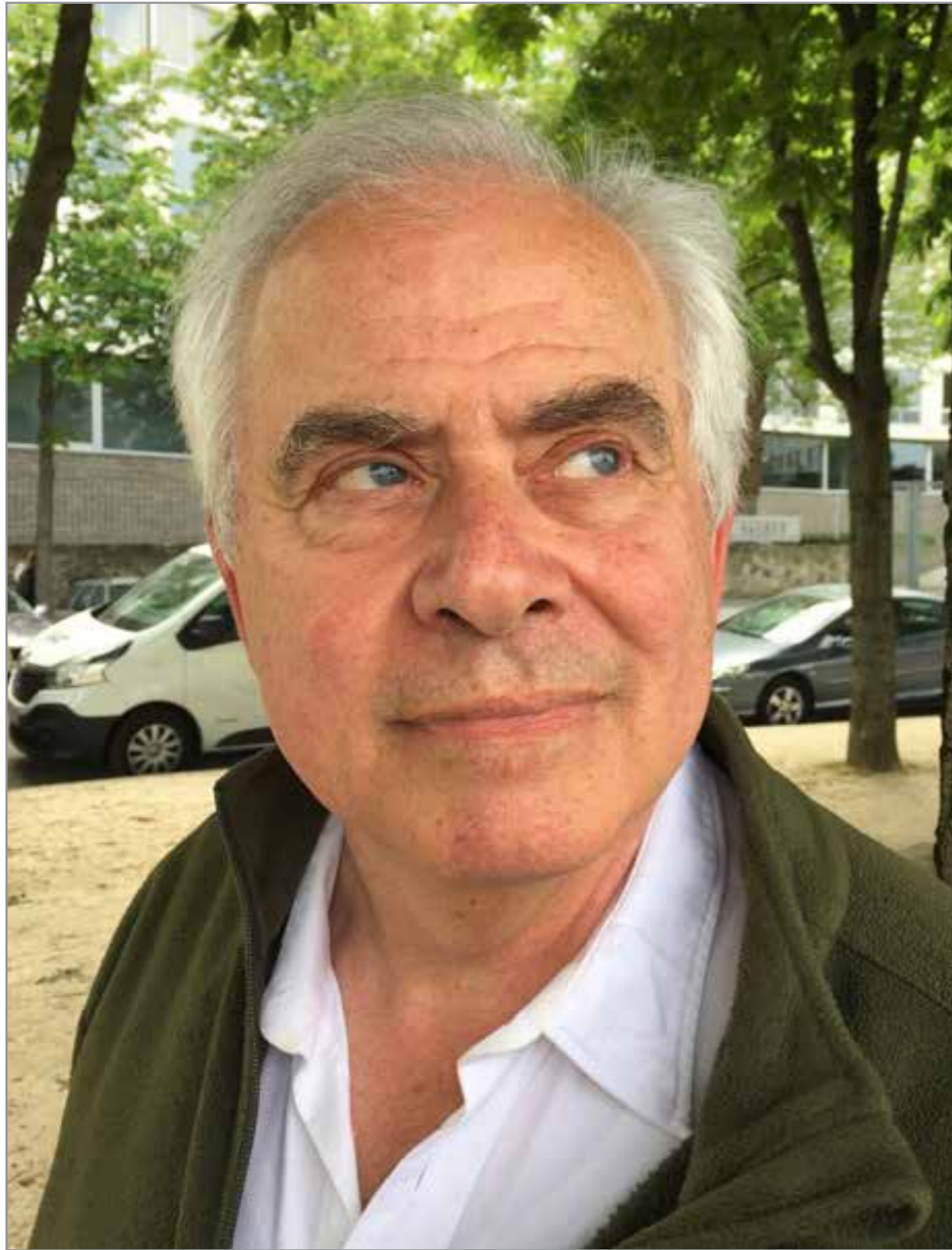
drifting out an open window his maestro's hands
that night white and fluent charming
you all aquiver from your lair

of convent niceties and doubts
hexing with murmured phrases
coaxing till you pledged

to banish *Quleque Fleurs*
and Arden's *Apple Blossom*
douse yourself in *Eau de Sauvage*

sharpen fangs claws howl
at the moon canticles
despoiled at Shepherd's Bush to curses

Richard W. Halperin has Irish/U.S. dual nationality and lives in Paris. He has published four collections via Salmon Poetry, Cliffs of Moher. The most recent is *Catch Me While You Have the Light*, 2018. In complement, he has published sixteen shorter collections via Lapwing Publications, Belfast. The most recent is *A Ballet for Martha*, 2022. In Spring 2023, Salmon is to bring out *Selected & New Poems*, drawn from both Salmon and Lapwing works. On 6 April 2022, Mr. Halperin will give his first poetry reading in over two years: a joint reading at The People's Museum, Limerick, in connection with Limerick: April Is Poetry Month.



VENICE 2

Church bells ring, waters lap, the barrier
between things is iridescent. Venice is
to time what music is to music. And so,
I have not aged, certainly not got wiser,
the wounds are all there, the rescues
are all there. Heaven and hell blur
like coloured oil stains on the floors of
the neighbourhood garages of my youth.
Mercy, I hope, is iridescent. Chances wasted
by corrupt politicians wash up on the stones.
The wrong kind of moneybags wash up on
the stones. The suffering brought about
by war – one going on as I write this,
the children running – wash up on
the stones. Our race may soon cease to be.
I think of a poetic film, *On the Beach*,
people dying from an approaching
radiation cloud, whose actors are
themselves poems – Gregory Peck,
Ava Gardner, Fred Astaire, Anthony Perkins.
'Brother, there is still time. Sister, there is
still time.' I think of a bridge in Venice
near the Fenice named after Maria Callas
who, in 1949, sang *I Puritani* there,
bringing back *bel canto* to a world which
had not heard it in a hundred years.

Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Bertrand A.

AUDEN

His project of a poem is not mine,
 nor that of any poet whose work
 I love. His music is distinct – all
 the anointed ones have their distinct
 music – but his I cannot whistle.
 For decades I tried to read him.
 Art, excellence, count as nothing
 if one doesn't care about a poem,
 and I didn't care. Recently a neighbour
 gave me an anthology which contained
 'On this Island.' I cared. I care.
 A great poet. A very great poet.
 I bought more of his. Love poems
 which are the goods. Witness.
 All the academic conventions he
 uses cannot suffocate the ardency
 of his soul. He mentions Hitler
 in a poem. I would never do that.
 The project of a poem. For those of
 my generation, he is one of the adults,
 but that does not explain this. Some
 of his poems are awful – so what?
 All poets write some awful poems.
 I am glad to have him in my house.
 He makes me know I do not know
 my house.

GLUED TOGETHER

Many years ago, at the house of a friend,
 I reached for a small volume of Auden's,
 a poet I had never read except for a poem,
 always anthologised, about a boy falling
 through space. In reaching, I dislodged
 from the shelf a Wedgewood bowl,
 which fell and broke into pieces, a family
 heirloom, I subsequently learned. Later
 the bowl was professionally glued together
 and put back on the shelf. After its fall,
 I started to read, and I did not like Auden.
 He wrote like no one I did like. Last month,
 I read *On this Island*. Whatever veil
 had separated him from me got jerked up
 to the flies. I have bought more. All the
 way to the end. The language, of course.
 When words push hard against reality
 and reality pushes hard back, you've got
 a poem. Yes, he was English. But when
 I open any of his poems, he is my New York.
 Many of my own dead come walking
 through the lines into my sitting room.
 I wish him calm seas and prosperous voyage.

A DOUGLAS POEM

*'... crying like a fool by the body and stroking the fur,
I sat bewildered as an orangutan,
pawing at its unmoving baby, and no wiser,
no wiser at all.'*

'The Lost Dog,' The Old Language

Poems of my friend Douglas Nicholas. The words go one after the other, take their time, as in a procession. They were always like that, even when he was nineteen. They have, they always had, the movement of going forward to the nothing which, when it happens, is for the moment, everything – mourners left behind. Then, that moment closes up, and there the poem still is. And there he still is. Even his use of grammar, always perfect, is a poem. His titles are often poems – 'Letter in the Middle of the Night'; 'Every Dear Receding Thing.' We now have books of them. Myself I do not need the books. The poems, as they came out one by one, formed part of me. I had at first wanted to call this poem 'Procession.' I chose the better title.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas

Roberta Beary has two award winning collections, *The Unworn Necklace* (Snapshot Press, 2007) and *Deflection* (Accents Publishing 2015). Her forthcoming book, *Carousel*, won the Snapshot Press Book Award. She coedited the international women's haiku anthology *Wishbone Moon* (Jacar Press, 2018.)



LAVA STONE VALENTINE

squeezing the tour bus into a space smaller than an alley those narrow walls suffocating me not believing the driver until he shouts and 20 pairs of eyes follow the tilt of his head in the mist the volcano nothing I expected but then you weren't either with your way of interrupting any tale I choose to tell even this one your elbow a sharp pin bursting my balloon of words get to the point your grey eyes urge and even the slate skies seem to take your side but that is just your way and isn't what we are a giving and taking a crossing to safety before the lava takes us and do your remember that day on Etna how I slipped on the black rocks and your hand fell away and the sun went dark behind the clouds of desire and the rumble of old passions stirred when I pocketed for you this talisman moulded by centuries of women fleeing their men and finding their way back again and again tell me you love me

Roberta Beary

I AM THE LAMP ON YOUR NIGHTSTAND

I watch over you at night reading David Copperfield on your iPad and you are the double bed with its blue-striped duvet and the window where a few stars burn and when you turn me out, saying time for bed, the iPad hums peacefully, its white noise app on ocean though I prefer oscillating fan, it's always ocean because I am the lamp gathering dust on your nightstand and you are the quayside, semi-detached with red door where even in daylight every corner of you is dark and unknowable.

RELATIONSHIPS (a haibun)

Are like a muddy stream that goes clear as you hold onto the hope that someone finally gets you and all your little quirks but that stream turns muddy again and you are left on your own watching a rose petal circle the water as day turns to dusk sometimes sinking sometimes rising

bonfire
a scent of woodsmoke
in her hair

Roisín Browne lives in Rush, Co Dublin and has been published in *A New Ulster*, *The Galway Review*, *Flare*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing*, *Poetry NI* and *Echoes from the Castle Anthology*. She was commended in the Gregory O'Donoghue Awards in 2018 and shortlisted in The Seventh Annual Bangor Poetry Competition in 2019. She recently performed her poetry with Ardgillan Creative Writers at the Fingal Poetry Festival 2021.



GESTATION

For Conor Seán

Dublin

It's baby steps again
a scribble of black felt ink
melting into my lined notebook.
The pages, hungry for letters, for words,
for mark making.

Montana

From inside my sister's belly
he is kicking, pushing heels to womb walls,
baby steps, tapping out his native rhythm;
getting ready to appear
for mark making.

Roisín Browne

PAINTRESS

i.m. Artemesia Gentileschi (Lomi) 1593-1656

In my hand, the mortar and pestle break the colour free,
each hour, each day, each week, in my father's workshop;
our home brims with students, easels, nudes.

Motherless, it is only men I see. No one sees me.
Neighbours say I never appear, that I am locked
inside the building, inside the acrid air of turpentine and linseed oil,
my solitary perfume.

In my hand I hold the brush, scarlet tipped and birth Susannah on the canvas.
I light her frame, turned from the Elders who shadow her;
these two figures, malevolent against my vibrant blue.
I sign my name.

Late, before a court, they say lies, all lies.
Those two, my father and my violator, will not utter truth.
Thumbs screws twist red, like he drew red from me.
He, one of my Father's artist men.

Later they say lies, all lies. I dream of Judith,
Holofernes' thick black tufts clenched in her fist.
I paint his sword, in her hand, on his neck,
ruby streams to decorate his bed.

After, I am married off, a banishment from infamy,
but in my hand the brush remains.
I use my maternal name to sign,
wear the gold of Patrons on my neck.

I illuminate for Kings and Dukes
I illuminate for Esther, Danae, even Mary of the Magadelenes.

I am daughter
I am woman
I am paintress

with colour I poison oblivion!

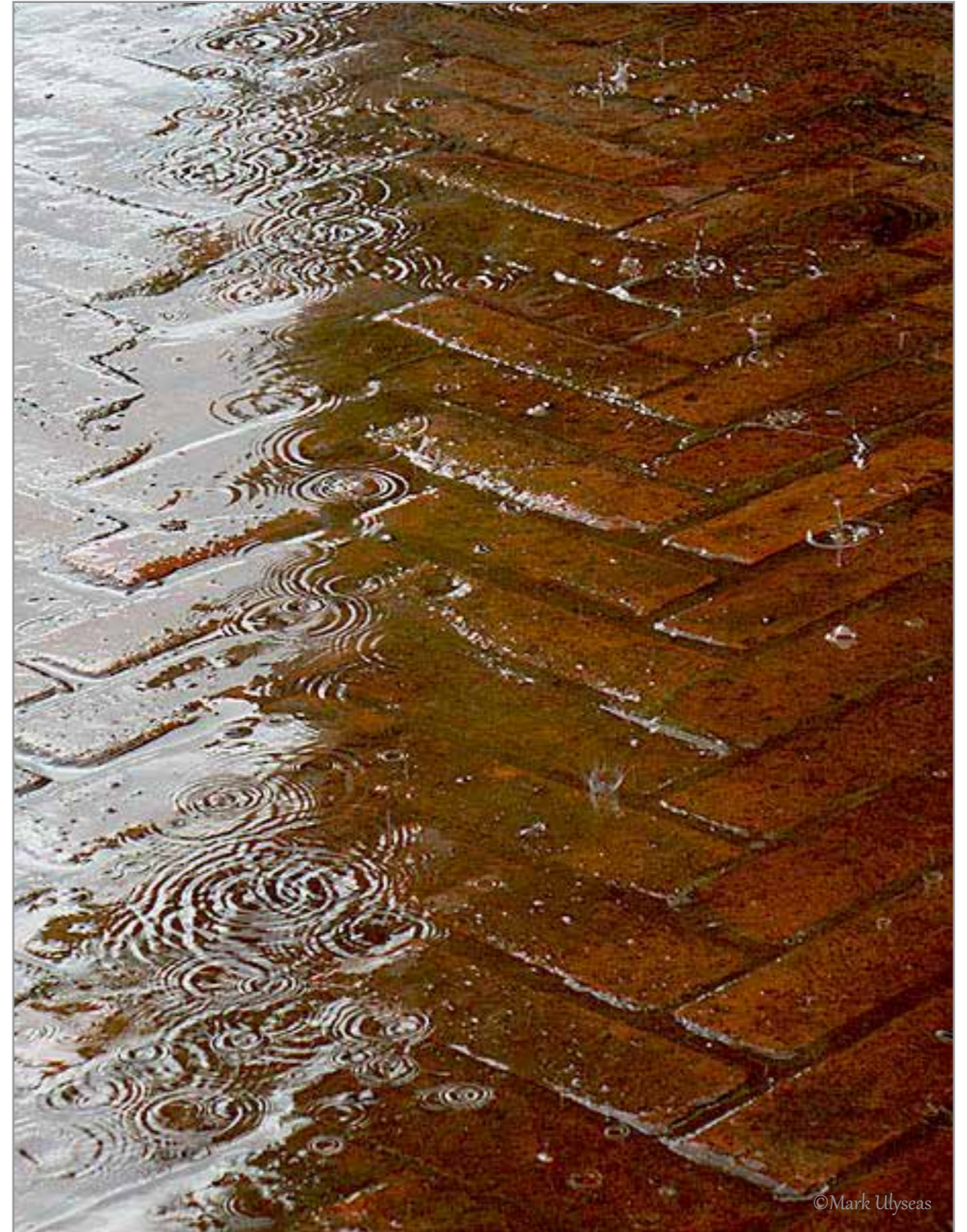
A POET READS AT THE MILL

She stands facing us, her audience
draped under a black canopy

She smiles, scans our gaze
her words ready to fill the evening

He sits in front of me, his left arm
rests on the empty chair,

through his black frames, I catch what he sees,
Poet Wife being, before the rain falls.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas

He is a sailor, an award-winning military journalist, and a poet. His creative work has featured with *Tinteán, A New Ulster, Live Encounters, Bangor Literary Journal, The Ranthology Anthology, Black Bough Poetry, The Boston Globe, Boston Accent, Poetry Jukebox, The Cobh Chronicle, The Silence Anthology*, and all his work can be read on www.paperneverrefusedink.com



UNDER THE BLUE SKY

Five names etched deep into the stone,
Whispering trees and dancing blackbirds,
Joyous swallows swoop,
Darting beneath the pine boughs,
Rushing life between the headstones,
Keeping memories unfaded under the blue sky,

Aching loss might ease with passing time,
As wind and rain erode the etchings,
When the lichen blankets each cracked stone fully,
The letters will be gone,
As might those in grief,
Hidden squirrels remain to keep little babes company,
Resting under the blue sky.

Gazing, at helium balloons spinning up,
Aching absence borne aloft for the dearly loved,
Crayon notes these soaring tokens,
That might break the earthly bonds,
No finer epitaph than a bed of snowdrops,
No stronger love reaching into a shroud of clouds,
When you come to visit me,
Will you laugh under the blue sky?

Ruairí de Barra

AUTUMN IS COMING

The swallows are gathering on the wires,
Days of the summer close in,
School children have started back learning,
Before life will become dormant again.

The apples will fall from their branches,
Auld gooseberry bush tis stripped clean,
Going are the days of great drying,
Now harvest our cupboards will fill.

The mackerel will flee from the harbour,
As lamenting of gulls fills your ear,
Bright herring boats pull into the quayside,
Autumn jars they are grandfather's pride.

The leaves they change in the hedgerows,
Summer fleeting over the hills,
Corncrake departs to silence the meadow,
Bites the edge of the wind with a chill.

The world has a wonderful abundance,
Nature's bounty endless and fair,
The seasons steady progression,
Journeys to the end of the year.

IN AWE OF LOVE

What is the texture of a Mother's love,
But diamond, clear & bright,
A certainty we're held in awe of,
Throughout life's strifes & slights.

Its dances lively across the heart,
And is now, as has always been,
Implanted deep at the very start,
Like the strong roofs stiffest beam.

For shelter beneath it all children do,
Enchanting care and endless grace,
And all fears & worries, by the dozens slew,
While held in the gentlest hands so true.

SEA GLASS

Who did hurl you that you came to rest,
Lost from your mortar,
At the high tide mark,
Here, were the sea licks Ireland,
As it takes its payment slowly,
Inch by sandy inch.

Like the child on summer days,
Consuming ice-cream cones,
With deliberation and care,
The restless wild waves motion,
Absorbing carparks & boardwalks,
Stone by stone.

Shaped by decades to pestle,
As if by the gentlest hand,
Of a seafoam sea sprite,
Dreamt up while draining,
Another flowing cup,
Dram by Dram.

PAINTED HARBOUR

Gaze across the painted harbour,
Far away from crying crowded piers,
Where the evanescent liner,
Breaks the sky then disappears,
Unwritten heartaches by the hundreds,
The empty tenders roll returning,
With their well-polished rails,
Such tasty work,
Nourished with linseed oil and tears.

Tony Hozeny is author of the novels *Driving Wheel* and *My House Is Dark* and numerous short stories. He has an MFA from Johns Hopkins and taught creative writing at four colleges. Over the past two years, he has placed several stories in literary magazines, two which have been anthologized. He plays mandolin in the Northern Comfort Band. He is married with three children and three grandchildren.



Tony Hozeny

REFLEX

At nightfall, Harlan and Marcia walked across the grassy field to their truck, though the country music festival was still going strong,

“Did you like the music?” he asked.

“I wish I’d thought to bring bug spray,” she said, slapping at her neck. “The music was okay. But sitting outside, all those people”---

“Once was enough?”

She nodded, then added, “But it’s always nice to get out and go someplace.”

“It’s kind of funny,” he said. “All those years, stuck running the store like we were, this festival just ten miles down the road, and we never went.”

They reached the truck.

“Now, Harlan, give me the keys. You know we have to drive back through the woods, and you don’t see that well at night anymore, and as we age, you know, our reflexes get slow, and sometimes you kind of drift over the centerline”---

“No centerline on a gravel road,” Harlan said, chuckling. “I’m fine. Just get in.”

“You had two beers. You could get sleepy.”

He started the engine.

“You’re so stubborn,” she said. “You just won’t accept the fact that you’re getting older.”

He rolled out of the lot and down about a mile south to the turnout. Even with a big yellow moon and the brights on, it was hard to see with the black forest all around and the tires kicking up so much dust. As he rounded a curve, Marcia screamed---an elk flashed across the front of the car, so fast, so close he could see the whites of its eyes, its gaping mouth and white teeth, feel the elk's terror and his own, as in that second he saw and heard and felt what would be a sickening crash, crushed metal and spurting blood, the elk's hindlegs kicking through the windshield, killing him and Marcia; and way back in his mind he could hear Marcia screaming and screaming.

He slammed on the brakes, the car's left front fender barely missing the elk's hindlegs, and he heard the elk crashing through the underbrush, safe. He exhaled. Marcia was shaking. He touched her shoulder, then took her hand and kissed it.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas

Tracie is an Australian high school English teacher living in the native bushland of Whangarei, New Zealand. She has an array of poetry and fiction published in Australia, New Zealand, India, Ireland, and Indonesia.



ON THE WIND

A flourish
announces the arrival of
a moment
where shade
is inverted
cast within
until time,
on the wind
travels fast and slow
without moving
outside or inside
an atmosphere
and shade bends perfect shapes
where we can lie
protected
after the moment
has passed
and maybe
you want to
shed sunlight
back on that moment
now gone on the wind
a photo edit
to enhance
the things you
want to remember
and let fade
those you don't
so that in the moment
at Midday's bliss
you can accept
that along with time,
you too are on the wind.

Tracie Lark

A BLINK IN TIME

Bird's eye
see me
a dot
on the sand

a blink in time
the flare of a star
a wind in a tree

my feelings are as big as this ocean.

i ride them, bobbing up and down
wondering how they all fit inside of me
like how can rain fit in a cloud and
how can light fit through a hole
 how could i grow a tiny human
 inside of me
 lose you inside of me

my feelings are as big as this ocean.

you were a
blink in time
and i am a
dot on the sand.

SURFACING

She dives into the deep blue, holding her breath, sinking her body down to the depths, past tropical fish flushing about zooming headlight-eyes; and while she descends towards carbon eating microorganisms rippling along that sharp blue-black blanket where fluorescent red and orange crustacea, and phosphorescent blue and pink jellies contrast with radioactivity; down where evolution's trash and treasures swim in mystery, oblivious to their grotesque oddities; down where the fear of the deep unknown trails a lone diver to the cliffs of their insanity; down where a conscious mind becomes its only friend and its own worst enemy; she snaps a photo to remember the experience, the feeling, the courage, the bravery...

Her lens zooms out. She sees the frame of the telly, sips on her beer, flicks her wiry black and grey mop behind her peach ears and cheeks. The bottle of tablets lingers on the lounge like the jellies and shrimp, floating within her view. She grabs at it, *a catch!* then husks the bottle-shell and slurps the insides, tastes salty, watery. Cigarette smoke engulfs her, beer bubbles bobble at her pink lips, masking the true taste of the antipsychotics.

She sends the photo via Messenger to her daughter, *Went diving today love, what do ya think?* And the reply is, a love heart emoji, *Good on ya mum, you're so brave, going down so deep like that hehehe*, and a smiley face - and then a fish emoji just slapping at the surface in floundering chokes.

Tricia Dearborn is an award-winning Australian poet, writer and editor. Her latest books are *Autobiochemistry* (UWA Publishing, 2019), and *She Reconsiders Life on the Run* (International Poetry Studies Institute Chapbooks, 2019). Her previous poetry collections are *The Ringing World* and *Frankenstein's Bathtub*. Her poetry has been widely published in Australia, internationally and online, and featured in anthologies including *The Anthology of Australian Prose Poetry*, *Contemporary Australian Poetry* and *Australian Poetry since 1788*. She was a judge of the 2019 University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize and is on the editorial board of *Plumwood Mountain*, an online journal of eco-poetry and eco-poetics. Tricia also writes fiction: 'The Case of G: A Child Raised by Trains' won the 2021 Neilma Sidney Short Story Prize. You can find her on Twitter @TriciaDearborn and Facebook



FREEDOM

you have to get used to freedom
like anything else

it might be some time before you can take a deep draught
and not have it rock you on your feet

but you can't fail at freedom
no matter how strange it feels at first

forget those people who told you
you don't deserve it, it doesn't exist

they would not dissuade you from seeking freedom
if they themselves were free

freedom is possible
freedom is real

there you are
(in your same old jeans
unruly hair tucked behind your ears
pouring from the same red enamel teapot
with the scar on its side)

flawed, as you always will be
subject to life's snarls and felicities
as you always will be

free

Tricia Dearborn

EARLY MARCH

Sydney, Australia

hot days, balmy evenings
nights when it's cool enough
for a coverlet

in my sunroom/study
I take a whip to the text
wipe sweat from my neck

outside the council gardeners
whine past, trimming off
the last of summer



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas

Recipient of fellowships and grants from The Rockefeller Foundation, Ireland Literature Exchange, Trubar Foundation, Slovenia, The Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature and The Foundation for the Production and Translation of Dutch Literature, Yuyutsu Sharma is a world renowned Himalayan poet and translator. He has published ten poetry collections including, *The Second Buddha Walk*, *A Blizzard in my Bones: New York Poems*, *Quaking Cantos: Nepal Earthquake Poems*, *Nepal Trilogy*, *Space Cake*, *Amsterdam* and *Annapurna Poems*. Three books of his poetry, *Poemes de l' Himalayas*, *Poemas de Los Himalayas* and *Jezero Fewa & Konj* have appeared in French, Spanish and Slovenian respectively. Half the year, he travels and reads all over the world and conducts Creative Writing workshops at various universities in North America and Europe but goes trekking in the Himalayas when back home. Currently, Yuyutsu Sharma is a visiting poet at Columbia University and edits, *Pratik: A Quarterly Magazine of Contemporary Writing*. <https://niralapublications.com/nirala-authors/yuyutsu-rd-sharma/>
<https://yuyutsurdsharma.blogspot.com/>



GLOOM

Punjab.
 I'm constantly on the move
 working fretfully
 mending slanting walls
 of our old ancestral house
 that I left decades ago.
 Damp walls of the large
 Mughal style house titling
 right and left, damp walls
 coming straight at me.
 They seem to be made of
 some chocolate plaster,
 some edible clay.
 A window comes off its hinges
 and slides towards me.
 Exasperated, I push it back
 to where it belongs
 with my bare hands,
 a cartoon figure
 fixing a calamity that
 awaits redress since my birth.
 Elated, I sing a forgotten prayer,
 to feel the thrill of this
 new found freedom,
 this liberty to shape things
 as I wish even
 at this dismal hour
 of the great gloom.

Yuyutsu Sharma

OUT AGAIN

A quaking fragment

And it came back
making us rush out into the night

We waited
ten minutes or so
out in the cold
our bones shuddering
in the freezing hour of the night
not a cricket sang,
the stars above
the only witnesses to our misery.
Feral dogs quiet after a wild uproar
doors of our hungry huts unhinged
silos of our courtyard
open wounds gaping into sunken
water wells of our sapped lives.

We waited
ten minutes or so
and went back in.

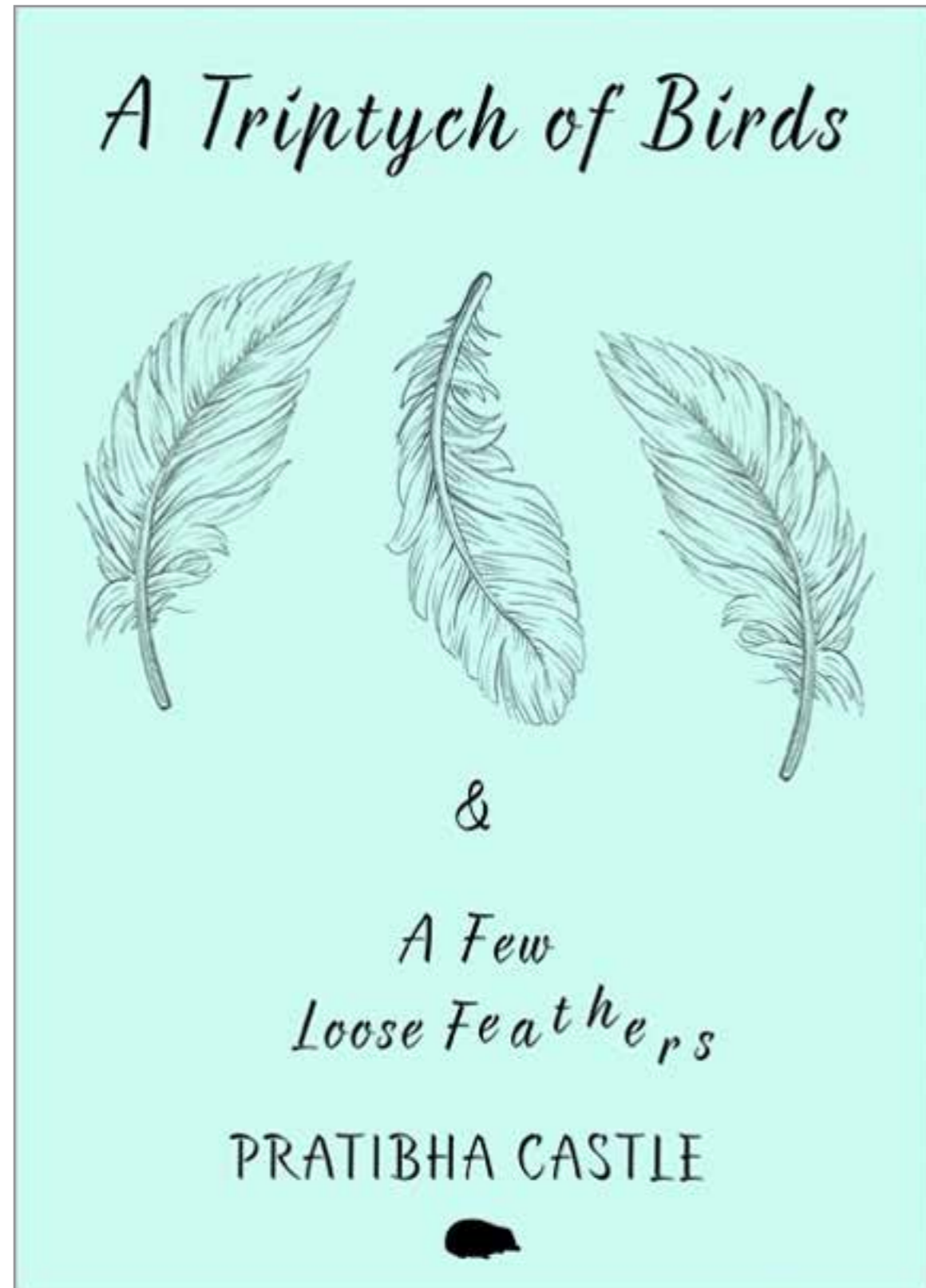
“It’s a demon,”
the grandma said,
wheezing from her rushed trip
out in the dark.

“It’s a demon child
on a swing,
moving back and forth.
It has swung over us,
and gone up to touch
the peak of Sagarmatha.
It’s sure to return
to lunge over our fragile huts again
as it hurtles back West
to go and play
on Annapurna’s
snowy ridge, Hyunchuli.

DONATION

Kathmandu.
 I wake up from a dream
 in a sullen city.
 I see its streets emptied
 as if some demon has sucked its essence
 with a funnel shaped long beak.
 Feral dogs come sniffing
 asphalt of the newly pitched roads
 looking for crumbs
 some INGO might have
 dropped accidentally,
 their bellies sunken,
 flattened at the rear,
 their tails shedding grace,
 turning into ugly carrots,
 obscenity of the current polity.
 One of them scampers around the city
 limping on its tripod.
 Kathmandu has been sucked
 out of Kathmandu
 like breath finally flies out of its lungs,
 pulling nuggets of survival,
 moth-eaten sacks of supplies,
 lentils, rice, biscuits,
 lifelines of existence
 petro-banks, bundles
 of freshly minted currency.
 The big clown sits in the castle,
 celebrating the myth
 of Himalayan immunity,
 crystal airs fed on pristine glaciers.

Monkeys from the nearby
 Rama Shrine come gliding
 over the telephone wires
 to eat flowers on my rooftop garden;
 there are no devotees
 to feed them in the shrine
 that they seemed to have owned
 since the birth of Lord Buddha.
 I throw a banana from the rooftop,
 he scowls at his accompanying consort,
 freezing her on the neighbor's rooftop
 and jumps onto the tin-shed in our courtyard.
 He quietly peels the banana,
 takes a bite and greedily gathers
 the crumbs of the Britannia crackers
 scattered for birds on the corrugated tin,
 eats them with relish
 and finally enjoys the banana
 as his skimpy dessert.
 The mate waits, bends her body
 on the rooftop, then places her chest
 on the warm cemented floor.
 I toss a banana towards her too.
 He frowns at my act, rushes in her direction
 to revert and reach the rooftop
 before she can devourer the donation.



Paul Brookes is a shop asst. Lives in a cat house full of teddy bears. First play performed at The Gulbenkian Theatre, Hull. His chapbooks include *The Fabulous Invention Of Barnsley*, (Dearne Community Arts, 1993). *A World Where and She Needs That Edge* (Nixes Mate Press, 2017, 2018) *The Spermot Blues* (OpPRESS, 2017), *Please Take Change* (Cyberwit.net, 2018), *As Folk Over Yonder* (Afterworld Books, 2019). He is a contributing writer of Literati Magazine and Editor of Wombwell Rainbow Interviews, book reviews and challenges. Had work broadcast on BBC Radio 3 The Verb and, videos of his *Self Isolation* sonnet sequence featured by Barnsley Museums and Hear My Voice Barnsley. He also does photography commissions. Most recent is a poetry collaboration with artworker Jane Cornwell: "Wonderland in Alice, plus other ways of seeing", (JCStudio Press, 2021)
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PAUL BROOKES

Reviews

A Triptych of Birds & A Few Loose Feathers by Pratibha Castle

Published by Hedgehog Poetry Press
February 2022

A whole aviary of birds are used to comment on our human condition. A red kite *keening in the blue... shadow splash of heron* (South Downs), a chuckling blackbird (A Celtic Spell), pert robin (Padraig – who drove the snakes out of Ireland).

Recurring images include dance terms
My heart hankering/ for their cabrioles /of joy. (Heartsease), The female flirts her tail/flamenco flounce/of a doyenne cute/at charm. (Sparrow Love)

Pratibha has a love of language akin to Dylan Thomas
The glory of walnut halves tallied/one to ten onto my palm/to be set with caution/on the buttercream/glaze. (On Reaching Heaven),

A Heaney-like love of the visceral, the making, the kitchen blended with religious references

Available at: <https://www.pratibhacastlepoetry.com/>



*And/though each week in the Finchley flat/that was
never home, mocked/by the tisk of a gas flicker fire,/
she sifted soda with a scrimp/of salt into ash fine
flour, /coaxed in milk soured/ with a fist of lemon/for
want of buttermilk,/ her nurse's hands/ cosseting the
dough/into a farl, blessing/with the sign of the cross/
and a nod to Our Lady/ on the mantel; slices/fried with
rashers for the taste. (Swans)*

A life story from childhood in Ireland, moving from house to house, ten over ten years, experiencing school, nuns and confessionals, grief at her mam's death, from London to Kells

*Breath wrung out/of you the way your/mother's tough
love/wrung out the sheet she/scrubbed rinsed scoured
till/her hands were scalded red with /washing soda,
effort. Puddles/on the draining board, the floor;/
faded pink and gold flamingos/ on her apron soaked
through/ to the quill from all that/ splish splash
sluice/to erase a stain stubborn/as sin even coaxing
and/crooning, the salt tears she/wept throughout
parching her/to a whip of winter skirmished kelp,/did
little to appease. (Drowning)*

Language to delight and be savoured in future rereading.

Paul Brookes

2010 - 2022



POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
APRIL 2022



COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE