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Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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TERRY MCDONAGH
Writing on the Train

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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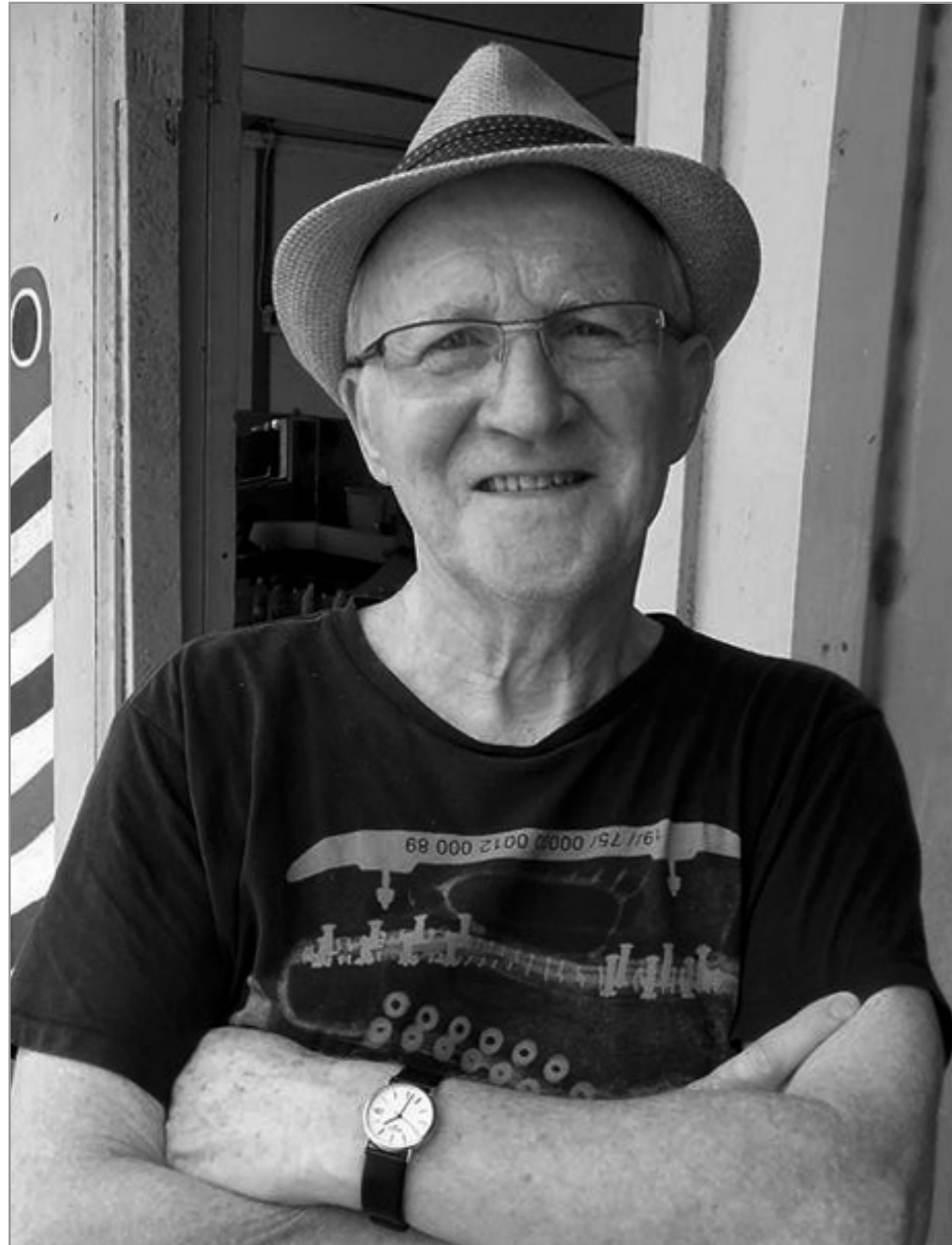
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TERRY MCDONAGH WRITING ON THE TRAIN

I'm on a train.
It is April in Ireland.
The countryside unfolds
like a rich green parchment
but everywhere I look
I see the tall masts of Hamburg
sail along the horizon.
Those many storms
have cut my boats adrift.

This short poem, *The Full Circle*, was included in my very first poetry collection, *The Road Out* – 1993. So much time has elapsed – so many journeys. Yes, I know I could have looked for a solid home on a remote mountain range or a residence in a fashionable part of town – but, instead I set out, to be *at home in my shoes* – to stick to rambling about with a fistful of poems – to be on *The Road Out*, awash with ups and downs. Long may it continue!

The last of the travelling bards in Ireland, Anthony Raftery, left *Cill Aodáin* and never returned – I left *Cill Aodáin* and have returned. I still journey, travelling about, selling my *soul at a thousand fairs*, as the poet, Patrick Kavanagh termed it. Bob Dylan wrote, *anything worth thinking about is worth singing about*. He's right, even if singing is confined to the bathroom or to the privacy of your own self. In *Sailing to Byzantium*, Yeats asked sages to be *the singing-masters of my soul*. When I see that clouds have things to do and sheep are busy with grass, I sing along and I try to write. I wonder if wind, sunshine and grass know that they sing to us – are bees aware that honey makes us hum.

Terry McDonagh



Photograph courtesy <https://kiltimagh.ie/railway-station-kiltimagh-museum/>

All living matter is in constant motion – walking, running, flying, creeping, crawling – travelling on buses, boats, planes and trains. I'm not talking about holidays. The whole of the universe is a symphony – conducting itself and constantly on the move. Becoming, living and dying. Have we got enough words to capture the Oneness of it all?

Just recently, I began working with a recently established writing group. We call it, Writing on the Train, because it takes place in an old parked-up rail carriage which has been, tastefully, refurbished as part of the Kiltimagh Museum. The unique aspect of this project is that we write in a train that's going nowhere – but we are all aboard. We are igniting so many memories – journeys we've all been on – a school trip to the city or to the big smoke, as it was sometimes termed. I remembered a one class trip to Dublin when I was about ten or eleven. We visited a museum and looked at stately buildings which was boring, but when our lunchtime soup arrived and one or two boys began to throw the hard bread rolls at each other, things began to pick up. Our teacher was not pleased.

Not all journeys were plain sailing on cloud nine. There are those that take on legs and fantasy is out on a spree. Some of us had actually travelled on this train to Dublin on the first leg of a journey to far-off horizons – at least they seemed to be far-off in those pre cheap-flight days. We live on an island and when we got to the coast, there was water to be crossed or a plane to be caught, if we wanted to experience foreign parts. Terms like boat-train were common in those now distant days of mass unemployment when *no god cared*.

A couple of years ago, I scribbled this poem, Morning Train, on a morning train from Dublin going west. I was trying to address the obvious changes I'd experienced in my lifetime as we sped along *in coffee and comfort*.

MORNING TRAIN

February on an early morning train
from Dublin heading west
sweeping along in coffee and comfort.
We're on time. Houses are not modest
and tucked away like they used to be.
Some stand like great empty churches
in pomp and circumstance as if
expecting a crowd but they feel hollow
and up for sale. Home's a commodity.
Hedges are wholesome, meadows greener
as slurry and silage have taken charge.
Turf is no longer cut and dogs don't freak.
A man with a handbag steps down at
Roscommon station and a woman with
a toolkit on the platform could be Polish,
German, African – Irish even. Fashion is
the leveller that nips and tucks at individuality,
that makes us plainer and almost the same.

But fields were there before wellness or
slatted-houses – even when famine raged
and no god cared. The memory of suffering
is deep in veins and crannies but the land

is slowly returning to its pagan roots
as it sails into light – as children, less sure
of their saints, hear other languages and
have classmates singing to stranger gods.

I, sometimes, wonder if trees, wind, sun and all living things are aware of their seasonal journeys. We seem to talk about change and travel all the time, but do we ask where piano music travels to when it's curious, tired or had enough? Can busy thoughts and dreams find their way? Our team on the train will leave no stone unturned. Rest assured.

Denise O'Hagan is an award-winning editor and poet, based in Sydney. She has a background in commercial book publishing in the UK and Australia. Recipient of the Dalkey Poetry Prize and former poetry editor for Irish literary journal *The Blue Nib*, her work is widely published both in Australia and overseas, including in *The Copperfield Review*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Quadrant*, *Books Ireland*, *Eureka Street* and *Hecate*. Her second poetry collection, *Anamnesis*, is forthcoming (Recent Work Press, October 2022).
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This poem will be published in Denise's second poetry collection, *Anamnesis* (Recent Work Press, 1 October 2022).

MOTHER AND CHILD

Flesh and blood, 158.5 x 35 cm, 1997, artist unknown

She sat, like we all did, holding him wrapped in
 Soft stripes of pastel pink and blue; you could tell
 Those hospital blankets anywhere. The air was

Hushed around her, shadowed like the underbelly
 Of a mushroom, painting her in the finest strokes of
 Pale grey. I held my own complicated bundle of life

Tighter. Things were precarious, more than any of us
 Wanted to admit. The nurses trod back and forth,
 Watching us, and the clock; our half an hour was

Nearly up. She looked at me then, her eyes dark bruises
 Against the shock of her face, and drew her child to
 Her breast, swollen with undrunk milk. The blanket

Slipped from miniature limbs, a plastic anklet. Silently,
 She pulled the blanket back and shielded him with the
 Full curve of her body, brushing his head with her lips.

She would not give up; she would fill the space left
 By his unresponsiveness, and tend that which had
 Grown between them during their nine short months:

A portrait of mother love, blocked out there in the ward
 In its most elemental form, unyielding in the face of fact.
 I recognised myself in her, and shivered; she was all of us.

Highly commended in the the Goldsmith International Poetry Competition, 2021
<https://olivergoldsmithfestival.com/poetry-competition>

Shortlisted in the Bournemouth Writing Prize, 2022
[The Shortlist for The BWP Poetry category is announced \(fresherpublishing.co.uk\)](https://www.fresherpublishing.co.uk)



Denise O'Hagan

JUST A BAG

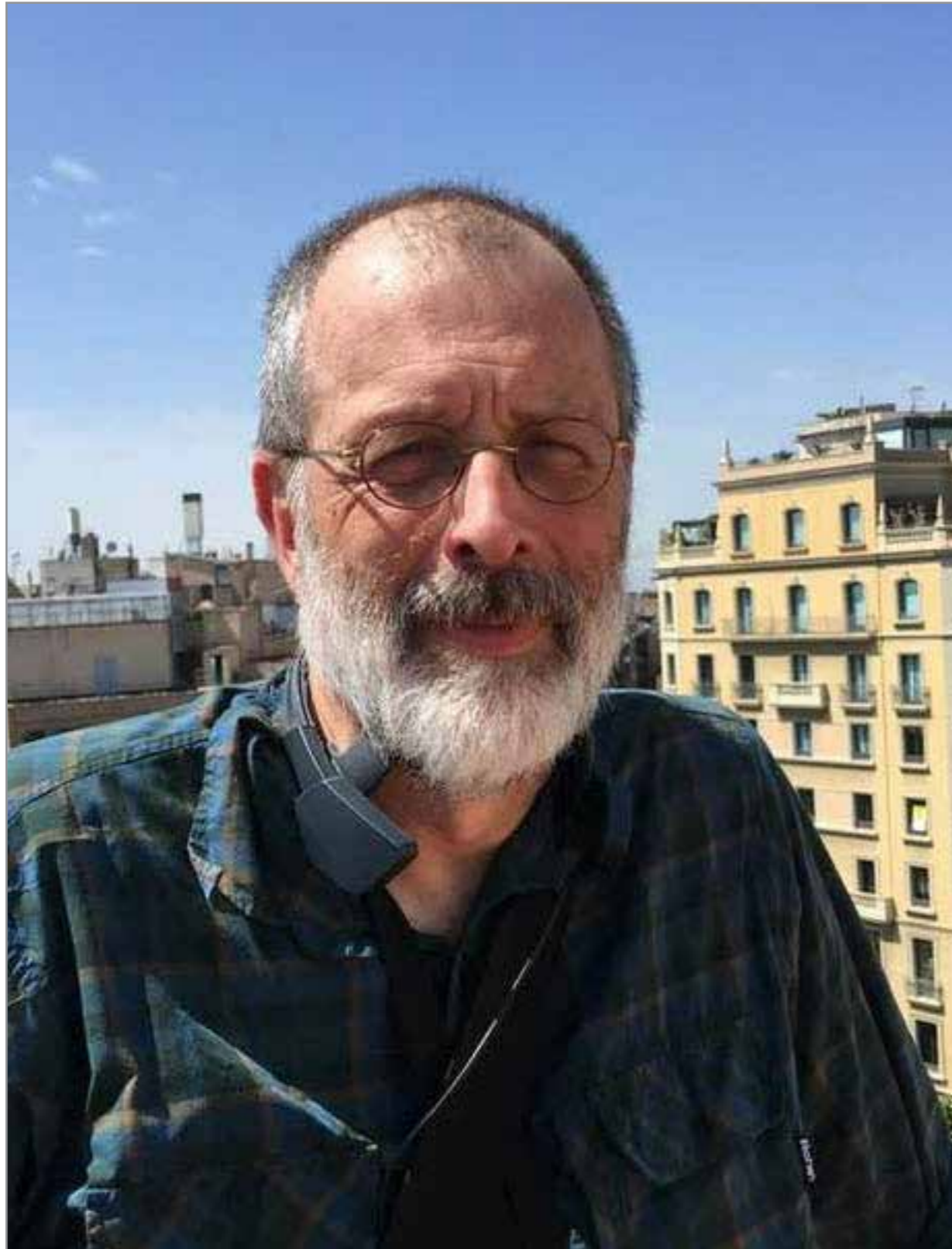
We treaded the familiar footpath back from school, his pace leisurely even then, the gift of his small plump hand lying in mine in an age-old token of filial trust. The rays of late autumn sun painted the street in slashes of honey, the leaves falling like giant burnished confetti in the gathering gusts of wind. Perhaps because it was at his eye level that he noticed it first, not slung over a shapely north shore shoulder but slouching solitary on a low brick wall, its strap curling over the edge. Did I scream first or wrench him back? All I remember is the casing of my carefully calibrated memory cracking, the nuts and bolts of lives laid bare, reduced in the intake of a breath to pools of rubble and glass, and a shard of frozen stillness before the crying began and the ululating siren grew ever more persistent, and then my son's eyes, dark with alarm, as a hand on my sleeve tugged me back to the tune of his high-pitched wonder, 'What's wrong, mamma? It's just a bag!'

Note: 'Just a bag' recalls Rome in the late '70s and early '80s when the city was marked by political turbulence and violence as the Red Brigades sought to destabilise the government, culminating in the kidnapping and murder of the Christian Democrat leader, Aldo Moro, in 1978.



Photograph by Daniel J. Schwarz on Unsplash.

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



POEM AFTER PEIRE VIDAL

*Long I looked for what I did not need, then
I opened my hand.*

I held these lines before the fire.
A poor student, I valued light over warmth.

By fire, of course I mean my mind.
By mind, I mean these flares from nothing to nothing.

By nothing, I mean the blue spine of the gas jet.
Try to grasp it, and you'll see.

By grasp, I mean the flue's circle of stars
I could not see, fire-blind.

Of course, I looked anyway. I looked hard and then away,
Poor student, who lacked the patience

To see a little to one side
Where flame and flame's shadow open their hands.

Jordan Smith

THE NAME OF THE BOW

... is life, but its work is death.

The bird was nothing I had seen before.
White wings, sun-white, it flew among the oaks above the creek bed.

The trick is in the loosening, not the grip.
In the wrist finding suppleness in the absence of will.

It was a fiddle bow I had in mind.
Until the bird lifted, I thought there was nothing I wanted.

Don't think of this as myth, the diligent or indigent pursuit of salvation,

When I raised my hand to cut the glare,
My intention split the sun to a gradient, refracted

Into light's presence, light's absence, mere light.
Listen, the story is an old one. Desire is an arrow,

And will, a jagged, tremulous flight
As the bow does its work in your hand.

FINDINGS

You'd think after so long I might begin to get it right.
You'd think I'd have learned the sprung meter of the rain

And the conventional rhymes for the autumn fields, sumac
Flaring, old wire fences, spent shotgun shells—for trespass,

For memory. You'd think my mother's gentleness
Or my father's crumpled pack of Kents falling

From the pocket of the plaid wool shirt she made him
That I borrowed without asking...you'd think all of these

Would find their rest somewhere mid-line, somewhere
Like my grandfather's house above the winter lake,

The rose garden by the turnaround, the dream of abandonment
As the snow circled and lashed, though I did not know

Any words for what had left me.

VIDA

Scribes, when you compose the lives of the poets
In whatever monastery, in whatever huddle of books is left
Be wary of insisting too much

On the importance of the faithless, the foolishly unobtainable lovers,
The stanzas excoriating infidelity, folly.

Leave the dregs of those cups to the speculators, the wordless.

Remember instead the days of long repetition until the tune came right,
Until her name in the epigraph was a mere flourish,

When the slipped tuning peg revealed a new mode
In the weather's betrayal.

Recall that solitude is a spur a good horse does not need,
But the rider must wear it.

Name each sharp tine, and still you will have barely begun.

HOODIES

We are pilgrims and we are strangers,
Slouched in the seat on the metro, standing in the last group

At the boarding counter, crossing the horizon
Of sleep in our economy seats on a short-haul flight,

Half-hidden in our headphones and face masks
Our hoods snugged down, with our carry-ons inspected,

Gate-checked, catching the shuttle, the cab at the gate,
The commuter train, the Uber, all of us pilgrims

And the road is wearisome, and discontent and folly
Shall follow us, as blinding as we turn to them

As the snow or sun beating on the terminal window,
On the windshield of the bus, those shrines to which we thought

We had given up all sense of destination until we knelt
In the shelter of our disappointments and drew our cloaks tight.

Author/educator Nancy Avery Dafoe writes in multiple genres and has twelve books through independent publishers. Her most recent books include *Unstuck in Time, A Memoir and Mystery on Loss and Love* about the death of her son and how we grieve (Pen Women Press, 2021) and *Naimah and Ajmal on Newton's Mountain* (FLP, 2021). Her new novel *Socrates is Dead Again* (Pen Women Press) will be released in September 2022. Her poetry won the William Faulkner/Wisdom award in 2016, and her fiction won the short story award from New Century Writers, among other honors. A member of the CNY Branch of the National League of American Pen Women, she is currently serving as second vice president of the organization. Dafoe offers writing workshops through the Downtown Writers Center among other organizations. Her books may be found on book distributor sites and on her website: nancydafoebooks.com.



LAST LIGHT

Against high, barren backdrop,
like an unholy Trinity in the rain,
three shapes of dark matter

hunched, not perched
in the way of spring birds,
but squatted, sullen and unkept,

with discontented plumage
jagged as invisible wings fold
into themselves, disappearing

any thought of flight;
their talons dug into barren snag,
exposing brown, dry inner layer

of a tree not dormant and leafless,
limbs no longer in distress,
but clean-stripped of bark.

These shades from another realm,
seeming totems of death,
were formed in the human mind,

not foreshadowing; nevertheless,
their massive bodies never moved,
and their eyes followed my approach

as if granting this short extension.
"I will see you again," I whispered
before hurrying on my way.

Nancy Avery Dafoe

ANY WEIGHTED THING

No question a fork can be dangerous
in the hands of a man, as Simic
bluntly stated, that implement latent

with possibility, as Natalie Diaz shared
her Christ-like wound delivered by brother
in drunken-rage, in "My Brother, My Wound."

Simic's slick, shiny fork with violent claws
used by a man stabbing his wife repeatedly,
and a woman stabbing her man until death.

But a fork is more than the sharp points
of its tines, this elegant, elongated work
of useful art made up of seven parts.

While the tines and points require
reckoning, a fork is also key to musical
harmony, the tuning fork resonating

at a constant pitch, producing pure note
consistently. Musicians are known to fork
a song, building on what came before.

Root connecting to back and neck, handle
of a fork doing the heavy lifting. Thirty-five
different types of forks, and we can imagine

why, with tines varying from two to four,
how much finer to sing or tune instrument
to the vibrato of a fork struck just so.

Tiny tuning forks in clocks and watches
vibrate in the ultrasonic range to keep us all
moving: this sleek, pure-voiced obliquity.

Elegantly useful or dangerous—this instrument,
but then, any weighted thing can be a weapon
in the hands of an angry man.

CHIRPS, CHIPS, AND TRILLS

Catastrophe! Calamity
as their nests came crashing down;
very late, heavy snowfall descended
on ground, trees, and everything beneath;
a branch as thick as a man
with many limbs fell to earth;
half a dozen nests and broken eggs
split and scattered at dawn.

After sun warmed the earth,
the clean-up crew came through,
and snows disappeared;
fragments of bird shell were all
that remained of that destruction.

But while birds may mourn
in ways we do not fully know,
they came again at daybreak
to chirp, chip, and trill
vibrations in the syrinx,
creating a musical chorus,
not of mourning but in the morning
as they gathered grass, mud,
and moss, to build anew;
their songs insistent, more complex
than we could fathom.

Little song birds going about life
as if this day—this moment—
is the very first and most important
one in all of existence.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Laura Foley is the author of eight poetry collections. *Everything We Need: Poems from El Camino* was released, in winter 2022. *Why I Never Finished My Dissertation* received a starred Kirkus Review, was among their top poetry books of 2019, and won an Eric Hoffer Award. Her collection *It's This* is forthcoming from Fernwood Press. Her poems have won numerous awards, and national recognition—read frequently by Garrison Keillor on *The Writers Almanac*; appearing in Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*. Laura lives with her wife, Clara Gimenez, among the hills of Vermont.



SYMBIOSIS

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

Laura Foley

BAD CATHOLIC

I'm waiting
 my turn, for the dark
 confession booth,
 remembering
 to cross myself
 right hand
 to forehead
 center
 left
 right
don't mix it up

I'm gabbling
blessmefatherforIhavesinned
 I'm fibbing
Idisobeyedmymother
toldonmysister
 hoping to
 dispose quickly of three *Hail Marys*
 two *Our Fathers*—

before I can escape
 to October's grace
 a crisp fall day
 made for running
 in new shoes
 of heavenly blue.

SIEVE

In a circle of birch trees,
 in speckled morning light,
 in summer's waning days,
 beneath the unseen moon,
 whose benevolence she feels
 like a maternal spirit
 guiding her tides,

in the stillness of a forest
 high above the silent valley,
 a radiating face emerges
 among long, green grasses,
 in the play of lightening shadows,

a portal to the vast unknown
 beckoning a quiet human,
 with her wise canine friend,
 to enter in.

The forest whispers
 of listening
 to trees' breathing,
 matching hers
 to crickets' thrumming,
 to leaves' swaying
 in the softest
 morning breeze,

releasing tension, fear,
 trusting the woods' spirit
 to carry her
 everywhere she needs to be,
 in peace, as morning light
 dapples equally,
 golden leaves sieved
 by every cricket's violin.

EVERYTHING WE NEED

I take my granddaughter to the beach,
a frigid Maine inlet,
but it's hot enough, this summer day,
that the cold dark deep will feel
tingly-good against skin.

Dipping one sandaled toe in,
she exclaims to gulls, to the sea
and me, to twelve bored geese
floating offshore: *I'm swimming!*
I quibble, *Not exactly, Dear.*

Acclimating, she wades in
ankle-deep, swirls hands
in the gray-green surface
of everything we need to survive.
Look! I'm swimming, like a butterfly.

Yes darling, I surrender,
then swing her, as she giggles,
kicking legs making
a foaming white wake,
as we engine through the sea together.

IF IT WERE UP TO ME, WE'D EAT CLOUDS FOR DINNER

When my lovely wife
gets too deep into the weeds

of her wonderful cooking...
with paprika or cumin,

*sautéed eggplant, cilantro,
braised carrots...my mind*

drifts to the sky behind her...
clouds building an ark,

animals climbing aboard...
when I realize

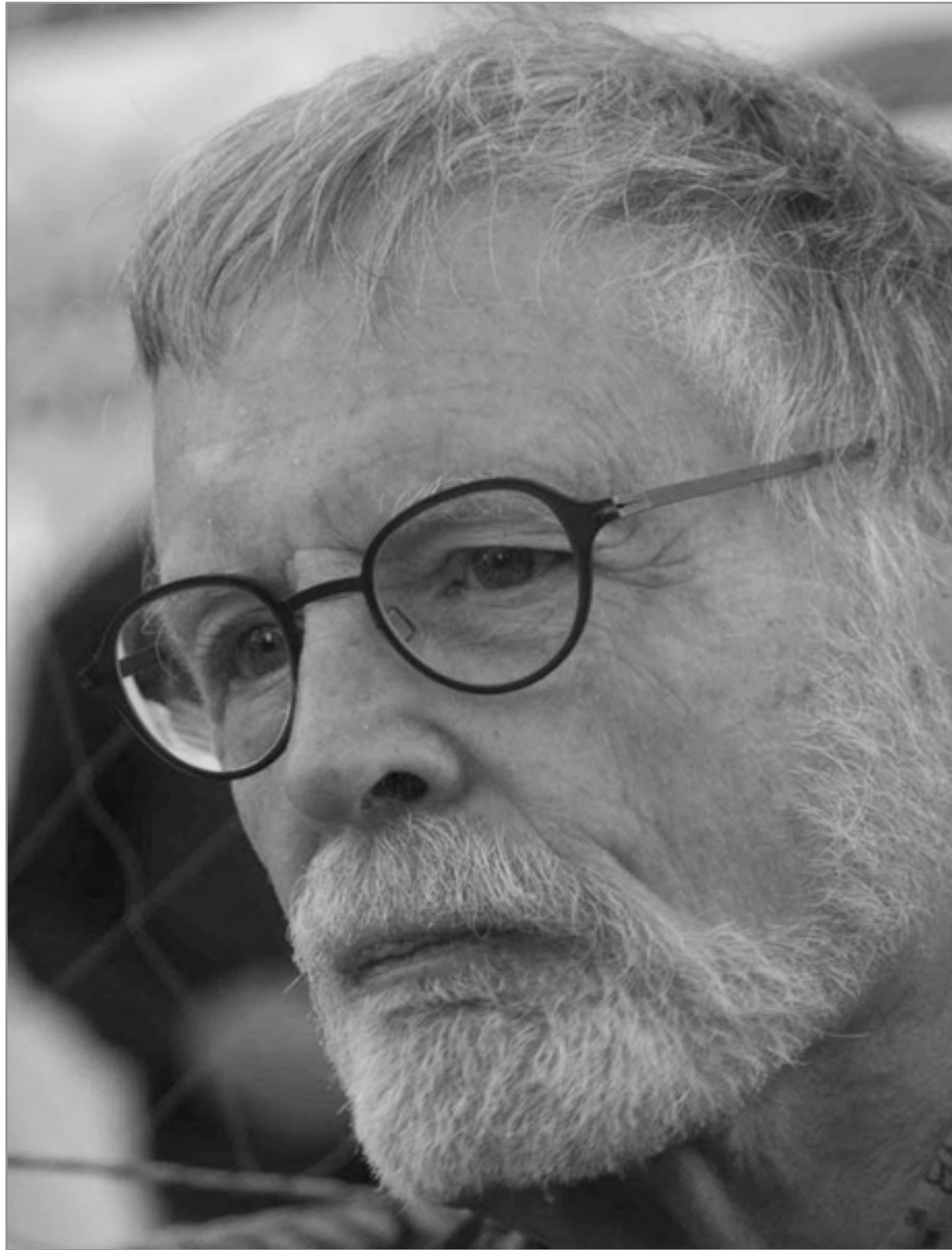
she's waiting for a reply,
I pull my mind back

from the ibexes,
the skinny crocodile

merging with the fat unicorn—
I agree, *fried*

(or, wait, is it baked?)
would be great.

Dirk has a BA from Stanford in writing and an MA from Columbia in contemporary literature. He writes novels, short stories, experimental forms, and occasionally verse. He publishes regularly in literary and other magazines to a total of about 90 items. You can learn more at <http://www.wandd.com/Publications.html>



VICTIMS

When the war in Vietnam was winding down, I found myself on a flight from Chicago to Buffalo or Syracuse; it must have been Syracuse in this case because that's the longer flight with time to listen. I found myself sitting next to a big healthy looking guy in his mid 30s maybe, broad shouldered, in good shape. I can't remember what he was wearing, but he was fidgety: lonely and nervous. He told me that he had just finished his second and last tour of duty as a fighter bomber pilot in Vietnam. Pilots were not allowed more than two four-year tours in those days for fear of their reactions slowing. He didn't know what to do with his life. He loved flying those hot machines and talked at some length about how much he enjoyed their acceleration and maneuverability and so on. The normal next step for people like him was to become a commercial airline pilot. Indeed, in those days most commercial airline pilots were former Air Force pilots. But he couldn't stomach thought of flying a plane like the one we were riding in after enjoying the rush of the fighter bombers. He talked about flying at some high altitude and dropping bombs on 'targets' and the satisfaction of hitting the target exactly. Some were, say, roads or bridges or just stretches of jungle specified by a spotter. He never mentioned the possibility that human beings might have been where the bombs went off. They were just 'targets'. He also talked a lot about how well he got on with his flight crew, which was mostly black whereas he was white; he took them out for steak dinners and the like and how if they didn't like you, they could leave a screw loose and you would never come back. He was getting hazardous duty pay and lived like a Prince in Thailand with a house, servants, and a Thai mistress. Yes "mistress"—that was the word he used to represent the high tone of the life that was receding behind him. He was returning to his wife and children without really knowing what to do with them or how he would support them. The melee of leaving the plane separated us, and he was a ways ahead of me. I saw an attractive young woman in a forest green pleated skirt and white blouse run to him in high heels and embrace him followed by two young children who must have barely known who he was. I thought to myself, these people too are victims.

Dirk van Nouhuys

Sharon Fagan McDermott is a poet and essayist who teaches literature at a private school in Pittsburgh, PA. Her most recent collection of poetry, *Life Without Furniture*, was published by Jacar Press in 2018. Additionally, Fagan McDermott has published three chapbooks: *Voluptuous*, *Alley Scatting* (Parallel Press), and *Bitter Acoustic*, winner of the 2005 Jacar Press chapbook award. Fagan McDermott's most recent book of personal essays on the craft of creative writing, *Millions of Suns*, written in collaboration with Christine Benner-Dixon will be published by the University of Michigan Press in 2023.



MIDNIGHT

this cold night, this fall-back night,
this night we play with imaginary time
turn back our clocks (our phones turn back

themselves): I'm back in time, pitch-blue of sky
Colors from the ocean's depths behind us,
a pit of fire leaping bold beyond the silver frizzle

of dead stars. We are bioluminescent on this chilly shore:

My brother's open laugh in fireglow;
My sister's golden aura as she dances;
My mother's glowing face as she holds

the measure of each of her children circled here.
Time spirals upwards, dissipates like sparks
in ocean's breeze. No moon. No moon.

For tonight we hold with spirits
and we come prepared with fire.

Sharon Fagan McDermott

HOW LOVE MEETS THE MORNING LIKE GLASS

There is rain that doesn't know me
though it slides like fingers down

my skin. A shivering.

Your finger on my spine the glide of it
turns me to river. Morning comes, and you follow
an old tabby down the alleyway.

Vanish into morning fog.

Still the rain's a glassy greenhouse
round my life, a site for the small fireworks
of zinnias and a twining forest of ivy, weeds,

Rose-of Sharon. Once you

said to me: *I don't say "love;" can't say love.*
It's a word that falls and splinters everywhere like glass.
And I nodded: I know, I know.

I did not know. It was nonsensical
to me—like how sand and lime combines
to form the green glass bird upon my kitchen shelf

and how, just after I admired the 5 PM light
swirling gold within its belly, I dropped it
on the tile floor. Sun spilled out

everywhere, a mess.

Once rain of nourishment, not of floods.
Drains and sewers afterward. The overflow.
The spiraling down

was memorable. But so, too, was the fevered rise
our bodies twined so tight we feared
we'd lose ourselves.

And then we lost ourselves.

Furtive nights of parrying; mornings
where the coffee burnt our tongues. And sunrise
cold and blistering.

But love is not defined by how it turns
out in the end— our hours of joy

on wooded trails, the fallen
mounds of gold. We were tossed coins.
And old enough to know better—we both craved—

oh I don't know what we wanted then. And now

I've grown much closer to the weeds.
They're mad in love with August.
I leave them all alone to thrive.
And let rain have its way with everything.

SCORCH

It's finally cooled off in the city.
The zinnia unfolds flame by flame.
Bumblebees swarm. Tyrant heat
has stopped beating us down.
There's the delphinium lifting its blues
toward the boy who stops to point.

His mom looks exhausted,
allows herself to pause, pockets
her phone, crouches next to her son
and exclaims as black butterflies edged
in blue settle on poofs of plum dahlias.

By next week we'll let go of this moment
—Eden revealed in the swelter
of days— back to our busy lives,
labor and loss. Memory's left town.
We're all water and air and forgetfulness.

CITRUS

Another early morning in Firenze
and the gray-haired grocer sings
his vowels over me, *Limones! L'arancias!*

then hands me a gift—two blood oranges—
as he has done these last five days.
Light turns the Duomo to fractals

of shadow and blaze. I want to cut my fingers
on them, release this crescendo inside.
Glow: city of rooftops sponging in heat

Ponte Vecchio's gold bridging gold
in the Arno's streaming. Mouthful of memory.
Fleet dreaming days. To savor this time

I belonged to it all. Crowded piazzas.
The fountains of late spring. *Sorbetto's*
sweet scoop in the peel of a lemon.

TO DAVE WHO NEVER TIRES OF THE PITTSBURGH SUNSET

4:30 and you slog the snowy hillsides—West End, Northside, Downtown. 14 degrees one day. The next, it's dipped to 5. And you're braving ice with tripod, cameras, grinning like a madman in the dark. In your morning video, your breath huffs out white peonies. *It's gonna be spectacular this morning. See the clouds coming? Sunrise bouncing off those clouds will be amazing!* You step out of your camera's frame: *Look at that color coming!* I look out my kitchen window and all I see is a faint smear of lilac overhead, barely lit, more like the deeper hollow of a foxes' den. I've known your work for years, Dave and every single day you chart sunrise over Pittsburgh, exclaiming like the first explorer.

And for the hundredth time during these long three years of hunkering down, of missing family far away, I marvel at your unblinkered optimism, buoyancy amid the loss your joy at each and every dawn. It's worth your forays in the dark, the biting cold, your fingers that take hours to unthaw Today, you face the Rachel Carson Bridge ice shards jagged in the Allegheny. Shaggy haired, exuberant—you take your shots, then run to catch the lisp of crescent moon waning over PPG Place, and finally back to make Hosannas of the gray veil lifting, the trumpet bray of lilac, rose, and tangerine.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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

Translated from the Albanian by Edita Kuçi Ukaj.



SMOKE

It is morning
and the good news doesn't come as the melody of the birds:
it was once a time the spring,
the hope
and the awareness that freedom is the absence of slavery.

Now there is smoke and a bad smell
and spring resembles autumn.

Grief waves over our heads
this mortal flag that as a cortege of sadness
spruce from hand to hand.

The good news is not like dreams.
They are written in the tunnels where there is a lack of light,
where darkness powerfully extends the power
on the guards of fate-
those people who play in the theater of democracy.

The city sleeps restlessly
wakes up agitated
cries and laughs agitated.

Coffees are full of ghosts
and the rumble of bad news.

There is smoke and a flag of grief
which is stretched out like a scarf of pain
on the aggravated neck of a people
that seeks to burst with sadness.

continued overleaf...

Ndue Ukaj

SMOKE *contd...*

And I took with me a bag of dreams
and I went out into the streets without hope.
I saw people turned into shadows,
a palace of solitude with refreshing props
and with the inscription:
"Freedom is a great deception."

On the way, I kicked stones of thrown grief.
"How much madness carries my city on its shoulders" -
said the girl with the beautiful scarf around her sweet neck
and a black bag of sadness she carried with her.

A PAPER

A paper may be more important
that the weight of your desires,
of dreams
of all the pain you carry in your chest,
on heavy shoulders;
more than blue eyes where ships of desire enter and goes out
more than a heart attacked by storms and tsunamis.

It can increase the pain or reduce it.

A paper can define:
where you can go and where not,
a letter called a permit to cross the border,
where the laws of passage there depend on someone,
as they are dependent here on someone else.

Human life is full of boundaries, obstacles, temptations,
sadly a letter can reduce your body weight,
the severity of the pain
of love,
of desires,
of dreams,
of sadness,
a letter can reduce the amount of joy,
the amount of happiness.
A letter can measure the amount of breathing,
oxygen in the body, tension, pulse.
Because we are always surrounded by borders
that appears and disappears quite suddenly in our lives.

continued overleaf..

A PAPER *contd...*

We know that borders have control,
 police and soldiers ready with weapons in hand to carry out orders,
 but we never do the right thing to replace them
 with clover flowers,
 beautiful sculptures and spring dreams.

Because the real boundaries are in the language,
 in morning dreams and bad desires of night.

Astonishingly, people do not like borders,
 but they are not used to live without them,
 therefore they seldom understand the weight of a letter
 that determines how much you weigh,
 who are you
 and can you go where ever you want.

Boundaries are a burden and people are doomed to suffer
 within them,
 therefore they find it difficult to increase the size of the heart,
 of language,
 of soul,
 of dreams
 and create the magnificent kingdom of love.

THAT LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL

That life is beautiful
 you don't need further proof,
 neither guides,
 neither economic experience nor scientific statistics.
 It's enough to wake up in the morning
 and see the dawn of the new day,
 hills undressed of darkness,
 trees freed from night captivity
 and light-wings girls walking with the wind.
 Then listen to the song of the birds
 or to see the wonder of a mountain landscape.

How many landscapes are before our eyes?

It is enough to have someone's hands which embrace you
 and you see the heavens open
 and feel how all the emptiness of the world is filled.

That life is beautiful
 you don't need much proof
 it's enough to have a roof to shelter the pain
 for the dissolved desires.

Life is also full of madness,
 and for that doesn't need much proof.

It's enough to know
 that Ernesto Sabato showed that a hungry man in a concentration camp
 was forced to eat a live mouse.

continued overleaf...

THAT LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL

contd...

Oh there is much more madness
that revolve around us: storms, wars, strong winds,
viruses that plague death and misery.

However, you never need too much news,
you can free your mind from captivity
with a sweet hug
and write an amazing book for tomorrow.

ALWAYS SOMETHING IS MISSING

Humans with pale faces that tighten the uncertainty.
They search for something because always something is missing.

After this gloomy rain like sorrow, tomorrow the sun gets back its look.
And we continue our uncertainty. Our searching.

You see that the sun always rise again
as a new story of hope.

Still, you're quiet like heavens peace searches the world's path:
Ithaca or Penelope lying down with unclearing wishes.
Sad memories and sleepless nights. A promised land.
Where you have to lay your head and your pains.

What do you find?
Foggy roads,
Promised lands filled with snakes.
When there isn't milk, honey and places for your feet.

Find your amnesia home where dreams sieve,
Where your dreams are eaten and explain happiness

You always forget something,
And forget that always something is missing;
You missed the path to the destination or to Ithaca.
That's where a woman waits unhappily
And a dog that sleeps troubled in front of her feet.

You always wait for something,
And forget that always something is missing:
House of dreams and the teller of happiness.

continued overleaf..

ALWAYS SOMETHING IS MISSING

contd...

You search the path to the destination,
 You feel yourself like a homeless and thrown by stones
 Because you always search for something different,
 For example: a person without hate glasses.

And what do you find!
 A path and a cross-
 They give you the cross and hand you the nails,
 And with that they want to kill both friends and enemies.
 Because you always search for something
 and forget that always something is missing.

ALWAYS SOMETHING HAPPENS

It always happens to see a dream and to dream something else.
 To be enchanted by one icon and to dream of another icon.
 Random to be somewhere and think of another place.
 For example,
 to be in Rome and suddenly understand
 that not all paths lead to happiness.

Or to be in Pristina and to dream of a far place
 where freedom has no political smell.
 Or being in a far place
 and to dream of Pristina with the political smell.

It always happens to come up with ideas and shape the pyramid of words
 with beautiful labyrinths and magnificent icons.

It always happen to accomplish something and search for something else;
 to be with someone and look for someone else.

It always happens to look for the pyramid of happiness
 and to be overturned in the triangle of sorrow,
 whose boundary happens to be invisible
 where you get confused like a drunkard who does not keep his balance
 and sees people lined up holding white papers
 in their black hands.

They look at the blue sky
 and out of their pockets, they draw poems that become readable
 just when there is sunlight.
 In an evening when the magical time is shaped for you and me.

BRIDGE

It would be better if this shapeless space
to have no bridge.
You will bear your pain
and I mine.

Today
you are silent like this night without lighting.

Remember when you told me the story of the abandonment,
That story for one whole life.

Yes!
Better this space
to have a prickly rose
from whence the song of the vultures would be heard
then this bridge that unites pain.

The night is beautiful and for my desire, I look at the stars.
They look like a dense cloud painting.
I embrace most of them
like this emptiness that eats me.

You again lure me to the stillness of the feathers.
Today and forever,
I remained drowsy with the gaze on that horizon.

NOSTALGIA

Last night I had longing
to see freedom without clothes,
without guards,
naked
like you
when the sun shines over your body
between the mountain and the sea
wholly without clothes.

Last night I had nostalgia
to see you like the freedom of the mountains,
naked,
in the endless spaces
among those green fields
on the silent sea
to see you
like a fairy divided from the sky.

Last night I had nostalgia-
lots of nostalgia:
To love and forget
enemies of freedom.

Lawdenmarc Decamora is a Filipino poet with work published or forthcoming from *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Common*, *The Seattle Review*, *Mantis*, *The Margins*, *Paperbark Literary Magazine*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *The Columbia Review*, among others. He is the author of three (3) full-length poetry collections: "Love, Air" (Atmosphere Press, 2021), "TUNNELS" (Ukiyoto Publishing, 2020), and "Handsome Hope" (Yorkshire Publishing, forthcoming in 2023). A Pushcart-nominee and Tupelo Press 30/30 Project alumnus, Lawdenmarc has his chapbook "Dream Minerals One" recently published by Ghost City Press. Also, his recent work has appeared in the following anthologies: *The Best Asian Poetry 2021-2022*, *Meridian: The APWT Drunken Boat Anthology of New Writing*, and *Contemporary Surrealist and Magical Realist Poetry: An International Anthology* (forthcoming). He lives in the Philippines where he teaches literature and humanities at the University of Santo Tomas.

AT PATCHARAWAN'S

There are no easy pathways for two people trapped
in the Corona-verse looking for an endless
story with splendid evenings. During the pandemic
we can find reality served on a platter by means
of contemplating fake news; the city square between us
blankets both time and lies in favor of the size
of our fantasy. Opaque as the dreaded life
of this plankton fear on earth, I remember
everything about the bridge that guided our dusty feet
to the place where tradition flavored with coco milk
now folds up to the frozen reference of social media.

Behind us are the savory spirits wrestling
with the tar-smoke of the past, the raw noodle
on the table sways like the bridge above a great shattering.
I love Thai Red Curry's soupy July mornings,
or this afternoon in our hands against the flavors
in salt and memory. Our patience in quarantine broth
swirls past the intimate sunset. The bridge in our mind,
home at Patcharawan's: the taste of life as the normal other.
But we have only to keep walking for the bridge,
our sous-builder, to bind our inarticulate futures.



Lawdenmarc Decamora

A THOUGHT, OR, A FATAL ERROR

has the gentleman standing in the doorway, making use of the pinkie stuck still in his nose to once and for all cancel the fourth and last postal service. What is wrong about the delivery today? A thought, or, the act of sun-gazing over the glittery green, waiting for the aureate making of numerals, a further lucidity. Or a line he cares so much about. So much repetition, so much nectarine the insects writhe instead inside the mail box. A thought, never mind the bluish pain of thinking as such is the bride of September afternoon, or, ideas driving the good news back into smoke again. *Ding*, or, the hand's decision to turn the key in the ignition. Who is coming? When a thought arrives, is delivered, the art of return is returned, the mossy silvereyes through the shrubbery repeat the panic, the fatal words creeping in, leaving him with two choices on his palm.

A thought, or, a fatal error?

The line placid, splitting. A question? The Lopez porch swing hasn't moved in months. He doesn't know why, but somebody's finally thought of replacing a fatal error with a home-made joke.

FARSI LIGHTS, SEPTEMBER 2017

after reading a few lines from The Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam

The cycle which includes our coming and going

Little did I know then that the Khayyam boys will soon become Khayyam men, out in the fields searching for that sticky tongue of fire singeing exits in between the heavy horns of departures.

Has no discernible beginning nor end;

Let the One Thousand and One Nights sing to the prophets and muses. Let the flowering chaos of the night sweeten sin with the grace of Samarkand, holier and silkier than a whispering ruba'i.

Nobody has got this matter straight—

Life... oh it's the magical mystery kind!
In the desert I could die loving the sand, the body that misses the soul's prayer in every particle of dust, calving colors, like the Eternal Painter.

Where we come from and where we got to

The Master of Fate greets the myth with the moon's arias, and sound to sound the rains of Iran shower us with metaphors and fragrant camels—reminding us now of Farsi lights' invasion of plateaus.

Sharon Fagan McDermott is a poet and essayist who teaches literature at a private school in Pittsburgh, PA. Her most recent collection of poetry, *Life Without Furniture*, was published by Jacar Press in 2018. Additionally, Fagan McDermott has published three chapbooks: *Voluptuous*, *Alley Scatting* (Parallel Press), and *Bitter Acoustic*, winner of the 2005 Jacar Press chapbook award. Fagan McDermott's most recent book of personal essays on the craft of creative writing, *Millions of Suns*, written in collaboration with Christine Benner-Dixon will be published by the University of Michigan Press in 2023.



TOGGLE

Here we are in
The height of
The uncertain

In the smoke
Which condenses
In the early morning

Giving to
Buildings
A look of
Carcasses

In your image
A look
Reason
Lost

Meanwhile
Rot
From the night

Yan Kouton

IN US

Every minute
Burns you

Like a sky
Can vibrate

When fell
Get down
You can finally
See the world

Mired
In his fears
Apocalyptic

Harmfulness
From this perspective
What remains

That it will be necessary
Healing from your taste
For death

LIMIT MOVEMENT

It is a borderline movement
Place of a tear
Near a Church
On a Square
Witness to an injury
From this tear
Its color of loss
Like a torn writing

It is a borderline movement
Born from a hidden text
Address carefully
Hidden between
The lines
A kind of burial
Absent vision
While it is everywhere

NOISES

The noises it makes
By dint of doubts
Chronicle of this
Writing and others
One more thing

Like the utensil
From a daily newspaper
Madly ransacked

The tension that runs
From one word to another
Way to forget
Incompletion

Impacts and
Shocks

EVEN ILLUSORY

What finds
Thanks to our eyes

The void revoked
The return of the crowd

The movement at last
What we don't understand
Not its power

Except that it leads to
Always further

Far away in any case
Of his fears

From this spread body
At the heart of the text

This experience
From the side

This place of a contact
Illusory

WHAT WE SAW

To catch
What is impossible
To keep

These fragments
Of body and
Neighborhoods

Everything that ages
Sometimes for a long time
Sometimes not

You never know
When wandering will take place
End

To catch
What is impossible
To remember

These fragments
Of skins that
We met

UNCERTAINTY

In these long collapses
We see the shadow of time

Its murderous color
Having lost his light

Disruption
As a symptom

Nestled in the heart of the mind
Constantly repressed

Refusal to hear
His rumor

Falling on life
Like a past
No return

CROSS

This desolation
Promise

Which becomes dust

Let us enlighten
Under the lamp

Pale light
From room

Falsely asleep
Close to you

Unscathed but
Penetrated by pain

Sure to rebuild
In the morning

AT THE END

Not without difficulty
It does not prevent

It does not replace
Worry

Beam of a world
That we cross
By transforming it

In this exhaustion
Poetic prose
At the speed of a
Megalopolis

Decipherment
Impossible
To turn off
Nevertheless
Everything that
Looks like
At the end

Frances Browner lives in Greystones, County Wicklow. Her short stories have been published in Ireland's Own, Woman's Way, the Blue Nib, Bray Arts Journal, Sixteen and UCD's HCE Review. One was longlisted for the Fish Publishing Award; shortlisted for Trevor/Bowen, Francis McManus, the RTE/Penguin prize and Cork Library's 'From the Well'; won 2nd prize in the Dromineer Literary Festival 2010, and was highly commended for the Costa Book Awards, 2020. Poems and memoir have also been published and broadcast on radio.



Francis Browner

THE SUIT

"This blooming weather," Jack stared at the raindrops battering the window and then made his way upstairs. "How am I going to go out in this?"

"Well, you have to go," Mae called after him. "No sense in making excuses."

Jack was always making excuses. Ever since the day she met him. Nearly stood her up on their first date. Slept it out, he said. He'd been on the night shift at the time, and sleeping during the day. She'd waited outside the GPO for half an hour; that was her deadline; and then she'd tottered home in her high-heels, not that bothered really. It affected her most when she let them down. She didn't like hurting people, couldn't bear the guilt, and anyhow, wasn't it better to regret the things you do than the things you didn't do? Jack showed up at her flat a couple of hours later, and they were still in time for the second show in the Savoy. She'd often wondered since, say if he hadn't shown up at all? Where would she be now?

"Where are you woman?" He roared down the stairs. "Where are you hiding yourself now?"

He had all these sayings. Some didn't make sense. Where would she be hiding in this blooming house?

"There you are." He burst into the kitchen. "Do I look alright?"

He looked alright. Blue shirt, grey two-piece, blue eyes, grey hair.

"You're grand," she said.

"Oh, don't get too excited," his voice was gruff, "whatever you do."

continued overleaf...

THE SUIT *...contd*

Excited how are ya? She'd had plenty of excitement. When they'd first made love, she'd been excited well enough. That soon disappeared when she realized she was expecting.

'Expectin' what?' He'd looked at her in amazement.

'What d'ya think?' She was sure he loved her, the sort of stupid thing any young girl would think. 'Well, you'll have to get rid of it,' he'd said.

Get rid of it. She couldn't contemplate such a thing. Yet, she found herself on a boat to England. A big brown suitcase at her feet. And all that worried her was that Auntie Margaret might turn up in the hospital. Her father's sister was in the Legion of Mary and that was the sort of thing they did. Visited hospitals trying to talk the girls out of it.

Mae never told anyone after, didn't know how to say the words. Had never heard them said. Mulled them over in her head instead. Felt nothing. Didn't feel like she'd aborted anything, such a word, because she'd never felt there was anything there in the first place.

She dusted down the grey shoulders of his suit. They were narrower now than when he'd first bought it. Not for the wedding, no, there had been nothing fancy about that. A quick jaunt to Dublin. A priest who was related to a friend had agreed to do it. The friend and her boyfriend the only witnesses. A cup of thick, black coffee in Bewley's café afterwards. She was expecting again, you see. At least, he didn't ask her this time, expectin' what? They were fertile anyhow, that's for sure. They'd had intercourse twice and conceived twice. Only problem was holding onto them. This one left her naturally. 'Just as well,' Jack had said, 'no one will be any the wiser.'

She straightened his tie, a darker blue than the shirt, not as dark as the eyes though. They looked black sometimes, when he lost his temper, which wasn't a lot. There'd been no conceptions since, when it wouldn't have mattered, when there'd have been no shame. She pulled down his collar, and kissed the crepe skin of his cheek. They were both well on now. There'd be no more chances.

"Sure, wait until the rain stops." She patted him down, one last time. They were all each other had now. Well . . .

"Nah," he said reluctantly, his cockiness fading. "It's best I'm not late."

She watched him stroll down the path, his body bent against the weather, flick open an umbrella, lift the latch of the gate and return it again before striding off down the street. Head up now, like he'd been taught, never let anyone know what you're feeling, his body working its way into the suit, the umbrella saving it from getting soaked. It was for his father's funeral he'd bought it, a couple of months after they'd wed. 'Just as well you've no bump,' Jack had said, 'it wouldn't have looked right at the graveside, people counting on their fingers instead of saying their prayers.'

He looked good in that suit. She was glad he'd worn it. After all, what else was he going to wear? What does a man wear the first time he meets his son?

Anne McDonald is an Irish spoken word poet, artist and creative writing teacher whose work is centered on the challenges we face in a society that is changing rapidly and how we respond or react to those changes. Through her writing, she explores themes of parenthood, aging, death, loss, inclusivity and response to the human condition. She is interested in the power of enabling people who would otherwise not be considered "writers" to find ways to give voice to their own experience. She has had work published in Women's News, Hot Press, Electric Acorn, Woman's Work Anthologies 1 & 2, The Blue Nib, The Strokestown Anthology, The Blue Mondays Anthology, The Waxed Lemon and online journals. Her artwork will be published in the fall edition of The Banyan Review. Anne has an M.Phil in Creative Writing from Trinity College Dublin. Her first collection of poetry "Crow's Books" was published in March 2021. <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Crows-Books-Anne-McDonald/dp/B08N979G5P>
<https://creativelythinkingweb.wordpress.com/>



WALK SOFTLY

Walk softly on the dying leaves of winter,
 they too, have had a difficult year.
 They could, in all fairness,
 bow their heads to die,
 refuse to be reborn.
 Who could blame them?

As we hear soft fires crack in hearths,
 they hear the screams of siblings roots,
 ripped from soft earth by flood waters,
 anguish gushing into rising rivers,
 banks ruptured by wet mud.
 They could, without reproach,
 keep their secrets to themselves,
 stay hidden, safe, below the surface
 refuse to rise in early spring.

Walk gently on the blades of winter's grass,
 turn your face towards the silent moon,
 ask her for forgiveness.

Anne McDonald

LOSING AIDA

She lost her figure by the time she found her life purpose,
she had already lost her confidence as a canteen in a class
full of right handed children.

Her virginity at seventeen in a fumbling embrace
She hardly remembered, and at nineteen lost her mother to suicide,
her father to a neighbour's wife.

She didn't know that when she got her first paycheck
for a job in the civil service, that she would lose that too
when she got married.

She lost a baby when she was thirty five, caught for air
with the cord round his neck. That was when she lost what
little faith she had in God.

She knew she mislaid her sanity for several years as a result.

At forty five she lost all prospects of a nights sleep,
woke up cold in sweat soaked sheets, exhausted
in the early mornings.

From then on she frequently lost her sense of direction.

At fifty five she lost her inhibitions and took up
naked sea swimming, at sixty she lost sight of what she
used to think was important.

At sixty five she lost any notions that she needed
to be anything to anybody when she found a lump
and lost her right breast.

At seventy five she lost her best friend which hurt
her more than any other losses, her witness to the journey
of her lifetime.

A year later the neighbours knew she had completely lost the run
of her self when the husband died, got new windows in
and dyed her grey hair blue.

At eighty, any reason why she shouldn't have a
Captain Morgans for her dinner, or why she had a pale white
half moon on her chest.

At ninety she lost any memories of having children
although two people came to visit
and called her "Mom".

When she knew that she could lose nothing more,
she closed her eyes and lost what she had heard
about but never really understood why it was called
The Good Fight.

LOSS

As I plant the last
of the winter bulbs,
I know this year
You wont be here
to see them.

HOPE

When buds appear
in early spring,
I will see again
in sepia tinted memory,
your hand around
each first years'
bunch of snowdrops.

Karen's work has been published in the UK, USA and Ireland and is included in several anthologies. She co-wrote 'Penned In' with Gaynor Kane, published by The Hedgehog Poetry Press in 2020, publisher of her recent debut pamphlet 'Missing Pieces'. Follow Karen on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/1karenmooney>



PALLBEARERS FOR THE PLANET

Not a gull cries as the elephant sky,
half open-eyed, scans the horizon
before tempting dawn back to bed.

I had risen early to capture her
breaking through the inky canvas
over the bay, but a brief glimpse
of us, even at rest, and she needs
no persuasion to retreat.

Our teary-eyed sun sighs, cries,
and with purpose dulled, melds
elements into a grubby reflection
of our sloth-like ambiguity,
casting a pall over this day.

Bearing the weight of her absence,
hearts slow to a simple duple
as we traipse along to a daily dirge,
inclement as the weather,
paying little heed to our own part.

Can we, too, break through,
rise up and make a difference?

Karen Mooney

DEAR JENNY

Noise, like the football rattle of my youth,
warned around our back yard from where
other cats and nesting birds once were barred.

But you're not to know that aged grind
of bone on bone renders our felines
from stalking prowl to rheumy prone.

I sometimes catch a glimpse
of your daytime flit tween tree
and bush as you play fast and loose,
outwitting larger birds of which you're king,
you sing an orchestral trill to thrill,
as nature's one-man-band.

But tonight, you hold the line,
the one where clothes are hung,
a fluffed-up silhouette on parade,
fiercely protecting your young.

SAND MARTINS AT MILLIN BAY

It was the peg board-like surface of the sandbank
that first caught my eye before you circled above
with earthy capes tied at the collar,
clutching clouds to your breast.

The smallest of gulps, yet you made it here,
with in-flight fuelling on the wing,
to raise a brood on this tranquil shoreline
of the Ards Peninsula before wintering in Africa.

I step away lest my presence deters,
watching from a distance as you
descend like paratroopers.
With a final flutter of capes
you exchange greetings with neighbours
before folding yourselves into the mouths
of sandy burrows and hungry young.

Greta Sykes is a German/English writer, poet and artist. She is a trained child psychologist and has taught at London university, UCL. Greta's poems appear in many Broadshets by London Voices Poetry Group. The latest one is Broadsheet 50, called 'Under Siege'. It was published at Easter 2022. Greta's novels are called 'Under charred skies' about the Weimar Republic and 'The defeat of Gilgamesh' at the time when Uruk was the first city on earth, 5000 years ago. She is an Associate Researcher at UCL. She is working on her third novel. Her essays can be found on <https://academia.edu/> and on her website greta.sykes.com.



VAGABUNDO

Travel poems from springtime.

1

At the rest place in early spring green
Where we had egg and pumpernickel
We spotted a
Congregation of silk road containers
Having a gathering.
Team Zed whispered the password
of our future:
peace, trade and cooperation.

2

Team Zed
Discovered hidden in
A forest of poplars
On the flat plane
of the river Po
a well disguised Amazon nest.
Silk road or Amazon:
I know what to choose!

continued overleaf...

Greta Sykes

VAGABUNDO

3

From the Po valley
 Monte Rosa
 Rises like a gentle giant,
 Guardian of the earth villages
 and rice fields.
 Paragliders follow thermals
 Like seagulls,
 Happiness oozes out into
 The atmosphere.
 In my mouth, a Mon Cherie
 Adds pleasure.

4

Quincinetto nestles
 With sandstone coloured roofs,
 A Venetian church steeple,
 Next to our path
 Below the majestic cathedrals
 Of the mountains.

5

All of a sudden
 The giant opens his huge mouth
 And devours our tiny selves,
 Our sandwiches and apples,
 Warm coat and books.
 It is dark and tight
 terrifying inside his cold belly.
 We cower silently, wait,
 Trembling. The giant turns
 into a she,
 she goes into labour with a roar
 to give birth to the light, the sun and us.

6

Monte Rosa,
 Today she is wearing
 Her splendid white golden crown,
 An emerald velvet gown,
 Layered with olive groves
 And vinyards,
 At her feet shingle decked cottages
 Huddle near the river,
 painted cows rest.
 Above her the immense blue
 reaches out to her
 Like an embrace.

7

Lemon yellow shimmers
 The rapeseed field
 Under the blue tent of the sky.
 Rye stands moss green,
 The earth ploughed fresh
 In pale sienna and chalk white,
 Around them a band
 of wild flowers
 and vinyards
 glow on the slopes
 of Lake Geneva.

continued overleaf...

VAGABUNDO

8

Team Zed
Sends greetings
To all the silk road traders
On their long journeys, fostering
peace and progress
All the way from China
to Africa.

9

Cubes and triangles
Of houses, like toys,
Steeple rounded or pointing
At the sky,
Miniature people and animals
Glide by, as we vagabond
Through Europe.

10

At 900 metres above the oceans
The ancient forest of
The Jura stands tall and proud,
Pointing up into the sky,
Nearby chateaux de Joux
High on a rocky top,
The trees a choir of
A thousand voices
Singing their praise
Of earth.

11

In fat and juicy
Spring meadows
In the midday sun
Brown and white flecked cows
Lie down in comfort
Chewing and resting,
So still
They could be large
sandstone boulders
rolled there by giants.

12

A herd of brown and blonde
Sheep, still in their
Winter woollen coats
Meander guided
By the shepherd
For a taste of fresh air
And grass.

continued overleaf..

VAGABUNDO

13

Under the horizon of
Windmills lie the fields
of the champagne land,
a glistening white earth,
Ploughed into parallel lines,
Next the lemon yellow rapeseed
Guarding the secrets
Of their fertility.

14

The rapeseed
Flowers in lemon yellow
Sun colour,
Sweet scent pouring
Into our nostrils,
They lie calm
Next to the sheets
Of white chalky earth
And wheat fields
Before we reach Reims,
Its chalky white houses
And in its heart
The cathedral rises
Like a fantastic dream
As if on wings
And celebrates the earth
It came from.

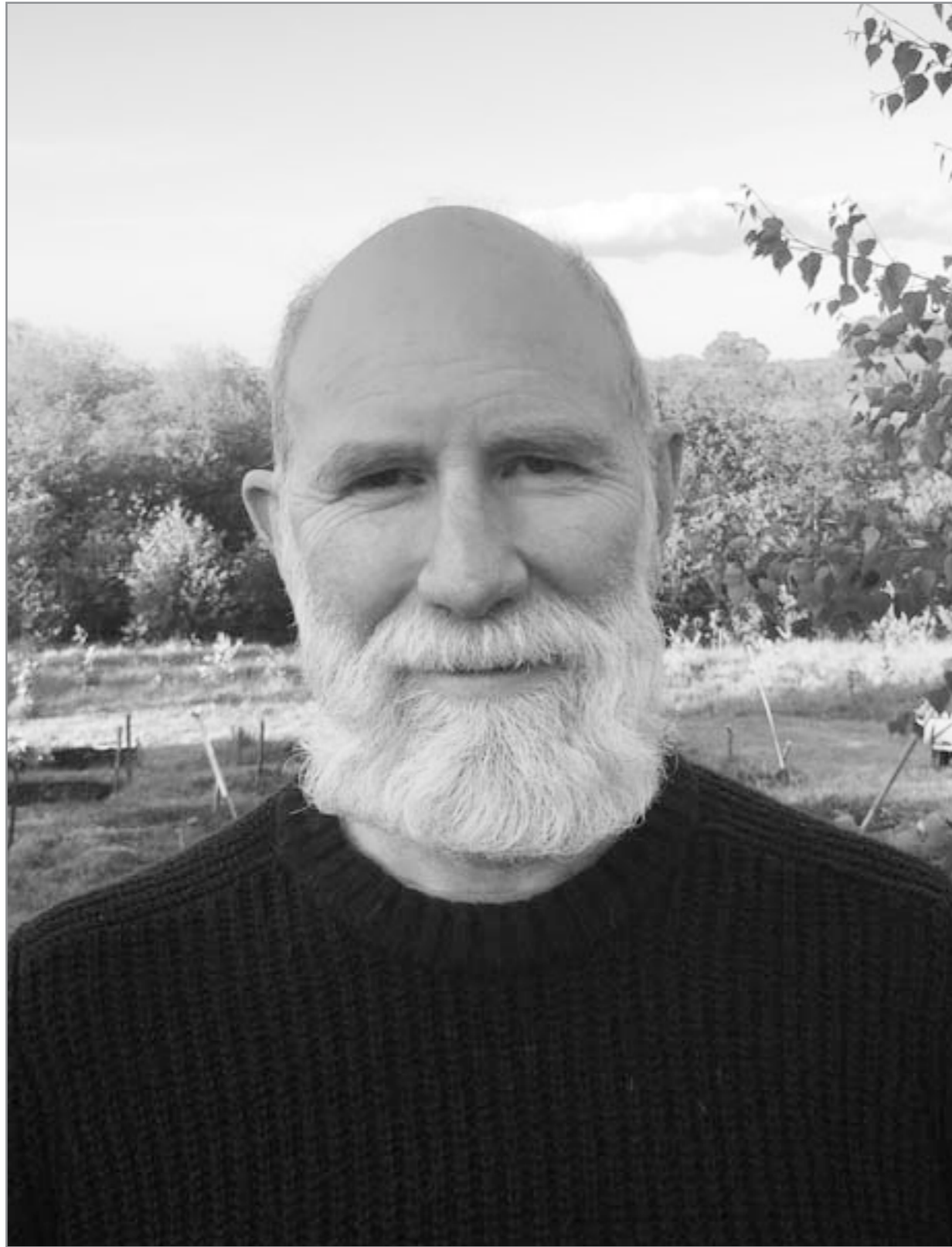
15

The soft veil of
Heat haze
Reaches out over the
Fertile earth in green,
White and yellow.
Next to us, the silk road
Pioneers carry the richness
Of people's labour.
With me
Travels my Chinese
Silk scarf
From the market in Italy.

16: The missing Zeds

On our walk past the lilac
Flowering Rosemary and Iris
We found many letters Z.
We carefully collected them
And brought them home.
We will return them
To all those words
That lost them.
with the message of peace and progress.

John D Kelly lives in Co. Fermanagh. His work has appeared widely in many literary journals, magazines and anthologies. In 2020 he won the Listowel Poetry Short Collection Award and the Desmond O'Grady International Poetry Competition. His manuscript was highly commended in the Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Award 2016 and he achieved Silver Medal in the International Dermot Healy Poetry Competition in both 2015 and 2014. His first collection *The Loss Of Yellowhammers* was published by Summer Palace Press, 2020.



RAVE ON JOHN D.

after Van Morrison

Time to rant and rave like the old ones. Rage like Van or either of the Dylan's. Shout out loud before the dying of the light on this sad island that no man was ever meant to be. Let us go then you and me; let us be blowing in the wind. Rave-on like John Donne! Let your crows' feet grin at The Morrigan! Plough-on like a brave Littleblood harnessed (this time) to the carcass of a raven! Be a transformation! Laugh with bloody teeth! Drink-in life! Dance and ring loud in the ears of death! Rave on like Mr. Yeats! Rise-up on linnets' wings!

John D. Kelly

THE SCALLCROWS

They attack the big window at dawn each day.
 Bloodied heads. Black beaks on glass.
 Hooked feet clawing.
 Muddied wings flapping, rising up against it.

Primaries paint fan-feathered patterns
 in frenetic washes of reddish-brown ochre
 on the pane. They remind me of Ulster, hunger,
 humanity, honour, hurt, dirt, death, shame; then . . .

snow angels. MacNeice's pink roses bloom again
 for me, drink water (soundlessly) in a vase on a sill
 oblivious to the loud menace of Hitchcock.
 But your ears hear only the Morrigan's caws

in the next room.
 For almost a year now they have awakened us.
 I am all-but dead to the world
 but still they won't leave us alone.

If you rise up and chase them, they'll go! you cry; but
 all I want is to lie with you, to lie
 into you, to feel the warmth of your skin next mine,
 to extend the night in sleep that has nursed my heart

for years. I don't want sight of those accursed eyes
 again. But still they caw and come.

Am I really to let them in?
Are you really to let them in?
Am I ready to let them in?
 Are you ready to let them in?

Half-echoes meet me. I know I must let them in.
 Even though you fear them.
 Even though you can't see
 them – as I do – as wise primal seers or symbols
 of positive transformation
 that could perhaps steer me, save me, help me
 find my own way; help me
 stride with courage and be strong
 in each footprint yet to be met each new day
 on this clay of soft earth where gifts are found
 or often appear, to be savoured later

in the long grass. You don't yet know
 this magical path, this dark way of unbroken twigs,
 this way of un-snagged bits of flesh or fur or hair
 on wire; this way of un-spilt blood
 that you still see drip from every thorn.

You've always lived in the circular world of déjà-vu.

A part of you was born in the round of ring
 like a mill-stoned ass – shod in the leaden-feet of fate.

Yours is the ouroboric way, a way that holds you back
 from owning trust in the darkest night, the deepest wood.

You can't even see the trees for the tail before your nose.

I let them in.

continued overleaf..

THE SCALLCROWS *contd...*

They show me a road I would never choose alone
unless I was already lost

or blessed. I see a way to break the peddled cycle
of curse; a way to fulfil the urgent need of must.

I'm fearless in their presence, happy to be a willing fool
under the blue-black lustre of a spell on each gun-steeled
feather or in the reflection of a blood-moon
in a tall well of deep dark water.

White is 'for the birds'

they say, as they try to trick me from you; and you fly
and go it alone – winging it off the coast of Utopia.

You, who have 'only just' escaped your own spell
and still carry the dark stains of cuttlefish-ink
that tell it slant on the tips of your majestic wings –
wings that were already badly burnt along with mine
when we both were pinioned – clipped and dipped
into another deep sea of wave after wave of lies
overwhelming you long before my black-inked page
of 'only searching' words tipped you over the brink,
blotted out the light
and any sense of love that could save me
from what – you thought – was truth.

You find it now, broken amongst plastic on a beach,
in a washed-up gannet – just feather, skin and bone.

Its battered form and once noble skull is hooded
like mine – slicked black in a sludge of brine and oil.

KINTSUGI

On a nest of duck-down in a finely-crafted
wooden box a porcelain egg lies mended.

Its cracked shell expertly rejoined to honour
its history. The splintered memory of its fall

recorded overtly – gilded cracks so cleverly
burnished for posterity. Unlike in the story

of Humpty. Sad that a silly nursery-rhyme is
all we have left to mark that crazed egg-

man who lay scrambled under hooves, got
fried in the mad-dog heat of the mid-day sun.

REMEMBER MICHELANGELO

after T.S. Eliot.

Let us go then, you and I . . .
but not on separate ways
below this rosy-fingered sky.

I want to hold you here
for another mo'; the two of us
as one; fingertips close, alive
and buzzing, never
needing to . . .
touch. Remember Michelangelo?

Let us not embrace the setting
sun, for at least another
short duration; but not just
for the sake of old times.

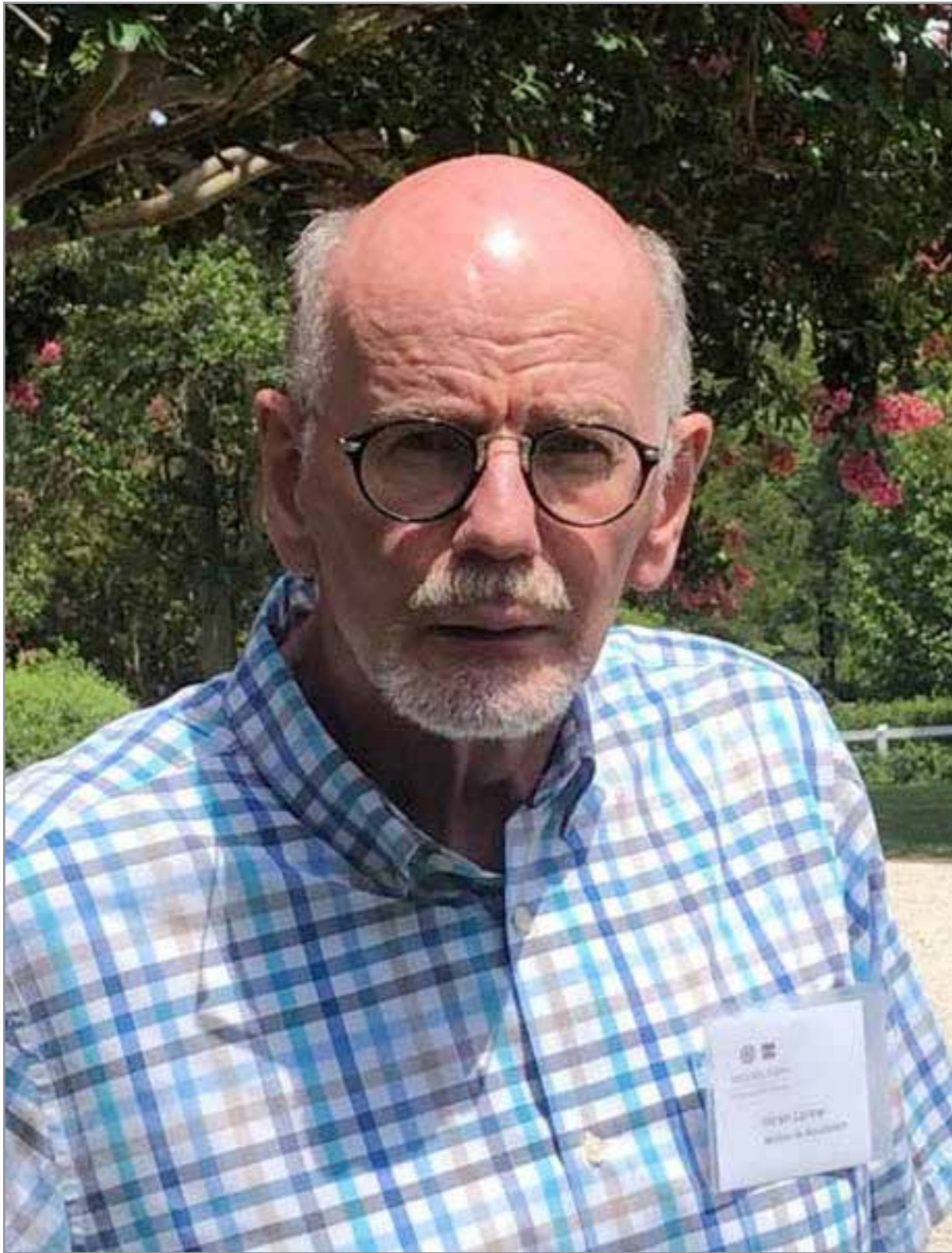
Let us have the patience to find,
again, the alchemy of rhapsody.

Can you remember a time-
past, a time of elation, another
time; a time when we were
not just making the best of it?

No time to misspend energy
or get lost in this wasteland –
this spiralling pit of animosity
or in the bitter monstrosity
of a 'for worse' (not better)
holy contract gone astray.

No time for lying belly-up and
gasping as if in the gas filled
tragedy of a floundering wrasse
wedded to its own bloated
swim bladder; a Being circling
with the bends; a fish
racked with waves of pain
on the surface of a vast sea;
reeled up by me – much too fast –
from the deep of a dark abyss.

Poems by Hiram Larew have recently appeared in *Poetry South*, *Honest Ulsterman*, *Poetry South* and *Iowa Review*. His latest collection, *Mud Ajar*, was published in 2021 by Atmosphere Press. He lives in Maryland, USA. www.HiramLarewPoetry.com



COUNTRY STORES

I live in meanwhile --
 my time frays with its undoing
My breath slantly breathes
 and these turning pages
 just suggest me

I hide in the midst of
 and peek through jaunts or dreams
My sacks are packed full of
 long for

My train whistles
And I travel the wishing
 on halfway between

Better said
I love country stores
 that sell that smell
 of then
 or just so

Hiram Larew

A GOOD MANY

The wisdom of mistakes
their joyous failings
are all gifts of
gold-wrong sublime

In fact a life that errors its way through
on full-throttled bumbles
makes stars in heaven

And faults are really a long-lasting wonder
in disguise --
as fine as milk is to cheese

Any poor choice may turn into utter bedazzlings
or become as loving as a handful
of handsome weeds

And let us never forget
what a kinked hose means in the long run –
its sudden gush of surprise
is a holy of holy to the withered



Photograph courtesy <https://pixabay.com/es/photos/rociador-de-agua-regar-agua-5108199/>

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



LATHED

Not the scrubbed look of a John Donne schoolboy
Bridal month. Satin. Mother's was brown. War was over the hills. Storm-horse gray.

A bouquet
Of silver dollars
These were the hardships of the home front.

Mother tried everything:
As I do now, in wedlock: yet
a spring bouquet, all the bruised colors of disappointment, looks dusty, a puppet-
theatre kiosk
Scraped, smoked mirrors, dimple distorting
the scene of two who would be land girls, the musk of a first kiss on the oth-
er's lips still ringing.

Lynn Strongin. Photograph by Catherine Dunphy.

THOUGH

I look like a blur
I keep my eye on the compass:
That
was an old 16-millimetre film

In a taxicab to boot
Only, my boots are attached to steel rods
Braces

Heavy
Yet I feel light
A firefly blink
 To live this night
 In ecstasy. I plead to you for transparency as I die.

THERE ARE

...more gentle ways to handle work
Like turning carefully, a porcelain
Hanging a mirror unnerves me:

I caught polio a week after mother, sister and I tried to hang a large looking glass
And look!
It broke.

It broke my parents' hearts
When I was paralyzed for life.
But look, in my eighties I am still a tomboy:
 I caught myself from all falls from a tree: a perfect batting average,
 Euclid, until tragedy.

2010 - 2022



Live encounters

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