

2010 - 2022



POETRY & WRITING

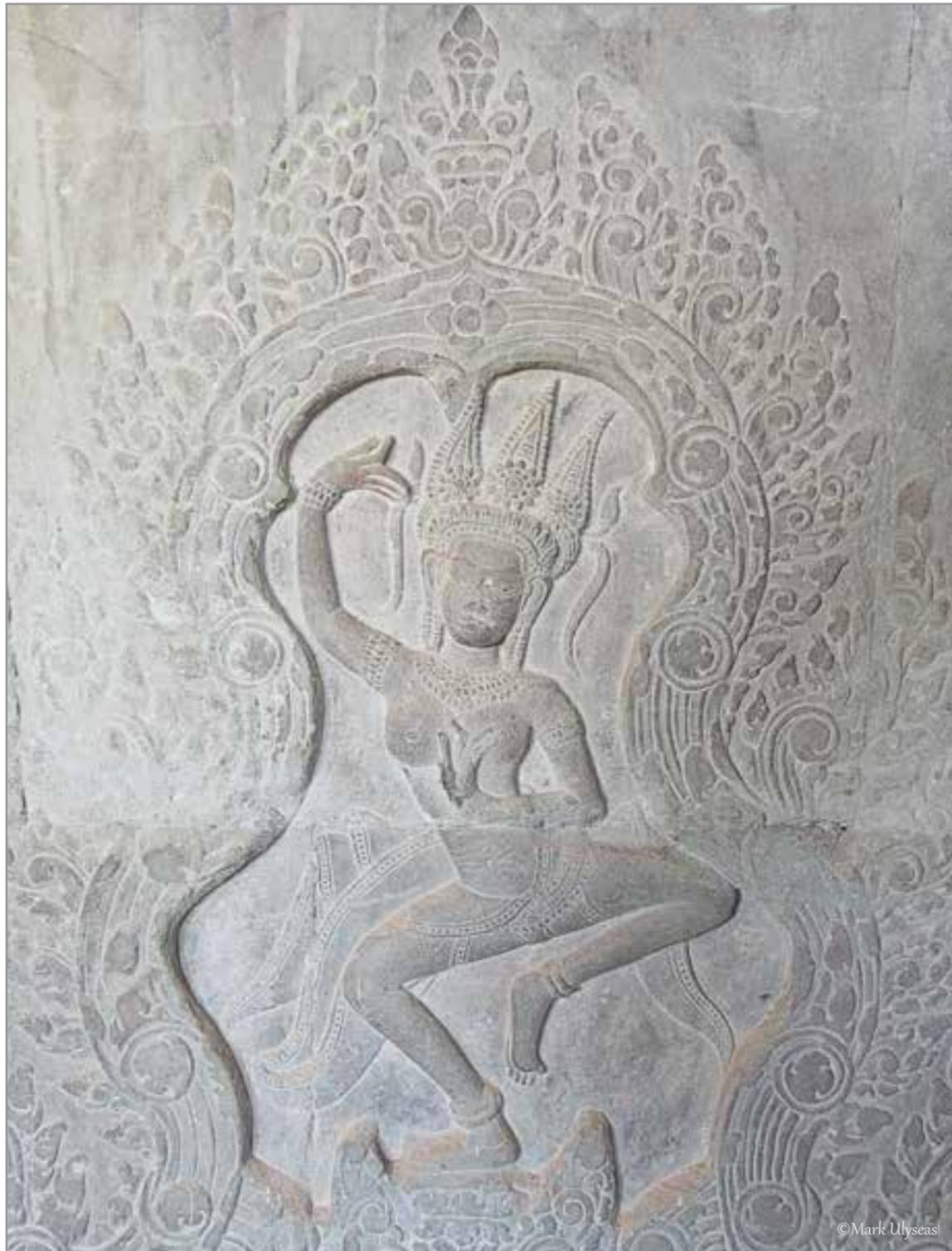
FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
MAY 2022



TIM TOMLINSON

HEAVEN NEVER TREATS YOU LIKE YOURSELF

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

Mark Ulyseas
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Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Mark Ulyseas has served time in advertising as copywriter and creative director selling people things they didn't need, a ghost writer for some years, columnist of a newspaper, a freelance journalist and photographer. In 2009 he created *Live Encounters Magazine*, in Bali, Indonesia. It is a not for profit (adfree) free online magazine featuring leading academics, writers, poets, activists of all hues etc. from around the world. March 2016 saw the launch of its sister publication *Live Encounters Poetry*, which was relaunched as *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* in March 2017. In February 2019 the third publication was launched, *LE Children Poetry & Writing* (now renamed *Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers*). In August 2020 the fourth publication, *Live Encounters Books*, was launched. He has edited, designed and produced all of *Live Encounters'* 242 publications (upto May 2022). Mark's philosophy is that knowledge must be free and shared freely to empower all towards enlightenment. He is the author of three books: *RAINY – My friend & Philosopher*; *Seductive Avatars of Maya – Anthology of Dystopian Lives* and *In Gethsemane: Transcripts of a Journey*. <https://liveencounters.net/mark-ulyseas/>



MARK ULYSEAS

LANGUAGE AND POETRY

Exist in the viscosity of emotions. Let it flow. The rage, the hate, the love, the generosity and the promiscuity. Why should anything matter? The rule being there are no rules.

Just think what fun this would be, the unfettered unfolding of life in all its sweetness and bitterness.

Why is there order? Dress codes, rituals and stifling traditions incarcerate our souls in a world hurtling through space...the darkness of eternity.

Some die. Some live, limping along, amidst the burgeoning crowds racing to buy, buy, buy, the malignant dreams of millions.

Share the link. Share the photo. Plaster your image across the net or be plastered on the windscreen of a passing fancy. The glare of headlights lighting up the nether regions and tickling the ego to fornicate with a lesser mortal, the power of domination. The feeling of planting one's seed without reason. The rhyme is left for those that nurture the sublime. New life is often left to its own devices.

Rain falls, rivers dry up and forests burn down while life unfolds in the first green shoots that emerge amidst the ashes. The churning of the earth continues, grinds mud, rocks, leaves and animals into compost for another generation of living things. The creepy crawlies come out to devour one another.

Words are just noise. Poetry, the song of angels, fallen and destitute, is left to rummage in human vanities of waste searching vainly for the truth in life.

It is poetry that encapsulates the illusion and seduces the imagination, the imagination that lifts us from an intimidating reality into a perpetual unfolding of Nature in its rawness, beauty and cruelty in a deadly embrace.

And so, in this fabulous edition, guest edited by *Tim Tomlinson*, is another menagerie of poets rising like green shoots from the burnt- and washed-out landscapes of society, a society in continuous struggle with itself.

Thank you, *Tim*, for this gathering of poets. And much gratitude to the poets for generously contributing their work.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om



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Tim Tomlinson is the author of the chapbook *Yolanda: An Oral History in Verse*, the poetry collection, *Requiem for the Tree Fort I Set on Fire*, and the short story collection, *This Is Not Happening to You*. Recent work appears in the Tin Can Literary Review, Columbia Journal, Litro, and the anthology, *Surviving Suicide: A Collection of Poems that May Save a Life*. His current projects include *Listening to Fish*, which fuses strains of scuba diving, poetry, lyric essay, and autofiction into ... something. And a second collection of short stories, the highly fragmented *Parentheticals*, some of which appear in Home Planet News, Another Chicago Magazine, Big City Lit, and elsewhere. He has lived in Miami, the Bahamas, New Orleans, London, Florence, Shanghai, Hua Hin (Thailand), and currently resides in the borough of his birth, Brooklyn, New York. He is co-founder and director of New York Writers Workshop, and co-author of its popular text, *The Portable MFA in Creative Writing*. He teaches in NYU's Global Liberal Studies.



TIM TOMLINSON

HEAVEN NEVER TREATS YOU LIKE YOURSELF

1. About writing fiction, Flannery O'Connor said, "You can do anything you can get away with, but nobody has ever gotten away with much." It's hard to argue with an author of Ms. O'Connor's stature, but I'm going to. Certain conventions endure, of course. You can't have a play if you don't have an audience. But even back when O'Connor said this (late 50s/early 60s), it was only partially correct. Writers have been getting away with quite a lot for a very long time, if we understand "getting away with" as playing with, even abandoning the conventions and yet still managing to keep (enough) readers on the page. Can you spell *Ulysses*¹? The very long "tradition" of formal innovation, and formal formal challenges, pre-dates Ms. O'Connor, but ever since Jasper Johns started hanging straw brooms off picture frames, it's seemed more and more easy, more and more common, and maybe more and more attractive to get away with at least *some*, if not *much*.

¹On the other hand, can you spell *Finnegans Wake*?

Tim Tomlinson

2. In 1994 Janet Malcolm published an essay in the *New Yorker* called “41 False Starts.” It was, ostensibly, a profile of the 1980s downtown NYC artist David Salle, whose work was characterized by, among other things, its salaciousness, its dubious originality, and its (eventual) value: Salle made millions. Many millions. Many many millions. Malcolm’s profile of the mega-rich artist became a template for how to fail at capturing your subject, but failure in the Bob Dylan sense of “there’s no success like failure,” (“Love Minus Zero/No Limit,” 1965). The essay showcases Malcolm’s forty-one individual attempts to get her arms around Salle, whom she finds elusive and alluring. She tries setting first, subject later, then subject first, setting later. She tries art historical. She tries secondary sources. She tries the man. She tries the interview. She shows us, in enumerated entries that amount to some ten-thousand-plus words, that not knowing is a very good way to get to know ... if not an answer, something. In this case, we get to know, as does Malcolm, that ambivalence about a subject (and Malcolm is ambivalent, about the sexual nature of the work, and about the amount of money it’s provided the artist) can lead to uncertainty about form. Further, that uncertainty finds its own form, *a form to accommodate the mess*, as Beckett had it.

3. A favorite example of uncertainty: “I once had a girl—or should I say, she once had me” (“Norwegian Wood,” the Beatles, 1965). Thus begins John Lennon’s mini-saga of a date gone wrong, at least for the protagonist. He doesn’t even know how to tell the story, and then he tells it. He includes details: the chairless room, a rug, a bath. Cheap paneling, the Norwegian wood of the title. What do they add up to? Hell if the protagonist knows, hell if we know. We’re both left in a state of wonder. Wonder finds its own form, then sets it on fire. Maybe.

4. Compare Lennon’s confusion with McCartney’s certainty: “In Penny Lane there is a banker with a motorcar...” (“Penny Lane,” the Beatles, 1967). In McCartney’s evocation of childhood, the empirical data piles up: a barber shop, a roundabout, a pretty nurse with poppies on a tray. McCartney’s so certain, he even knows the contents of a fireman’s pocket. But as he says, all these details create a picture that’s “very strange.” It’s a reworking of Kierkegaard’s either/or dilemma: don’t know something, you’ll be uncertain; know something, you’ll be uncertain, too. What’s a writer to do?

5. “Don’t fear mistakes,” Miles Davis said. “In improvisation, there are no mistakes.”

6. Mondegreens—or some mistakes are better than the original. Tom Waits’ wife, Kathleen Brennan, thought Creedence’s “There’s a bad moon on the rise,” was “There’s a bathroom on the right.” A student of mine, whose ambition was to become a sexologist, thought the Shirelles’ “Can I believe the magic of your sighs,” was “Can I believe the magic of your size.” I thought Fleetwood Mac’s “Have you any dreams you’d like to sell?” was “Heaven never treats you like yourself.”

7. In a *Paris Review* interview from the mid-1990s, Sam Shepard said, “A lot of the time when writers talk about their voice, they’re talking about a narrative voice. For some reason my attempts at narrative turned out really weird. I didn’t have that kind of voice, but I had a lot of other ones, so I thought, Well, I’ll follow those.” John Lennon said, “I think a no, I mean a yes.” (There are no mistakes.) (You *can* get away with much.)

8. In a recent *New York Times* interview, Ocean Vuong cites *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* as a book that infuriated him. This is a book that cites the rules, that advances the paradigms. Quite a few of its sections reference Flannery O’Connor. He recommends Jane Alison’s *Meander, Spiral, Explode: Design and Pattern in Narrative*. This is a book that questions the rules, challenges the paradigms. It contains no Flannery O’Connor.

9. Once I did a reading at a conference in Bali. In the audience were some friends. By the time I finished the reading, even before, they had become enemies, something I learned only the next morning when, so radioactive was I, they wouldn’t even sit with me in the same taxi. They couldn’t bear to walk the same halls as me. I’ve never heard from them since. That was five years ago. Oh, the judgments of the culturally sophisticated, of those-who-are-certain, those-who-uphold-the-standards and embody the virtues. I followed a voice, but not their kind of voice. Or: I read a story, but not their kind of story. Or: I didn’t include a point of view. Or: I didn’t know another point of view existed. Or: the author was the narrator. Or: Or: Or:

I once had some friends, this song might begin.

10. My father was not a praying man, he was a working man. He used to say, “Work is prayer.” By which he meant, work is labor, observable labor. Effort of a physical sort. Sometimes he’d see me looking out a window or staring down a blank page and ask what I was doing, a question that was always an overture to work, an overture that wasn’t a request. “Thinking,” I’d tell him, not meeting his eyes, because mine were already filled with fury. I knew what was coming.

“Oh yeah?” he’d say, “well think outside with a rake in your hand.” Oh, how many Kubla Khans expired in the leaves piled outside my windows? How many blew away? Probably none, but that’s not the point. “Lost time is not found again,” Dylan, (“Odds and Ends,” 1967).

11. Jasper Johns said, “Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it.”

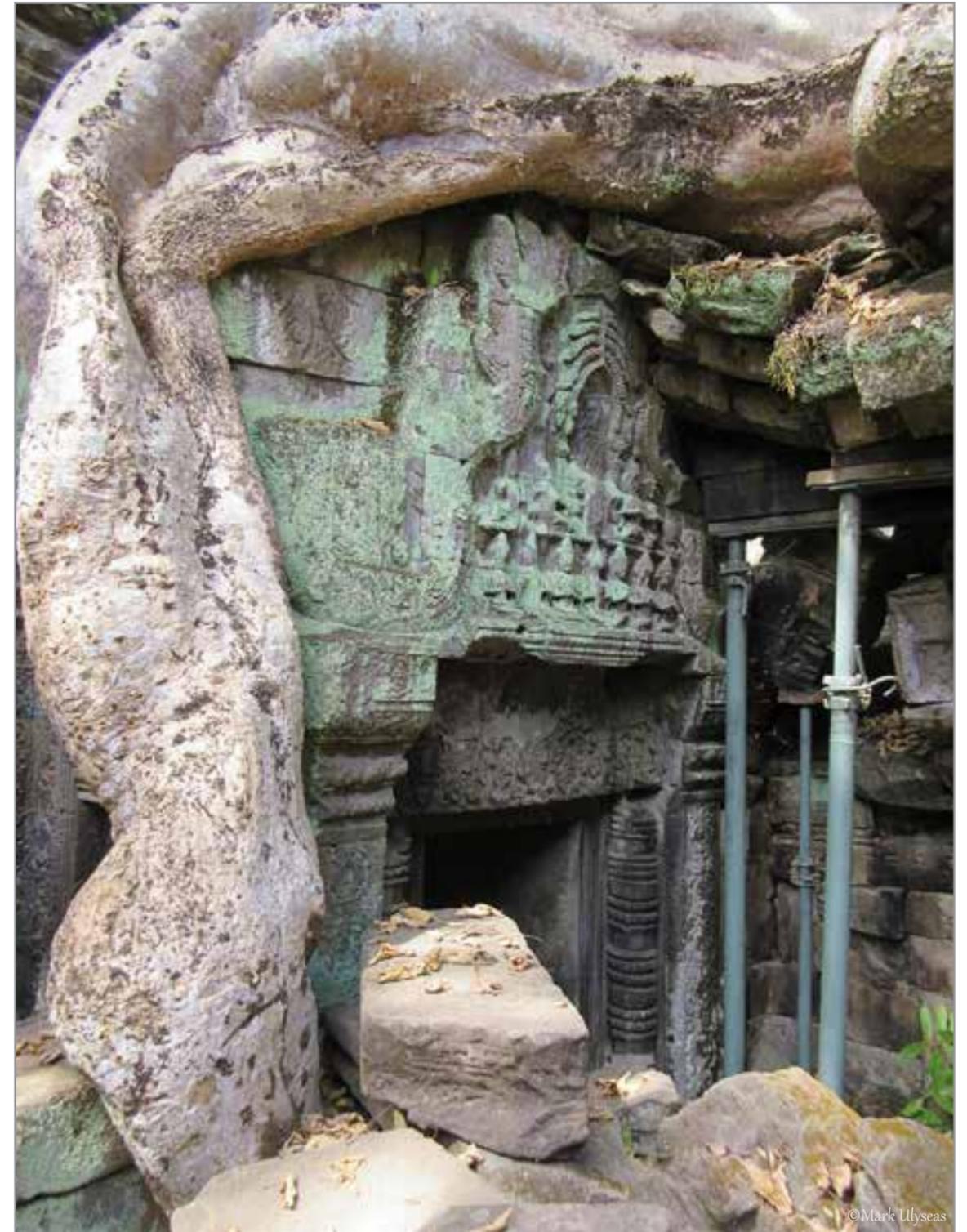
12. If you’re working class, you enter the world of the culturally sophisticated not knowing if you should shit or wind your wristwatch. You think a yes, you mean a no. You’re certain of only one thing: you can’t get away with very much, if anything. This is a critical awareness in Elena Ferrante’s *Neapolitan Novels*. Lila takes an object, she does something to it, then does something else, and everything she does turns out wrong. Nino, the son of a writer (who molests minors) who becomes a professor (who fathers children that he abandons²), says, “[Lila]’s really made badly: in her mind and in everything, even when it comes to sex.” Lenu, Lila’s perennial friend, recoils. She thinks, even *that* we get wrong? It’s not just men judging, it’s class. For Lila and Lenu, there are nothing but mistakes, even in the things they do well. Lila makes mistakes, Lenu fears them. Lila hears voices. She tries to outrun them. They drive her mad. Lenu hears Lila and her voices. She absorbs them. She gives them voice. Her friends become her enemies.

13. There are mistakes. You have to live with them. But it’s not a mistake to read your story. It’s not a mistake to write it, to think it, to imagine it, even to borrow or steal it. You might not get away with it, but the only mistake is to keep it inside. “If my thought dreams could be seen, they’d probably put my head in a guillotine, but it’s alright, Ma,” Bob Dylan (“It’s Alright, Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)”).

14. I used to teach a workshop called “Building the Dramatic Arc.” In it, I would, on occasion, assign sections of *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*. And often I’d draw on the work of Flannery O’Connor³. Now I teach a course called “The Fragmented Text.” It begins with Janet Malcolm’s “41 False Starts.” Then it meanders, spirals, and, one hopes, explodes.

² I point out Nino’s flaws not to judge him—I don’t. He’s forgivably, if unsympathetically, flawed. I do judge his father. His father is the kind a predator that sniffs out opportunity among the disadvantaged—a hyena.

³Whose work I still love and admire.



Giant root of the Silk Cotton Tree growing over Ta Prohm, Siem Reap, Cambodia. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

The only Adam Narnst on the internet is an Australian writer who has spent the last 12 years teaching and travelling while based in Shanghai. In a previous life he was a pro cage fighter and worked for many years as a bouncer in notoriously violent bars at nights while teaching poetry to uni kids, or singing - "Hello, hello, hello, how are you?" song to Chinese kids by day. He has been shortlisted for several prizes and his memoir/novel was selected for a manuscript development prize, but he never wins stuff like that, because there is chaos in his heart.

ARTISTS IN THE CELLAR

The new guy says "I will never find love here"
 I tell him, you are on a snowflake
 A thousand miles from Tibetan peaks
 There is no smoke or mirror here
 Just my continent in a city
 Yesterday I saw a man shot in the street
 About a block from here
 In broad and bloody noon
 That made me feel like -
 I should have added colour to this poem
 But I couldn't decide:
 The pink glint
 Of the Pearl Tower?
 Or the red brick's
 Of Mao's house?
 Instead: the black back,
 Of a Raccoon dog.



Adam Narnst

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Got in an argument
With my girlfriend
About whether my clothes were fake
I told her
There's no such thing as fake clothes.
There's just shirts
And non-shirts
Shorts
And non-shorts
Five minutes later they arrested me naked.

PARTS PER MILLION

A billion Chinese people beat me to the train
But someone let me on
Made room for my catastrophe of white baggage
While a grinning aunty
Clutched asphyxiating chicks
In plastic bags

On the screen in the metro
Some disaster in a city of millions I've never heard of.
My guilt washed away like the mountain train they were on!

Years later, lying awake at night again
Trying to value my own life
Or anybody else's
All I hear is the
tiny screams of dying birds

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.
Definitively 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.

Angelo R. Lacuesta has written many books of fiction and non-fiction. He has won three National Book Awards, the Madrigal Gonzalez Best First Book Award, the NVM Gonzalez Award, and numerous Palanca Awards and Philippines Graphic Awards. He is Editor-at-Large at Esquire Philippines. His novel Joy was published by Penguin Random House SEA in 2022.



PRAGUE

Imagine that the rain falling outside the window
 Is another person in your bed
 The stirring of leaves, the twitching of eyelids.
 You check your own breathing because everything
 Seems to happen outside of you,
 Out of your control. Clouds of veins and nerves
 Cluster like moving night crowds on bridges,
 Keeping you with the soft glare of half-closed eyes,
 The nudging and brushing,
 The tidal breathing
 And with it, the smells and sounds, rancid and fluent tells
 Of aging and dying love.
 Out of the rain comes a murmur or a moan,
 Something forgotten and remembered
 Without will. On this night we accept
 The hand brushing our sex or our cheek,
 The creeping body that is beside us but is ours,
 Welcoming us, fallen upon us.

Angelo R. Lacuesta

Ann-Margaret Lim is Jamaican and lives there. Her second poetry collection, KINGSTON BUTTERCUP (Peepal Tree Press: 2016) made the poetry shortlist of the Bocas Prize, and her first, THE FESTIVAL OF WILD ORCHID, (same publishers, 2012), was nominated for the UK Guardian First Book Prize and received Honorary Mention in the 2013 Bocas Prize. She is a Calabash Fellow, a national book awardee (highly recommended), whose poems have appeared in the Orion Magazine, the Academy of American Poets Poem a Day Series, other literary journals and magazines worldwide.



MY FATHER'S HEART

I was 21 when he said I broke his heart.
In the decades after, I try stitching it up
with a needle and thread.
I hope this last thread— his grand-daughter, holds.

My father's heart is frail from a mainly absent
mother and father. Black in China, but
speaking Chinese in Jamaica
my father being the other, had his haberdashery burnt
to the ground twice—on Beckford, then Princess Streets.

A fan of songs and a singer too, from his days in China
my father held a concert: made no money
but being the other, despite his brown skin
darker than Marley, they labeled him 'Chinaman
gone wid di money'.

Betrayal, became the expected, even from his kin
and, as I think he saw it, I betrayed him
with that first one at 21—broke his heart.
Been trying to stitch it up since, as I said
with a needle and thread.

And what if all this is scripted in our book:
dad loves daughter, daughter loves dad
until that time, or as we say in Jamaica, until such time
when the girl becomes woman and the script goes haywire?

Well, if that is it then
I'll sit at the desk, write our own script
where I stitch and patch your broken heart, dad
with the thread of your granddaughter —me, all over.

Ann-Margaret Lim

ONCE ONE HAS SEEN GOD, WHAT IS THE REMEDY?*

I saw God
—opened my mouth
asked for my mother.

And my mother who was ghost-like
like the clouds, no, my mother was Houdini
re-appeared, just like that.

That seeing God struck me dumb.
After all, who am I, but a poet without a mom.
Julie O'Callaghan would understand:

I had my angle —the Jamaican dread-locked doll
pining for a mom, who God knows, could've been
zapped from the air by aliens

extra-terrestrials, in the Bermuda triangle
or was among the 30 or more
killed in the 3 bus collision in Venezuela in '94.

Venezuela, the country she left us for.
And the us, me an' my half, not whole-sister
who I just can't remember

spending two entire years of my life with
before mom hopped the Venezuela-gravy-train-
plane, on the eve of the 80s.

I told God
I didn't want to see my mom again
for the first time after a lifetime, in a casket:

that if she lives, I should know.
I see her now through video calls
still in that lost country.

So yes, I've seen God
and my mother — a Billie Holiday, Nina Simone
kinda figure, with an old Virginia-Woolf-like-pain—

a smouldering fire
engrained in the sentences coming over.
And what is the remedy?

Reading and re-reading you Sylvia, I want to say:
the remedy, *Once one has seen God*, is
to see God again and again

in the big and smallest things
*...picking up the bright pieces of Christ
in the faces of rodents*

but in this moment Sylvia, God and my mother
my tongue is a wooden plank
and I'm frozen at the intersection, the collision

of mother, daughter, daughter.

* the title and lines in italic are from Sylvia Plath's "Mystic".

Ashley Somwaru is an Indo-Caribbean woman who was born and raised in Queens, New York. She received an MFA in poetry from CUNY Queens College. In 2021, Somwaru published a chapbook with Ghostbird Press titled, *Urgent // Where the Mind Goes // Scattered*. Previous work has been published in Honey Literary, Newtown Literary, Solstice, SWIMM, The Margins, VIDA Review, and elsewhere. As a storyteller and poet, her work is immersed in her mixed tongue and cultural traditions that have stemmed from the Caribbean. She currently serves as the Assistant Editor of Best of the Net and the Program Associate for SAADA. Somwaru's passion is creating and supporting spaces for underrepresented voices to be given the attention they deserve.



EVERYTHING IS A TRIGGER.
A DOG'S OVERGROWN FUR.
FREEZER BURNED PRALINE ICE CREAM.
THE WOLF MOON.

A rocking chair. A baritone lullaby. Chand angdaiyan le raha hai. Chandani muskurane lagi hai.

Here lies another girl who didn't know her limit. Who was trying to compensate for the words *yuh crazy? Yuh mind nah get sense? Yuh losing it yuh losing-*

Everything tastes like metal Auntie whispers.

To make a good chulha that doesn't mash up, use sticks from the bottom house your grandparents abandoned. Kajal. The cow dung stuck to your uncle's old shoes. Hair as twine. Trench water. Dried bird bones. Stones found near the madhouse. Grass a woman trampled.

Gajendra's foot stuck in the crocodile's mouth. A lotus, a savior. The way that man's hand acted like a crocodile, clamping down onto her thigh.

KOOELOO. MUNIJIRIA. SHIVNAUTH. RAMDHAN.

My uncle has started drinking again. He first aimed for his heart, clogging his veins. Now he has aimed for his legs. Blood clots blocking his footsteps. As if he no longer wants the ability to walk to the corner store for a bottle and this was the only way to stop himself. We stare into our own cups. Take a sip and swallow down anything that could enunciate *gri-*.

continued overleaf..

Ashley Somwaru

EVERYTHING IS A TRIGGER.
 A DOG'S OVERGROWN FUR.
 FREEZER BURNED PRALINE ICE CREAM.
 THE WOLF MOON. *contd...*

if you hear cock crowing in the back doh study dat

“But Lord, a sugar-cane cutter with whom she had eloped when she was only 13, found them in a nearby town. In a deadly and drunken fit of violence, he took the lives of their children—along with Houston’s right arm and most of her left hand.”
(NPR, June 29, 2018)

Let me tell you something. A jumbie haunting will take away your breath and have you wondering if it was an ancestor needing it to speak again.

MY MOTHER TELLS ME
 IF I WANT TO KNOW
 MAYBE I SHOULD TRY ASKING

Do you remember the time when he bounced you on his knee? When the rhythm of his laugh put you to sleep? How you jolted out of your sleep and almost out of his arms when you found yourself suspended in air?

//

What creates the hands that carry?

//

I am waiting for a phone call. Tell me when you hear the ring. Okay?

//

My mother tells me when I want to say something, I should write it down first. But what if I want to forget these words on the tip- on the tip- on the tip- swallowed-on the tip- ?

//

A woman sniffed and said that poetry tells lies. Do you believe that?

//

In what ways does trauma affect a five-year-old boy who peeked behind the sheets on a clothesline and found his mother’s tryst with a fist?

//

continued overleaf..

MY MOTHER TELLS ME
IF I WANT TO KNOW
MAYBE I SHOULD TRY ASKING *contd...*

If x = the amount of bruises she has around her neck multiplied by the blood of my blood (denial + the shoving under the rug for y years - criminal charges) how do we solve this?

//

Part of me wants the phone call, wants the *I'm sorry. I'll change. I'll get help.* Another part doesn't want to hear the distortion of his voice when he tries to talk over his fist. Part of me wants to say yes, *I do judge you.* Part of me wants to say *how could you have done this?*

//

Read this line as me extracting myself from ancestry. Will you believe me if I said I came from nowhere?

//

In what ways does trauma affect another possibly five-year-old boy who had to stop the weight of a fist from ironing his mother to the floor?

//

My mind keeps replaying *and like a loyal dog, she returned.* Can you teach me to forget?

//

If I, by default, can only tell lies, then stop reading. If you're still there, I want to ask—have you known this all along?

//

Does denial unblemish her skin?

//

Do you remember when you ran outside, trying to get a glimpse of him because he said he would be there soon? Do you remember how it felt after so long to hug him? Did you by chance ignore the smell of alcohol or the way he fumbled with his fists?

//

Let's say for y years you've been in the dark about this = n number of women he's done this to / t times no one said anything. What will you do now that you know?

//

Part of me wants to let the sound of family rattle in my diaphragm until it dissolves with the air I exhale. But I'm not that heartless. Right?

//

continued overleaf..

MY MOTHER TELLS ME
IF I WANT TO KNOW
MAYBE I SHOULD TRY ASKING *contd...*

Sometimes I want to laugh, I must admit since I don't want to lie anymore. How could he and him in that corner and him drinking in the rum shop at the roundabout think that they were doing *big man tings* as they formed her discoloration?

//

How do hands carry the weight of a fist?

//

Do you also see how small they are, like little particles of dust floating in the air that you want to brush away from your face?

//

Don't think that I will be immovable if he happens to call. My platysma muscle will be working overtime. The memories of him will lock me in a fist. But I can't just forget her. You know?

//

Read this line as me having said these words. *Abuser. Responsibility. Karma. Atone-ment.* Do you believe he will change?

//

In what ways does trauma affect a five-year-old boy who has only seen fists and has grown up but is still just a five-year-old beating his fists against his body and other bodies and the bodies he can't stop from replaying in his head?

//

A woman sniffed and said if it's been happening for so long, what makes you think it would be different this time? And I thought- why is time the excuse for staying still?

//

I decided to call him instead. Listen to what he said. *Everything is fine. I'm just working on getting myself back together.* Does "back" sound like the right choice of words to you?

//

Will you believe the blood restlessly flowing inside of me has been severed from the same bloodlines that have decided to raise their fists?

//

Think of you as someone reassuring yourself that the person you know can't be an abuser, using the following: *From the time that I've known him, he's never been anything but kind. He couldn't have done this if she didn't say anything before. They're lying.* Does saying this make you feel better?

//

My mother tells me that nothing, not even a fist, can stop her from speaking up. So, tell me, how does one ignore the weight- the weight- the weight- of women piling on- the weight- the weight- of their voices- the weight- weighing- ?

Married to words, Bob is a poet, novelist and consulting educationist with several books, novels and poetry in paperback as E-book. He has inspired countless students in his teaching career, teaching them that happiness comes from a healthy body and mind. Many of his students hold eminent posts as medical doctors, army men, air pilots, DJs, business magnates, you name it. Most of them are constantly in touch with him even after his two decades of service in the teaching field. He tutors English where he also gives talks on *Happiness* that can be achieved by living a simple life, minimum wants and living one day at a time. That is, living for the *Now*. Bob lives in Kolkata but dreams of mountain mist floating through the open window and bringing the soft peals of bells from the Buddhist temple into his room. An Honorary D. Litt from World Academy of Arts and Culture, California, Bob is a member of Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature, the SAARC Apex Body. bob.dcosta14@gmail.com
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FIRST BOOK OF VERSE

My first book of verse
limps with age, knock-kneed,
bow-legged, balls in brackets,
like the whore of Prostitute Street
who powders her cheeks, the cheap make up scoffs a sad smile
paints the cheek bones with evening memory
carried over by her son,
studying under a ceiling bulb
in one corner, and behind him the silk curtain
separating the bed where his mother is busy with customers.
This cloth of separation bought from the Hawkers' Market
to the refugees the government allotted
who plodded across the border between East Pakistan and East Bengal
escaping the bayonets of Bhutto's fury
of 1971 Bangladesh War of Independence.

My first book of poems a library
of prostitution of ideas
baby steps of elegy of pavement children
sucking their mothers' apple-size breasts
withered with worries of broken homes.
My first book poems without commas
freedom of the soul without full stop
freedom of the mind without semi-colon my private parts.
My first book is me with one mole of desire
near the phallus tip
rising like a cobra about to strike
to meet you in the depths of your soul
to unite in oneness for a new creation
-- Shanaya –
In a motorbike accident, killed...

My first book of verse is love
to be classified it refuses
to be tamed it desires not...

Bob D'Costa

WITH TEA, NIGHT THOUGHTS IN THE HOSPITAL

This tea has been a witness to the silent voices floating in the room from the moment it lay
in tiny bits of nudity
in the plastic container of cheeselings sold by Britannia.

The thud of the oxygen cylinders reaches its ears
as they land on the hospital ground
when thrown from the mini truck at 1:30 a.m.
while the COVID-19 ward lies in drunk slumber.

In slumber?
My 703 bed is awake to the gentle rhythmic snore of 702 and 704
as I sit on its edge
my finger tapping in tune to the invisible movement around.

It's 2 a.m. by the circular ghost on the wall
and the light blue drape from head to toe in human shape
is the living PPE corpse called nurse by the civilized
snatching some rest in the gathered darkness of the corner cot
below the black-screen wall TV that peers down to rehearse the rise and fall of her chest
waiting for that moment when her lungs will heave and sigh with breathlessness
and the final collapse will arrive in a mute musical soiree of sorts
and its Second and Minute hands
will grab her by the throat
and hand it over to that doctor called Hour Hand.

Even Aesop's Fables and Panchatantra
are exhausted siblings sleeping in the downloaded PDF online bed of my cell phone
unaware of the scheming affliction around.

It's 4 a.m. and the faint voice of birds from the mini screen
tries with living endeavour to cheer up my blood
till 6:30 a.m. will arrive
and the familiar clatter of syringes
on stainless steel trays
will invite the remdesivir to begin its journey,
by plopping into the plastic pouch,
drop by drop
in a space of three seconds
and bed tea arrive for the jailed hungry victims.

Damiano Abeni, MD, MPH, is the Head of the Clinical Epidemiology Unit in a National Reference Center for Skin Diseases in Rome, Italy. He has published over 250 scientific articles in international peer-reviewed journals. He has translated American poetry since 1973, and is the recipient of a Bogliasco Foundation Fellowship, 2008, of a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship (Bellagio, 2010), and of the James Merrill House (Stonington, CT, USA - 2015). In 2009 he was Director's Guest at the Civitella Ranieri Center. He is Advisor for literature to the American Academy in Rome. He is an honorary citizen of Tucson, Arizona, and of Baltimore, Maryland, for cultural merit. He lives in Rome, near the church of San Clemente, with his wife, the poet, Moira Egan.



FROM JERRY & JERRY
 A COMIC JERRYATRIC THANATOBIOGRAPHY
 IN ZERO ACTS

*for Decomposed Lovers,
 and for my Mirror*

Cast of characters

JERRY - Jerry dead
 JERRY - Jerry half-alive

This comedy is a work of fiction.

Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events, and incidents either are the product of the authors' imagination or are used fictitiously.

The many resemblances to actual persons, living or dead or incarcerated, events, or locales - on this planet or elsewhere - is entirely coincidental.

LORDS:

THE TRUE POET IS, OF ALL THE SCRIBES, MOST DRAWN
 TO THE CONCRETE. YES SIR, WE THRIVE ON IT!

W. H. Auden's spirit, in James Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover*

the most dangerous part of a gecko is its mind
 Martin Crane

I don't like stuff that doesn't melt
 Frank Buffay Jr.

*Praeterum censeo clitoridem excellentissimae majestatis
 diutius titillandum esse.*
 Gerard van Swieten

Damiano Abeni

FROM JERRY & JERRY *contd...*

*For whom do you write?
For all the dead I have been
Jerry (or Jerry?)*

*Nothing in this book is original, except, possibly,
by mistake.
W. Hodges, Logic*

* * * * *

Then, finally, one day Jerry picks up his pencil, and starts writing to Jerry:

Dear Jerry,
I totally understand you. You had no choice.
But I do and, I promise, we shall not die a second time.
Sincerely,
Jerry_

*

“I am trying to forget you.”

*

“Why do you burn and cry?”

*

Who might have ever thought that zero millimeters can be an infinite distance?

*

Jerry reminisces, “my days ended just after 3pm on Thursday. The rain was falling and beating disconsolately at my window pane. It was dark in my room, and darker outside.”

*

Jerry was sure he had turned off all the fires on the stove. But they kept burning.

*

A pint of water for a bouillon cube: one of the very few certain things in this universe.

*

Jerry would like to tell Jerry how happy, how exhilarated he was for the whole week, washing dishes, making his bed, piling up neatly his books, and thinking about what he might have cooked, even if – in the end – it didn’t amount to anything.

*

“I am only laughing at your being your own enemy, and if you had tried you would have succeeded, perhaps.”

*

A veiled black. A semitransparent black. Under it, you may imagine to discern a curl, stark, that twists clockwise like a breaking wave. A black wave, veiled wave, a moment before breaking. Hokusai, black Hokusai!

*

continued overleaf..

FROM JERRY & JERRY *contd...*

Do you trust me? Jerry would have liked to ask him. Not so sure, Jerry would have answered.

*

Jerry often reminisces about something he may have, or may have not, heard from Jerry, "I think with my skin."

*

I drink to remember, Jerry confesses to Jerry.

*

Not that Jerry thinks that often about Jerry. Nor about himself.

*

The click of the bindings on the ski boots. That's what Yeats would have told Jerry & Jerry on how a good poem should start.

*

- Why do I tell you these things?
- You are not even here.

*

A serene, shared intimacy. That's the whole shopping list that Jerry wrote down for Jerry.

*

Dark, warm, and bitter waters.

*

To honor classical forms, by contributing to their dissolution.

*

Jerry hears Jerry telling him: "I am exactly like Ulysses, except there is no Ithaca anymore, and nobody cared to let me know."

*

Give me a break, you say. Then you withdraw in unknowable woods. And while you disappear from the view, here you are kneeling at my feet.

*

- Would some kind of explanation help?
- No.

Dean Kerrison is a PhD candidate at Griffith University, Australia working on his first novel. His work often focuses on the (dis) connection of the outsider in foreign lands. He's had a playscript, fiction, nonfiction and poetry published in *TEXT Journal*, *Meniscus*, *The Bangalore Review*, *Joao Roque Literary Journal*, *Usawa Literary Review*, *The Incompleteness Book II*, *The Lit Quarterly*, *Allegory Ridge*, among others.



ANDRE

After midnight Friday. Canudos bar in Tbilisi, Georgia in the autumn of 2019. A few of us including Andre take a taxi to a techno music festival up the mountain on Mtatsminda Park next to the TV tower, overlooking the city. Small bottle of vodka in my pants. Experience enhancers taken. The event runs for three days but at the gate we get one-day tickets, whatever that means at 2am.

The festival is a forest and the forest a festival. Thick vines emerge from beneath the earth and stretch up tall, like rebellious youth with a point to prove, before they wrap across, forming an archway over the path. As the archway narrows and narrows I race and dive through to the other side, just before the vines age and decay, drooping and blocking the path entirely so I can't turn back. Dancers fill the main stage floor. It's open-air and open to the elements.

Andre meanders around, speaking on the phone and meeting a random guy and handshaking before he's on the phone again.

Surrounding the stage, the ground begins to space out. The grass rumbles underneath my feet. Before I can warn Andre about what I'm sure is an earthquake, fat trees surface from nowhere in the grass all around and slowly ascend like rusty old Soviet elevators. The trees, approaching their fine wise years, don't deteriorate. Their branches keep growing and reach out in real-time across the dance floor to lean on each other, leaves brushing and forming a roof under which we bounce and jostle for enough space to move in.

continued overleaf..

Dean Kerrison

ANDRE *contd...*

The grapefruit-kissed sunrise hikes through the Caucasus Mountain range across the other side of Tbilisi, where normal people who aren't at some techno mountain rave are lying asleep or starting their day. Andre, born at the sea, says, 'When the sun rises, we rise.' But I can't remember the last time I willingly got my sleepy corpse up early enough to see it. Maybe it's best to stay risen till you crash. We've had enough and start walking – taxi drivers hustling for customers – down the zigzagging pedestrian course. Along the way in this park is some red-painted concrete overlaid with white English words:

I HATE LOVE
I LOVE HATE

For half an hour, as the birds call louder, we stare at these lines trying to make some sense of what they could possibly mean. But not much luck. It's made no easier that our attention's drawn to the fact that the damn words keep disappearing. Then each letter returns one-by-one. Every stroke of every letter is carefully re-laid, a calligrapher the architect behind this project of confusion. After witnessing countless cycles of the phrases being written and erased, I wonder why the word with a negative association – 'hate' – seems to dominate the meaning no matter what sequence the words are put in. But before I can reach any conclusions, my frustration grows too heavy at the artist for so slowly putting this work together each time – and so quick at tearing it apart again – so we keep moving.

Tbilisi at its highest point is lined with buildings painted assorted colours that bend and flow into the street's space in between – a mediaeval fairytale – and they pull back out to let us pass through.

'I feel like I'm in a dream,' I say with increasing volume and Andre laughs.

Thin purple and green vines have made homes on some blocks' faces. Centuries-year-old balconies slant down a little, like people receiving bad news about things just out of their control. But they'll last at least another few hundred years before nature has its way. The vines suddenly launch across from one balcony, across the cobblestone road reaching and latching onto another balcony.

'Shit, look at that!' I point at the vine passageway.

'What?'

'Never mind.'

As we approach closer to central, motor vehicles get louder. But the revs aren't typical. In the main street – Rustaveli Ave – we act as normal as possible like everyday citizens amid the crowds. We're about to cross the road. Someone yells in Georgian. We stop on the pavement.

'Fast and Furious! Movie!' is shouted in English.

Down the street a lime green sports car speeds from one end to the other before I can make out any other details. An ordinary black vehicle follows with a crane-like extension holding a big camera. When these cars skid and drift around, Andre whips out his phone and takes a photo or two. A policeman, angry at us for interfering with this make-believe reality, shouts again in Georgian then says, 'Delete photos!' and grabs Andre's arm. Andre tries to pull his limb free but the cop tightens his grip and Andre's veins are deep blue divergent rivers on the brink of flooding and I wonder where we can take refuge. Andre tries to shove him but the officer twists his arm and ankle-trips him to the ground and performs a headlock.

'OK, OK,' says Andre. The officer lets go but forces him to open his deleted folder and double-delete the pics. Just to make sure.

I cross a bridge over the river to get home. 10am. Want to sleep but everything keeps me up.

continued overleaf...

ANDRE *contd...*

Sharp light strikes through the curtains onto the wall, forming fluid animated shapes, and as the shapes sway and mould into others, I think of the vines and the trees and the other vines again and the rivers, and how can you have a sense of self if there is no self, what is this self that we can never quite grasp, everchanging and incomplete like the Fast and the Furious series that's needed eight sequels to try to figure itself out, then a mate sends me a trippy kaleidoscopic GIF which makes me burst with laughter and I don't want to live in a world without laughter, now I think of what I appreciate, the people that matter and if we'll have any sequels of our own after this life is all said and done.

Two weeks later Andre goes missing, possibly caught with some amount of something, before he was soon meant to meet up with his mother in a nearby country. My last image of him at a bar with his humbly excited smile about these plans to travel together, his last active date on WhatsApp remains the same three months later, six months later, forcing me to wait for his status to change to 'Active today' with much more patience than we had with that damn calligrapher.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Deedle Rodriguez Tomlinson was born and raised in the Philippines. Her essay and poem have appeared in *The Incompleteness Book* and *The Incompleteness Book II* by the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP) about life during and after Covid-19 lockdown. Her poems, reflecting her peripatetic life, appear in the literary issue of *Silliman University Journal*, as well as *Tomas*, the journal of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies. More recently, she has works of poetry and fiction published in *Wonderlust Travel* and *Mom Egg Review*. She is Program Manager for New York Writers Workshop and lives in Brooklyn, New York.



FOR L.*

When she stepped up to the ledge and
peered into the darkness, the birds
still asleep, the sun still to rise,
did she wonder, before she jumped, what life would be like
for her mother and father whose prayers
appeared not to reach God in
the moment of her
despair, a rosary clutched in her hands?

* A Golden Shovel using the last line of a Gary Copeland Lilley poem called "Our Lady of the Birds."

Deedle Rodriguez Tomlinson

GUTS

The *kusinera* hunched over the white sink, a *bangus* from the wet market in her hand, the *krik-krik* of a knife scattering fish scales

all over like rainbow sequins.

The tinny sound of Neil Sedaka singing from a transistor radio on the window sill:

*I love, I love, I love my calendar girl/
yeah, sweet calendar girl*

Blood, stark red against the whiteness of the basin— the iron smell of it when she cuts open the milkfish and removes the entrails.

*I love, I love, I love my calendar girl/
each and every day of the year*

With thumb and two fingers she grabs hold of the gills and pulls them out. Under running water she washes all traces of blood and guts then lays the *bangus* carefully on the chopping board.

*I love I love I love my little calendar girl/
every day/ every day/of the year*

I can't recall how old I was when I asked the cook if I could help her clean the next *bangus* and she drew up a *tungtungan* with her foot

so I could step up stand by the sink help pull out guts then hold the fish in my small hands under cool running water till the kitchen no longer

reeked with the smell of blood.

Dr Sally Breen's work has appeared widely in national and international journals and anthologies with features in *Asia Literary Review*, *Meanjin*, *Open Road Review*, *The Age*, *Best Australian Stories*, *Review of Australian Fiction*, *The Guardian London*, *Veranda*, *Overland*, *The Australian*, *Hemingway Shorts* and *Griffith Review*. She is a regular contributor to *The Conversation*. In 2009 Sally won the Varuna Harper Collins manuscript prize for her memoir *The Casuals* (Harper Collins, 2011). In 2013 her debut novel, *Atomic City* (Harper Collins) appeared, and was shortlisted for the Queensland Literary Awards Book of the Year People's Choice in 2014. Sally is Executive Director of Asia Pacific Writers and Translators, an organisation dedicated to raising the profile of Asia Pacific literature. APWT hosts a major networking event in a different city in the Asia Pacific each year. Sally is Senior Lecturer in Writing and Publishing at Griffith University. She is currently working on various book projects including a new novel and a collection of creative non-fiction.

THE BOYS

Carrie likes to think what she's doing with these young guys is play acting rather than revenge, but maybe revenge is what it is. From the bed she can see into the walk-in robe where Gary's shirts used to hang, white, blue and grey ghosts. The arms flapping about so hard when she opened a window in an onshore wind, she imagined they were reaching out for her instead of trying to escape, so she sold them.

She'd met Callum at a friend's party, he hadn't been there at first and she'd spent a decent enough afternoon talking and drinking the good champagne with his mother. Light bouncing off the pool, bare feet digging nicely into her mate's freshly mowed grass. His mother said something about Callum being a bit off the rails, Carrie nodded but didn't really care. She imagined him younger like the rest of the teenage boys at the party, slinking around and grunting when they were asked things, growing so fast sometimes you could see where their muscles were mishappen as if the bones were still trying to figure things out.

Callum was figured out.

Lying on his back, hair fanning, auburn veil with the sun still in it. She can feel the sun coming out of his skin too as if it has soaked in during those long hours in the surf and is now leaking a dull heat, into her. Skin young enough not to crack open and burn. She knows this is her best light, that the twilight edging through the blinds will be kind to her and she draws her long legs up into a kind of bow and sees his eyes slide.

When he'd sauntered into the party a violent urge had rippled up her spine, so vicious and involuntary she'd had to hold herself still, bite down hard on her tongue until blood came so as not to signal to his mother or her friends or especially him any semblance of who she really was. And all the time he was looking at her as if he did know who she was and knowing didn't concern him, inching towards her, swaying and looking down. Carrie stared past his luminous, sneering face, into the endless sheath of black sky.

continued overleaf..



Dr Sally Breen

THE BOYS *contd...*

No one was stepping in, probably out of respect – his mother, a statue of patience, had already lost the war. A fight isn't even a real thing when your twenty-one-year-old is over six foot four. Callum knew how to end a party and Carrie suspected he knew how to start one. People gathering their things and peeling away, all the movement and nervous laughter enough to diffuse him and he'd thumped down on the bench next to her and pretended to curl into her lap. A cheetah trying to fit inside a shell. Laughing and asking her to take him home instead. And his mother. 'That's enough,' mumbling her apologies. 'He's drunk, I'm sorry, he's just had too much.' Grabbing frantically at his shirt as Carrie slid sideways away from his grasp, the impression of his large hand on her bare thigh in her mind, a splayed-out Tarantula.

He'd found her on Instagram.

He is all around Carrie like a wave, and even though she's held down, the sensation of him wanting her is thrilling. Her hands on his face, as if in worship and he doesn't look away. His hard cock inside her, her pussy an axis, a turning point. Young men always love how wet she is and seem surprised by it. Telling her over and over how wet she is as if it's new information. Grabbing great handfuls of his hair, and she is here now, in this. And then she's convulsing, throwing him off, Callum reaching for her and asking did you come? Are you coming? And how can she explain? And so, she just nods, and he holds her until her heart and her body tick back into silence, fingers running along her spine and even when things calm, they don't untangle and she's surprised she doesn't mind it. That the whole of him here is what she wants. That the pheromones and something about how they are keep drawing her closer. With other young guys it hadn't been like this. The boy with the tattoos, so many he'd looked like a moulded sheet of hieroglyphics, how that had seemed sexy to the point of distraction at first while she was riding him cowgirl but then, after, when he was talking trash in her kitchen, he'd looked and sounded like a kid who'd drawn on himself with Sharpies. She fed him slivers of mango and called him an Uber.

Callum is telling her about his ex. The stripper who'd made him pay for everything when they were barely fucking and even when they weren't. The spiral going until he'd had to move back in with his mother. Carrie watches the pulsing lines in his neck and notices two things about the conversation – made him and fucking him – and how in his head these two things are an exchange even though he's been born in the 21st century, but she knows better than to make the point, and says only, 'I'm sorry but I think you got taken for a ride.' Maybe how much older she is and beyond catering, is why he likes her. Carrie can still hurt him but not in the same way.

They fuck a few more times and when he folds into her linen sheets as if he's passing through them Carrie listens to his breathing until he is asleep. She looks again at his neck. Imagines holding a blade there, how all that heat inside him would seep out, and what would happen next. She thinks about his mother. How mothers can go down rabbit holes and leave you on the earth for other people to play with. She goes to the kitchen and pours herself a drink.

E.R. Pulgar is a Venezuelan American poet, journalist, editor and translator. Their criticism has appeared in *i-D*, *Rolling Stone*, *Playboy*, and elsewhere. Their poems have appeared in *Epiphany*, *PANK Magazine* and *b l u s h*. They have designed interdisciplinary writing courses for Catapult, Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY, and The New York Public Library. They run *Endless Blue*, a monthly queer salon and reading series at the Bowery Poetry Club. Born in Caracas and raised in Miami, they live in New York City.



ODA AL OCÉANO/OCEAN ODE

There are parts of you
 Cold and ever-moving
 Eternal and expansive you are
 I can not grasp your depths
 Or ground myself in you
 You're not ground
 But motion everlasting
 I always knew you
 A friend to dive into
 To speak to when it's warm
 My friends from the other sea
 Say you were a cold mother
 One to respect and to be admonished by
 They looked at you and contemplated
 They knew you differently
 But to divide you as we have
 How unnecessary
 How human and eternally cruel
 Because you are a cold mother
 And a warm friend
 You are stillness
 And endless motion
 You are where it all ends up
 And where new journeys can begin
 You are all the night can see
 All we chart
 As we set sail

E.R. Pulgar

CATARATA DE LAMENTOS / SÉANCE

que tenga tantos de ellxs y que les pueda hablar en dos idiomas y no sea suficiente que soy yo el que sobrevivió el clarividente soy el que vive libre debe vivir mejor y aquí sufriendo por palabras que con todo lo que hay de estar agradecido me dan más ganas de llorar que el español se me da bien para poesía dolorosa apasionada	ways of explaining channel and planes of existence bad spirits latching moving through making an altar between us the dead tell how to make a garden flowers which are colors that can say what they cannot fills with rose and cologne the air and my extra language communication of angels and her ghost finally appears
---	---



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Heather Altfeld has an undergraduate degree from Columbia University with majors in both Anthropology and Creative Writing, and an MFA in Poetry from the California State MFA consortium. She teaches in the Honors Program and for the Department of Comparative Religion and Humanities at California State University, Chico. Her second book of poems, *Post-Mortem*, was selected by Eric Pankey for the 2019 Orison Prize.



THE MARATHON

When Creon, King of Thebes,
surveys the cave where Antigone
slew herself with a loop of white gossamer—
Haemon wailing at her side
before turning his sword to his own breast—

and the messenger arrives, telling Creon
he bears more bad news—Creon asks in horror:
What can be worse than worst? We already know
that Eurydice, seeing the worst thing
a mother can see, has killed herself,

so we begin to understand
what Creon will soon learn,
that death multiplied is exponential
in its delivery of acute pain,
that the loss of everything is in fact

the exact triumph of nothing—
it qualifies us to enter a whole new dimension
of worsts, a kingdom of hells,
an inferno inside the inferno,
a frozen lake beneath the frozen lake.

But is it all relative, this worse
of worsts, is it possible one's worst
at least for a while could be when
you accidentally let out an explosive fart
during the all-school assembly

continued overleaf..

Heather Altfeld

THE MARATHON *contd...*

just as you were about to sing a rousing chorus
of “Up, up, with people,”
so that the boys behind you begin singing
“Up, up, with poopholes!”
as the little cloud of you filled the room—

this happened to be the same morning
on which Ronald Reagan was shot,
the worst, as my father said at the time
president this country has ever seen—
and when the news came in, they wheeled

the ancient television cart into the auditorium
and we watched what was not an assassination of evil
but just one symptom of it, the shooting
and the shooter and the shot alike.
The man didn’t die, but continued

to *wring the necks of the country*
as though we were all chickens in a barnyard
as my father said, *every damn day*. And of course
Reagan was not really worse than the worst;
think of the metaphoric accuracy

of his economic policies, a giant stopped-up spout
we stood beneath to sip at the rusted spigot
as it dripped a teaspoon of dirty water
every century or so—he was a cowboy,
after all, at home on the range and the screen,

a fantastically lucky simpleton.
Because as you, and I, and Creon know,
the problem with a contest between the worse
and the worst of anything is that everyone wants to win
at something, to be the best at whatever it is,

Chutes and Ladders, spelling bees, chess,
genocide—for every Hitler,
there is a Stalin, for every Stalin,
a Pol Pot, for every Trump,
another waiting in the wings to trump

the unholy policies of his predecessor,
so that death—yours, or everyone else’s
around you, is the only way to feel
the triumphant breeze on one’s face,
to cross the finish line as the winner,

one toe ahead of everyone else.

OLD DOWNIEVILLE ROAD

What made you leave the dinner party
to go out for a cigarette—the glasses clinking
behind you, full of port and cheer—to wander
down the lane and into the woods as though
chosen for something—a contest in solitude,
in daring—when it was already too late
for a stroll? The pines drenched with sun
all day shut their boughs for the night,
the branches ribboning and scissoring
over every available swath of light
so you cannot see in nor can you see out.
The tiny houses you saw in the distance
are all shuttered up and twinkling
so far off they may as well be stars.
Even the man who called to his lost dog
over the roar of the creek has turned in
for the night, reconciled to a fitful sleep,
the apparition of his pup in the dark dreams.
The private property signs that warned you
not to trespass seem like omens;
from a distance in the growing dark
the last one looked as though written
in the forgotten tongue of Knaanic,
translated as a prophecy of your imminent demise.
What is it that brought you out here to see
what the woods know each night?

What terror lives in you that wants to be touched
by this trail that vanishes into the dark?
Who sees you, small and hardly glowing
in the growing blackness?
Each tree an eye,
each boulder an auricle,
the creek one long mouth screaming.
Where is the path to the wine and the table,
the talk of Voltaire?
Is there anything here to tell you
despite the signs nailed to the trees,
you are not a trespasser here?
No. You are a part of this darkness.
It is already inside you.
What happens here when the sky closes
is already familiar. It has entered you
and altered you,
from human to animal
to stone to ghost.

Born in Jamaica, Jacqueline Bishop is now based between Miami and New York City. She is a writer and visual artist and author most recently of *The Gift of Music & Song: Interviews With Jamaican Women Writers*. Her book, *The Gymnast & Other Positions*, was awarded the 2016 OCM Bocas Award in Non-Fiction. She has published a novel and two collections of poems. As a visual artist she has had exhibitions in several countries. Awards she has received include the Canute A. Brodhurst Prize for short story writing, a year-long Fulbright grant to Morocco, and a UNESCO/Fulbright Fellowship to Paris, a Brown Foundation/Dora Maar visual arts award. She is an Associate Professor at New York University.



GANZIE

For Janet Poynting

By the time I came to know you,
 you were a rude boy, lounging on street corners,
 white and netted against sun-burnt skin.
 Sometimes you would be in such brilliant colors:
 hibiscus red, ital green & taffeta gold,
 with natty dreads chanting *fire-bun!*
Jah! and *Babylon!* encircled in ganga smoke.
 Imagine then my surprise to find you in Leeds,
 a pale northern boy, sheep wool,
 dark blue, resistant to waters.
 You were what fishermen wore out to sea,
 see the steady or unsteady hands that knitted and un-knitted,
 all those names into these garments.
 The prayers women must have always been saying.
 Take for example that woman sitting by the fading light
 on a cold grey winters evening,
 un-waved silver hair pulled tight in a bun.
 Who is she making you up for---
 father, son, brother or secret lover?
 Watch her plump heavily knuckled hands
 move over and over again, a Penelope,
 weaving and stitching, unraveling, then redoing---
 all the while hoping this will not be the ganzie
 that is washed ashore to bear the weight of a missing story.
 All the while praying his will not be the garment
 that gets translated then transformed
 from one thing into another.

Jacqueline Bishop

TAKING DOWN THE MONUMENTS

Sometimes it has to be done in the dead of night
when a man has for too long stood guard
over a cowering group of people,
all that iron and steel and bronze and corrugated metal,
all the things that were needed
to keep him upright,
to keep him standing, long after
that man been defeated, dead and buried.
Robert E Lee and all the others
needed to be taken down,
taken off their pedestal.
If you ask Rivermuma she would laugh and say,
she should rightfully keep her mouth shut
for she nothing but an immigrant to this country.
Though, in one way or another,
aren't we all immigrants these days?
If you ask Rivermuma,
long time now those men in iron and steel
and corrugated metal should be put in a museum
or cemetery or hidden away in a warehouse somewhere.
But who listening to a woman looking like
and sounding like she-self anyway?
Who care what she have to say?
Not even the men looking like she-self
who always quick-quick to tell her story for her
listening to anything Rivermuma have to say.
Rivermuma wants to know what the use
of having plaques and more plaques
explaining and surrounding these men
that nobody going to read anyway?

Take a big crane, is what Rivermuma believes,
do like they did do in New Orleans,
take that man, take all those men,
every last one of them,
off their high and strutting horses ---
the foolishness of which horse leg was raised high in battle.
As for Columbus, still standing,
in his flowing white marbled robes over Columbus Circle,
Rivermuma have to laugh.
The day will come, Rivermuma believes,
when more and more people start asking of Columbus,
the same Columbus she passes on her way to and from work,
to clean these people houses so she can send money
back home to her children in Jamaica,
what he doing there, standing so tall,
Columbus, lording it all over everybody?
Whether in fact he did even discover
a place people now so call America?

BLUEPRINT

My uncle has taken to sleeping
outside the house, under the amputated
arms of the Julie mango tree.
He is wrapped tight in a cheap blue tarpaulin ---
surrounded by all the voices he keeps hearing.
He does this even when it is raining.
Sometimes he points a skinny finger
up into the inky blue black sky,
his voice impatient,
getting louder and louder.
He is the one responsible
for keeping everything in alignment,
the universe in order.
There are nights he goes off walking,
and we find him standing alone by the seaside,
communing, with so many unseen
people all around him.
He is of course some kind of emperor.
It wasn't always like this.
At one point he was a man with a woman
he loved; their three children.
You can take your pick as to what caused the break:
Was it the woman leaving?
Was it one business or another failing?
Was it bad-treatment by his now grown children?
Or was it like my grandaunt says ---
even as a child, your uncle would be talking-talking to himself?

When I came to know him he was a tradesman,
could read the architectural blueprints
for any building or foundation. Yes,
the stories that are whispered about him are true.
My uncle was the head foreman on any construction site,
the most skilled builder. He was a boss carpenter too,
could transform downed trees into things of beauty.
I saw him do this once, with pieces of wood,
some nails and a hammer, a bit of varnish.
But oh! The unachievably high standards
he had set for himself! Over the years
one disappointment, one unfulfilled dream,
would give way to another.
As a family we watched helplessly
as this man collapsed in onto himself ---
a wounded bird, moving out of the house,
then off the grilled white verandah,
then out into an imaginary place of stars and numbers ---
where nobody could reach him.
A place where he would be respected and obeyed
and people would always listen to what he was saying.
A world of his own making.

Jesse is a writer living in Vermont. After a long hiatus in California she and her husband (filmmaker Isaiah Seret), two sons, and a dog moved back to Vermont, where she was born and raised. She received her BA in Art from Bates College and then moved to California and worked in film for many years. She now spends her time writing, weeding, and most recently, weaving.



HOW TO GET TO WHISKEY ISLAND

Suggested listening for the trip: Paul Simon's Graceland.

After a long drive through the Adirondacks and across the flats of the Mohawk Akwesasne Reservation, you'll get to the town of Clayton, New York on the St. Lawrence River. Drive to the marina and unload your duffle bags. Use the payphone to call Whiskey Island and while you're waiting for Grandpa to come fetch you, head to the A&P and pick up some groceries. Do not forget the Cheese Balls, or the Schweppes ginger ale.

While you wait on the dock, let your eyes adjust to the large expanse of water. It doesn't look like a river. It looks like a huge lake, you can't even see the other side. But it is the St. Lawrence and you can see the water slowly flow. The air is a bit heavier here than it is at home. Watch for Grandpa's boat coming through the horizon. When he's within sight, he'll stand and wave, one hand still on the wheel. Mom and Dad will help tie off the boat and Grandpa will slowly rise to greet you. He'll look older than he did the last time you saw him. Oh, hello he'll tell you and if he remembers who you are he'll steal your nose and kiss both of your cheeks and his will smell like aftershave. Snap into your yellow life jacket, help pull in the buoys when it's time, and sit down on a vinyl seat, the one next to the window with the World Wildlife Fund sticker on it. Listen to the inboard engine rumble. And to the water as it sprays aside and feel the mist on your face. Grandpa will head straight for the tip of Goose Island. There are so many shoals in the river. Everyone uses landmarks to not run aground. Follow the path of the deepest water. Head for the tip of Goose. After awhile you'll round the bend toward Grindstone Island and then Whiskey will come in to view. There is the big red house, the pine trees growing like wind. The granite rock outcroppings, the diving spot, the swimming hole. To the right is Papoose Island with the green house and the lawn. As soon as you can see the Watch Island boat house in the distance and straight ahead, you can safely turn into Lindley Bay. And then into the Whiskey Island marina where the waters are calm. If it's sunny out the light will reflect off the sandy river bottom and dance up into the boathouses.

Jesse Boyer Klein. Photo credit: Shelby Duncan.

continued overleaf..

HOW TO GET TO WHISKEY ISLAND *contd...*

Granny will be waiting on the dock with the dogs. She'll hold her hand above her head and wave.

Granny will tell you Oh, Hello and you'll put your little hand on her thin shoulder and she'll do the same and you'll kiss each other on both cheeks. And she may not talk to you again until you leave and say goodbye, the same way you said hello.

While Mom and Dad are putting the bags into the garden carts to be brought up to the house, you run ahead. Across the dock to the little covered walkway which runs against the side of the middle boat house, the one with the sailing skiffs and the canoes and the old water skis, with the apartment upstairs. Your shoes will be off by now. The ground is cold, smooth dirt in places and prickly dry cut grass in others. Take care not to step on any acorns. There is the rusty swingset. There is the big hammock with the best view of the sunset, waiting between two big old oaks. The wind shimmers through the trees. There is the big birch tree where the weasel lives. There is the fenced dog kennel which was called Alcatraz until your grandparents' clever friend John Cheever renamed it Eden. So there is Eden. And the Big House. Red and shingled with so many windows and cob webs under the eaves. An island is a spider's haven, too. Run up to the kitchen side. Go up the stairs and open the screen door, and then let it bang shut behind you.

That is the sound of your welcome to the River.

There is the pantry which will soon be filled with all the snacks you're never allowed to have at home. There is the big black industrial stove. Smell the gas. Cross through the kitchen and up the wide steps to the butlers' pantry. Stacks of mismatched family china will rattle on shelves behind glass cabinet doors as you pass. Push through the swinging door into the dining room. You can see the River out both sides here, through warped window panes. That mounted Muskelunge fish on the wall is the only one here. That dry, dusty, Musky was caught by a maid around 1950, they say. Give the huge lazy susan in the center of the dining table a spin. Poke your head through the little trap door that opens to the butlers' pantry, where, you can imagine plates of food were passed through. You will probably not eat a meal in here, unless there's a big occasion like a 50th wedding anniversary or an 80th birthday. Granny doesn't like this room, because it reminds her of fighting with her mother.

Even after you help Mom paint all the furniture a nice robin's egg blue, she will still not like it. So, everyone will eat in the kitchen touching elbows around the table. If Grandpa starts to sing, Granny may scold him. Now go through the rest of the house and see if anything has changed. It won't have. In the Gloom Room, above the fireplace, the architect's rendering of the original Whiskey Island house. The piano still needs to be tuned. The framed paintings and photos of the dogs will be slightly crooked. The window seat is a nice place for a nap, or a fort. Out in the hallway is a green chest with the initials I.M. It has croquet sets and badminton rackets and flat tennis balls and Twister and Scrabble. Grandpa's yellow office with the scratchy jute rug and all those books. The downstairs bedroom where Mom and Dad sleep with the orange bathroom and tiny clawfoot tub, perfectly your size. Go upstairs and run your hand up the banister the whole way. Check the hall closet. There's a Big Brown Bag full of hand-me-downs from your cousins. A red hooded shirt with little embroidered flowers, black riding boots with straps and buckles, a purple dress with pink polkadots and pockets. Pick your room. The single room that was Mom's (the box of hair curlers are still in the closet on the top shelf). The main room above the Gloom with the chaise and the dressing table. The middle room with the mirror with the initials "A.M," not for Alice Mildred (Granny) but for Alice Morgan, your great, great Grandmother, and the dressing table where you might still be able to smell a trace of your cousin's perfume. Or, the nursery with the white walls and the sink, and the faded orange and pink floral curtains that light up at sunrise. You'll probably choose this room. By now the bags have arrived and you can unpack just enough to find your swimsuit.

The dresser drawers will be sticky, use both hands. This smell of old wood, freshly laundered but well worn bedding, the River breeze coming in through an open window, this is the smell of a childhood. Flop down on to your bed of choice. The beds are creaky and they sag, but you will sleep well.

There is still much to do: Go for a swim. See if you can jump off the high rocks this year. Try again to resurrect the cranky aqua bike. Start a puzzle. Finish a book under the cover of the round porch on a rainy day. On Saturday you may have to go to baseball. Everyone gathers at Rum Point for a friendly game, played on an old clay court, with tennis balls. It's okay if you don't like to play. You should know, Granny didn't like Saturday baseball and neither did John Cheever. The best part about it is when you can climb back into the boat with everyone, and head back home to Whiskey.

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



ABORTED HIKE

Jen retreats down the rain-soaked track,
avoiding mud, stepping around puddles.
carefully engaging the slipperiness,
expecting to fall at any time
but somehow keeping her balance.

The sky is gray and troubled,
drizzly like a sad child's eyes,
and threatening more downpours,
as songbirds retreat into leaf cover,
and there's critter tracks everywhere
but no critters.

Jen was on her way to the top
but the weather talked her out of it.
It's like that all the time in her life.
Only it's mostly people doing the talking.
They said she was foolish to go hiking
on such a day.
She knew it too but, having heard it
from them, the contrarian in her
set out in garb nowhere near up to the task.

So she'll return soaked no doubt,
a perfect illustration of "I told you so."
Jen hates it when other people are right,
even when she agrees with them.

John Grey

CREAM POEM

They're on chins, on cheeks,
mountains, red on all sides, white-capped,
scattered among pink thruways and valleys.
I ooze up some, spread myself across others,
while, all the time, dodging squeezing fingers,
stopping only when, from time to time,
I admire myself in the mirror.
My purpose is to gather information,
draw conclusions, come up with a plan.
Apparently, the one cursing or crying,
would prefer a smooth plain to a relief map.
At the base of Everest, at the heart of the jaw,
I seep my way through scarlet skin.
My aim is to implode the face's tallest peak.
For Scarlett has a date tonight.
I wonder if it's a retinoid I know.

THE NAKED MAN

He struggled to put his pants on.
He toppled to the floor in the attempt.
He lay there like some heart attack victim,
pulling at the waist as frantically
as if he were calling 911.
He lived alone.
There was no one to come to his rescue.
His cell phone rang.
Someone knocked at the door.
He cried out but went unheard.
He knew he wouldn't die.
He figured that, eventually,
each of his legs would find their equivalent
in that pair of trousers.
In the meantime,
many past incidents in his life flashed before him.
He made a vow to change his lifestyle,
to live a healthier life from thereon.
And to go to church more often.
Eventually, the cleaning lady
came on her twice-weekly rounds,
discovered him half-in and half-out
of those uncooperative pants.
She screamed and ran
at the sight of his Houston Astros' underwear.
Eventually, he slipped right out
of those slacks altogether,
tossed them in the trash,
went out naked in the world.



Julia Prendergast is a writer of short and long-form fiction. She lives and works in Melbourne, Australia, on unceded Wurundjeri land. Julia's novel, *The Earth Does Not Get Fat*, was published in 2018 and longlisted for the Indie Book Awards for debut fiction. Her short stories have been recognised and published: Lightship Anthology International Short Story Competition (UK), Ink Tears International Short Story Competition (UK), Glimmer Train International Short Story Competition (US), Séan Ó Faoláin International Short Story Competition (IE), TEXT, Elizabeth Jolley Prize, Josephine Ulrick Prize (AU). Julia's short story collection is forthcoming (October 2022). Julia is Chair of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), the peak academic body representing the discipline of Creative Writing in Australasia. She is Senior Lecturer and Discipline Coordinator at Swinburne University. Julia is a practice-led researcher—an enthusiastic supporter of transdisciplinary, open and collaborative research practices, with a particular interest in neuropsychanalytic approaches to writing and creativity. Her research has appeared in various publications including *New Writing* (UK), *TEXT* (AU), *Testimony Witness Authority: The Politics and Poetics of Experience* (UK).

WROUGHT IRON

Each night, Mama sits in the courtyard with a carafe of wine, talking to my dead sisters.
I can't stand the ghetto sight of her, ricketing in the plastic chair.

I buy a wrought iron garden setting, greyblack, velvet cushions, burnt orange.
Mama wriggles her skinny-soft fingers between the gaps in the fretwork, knuckles twitching as if she's knitting.

I fill a small carafe from a silver goon of wine, pour her a standard glass, set the carafe beside it.

Sweeping her fairy-floss fringe out of her eyes, kissing her papery forehead, I lay out her tiny dinner. *You must eat this*—a chicken leg, beans, carrots.

I take hold of the vase, a wilting passionfruit flower in green glass. Pouring the dust-blown water into the garden, refilling at the rusty tap, I tear a sprig of mint from the bush that grows wild in the clocktick dripping, adding a fresh passionflower from the ailing paling fence—soft-white petals, windmill fanning, violet threads erupting from the centre like airborne veins.

In the sundowning light, the floral arrangement casts a shimmering bruise across the gunmetal table, mottling her hands.

When I hear her call, I return.

Noting teeth marks in the drumstick, I top up the carafe, halfway. *That's it for today*, I say. She jabbars in refrain.

I rest my hand on the cushion, making sure she's dry. I take the pilld grey cardigan, slung over the back of her chair, easing her into it.

I kiss her again before heading to her bedroom—a 'study nook' to be precise. Folding out the portable bed, I puff pillows, smooth the floral bedspread—the same yellow daisies that ran amok in Willow Park, back in the day, Mama's fingers threading long chains in mere seconds.

continued overleaf..

Julia Prendergast

WROUGHT IRON *contd...*

I take the goon to bed with me, curled in the hollow of my belly like a water baby.
 As I fall into sleep, she tries to wrestle it from me.
 In stupor, between-worlds, I fling her off.
 Stumbling back, she cracks her skull against the low windowsill. So much blood. Who
 knew a tiny washed-out person had so much to spill? This is the first ambulance.

The second follows in close succession—I find her near the laundry door, sprawled
 like a question mark in dewy dawn light. Her cheek and forearm ... greenglass rain-
 bows.

This time, the health care professionals grill her about the booze.
For most of her life she was a teetotaller, I laugh.
 They look at me as though I am indistinguishable from the wayward storm cloud
 passing outside the hospital window.
I'll ask again about swapping the overnight shifts, I say.
The alcohol is the root problem, says the shiny-skinned medic, the sclera of his eye-
 balls whiter than milk.
My sisters are both dead, I say. The pen-holder scribbles a note.

I fall asleep, watching infomercials, wake in the fast sweat of pending doom.
 Shifting stiff and shadowy-eyed to the laundry, I peer through the window, bring the
 cushions inside, place them on top of the washing machine, switch off the night-light.
 Mama's bed is empty.
 I run to the toilet, six steps—three more steps, I pull the shower curtain aside—ten
 steps, hallway-running, checking the deadlock at the front door ...
 Perhaps she's in my bed—beside me all the while like a pillow. Did I ghost her—in
 dreamshadows with my hilarious sisters? Where's the funny, now, huh?
 Flicking the switch, I find her swaddled in her doona at the foot of my bed, her face
 shrouded in daisies like the wreaths of my childhood, loose strands of golden-grey
 hair on the carpet, a wet patch near her exposed thigh. She looks like a newborn
 infant, like a loyal old dog that you can't euthanise—never mind the mixed metaphor,
 this is for real. *Malting, Mangy, Fuckwit! Me, Ma—okay?*

She speaks gibberish—songwords I can't place.
 I peel off her undies, clean her jelly-skin with baby wipes under the warmth of the
 doona. Her polyester slip is scrunched under her pancake breasts. I disentangle her
 from it, one arm at a time,
GET-OFF, she says.
 In her voice, I say, *It's okay, Honey pie.*
 She is silenced, momentarily, then singsongs my sisters' names, plaiting them together,
Me-Licity.
We're here Mama, I say.
 Humming the Willow Park folktune, I wrap her in a throw rug, carry her to my bed.

Julie Batten teaches in the Nonfiction Writing department at Brown University and spends her free time tending her dogs, gardening and bicycling alongside the ocean with her poet-partner and their six children.



REVEILLE

Half a world between us,
 a'16 hours de retard par rapport
 a Sydney and yet our thighs touch
 every night, the darkness an elevator
 opening into a penthouse of our own
 making, the luxe of our own velvet
 fields, a Netherland in which you are
 a phantom of tomorrow.

At 3 am, you are reportedly seen wrapping
 yourself around the spire of the Empire
 State building in my dreams. I used to love
 the way our stars crossed, the tantalizing what-ifs
 of unanswered voicemails, the head tosses
 that preceded our leave-takings, the chance
 to walk on water, the default to orbiting
 at dawn and the day after.

But it is no use. The blues of your twilight
 have already wet your lips when the
 promise of tonight's women & wine
 step in to stave off the solitude of exile
 and the first light of your yesterday swells
 in my breasts, and the arms on the clock
 lurch forward, saluting me, disarming me,
 the hour, and somewhere in Aussieland,
 the band begins to play.

Julie Batten

AUGUST

for Talia

The half bare breasts of oh-so-many
round women wading in the surf
jostle and shine, and the full-calved steps
of old men unused to the lightness
of bare feet leave soft welts in the sand,
and our beautiful brown girl, too young
to know the weight of time, the bent
shoulders of sinks full of dirty dishes,
the worn soles of too many stairs climbed,
collects tiny, white seashells in her palm,
one chitinous treasure after the other,
mingling moon clatter with innocence
as the thievery of the high tide commences.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Kenneth Hickey was born in 1975 in Cobh, Co. Cork Ireland. He served in the Irish Naval Service between 1993 and 2000. His poetry and prose have been published in various literary journals in Ireland, the UK and the United States including *Southword*, *Crannoig*, *THE SHOP*, *A New Ulster*, *Aesthetica Magazine* and *The Great American Poetry show*. His writing for theatre has been performed in Ireland, the UK, New York and Paris. He has won the Eamon Keane Full Length Play Award as well as being shortlisted for The PJ O'Connor Award and the Tony Doyle Bursary. His work in film has been screened at the Cork and Foyle Film Festivals. He holds a BA and MA in English Literature both from University College Cork. His debut collection 'The Unicycle Paradox' was published by Revival Press in November 2021. He still resides in Cork. www.kenhickeypoetry.wordpress.com



FORTRESS

Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came

Sweet creatures of the word sit reading
 Alone in cells of separate towers
 Outside the world of flesh decaying
 Only God voice speaks here still

Silent tears water dry arid soil
 From which strange hybrid blossoms bloom
 The emptiness beyond still singing
 In ancient chords the elders knew

Time breaks into fractured fevers
 Prayer the only saviour now
 He died upon a hill in darkness
 Place of the skull where mothers cry

I die each day in this small room
 At ever dawn again I die.

Kenneth Hickey

ODE TO A GREATER AGE

I am the Equinox
Equal measure of darkness and light
A lesser God
of unknown ancestry
Half awake in a land of shadows

The city lies before me
A memorial to emptiness
The whispering woods
Where meaning darts from click to click
A statute raised to nobody

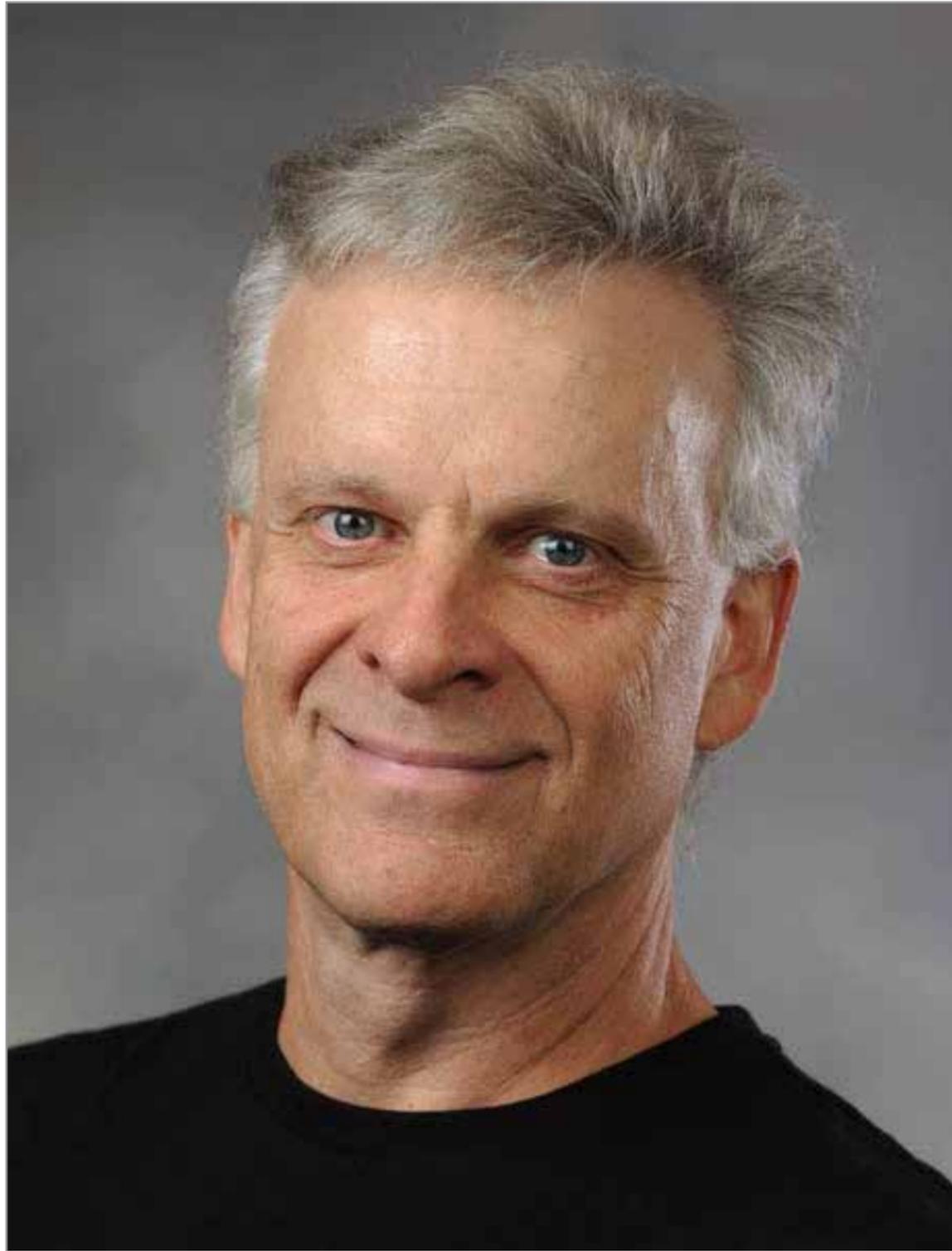
Tearful rage can not revive
the desert of its sands

And still we blubber blindly on
Reciting well the dead thieves' song

MONSTROUS

Music to the ears of the elderly.
Faith of our fathers.
Mass murderer on the loose.
A lady killer on the loose.
Many young people will die.
It's okay not to be okay.
More room now for mobility scooters.
Take back your freedom.
Morning after morning of uninterrupted knitting.
Alternating cable cast-on
Much more easy listening on the radio.
There now follows the death notices.
Microwaves will lie unused.
Your food is our passion.

Kevin Boyle grew up in Philadelphia and now lives in North Carolina. His poems have recently appeared in *Tar River Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *North American Review* and *Pleiades*. He is the author of two collections of poetry: *A Home for Wayward Girls* (New Issues Press) and *Astir* (Jacar Press).



SWARM

Great to see the swarm of migrant bees
forming a tornado cloud that swims in circles
around our outdoor wine chiller we never use,
preferring the fridge to the great outdoors,
the patio slates slippery now, wet with the dust
of pollen and catkins blowing into little waves
that roll into the house walls, the river birch and oak
sending so much seed into the air it feels almost
teenage, and the bees are using the same April sun
to decide, decide where to move their new home
with a new leader, the old world overgrown,
and so their wings hum while they think it through,
a thousand minds forming consensus without
raising a hand to strike or call for order, then
from inside the rhododendron that is all green bud,
no fuchsia or red yet, the directive is found
and out they light, a cloud of knowing, settling down
so far out of sight they could be by the creek
and the willows, or in the next county, across the fence,
making a home out of wax and honey, no thought
of colony collapse or boys with rocks the size of hands.
They march to the same drummer and find
themselves in the work they do, building from nothing
but the air between two branches a palace fit for a queen.

Kevin Boyle

IRISH FLU

The Spanish flu began in Kansas, a soldier
 on the train to Europe, shipped out to trenches
 in France, slipped across the Maginot Line
 in hand-to-hand, crossed back to England
 with the injured below deck, on deck, starboard,
 and escaped south with the displaced crossing the Pyrenees
 on mules, in wagons, San Sebastian to Cadiz
 and a quick crossing to Morocco, the virus
 in Italian virus, and in German virus, Arabic *alfayrus*,
 meaning the virus had legs, the virus rode in airplanes
 to Istanbul, the Holy Land, the grand tour
 and arrived back to Ireland just before its civil war

so my father could remember from his death bed
 for months the story: he brought the warm food
 in a tin to the cottage where his kind neighbor
 was confined with the flu. "I risked my life,"
 he said, "to deliver food to the sick,
 the dying, leaving it on the step or sill for her to pick up."
 They knew she was dying when the food was left as is,
 then dead when he placed his ear to the window
 and no longer heard her praying, or coughing, or breathing.
 "God remember my good deeds, and forgive my—
 it wasn't cruelty, was it?" And he slipped away
 in his sleep, beneath a sheet that was raised up
 like Veronica's cloth, a veil not to reveal his face
 but to hide it as death took him and its millions away.

LAWS

We go around the room, around the dark
 Though there's candlelight, and since we're close
 To the sea the moon will come out of, dry and full,

Someone begins the round, telling of a near
 Drowning, who saved a friend, saved a child,
 A very heavy stranger, there's wine, there's joy,

Though one has cancer, her ankles, her calves
 Swollen, her stomach distended with fluids,
 Everyone has saved or been saved, two pools,

One river, an ocean, and when I think of telling
 The lake story, of the man whose hand waved
 And then didn't as he sank, and I swam under

Unable to hold him, or even reach him, my ears
 Feeling pressure, the water wrapping him up
 And letting him tear loose, I think again

And drink some more, why mention it? The moon
 Presents—the waves must dilate—and it says,
 Gravity is not everything, as it begins to float up.

ADJUSTMENTS

As a teen, I always wanted to learn just what made me tick, so I'd sad-sack off to the altar of my father's work bench in the cellar where the water bugs seeped and hack at my legs that seemed to always twitch and shake while seated in class or church, the priests asking me to calm myself, please, son, so they could wax on about sin and sanctity, and I'd find a little nerve near the knee that just needed a tweak to settle, or I'd remove my hands that couldn't stop clicking to a distant beat, my middle finger snapping against my palm in a castanet of rhythm everyone found distasteful or annoying, my father saying, "Please stop clicking those pencils, or pens whatever that racket is," and I'd just loosen a bone with a monkey wrench while holding the hand in the magical vise that screwed me in good, or I'd unscrew my penis from its home base, its pearl jam, a weekly nuisance that flung itself into my pajamas as if cotton could conceive, and there I merely tightened a nozzle and an already stripped slip nut just a pinch, and my head I'd trepan with my father's planer and remove a hemisphere at a time, and just adjust the pilot light a bit lower beneath the sense of shame and sinfulness,

not blowing it out, of course, but lightening the mood around the house some, then once repaired, full of self-knowledge, I'd climb the stairs just in time to join the family in prayers, everyone kneeling into the loveseat, La-Z-Boy, settee, cushioned chair, sofa bed that was a poor sofa and a poorer bed, and pray we'd keep our zippers up, our hands off our body, and brothers would not eye their sisters or mother, and everyone would keep the shades drawn whenever they adjusted a bra strap or tightened a belt, which could always be tightened further, God willing, our tortured God watching us from the cross, his twisted neck out of whack, his eyes closed from the pain (as well as death), and we'd all rise to find a chore befitting our age, knowing that to be young was very heaven in that time compared to the relatives who were dropping from strokes in the arteries, chest pains, whiskey heads, and the suicide who stopped, God bless, his own brain—self-adjustment, noose—that was beyond repair.

GIFTS

On leave I save the most
money taking long walks in late fall,
early winter, keeping my eyes down
around the pecan trees, finding
some little darlings still in their outer shell
that peels into four parts like ancient Gaul,
and others that are naked, just lying on tar
as if that were a best practice for growing
into another blessed tree. And the hoards
are different with the trees on Fountain
shaping nuts as long as a finger, and Sunset
offering small dollops, and the reverend's
trees creating short and squat. Aw nuts
my mother used to say in frustration, anger,
but now I announce, Ah, nuts, in awe
at their promiscuity and randy ways,
sometimes having so many young a branch
bends low with the weight, then snaps in wind
and rain. And because this isn't an orchard,
no one does any work, we sit around as the trees suck
life out of our crappy clay soil. They like
the miserable heat of July, and they shape nuts
as easily as some trees make leaves.

They are the quietest factory, a large exporter
of goods, and if they lose a branch, work
doesn't stop on making nuts, they stick with it,
little magicians making something out of the nothing
that is our town, and in a February fog
they seem to have their arms up into the sky
in surrender, smoking a cigarette on break for a month,
though if you put your ear to the ground
at the base, you can hear a voice saying pe-can,
and another pe-can, long A and short A
in a sing off, and beneath the word is the hum
of machinery, the arm-like roots lapping
at the heavy soil, the bark not giving
a damn, and near the crown, the boys are shaping
five-inch catkins that'll droop, and the females
are thinking of making feathery, greenish flowers
that will catch, in passing, in flight, the falling
pollen grains. Thanks for all the kind largesse.

ROBOT

Am I a fool to hesitate
 before placing my X
 in the box in which I swear
 I am not a robot
 because I know the root,
 the Slavic root of robot
 is *robotnik* meaning
 worker or laborer, or labourer,
 or farmhand or hand,
 (in Czech, in Polish)

and what am I now
 if not a hand as I putz around
 the little yard weeding
 as I walk, or a worker
 who prepares spreads
 for dinner, or who uncorks
 a wild zinfandel while
 singing to entertain
 myself, a workman
 who makes a bed and strips
 the sheets, looking for
 stains the way I once
 examined my conscience
 for the stain of sin,

and now in near retirement
 I seem unable to sin,
 though I still work,
 a homemaker, a stay-at-home
 man, a grocery *robotnik*,
 a sweep-the-floor dancer,
 my arms a kennel
 for my lapdog, and when
 the winds come—which
 they always do—I become
 the tree surgeon, lopping
 that which I can reach
 without a ladder, picking
 up the crazy sticks and branches
 that have just given up, saying,
 Enough, enough, and I

just place my X in the square
 while crossing my fingers
 since I am a hard worker still
 and I whisper
 to my wife, who says, “Speak
 up, my little charman,”
 I repeat, “I will enter the web now
 to search out our savings”
 and after a long hour
 of math work I tell her,
 “We may have enough, darling,
 if everything pans out
 the way it did for those miners
 who worked all of that gold
 from the gravel in their mesh pans,
 a magic trick we can replicate
 if we should be so lucky.”

Kim Addonizio is the author of a dozen books of poetry and prose. Her most recent poetry collection is *Now We're Getting Somewhere* (W.W. Norton). Her memoir-in-essays, *Bukowski in a Sundress*, was published by Penguin. She has received NEA and Guggenheim Fellowships, and Pushcart Prizes in both poetry and the essay. She lives in Oakland, CA and is online at <https://www.kimaddonizio.com>.



TRACES

The house falling down, the mantel broken off and moved to a corner.
The car in the garage, new in 1957, still looked new.
The man before he died had lived alone in a bedroom,
TV rolled out from the wall on a cart. From there he'd walked to the bathroom
so often he'd worn a path in the carpet, a detail that afterwards
the real estate agent noted
as she'd noted the valuable car and the ruined mantel. Gone
except still there in her head years later, told at dinner
when she no longer remembered who or where
and no one thought to ask. Anyway, nothing's left. Maybe
a stone or child somewhere. Words over bread and too much wine.
Maybe a cautionary tale, maybe just a story.
No bruise or burden, nothing to quicken the heart.
Something to vex the annihilating silence.

Kim Addonizio

Lakan Uhay Alegre is a member of UP Writers Club. His works have been published in Filipino and international publications such as *Lunop*, voices and narratives of typhoon Yolanda, *Dagmay*, the Literary Journal of the Davao Writers Guild, *Katitikan* Literary Journal of the Philippine South, *Leyte-Samar Daily Express*, *Sands & Corals*, *A Thousand Cranes*, and *Panitikan*. He won second place for Waray fiction during the 6th Chito S. Roño Literary Awards and first prize for fiction during the 10th Jimmy Y. Balacuit Literary Awards. Currently, he is a BA Comparative Literature student majoring in Philippine English Literature and English Translation in UP Diliman, where he continues writing despite struggling with his readings.



SUNZIBAR

This is where we borrow time,
where I marvel
the outlines of your face in full,
no lies underneath
your facemask, pure,
a clear reflection of my longing.

This is where we dissolve distance.

Our hands cleansed with alcohol,
on top of the table after we've eaten,
playfully dance
translating our yearning.

This is where we receive love,
the restaurant in front of your dentist,
while your mom
has not yet called
to take you
home.

Lakan Uhay Alegre

VICE VERSA

When Ate Maria lost her Upper West Side apartment in a fire,
I thought of the rubble after Yolanda:

streets putrid of
dead bodies upon dead bodies
clogging sewage; their pus sipping in the roots of
concrete cracks, watering Tacloban's bedrock
as if hope

would sprout from the decay.

Leyte High, my alma matter, was a paradise
of collapsed buildings.

All the wreckage piled up

in the Mini Forest.

On Messenger, Ate could not tell me
how her ceiling collapsed,
how the fire burnt water pipes flooding their floor.
Tita Aida, her mom, told me the details later.

The last time I visited, Ate was moving in
to that apartment. We bought boxes.
Outside the hardware, a funny-looking fellow approached
—bald head, sunglasses, crooked teeth, stained shirt;
construction, I assumed

but he offered to load our empty boxes when the Uber arrived.
We listened to his story, how he got fired, divorced, and broke.
Ate gave him a tip, an amount more than generous.
The same she did during Yolanda, organizing a fund raiser
not only for our family
but also for the impoverished of my city.

Hope did not sprout from decay,
it was born out of people's kindness,
Ate's kindness and generosity.

When Ate Maria lost her Upper West Side apartment in a fire,
Our father's posthumous book just arrived, *Biyaheng Pinoy*.
On the last page, Tatay wrote, "Life has made real bondings.
After this page, life continues."
Ate and I continue our lives together despite
the distance.

May this poem be an ounce of hope,
a heart song echoing from Tacloban to New York.

Lisa López Smith is a shepherd, mystic, and mother making her home in central Mexico. When not wrangling kids or rescue dogs or goats, you can probably find her wandering the wild places of Jalisco. Recent publications include: *Maine Review*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Mom Egg Review*, and *Tiferet*, and some of these journals even nominated her work for Best of the Net and the Pushcart prize. Her first chapbook, *Grace Notes*, was published by Grayson Books in 2021.



ANTIDOTES TO FEAR OF DEATH

six of us in a skiff—
 the grey Pacific as calm as a wild thing can be,
 when a pod of more than sixty dolphins
 appeared:
 fishing,
 leaping,
 some hydroplaning
 on the break below the bow
 at our fingertips—
 two or three or seven at once,
 slippery flippers sliding
 easing through the breach,
 and my tameness didn't belong with such easy grace;
 but maybe Nature—
 like any of us,
 just wants to be
 awed at.

Lisa López Smith

ARS POETICA

With thanks to Sean Thomas Dougherty for the lines

i.
Somewhere far from any classroom
studying “How to Write a Poem”
I’m probably kayaking—
white water rapid
paddle flailing
as I windmill off the waterfall
peaks of rocks and spins, words spitting,
spraying, soaking wet across the page.

ii.
Then, cave exploring
curiously deep into the stalagmites
and stalactites
springing out of the floors and ceilings
of childhood or job or the back alleys,
and standing back in grim awe
at all this life,

iii.
and those lines clumsily glued together.
Turning the velvet petalled leaves over,
checking each word with a tuning fork,
allowing the clunky chunk words
to scaffold the poem, lines
breaking through the muddy foundation—

iv.
then bracing them tighter like cinching the saddle
on Cascabel, the golden-skinned ex-racehorse
never quite knowing how far he can go or whether he’ll pay attention
to the subtle clicks of my tongue or the touch of my heels
but then leaning into the curves as he picks up that glorious pace
halfway to flying. Back in the car,
heading home, listening to a few AM psalms
I might have gone somewhere
or not, but it was one quirky ride
which is all I wanted out of life and this poem anyhow.

MY WORK IS LOVING THE WORLD

I hold my dying goat, thinking
 maybe it wouldn't hurt so much
 if instead of more consulting,
 injecting,
 medicating,
 trying,
 demanding—
 if

 I just let her go.

 Maybe

also, if I hadn't sweated
 a hundred tiny mesquite trees into hard dirt
 before neighbours, drought, municipality,
 rogue cows found a dazzling array of ways
 to kill all but two.

I'll take Devotion, but not just on my knees.
 I'll lean on the quiet, on the morning sunlight,
 letting the flower bloom, or not,
 in her own time, in the colour of her choosing.
 I've stood here long enough now to know:
 sometimes I'm the owl
 and sometimes I'm the field mouse, body crushed and broken,
 a feast for owlets.
 Each story has its ending,
 but that I held the book in my hands
 reading each word out loud.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

M. G. Stephens is author of 25 books, most recently two novels, *King Ezra*, about Ezra Pound; and *Kid Coole*, a novel set in the underbelly of multicultural America, against the background of boxing. He is also author of *The Brooklyn Book of the Dead*, *Lost in Seoul*, and *Green Dreams*, among other works.



LONG ISLAND

How many times did I go to Long Island,
 Searching for solace, looking for comfort?
 I ran away from home when I was just fifteen
 Years old, vowing never to return, yet
 Back a handful of times, Jones Beach or out
 At the Hamptons, the North Fork or that one
 Summer renting a house in Stony Brook,
 The owner a writer friend melting down
 In a bi-polar fireworks of fury
 And vulnerability, and his teen
 Psycho neighbor breaking into the house
 Right after we went back to the city,
 Trashing the rooms and painting the pale walls
 With anti-Semitic slogans, at first
 My friend thinking that I did it until
 He found out about the demented
 Kid next door. I have even taken the
 Ferry a few times from Norwalk when I
 Was in grad school and lived in New Haven,
 Sailing across the Long Island Sound to
 Port Jefferson, driving a quadriplegic
 Former stage manager from Yale Rep home
 To visit his family, while my own
 Wife and daughter languished in the married
 Housing complex up Prospect Street near the
 Divinity School. I have vague recol-
 Lections of the house I grew up in, my
 Friends and schoolmates and family opaque
 Behind a scrim backlit for maximum
 Effect, the main character there to tell
 A tale of how she was betrayed by love.

M. G. Stephens

JASMINE POTS

The arc of the day bends back home to this flat in the midst of a city with ten thousand people passing by my kitchen windows every day, not even nodding acquaintances, simply strangers, but what anchors me here to this place are the rooms in which I live, tomato plant on balcony, olive tree, sparrows landing all day for water, mice, pigeons, nodding junkies, the street gangs (Somali Jamaican Russian Polish), in summer herb pots and outside the front door, amid the deafening roar of trucks, cabs buses (24, 27, 29, 88, 134), ambulance sirens, motorcycles, and the roar of subway lines underneath the building (Northern and Victoria), are the jasmine pots, three of them, bought on Leigh Street in Bloomsbury last year, tiny and alive and now climbing seven feet up the trellises, their white flowers about to burst with life and the deep perfume of their burgeoning unites noise with pollution, crime, council idiocies (shower never fixed, sink backing up, noisy neighbors), barking mad dogs and people (neighbors and strangers), and circumstance (a cheap flat in the midst of the city), the blue tits and sparrows, with the jasmine's flowers expressing not just hope, the possibility, with its determination to blooming even with limited sun and light from its two boxes, a foot square each, filled with rich soil (from a friend a few years ago, so I am not exactly friendless or without hope, bereft of possibility either), its perfume drapes the bricks in its sensual aromas, a kind of rap, I mean rhapsodic music for that old factory of the nose, a kind of rapture, a rupture of feelings, this crash of smells wrapping up my neighbors in its blanket, some loving it, some hate its intoxicating aromas, which waft over them, like a gift, a new song, so that even the street criminals stop in their tracks (dead in their steps, the new tracks on their arms frozen still), they stop to smell the jasmine, wafting in the air, wonder of wonders, incandescent, why is their instinct to rob and kill stymied, stopped dead where they are, and who they are, and why they came here in the first place, to score, but now they are thinking of getting clean, detox over the weekend, check themselves into a rehab for three months, this moment then a moment of grace, a grace note, a high all its own, this moment caused

by jasmine pots two stories above them, unknowing the whereabouts at street level, by night they are more spooked than awakened, they are still walking around in a daze, why me, they ask, why me and why now, who is it that wants me off the street and well, not this living hell below the jasmine pots, only limited light getting to them, and still they flourish and go up the trellises from the square pots of soil, limited light, hell, there is hardly any light at all in the late afternoon of every day, bursting with energy two flights up, the landing in front of Flat 7, there, such a day as that one is just about here now, on Hampstead Road, near Drummond Street, amid office towers and office workers homeward bound, the edgy street people, drifters, holy Russian street tramps, sacred homeless Polish carpenters drinking themselves out of reality on cheap vodka swilled on park benches, amid it all, blooming, its scent transcending, and healing: jasmine.

ORNITHOLOGY

Gentle birds
In

Trees

Help me
Please

What think
You

On this
This

Theme

Sunrise
Sunset

What happens
Next

Hieronymus
Bosch

Patron saint of
What

Inspiration for
Apocalypse

Grant us
Mercy

Give us
Peace



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Millicent A. A. Graham lives in Kingston, Jamaica. She is the author of two collections of poetry, *The Damp In Things* (Peepal Tree Press, 2009) and *The Way Home* (Peepal Tree Press, 2014). She is a fellow of the University of Iowa's International Writing Program, 2009 and an awardee of the Michael and Marylee Fairbanks International Fellowship to Bread Loaf Writer's Conference, 2010. Her work has been published in: *So Much Things To Say: 100 Calabash Poets*; the Jamaica Journal; Caribbean Writer; BIM; City Lighthouse, Yonder Awa, an anthology of Scottish and Caribbean writers for the Empire Cafe Project and most recently in *A Strange American Funeral*, edited by Freya Field-Donovan and Emmie McLuskey and designed by Maeve Redmond. Millicent is co-founder of The Drawing Room Project Ltd.



LIBERTY AGAIN

Is time now, time
we gather at their graves
friend and friend take liberty again.
Lean and hug, sing Sankey, lick mug. No mind
eye-water catch you, spit or breath
cause Massa Death can't kill we grieving rite.

That thieving slip that happens, each to own,
in separate dread, our vanishing alone—
Come certain wine that burns us lip to lip
as Cantor sways against an organ's grip.
Is time for bells and congregated swells
to damp the sting of guilt we've held too long;
why we remain, while best of us are gone?

Is time now, time we gather at their graves
Come friend and friend, take liberty again.

Millicent A. A. Graham

WATER CALLIGRAPHY

For the old man in Jing'an Park, Shanghai

Here is my poem
composed in
the hush of summer
on the south gate's slab
where the echo of footfalls
dampen away
I write it in water
with a horse hair brush
truth which I never uttered
left in the bristle's wake
I want it to last
long as my life
so that passers-by
can stop to admire
the wondrous trail's
grey vanishing
and think to themselves
what did it mean?



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Moira Egan's most recent book is *Amore e Morte*, a bilingual New & Selected Poems (out with Edizioni Tlon, Rome). Her work has been published in journals and anthologies on four continents. She lives in Rome. The poems included here are from the "anagrammes" series from her book-in-progress, *The Furies*.



Moira Egan. Photo credit: Eric Toccaceli.

[OUR OMEN, INNIT?]

sitting here twiddling
fingers, wistful legend hid, writ

not in water but on a screen
so plain and mean no sane crone

would deign to touch
it, a dark so dark i'm induced to goth.

then! o joy, a popup! WINEBAR.
oh. wait. no, it's just a webinar:

"how to succeed on zoom!" [so much *merda*]
musing, fusing the old sweet dream

of connection. o, poor brain, your re-wired
synaptics, a path so hapless & weird

I long lovingly for a getaway.
all we got's this cut-rate gateway

to a buncha boring left-brained tips
[and no delicious sniff and swirl and spit]

— ring lamp; silkscarf-swathe; firm pout:
we're all so stunning from the waist up.

eff and blind this endless winding Safari
of roads untouched, each as just as fair

[monitor ennui]

[ATTRACT. ELSE LIE.]

Hwæt. Yo. Aloha,
bad boy, you, a halo

of frizzy IOU curls,
demeanour all curious

and marsupial cute,
pure lamia cuts

straight outta Keats:
you've thrust your steampunk stake

into my heart.
My solitary, homey art.

Now what? Now: Detonated
is what, *tanto, tanto*: don weed

of widowhood, gutted;
hold in tow god (muted

for a change). prescient,
the alcoholic's secret nip,

booze on flare on fire.
O, fine felon, fairer

than anyone ever, embrace
me, these amber eve rec-

konings, night's perfume
nascent, grief spent. Hum

alongside me, ever united,
even when the line's untied.

[a little. a secret.]

Mookie Katigbak-Lacuesta is the author of five poetry collections: *The Proxy Eros* (2008), *Burning Houses* (2013), *Hush Harbor* (2017), *Eros Redux* (2019), and *College Boy* (2021). *Assembling Alice*, her biofiction, was published by Penguin Random House SEA in late 2021. She obtained an MFA from the New School University in 2004, and has since taught in major universities in Manila. Katigbak-Lacuesta has also co-edited various literary Filipino poetry anthologies for the Cordite Poetry Review and Vagabond Press. In 2019, she co-edited *The Achieve Of, The Mastery*, a survey of contemporary Philippine Poetry in English, with Dr. Gemino Abad. Widely-awarded for her work in the Philippines, Katigbak-Lacuesta has also been the Filipino delegate to international literary festivals in Rotterdam, Medellín, San Francisco, Macau, and Kuala Lumpur. In 2015, she completed a writing residency for the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa.



COLORED

As in a past, as in an expectation, as in
 The journalist asking a leading
 Question. The first time I knew
 I was colored was in a midwestern town
 In America, I was that kiss of yellow
 Blowing through fifty bread varieties
 In the neighborhood Whole Foods. I was
 The crane of a neck from the neighboring
 Aisle, the angle when the boy from Cashier 5
 Bent to look. Yellow,
 But also the double gaze, crane
 of a taut neck. Not from here,
 But where. That cross between
 Hazed guesses. China. Malaysia.
 More rust than yellow? Andalusia.
 Once, the burnt olive color of Oi.

I knew better than to linger
 In a town square after a baseball game,
 Knew it was grace that carried me home
 After a late night out; knew after I'd
 Latched the lock, I was a runner hitting base.
Safe. How many times since then,
 Assessing the mirror, have I proclaimed
 I haven't changed—but the self I held
 So secretly and alone, skin only a tent
 For ribbed bone I kept all my love in,
 Had changed, I mean, had stayed
 The same, but had *changed*, had become
 Color instead of skin. Oi,
Go Back. I can't. How could I assume
 Sameness then; thereafter, how
 Did I love the world?

Mookie Katigbak-Lacuesta

Patricia Jabbeh Wesley, originally from Liberia, West Africa, is the author of six books of poetry, including, *Praise Song for My Children: New and Selected Poems*, *When the Wanderers Come Home*, *Where the Road Turns*, among others. Her poems have been published/ featured internationally and in the US, including in *Harvard Review*, *Transition*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The New York Times Magazine*, among others, and her poetry has been translated into several languages. She is editor of the first comprehensive Liberian poetry anthology, "Breaking the Silence: Anthology of Liberian Poetry, 1800s to Present," forthcoming from University of Nebraska Press in 2023. Since 2003, Jabbeh Wesley has lived in Western and Central PA, and is Professor of English, Creative Writing, and Literature at Penn State - Altoona.



WHEN I GROW OLD AND TIRED

When I am old and tired out
I'll wear my ears backwards,
sweatshirt inside out, finally,
free to walk around
with ugly sweatpants, loose strings,
dangling, and when I stand to shake your hand,
it will be fine even if I'm bent, wobbling
and empty of my lovely front teeth.

When I am old and spent, I will not return
your calls, and when, you pass me down some isles,
I will not greet nor ask your name.
That little white blond, staring
at me because I'm the only
black woman he's ever seen,
will finally have grown to know
that color is just a word.

He'll know for sure that we grow old,
bent and wobbly, all of us, our eyes,
our fingers, the feet and all.
And when he meets me down some isles,
he will have learned something new.
When I grow old, and tired out, I'll tell those secrets
you do not know, and sing
the songs I could not sing, and write
that book I could not write
when I was young and full of life.

Patricia Jabbeh Wesley

FOR MY STUDENTS CRYING IN CLASS

I think I'm writing a poem about my students
crying in my class. Students, breaking up,

red, bruised like a bruised bark, their eyes, red
and drowned in tears, a girl, holding back

anxious mucus, the rest of the class, mute
as night, fearful of another tear breaking loose

and I, so used to this ritual, I'm down in my purse,
scrambling through for some clean tissues.

Consolation all over my face. After all, it's right
there in my course syllabus that there will

be a dissection of their fragile stories and poems,
an opening up of any poems trying to do things

a poem is supposed to do, but failing, since
the writing process is not a birthday cake, sweet

and fattening. So yesterday, when my young
freshman began to turn red, starting first at her

cheeks, reddening slowly, the way you dash
a brush against your cheeks and brow, slowly,

my student's eyelids, puffing, tiny streams forming
in her blue, blue eyes, her nose, ready to let itself

go, and then the entire face becoming red, like
how only a white girl turns red, and to call up

more emotion, she tried to question me, then
tiny streams were rolling down her fine face,

and the class awoke at once to her mourning
for her story, and right there, I could see the battle

in her that maybe her story was not loved
by this teacher, this black woman daring to do

what black girls are taught to do, to speak truth
even at the fear of death. Frankness, taught

even in the villages of Africa is like the center
of the diamond, the center of the center of life.

The last time a student broke down in pieces like
this, it was my first-year teaching here, and shocked

I was, shocked that in the Northeast, unlike
the Midwest where I came from, you cannot tell

a student she is not Maya Angelou or Toni Morrison
or Anne Tyler, Sylvia Plath, or Gwendolyn Brooks.

You cannot tell her that her poem needs the images
upon which her small town folds its legs so the train

can carry steel and coal across the world. So, now,
I carry my tissues openly, have become all ironed

out like the steep hills cliffing around this strange
town, and I have lost teacher rating, have been called

a vampire, harsh, hard like rock because teaching
Art is a delicate act of balancing a toe against heel,

the bite and blow if an artist must become,
will shape clay and stone, like Byzantine carving,

hard, so I order hugs and a smile and more tissues.

THE IDEA OF ORDER IN A WAR ZONE

In a corner of the shelter,
a mother gathers her children,
her bootless toddlers, feet too big for shoes
now. The shoes they wore
in their flight from home, have grown small.
Old pans, one spoon they take turns using
in the camp room, an old blanket,
now ripped, after months of use.
Time is not so kind
to pieces of blankets.

Old margarine cans her husband found
after the last bombing raid have become
their cooking pots.
On the mat she uses for a couch,
sit her three toddlers, now turning school age,
but she draws them closer
so, they do not stray over to the camp room
neighbors' pile of old things.
Even in a war zone,
there's a territorial border.

A Jack-o-lantern made from an old piece
of rag in an old can, old motor oil for kerosene.
If someone should die tonight,
their body will have to wait
until the night's bombing ends,
before it is clear
outdoors, before it is safe
to drag out their body into the nearby brush.
In the pounding drumming
of bombings, buildings crumble

and around them, the fiery skies light up
the night. Here, sleep is as costly as food.
But there is no money to buy food,
and there is no food
for anyone to buy. In the daytime, you
cannot hear yourself for the sounds of bullets,
rockets, refugees, moving
and coming. Long faces, long arms,
longing eyes, only their feet know
from how far they have traveled.

Popi Laudico is based in the tropical clime of the Philippines. A practicing architect by profession, both the left and right side of her brain dwell in the tango of the creative and the technical. Grounded by a decades old Iyengar yoga practice, she has recently ventured into sticking her supposed two black thumbs into pots of soil in her concrete apartment, hoping them thumbs turn green as she breathes with the growing jungle that is engulfing her living space. Her last adventure involved being hugged by an enthused eagle ray at seventy-feet below in the Galapagos. And then later falling deep into the abrazo of another in a milonga in Buenos Aires. Her lyric memoir, *Shaw Boulevard*, was nominated for a National Book Award by the National Book Development Board and the Manila Critics Circle, and the Madrigal-Gonzalez Best First Book Award.



DORMANT

Here you go. Here is my last leaf.
 Rolled up at the edges, brown at the tip.
 At the feet of my stem, my desiccated brothers.
 Their dead legs, still standing in soil.

Give up on me. Leave me alone.
 Can't you see? I have moved on.
 I need rest. Please, just stop.
 This dying, it is exhausting.

You pull, pulling up, pulling loose.
 Released. No resistance. Shaken, rinsed, inspected, judged. Cleaned up.
 Nothing has changed. Look, nothing has changed.
 The dead are drowned anew in crystal clear water. Begin. Again.

Popi Laudico

SMELL OF SKIN

“I think we’re ready.”

The white cotton nightdress she’s been wearing all day comes off. It is soaked from the waist down. Even with the added load on her belly that effectively doubles her weight, this little stitch of a woman makes the ten steps necessary to make it to the bathroom, before her water bursts.

“You’re right. I need you here.”

The shower is running steaming hot, as she likes it. Her favorite black dress is laid out. It is stretched to the breaking point. She will not be able to wear it after all this is over, but she has always refused to buy any “situation-appropriate attire,” as she calls it. I am here ready for her, waiting for when she might need me, but it is just like any other day in the shower.

She is still all wet as she oils her skin, and there is that smell that drowns me and infuses the hot, steamy air we share. She holds out the bottle as I hold out my hand. I oil the parts of her she cannot quite reach today. I ask her if she is in any pain. She shakes her head. The white cotton towel already smelling like her, I wrap her with it as if she were the baby we are about to have. She lifts it up to dry her face. It stays there longer than usual. We aren’t married yet. She is so stubborn.

“Why do things have to be something?”

We were best friends. She hated it when I said that. There I go again calling her something. I loved the way it drove her crazy. We were in high school, just two in a sea of identically dressed girls in pristine white blouses and red plaid skirts with matching ties. Just two identically shod teenage girls in our black leather Mary Janes running off and experimenting in the many out-of-the-way stairwells of our Catholic school.

She was my first. She was what skin felt like to me, the inside of her right arm held against my left cheek as my lips rested below her ear. She was what skin smelled like. She was what skin tasted like. It was delicious. It is delicious. I remember feeling her in my belly, like a wanting that needed to be satisfied, from just smelling her skin.

The white cotton nightdress she was wearing all day still lies discarded at the foot of our bed. It has been there for days, I no longer know how many. I am so exhausted. These sheets, these pillows ... I bury my face in them, breathing. They are her inner right arm, the base of her ear. She has to be here somewhere. But she’s not. The discarded nightdress tells me she never will be again.

Rafael E. Fajer Camus is a Mexican born writer, educated at NYU and Naropa. He has traveled extensively and has lived in Mexico City, Paris, and NYC. He's been through a few rehab treatments in the US and Mexico. He's also spent time in psychiatric treatment centers. He's now aware that he's not a cyborg destined to settle humans on Mars and is working on his first book, *Notes from the Bordeline*, from which this excerpt is taken. He enjoys reading the word flabbergasted.



REHABBING IN TIJUANA

I wake up late today. The first thing on my mind is sex. How I haven't had it for 16 months. It feels strange to me, not wanting it as much as I think I should. That's what I'm thinking about, how I'm not driven to have sex even after such a long time of not having any. I used have sex a few times a week with several men, often at the same time. My husband did so too.

I go get a cup of coffee and sit back down in bed, pensive. I think about that, about our relationship. My thoughts drift to my lifestyle in Paris. How did I end up there? How did I end up living in Paris? Why was I involved in the world of fashion? How did something so uninteresting to me, something I felt not only useless but actually bad for us as humans, draw me in? I had left myself. I wasn't paying attention to myself. The twinkling lights dazzled me, though they really didn't.

I get ready for a run. As I leave the apartment, I hear the music booming from the house in front. There's a line of people. They're waiting to buy their fixes. Strange that working at a rehab I would end up living in front of a dealer's house. My flatmate, who is also a counselor at the clinic, found the apartment. It's near our work, it's affordable and it's nice. No need to run from my fears anymore. The house, the people waiting are reminders of what I don't want in my life and of how much pain there is in addiction.

I start running. The street is peppered with potholes. I'm considering buying high top trainers to protect my ankles from the road. I will. The houses seem all to have been built accidentally, rapidly. With no sense to them. Most of the structures look either unfinished or worn-down. Dogs everywhere.

I keep running and look up. Cables cross the skyline like vestiges of a broken ceiling. I can see the structure but the actual roof is not there anymore. Just a criss-cross of wire uniting both sides of the street.

continued overleaf..

Rafael E. Fajer Camus

REHABBING IN TIJUANA *contd...*

I'm happy not living the life that I had. Happy to have meaning now. To be writing, to be helping at the clinic. I'm happy to not be a part of the world of fashion. Happy not to be using. Happy that I'm not chasing after sex, having orgies. Happy to be free from my marriage (still not divorced, but emotionally and psychologically free). Happy to help, sad that there is a need for help. Happy I was helped.

Then I start looking at people around me. People here are of two main sorts. They're leftovers or stopovers. Neither sort wants to be here. Their stays are incidental or accidental. In either case, there's a feeling of neglect that arises from this. A neglect visible in the city. The neglect sticks to my skin as I pass through. The dirt, the pulverized shit, the grease from the taco stands on each corner, they all stick to my skin.

I see a guy who reminds me of a man I met in treatment. The man in question came to Tijuana expecting to cross the border. He stayed after he got involved with some drug traffickers. He did small errands for them in exchange for drugs. After a while he graduated, forcibly, to bigger things. He didn't have the temperament to deal drugs, much less kill. So, the gang gave him a job he could do and did very well. He became a pozolero. The gang, as gangs tend to, killed people on a regular basis. They needed the bodies disposed of. This man was in charge of solving the problem. He dissolved the bodies in caustic soda. He would place the bodies in vats of this stuff and stir corpses in the solution until they became a homogenous thick liquid. This man hated murder. He told me he would rather let himself be killed than to kill someone, even if they deserved it. But nobody deserves to be killed anyway, he said. He wasn't killing, he said. They were already dead. It's like when you eat an animal that was killed by a butcher. You wouldn't kill the animal, but once it's dead its life is no longer your problem. Though he was being treated for addiction and he wanted to stop using drugs, he told me he was going to keep his job. It pays very well. He left treatment early. The staff wouldn't tell us what happened. His departure was quick and silent. He fascinated me, but I was glad he was gone. I just hope another pozolero didn't find him a problem to solve.

I keep running. The city's neglect is nothing compared to the neglect people here feel. I always thought there would be a sense of hope, of people waiting to cross over into a better life. Now I feel people are hopeless and this is what drives them to cross over. I feel like they expect hell on the other side too, just hell with better pay. This disheartens me. Then there are those who couldn't cross over. They're stuck here with inhumane jobs: forced prostitution, drug dealing, human trafficking. They seem to have hope, but their eyes tell a different story. And then there are those who exploit them... for them I have no words yet. They create this garden of tortures for those looking for a better hell. The pain of seeing this is too much at times. I turn away. I try not to feel, I try to understand and see how I can help. Feeling the pain will only make me want to extinguish my pain. It's better for me if I learn. I do my part in my little corner... in the clinic for now. I finish my run, take a shower and walk to work.

JESUS LOVES YOU

A caravan of cars passes me by. I'm walking towards the barbershop. They're honking. They're screaming out the windows

Jesus loves you!

They carry signs expressing the same sentiment.

Jesus! I think. Not today. I'm still sour about the conversation I had with Ricardo yesterday. He's a Christian. I'm not against Christianity per se. I'm just against people's hypocrisy. Against mine too. Yesterday I uncovered that about myself. I uncovered many things about Ricardo. It's good to uncover things. Sometimes the result is unpleasant. But the revelation is necessary. It's closer to truth.

Maybe I need to find Jesus to understand certain things. I don't mean to convert, just to appreciate certain people and ideas. That's what I need, methinks.

So I'm walking to the barbershop to uncover my face. I've been wearing a beard for the past months. I don't remember what my skin looks like underneath. But I'm in an "uncover everything... reveal it all" phase.

We're all wearing masks on the streets. They're covering our mouths and noses. Covering a film of saliva, bacteria and (maybe) viruses splattered on our lips. Not a pretty image. But a necessary cover. Sometimes things need to stay covered, I think. OK. Don't uncover everything, just what's worthwhile. Government secrets?

Ok. Calm down, I think.

I arrive at the barbershop and ask for Lalo. Lalo couldn't make it today. He says he's sorry. Sit here, I'll take care of you. I had never thought I'd be so happy by Lalo's absence. My substitute barber is hot. He's 5'7". Thin but tight. His vascular arms hairless. His dark brown skin contrasts with the white of his eyes which in turn contrast with the black of his irises. Thin almonds stare back at me. He's about 30 years old. His mouth and hands covered. One with a black mask (same as his t-shirt and jeans) and white latex gloves on the others (same color as his Nike trainers).

He starts cutting my hair. His legs graze my hands as he moves from one side of the chair to another. His hands are soft on my head. He's gentle. Firm but gentle. I stare at his butt in one of the turns. Unexpected. Round and high.

That definitely needs some uncovering.

He finishes with my hair and starts with my beard. I tell him to leave a moustache. I start being afraid of uncovering my whole face to him. It's only fair not to. He's got a mask on... and gloves.

His hands work efficiently but slowly. He looks straight into my eyes. His eyes squint. Is it a smile or just a squint? I close my eyes and try not to pay attention to his touch. My pants are starting to feel tight at the crotch.

I think about how I've uncovered many things I like lately. An important one is that I like writing. That I like the way I'm writing. That I like when people like what I'm writing. I think of how I need to write about the monsters in my head and heart that I've uncovered in the past year. How seeing them face to face, for what they are, makes it possible to deal with them. To accept them.

I feel his hand on the back of my neck. Cold. Delicious. He had taken his gloves off. He's putting shaving cream on me. His hands were worth being revealed. He takes the blade and brings it close to my neck. I'm fully erect. Why is him handling a blade so close to my jugular exciting me so much?

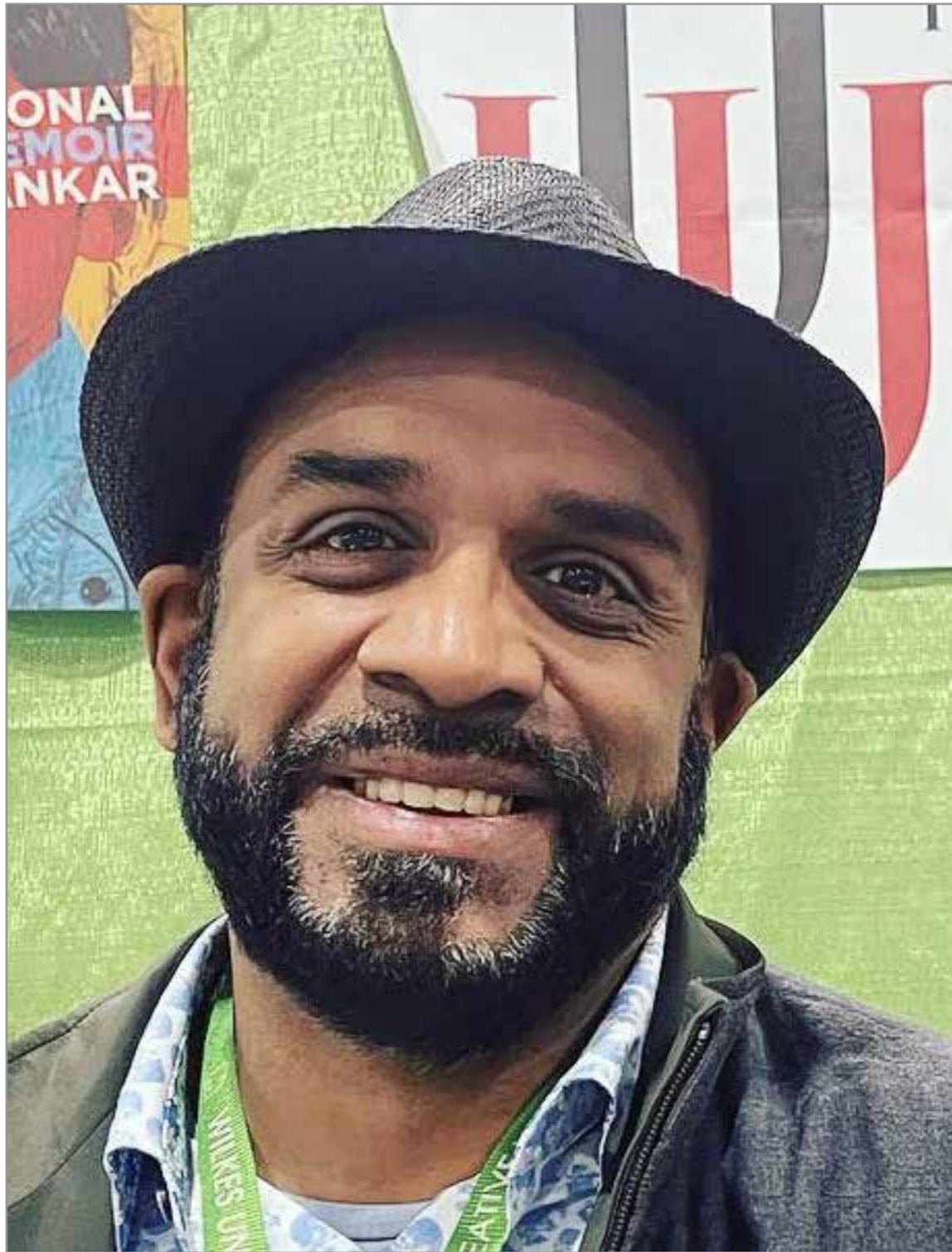
His mouth and teeth must be horrible underneath his mask. I'm trying. Rafael. You can't even see the rest of his face and you're all ready to fuck him. Not good.

I remember how many times in the past few weeks I've been attracted to men only to find them unattractive when they take their masks off.

My hard-on subsides.

He finishes. I pay. I leave. The barbershop is on the second level of an outside mall. I walk down the stairs and look up. He's looking at me.... without a mask. His face is beautiful. His lips plump and brown and full of white teeth staring at me from his wide smile. I call out. What's your name?
Jesus.

Ravi Shankar is an award-winning author and editor of more than fifteen books and chapbooks of poetry, most recently the acclaimed memoir *Correctional*. He is the founder of *Drunken Boat*, one of the world's oldest electronic journals of the arts. He has been featured in the *New York Times* and on BBC, NPR, and *PBS NewsHour*. He serves on the board of New York Writers Workshop, and lives in Providence, Rhode Island with his partner and their dogs, Annie and Rishi.



SATURDAY MORNING RERUNS

No single imagination is wild or crass or cheesy enough to compete with the collective mindlessness that propels our fascination forward.
— Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange*

“Hiyaaah!” slobbers Hong Kong Phooey;
slurping a similar sound, a new kid clobbers
me on the neck from behind. “Chop suey!”

Cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers,
Dick Tracy and Joe Jitsu—and guess who
I always was? Behind the castle drawbars,

peering intently, so as not to misconstrue
what to do, I wouldn’t play, unless asked,
then deftly would transform—*peekaboo!*—

into stereotypes from cartoon broadcasts:
Hadji Singh with a jewel in my turban
or over by Squishee machine, miscast

again as Apu by some drunk on bourbon
slapping my back. Thank you...come again?
I grew up in Northern Virginia, suburban

as a kid on *Growing Pains*. No campaign
against Asian immigrants works as well
as Oddjob in James Bond to create disdain,

or Long Duk Dong to craft an absurd shell
of masculinity into which we are shunted.
Outsourced, a call center sitcom? Go to hell.

Ravi Shankar

FROM THE MOUTH OF THE TERRIBLE DOGFISH

Exactly midway between Pisa and Florence,
along the verged banks of the Rio delle Volpi
in a Tuscan village called San Miniato Basso
wafts the perfect air and terroir to plant gold
coins for fall harvest if you are a wooden

marionette; or if a century and a half ago,
you were Carlo Collodi dreaming of a wooden
marionette; or if, even just a mere meme ago,
you were an urban legend, the cryogenically
preserved head of Walt Disney stored beneath

the Pirates of the Caribbean ride dreaming
of live action prequels and merchandising;
or if you were the anguished pendular bronze
wire nose of Alberto Giacometti's Le Nez
sniffing out fumes of postwar existentialist angst.

No, you are stringless, an imaginary real boy
with oppositional defiant disorder, breaking
promise after promise on Pleasure Island
until your friends start growing donkey ears
and your father gets swallowed by a whale,

all for the purpose of an Italian morality tale,
which happens to be the most blatant lie,
for when you wish upon a star, nothing happens,
but when you weave a tangled web of words
even an inert stick of wood can flare to life.

TAXI RANK (OIL ON CANVAS, 1931)

'My pictures, like music, should speak for themselves'
-Clarice Beckett

A train ride from the cliffs of Beaumaris,
far from the arrays of vertebrate fossils

buried in a gravelly bed, the seal bones
and shark teeth, corals and crustaceans,

a solitary woman pulls a homemade cart
of paints in the rain. It's hard to explain

atmosphere. Overcoats and shoegazing
umbrellas smudged in streaks of light,

hazy with the ache of waiting for a taxi
in the mist to return to care for an ailing

mother and a bank manager father who
would set ablaze most of his daughter's

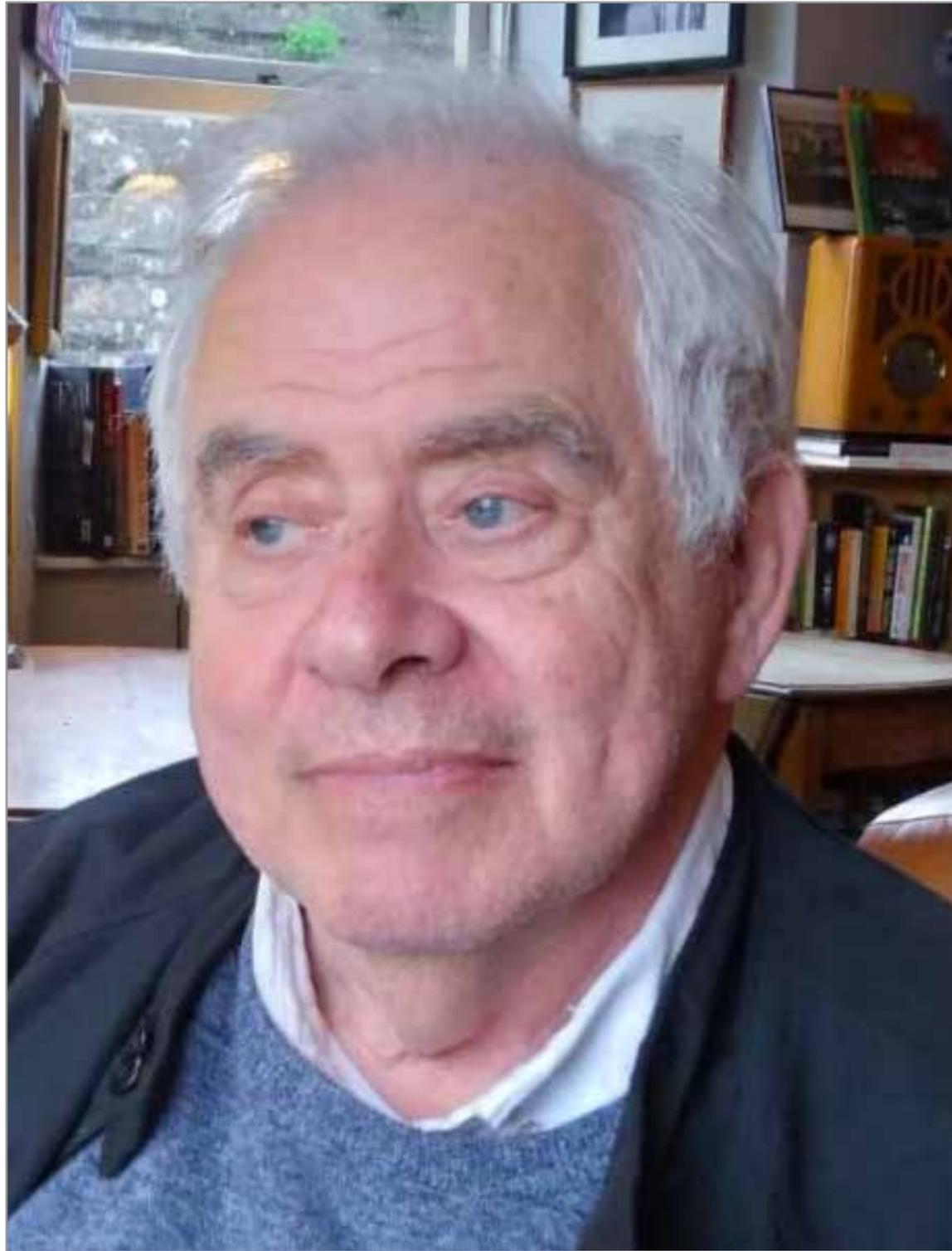
canvases, painted *en plein air*, soon after
she died of pneumonia. Distant intimacy

or intimate distance glistens, almost still
wet, blurry, a viola solo faintly rising

behind a windowsill no more than a story
above your head, beckoning but always

just out of reach like the memory of a trip
you have yet to take this life and never will.

Richard W. Halperin holds Irish-U.S. nationality and lives in Paris. Since 2010, he has published four collections via Salmon Poetry, *Cliffs of Moher*. The most recent is *Catch Me While You Have the Light*, 2018. In complement, he has published sixteen shorter collections via Lapwing, Belfast. The most recent is *A Ballet for Martha*. In Spring 2023, Salmon will bring out a *Selected & New Poems*, which will include poems from both publishers.



CERTAIN POETS

'... smiling at a remembered joke,' Jessie Lendennie,
from 'Skinny D's,' *Walking Here*

I like being in certain poets' worlds.
In them I feel the right kind of unsettled.
Where did I come from? Who am I?
Where am I going? Gaugin called one
of his immense triptychs that. His colours
knew the answers, even though he did not.

Certain poets' words. Certain poets'
places. Skinny D's in Jessie's Alaska.
The Cave of Despair in *The Faerie Queene*.
All of *Pale Fire* – tell me it isn't a poem.
The Upper West Side in Saul Bellow – ditto.
The exact spot, thanks to Tenniel, where
Old Father William stood on his head.

The *cinema verité* of those gifted,
really gifted, with words. Smiling
at a remembered joke. The mirror
crack'd from side to side. For Esmé,
with love and squalor. If the project
is simply to be merciful because one is
(Jung's phrase) just another little potatohead,
one is grateful for Skinny D's.

Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Joseph Woods.

I AM BACK FROM MY TRAVELS

For Christopher Dillon

I am back from my travels
but will be travelling again.
I am back home
but I do not recognise it as my home.
I met up with friends in my travels
who now seem scarcely real
but they are real, solidly,
which I take not on faith but on memory.
In Middle English
mind and memory were expressed
by one word which was bigger than either.
Current English separates.
Distorts?

I am back from my travels
where, poet to poet,
a friend and I conversed about Ovid.
The friend improvised a translation –
I can still hear his voice –
of Hermione's silent monologue
to her mother Helen
which brought tears to my eyes
as no written translation by experts ever has.

*When your ship approached the dock
at your return to Sparta where you had left me motherless
all those years ago,
you did not recognise me, surrounded by my women,
waiting for you on the dock,
but I recognised you, surrounded by your women,
on the ship's deck,
because you were the most beautiful.
Ovid spoke – poet – as a woman for all women.
Ovid caught in words the curse of too much beauty.
Too much beauty has something of the mirror in it.*

I am back from my travels
but will be travelling again.
Will be travelling again.
Only a fool would say more.

THE THREE SISTERS

They are three sisters, Olga, Masha and Irina, and they want very badly to go to Moscow. Over fifty-five years ago I saw in New York an inspired production by the Actors Studio of this play which so many say can never be performed perfectly, but which was – Geraldine Page, Kevin McCarthy, others – and which changed my life. What I saw at that matinee made me know that the house of art was no different from the house of life. That actors and a whole company could be vibrations. That the shocks which had been my life up to then – the worst shock of which was my certitude that no one else ever had felt those shocks – were simply Chekhovian. That, genetically, I too was a writer, and that *I must write*. I did write: a review of the production for my college magazine. 'In Chekhov, nothing happens, but so beautifully.' It was all wrong, but I had hit the ground running and am running still. That the Actors Studio production was perfection because each of its many artists struck exactly the right notes of imperfection.

In Chekhov, everything happens. At the end, there the characters are, even more beautiful in their sorrow than they were when the play began. I had got to that performance thanks to the kindness of a young English teacher who asked me if I would like to go for free, in exchange for my distributing Playbill Magazine surveys to entering customers. I have been told that he is still living but afflicted with a malady which has deprived him of memory and of his beautiful mind. I dedicate this poem to him and to his privacy. Everything happens, there is no ending, except for the Baron, killed in a stupid duel. They are three sisters. Olga, Masha and Irina, and they want very badly to go to Moscow.

Robbi Nester is a retired college educator and the author of four books of poetry, editor of three anthologies, well as an elected member of the Academy of American Poets. Her poetry, reviews, articles and essays have been widely published in journals and anthologies. Learn more about her at <http://www.robbinester.net>.



HINDSIGHT

At fourteen I used to ice skate at Tarken playground, where almost everyone I knew would go to spend a couple hours on the crowded ice. I wore my skin-tight Wrangler jeans—I had to lie down on the bed to zip them. I slung my skates across one shoulder, walked the two blocks to the park, paying my quarter to the bored girl at the booth. At first, the ice was smooth and empty. A small girl in full skating gear spun in the center, short skirt flying out around her, while parents with their toddlers, swaddled in warm scarves and balaclavas, shuffled on the outside edges by the rail. And then the kids I knew moved out in groups of two or three, rough and loud, shouting insults at the skaters as they passed, shoving each other into shaky newbies, knocking down a few. And then a boy arrived. Everyone knew that I admired him from afar. Adrenaline surging like a tsunami, I fell butt first onto the ice, and felt a sudden chill spreading down the back seam, where the seat had split. Imagining the bottom of my pants flapping free like a bright flag, I hurled myself across the rutted ice and out into the street, didn't even stop to take the skates off, just slipped the rubber strip along the bottom, running the two blocks home on blunted blades.

Robbi Nester

TO BETTY NESTER

In a world of broken jugs, you were a mender.
You could knit a sweater without a pattern,
draft a will, or clean a house. If time and
circumstances had allowed, you could have
designed and built one. Instead, you
took orders from men not half as capable
as you. You used to board those narrow
airliners despite your claustrophobia,
just to see your son and grandson,
take the baby to the park, feed him
his first ice cream cone. I still struggle
with my clumsy hands to wash the dishes,
make the bed. I wrestle with my fears.
If only I could have given you what you most
hoped for: a daughter-in-law much like
yourself. Now it's too late. Still, I wanted
you to know how much I valued
who you were, and everything you made.

PORTRAIT

On the black and white TV my father cobbled
out of bits and pieces of old sets, I watched
Armstrong landing on the moon. But while I
was watching him, what was he watching?
Surely something I, a girl of 15 at that time,
had no way of recognizing, the landmarks
he'd expected, formations he'd studied
in an atlas of the moon. I envied him
his journey so far from this Earth,
longed to stow away inside a bulkhead,
to leave this narrow life behind and step
into the sky. Now I know: in many ways,
we end up where we started. Armstrong
couldn't see past history, past the burden
of the millions watching this mission
on TV; the meaning of this moment
must have been as heavy as the clumsy
suit he wore, the awkward tubes that
kept him tethered to the tank of oxygen,
the ship behind him. I imagined him
as free, with a perspective none of us
could ever grasp, watching him watch
earthrise from the surface of the moon.
At the time, I didn't realize Earth held
him firmly in its orbit of responsibility.
He would always be the person he had
been, had not really left it all behind.

PICNIC

On Sundays in Pennypack Park, I'd go on picnics with my parents. It was the only time I spent near trees. They were blighted, infested with the nests of gypsy moths strung like hammocks between the branches. It was the creek I really loved, water thick with soap bubbles, windows onto another world, pouring out of pipes under the highway bridge. Blue and purple dragonflies bigger than my hand buzzed the surface, snapping at mosquito larvae and small fish. A predator myself, I'd follow shadows by the rocks, schools of sunfish, minnows, tadpoles, sometimes catfish in the deeper water by the falls. I longed to catch them in my green net, ready to grab one with my hands, braving sharp barbels, but I never could. The blue bucket swung from my arm, full of fat pollywogs. Lunch was the least of it, the circle of trees leaning in like ancestors, the grass singing under my feet, the spicy scent of summer afternoon.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Stephen Policoff's first novel, *BEAUTIFUL SOMEWHERE ELSE*, won the James Jones Award, and was published by Carroll & Graf in 2004. His 2nd novel, *COME AWAY*, won the Dzanc Award, and was published by Dzanc Books in 2014. His 3rd novel, *Dangerous Blues*, will be published in November by Flexible Press. His essays and fiction have appeared recently in *deceMBER*, *Entropy Literary Journal*, *Oyster River Pages*, and many other publications. He is currently Clinical Professor of Writing in Global Liberal Studies at NYU.



Stephen Policoff

SOME DEAD PUMAS

We fled into the kitchen.

"We must be safe!" one of us shouted. We did not yet perceive the unlikeliness of this. But no one had ventured into this much-touted kitchen since we arrived. It appeared as if no one had ventured into the kitchen in many years, despite the enticing words of the rental portfolio.

Gleaming! Well-appointed! Like home—but safer! was the claim.

This claim, like home, was trash.

Gray dust resided everywhere in the kitchen; intricate spider webs loomed in several corners. We admired the spider webs, briefly. They suggested complexity. Pots and pans lay scattered across the vast brown floor.

"Why have we fled to the kitchen?" someone inquired.

"The door," we said, pointing to it. A barrier! A liminal space which the small men might not wish to enter.

True, it was a swinging door, but even this flimsy impediment suggested that the kitchen was a more protective haven than the cubby holes--each with one tiny cot--which stood in for bedrooms in this shoddy rental.

This was a mistake, this rental, this getaway. We were beginning to notice this. We got away from nothing, and the small men with their smaller children were already surrounding the house, chanting things which we could not entirely understand.

Also, there were the pumas, or the fear of pumas anyway. Some of us had heard that this mountain town was the center of puma activity in the region. Others claimed that the pumas were all dead, long gone from the region.

continued overleaf..

SOME DEAD PUMAS *contd...*

Then, one of us argued that puma ghosts were the danger.

"Some dead pumas exist," she said. "We need to be aware of this."

It was the fires which brought us to this so-called haven, and they were still raging, if the admonitions of News Flunkies could be believed.

Some did not believe them.

"The fires have burned out," one of us observed. "We came here for nothing and now we are threatened by small men and their smaller children."

"And the pumas," someone muttered.

"And the dead pumas," another added. "We need to be aware of all the dangers not just the fires which may or may not have burned out."

The small men now howled in the courtyard.

Who are these small men and their smaller children? Are they an understudied ethno-minority? Aliens who escaped from some nearby military facility? An indigenous grouping unknown to contemporary anthropologists? Merely the result of centuries of inbreeding in this secluded mountain town now not so secluded? Or possibly just a random mob of pear-shaped inhabitants who do not appreciate our decision to flee the fires and secure our well-being at their expense?

"We blame you! We blame you!"

This is what the small men seemed to be chanting. But why? Why are we to blame?

We did not know that what we did would result in the fires, someone asserted.

There was a long silence, pierced only by the faint chorus of the small men.

"Some knew," one of us whispered.

"No no, we did not know. Except perhaps once in a while we came to know, a glimmer of the knowing which we immediately thrust from ourselves like unwashed laundry," another observed.

One of us cracked open the swinging door.

"I think I see pumas," she said, a hint of agitation in her voice.

"Heading our way?" someone wondered.

The door swung all the way open then, and we saw them, with our wide eyes, the small men and their small children, screeching at our betrayal, and then the pumas, who may or may not be dead, but were nevertheless leaping toward us showing off their bright black claws.

Susanna Horng is 2021-2022 Jerome Hill Artist Fellow in Literature. She has received a NYSCA/NYFA Artist Fellowship in Fiction from The New York Foundation for the Arts and residencies from Catwalk Art Institute and Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in *Bennington Review*, *Minerva Rising*, *Global City Review*, and *The Rumpus*. She is a clinical professor in Liberal Studies at New York University.



THREE SUSANAS

Prisoners housed in the attic of ESMA,
Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada,
in Buenos Aires, for paramilitary
activities after 1976's coup d'état.

Hooded, shackled, denied
food, water, thirty-six or so mothers
gave birth in captivity, wrote
letters to their relatives, reassured:
*we're safe, please care
for our babies until we return.*

The torturers told the mothers
their letters and babies,
would go back to their families.
Instead, their letters were trashed,
their infants were stolen, adopted
out to Navy couples.

Remembered by witness testimony:

Irma Susana Delgado Lizazo
was four or five months pregnant
when she was kidnapped patrolling
the north quarter of Montoneros
with her companion on October 18, 1976.
She would have given birth in March 1977.
Her child's whereabouts are unknown.
Irma Susana remains missing.

continued overleaf...

Susanna Horng

THREE SUSANAS *contd...*

Susana Pegoraro was five months pregnant when she was kidnapped with her father at Constitución station on July 8, 1977. After giving birth in November, her baby girl was removed from ESMA and adopted by an Armada couple. Evelin Bauer Pergoraro's identity was returned to her by Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo in April 2008. Susana Pegoraro remains missing.

Susana Siver was four months pregnant when she was kidnapped with her husband on August 14, 1978. In January, her daughter Laura was born by C-section and taken away the same night. Laura Reinhold Siver's identity was returned to her by Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo in August 2011. Susana Siver remains missing.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Thaddeus Rutkowski is the author of seven books, most recently *Tricks of Light*, a poetry collection. He teaches at Medgar Evers College and received a fiction writing fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts.



Thaddeus Rutkowski

PAIN IN THE NECK

A classmate of mine was not in the studio, and she was the one I wanted to see. Another student told me she was in the hospital—she'd had an accident.

I went to visit her, though I didn't know if I was supposed to be there. I wasn't her relative, and I wasn't yet an adult. Could unrelated minors just walk into the college clinic? No one stopped me, so I went to a floor for patients and found her room. She was alone in it, lying under a sheet. A medical brace was attached to her neck.

"Can you walk?" I asked.

"A weight was pulling my head for a while, but now I'm free."

"What happened?" I asked.

"I was riding in the rain."

I could picture her rolling downhill on her bicycle, coasting from our dorm to the main quad. Her bike had English-style wheels, and she must have been going fast.

"You fell on your own?" I asked.

"I'm never riding in the rain again."

I hoped she would be back in the studio soon. I remembered the way she sat on a stool next to a drawing table. Her face almost touched the sketch paper, and one knee was raised over her back, supported by a foot on another stool. She held a pencil in one hand, and her thick hair lay over a shoulder. Like the rest of us, she was drawing the life model posed in the center of the room.

"Are your parents coming to see you?" I asked.

"They live too far away."

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PAIN IN THE NECK *contd...*

I wondered if I should stay in her room. My chair was fairly comfortable: It had wooden arms, and a soft seat and back. I could sleep in that chair. Staying there would be a friendly gesture, company for someone who was alone.

"I could sleep here tonight," I said.

"You have to leave now," she said. "I have to get up."

I wondered if the neck weight would be applied again, after I'd left.

"Feel better," I said.

"Lovely visit."

Rain was still falling outside. I walked past the place where she had fallen, just where the steep road curved. An artificial lake lay on one side, and a Gothic-style residential college and professors' houses stood on the other. I could picture the crash. As the front wheel skidded out, the rim must have bent and the spokes must have snapped. But the twisted metal was only collateral damage. The main event was the rider flying off the saddle and over the frame, then hitting the ground in such a way as to injure her neck.

I would be careful if I ever rode a bicycle down that hill. But I had no bicycle; I walked everywhere.

RUNNING DOG

I looked one way across an empty parking lot and saw a large dog charging at me. I looked the other way and saw a man sitting in an idling car. The man yelled through his open window, "Get in!"

If I could get to the car before the dog caught me, I could jump into the passenger seat and slam the door. The driver would gun the engine, and the dog would be left behind. I didn't know who the driver was, and I doubted he knew me. All he saw was a guy being attacked by a large black dog. I was close to the car, maybe fifty yards away, and I ran toward it. I was not a fast runner, but I summoned whatever speed I could. I pumped my legs and punched the air with my arms.

Over my shoulder, I saw the dog streaking across the pavement. Why was it attacking me? I had done it no harm. Regardless, the animal somehow knew to bear down. Maybe the creature was inherently evil, like the hound that haunted the Baskervilles. Or maybe it was a generic hound from Hell. The dog closed in, and I turned to meet it. When we made contact, would it jump on me and sink its teeth into my flesh? Would it knock me to the ground?

I was still yards away from the waiting car when the dog and I collided. At the moment of contact, I heard a crash. I saw nothing—my eyes weren't working—and felt nothing. But I heard distinctly the sound of something soft and heavy thudding against solid objects. The noise lasted about a second. When the sound stopped, I realized the soft and heavy thing was my body.

I was sitting. I wasn't running. I was leaning against a stack of books and papers. My groin hurt—the skin there burned. I felt an after-impact in the muscle of my thigh. I didn't know if bones were fractured. More important, I didn't know if I would be able to pee easily. The image of the angry dog was clear in my mind.

I'd been sleeping on a raised mattress, without side guards, for many years. Anytime I'd rolled to the edge, I sensed the empty space and moved back. I had never gone over the side. This time, I had sprinted over the edge.

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RUNNING DOG *contd...*

My wife's voice came from the loft platform, six feet above the floor. "Are you all right?" she asked.

I was not all right. "I'm all right," I said.

"Did you fall off the ladder?"

The ladder was lying nearby. A powerful force had knocked it from its slot in the loft frame. As well, a laptop computer and a printer had been thrown down, onto the pile of books and papers on the floor.

"No, I was dreaming that I was running from a dog."

"Sometimes the things you see in dreams are parts of yourself."

The driver in the car might have been the sane, sober part of me, but the dog was the berzerk part. This creature existed only at night, when it hunted for small game or for unaccompanied humans. During the day, it was human, protective, looking out for the welfare of others. The changeling lived according to the pattern of daylight and darkness—shifting from one form to another with the arrival of dawn or dusk. When I started to run in the night, who knew what would happen? I would keep going—nothing would stop me—until I went over the edge.

FIGURE SCULPTURE

In the evening, the model from my sculpture class dropped by my dorm room. She had a young man—a student—with her. He was tall and athletic-looking, and had curly black hair that hugged his head. "This is Sandro," she said. "His father owns a shoe company."

Sandro called her his "bird." "My bird and I are going out," he said, and they left.

I also wanted to go out, but I was too young to drink. So I asked an older dorm mate if he would lend me his ID. His driver's license had a picture of a young man with straight black hair and a wide face—close enough, I thought.

I walked down a long hill to an antique-style bar. At the door, a bouncer asked for my proof of age. I showed him the license, and he asked, "Is this your face?" I wanted to say, "No, it's my ass," but I didn't say anything.

He confiscated the ID. "You can come in," he said, "but if you drink, I'll throw you out."

I joined some classmates at a small marble-topped table and ordered a pineapple juice. An argument developed between one of my chums and a young woman I didn't know.

"I'm from C.U.," the classmate said, referring to our university, Cornell. "It's on the hill."

"I can see you at C.U. fine," she said, "even from my hill."

"Aren't you from I.C.?" he asked, referring to her college, Ithaca.

"I can get from I.C. to C.U. anytime," she said.

"I see, but you're from I.C. Who would want to go from C.U. to I.C.?"

"See you at C.U. later," the woman said, and threw her drink in his face.

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FIGURE SCULPTURE *contd...*

The man wasn't fazed; in fact, he was smiling. "I'll see you at I.C.," he said. He picked up his drink and threw it in her face.

Nothing much happened in the bar after that.

When I got back to my dorm, I returned the ID I'd borrowed. "It was taken away," I said to the student who had lent it, "but I got it back on my way out."

The next day, the sculpture model came by my room.

"I looked for you at a bar downtown," I said, "but all I saw was an argument."

"We went somewhere else," she said.

"Will you keep modeling for art classes?"

"I need to do something for money. I'm always almost getting kicked out of school."

"Not good," I said.

"I'm thinking of majoring in religion. I want to join a ministry."

"Which ministry?"

"The one led by Sun Myung Moon. He's the source and the reflection."

On a sunny day, the art students and I met outside the sculpture building for the session. The model stood on the grass, and we made a semicircle around her, working with Plasticine clay on our wood-topped tripods.

The teacher came to my figure and began to touch it. He looked at the model, then at my figure, and said, "You should make the surface look like skin." He rubbed the miniature body, breathed on it, rubbed some more. Every place he touched came out smooth. "Then you should cast it in plaster and finish it with lacquer."

Later, I made a cast of my clay figure in plaster and brought it to my room. The small nude stood straight, with her arms at her sides. There were details on her face—eyes, nose, and mouth—made by a tiny spatula. You could tell who she was. I moved the sculpture around on my desk; the figure actually balanced on her feet. Anytime she faced me, she seemed to be looking directly at me. I went through school without seeing her in real life again.

*

A few years later, I ran into her on a subway platform in New York City. We recognized each other and paused. To me, she was as beautiful as ever, but I didn't say anything like that. I wondered if she was still a member of Sun Myung Moon's group, if she accepted the church wholeheartedly, and if she had married a partner chosen by Moon himself. But I didn't get a chance to ask. Her train arrived, she got on, and I remained on the platform as the train left.

Thomas Mar Wee is a writer, poet, and editor based in New York City. A recent graduate of Columbia University, they have served as an editor for various publications. Their poetry was awarded a University & College Poetry Prize from the Academy of American Poets. They currently serve as an Apprentice at *One Story*.



KOUROS¹

*"Stop and show pity beside the marker of Kroisos,
dead, whom, when he was in the front ranks, raging Ares destroyed."²*

For twenty years, this Body
This constellation of hurts
Quivering flock
of Collected Wounds

Yours, of course, in the end
failed you

One explanation
for this body-hatred:
as Inheritance

*Made in the image of the Father
The Son, that prodigious mirror
Casts a vision of you*

Of the sick, hollowed out man
whose body, a deflated vessel
Capsized in sarcoma
Rapidly takes on water

In the shower,
making my daily ablutions
I watch yours decay
Cleaning myself, I witness ravages
Time leaks, in rivulets

And in mine: that Young Apollonian
a beardless youth, from Attica, advances
(fertile/febrile) in which I discern
a faint prognosis

¹ Kouros (Ancient Greek) "youth, boy, especially of noble rank."
² Inscription on the Kroisos Kouros, c. 500 BC

Thomas Mar Wee

Troy Jollimore is the author of five books of poetry, most recently *Earthly Delights*, and three books of philosophy, as well as numerous articles, essays, and reviews. His first collection of poetry, *Tom Thomson in Purgatory*, won the National Book Critics Circle award in poetry for 2006. His third, *Syllabus of Errors*, appeared on the New York Times' list of the best books of poetry published in 2015. His poems have appeared in publications including the New Yorker, Poetry Magazine, McSweeney's, the New England Review, Tin House, and *The Best American Poetry 2020*. His essays have been published in venues including Conjunctions, the Kenyon Review, Zyzzyva, and the New York Times Book Review, and he is a frequent book reviewer for the Chicago Tribune, and the Washington Post. In 2013 he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in poetry. He has also received fellowships from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and the Stanford Humanities Center in Palo Alto, California. Born in Liverpool, Nova Scotia, he earned a Ph.D. in Philosophy at Princeton under the direction of Harry Frankfurt. He is currently a Professor in the Philosophy Department at California State University, Chico.

MIRROR

Words on the wind of a distant fire,
 somewhere past the range of vision, or
 the breeze that flattens the grasses radiating
 from the place where a stranger is standing: what are
 these things to us, what are we to them,
 or to each other? I see a mirror
 in your eyes of the mirror you see in mine,
 as a woman who looks at herself from a distance
 of decades, through the lens of extended
 years, or gazing straight into the mirror
 of time's silent passage turns to us,
 and then—the scene shifts. The error you thought
 might be your undoing turns out to be nothing,
 and what you took to be trees were mere
 reflections of trees, not even the water
 the same from moment to moment. The distance
 flattened in the mirror you hung on the wall
 of the house that the fire consumed. But was this
 before or after? You are waiting in a small dark
 room while the grown-ups talk on the other
 side of the wall. Not knowing the names
 of the gods. Not knowing the words of the prayers.

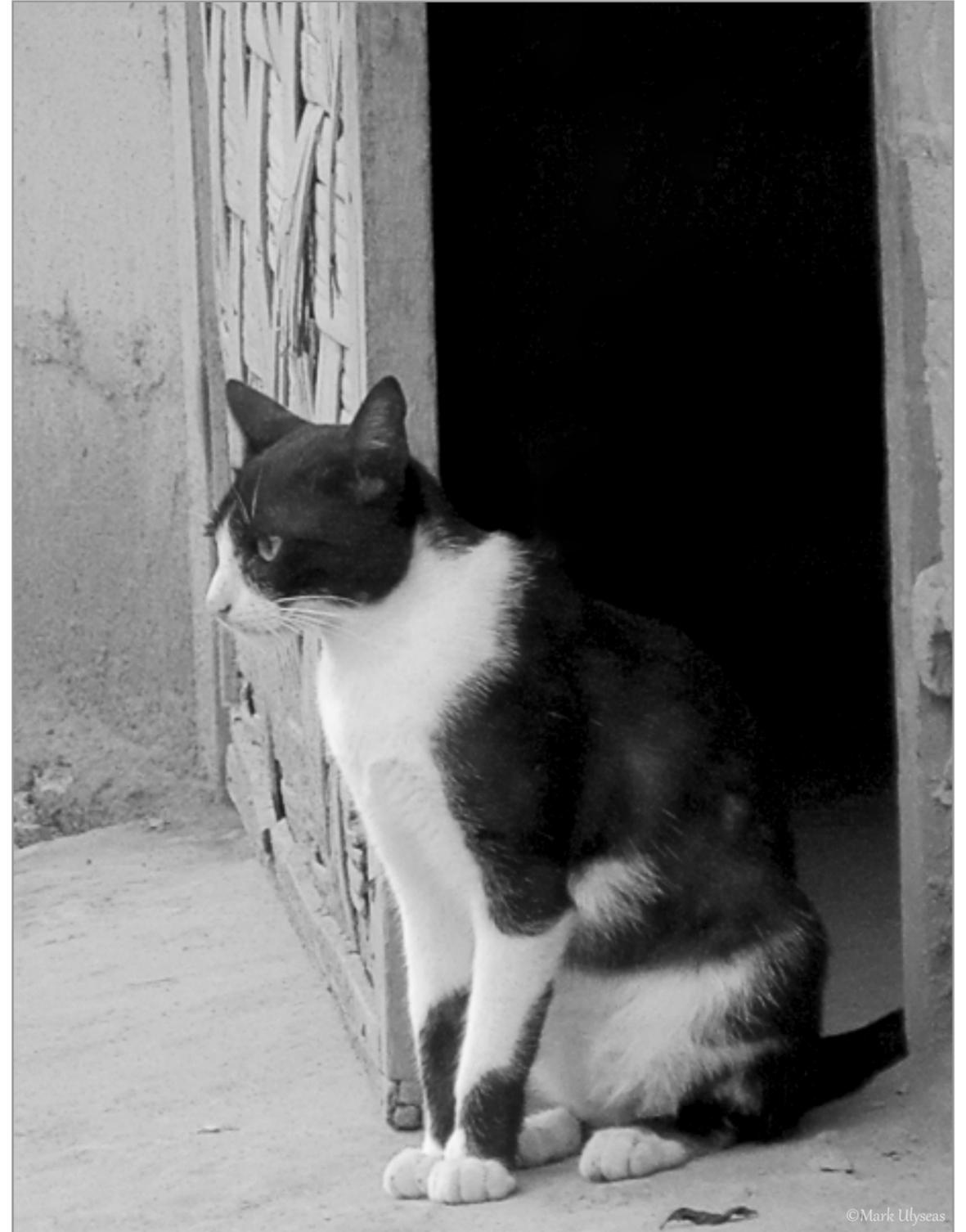
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Troy Jollimore

MIRROR *contd...*

Not knowing which shapes stand for which ideas,
not knowing which ships will return tonight,
which sailors will pilot them, what cargo
they carry, which sounds are the names of women
and men you have met in the street and greeted
and which are the groans of creatures in heat
or in pain. Because you wrote poems that moved me,
that worked their swift way inside me and lodged
themselves deep inside, I thought that you must
be more real than the others, more real
than me. A leaf vibrates, it is whispering,
or singing an ancient lament, and if
its voice is a voice I have given it,
and in the process abandoned my own,
I can pay that price. I can live in this house.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Vasilis Manousakis, short-story writer, poet and translator, has published in *New American Writing*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Barcelona Ink*, *Parentheses* and *Drunken Boat* among others. He writes reviews and translates poetry and short stories for literary magazines and e-zines. He is a founding member of *Bonsai Stories*, the blog connected to *Planodion* literary magazine, dedicated to Flash Fiction from well-known writers from Greece, the United States and other countries. He holds a Ph.D. in Contemporary American Poetry and currently teaches Creative Writing, Modern Poetry, Short Fiction and Literary Translation at the Hellenic American College, Athens, Greece. His focus on the human thought and behavior in his writings has led him to a Master's Program in Mental Health Counselling and he holds individual and group sessions with clients, specialising in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.



THE QUESTION

The old man changed his routine that night. "O Father, who art nada..." lifted his head from his brandy and started praying in his booming voice.

"Shhh..." a young waiter hurried beside him. "People coming here are religious, they don't want to hear your nonsense."

"It is not nonsense, everything is nothing."

"What is this? Another one of your drunken philosophies? Huh? Nice, old man! Drink your brandy and get going! We're closing. We've got wives to go to."

The hand of an older waiter on his shoulder made him say nothing else. He had said enough before anyway, when he was bitching about the old man and his arthritic hands who couldn't even hold the glass without spilling the drink on the floor, which he would have to mop now and his wife would be expecting him to go home early, he had a life of his own, he had dreams, he would be someone, he wouldn't be serving old men forever.

His daydreaming slash complaining slash cursing his fate was interrupted when the older waiter told him he would stay and have a drink with the old man after closing. He never liked this waiter. He was always too accommodating for his taste. Always on the side of customers, especially the older ones, he drove him crazy with his Zen attitude. Ready to accept, willing to forgive, the older waiter was not for him. He had a life of his own, he kept repeating. He had a wife, he had a family. *Those two, what do they have? Insomniac dementia*, he snickered and started mopping the bodega floor.

Buenas noches, the young waiter threw at them, as quick as a baseball pitcher, when he finished cleaning the tables.

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Vasilis Manousakis

THE QUESTION *contd...*

They didn't hear him as they were too busy praying in unison "Nada be Thy name."

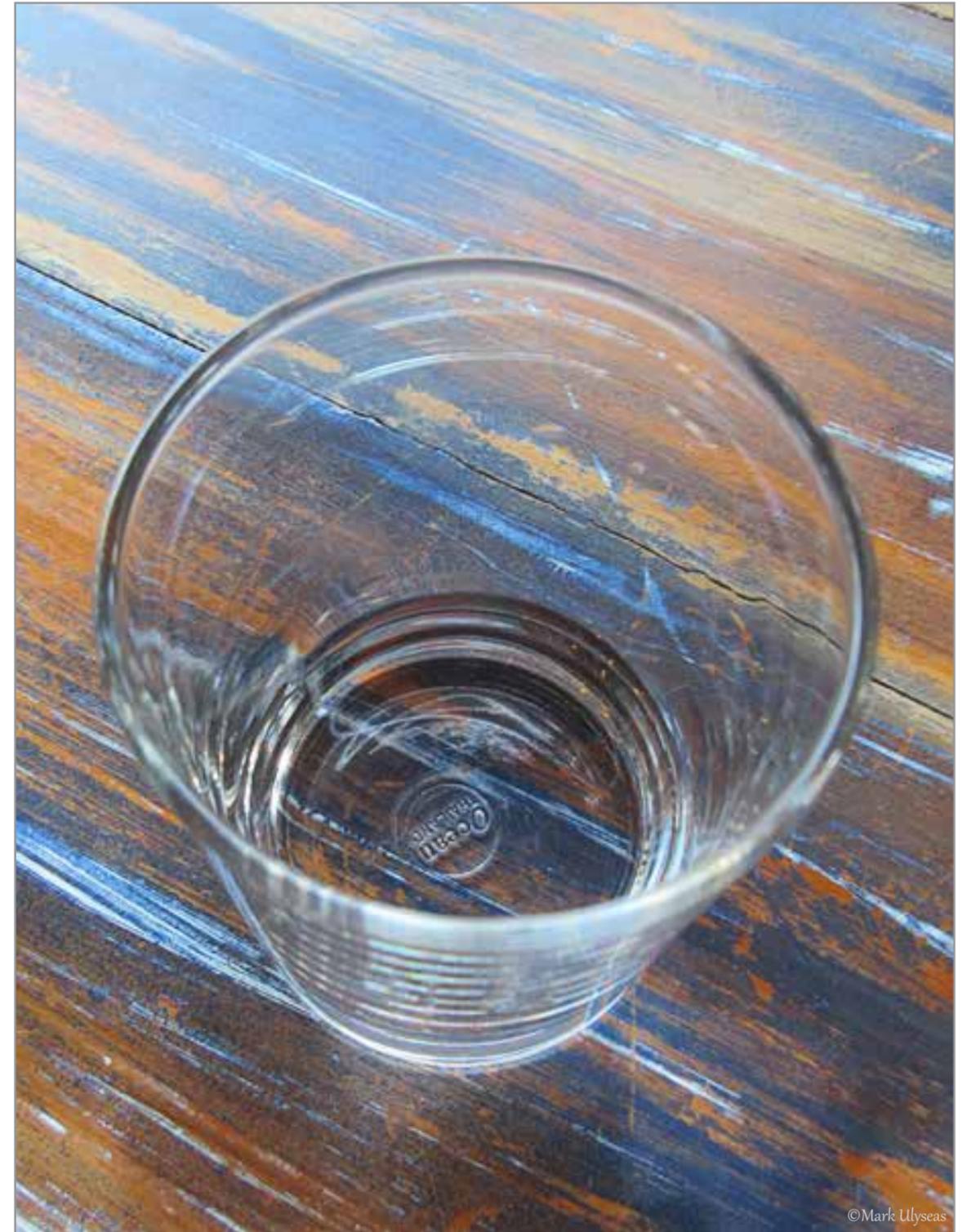
It doesn't matter, he started his mantra, while walking home in the breezy evening. I am better than them. They are already dead. I have a life, I have a wife.

Turning his keys, he repeated the words to himself one more time and tried very hard not to wake his wife up. She was working double shift at the hospital these days and she was very tired. She needed her rest. And there was the question, of course, he was dying to avoid.

The sheets betrayed him as he was lying beside her and she stirred.

"Mi vida, what is it that you want from your life?" she asthmatically murmured in her sleep, as she would ask on a regular basis trying to make him move on from whatever it was that was keeping him a waiter.

"Nada."



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Based on Ernest Hemingway's "A Clean Well-Lighted Place"

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COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE