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Live encounters

BOOK - REVIEWS

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DAVID RIGSBEE
On Reviewing Poetry

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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor
markulyseas@liveencounters.net

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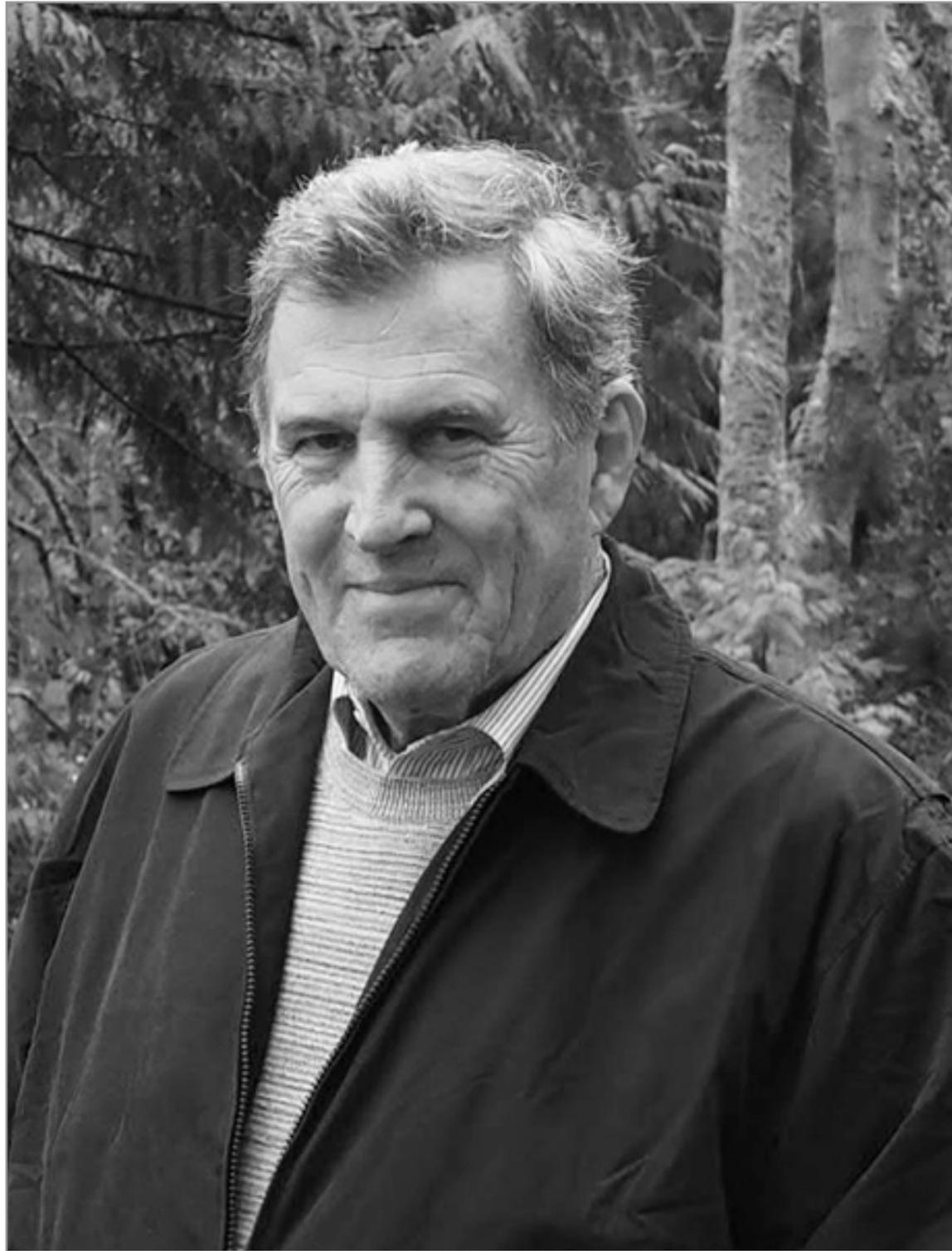
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David Rigsbee is an American poet, critic and translator who has an immense body of published work behind him. *Not Alone in my Dancing – Essays and Reviews* (2016), *This Much I Can Tell You* (2017), *School of the Americas* (2012) and *The Pilot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



DAVID RIGSBEE ON REVIEWING POETRY

I had been reviewing poetry collections, off and on, since the late 1970s. It seemed to me then—and it does even more so now—that the best poetry collections were due fair consideration, which is to say a sustained and careful look, after the cork-popping of publication. I had been aware that not a few really commendable collections, including those of established poets, can emerge only to face a mysterious and frightening silence. At that time (i.e., late '70s), I taught English at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro, a storied department that had boasted Randall Jarrell among its faculty eagles. By the time I got there, Jarrell's posthumous legacy was assured. He defined and embodied that rare hybrid creature, the poet/critic, and his assessments, sometimes strict, were taken by many as scripture. For Jarrell, poets were thinkers too. His celebrations, likewise, marked him as a fair, often amiable judge. The seriousness with which he undertook the rescue of Whitman and Frost, whose works were mired in the lip-service of high school teachers and the namers of Interstate rest stops, seemed like inspired reclamations. It had been over a decade since his death, but his spirit still hovered angelically over the department. By the time I arrived, the writers included Fred Chappell, already a regional icon, whose stories and precocious novels were by then making their transformative way into poems. There was Robert Watson, an urbane and capable poet, whose work was published by Atheneum, also known at the time as the Rolls-Royce of poetry publishers. Of this imprimatur, we were impressed. Tom Kirby-Smith wobbled down the hallways, an almost preternaturally shy (and perhaps as a result a little-known) poet who was also an amateur astronomer.

David Rigsbee

Finally, there was a young, promising novelist, Lee Zacharias who seemed positioned to steer an ever-upward career. I had met Mary Jarrell shortly after joining the department. Indeed, she appeared at my first poetry reading at the university, sitting on the front row. That community clued me in to a kind of generational caretaking that was to characterize the place.

However, the first review I ever wrote turned out to be a reverberating faux pas. I had been assigned to review Bob Watson's latest collection for a local literary newspaper. Bob and his wife Betty had become friends with my wife Doris and me. We often met for dinners, drinks, and parties. Coming to UNC-G from Hamilton College, where I had my first job, gave Bob the impression that I was a northerner of the old school: tweedy, wit-calibrated, a gentlemanly pushback to the southern status quo. Fred Chappell held the same misbelief, not knowing I had been born and raised just down the road in smoky Durham and hence accused me one night of being a Yankee, reeking of Yankee superiority and inauthenticity. On discovering his mistake over dinner and drinks one night, he smacked his brow and, lurching to apologize, fell out of his chair onto the restaurant floor. In retrospect, of course, I see this in slow motion. The manager invited us to leave. Nonetheless, soon after, I was cheeky enough to accuse Bob Watson of not being ambitious enough in print, and he took offense, retreated into silence, and subsequently dropped me altogether. I found that I missed his company. Moreover, it never occurred to me that 1) he expected a fair assessment, only to get a comeuppance from a mere instructor (he was a full professor) and 2) his book may not have had other reviews. I made the lame excuse that I had only declined to grade on a curve. Was this a hill I was willing to die on? It was absurd, but I didn't stop there.

When I had moved on to LSU in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in the early '80s, I began reviewing new collections for *Magill's Literary Annual*, a roundup of "serious literature," intended for libraries. I reviewed Paul Blackburn's *Collected Poems*, Louise Glück's *The Triumph of Achilles*, and Brad Leithauser's first collection, *Hundreds of Fireflies*. With the latter, I found issue with what I took to be Leithauser's simultaneous bringing up, then playing down, his efforts to wriggle out from under the taint of his unpoetical education at Harvard Law School. I took it as self-aggrandizing and disingenuous and painted the whole collection as the timid, formalist work of a privileged, spoiled brat. A few months later, I received a lengthy letter from Leithauser begging to correct me by insisting that neither his intentions nor his finished work was evidence of special pleading.

I was once more chagrined that I had written the review as I did. It was personal, and that wouldn't do. I didn't even know him. Soon after, I reread his work without putting my gun on the table and began to see what went into making poems in his own eyes. I gradually became an admirer of the fineness of his imagination and of the finish he afforded his work, far more polished than what I was capable of at the time. I'm sure there was envy too, on that score, and it didn't occur to me that my framing of the review might have taken the turn it did, thanks to unacknowledged motives. It was also a review you could look up years later in the infallible reference section.

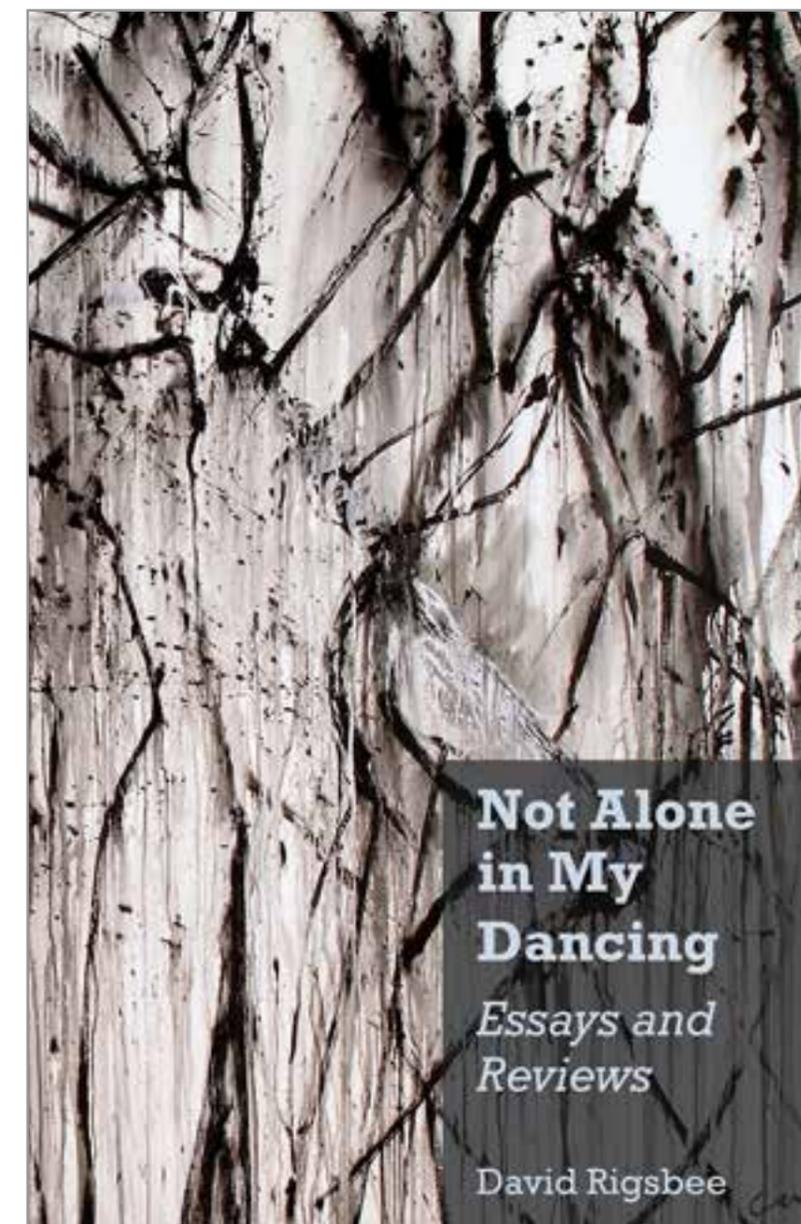
For the next decade, I rarely did reviews, and the ones I managed weren't about poetry. For instance, I reviewed Ray Monk's *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, a biography of the philosopher whose work has bewitched so many poets (Wittgenstein himself confessed that he could never understand poetry). I also undertook a series of introductions to southern poets to accompany a critical anthology that poet, publisher, and translator Steven Ford Brown had proposed. Over the course of several years, I undertook to write assessments of James Dickey, Nikki Giovanni, John Crowe Ransom, Donald Justice, Robert Penn Warren, and a dozen others. After *Invited Guest: An Anthology of Twentieth Century Southern Poets* came out in 2001, I was invited by the editor of the newly founded online magazine, *The Cortland Review*, to become a contributing editor, specializing in book reviews. The concision required for *Invited Guest* gave way to the opportunity to write capacious, even meandering reviews, unrestrained by word count, where I could relax and think about each poet in extended terms, including many sidebars. These essay-reviews were collected in *Not Alone in My Dancing: Essays and Reviews*, that came out in 2016. In these pieces, I tried to bring back a degree of subjectivity that would allow me to describe what reading poems was like as an experience, an aesthetic experience. It has been noted that standing in front of a work of art can often as not leave one speechless. Karl Ove Knausgaard, who is doubtless the most loquacious writer alive, wonders in *My Struggle* why the experience leaves him feeling vulnerable and witless.

A similar sense of feckless engagement can accompany the reading of poetry, as can attending readings. Poems, like paintings, are dense with implication and leverage nuance in the pursuit of bits and vistas that lie beyond the ambit of language. They also pursue and summon—the best ones, at any rate—feeling.

This was once explained to me as the basis of reader-response theory, namely, what it feels like to be me reading you. If you cannot redescribe the poem you have read, you can still describe the feeling it gave you, and feeling is not a wispy change in self-management. It's a visceral core in that it underlies the effects of sensation, securing the unfolding of anything (and everything) else. My friend the poet and memoirist Rodger Kamenetz recently discussed this aspect of poetry's invisible torque in an essay on Wordsworth, for whom "all things, and all persons, have a palpable presence out there and also within us— and if given attention, evoke feeling."

The observation bears on reviewing. When I write a review, I not only want to suggest the shape and valence that emerges in a collection, but how it feels to have read it. This is not analysis or the "explication" with which I and so many others were trained during the reign of the New Criticism. It's not the unpacking of rhetoric's legerdemain or following the Reese's Pieces of image trails. It's to say how the poem shifted our most fundamental state and somehow enlarged the range of our experience. That kind of response bears revealing, it seems to me, by the reviewer. It can go by the name of "appreciation," but that term is jejune, seeming to acknowledge the reader's (and reviewer's) subaltern position. Rather, poet and reviewer stand in a commensurate relationship with respect to the words under review. My job as reviewer is to describe what is offered, just as my job as a poet is to summon the offering. This brings me back to subjectivity, a vexed subject for some good time (and for some good reason) in the world of literary criticism. Subjectivity is unavoidable, I am happy to think, and regardless of school or trend, knowing how I align with the poet's utterance (and occasionally even now, song), is analogous to the other bonds by which we navigate the sheer relativity of our lives. Reviewing assumes that plurality. It is a kind of more committed reading.

I come back to the poet-critics whom I admire: Dan Chiasson, Charles Simic, Robert Hass, Adam Kirsch, William Logan (despite his demystifications and pugilistic style). They are upholding something important, without which Knausgaard would be standing forever dumbfounded in front of Munch's *The Scream*. It's the Mona Lisa smile on the face of Randall Jarrell as he cranks the engine of his Mercedes and drives off to class. It's what Linda Gregg meant when she said that reading poetry (in her case, Jack Gilbert's) was "like being alive twice." When I was writing on Randall Jarrell for the southern anthology, I sat down with his widow Mary and brought up the subject of his untimely death, and she insisted, looking into my face: "It was not a suicide, and you must not write that it was." I imagine that if we can be alive more than once, we can make the case, *sub specie poiesis*, that she was somehow right.

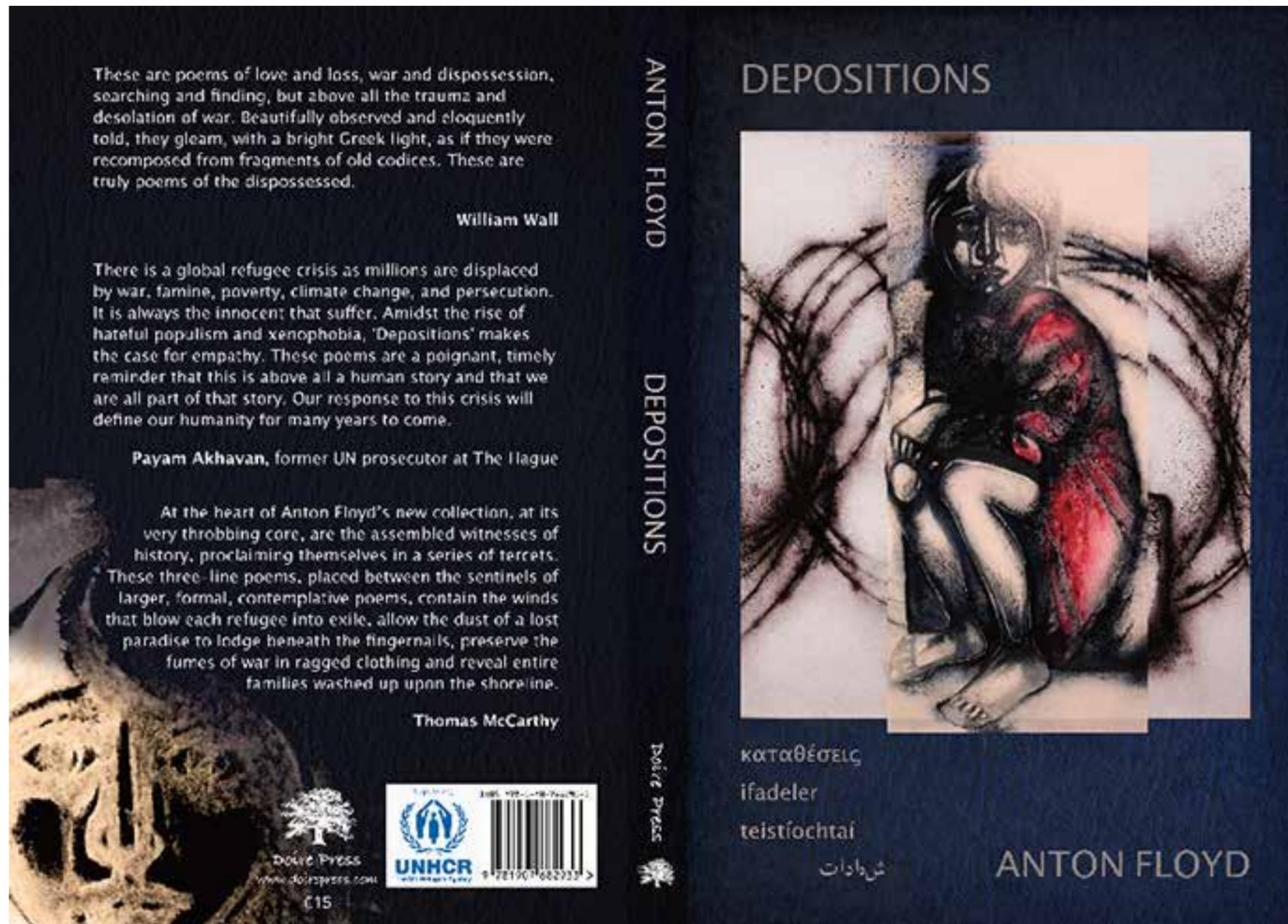




Anton Floyd born in Cairo, Egypt, a Levantine mix of Irish, Maltese, English and French Lebanese, now lives in West Cork, Ireland. Widely published in Ireland and overseas, a debut collection, *Falling into Place* was published by Revival Press in 2018. A new collection, *Depositions* from Doire Press launched in June 2022. Website antonfloyd.ie



Brian Kirk is a poet and writer from Dublin. He has published a poetry collection *After The Fall* (Salmon Poetry, 2017) and a short fiction chapbook *It's Not Me, It's You* (Southword Editions, 2019). His poem "Birthday" won Poem of the Year at the Irish Book Awards 2018. He blogs at www.briankirkwriter.com.



BRIAN KIRK
Review of
ANTON FLOYD'S
Depositions

Doire Press – ISBN: 978-907682-93-3

Text of speech given by Brian Kirk at the launch of 'Depositions' by Anton Floyd on World Refugee Day 20th June 2022 at the National Bahá'í Centre, Dublin.

When we think of the word deposition we generally think in legal terms: a sworn statement or testimony given outside of court by a person involved in a legal case.

The recording of a deposition is an attempt to get to the truth of the matter. In this book of poems, 'Depositions' Anton Floyd presents the stories of those who have suffered the trauma of flight and exile and, using the poet's twin skills of memory and imagination, he presents a sequence of urgent testimonies from people living on the move and existing on the fringe of society.

This work is by its nature fragmentary, reflecting the broken lives of those we know as refugees, but these fragments, compiled in this collection, taken together create a mosaic which tells a fuller story, one that gives voice to the voiceless and extends its reach beyond geographical and temporal borders.

To order a book, email depositions@antonfloyd.ie

Every day, online and in print, we are confronted by the stories of those who have been forced to leave their homes because of war, famine or persecution of one kind or another. In our world of instant mass communication, we are in danger of becoming inured to the individual human stories behind the headlines. Anton Floyd, in this collection, has chosen to tell these difficult stories, using his own personal experience of displacement and relocation. Furthermore, he has built on that knowledge by engaging with others who have suffered the trauma of forced exile by listening to their stories. Floyd is a teacher and a poet and he understands the unique power of language to bring to visceral life the experience of others.

At the heart of this collection is a sequence of one hundred and twenty tercets, or three-line poems, that reflect the refugee experience through skilful use of image and voice. These are framed by longer poems that mark out the poet's area of concern. In this chosen structure we get a sense of Floyd as curator as well as poet and artist. He opens with a translation by William Wall of the Italian, 'To the Victims of Mauthausen' by Maria Luisa Spaziani, and goes on in the epigraph to use lines from Anna Akhmatova's 'Requiem' which signal the poet's intention in this collection almost perfectly:

*'I have woven you this wide mantle for them
From their meagre, overheard words.
I will remember them always and everywhere,
I will never forget them no matter what comes.'*

We get a sense of the extent of the poet's task in an early long poem, 'Michelangelo's Slaves Florence':

'What poem can confront this enormity?' he asks. And later in the same poem, there is a clear statement of intent:

*'If any poem is equal to the act
it must come from the gut...'*

In the longer poem 'The Ghost of that Gadfly – a monologue', Floyd writes out of his own personal experience. But rather than feel an obvious and understandable bitterness for what he and his family have been put through, he manages to strike a philosophical note:

*'...I should hate them all for all
they'd done. For all I'd seen. But then
I would have to hate myself and my own
for what we'd done.'*

The poet's desire to understand the experience of others shines through always, and this is matched by a natural empathy for those who have been displaced, those for whom home is just a memory.

Michael Hartnett was the first Irish poet to publish haiku and senryu. His Inchicore Haiku brings to life the quotidian experience of a migrant poet living in the city in snatches of remarkable clarity. The tercets that form the core of this collection act in the same way, giving the reader glimpses of lives lived in extremis, by giving us access to their world in panorama and in close-up. Although each tiny poem is separate, there is a sense of narrative throughout as each piece connects, telling a story that is unique and all too common, and marking the ground for us readers as we go, so that we can find our way back home.

*'this story
forged on the anvil
this rasping file'*

It begins with a view from afar:

*'distant thunder
black smoke from the village
fringing the hills'*

As we progress details emerge, sensory images drop us in right there into the action.

*'fingertips
caress the walls of home
reading braille'*

In this way, we are somehow both inside and outside lived experience at the same time. Only poetry can do this. The fragmentary nature of these glimpses and images, eked out in a broken sequence, seems to me to be the only honest way to approach a subject which is so distressing:

*'a child
face down in the shallows
line in the sand'*

But it's not simply a matter of the poet trying to convey the horror of what those fleeing their homelands must endure. Floyd does that, but he also manages to capture the complexity of feeling that must accompany the displaced person when and if they arrive in safe harbour.

*'of the rescued
only the body
is unlost'*

*'asylum feels
like a hollow wasteland
between drawn lines'*

The final section of longer poems features two poems dedicated to Ilya Kaminsky, the Ukrainian poet. These poems and others in this section directly address the ravages of war. In 'The Grandmother's Sunflowers' the old woman offers sunflower seeds to the young invading soldier, telling him:

*'Keep them safe. And when
you're dead and buried here,
they'll germinate in your grave.
They'll grow a marker
for your mother to find.'*

And again in 'My Mamoolychka – a letter home' in an interesting switch, the young soldier writes to his beloved mother:

*'And know this my Mamoolychka, all over the country we scorch hour
by hour, the innocent have planted seeds and long after we have gone,
sunflowers will grow – year on year.'*

Somehow, out of all this suffering and trauma, and despite what history has shown us, Anton Floyd insists that we must find room for hope. In these poems, he has let the ego go completely, and pinned all his hopes on empathy and fellow feeling, allowing the emotional core of the work to emerge. The final lines of 'Angel of History' spell it out for us:

*'Minute by minute
we sift from the debris
vestiges of hope.'*

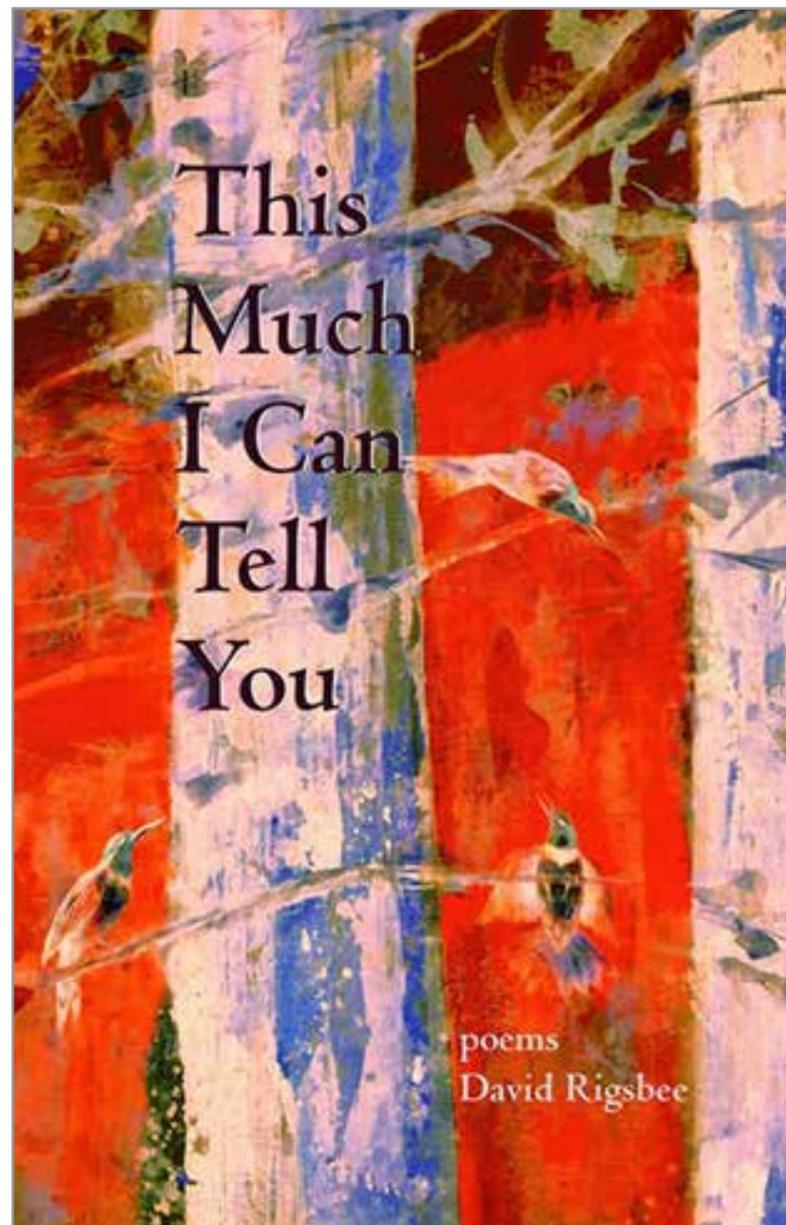
I wish 'Depositions' a fair wind on its travels. I know it will bring understanding and solace to those who read these poems.



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



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.



Available at: [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

The cover art is by Catherine Carr Whittemore.

JORDAN SMITH
Review of
DAVID RIGSBEE'S
This Much I Can Tell You
Black Lawrence Press 2017

For more than four decades and in more than twenty books, including poetry, cultural and literary criticism, and translations, David Rigsbee's hallmark has been a style of writing that is also a style of mind, at once receptive and precise, elegant in its constructions and fierce in its inquiries, an intimacy of thought combined with a reluctance to trust whatever might come too easily, in language or in emotion. If there is a burnished quality to his work, it comes from this reluctance to earn the reader's sympathy by trading on sentiment, to offer any distinction that is less than fine. Against the tenets of the plain style, the assumption that meaning always resides in details, Rigsbee has created a poetry in which abstractions have the tactile force of images. They touch the heart of things.

Take the ending of "The Complaint" from his newest collection of poems, *This Much I Can Tell You*:

...The point is, a world spun
out of that nothing, and here we are lined up,
goodness on one side, grievances on the other.

This is what a creation story comes to, from the wholeness of nothing to the understanding that the opposite of the good is the sense of grievance that keeps us from recognizing it, a view we can only grasp with a refresher course in poetry as a lover's complaint ("The old poets used to complain about their loves: / they were cruel or remote, or cruel *and* remote.") in the understanding that these tropes are as pernicious as they are persistent ("...quite unsatisfactory: objectification, the gaze / and all that."), in the despairing ("I don't think you love me, and I am / in pain") acknowledgement that the work of creation is separation of which "God could have said, / it's not so good, but He didn't: / He said quite the opposite." And so we're stuck with it, love and its troubles, the good and the disaffections that make it visible.

This Much I Can Tell You follows the taut mix of autobiography and politics that informed Riggsbee's previous collection, *School of the Americas*, but it is a more meditative book, less concerned with memory's narratives than with the troubling presence of the present. In "Oversize Load," ("Of course they left the "d" off. / People don't see the use / of the past participle anymore."), the grammarian behind the wheel, driving to outrun depression, considering the virtues of having "no feel for suffixes... docking the past," listening all the same to the Everly Brothers and Roy Orbison, discovers that the overloaded truck he is following carries an Abrams tank, "the barrel of the cannon, lowered / and trained squarely at me," and wonders what the connection is between this menace and his own loaded emotions:

Yet something yokes them both
in the mind and, as Wallace Stevens
would have said, the mind of the poem.
I have often noticed it, and I know
that you must have too.

How the mind finds its reflection in the poem and how the act of writing alters what it records is a preoccupation of this collection:

... It is a closed system
but vast, and time unfolds there too,
unrelenting, nothing in abeyance,
like animal eyes suddenly appearing
in the roadside weeds and fields,
through which the highway plunges,
and on it a car traveling, not speeding,
not hanging back either...

Here, in the title poem, the images have become part of the effort to comprehend what Creeley calls "the mind's / vague structure, vague to me / because it is my own," and the vagaries of the images themselves reveal the structure only as the thread they are strung along. In "Dream Baby," walking along a street where "Russians stare at the Greeks / and the Greeks stare back at the Russians," perplexed by the way that "the individual / man sheers off from the collective, / and the collective must only wait / a short length to find him again," the speaker considers poetry as the withdrawal from this cultural capital into something more private:

I have often thought I should turn from the world
to live in the poem, like the man in the tree
who pulls the ladder up after him,
as if to wed the anonymous and the personal
among the leaves, the clattering branches,
there in the wild perfection of the tree.

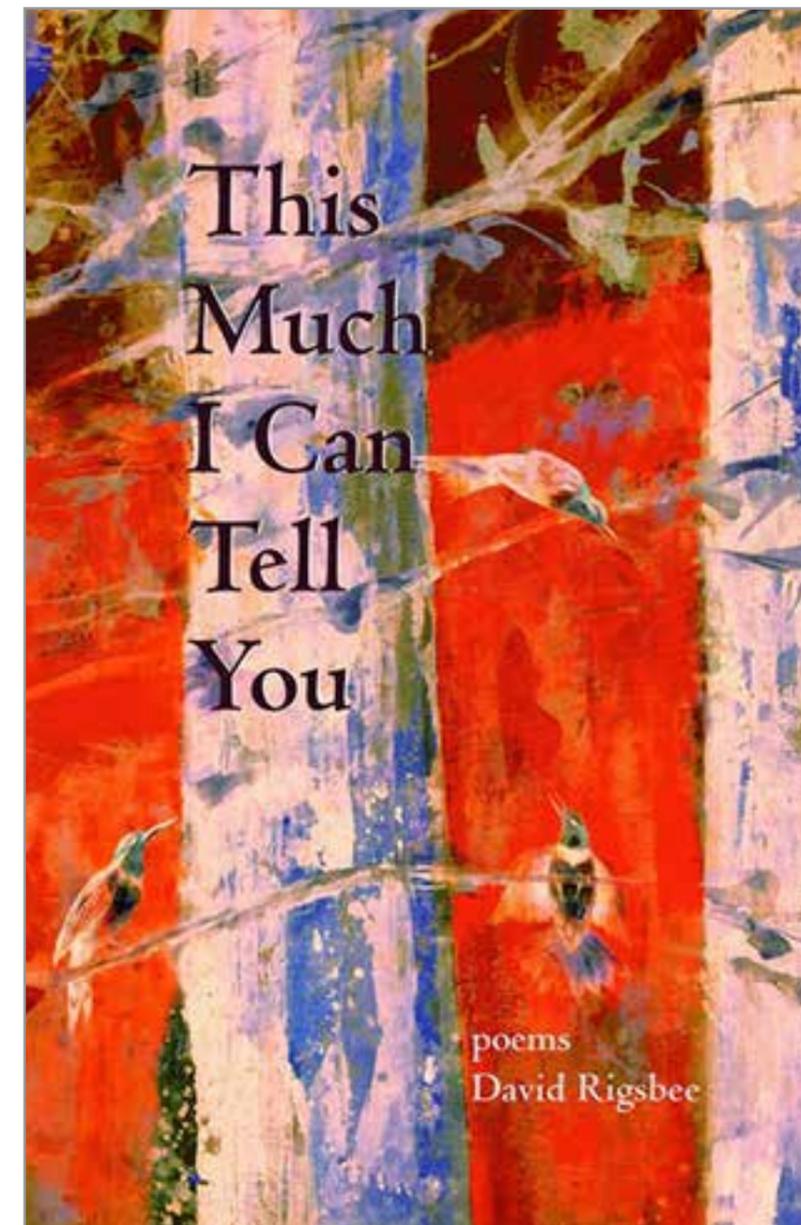
That this is more a form of temptation than an actuality doesn't dissipate its power, which is due to the very circumstances that make it impossible:

Like an acorn or a booster falling away,
even the Beloved, who in my dreams
made care a spotted fruit and death
a feather: reduced to a period.
A man raps inaudibly on the door.
The light in the upstairs window
is small, but it covers everything.

If isolation and loneliness are the conditions of the poem, what escape can be offered by even the acute vision they make possible, by the satisfactions of getting it right in words? The “I” is never another, not quite, and style is an accomplishment, like dressing impeccably for a funeral, that both transcends and underscores its occasion.

That’s not just true of poetry, but it suggests the value of the fine poems of *This Much I Can Tell You*. Their elegance and precision are acts of faith against the pettiness of grievance, even the pettiness of death in the face of God’s declaration of what is good and what we, with language, make of it:

And then there was the Greek poet
who heard a man had died upstairs
in the boarding house where he was drinking.
He pleaded with the undertaker to delay
removing the body before he had a chance
to address it. So insistent was he
that he was granted his request and spent the night
reading poems over a dead man’s body,
expecting a resurrection to rival Lazarus.
All night long he chanted his best work
and finally descended, haggard and dispirited.
It is the power of language that it doesn’t
need to tell you how the story ends: it is
the crispness of pine, after the air of summer.
 (“Composition”)



The cover art is by Catherine Carr Whittemore.

EILEEN CASEY

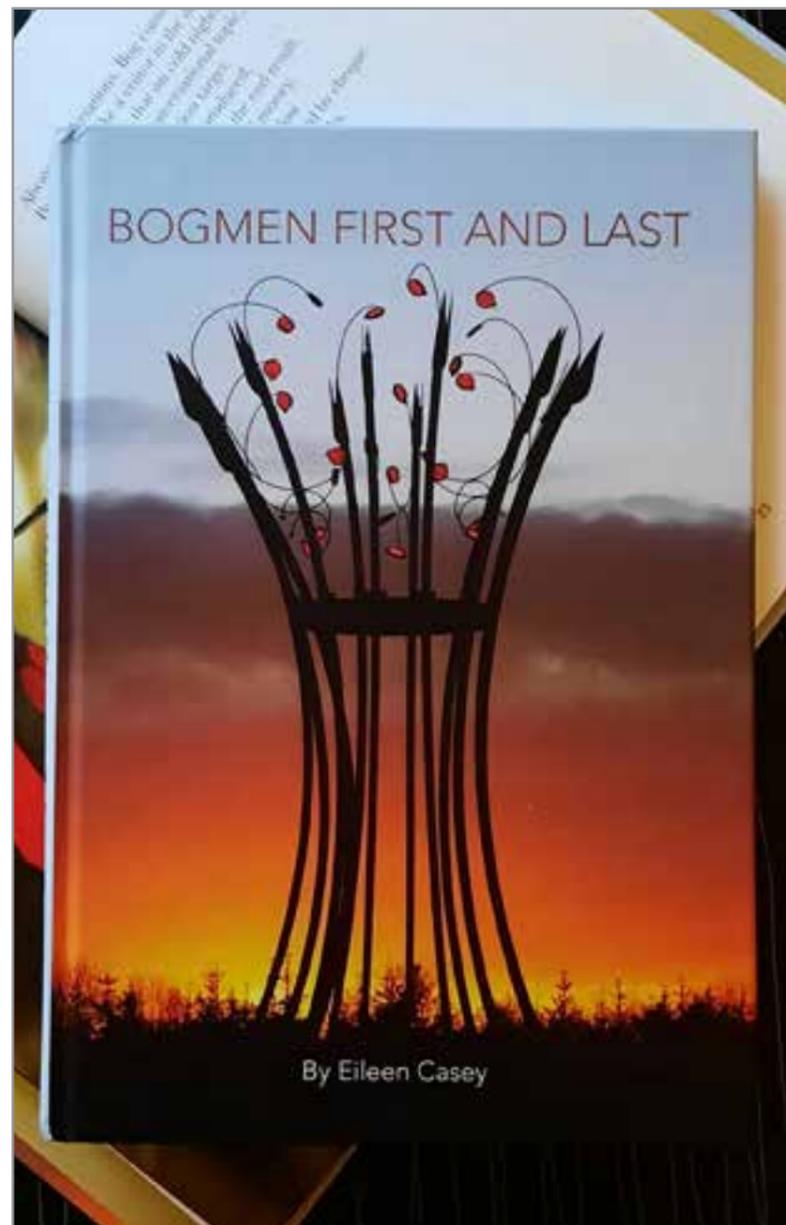


Eileen Casey is a poet, fiction writer and journalist. Her work is included in anthologies by Dedalus, Faber & Faber, New Island, The Nordic Irish Studies Journal, among others. A recipient of a Hennessy (Emerging Fiction) Award, she also received a Katherine and Patrick Kavanagh Fellowship. Her poetry collections are published by New Island, Rua Red Arts Centre, Tallaght Community Arts Centre, Arlen House and Fiery Arrow. 'Bogmen First and Last' was awarded a Creative Ireland Community Award and she's received numerous bursaries and residences from South Dublin, County Offaly and the Arts Council. She holds an M.Phil in Creative Writing (The Oscar Wilde House, The School of English, Trinity College, Dublin). Casey's 'Bog Treasure' (Arlen House), a collaboration with Canadian Jeanne Cannizzo received a review from British Columbia Review of Books <https://thebcreview.ca/2022/06/18/1493-frankish-casey-cannizzo/>

RITA KELLY



Poet & writer in both Irish & English; Rita Kelly (Galway, b. 1953) has won various awards and prizes since the beginning of her career. Her work has been translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian, Dutch and Galatian. Her work has been placed on different courses, most notably, post-graduate courses at Yale University. She holds an MA and is at present reading for a PhD at UCC. She has lived in many places throughout Ireland and also abroad. At present, she lives in Birr, in the Irish Midlands.



RITA KELLY Review of EILEEN CASEY'S *Bogmen First And Last* Fiery Arrow Press. Dublin 2021

This is a book whose quality can be gauged by its cover; a stunning visual of an amazing sculpture by Caroline Madden, shot through by sky and light and a setting sun. This splendid sculpture is part of the open-air collection of sculptures on Boora Bog. This is a beautiful hardback book, with stylish golden endpapers. There are eight breath-taking photographs of various bog detail by bog-chronicler, photographer Tina Claffey. The collection also includes a poem each by Seamus Barron and Sean Craven.

A well-established and respected poet and writer, Eileen Casey shows from the outset that she knows her bogs in all their aspects and seasons. Bogs hold different connotations in our cultural history. Bogs are sacred places again. 'Again' – because they must have been very sacred to those who have gone before. Sacred and mysterious. In Boora Bog, a Mesolithic habitation site, discovered by Joe Craven (1977) was considered important enough to be excavated by the National Museum of Ireland. In her poem about this find ('The Mesolithic Loop'), Casey makes the point "Whatever time or place, we leave traces./Folds, creases, pinch-points. Our comings and goings mapped out like scent drifted/ from history's open window."

'Bogmen First and Last' available from author,
numberrinebirr@gmail.com €15 (to include P & P).

Bogs are places which take in and preserve; emit strange light and echo the lone-some sound of a water bird at evening. Bogs are places whose depths might be as unfathomable as silence. Bogs are now being rewetted and restructured not only in reality but also in our minds and imaginations.

The Midlands' bogs, as Casey illustrates, gained a whole new life in the 50s and 60s – peat was harvested, mainly to produce electricity. It was dried and compressed to produce peat briquettes. Casey shows how that production provided much-needed employment and how bogmen built and sustained whole communities. The poet, in response, creates a suite of poetry to pay homage to these men, to record their contributions and to celebrate their lives. She sees the bog itself as “a patterned poem”. A great aural and visual image.

*.....Footprints in dust.
Berry ripe winter words
scooped into gathering arms.
Bog poems are places to imagine
wet, spongy ground or pegged pathways....
(from 'Bog Poem')*

Casey connects her bogs to the classics, to the universal, “A chronicle of ages; past, present, future;”

*...unravel from peaty sods. Like Theseus
in the maze, a bogman finds his way
back to his own kind. Bog geography
maps out senses. Infuses speech.
No need to sieve language.
Bog words always under tongue.
Bog women too
know how it goes....
(from 'Bogmen First and Last')*

Casey has a great ear for the sounds of poetry; for what words can do and especially when they are juxtaposed, creating rich and surprising outcomes. She has a clear eye too, when she speaks of “slender necked birds” (‘Bog Poem’) she describes them, “elegant as a lyric” (‘Bog Poem’).

The poem travels from aural to visual: “pale calligraphy”. Also, we get that wonderful image “sink like a startled moon.” She is at her ease and full-throated when she paints a landscape while keeping the symphony of sound alive:

*Boora's swans tinged with myth,
wing-stroke the lake, graceful oars. Rounding
a bend at Lough Boora, symmetry miraculous.
Boora's warm ochre shades. Sepia evensong
reverent ripples in Boora lives.
(From 'Bog Poem')*

Real people inhabit this suite of poems – who have lived in the locality and worked upon the bog, drained it, drove the machines which skimmed off a layer of peat, dried it, heaped it up like small hills under polythene. Brought home the cheque and the ingrained turf mould imprinted on skin, under fingernails: “A visit to the pub to cash it in./ A few pints to slake the thirst, / quench away dry dust”. (‘Once Upon a Kilcormac Time’).

There are many poems in this suite which translate the reality and the beauty of the bog’s flora and fauna – caddis fly, frogs and frogspawn, bog rosemary, hazel trees, fuchsias and of course, bog cotton; “Torchlight from a distance, snowy-headed buds./ Up close, fronds blown back in a bog wind/tasselled luminosity against peat back-drop,” (‘Bog Cotton at Derrinlough’ dedicated to Tina Claffey). In the poem ‘Wind Farm,’ such blade rotations are compared with “flocks of snowy gulls,/wind-spun miracles; towering turbines./Bog returns to green.”

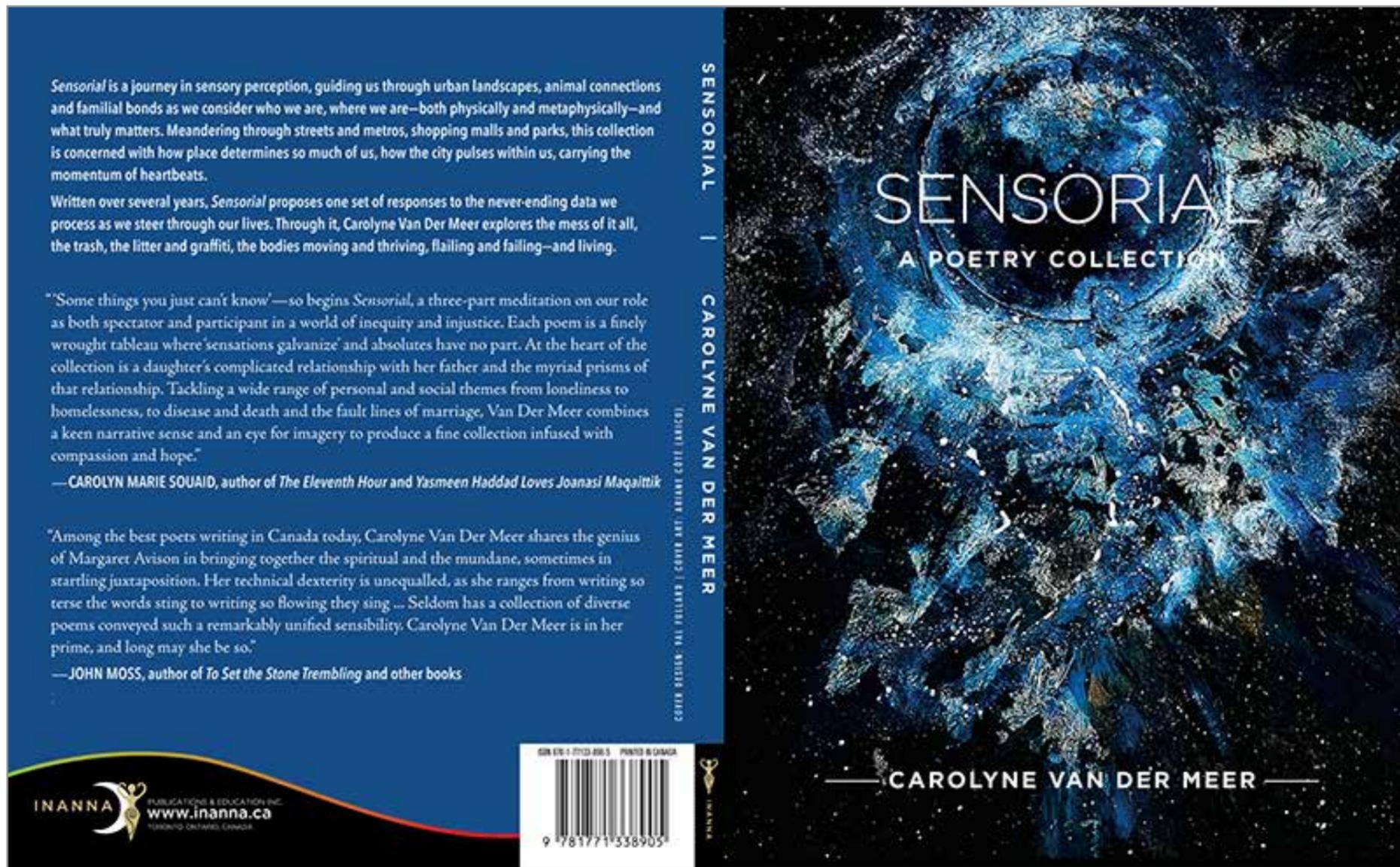
There is an emotional empathy shown with these lives in her own lifetime and indeed in historic time. ‘Bogmen First and Last’ is a thought provoking and above all, poetic documentation of boglands. It is heartening to see that a Creative Ireland Community Award has grant-aided this very worthwhile collection of poems. This collection is a living record, but it’s more than that, it is a ‘translation’ of the myriad facets of the bogs and their surrounding villages into a well-structured suite of poems. Beautifully presented; it is a rich and aesthetic production. It is an ongoing testimony to community living, loyalty and enduring relationships between bog and lived lives continuing to present day; “We hitch out star to new starts/with others of our time,/lives of equal rhyme.” (‘Fresh Starts’).



Carolyne Van Der Meer is Montreal-based journalist, public relations professional and university lecturer who has published articles, essays, short stories and poems internationally. She is the author of *Motherlode: A Mosaic of Dutch Wartime Experience* (WLUP, 2014), *Journeywoman* (Inanna, 2017) and *Heart of Goodness: The Life of Marguerite Bourgeoys in 30 Poems | Du coeur à l'âme : La vie de Marguerite Bourgeoys en 30 poèmes* (Guernica Editions, 2020). This book, for which she translated her own poems into French, was awarded second prize in the Poetry Category of the Catholic Media Association's 2021 Annual Book Awards and was a finalist in the Specialty Books category of The Word Guild's 2021 annual Word Awards. Her fourth book, a full-length poetry collection, *Sensorial*, was released by Inanna in May 2022.



Michael Farry's latest poetry collection, *Troubles* (2020), is published by Revival Press, Limerick. Previous collections were *Asking for Directions* (Doghouse Books, 2012) and *The Age of Glass* (Revival, 2017). His poetry has been widely published and has won prizes. He has also written and published widely on the history of the Irish war of independence and civil war.



MICHAEL FARRY
Review of
CAROLYNE VAN DER MEER'S
Sensorial
Inanna May 2022

Carolyne Van Der Meer's latest poetry collection, *Sensorial*, is dedicated to her late father who died in 2019. He is a continual presence appearing in unexpected places until in a series of poems in the last section, Connection, she confronts their difficult relationship and through a mix of imagery and fiction, explores with great tenderness and understanding his final decline.

In the first poem in the collection, "Finding Atlantis", set on a bus trip in Mexico, the speaker in the poem tells us why she is there: "I was escaping. The death of my father / weighed heavily. Art. Paradise. /I needed to create in / his honour, his memory."

But there is no escape, he remains with her, entwined with the difficulties she encounters until having safely navigated those difficulties, her father and herself find some peace:

"My father swims in the lagoon /and before he leaves me for good, /he waves."

Available at: <https://www.inanna.ca/product/sensorial-a-poetry-collection/>

The collection begins with three questions illustrating well her inquisitiveness and ability to look freshly at every experience: How do you walk on an atoll? /Is it too deep? If I follow the curve, /will I cut my feet on coral?

The poet's answer to the third question is "cutting your feet is your choice" and Van Der Meer chooses to cut her feet metaphorically by immersing herself in the reality and the echoes of her wide-ranging experiences. Everywhere she goes she navigates, explores and connects, becoming involved in the history and reality of life in those places. In Mexico, she is interested in the "The gap between/ the rich and poor"; in the Dominican Republic she acknowledges that "Spanish colonial rule captured the New World"; in Belfast she is interested in the peace accord with a companion who wondered "how long it will be/ before she stops /looking over her shoulder" and on the Champs Elysées she notices the "a burn victim in a wheelchair one leg amputated/ war veteran perhaps"

Van Der Meer has a keen eye and ear for the good story, the incident which can be mined for a reflective poem, a comment which is both particular to the event but also universal in its application. In "Let Her Sleep" Ruth Priscilla Colbath, the abandoned wife, "asks herself questions every day" as this poet does. In "The Strength of Dragons", Joseph Mary Plunkett, the Irish 1916 executed rebel, tells his new bride, Grace Gifford "you believed, never refuted me/ for another's inadequate music/ remembered me long after I vanished/ into execution's lair".

The final section, especially the poems that explore the difficult relationship between father and daughter, are the highlight of the collection. In spite of the fact that "She was never really close to him" ("Parkinson's Disease"), the speaker in Van Der Meer's poems recounts some tender moments of fun and closeness such as in "Learning to Shave", "and what I rarely saw—a laughing man". The meticulous details add to the sense of regret "Briefly the reddish-brown skin on his neck/ holed by a pigment defect, is covered".

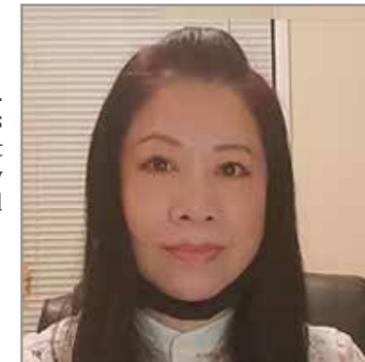
In "Parkinson's Disease" the sadness of the realization that by the time "she finds/ her anger dissipated, disappeared" it is too late to bridge the gap, have a heart to heart conversation because of the ravages of the disease and the approach of dementia. All Van Der Meer's speaker gets in return for her care and concern is "a hollow // look in those /glassy blue eyes". The change in their relationship is further developed in "The Father Who Cried Wolf" when he begs for her help over the phone.

The beautiful final poem where sitting by his bedside near the end she is grateful for the calm which has settled - "a peace/ you could not have achieved/ in your waking moments".

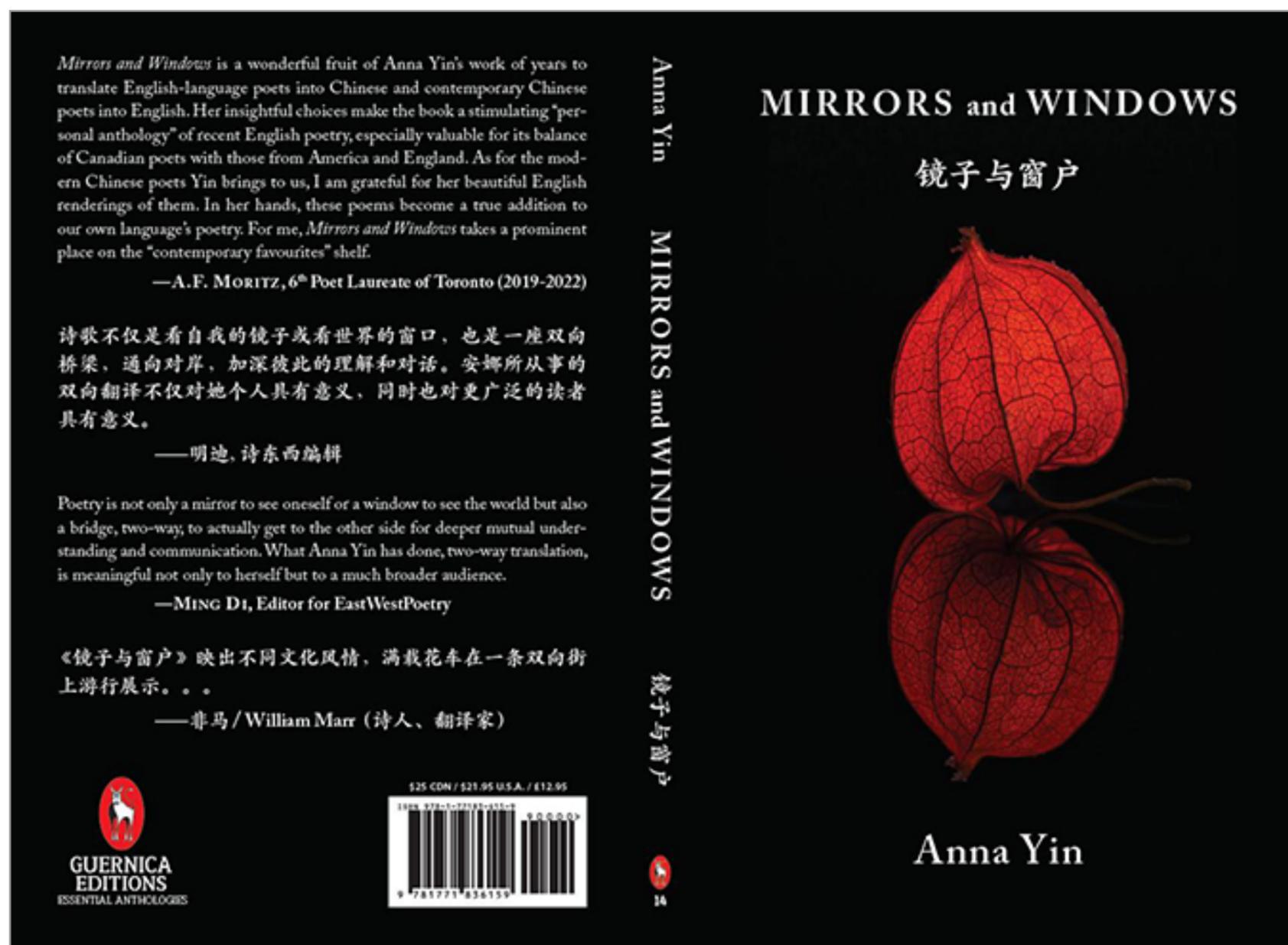
The collection is a celebration of humanity in all its brokenness, in which the "I", the poet shares, recognising her own faults and imperfections.



Anna Yin was Mississauga's Inaugural Poet Laureate (2015-2017) and has authored five poetry collections and one collection of translations: *Mirrors and Windows* (Guernica Editions 2021). Anna won the 2005 Ted Plantos Memorial Award, two MARTYs, two scholarships from USA and three grants from Ontario Arts Council. Her poems/translations have appeared at Queen's Quarterly, ARC Poetry, New York Times, China Daily, CBC Radio, Literary Review of Canada etc. She has designed and instructed various Poetry Alive workshops with multimedia since 2011. She read on Parliament Hill, at Austin International Poetry Festival, Edmonton Poetry Festival and universities in China, Canada and USA etc.



Vivian Zhou is the founder of *WePoetry*, a poetry network for all international Chinese poets. She is also a freelance writer and editor, working for several Chinese-language journals (*World Weekly* and *Poetry Society of Wuzhou*). Her travel essays and poems have appeared at *World Journal*, *Overseas Digest*, *Flushing Poetry Festival Collection*, *Poetry Hall* and the *Poetry Review*, a *Slave of Freedom*. She graduated with two bachelor's degree in Accounting and Economics. Currently she is working for a financial institution in New York.



VIVIAN ZHOU Review of ANNA YIN'S *Mirrors and Windows* Guernica Editions 2021

Anna's *Mirrors and Windows* is a collection of poetry in translation that brings together the works of 56 poets from the East and West. There are three parts in the book, the first part is "From English to Chinese", in which Anna translates the works of 36 English-language poets into Chinese. The second part is "From Chinese to English", in which Anna translates the works of 20 contemporary Chinese poets into English. The third part is "Poems Inspired by Translations", which includes 7 poems written by Anna. *Mirrors and Windows* is a successful demonstration of Anna's ten-year poetry translation career. And it's a high-quality book to consume and relish at sitting and then return to savor gradually.

I was especially impressed with Anna's translation of the verse "Couple Sharing a Peach" by American and Canadian prominent poet, Molly Peacock. This lovely short piece of verse is full of the reality of life and is imbued with the philosophy of love. Some of Molly's ideas are alive with sensory experience which can easily resonate with wide audiences who are trying to refresh the love in their lives. In translation, Anna strives to translate each line accurately and at the same time she does not ignore the poetic charm of the original verse: rhyming.

Available at: <https://www.guernicaeditions.com/title/9781771836159> and <https://www.amazon.com/Mirrors-Windows>

She pays attention to the rhyming words in the translated language, even though its hard to find two words with the same rhyme in another language, she still tries to get as close to the definition of the original words as possible. Thus, Anna's translation integrates the original work into the context of Chinese classical poetry, it preserves the dramatic tension, coupled with rhyming words; so the verse has a vivid sing-song feeling.

Moreover, the Chinese language is changing rapidly. How to utilize Chinese language, either classic language or modern language, will directly have an influence on the effect of translation. When translating Molly's verse, "Couple Sharing a Peach", Anna utilizes the poetry style of Minguo, a moment in history right after the fall of the Qing dynasty and before the Communist period, as well as on choice of words. For example, the "hotel" in the original work can be translated into "賓館", "酒店" in modern Chinese world, but Anna picked the classic word "客棧", which gave the verse a classic romantic flavor. It fully demonstrates her strong knowledge of traditional Chinese literature.

Mirrors and windows is diverse in subject matter, and contains numerous authentic content about the family life, the beauty of nature, the truth of material world and the nature of memory. Some topics are related to classical Chinese culture and religion. Luo fu's lengthy verse "Early Snow", is a poem of limpid meditations which drives us to pause as we read: "他一向啞默/ 從不追究為何膚色那麼蒼白/ 沒有歷史, 沒有軌跡和腳印/ 翻開去年的照相本/ 冷, 仍在那裡裸著/ 河水喧嘩/ 是他的笑聲也是輓歌." as Anna translated below: "Mute at all time/ he has never looked into why skin is so pale/ no history, no tracks and footprints,/ opening last year's photo album/ cold, he is there still naked/ the river clamoring/ it's his laughter, it's also an elegy."

Comparing with original verse and translation, we can see Anna's translation is not only accurate, but also expresses the original flavor of the poem vividly and delicately. It fascinates readers to see the picture of white snow with stillness and clarity, covering on the ground.

Anna is a loyal reader. When she focuses on translating, she always thinks deeply into the context of the original work; he strives to invite the spirit of the original verse into her translated works letting two souls representing different cultures, religions and beliefs united. This is the most meaningful approach for her.

She said: *Translation gave her a lot of windfalls*, as she wrote in her poem: "Now I look at leaves and fruits,/ stones and stars, each a new poem./ I too bite the juicy fruit of it."

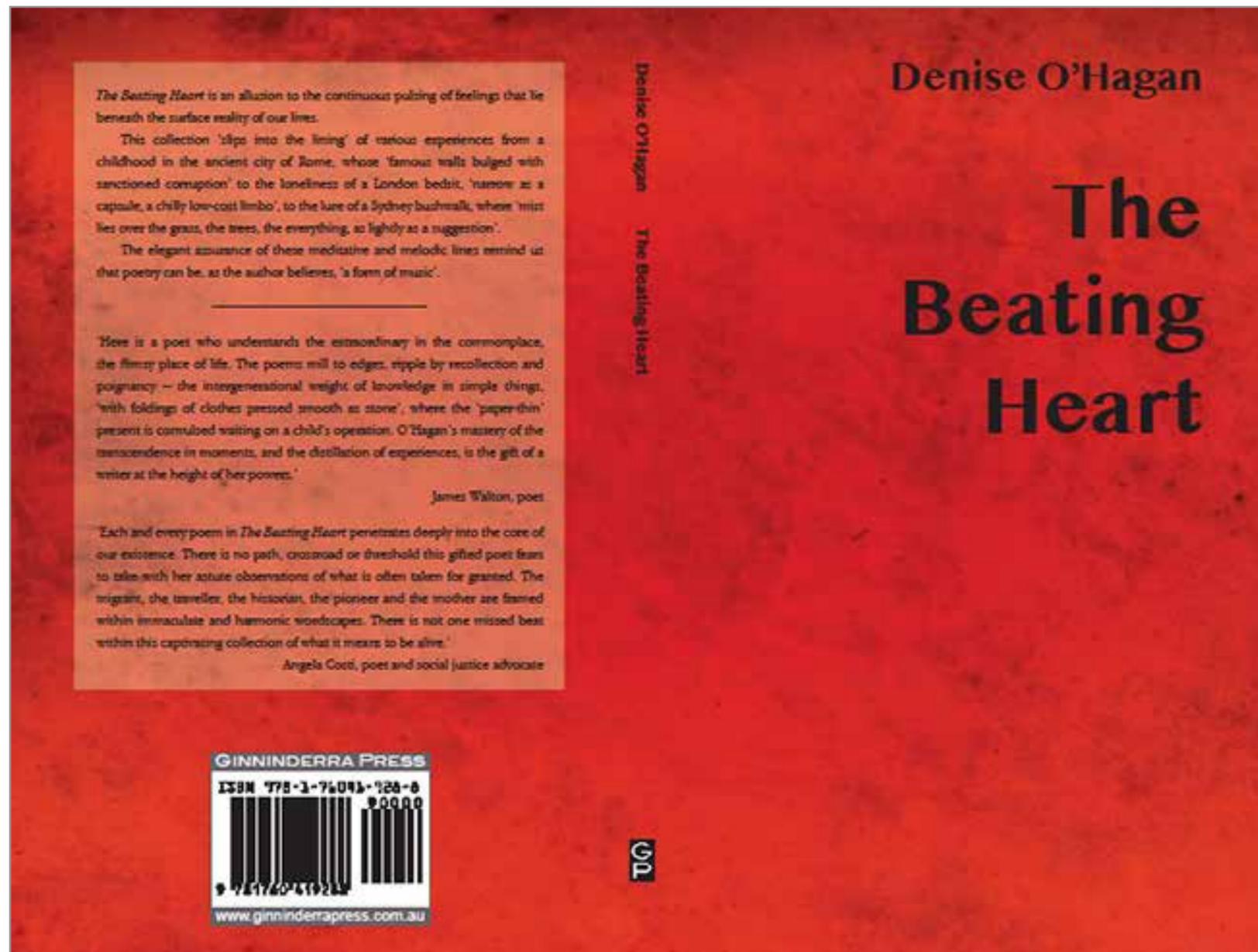
From *Mirrors and Windows*, we find two Annas standing inside and outside the mirror, one who speaks her native language outside the mirror while another who writes in a foreign language inside the mirror. They are harmonious and coordinated with each other. Like the left hand and the right hand playing on a piano, when they working together, a wonderful melody will be flowing out. And that window is the symbol, it enlarges Anna's vision of poetry, but also opens the window for the vast number of Chinese poets and audiences who truly desire to read the works of contemporary Western poets. In addition, it benefits more and more Western poets who are deeply interested in Chinese culture, tradition and literature, to have more opportunities to stand on the stage of China. Anna's work has built a bridge to enhance relationships between the Western and Eastern poets. In this respect, Anna's Work has transcended poetry itself.



Denise O'Hagan is an editor and poet, born in Rome and based in Sydney. She has a background in commercial book publishing here and overseas. In 2015 she set up her own imprint, Black Quill Press, to publish her late mother's historical novel *Jerome & His Women* (2015), shortlisted for the inaugural Institute of Professional Editors' Rosanne Fitzgibbon Editorial Award (the 'Rosie'). Her poetry is published widely both in Australia and overseas. Recipient of the Dalkey Poetry Prize, her poetry has also been awarded in Australia, Hong Kong and the States. She was Poetry Editor for Australia/New Zealand for Irish literary journal *The Blue Nib* until 2020. Her second poetry collection, *Anamnesis*, is forthcoming (Recent Work Press, October 2022). <https://denise-ohagan.com/>



Henry Briffa was born in Malta and practises Psychology in Melbourne, Australia. His poetry was highly commended in the Queensland Poetry Festival Emerging Older Poets Mentorship (2018) and the Christos Poetry Prize (2001). *Walking Home*, his chapbook, was published by the Melbourne Poets Union (2019). Over 40 of his poems have appeared in local and overseas journals including *Rabbit Poetry Journal*, *N-Scribe*, *Unusual Work*, *Golfo*, *Teesta*, *Poems on Posters* (University of Western Australia) and *Receipt poetry* (City of Yarra). They can be found online at *Mediterranean Poetry* and in the 'Disappearing'. He has been anthologised in the *Australian Poetry Journal 2020*, *Stay a While*, *Writer's Egg Magazine* and *9000 Miles*. He has written reviews for *Plumwood Mountain* and *Rochford St Review*. <https://www.henrybriffa.com.au/>



HENRY BRIFFA Review of DENISE O'HAGAN'S *The Beating Heart* Ginninderra Press 2020

Denise O'Hagan's capacity to hold, engage and transform her reader is a gift. It requires skill and a generosity of spirit. She takes us from Rome to Italy's north, on into Switzerland, London, Boston and Sydney. Each move takes us back to the places, the people, the stuff left behind. Memories persist; a return is impossible:

*My memories are so carefully displayed
In the cabinet of my mind
Selected, positioned,
And polished to a gleam
That the blunt touch of re-experience
Would surely tarnish them.
(‘I don't want to go back’, p. 36)*

Available at: ginninderrapress.com.au, Amazon, Book Depository

The Beating Heart reflects on specific personal and inter-generational migrations, teenage struggles, the tedium of paid work, a son's ill health, acts of terrorism, abandonment, and so much more. The poems are rich with feeling, engaging us in personal struggles and causing us to reflect on something universal; those moments that enliven and shape our being:

*Our journeys make us, they say, they define us
And to an extent, they are us.
(‘Blessed to be here’, p. 64)*

The collection explores the complex psychological paradox of migration itself; the difficulty of ever fitting in, the intergenerational traumas. ‘I left suitcases’ unpacks the contents of past lives. ‘The quiet assimilators’ depicts a yearning to belong, to be invisible, while inevitably becoming *undone*, wondering perhaps *if we ever should have* migrated. As a Maltese living in Australia this really speaks to me; though perhaps only a migrant might really understand.

In ‘What was’, the family kitchen, *the tripart ritual* of coffee pouring, the dipping of toast are given the reverence that Mass delivered to the speaker's Irish ancestors. It's a superbly secular poem, grounded in a commonplace contemporary kitchen infused with coffee aromas. The speaker is at peace, *fortified even, for the moment*, by the traditions (Christian and pagan), whose spirits are living on.

O'Hagan's writing is tight, her language accessible, personal but not too revealing, emotionally rich, never overly-sentimental. Its strengths are in its detailed imagery, symbolism and powerful descriptions, employed to comment on what it is to be human. ‘In the shadows’ is set in a park in Sydney, looking up at the underbelly of the bridge. The speaker rises from that grey Australian landscape, looking beyond her darker moments:

*I too will rise,
Negotiate my way through the mesh of undergrowth and my life,
Catching my thoughts on brambles, tripping on memories, as
Still heavy'd by longing after all these years,
I cut between great slabs of rock, polished lustrous
And emerge, at last, panting, on a high flat path
Streaked by sunlight and dappled in hope.
(‘In the shadows’, p. 88)*

The Beating Heart is rich and alive; a brilliant debut. Denise O'Hagan's voice is honest, sensitive, hard hitting. She's thoughtful and reflective. I feel privileged to have read her and look forward to what she writes next.

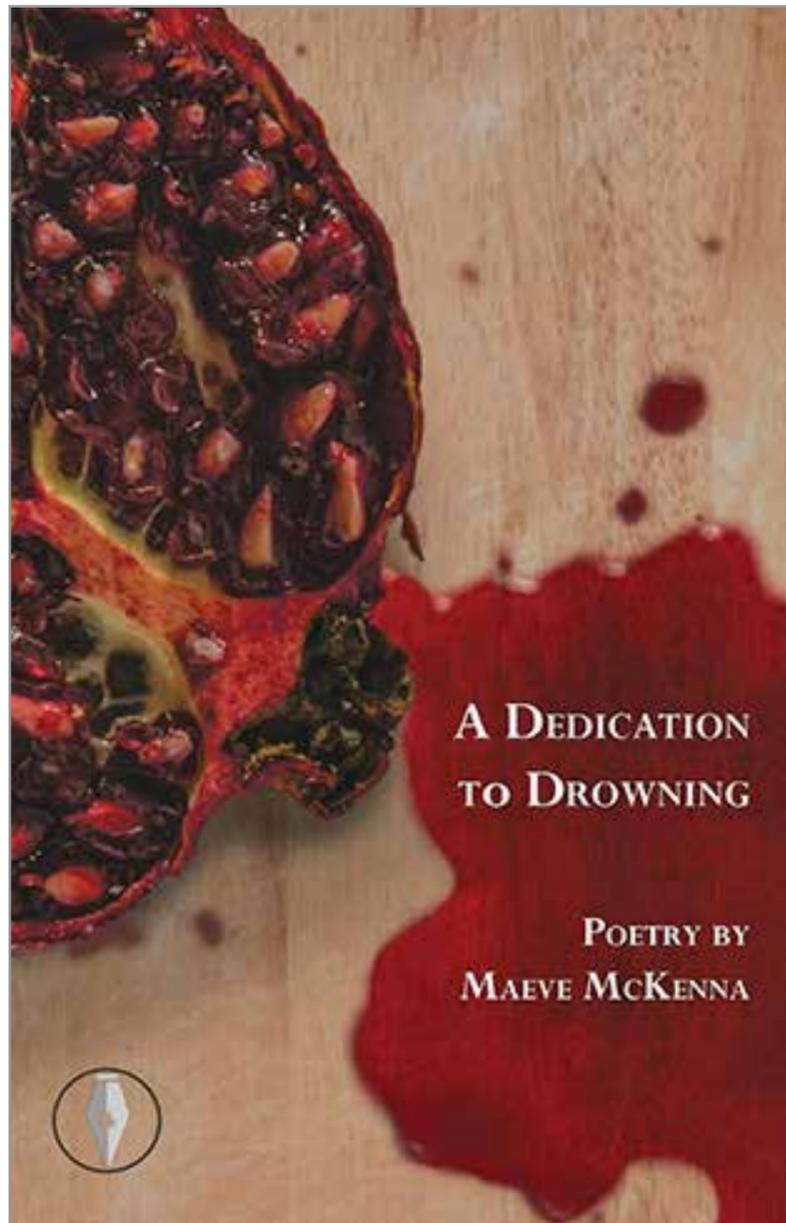
*And when we touch the pulse, the raw emotion
Of deep-seated, nameless thoughts and feelings
Which move us all, then we are touching
The beating heart of poetry itself.
(‘The beating heart’, p. 54)*



Maeve McKenna is a poet living in Sligo, Ireland. Her work has been placed in several international poetry competitions and published widely. Maeve was a finalist in the Eavan Boland Mentorship Award 2020, third in The Canterbury Poet of The Year, 2021, and a Pushcart nominee, 2022. Maeve was part of a collaboration with three poets and their pamphlet won the Dreich Alliance Pamphlet Competition, published October, 2021. She was a bursary student of the John Hewitt Summer school, 2021 and the Seamus Heaney Summer School, 2022. Her debut pamphlet, *A Dedication To Drowning*, was published in February 2022, by Fly On The Wall Press. A second pamphlet will be published in September 2022, by Rare Swan Press.



K.T. Slattery is a West of Ireland based writer, originally from Memphis, Tennessee. Her poetry has appeared in *Ropes Literary Journal*, *The Blue Nib*, *Streetcake*, *Planet in Peril Anthology*, *Impspired*, *Trasna*, *Nightingale* and *Sparrow*, *Drawn to the Light*, and *Anti Heroin Chic*. She received a special mention in the 2020 Desmond O'Grady Poetry Competition, was a featured reader for Over the Edge in January 2021 and a featured writer in Trasna Literary Arts in February of the same year. In 2022 she was nominated for *Galway's Cuirt Festival Over the Edge New Writer of the Year* and is one of the featured writers in the collective, *Pushed Toward the Blue Hour*. When not writing, she can be found throwing the ball for her dogs or painting.



K. T. SLATTERY
 Review of
 MAEVE MCKENNA'S
A Dedication to Drowning
 Fly on The Wall Press February 2022

Maeve McKenna's debut pamphlet, *A Dedication to Drowning*, from Fly on The Wall Press, invites the reader on a journey of stark honesty, an examination of universal themes such as womanhood, family, motherhood, loss, grieving, and childhood reflections.

In this fearless collection of poems, McKenna is a poet determined to confront the realities of life and is committed to exploring themes most would shy away from.

Her voice is unique and refreshing and the poems resonate with an urgency to keep going, to try your best to find little slivers of light when confronted by darkness.

Available at: <https://www.flyonthewallpress.co.uk/> and [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/)

From the first line of the opening poem, 'The Sound of Distance' the reader is alerted to how candidly McKenna will tackle the brutal truths running throughout the pamphlet. '*Your son is trying to kill you/ he's thinking about it and you know this*', she writes, and yet as the poem develops it becomes apparent there is a hidden story running within. This thread of undercurrent courses through every poem, hiding beneath the surface, teasing the reader, pulling them in and out of her words like tides of the Atlantic.

In 'A Burial in The Home', McKenna writes of the death of the much-loved family pet, bringing the reader into the ritual of the dog's burial, while speaking of much more than the act of burying and using this template to address mortality. '*Today, tomorrow's deaths have begun*', she writes, reminding us of the fragility of life, but also hinting at the variety of other deaths that can occur, every bit as permanent, but less talked about- the mortality of dreams, identity, youth and how often the greatest losses are in the small moments of one's life, that without close observation and deep thought, might go unnoticed.

Many of the poems speak to the female; pregnancy, miscarriage, motherhood, sexuality, desire, daring the reader to face societal preconceptions, often using nature imagery and metaphor to address the imbalance; 'Propagation', 'A Meal for One', 'Fertile', 'Tent', 'Cat Without Claws', 'A Recipe for Hunger', poems playing off each other on similar themes, resound with her unparalleled uniqueness of language. The heart-breaking, 'Undelivered' is a moment of unflinching honesty, '*today is the culling day for the undelivered; vacuum cupping a hairless skull*'. This crushing opening line pulls the reader along with the writer on a devastating journey, '*Was your face veiled, belly untethered/your cry unslapped? You are only questions*'.

Childhood is also a theme in many of McKenna's poems. We read of the struggles of a mother in 'Cat Mirror', and once again the undercurrent, hinting at so much more beneath, leaving the reader to contemplate who was this person was, what lurked beneath the surface of this woman whose existence was been diminished to one title: mother. '*The slap of morning water smeared itself across our attempted childhood/ and each morning her smile froze*'. Similarly, in 'Waking is November', '*the weight of waking—compounded memory—an inheritance of empty vodka bottles*' a short, tragic account of a troubled parent.

Again, in the somber poem 'Never Tell Your Business', we read of a young child in a busy home who feels invisible and unheard, '*Mornings when the whole house was asleep/I cuddled the dog, mimicked the budgies attempts to fly*'. This is an unsettling poem and gives a clear indication of the poet's abilities of reflection from a young age.

Despite the many challenging themes, there are poignant moments of tenderness and hope throughout. 'Knitting Wounds' asks the reader to face their pain and view it as an opportunity to heal and grow, '*Contracted as skin is by each penetrating/stitch, it is bodies of texture constructing/a flesh cardigan of wool*'.

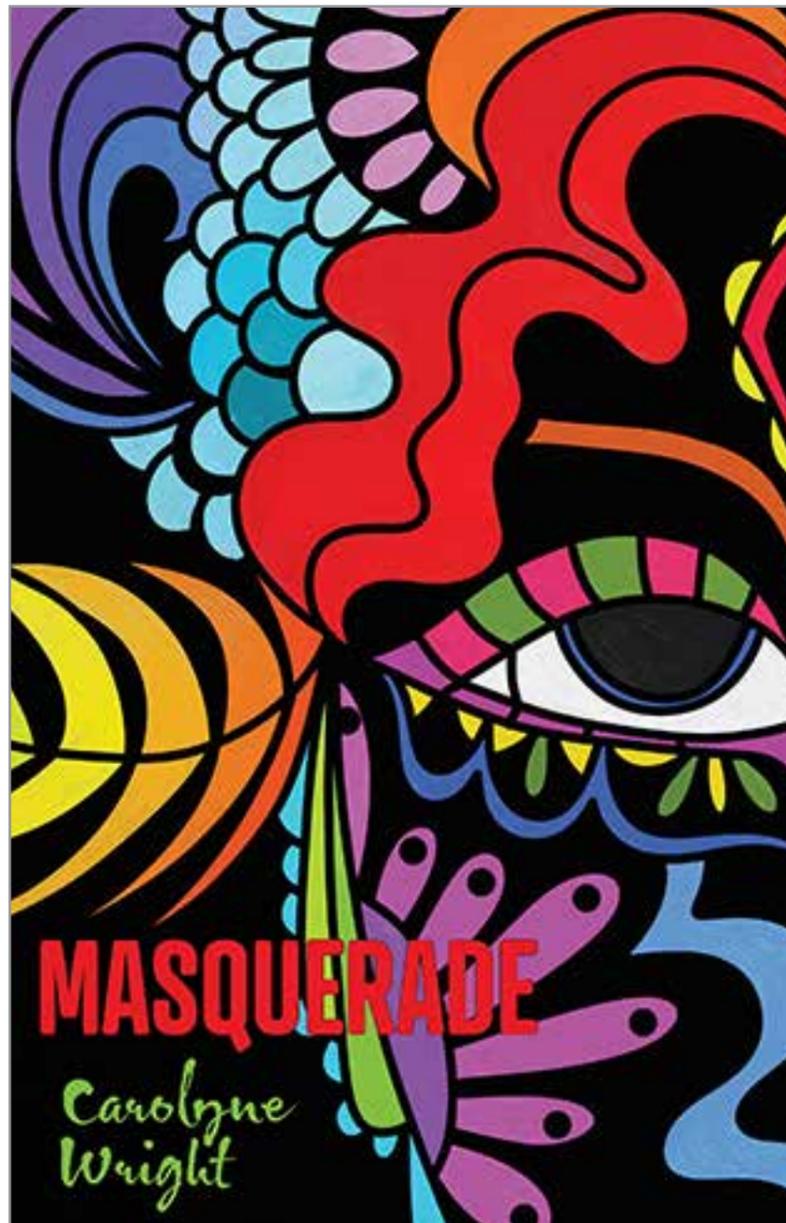
This is a poet who asks the reader to trust the intention of the poems. There are no easy ways to face our lives as humans. Most of us will relate to many of the themes contained in the book, and with their openness and honesty, we feel less alone and perhaps understood. It is clear throughout this pamphlet that McKenna has found healing through her writing and she reflects on this journey in the final poem, 'Book-marker,' where we are asked to '*assemble our bodies, limb to limb against/the walls of unoccupied margins*', with the final, comforting line, '*I am writing it for you. For me*'.



Carolyn Wright's new book is *Masquerade*, a memoir in poetry involving an interracial couple trying to find a place in racist America (Lost Horse Press, 2021). Her previous book is *This Dream the World: New & Selected Poems* (Lost Horse Press, 2017), whose title poem received a Pushcart Prize and appeared in *The Best American Poetry 2009*. She has five earlier books of poetry (including *Mania Klepto: the Book of Eulene*); four chapbooks; a ground-breaking anthology, *Raising Lilly Ledbetter: Women Poets Occupy the Workspace* (Lost Horse, 2015), which received ten Pushcart Prize nominations; and five award-winning volumes of poetry in translation. A Contributing Editor for the Pushcart Prizes, Carolyn lived in Chile and traveled in Brazil on a Fulbright Grant; she returned to Brazil in 2018 for an Instituto Sacatar artist's residency in Bahia. A Seattle native who teaches for Richard Hugo House, she has received grants from the NEA, 4Culture, and Seattle's Office of Arts & Culture, among others. A Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award granted in 2020 will take her back to Salvador, Bahia, after the CoVid-19 pandemic subsides in Brazil. <https://carolynwright.wordpress.com/>



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.



Available at: [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

NANCY AVERY DAFOE Review of CAROLYNE WRIGHT'S *Masquerade, A Memoir in Poetry*

Lost Horse Press 2021 ISBN - 978-1736432334

"You are the man with whom I share a wall" (6-7,) writes noted poet Carolyn Wright in her new lyric memoir, *Masquerade, A Memoir*. One line and we have both the intensely personal and a world by extension. Wright's ten words within the context of her poem "The Putting-Off Dance" can be interpreted through the lens of race in America, as comment on the dichotomy between the sexes, on the unarticulated-unmovable between lovers in addition to racial divides: the invisible wall that separates.

Wright quotes W.E.B. du Bois from *The Souls of Black Folk* in *Masquerade's* book description, openly acknowledging, "the problem of the twentieth center is the problem of the color line." Wright's acknowledgement is more than historical, political, cultural criticism of race relations in the United States of America. Her acknowledgement takes the form of cutting open her life to show the blood, bone, beauty, and great sorrow of our failures to understand one another.

Masquerade, A Memoir in Poetry is divided into six sections corresponding to periods in the relationship of the lovers. The first section, "Cape Indigo," opens the book with all the doubt, tentative gestures of emerging love before Wright drops us into "Fire Seasons" and then "Crescent City," as the second and third sections. The fourth section, "Notes from the Stop-Gap Motor Inn" precedes the weightiest section "Big Uneasy," the physical and emotional locus of the book. *Masquerade* ends in reflection as in the sixth section, "Reflections in Blue" in which the distance of separation and finality still leaves questions: "What If?" asks the poet.

While a narrative thread revealing doomed lovers trying to negotiate the rough terrain of racial identity in a racist land is richly powerful, it is Wright's language play that is so arresting. In "1040," the narrative persona intones, "Your voice Deep South under duress, / stress-dialect" (37-38).

As the *persona* reflects on the lovers' time together, it is we who fully recognize that these two artists from other races, from other cultures have misrepresented what was, and we see through their self-deceptions, even their good intents in "The Putting Off Dance." Wright allows us into their intimacy and their pain in this poem: "Your honey and mulled wine/ win this round, your tongue-tied plea/ I never quite believe, but my alibis/ ride a tilting raft" (29-32). Their denial is born in paradoxes inherent in love.

In her triolet, reminiscent in form to the French rondeau, the poet begins with a wistful longing of love that was: "We make love only once in the dune shack" (1). "Triolets on a Dune Shack" ends with inversion, "We never made love, we say, in the dune shack," (15), those once-upon-a-time-lovers now denying even their love-making and in evident denial about their relationship.

The poet is fully aware of the side she has chosen to represent in the lovers' relationship as she notes in the book's description: "Work that I am aware of in this category is the writing of Hettie Jones (particularly her 1990 memoir, *How I Became Hettie Jones*) and the novels of Susan Straight. In both Jones's and Straight's work, I am edified and inspired by the courage of the women (both the female characters and the authors themselves) in the wake of separation and divorce, single motherhood, and literary careers overshadowed by the assumed prerogatives and privileges of males."

In spite of this claim, readers will feel the point of view of the man as well. We have his actions, sometimes playful and sexy, as found in "The Putting-Off Dance" lines: "In jest you press a stethoscope/ to my wall, X-ray vision switched on full/ like figments of wishful thinking" (15-17). We have the male artist lover, "Humming a blues riff from far inland, / you lay the moon shells I give you/ on your table's little dune of letters" (1-3) in "The Putting-Off Dance." We also discover his gifts that are broken before given as in the lines, "You give me a turquoise/ amulet with broken clasp, its damage/ unexplained as women who ring for you/ on the downstairs phone" (32-35).

Even without the bits of dialogue that link the poems to their exchanges, we know the lovers' communication will be strained as, "Rain squalls off and on/ all evening like a difficult conversation" (54-55) from "The Putting-Off Dance" verse. These two young artists want each other, but their divides are great as Wright suggests in lines from "Of Omission," such as, "How do we face each other across/ the kitchen table, and later the insomniac/ laundromat whose walls blare heavy metal/ above the roar of spin cycle?" (40-43).

In "Faubourg-Marigny," the artist/lovers take up resident on "Royal, between Piety/ and Desire," (1-2) in New Orleans, but their passionate affair immediately reveals omens of doom as they find an apartment:

"The old slave quarters,
... a houseful of servants going down
like moses in their chains (3-9)

We should not be at all surprised by the outcome of this affair. As Wright's *persona* tells us in the title poem, "Out there, it's a gala evening/ of lost chances" (21-22). Even with "Momus Rex/ rid[ing] by on his palomino/ with a million-dollar smile" (22-24). It is a credit to Wright's lush storytelling as well as her poetic voice and considerable technical skills that we see failure written into these characters' lines and lives, but we hope they make it in spite of everything. Like the female *persona* in this collection of narrative poems, we want the lovers to figure it out, to make their relationship work, but that, too, would be a kind of mask.

Author of six books of poetry, including *This Dream the World: New and Selected Poems*, Wright is a Pushcart Prize winner for her poem "This Dream the World." In *Masquerade*, she employs the demanding sestina, the ghazal, uses a modified terza rima rhyming pattern, creates stanzas in quatrains, and other stanza arrangements as if they are her first language and ours.

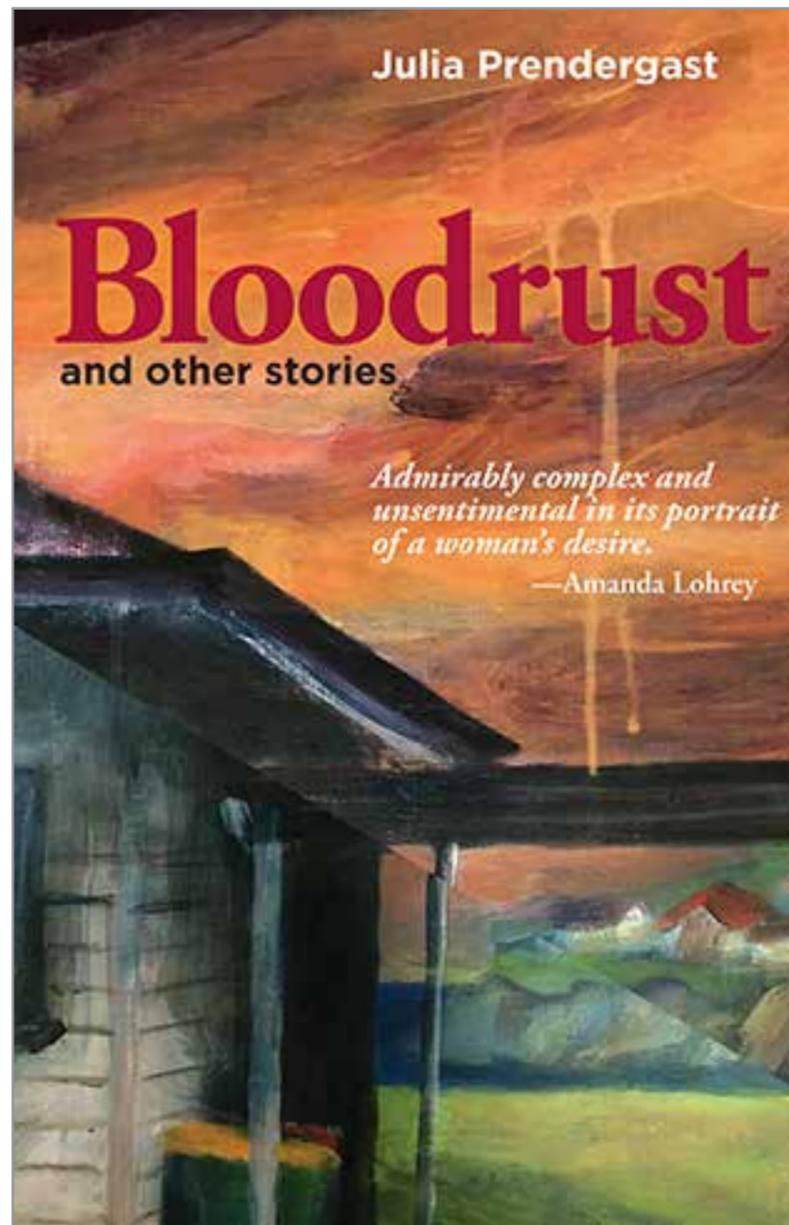
This gorgeous, personal accounting of love, betrayal, race, and America is at once confessional with intimate knowledge of two lovers, and at the same time a chronicle of our landscape shown through our greatest divide. The setting of the poems moves with the lovers from Seattle to the Faubourg-Marigny of New Orleans with its richly textured characters. Yet the emotional terrain of Wright's poetry is the human heart with all its lust, love, and weighed loss as the female protagonist wants to "go home, but/ where is that? Our walk to the level crossing on the day you leave (52-52) ... As if the vanishing point of rails/ is some other woman's peril" in "Of Omission" (56-57). And her lover "withdraws into foglight and riverdust," ("Another Country," 7), as the woman drives, "away alone over a horizon other than yours" (30) in "Ghazal: Other Than Yours."



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). She is Chair of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), and Senior Lecturer and Discipline Coordinator at Swinburne University.



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.



Available at: <https://www.newsouthbooks.com.au>

TIM TOMLINSON
Review of
JULIA PRENDERGAST'S
Bloodrust and other stories

Spineless Wonders October 2022 ISBN - 978-1736432334

To enter the world of *Bloodrust and other stories* is to enter a hall of mirrors. Complicated pictures emerge—who are these women? What drives them? Why can't they fall asleep? "Their othered sel[ves] ... talking in mirrors." I'm reminded of Catherine Deneuve in *Repulsion*, ducking the hands that grab at her from walls. I'm reminded of the duality of Patti Smith, the snarling provocateur of "Babelogue," the tender lyric priestess of *Just Kids*.

The ground beneath the stories is unsettled, we're on canted footpaths, the frames tilted, the narratives porous. Revenants from early stories materialize faintly in later selections, but barely—maybe a line, a fragment, the stories sprinkled liberally with the em dash and ellipses. Many stories italicize interiority, their narrators in dialogue with themselves. In *Bloodrust*, four characters aren't necessary to create a Rashomon effect. One is quite enough. Time itself is uncertain: today is tomorrow.

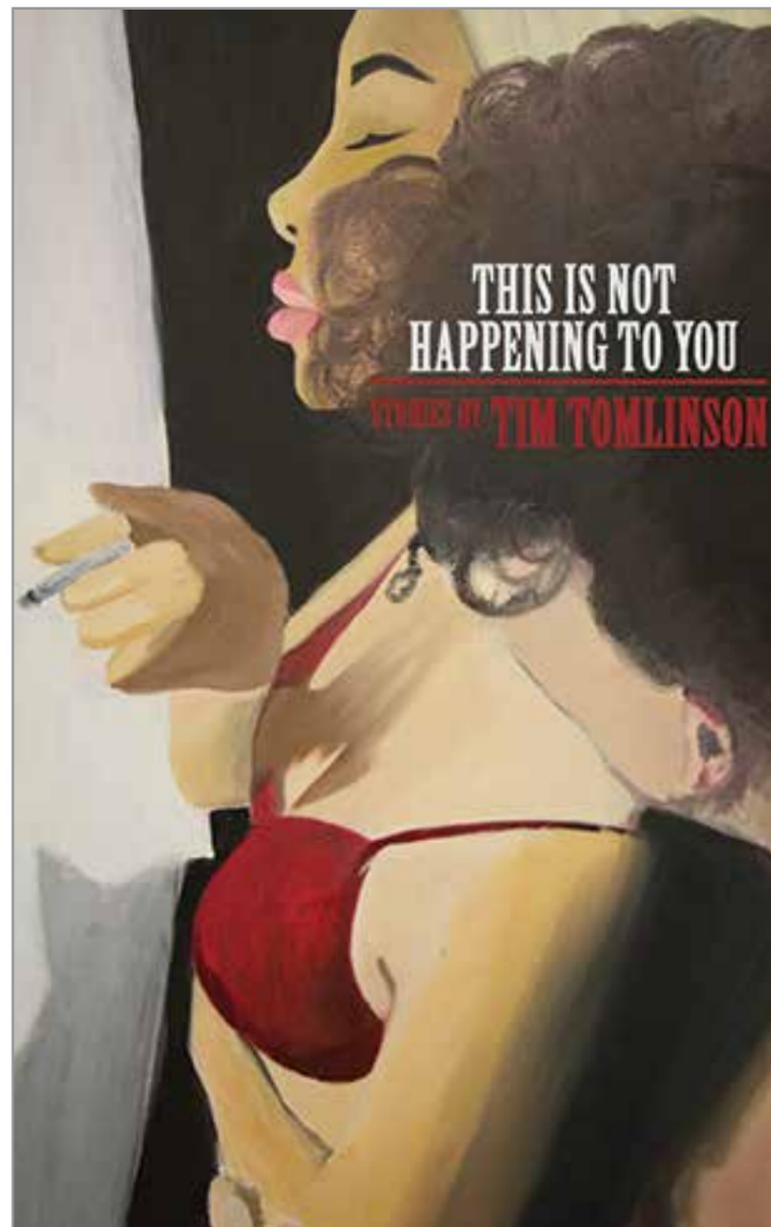
Loss and becoming, enigma and precision. Enigma because of precision: the mercy killing of "Rhodes," the mis- or near-understandings of "Mirage." The lyric effusions lineated at times more like verse than narrative, evocative, smoky wisps of ideas and images. Less Lydia Davis, more Ocean Vuong. Always the sensual, which seems to evaporate the moment it's apprehended ("love ghosts"; "you are here in your gone-ness"). You get the sense of a full-spirited woman staring out a window, a dishrag draped over her hands; of characters and narrators bewildered by their existences ("People emerge from their rooms as if something is going to happen, but it's only dinner ...").

The stories, their insights and identifications, stick like spiderwebs you can't quite pull off.

I love stories that cause visceral discomfort. I love these stories.



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.



Available at: [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)



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.

VASILIS MANOUSAKIS

Review of

TIM TOMLINSON'S

This is Not Happening to You

Winter Goose Publishing 2017

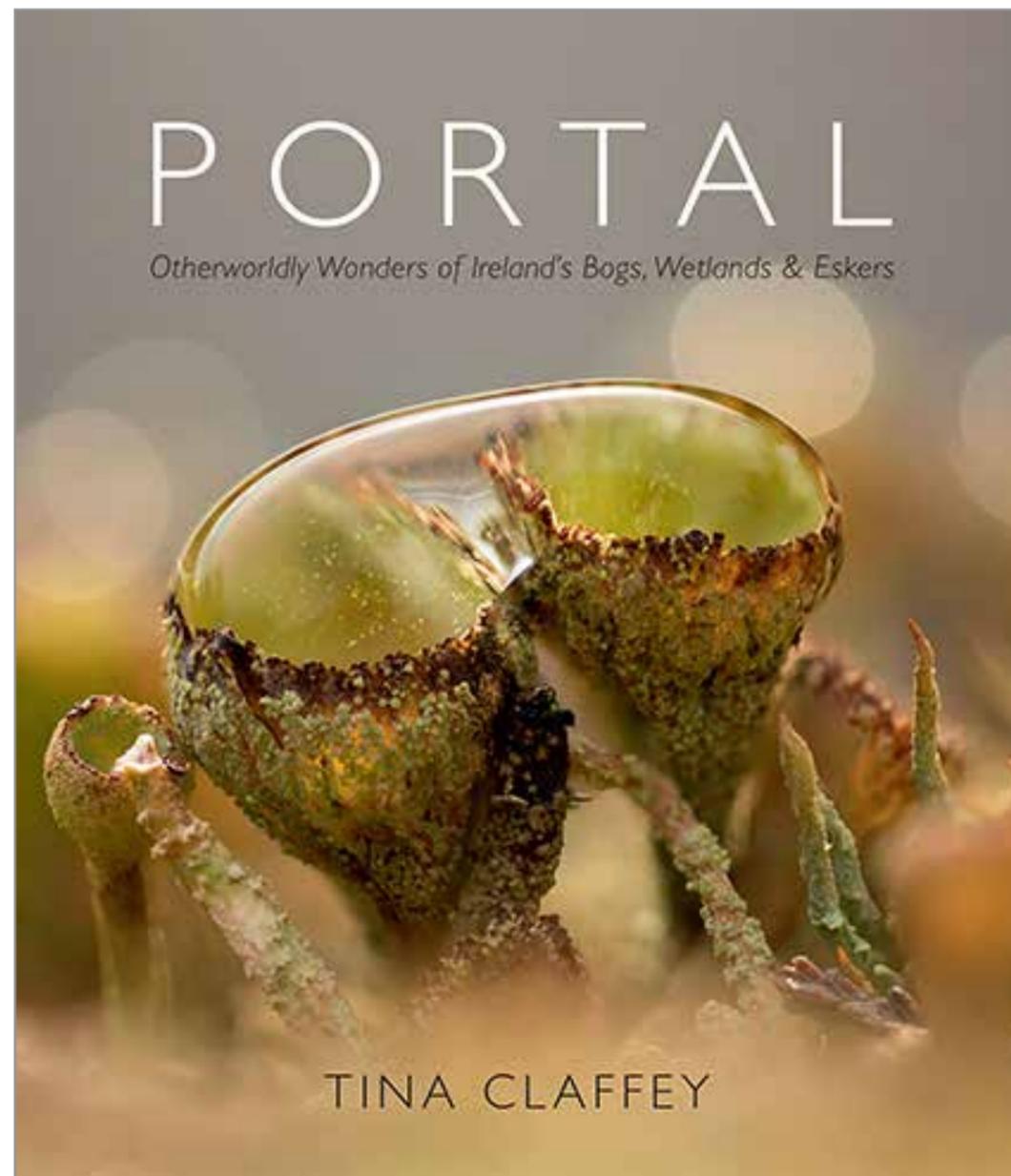
This is Not Happening to You by Tim Tomlinson is a book full of wonders. But mostly it is a book full of extraordinary characters in many aspects. Characters that both stand out with their completeness and realism in their depiction, but they are also extra ordinary with a twist. Uncommon in their commonplace reactions to triggers. From the woman who dreams of travelling to Paris, but ends up disheartened in her first hours at the airport and the son and mother who discuss a difficult moment of their past to the Tylenol and alcohol addicted character of the title story who is at war with a rat in his kitchen and the boy and his dog named Wolf, Tim Tomlinson dances unseen among his characters, watches over them and molds them as gritty as possible. They move like us, think like us, act like us in situations realistic and heart-breaking at times. And this is done in a way that we can shout out "I know this guy!" or "I am this girl!", giving us the opportunity to identify with each and every one of them, while providing us the space for introspection and eventual reflection of our own character. In addition, and equal to his mastery in character creation, Tomlinson gifts the readers with a language so powerful and at the same time so natural that can even go unnoticed. In other words, his words cut to the bone in Carver manner, but they are very properly chosen to fit the mouth of his very diverse characters in Salter manner. Naturalness at its best, which facilitates reading and the desired immersion of the reader in the story. As a reader of *This is Not Happening to You* myself, I enjoyed the truthfulness of this language, which eased my way to the truth and depth of the people described in the book.

"He remained in character," the author tells us about Maris in "Motive for Metaphor," his playful and very literary story, "until he believed he didn't have another tear left in him for as long as he'd live." Indeed, an essential part of both the writer and the reader's experience with this book of stories is that all of us remain in character until we cry out "this could be happening to me!"

PORTAL
Otherworldly Wonders of Ireland's Bogs, Wetlands & Eskers
 by Tina Claffey

Published by Currach Books,
 Ireland <https://currachbooks.com/>
 Release Date: Friday 27th May 2022

Portal is an immersive visual exploration through the realms of unique flora and fauna within Ireland's bogs, wetlands and eskers, revealing the hidden gems that have lived and evolved for millennia.



Available at: <https://currachbooks.com/>

Tina Claffey is an award-winning Irish nature photographer and author of 'Tapestry of Light-Ireland's bogs & wetlands as never seen before' released in October 2017, and now her new book has just been published, 'Portal-Otherworldly Wonders of Ireland's Bogs, Wetlands and Eskers'. Her observations and unique perspective through her macro lens of the flora and fauna of the raised bogs and wet woodlands of the Irish midlands are celebrated in her work. She has exhibited in group shows in the US, Botswana, Zambia and has had solo exhibitions throughout Ireland. Her work is part of many art collections, permanent exhibitions, including the permanent collection at Áras an Uachtaráin, home of the Irish President. She has presented her work on many worldwide online platforms including the Wildlife Habitat Council Online Conference in the US and the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) to promote the importance of the Irish bog wilderness. <https://tinacloffey.com/>



ENDORSEMENTS

Dianna Kopansky, Global Peatlands Coordinator, Global Peatlands Initiative
Tina Claffey's "Portal" is an absolute treasure as she transports you through the eye of her macro lens, sharing her captivating perspective of the beauty of Ireland's unique, rare and threatened nature. By intimately documenting the biodiversity in peatlands, Tina reveals the unsung and unseen heroes working hard to capture carbon and secure water for our health and the well-being of our precious planet".

Margaret O'Gorman, President of Wildlife Habitat Council, USA
I wish everyone saw the natural world like Tina Claffey does. She sees and shows the beauty of the quietest moments and smallest creatures living in our bogs. Her work is a rich testimony to the importance of peatlands to our natural heritage and as an ark for bogland biodiversity. From the sleeping bee to the frosted fungi, Tina's photos remind us of the wonders that surround us if we only pause to recognize them.

Colin Stafford-Johnson, Wildlife Film-maker and TV presenter
A nature photographer of the highest calibre, Tina Claffey casts a light on oft overlooked habitats in her unique, original and mesmerising style- her eye for detail, her composition, simply wonderful. Never has such work been more important.

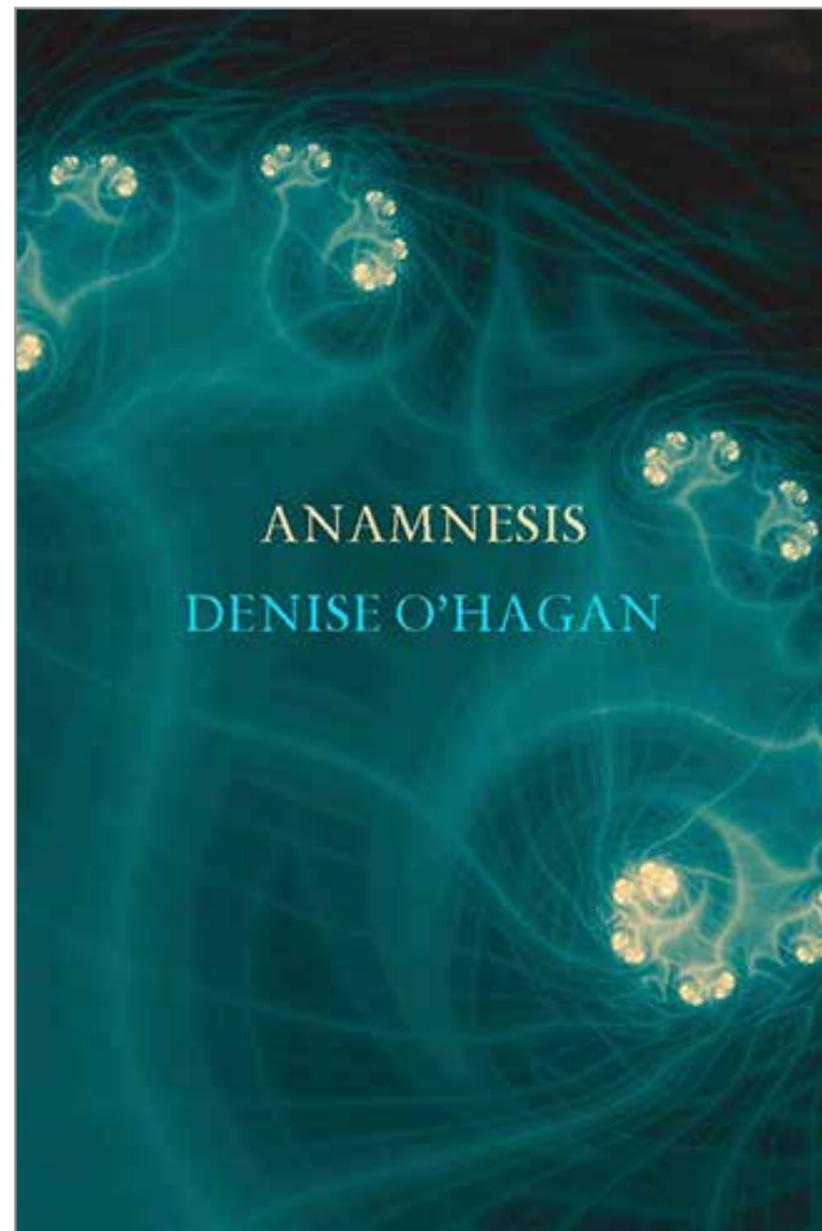
Manchán Magan, Writer & Documentary maker
Tina Claffey's photography captures the astounding intricacy and eerie beauty of the bog like no one else. Her profound engagement with Ireland's peatlands gives us an opportunity to get closer to it and to witness its wonders.

John Feehan, Geologist, Botanist, Author & Broadcaster
At a time when photographic guides to flora and fauna proliferate as never before, Tina Claffey's 'Portal' is in a league of its own. What distinguishes it is an acutely observant eye that captures moments when we can see something that lies beyond the name: where we catch a reflection or echo of the beauty and complexity that draws us to living species in the first place. And so it is a book that encourages those of us who turn its pages to look beyond mere names, to find ourselves in a world of microscopic wonder we scarcely knew existed.

ANAMNESIS
poetry collection
by Denise O'Hagan

Published by <https://recentworkpress.com/product/anamnesis/>
Release Date: Saturday 1 October 2022

Denise O'Hagan is an editor and poet, born in Rome and based in Sydney. She has a background in commercial book publishing here and overseas. In 2015 she set up her own imprint, Black Quill Press, to publish her late mother's historical novel *Jerome & His Women* (2015), shortlisted for the inaugural Institute of Professional Editors' Rosanne Fitzgibbon Editorial Award (the 'Rosie'). Her poetry is published widely both in Australia and overseas. Recipient of the Dalkey Poetry Prize, her poetry has also been awarded in Australia, Hong Kong and the States. She was Poetry Editor for Australia/New Zealand for Irish literary journal *The Blue Nib* until 2020. Her second poetry collection, *Anamnesis*, is forthcoming (Recent Work Press, October 2022). <https://denise-ohagan.com/>



The book can be pre-ordered from the publisher at:
[Forthcoming Titles - RECENT WORK PRESS](https://recentworkpress.com/product/anamnesis/)

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True to its title, the poems in O'Hagan's second poetry collection, *Anamnesis*, allude to a world hovering at the edges of our minds, one that can be sensed and yet lies, teasingly, just beyond conscious reach. The arc of poems through time and distance represents a summoning up of, and immersion in, small moments which reveal themselves to be quietly momentous; a distillation of personal experience from which we feel there is something to be collectively gleaned. The recovery of memory in its various facets is explored, and the poetry that emerges is both poignant and lyrical.

Jena Woodhouse

'Through the excavation of personal memories, O'Hagan shows how our inner worlds are kept alive and made coherent, turning keys of recall to unlock a deeper awareness of who we are, and why. Her finely nuanced and delicately wrought poems are eloquent testimony to the functioning of memory and its implications for creativity, reminding the reader how another's exacting work of remembrance can illuminate our own.'

Dave Kavanagh

'In a world of pretenders, O'Hagan's is an authentic and powerful voice. Anamnesis engages the senses as entirely and effortlessly as if the poet herself had grasped your hand and softly whispered, 'Come, see the world through my eyes.'

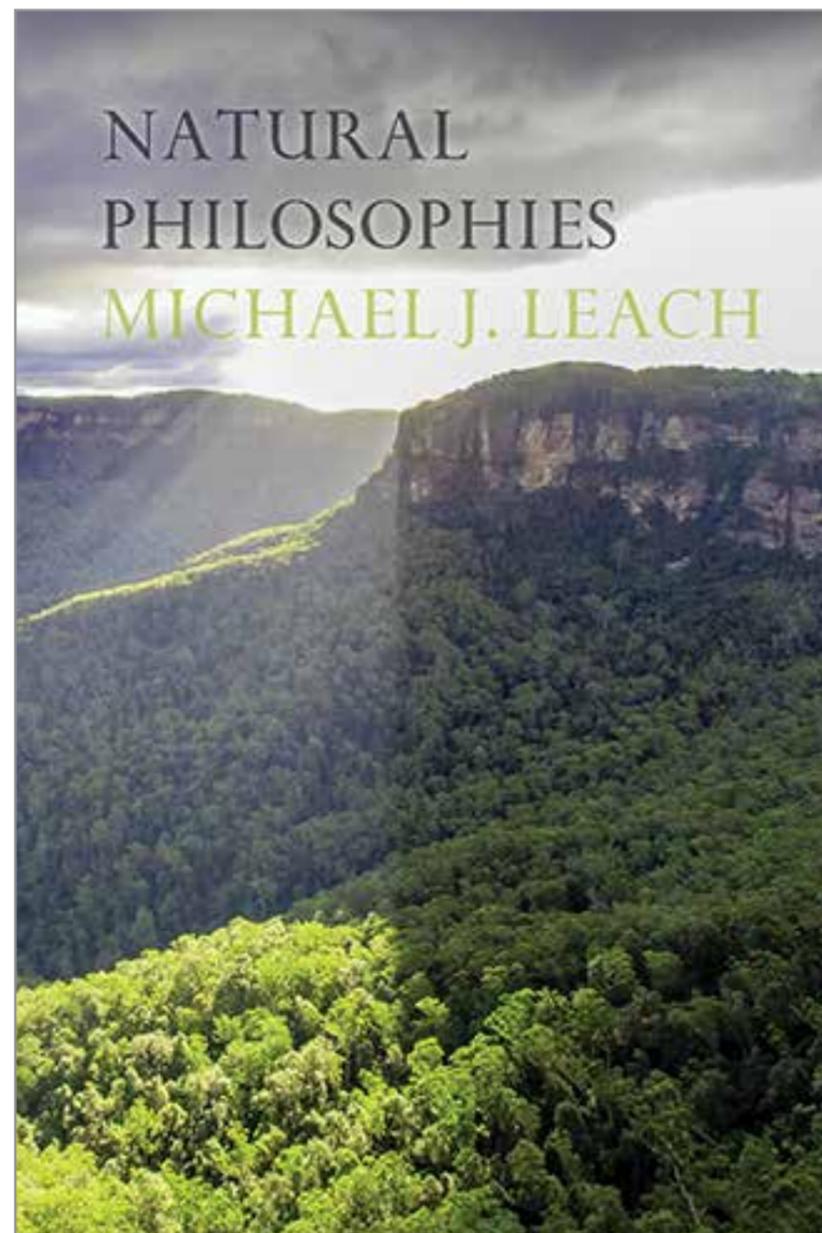
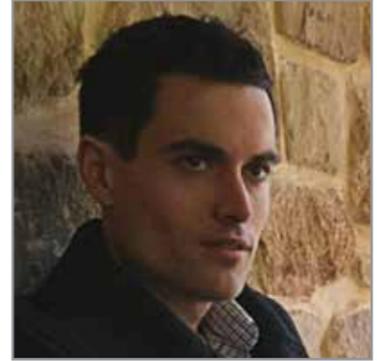
Linda Adair

'O'Hagan's poetic voice is a complex, subtle, and authentic one that captures moods and behaviours with an intense and elegant analysis, and a searing insight into the stories we tell ourselves, what our memories conjure, and what lies beneath the force of forgetting.'

NATURAL PHILOSOPHIES
poetry collection
by Michael J. Leach

Published by <https://recentworkpress.com/product/natural-philosophies/>
Release Date: November 2022

Michael J. Leach lives on Dja Dja Wurrung Country and works at the Monash University School of Rural Health. Michael won the UniSA Mental Health and Wellbeing Poetry Competition (2015) and received a commendation in the Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine (2021). His debut poetry collection—the chapbook *Chronicity*—was published by Melbourne Poets Union in 2020.



The book is available at:
<https://recentworkpress.com/product/natural-philosophies/>

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In his first full-length poetry collection, *Natural Philosophies*, Michael J. Leach grasps for truth and solace by embracing interdisciplinary perspectives and alternative meanings. The poems in this collection address the archaic term ‘natural philosophy’—the philosophical study of nature and the universe—in past, present, and future contexts through the lenses of various natural science disciplines, including botany, zoology, astronomy, chemistry, and medicine. Michael explores a range of urgent personal and public issues, from climate change, extinction, and post-truth logic to assisted dying, natural death, and COVID-19, all the while pinpointing much-needed beauty across physical, emotional, and spiritual domains of existence.

Phillip Hall

‘This is an innovative and sculptural poetics of dwelling in space-time, informed by astronomical, biological, and health sciences, and fine-tuned to the imperatives of moral philosophy: care for Earth, self-worth, and goodwill. Born in lifeblood and consciousness of the cosmos, this collection will leave your eyes glittering like distant suns.’

Tricia Dearborn

‘In Natural Philosophies, science is used in elegant and surprising ways to explore the Universe, the planet we live on, the times we live in, and human life, replete as it is with loss, and grief, and love. Readers with a background in science will relish the skilful use of scientific language and metaphors, but those without will also enjoy these eloquent, moving, and playful poems.’

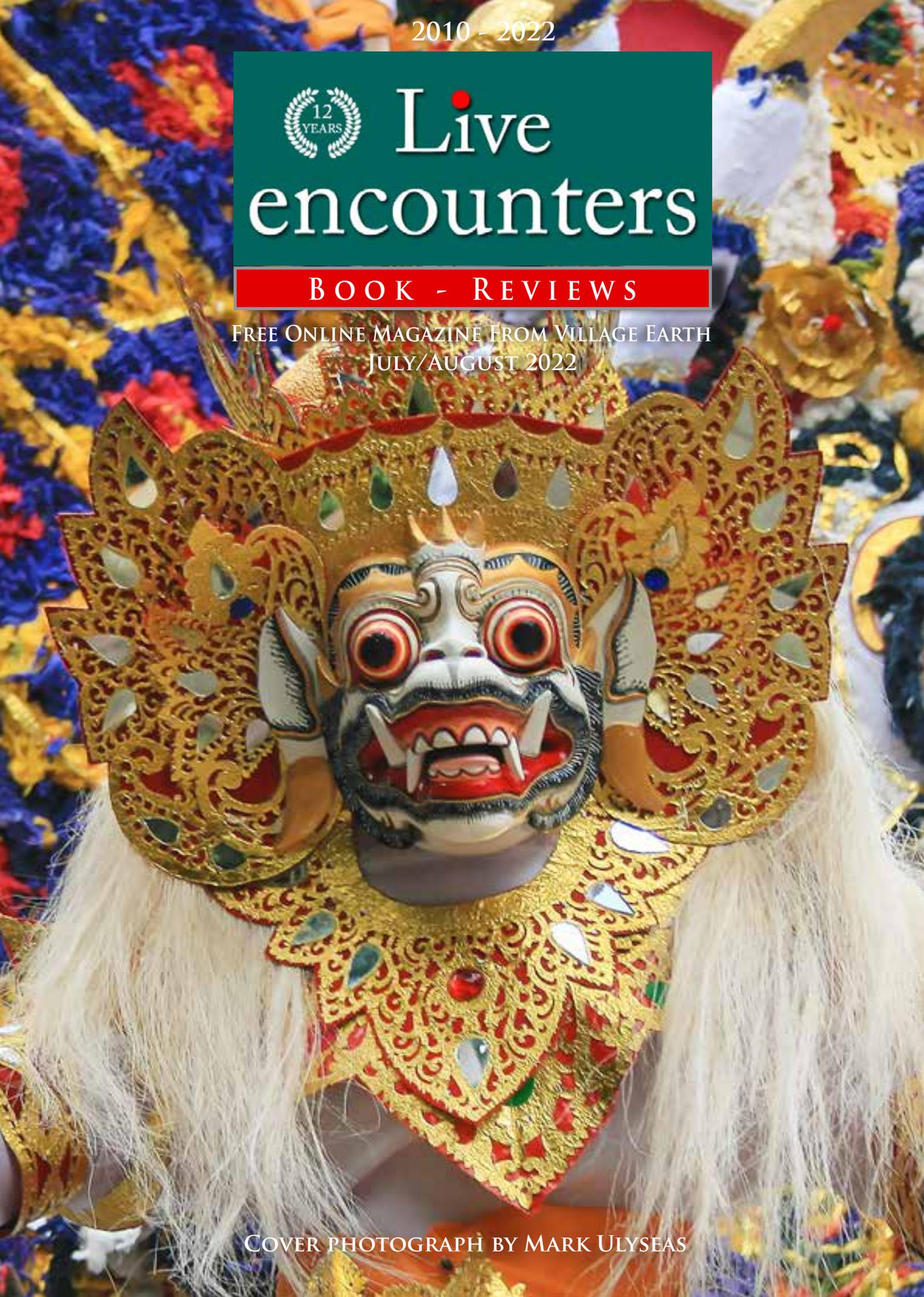
2010 - 2022



Live encounters

BOOK - REVIEWS

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
JULY/AUGUST 2022



COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK ULYSEAS