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GERALDINE MILLS
Become a Voice

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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

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

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

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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GERALDINE MILLS BECOME A VOICE

'The imagination is wired to make great leaps into the unknown,' the author, Nikki Ducornet, says but very often these days when I write, it feels like I'm sowing stones. Planting little pieces of rock in the ground and watering them, in the foolish hope that light and heat will bring forth something worthy, but nothing sprouts, no little hint of leaf-line breaking the hard surface, no stem-sentence emerging. No scent of granite, limestone or moon milk calcite couplets filling the air around me in the way the first tiny leaves of lemon balm carry their primordial scent. The language that I need to put a shape on this unstable world of ours fails me. Again and again.

I recently read an article in *The Paris Review*, about the Italian Poet, Patrizia Cavalli, who grew up in Umbria and died in June of this year at the age of 75. A celebrated poet from an early age, she was audacious, with no regard for authority. Apart from being a writer who took leaps into the unknown, she was famous for her fantastic dinner parties as well as being a performer who loved to get up on her table and tap dance the evening away. She was also very clear in what she says about poetry: 'The word must surprise you even in its necessity as if you were hearing it for the first time. Poetry knows how to glide into the air.'

My stone words don't glide into the air. They merely stay where I put them, unmoving, inert. Where do the poems hide when I go looking for them? Why do I still do it?

Geraldine Mills



Butterfly on the bank of the Mekong river. © Photograph by Mark Ulyseas

I take to the woods across the road from our house, let the sounds of our frantic world be shrouded out by the trees, until I can no longer hear the cars whizzing by, burning up millions of years of making, the birds the only noise in the lift of sky above me. I walk differently here, the softness of the ground yielding to my step, lightness entering it until I find my own rhythm and my heart slows. All the greens become their own luminous selves, oak, ash and alder. Pennywort shows off its navel as it grows from a tree stump, mosses and ferns come into their own. And yet I know that no matter what I write it will not capture the grace of the moment. My words are impotent, are not worth pulping a tree for. I go back and sit at my computer. Try again, fail again.

When I first see the photograph on my screen, I think how beautiful the light that falls on the lushness of shrub and the way it comes through the open window. The room is almost in darkness. The colours, the shading, remind me of a painting of the old masters, Rembrandt maybe, or Goya. *'Beauty can bite,'* says Yusef Komunyakaa. And it does. For when my brain finally registers the truth of the picture, what it sees are the rows of metal supports that were once students' desks, their tops burned away, shrapnel pockmarks on the walls, the whole floor covered with pulverised concrete, windows not open to the air but the glass panes completely shattered, leaving nothing but skeleton frames.

Where can we find the language that will portray clearly and accurately the devastation of war and all that it brings with it?

I look for inspiration everywhere that might let me do that: the taking in of breath, to inspire, to breathe into.

And then I listen to the Ukrainian politician, Kira Rudik, being interviewed on the radio. When asked what was the thing that she missed most since the Russian invasion over six months ago, she said it was the freedom to exhale, having to hold her breath while all around, her country is being bombarded by missiles. Unspeakable crimes against men, women and children. A nuclear plant in the balancing act. A woman gathering linden blossom and brewing tea, once a herbal remedy for anxiety.

While elsewhere in the world all the other atrocities barely make our news.

Cavalli's first publication in 1974 was: *My Poems Won't Change the World*. I am drawn to the title, knowing from my privileged position that it's a tall order to expect a sonnet, a pantoum, a villanelle to change the mind of a leader/government hell-bent on destruction and domination.

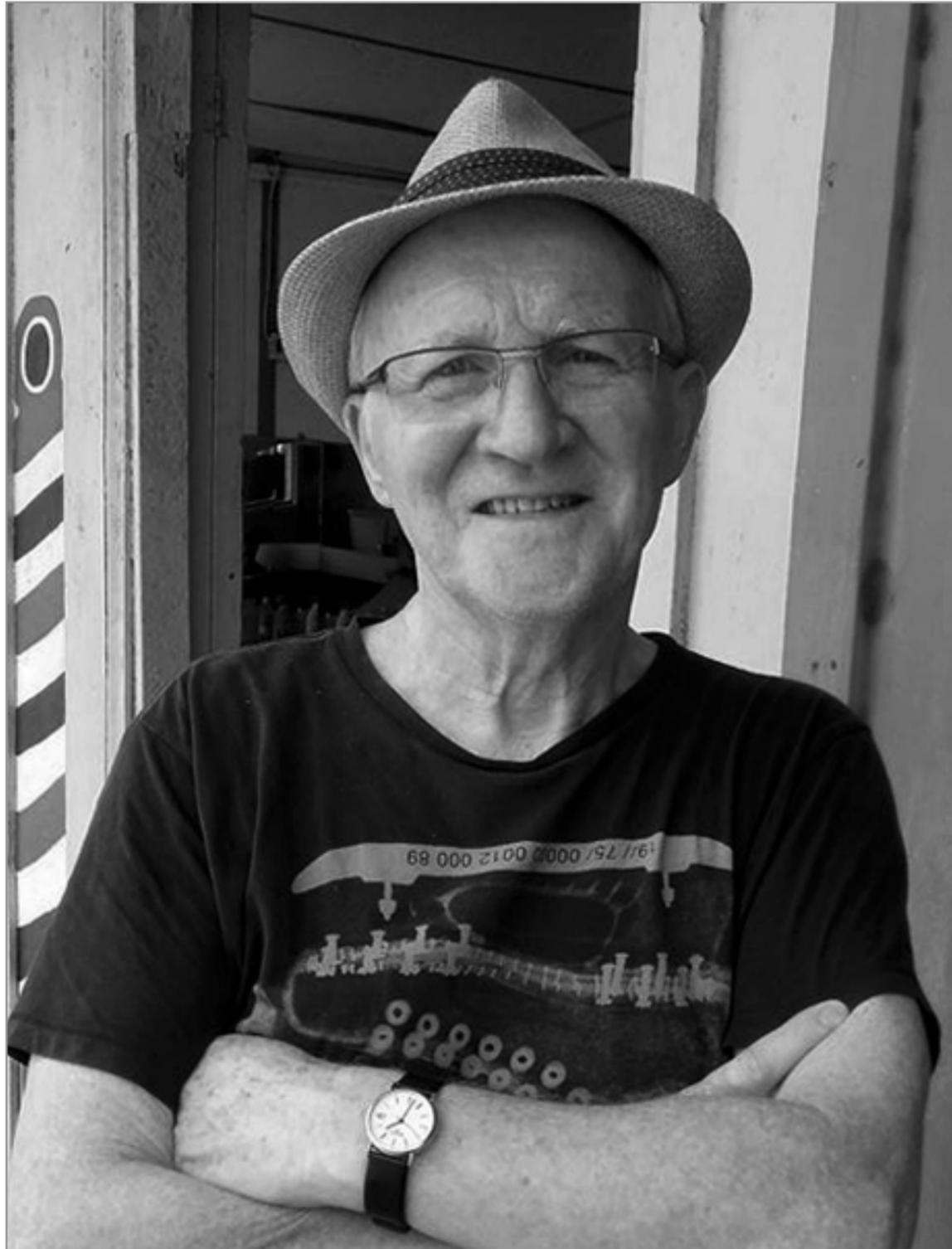
And yet there is that blessed moment when something happens. Somewhere amidst the world's woundedness, I lift my head and something miraculous catches my attention, the morning breathing out the chill of autumn, the silver-washed fritillary that lands on the Buddleia, or a heron rise so silently from the pond that if it wasn't for the side of my eye registering the grey glimpse, I would never have seen him draw me towards something that previously didn't exist. While I'm focussed on that, a tiny seed of hope surfaces. Like the hazel seedlings that are forever breaking through their shell and sprouting, becoming what they are ordained to be.

And so I write.

Most days I continue to sow stones. But I hear Sappho say, 'Become a voice,' and I make another effort. My voice is a tiny one, but a voice, nonetheless, as I try to use language – however paltry that is – to make sense of what is happening in so many areas of our planet.

For over twelve years now, *Live Encounters* has given the space to writers from all over the world to become a voice. There is power in that. There is hope.

Terry McDonagh, Irish poet and theatre maker has worked on writing programmes in Europe, Asia and Australia. He's taught creative writing at Hamburg University and was Drama Director at Hamburg International School. He's published eleven poetry collections, letters, drama, prose and poetry for young people. In March 2022, he was poet in residence and Grand Marshal as part of the Saint Patrick's Day celebrations in Brussels. His work has been translated into German and Indonesian. His poem, UCG by Degrees is included in the Galway Poetry Train on Galway University campus. In 2020, Two Notes for Home – a two-part radio documentary, compiled and presented by Werner Lewon, on *The Life and Work of Terry McDonagh*, The Modern Bard of Cill Aodáin. His latest poetry collection, 'Two Notes for Home', to be published by Arlen House in September 2022. He returned to live in County Mayo in 2019. www.terry-mcdonagh.com



Terry McDonagh



The Piper of Treenabontry by Terry McDonagh. [Music on the Uilleann Pipes: by Jerry O'Sullivan.](#) 

This poem, *The Piper of Treenabontry*, came about after several encouraging conversations with musician, radio presenter and historian, Joe Byrne who had been researching Irish musical heritage in Chicago – the home of the legendary uilleann piper, Joe Shannon.

Joe Shannon, my mother's cousin, emigrated to Chicago with his family in 1929 and died there in 2004. In later years he was, frequently, invited to return to Ireland to share his talents and to be conferred with numerous accolades. His Taylor Pipes are unique and remain with his family in Chicago.

This poem attempts to outline the story of his life from his boyhood home – among fairies and music in rural Ireland – to his work, music and, in later years, his special relationship with nature and bird-life in his back garden.

Also, thanks to Joe Byrne, I met Jerry O'Sullivan, the well-known uilleann piper from New York – with relatives in County Mayo – who composed this piece of music in response to my poem.

Above photograph courtesy <http://www.uilleann.com/pipes.html>

THE PIPER OF TREENABONTRY

in memoriam: piper, Joe Shannon, Chicago.

They took their tunes with them
but the music refused to budge.
In Treenabontry I taste and smell
wind on the path the fairies crafted
when they chopped a corner off
Brennan's house – it had stood
on the track they'd worn to a frazzle
when transporting the music
and memory of the Shannon family
into posterity.

Before they'd left, melody tangled
about the house or hung carelessly
on hawthorn and briar – spirits danced
in moonlit splashes and stowed
treasured tunes in wistful wind,
dozing bog and landscape crannies.

Only those little people have
the language to tell us
where a musical note comes from,
how it lodges in the land,
in the heart of a departed family,
in a memory of a house.

Joe Shannon played the uilleann pipes
in Chicago. This was real – big
untainted sound – visible in loneliness,
choking fears, loss or in the smiles
it cloaked and covered up. It was
the stuff that held imagined fields,
fences, happiness and tears together.

Joe had *the gift*
in the rough and tumble suburbs of Chicago:
a piper, baseball player and fireman.
His uilleann pipes –
imitating rhythms
of blackberry clusters
of fire-department sirens
of domestic sounds
of birds in the back garden
of being finally alone –
came to him by fate
like a harmonious fragment
when Patrick Hennelly – piper
and pipe maker from Mayo
gave him his gift of pipes.
There were drones to be mastered,
children to be fed. His arms
would have been exhausted
from gathering food. Even
Odysseus in times of myth
must have cried out in frustration:
what are the kids up to, now, Penelope?
I can hear nothing in this light.

Francis O'Neill sang accolades
to his playing at The World Fair in 1934.
Joe tuned into the piping of
another left-handed piper, Patsy Touhy
and off he went like a poet
trying to find rhythm in a poem – like
a mother building hope into
a prayer for a special intention.

THE PIPER OF TREENABONTRY *contd...*

John McFadden, the fiddler from Newport
 composed The Pleasures of Hope
 before Joe's time. Eddy Mullaney
 handed him a set of Taylor Pipes
 in the sixties. They unlocked squeals
 of delight in Joe. He didn't ask who
 he could play with. He just did.
 Fiddler, Johnny McGreevy lifted
 his spirits. Defiant as robins in frost
 they battered aside new waves
 in their euphoria of reels and jigs.
 They heard the far-off cuckoo
 and the corncrake in the long meadow
 in their country of home-from-home.

Music had found its mark. Pilgrims
 descended on his kitchen. Joe
 and Johnny recorded Noonday Feast
 over cups of tea – word was out.
 The young came running.
 Piper, Jim McGuire, Box player, John Williams
 and Liz Carroll, the fiddler
 threw their hats into the ring – Joe
 gave them hope on nothing stronger than tea.

The Chieftains came and laid out a carpet,
 They played with the big man and
 acknowledged the **duine uasal* in him.
 Willie Clancy School and Cork University
 turned out like new brooches
 with awards and garlands – quiet as
 his mother Ellen, he took it in his stride.

In later years – alone, he'd whistle
 with birds in his back garden. They
 responded. He took a pair of
 Cardinal birds into his home and
 refused to bury them when they died.
 They came to light in his basement.

Joe Shannon
 left as a boy
 in 1929
 to answer
 the call to life
 in Chicago
 and he went
 to the homeland
 of the dead
 in 2004.

The ghost in his pipes says it all.

**Duine Uasal* = Unique person

Anthony DiMatteo has been defending writing, art and literature for over thirty years at the New York Institute of Technology where he is a professor English. His poems have recently appeared in the *American Journal of Poetry*, *Cimarron Review*, *Connecticut River Review* and *North Dakota Quarterly*. His latest book *In Defense of Puppets* explores the way we imagine things when we speak for others or they for us. A recent chapbook *Fishing for Family* charts the experience of language from infancy to senescence. His third book *Secret Offices*, forthcoming from Kelsay Press, regards a lifelong search for beauty and grace, a paradoxical quest because one never quite knows what one is doing in such a venture, a realization required for moving ahead. Please feel free to leave a trace at his e-tent: <https://anthonydimatteo.wordpress.com>



RECYCLING

She looks at me strange when I yell out
 “*Mazel tov.*” “Y’all right there?” she shouts back,
 thinking a shard of glass has struck me.
 “I’m fine. It feels like something to celebrate
 when a bottle smashes.” “Oh, ok, I thought
 you said, ‘my eye’s popped’?” “No,
mazel tov. Jewish phrase for good luck.”

The look on her face tells me she’s puzzled,
 never having heard the expression
 or wondering why I’d say it breaking bottles
 or both. We’re at the recycle center,
 alone in the dead heat of August.

I’m a transplant from New York, she’s
 a native of the Outer Banks. “Yup, lived here
 all my life,” she tells me, squeezing hard
 on her trash picker. “I’ve picked up all kinds
 of stuff that got no place in our bins,
 from diapers to a bucket of dead fish.”

“Well, now you’ve picked up a new phrase
 that deserves recycling,” I tell her
 with a laugh. “Oh, that’s right, my old stuff.
 Isn’t that what you said?” “Close enough.
 And good luck to you.” “Oh, to you too.”

Anthony DiMatteo

CROW ENVY

I'm pumping gas, and these two crows
high on a lamppost just above me
caw in tandem, first one, then the other,

pumping up and down, jaunty as if
mocking me for needing fuel when all
they need to do is spread their wings

and take off but they don't. Like pistons,
up and down, they caw, first one, then
the other, and then others across the way

answering back. Beneath their lofty sight
I am reduced and mocked though I know
it is arrogant to think they give a damn

about us except for what we leave behind
when we leave. They are smart, no doubt.
I've seen one use a leaf for a sled

to slide down the snow on a pitched roof
again and again, carrying the leaf
back up like a driver's license and then

surfing on the snow. And we thought
we've inherited the earth, caretakers.
We should know better, that the earth

will take care of us one way or the other.
When I put the pump back in its slot,
the crows take off as if I'm no longer

at their merciless mock. Behind the wheel,
I feel how weak we are to depend
on so much when it must be far better

just to lift one's wings and take off. How sweet
it must be to see us from above,
to go as high as one needs to silence

whatever we're doing, with all those trees
a possible perch from which to laugh or mock
how we have only the one road ahead,

eyes glued behind a streaky windshield,
not the vista that sees at a glance
what's coming, what's going while knowing

at some point we'll leave it all behind.

GIFT WISH

If there's any one thing I want
it's a soul. Each Christmas or birthday
I mistakenly hope to find it wrapped,

cut to my size, in the exact color
that go with my eyes, russet brown
as seen dimly through trees at sunset.

It would be pulsing out of the box
waiting to stretch its long beautiful neck
like a flamingo cramped for too long.

But then I recall many books say
the soul is what one gives away,
never to be hemmed in or hoarded,

hopeless in its attempts to put
a smile of thanks on someone's face.
So I make sure there's one on mine

no matter the neon socks or tight pants
I receive, reminding me I'm not
a child anymore and two sizes bigger

than I was last year. Yes, my arms
stretch wide, making a little harbor
for the giver's soul to rest, hoping

mine can find asylum in return.

SECRET OFFERING

For James Lloyd Davis

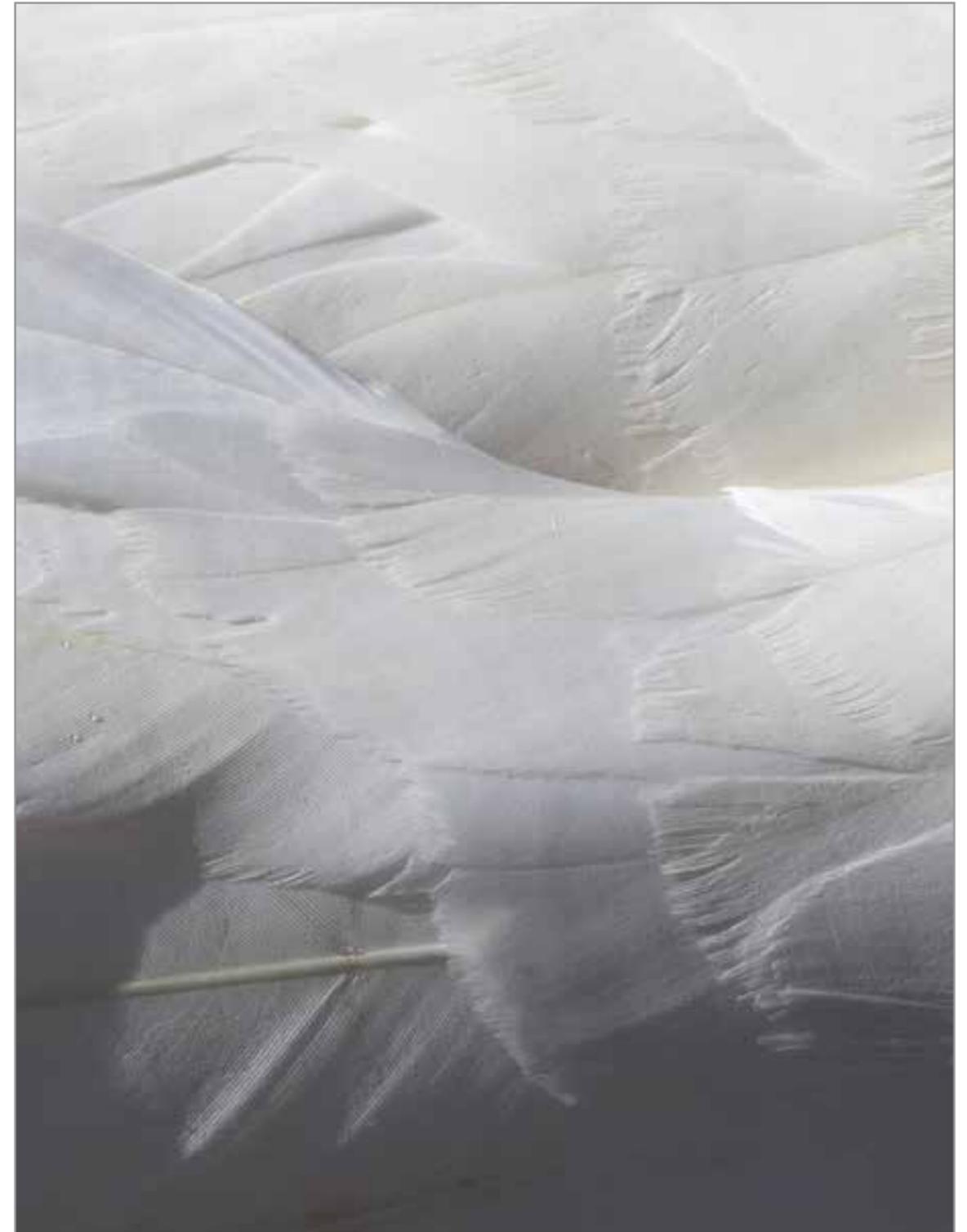
The old man, dying, dreamt
he was a young man again,
a boxer looking to spar.
No one showed up, half
good-bye, half affirmation.

He woke that morning
to where the pain led him
back. He can see his life
in a single span of time
like no time before. That
was a gift the dream granted,

both salute and farewell.

THE WORK

Seeking beauty, she becomes beautiful.
Forms rise up to greet her, subtle
her work as clouds or stars. A grackle,
finch and sparrows scatter before her.
A mockingbird stays. She ponders why.
She knows the bird knows its powers
to flee at any time, a freedom
denied her from the children she's raised.
Her seeking, beautiful, is always one
step behind the one she cannot take.
It's not towards a mirror, her lifelong
belief, no beauty ever courted,
only found and always on the wing.



Photograph: <https://pixabay.com/photos/feathers-white-swan-plumage-6365294/>.

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 (2021). *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*, *Rochford St Review* and *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing*.



THE ODD JOB

which story should I give
as I introduce myself

to this man asking
what' you do?

if I say
"I'm a consultant"

he'll leave it alone —
suitably impressed

I announce my title then hear
scuse me must get a beer

my words hang
like spring lamb

truth is I sell
love to strangers

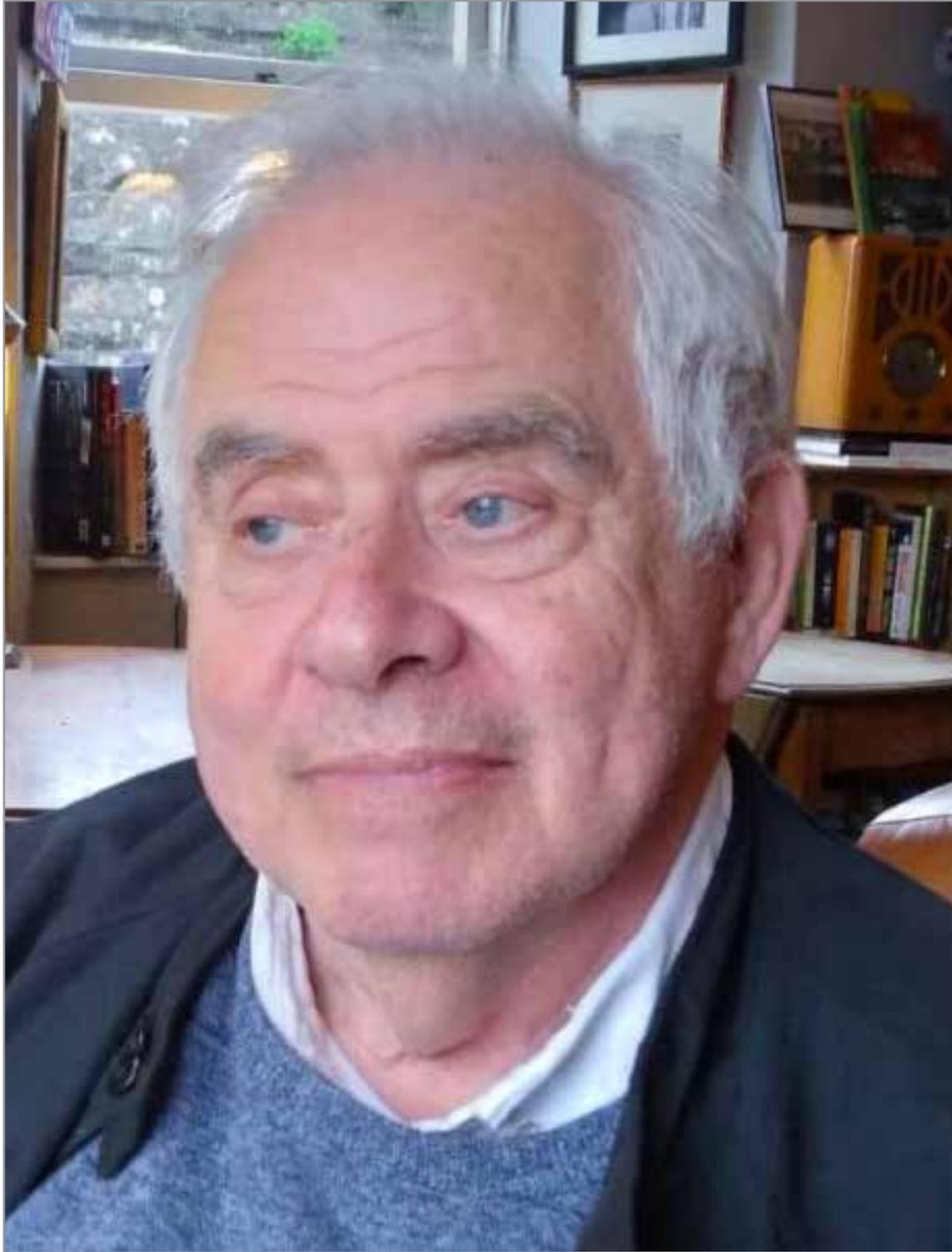
liberate people
from sense-less jargon

assist them develop
their stories

help re-form their
neural sentences

Henry Briffa

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



WHEN THE LAMP IS SHATTERED

Paris, summer 2019.
My street is being excavated.
To lay fibre, I think.

The tarmac, stripped back,
reveals tramway tracks from
the early twentieth century.

The people on them, the hats,
the worries, the anticipations.

The world of Welles's masterpiece
The Magnificent Ambersons
All those souls.

Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Joseph Woods.

BRIDGE OF DREAMS

Old Uncle Ralph, sitting in his chair, interpreting,
is the bore at the party. Listeners are listening
to their own inner worlds anyway.

A still small voice – ‘here I am’ – God briefly
in the Bible. It is enough. Roses and pine trees
and coasts say very little, so, invite me to listen.

I read Lady Murasaki, Shakespeare, Henry James.
They wrote beautifully because they thought
beautifully. Has no one ever noticed?

Old Uncle Ralph sitting in his chair.
Cassiopeia sitting in hers. You, when you were here.
The blood in my veins. Constellations.

SEARS R. JAYNE

1920 - 2015

Your hand holding a coffee cup.
Your face on every occasion.
Your way of saying ‘hello.’
Ditto ‘good-bye.’
Verbs would ruin it.
You were the verb.

Today the man who got me to write poetry
died.
I hadn’t seen him for forty years.
His Spenser classes were packed to the rafters,
people used to bring their friends along.

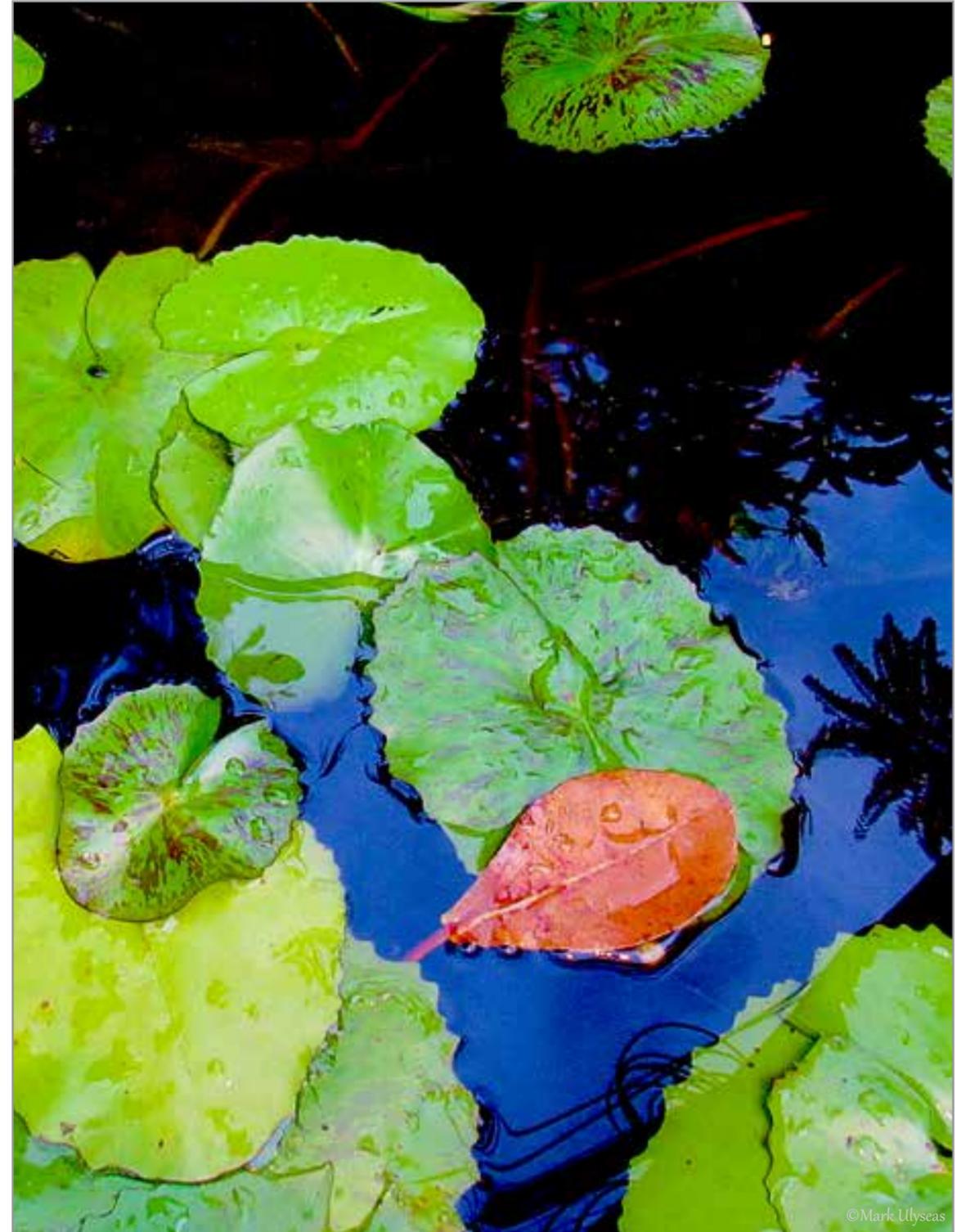
There is no such thing as any teacher.
Rather, a unique particular flawed cracked
sentient one hopes sympathetic being.
And – of the face; of the hand; of the look;
and sometimes of the word – language.

Getting through even the next second
can have all the characteristics of a road accident.

Goodness and mercy are not the name of a law firm.
They are quite what they are
when come upon.

JAMES T. FARRELL

He wrote about bedbugs and God. A passionate artist. I think of him to-night, after rereading *The Death of Nora Ryan*. In all his books, a describer of glaring wrongs over which the oblivious step and still step. His favourite author was Proust. His second favourite, Yeats. An immense output of novels, short stories, essays. Then he walked away like a cat.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Emma Lee's publications include "The Significance of a Dress" (Arachne, 2020) and "Ghosts in the Desert" (IDP, 2015). She co-edited "Over Land, Over Sea," (Five Leaves, 2015), was Reviews Editor for The Blue Nib, reviews for magazines and blogs at <https://emmalee1.wordpress.com/>.



IT'S JUST A BUNCH OF FLOWERS

John Everett Millais' painting of Ophelia adds a red poppy, signifying death, to Shakespeare's daisies, violets, rosemary and pansies.

She finds them on the doorstep: no card.
A bouquet of daisies for innocence and purity.
As they fade, another is left, courier delivery.
This time a blank, white virgin card.
Her friends laugh: the flowers are lovely,
perhaps the card's blank because he's shy?

The next is of daisies and pansies, white and regal.
Friends think they're unusual and beautiful.
She takes them to work and leaves them behind.
'Thinking of you,' the card smooth as a stone.
Going home, keys in hand, she checks she's alone.

Colleagues smile: a mysterious admirer.
The bouquet changes, violets make it bigger.
'These are only for you' typed on a calm
sepia. She buys a video doorbell to go with the alarm.

She keeps the curtains closed. Begins to lose track of time.
The next includes rosemary. 'In remembrance'
She phones the police to be told it's not a crime.

Dead flowers invade her dreams and fail to revive
her. She shrinks, only goes to work, eats to survive.

The next has the addition of a red poppy.

Emma Lee

HE LOOKS AT HER THE WAY I WANTED HIM TO LOOK AT ME

Bertha Antoinette Rochester, née Mason

I go to look at her. What does he see?
 She's pale, skinny, sharp-eyed, prim.
 But he looks. He looks past me at her.
 He looks through me to her. It's trickery.
 It's as if I'm in a thick surround like a hurricane glass.
 Am I that damage? Can I create such destruction?
 What can I not feel? I waver like a flame.
 She darts him looks. He wants to touch,
 to lift the glass and touch her light within.
 I'm snuffed out, a shadow in a white dress.
 Ghost. Ghostly I shuffle. I go to look at her.
 The one he hovers around, touching her space,
 her outline, inhaling her scent, his dream of her.
 A vessel for his hope to be a husband.
 I see the white dress he bought her, the long veil.
 It shrouds me. She thinks she will wear it.
 He will touch her where he rejected me.
 I will be witness. I wear this so they won't see me.
 There's a shriek. It's not mine. He will darken her.
 She's awake, not watching but rising.
 My hands flutter. I hear ripping. It will not be hers.
 I've torn my veil. My flame will burn.

UNHELPFUL CAPTIONS: *Speaking a foreign language*

Translation is not considered important.
 More troubling is the lack of transcript.
 It implies those who struggle to hear
 only follow one language,
 and are not trusted to understand another,
 yet are already bilingual.
 Who programmed the subtitles?

Fred Everett Maus is a musician, writer, and teacher. He teaches music classes on a range of topics, for example a recent course on “Music in Relation to Sexuality and Disability” and a recurring contemplative course “Deep Listening.” He is a trained teacher of mindfulness meditation and Deep Listening, and a student of music therapy and object relations psychoanalysis. He has published prose memoir and poetry, for instance in *Citron Review*, *Palette Poetry*, *Roanoke Review*, and *Vox Populi*, and in *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* March 2022. He lives in a house in the woods north of Charlottesville, Virginia, and in Roma Norte, Mexico City. *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness*, which he co-edited with the late Sheila Whiteley, has just been published.



GARDENING WITH MARK

When I was younger, I tried to kill myself—once when I was sixteen, again when I was nineteen, with pills both times, the first time with my mother’s sleeping pills, the second time with my own clonazepam, which I was instructed to use, only rarely, for my anxiety or insomnia. After the first time, I talked with our family doctor and persuaded him that it was an accident. That was the assessment I wanted him to give my parents. I knew they couldn’t afford psychotherapy, and I didn’t think therapy would help anyway. The second time, my college counseling center connected me with an excellent therapist, Marilyn, and a wonderful psychiatrist, Kate, who still helps me with medication. They took away the clonazepam and put me on Wellbutrin and Lexapro, the first in a long series of fairly successful attempts to match my illness with the right meds.

Recently my relationship with Mark had felt serious, perhaps lifelong serious, and I thought it would enrich our connection if we started to talk about that difficult part of me. We had a pleasant Chinese dinner together, and then went to my apartment to sip some wine. We talked a bit, redundantly, about how good dinner had been.

I paused, and then: “We’ve been seeing each other four months now.”

“I know, Paul. Four wonderful months.” The sky outside was dark, as dark as it gets here in the city. There was a quiet hum from the traffic, three stories below. If I were closer to the window, I could have watched the traffic lights changing, and changing again. It was strange how those rhythms could be comforting.

“I’m sorry, I am not ready. I need a place of my own. I can’t live with someone just now.”

“That’s not what I meant, Mark,” I said. “I wasn’t bringing that up again. We are fine this way.”

Fred Everett Maus

continued overleaf...

© Fred Everett Maus

GARDENING WITH MARK *...contd*

"Tonight, for instance. I need to leave soon. I have to get up early for work."

"I get it. Thanks for spending time with me on a Tuesday."

"Of course." He smiled, tired and a little distracted.

"It's been four months," I said. Now he looked straight at me. Mark had a characteristic direct gaze, but this was different--alert, curious, maybe apprehensive.

"Yes. It has."

"It's ... it's that I want to tell you something."

"Well. It's late now. I'm sure it can wait." I heard it first, and then out the window I could see a jet, approaching the airport, lights blinking.

"It has already waited." I regretted the words and my firm voice, but now I had to continue. "You know that I talk with a therapist."

"Yes, of course. I've done that too. It's not a big deal."

"Sometimes it is. I have a diagnosis." I am not sure why I paused.

"Oh, everyone does. I have been diagnosed three times with adjustment disorder so that I could access my insurance."

"Actually, she's not a therapist. She's a psychiatrist. Mark, I have depression." The refrigerator hummed loudly, with that odd sound it made from time to time, not, it seemed, the sound of a motor, but something else.

"I'm sorry that you are depressed," he said after a moment, and I thought that I had never heard him sound so insincere. Then he was himself. "Paul, I know you very well, and I don't think of you like that. We all get sad sometimes. If there is anything wrong with you, it's that you work too much. You don't know where to draw the line. I'm sure it affects everything in your life. You probably made yourself really tired at some point."

"Mark, it's not that I am tired. I have depression. It's a medical condition. Sometimes I feel like I can't do anything, even get out of bed. Sometimes I feel like there is no value in anything, in me or anything in life. I try to remember that it is just something my body does to me. I'm better now, thanks to my meds, but Mark, in the past it was often very hard."

"Paul, you never told me." The refrigerator stopped humming and the apartment was harrowingly quiet. The car sounds started up again, another change of the traffic signals.

"It has been months, and you didn't tell me. We've been together four months, and now you are telling me that you are sad. What have I done wrong? What can I do for you? Is it about moving in with you?"

"Mark, it has nothing to do with you. It's a medical condition."

"You didn't tell me. You don't trust me."

"Mark, I am telling you. This is not easy for me. Basically, I don't tell anyone unless I have to. I am telling you because I trust you." I wondered, for the first time, whether I actually did trust him. What was happening to us right now?

"Is it because I don't want to move in with you? Speaking of my apartment, as you know I work tomorrow. I need to go home. And sleep. I hope I can sleep after this conversation."

I had nothing to say. I watched him put on his coat and let himself out.

It was the closest we had come to a quarrel. Mark was even-tempered and kind. I had never seen him angry, and in this conversation, I sensed only hurt. The next day, I went over the conversation again and again, wondering where I was at fault. I never wanted to hurt Mark. I cherished his quiet happiness, and I depended on it to ground my own unsteady feelings.

Suddenly, though, mid-afternoon, I realized: Mark was saying he didn't want to know me; or didn't want to know certain things about me. What was this unfamiliar boundary that I had encountered? I was at the bookstore.

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GARDENING WITH MARK *...contd*

Mid-afternoon was often a nice time of day there—not many customers, just me and my boss in a quiet place, good for reading or thinking. Or sometimes writing, but I was shy about working on my poems when my boss was around. I knew that he was sure of himself as a judge of literature. I could imagine him insisting on reading a poem-in-progress, and then letting me know that the poem was poor. Michael was a somber man in his fifties, single, with a persistent air of disappointment that readily transformed into harsh criticism of those around him. I was sure he had grown up with ambitions grander than his twenty-five-year run as owner of an independent bookstore. Though it never came up between us, I felt he was 100% heterosexual. For one thing, most people think I'm cute, and I sensed no sexual response from him. I was also pretty sure that he was sexually inactive. Nothing about him intimidated any kind of bodily satisfaction. I didn't like him, but I liked the job he gave me, so I took care over our interactions.

Mark and I first met at the gym. That might sound sexy, and I guess for us it was, sexy by our shy-nerd standards. I had seen Mark at the gym before. I thought he was handsome; some people might not. Maybe he was kind of ordinary looking. He was not tall, 5'5", which matched my 5'7" pretty well. We were both skinny, with barely visible muscles. My dark brown hair was about as boring as his sandy hair, both of us with convenient short cuts. We didn't exercise to be buff but, I suppose, to stave off illness and death. I thought I had seen him looking at me before. On the day we met, he came over to talk as I was doing some triceps work. "May I give you advice?"—the first time I heard his soft, unemphatic voice, neither high nor low, neither butch nor feminine. That safe vocal neutrality that some of us were lucky to have.

"Sure."

"You only need to move your forearms. From the shoulder to the elbow, you need to be like a rock, immobile." He was right. I was pushing down with my whole arm, moving from the shoulder, with loose elbows.

"Like this?"

"Yes, much better!" Later we chatted a little more. And later, we happened to be leaving at the same time, so I asked if he wanted to get coffee.

Neither of us was obviously gay. I don't mean I'm proud of that, but it often made things easier. Not that either of us was obviously straight, either. We both fit into the "nerdy asexual" category, and it probably saved our lives in high school. Now, in our thirties, it mattered less to our safety, but it was still who we were. Nonetheless, for whatever reason, from our first words to each other, neither of us doubted that the other was gay. We immediately felt safe with each other, and mutually attracted. Were nerdy asexuals supposed to pair off? Weren't we supposed to be looking for a little more contrast? Anyway, we did what we did. By asexual, I mean that's how people thought of us. But anyone who saw my bedroom trash basket when I was in high school would have known that solo sex was happening a lot. Same for Mark. We had both been single for about a year when we met; lots more tissues.

On that first date, if that is the word, Mark and I had the unexpected ease that sometimes happens between people, as though we had known each other for much longer than two hours. We exchanged phone numbers and two days later we had coffee again. The second time, we talked about our families and other people we knew, about some successes and disappointment in our lives, feeling more and more attuned, and ended up a few blocks away in Mark's bed. Over the next weeks we flourished in each other's company. Soon we had keys to each other's apartments, and we saw each other three or four times a week, sometimes with sex, sometimes not, sometimes sleeping over, sometimes ending up in our own apartments, three blocks apart.

Neither of us had had an exciting life. That was one of the ways that we matched. Mark had gone to a community college, and after graduation he got a job in a camera shop, selling goods at first, then, as his skills became known, advising customers and doing repairs. He had had the job twelve years. He was known, now, for his reliability and honesty, and everyone said he was a magician at repairing old cameras.

I had gone to a pretty good state university in the city where I still lived, majoring in English, and then I realized that I had no ideas about what to do next. I waited tables in good restaurants for—it's hard to believe—four years. I was sort of charming, and I had a natural impulse to please people and keep them comfortable; the restaurants exploited these qualities to the point of exhaustion, sometimes even revulsion. And three times I lost waiting jobs when I was feeling down and couldn't leave my bedroom for several days.

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GARDENING WITH MARK *...contd*

Finding the bookstore job was a lifesaver, even if, at the beginning, I sometimes went to the bathroom to cry after a dressing-down from Michael. My first bad experience with him came about a week into the job. I was lost in thought, and then I realized he was standing two feet away, glaring at me. "Are these shelves alphabetized?" he said, pointing to Fiction R-Z, not overtly angry but more intense than I might have thought the topic required. Obviously, he knew the answer to the question, and I did not, and he knew that I did not.

"I'm sorry," I said immediately. I felt submission flood my body. I wondered if I looked like a sad scolded puppy.

"*Customers will not buy the books that they cannot find.*" He didn't raise his voice, but there was something startling in the sound, something poisonous.

"I'm sorry," I repeated.

He wasn't finished. "Paul, I can't tell whether you are selectively blind or just very stupid." The venom was gone now; he had returned to his usual preen when he felt comfortably superior. I would learn to expect interactions like this one, arriving out of nowhere every few days.

But twice in my first two years, I missed more than a week of work, lying in my bed, barely able to get up and feed myself, and Michael acted as though it was just something that happens and welcomed me back. I guess he was not all bad, though that was hard to remember when he was a shit, which he so often was.

Sex with Mark was different from anything I had ever experienced. Mark preferred to top, so that's what we mostly did. (I liked either role, a lot.) He also strongly preferred face-to-face. Fucking went very slowly with Mark. He would enter carefully, taking a long time, often murmuring, almost as though to himself, "I don't want to hurt you." Then he would start to—I could say thrust, but that sounds too forceful. He moved in and out, slowly, steadily, for a long time. When he was going to come, he flushed, breathed more deeply, looked into my eyes, and radiated a special intensity; nothing sped up much.

Finally, he would exhale, making a quiet sound of contentment, "mmm," and a slow smile would find his face, and he was still, his eyes closed. I suppose he just didn't have that jackhammer gene; or maybe he backed away from anything that felt scary or out of control. As he fucked, he would close his eyes for a time, deep inside himself, and then open his eyes, looking intently into my face. This alternation, eyes closed, eyes open, was a rhythm, like impossibly slow breathing. Especially when he looked at me, I sensed that for him the experience was even more about my pleasure than his own. It made me emotional, being cared for by his cock in that way; sometimes I got tearful.

If I asked to top, he always said yes. Getting fucked, he would go into a kind of quiet trance, blissful. Once, early on, I got excited and started to pound him, the way I had always done with other men. He suddenly took my head between his hands, looking into my eyes from three inches away, and whispered, "It's all right. It's all right, Paul." For a moment, we were still. Then I continued, slowly, in the style I had learned from him.

I admit I missed the more vigorous fucking, my own and that of my previous tops. There was a way I often cheated on him. Alone in my apartment, I jerked off to porn that had the rough energy that I would never get from him. It was easy to find; I went to porn sites and used the search terms "hard gay fuck." The habit was a little risky, with him having the key to my apartment. I didn't want him to walk in on me, but I knew his work schedule. Though I felt kind of bad about it, I thought it stabilized our relationship.

As we started to see each other often, I found some significant differences between us. We liked to watch movies together, but we didn't like the same movies. He really didn't want to see movies about gay men. Somehow that was triggering for him; I didn't understand why. Neither of us was political—we were "relieved to be under the radar" gays—but sometimes I wanted to watch stories about people like us. In general, he was unlikely to accept my suggestions about movies to watch together. We saw much more of *Desperate Housewives* than I would ever have watched on my own. When he proposed viewing *White Chicks* again—it would have been the third time—I said no, never again.

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GARDENING WITH MARK *...contd*

We also had different relations to photography. I had a brief, enjoyable period in my mid-twenties when I tried to make artistic photos. I wasn't bad and I wasn't really good either. Mark had been fascinated by cameras since he was in middle school, but he didn't care about taking photos himself, and he had no interest in the work of famous photographers. I had a few photography books in my apartment, some gay or gayish stuff like Peter Hujar and Ryan McGinley, some others, Helen Levitt, Walker Evans, some that I had had for a long time, others that I had found in the bookstore. From time to time, I enjoyed sitting with a book of photographs for an hour in the evening. The books did not interest Mark. I never tried to show Mark my poems; I knew what would happen, and I didn't need to experience his indifference. I think my inner art fag was disappointed in me for pursuing this relationship, but I cared more about Mark than about the art fag.

The one kind of art that interested Mark was classical music. He studied piano from childhood until he was in tenth grade. He had an old upright piano in his apartment, and he played every day. It had a small sound compared to more professional instruments, but it was beautiful to hear. A piano technician visited when needed: Mark kept the instrument in excellent condition and perfectly in tune. Mark had no interest in listening to recordings of classical music. He just liked to play. I asked him why he stopped studying. "There was no money, and it's not like I wanted to become a pianist." But his playing sounded advanced to me. He particularly loved Schubert's music, delicate sweet pieces. I asked him if he knew that Schubert was gay. He didn't know and didn't seem curious to hear more. Sometimes I sat next to Mark as he played, watching his hands and face. More often, I would lie on the sofa, close my eyes, and go into a kind of dream.

From hearing Mark play, I soon had a favorite piece by Schubert. It was the first movement of a Sonata in G major; Mark told me it was sometimes called Fantasy. I liked the name Fantasy, an invitation to let my imagination roam.

The music started with a long gentle hug, Mark caressing the middle of the keyboard. Suddenly, though, Mark's left hand plunged very low: there was thunder, far away, and then a moment later, in the distance, sunlight through the clouds.

Tender hugs again, holding a little tighter this time, and then an unexpected delicate dance. The dance flew higher and higher; the left hand stood on the ground, looking up. Then the dance transformed into a rapid, sweet flicker.

There was a middle section. Those loving hugs became something harder, more serious, almost frightening. Had the thunder I heard before become a storm? Mysteriously, the new harsher music alternated with that lovely dance. But before long, the troubled music led back to the opening. Loving hugs again, sweet dancing, and the thunder was gone. That return to the opening music brought me an exquisite sense of safety and trust. Always, what I saw and heard when Mark played piano fused with my knowledge of how those same hands could touch my flesh, and most of all when he played this Fantasy.

I found performances of the piece online, but they affected me much less. For me, the music was the beautiful sound of Mark's nearby body. I also discovered that professional pianists played the middle section much more brutally, and their versions were unsettling. I wanted Mark.

As I said, Mark and I had an awkward, incomplete conversation about my depression. The next day, Wednesday, was not a day when we would normally see each other, but I didn't want to leave that conversation hovering between us. After work I went to his apartment. It was about 9:00 PM; my lovely boss had asked me to work several extra hours, with no notice. Outside Mark's door, I paused. Something was happening: crashing piano chords, wild and fierce, in a maddening repetitious rhythm. It sounded like Mark was trying to beat the piano to rubble. It was the ugliest piano sound I ever heard, and it went on and on. I thought there were a lot of wrong notes, too, nonsensical clumps of sound, though I didn't really know about such things. From what I heard, I was sure that Mark's face had some terrifying expression that I had never seen. An unworthy thought appeared in my mind: "He certainly doesn't pound me like that!" I tried to set it aside. I didn't want to know more, and I left, queasy and shaken. As I walked down the hall, the piano sounds faded. I entered the stairwell, and I couldn't tell whether I was still hearing the piano or only its resonance in my head. I was worried for Mark and frightened by him, and disconcertingly aroused by this unknown animal version of my boyfriend.

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GARDENING WITH MARK *...contd*

When I got to my apartment, I went to YouTube immediately to learn whether I had heard an existing piece of music or some astonishing invention of Mark's. It made sense to look for piano music by Schubert. After a while I found it—Moment musical No. 5 in F minor. It was the same music, but less disturbing in the online recordings than what I had heard earlier.

I listened to it again and again with different pianists. Some interpretations sounded downright tame. I found performances with some of Mark's wildness by Grigory Sokolov and Vladimir Feltsman. I was right that Mark had played a lot of wrong notes. Also, the actual piece had loud parts and soft parts; Mark's playing had only been loud. And it was a short piece; Mark was playing it over and over. I couldn't stop listening to the online recordings. About an hour of nausea and jitters.

I really needed to see Mark the next day. I fell asleep slowly, fragments of F minor Schubert floating around me, sometimes scratching against my skin, but then I slept soundly.

Thursday, a good day at the bookstore. Many customers knew that if they described a book to me, I could probably identify it and find it for them. Putting my degree in English to work! There were a lot of those queries around lunch time that day, but midafternoon brought a long period of quiet. Over the last few days, I had been working on a poem, near completion. I started to think about it again and for once, I ignored my fear of Michael. I sat at the main desk with my laptop and, lo and behold, finished the poem in about an hour. No harassment from customers or boss.

I didn't write poetry in college. I started a couple of years after graduation. I never had teachers, though I read some poetry in college, and much more once I started writing. I discovered that writing offset the harrowing feeling that my waiter job was my essential reality. Before long, I published a few poems, not in leading journals, of course, but in good ones.

This new poem took the form of a dialog:

Thin Line

I spoke:

The full moon nourished us.
It overflowed. Soft as milk,
silver splashed down, delicious, and
we looked around, bewildered.

But tonight, a simple
curl, to trace
a shallow bowl
or two hands, cupped.

And we have nothing to offer
but the time our light will take,
whether we give it or not,
to grow round again.

You replied:

The heavy eyelid
almost hides the glow of an ample soul.
No one sees, through a gap
so nearly closed.

No move I make will
catch that eye. In my gratitude,
under this sky,
in my envy, I feel alone.

Was it any good? I could never tell. Two people looking at the same thin curl of a moon, thinking different things. Was it foolish to write a poem about the moon when so many already existed? I thought of the characters as lovers. Part of the idea of the poem was that the first character tried to speak for both—typical masculine entitlement, though I didn't gender the characters. And the second character responded by describing isolation. As always with my poetry, it was not about me but created an imaginary situation. I seldom knew where my ideas came from.

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GARDENING WITH MARK *...contd*

Finishing “Thin Line” restored my balance and calm. I sent a message to Mark to arrange dinner.

I had the idea of going to the same Chinese restaurant as Tuesday’s dinner. Would that help us pick up the thread, maybe return us to where we were before that failed conversation about my depression? I wondered whether we would talk about Mark’s explosive bout with the piano. I arrived first. I felt alone. The glow from finishing my poem was gone, and I was nervous. I looked around, at the worn white tablecloth, the old menu that I could probably reproduce from memory, the shiny red walls and cheap looking red fabric decorations, the many empty tables, a middle-aged heterosexual Asian couple eating together on the other side of the ample room, the swinging door to the kitchen with its tiny round window, the stained brown carpet, the dingy white acoustical tiles, the one window with its Venetian blinds nearly closed. The wife of the owner entered from the kitchen, ancient, her hair beautifully, unnaturally black. She looked at me and disappeared without saying anything. The front door opened for three teen girls, two of them Asian or Asian American, the third pale and blond. Street sounds for a moment, cars passing, a distant conversation, then the door closed and there was a hush. The three girls and the couple all began talking at once, but quietly, as though respecting the stillness of the room. I couldn’t understand what they were saying, the girls with their soft English, the couple with their Asian language, but I listened to the music of their voices, the pitches and wavering melodies, the overlapping phrases, the changes of sound-color as different individuals spoke, the intermittent silences. The sounds relaxed me. As I listened, I noticed for the first time that there was a faint clatter of pots, plates, and utensils from the kitchen, and sometimes voices muted by the door.

Then Mark was sitting down, looking at me as he always did after time apart, with warmth, gratitude, a gentle smile, his direct gaze. “Paul,” he said. “You know that I love you.”

“Yes, of course.”

“I wanted to say that. I don’t always say it. I love you.”

I waited, meeting his gaze, starting to feel the calm that he so often brought me. “I was thinking about what you are to me,” he continued. “I think I can say it right. *You are my peace*. The world is not simple. With you I feel the world can be quiet, and still, and good, and peaceful.” I was overwhelmed by the beauty of this man and the beauty of what he was saying. I felt we were back together, like before, our recent days of confusion erased.

“I don’t need to know everything about you,” he said. “There’s the part of our lives that we have together. We need to take care of it. It’s a garden, our place of love and safety. Please help me cherish that garden.” Caught up in this vision, I melted. How could I have deserved to find this wonderful man?

Then we ate and talked and laughed, finding joy in each other. A bit later, we were serious again. “Mark, how do you see the future of this relationship?”

“Well, I’ve thought about it a lot. I think we’ll continue just as we are for a while, and then at some later time we will get married. I can’t imagine anything else.”

We had never mentioned marriage before, but what he said felt good. We ended up in my apartment; a tender, slow fuck, and Mark slept over.

Mark left early in the morning. Friday was my day off from the bookstore. I woke up aglow with love. But as the morning passed, my good mood began to falter. Mark seemed to know what he wanted, and it was what I wanted, too, wasn’t it? Or mostly it was what I wanted, and the other parts didn’t matter. Or they did matter, but nothing was ever perfect, and nothing else was as good as what Mark and I had found.

Then I flinched with the sudden return of the recognition: he didn’t want to know all of me. He wanted to create something by building it together and by excluding what he didn’t like. But wasn’t that what people always did? I didn’t know.

I had felt so clear and confident, last night and earlier today, and now I couldn’t think. I was glad I had a therapy appointment that afternoon. I needed to talk about Mark with someone who wasn’t Mark.

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GARDENING WITH MARK *...contd*

Then I was with Amy in her office, a tidy room that was a museum of beige. No sounds from outside the room bothered us. With therapists, my history was spotty. I would try one for a while, maybe six weeks, then I would start to feel that it wasn't going anywhere, and I would take a long break, sometimes years, before starting again with someone else. It was different with my therapist Marilyn, who along with Kate had saved my life when I was in college. It wasn't just the diagnosis of depression. I had been living away from home for the first time and I didn't know who I was, sexually or in most other ways. Marilyn told me it was all right to be gay, and she said it so many times that I finally believed her.

This was only my third meeting with Amy. We were getting to know each other. I tried to explain what it is like to be with Mark. "He's not very interesting. Maybe he's the least interesting person I know." She raised one eyebrow and stared silently. "I mean, it's a lot like being in love with a Labrador retriever. He's usually so sweet. Not always, but ... It's not exciting to be with him, but it's as pleasant as possible. When I'm with him, it's like I'm on my second martini." The eyebrow went up a little more. "Sometimes it makes me think I'm not interesting either, and ... maybe that's OK." As I was speaking, I realized I was leaving out the scary part about the Schubert Moment musical. But how to describe that inexplicable deviation from everything I knew about Mark? Actually, I was leaving out a lot. What about that conversation about the garden?

A pause, and Amy said, kindly but with an edge of purpose, "What does it mean, for you, to have a boyfriend?"

I was pleased; she understood me. "Yes, exactly," I replied. "What does it mean to have a boyfriend." Then I changed the subject to some other stuff from the preceding days. My boss, that prick. A few hours after the session, walking through the city by myself on a pleasant evening, I realized she might have been asking me a question, and maybe I was supposed to try to answer it. I noticed a CVS across the street and remembered that I needed to pick up a few things. Toothpaste, definitely, and I was low on rubbing alcohol. And it never hurt to look for good discounts on anything else that I might use.



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Angelito. Photograph by Fred Everett Maus.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Sheepshead Review, Stand, Poetry Salzburg Review and Ellipsis. Latest books, "Covert" "Memory Outside The Head" and "Guest Of Myself" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in Washington Square Review and Red Weather.



John Grey

THE WOMAN IN THE BAR

She knows it happened
but, after all these years,
and all these drinks,
she can't remember who
was responsible:
a father, an uncle,
maybe a friend of one
or the other.

Her memory hasn't been
the same since it
wasn't the same
the last time
and the bar-tender
only takes her orders
to shut her up
but she yaps about it anyhow.

The story keeps changing.
The details won't hang together.
But the way her face comes apart
and her eyes bulge like a fish's
keeps the truth on a very tight rein.
On and on she rants.
She has no other take to tell.

When the other patrons
are through being annoyed,
they start to feel sorry for her.
Some for the right reasons.
Some for the wrong.
It's not pity she's looking for.
But it always comes looking for her.

GRADUATES

Graduates with a BA in creative writing,
has no idea where it leads him,
not to a clear path ahead that's for sure,
his father suggests the army,
his mother still tells him to pick up his clothes.

And he also graduates with full honors
in homosexuality, spent time naked with a fellow student –
what would the army think of that?
he's already admitted as much to his parents,
stone faces paid about as much attention to him
as horses chewing grass.

Army, no way. Maybe advertising.
And there's still that great American novel,
surely welcoming to the gay spirit.
His father's disgusted.
His mother says his room's a mess.
He tells them many of the songs they love
were written by Jewish gay guys.
It doesn't help. No one in the room is Jewish.

Graduates with nothing much more
than he began with –
his father's crushing disappointment.
his mother's fetish for absolute neatness.
If there's a career out there
awaiting someone as educated as he
then it's not making itself known.

Life goes on pretty much as expected.
There's no army in his future,
no cleanliness either.
He's old enough to drink now
so he can put away the fake ID.
And he can hang at the gay bar,
maybe meet somebody with
a BA in creative literature.
They can get drunk together,
maybe get laid.
It could feel like an army.
It could be neater than he imagines.
Not a vocation though.
At best, more graduation.

Kate Ennals is a poet and writer and has published poems and short stories in a range of literary and on-line journals (Crannog, Skylight 47, Honest Ulsterman, The International Lakeview Journal, Boyne Berries, North West Words, Crossways, The Blue Nib, Dodging the Rain, The Ogham Stone, plus many more). Her first collection of poetry *At The Edge* (Lapwing) was published in 2015. Her second collection, *Threads* (Lapwing), was published in April 2018. Her third collection, *Elsewhere* (Vole Imprint), in November 21. Her fourth, *Practically A Wake*, will be published next year (Salmon Poetry). She has lived in Ireland for nearly 30 years and currently runs poetry and writing workshops in County Cavan. Kate also runs *At The Edge*, Cavan, a literary reading evening, funded by the Cavan Arts Office. Her blog can be found at kateennals.com. She is currently on the board of PEN na h'Eireann/PEN Ireland.



A DAISY CHAIN FOR MY FATHER

The curve of his spine as he sits at the table
 The whisper of page as he skims his newspaper
 The gigantic of we with me on his shoulders
 The clam of his forehead clutched by my fingers
 The brick of pub beneath my plump of legs
 The twist of blue salt in a crinkle of crisps
 The cleft of his chin beneath the thin of his lips
 The rise and fall of his belly during his afternoon kip

The delicate of daisies I thread to chain him to me
 The snap when he wakes and shakes me away.

Kate Ennals

I DO NOT KNOW HOW I CAME TO BE

under a blue sky and a green tree
 dressed in a red coat
 bare feet
 clutching a one-eyed teddy
 in an un-gloved hand
 beneath a shower of samara seeds

I stretch to grasp one spinning past
 It lands on the grass.
 I squat to examine
 its paper wings, its woody heart
 sniff clods of soil, rain, petrichor
 I pick it up, then hear a voice

*For the love of Christ
 child, how did you escape?
 Come back here
 You're not supposed ...*

And so, my world begins its flow

THE INCHOATENESS OF BEING

Each step is dredged from silt
 every smile is a wedge of lip

fixed by genetic modification, pandemics,
 politics, hash tag poisoned umbrellas
 eagles with golf balls stuck in their throats
 wars, dead black coral, child soldiers.

I'm exhausted scratching poems
 that bring the inchoateness of being
 into an expressible state*

**Seamus Heaney*

DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELS

A winged flash of iridescent blue
 flits from green shoots
 alights on a water willow
 its membrane wings as soft
 as the gasp of a child
 whimsical
 like a sideways glance.

In Scotland, the damsel
 is a water witch
 the dragon is feared
 a hobgoblin fly

In Japan, the damsel
 is a symbol of strength

In Indonesia, the dragon
 is flipped
 deep fried.

COUPLING

after Francois Villion

There is no chimney sweep nor infant born
 without a nemesis to reflect its own

Couplets writhe in ecstasy and pleasure
 but each day, line up, soldiers with weapons

With a polished step, cruelty tangos with kindness
 a delicate ankle in a red, sharp stiletto

A punch is futile without a driving passion
 packed with love, hate, determination.

Innocence only exists without experience
 as death is the only true blossom of living.

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



WILDFLOWER ABECEDARIAN

A rose is just a rose, or so I've
 been told. Still I want to know—
 could there be a name for these
 deep-throated blooms, in red and yellow,
 eggplant hues, just waiting
 for the entrance of an acolyte with wings,
 gowned in golden pollen? Or these pale blue stars
 hidden behind a rock, the smallest asterisks
 in a gilded field of mustard weed?
 Just as I'm ready to snap them with the camera phone
 kept in the pocket of my jeans, I realize I've
 left it home, so I'll probably never get
 my wish, will never know what others dubbed them—
 names after all no better than the ones I might give to
 other beauties on the trail or by the road, like these
 pouched white clusters on a waving stalk,
 queenly on their lofty thrones. If I had a garden, I'd choose over
 red tulips and hibiscus, sticky snobs crinkled as crepe paper,
 some of these and these, whatever they are. So don't
 tell me what they're called. I'd rather not know--
 unless we make a game of naming and unnamings them,
 violet stalks closely covered in tiny curls of petals,
 white blossoms, pinked at the edges, with a golden eye.
 Xerophytes, suited to this arid land--
 you know, tough and hardy, as I never was,
 zinnias are nice, but they can't beat the brash
 and rude panache of purple-spotted orchids
 boldly fashioned in the form of a nude man.

Robbi Nester

LIVING ROCKS

The lithops are blooming again. All year, I hardly notice them, grey as the gravel they are buried in. But when the rains come, they take it in, swelling fat as hammered thumbs, and soon, buds emerge in the crack between the twin lobes of the surface, topped with translucent screens where the light comes in. From this groove, the flower grows, its pink or white or yellow petals erupting like an asterisk, obscuring the tiny body of the plant, low to the ground. In its native Karoo desert, in remote South Africa, the living rock shows little of itself. A solar battery, it brings light to the fleshy taproot underground while evading the sun's heat, enough to sport a showy bloom or two before dividing as a cell does, a perfect model of mitosis. When the flower withers, what's left becomes another set of fleshy surfaces. In the cleft from which the flower grew, more clones begin to sprout like teeth. What started as a single button spreads, only waiting for the next rain to bring the rocks to life.

SILK FLOSS TREE

The silk floss tree, *Cerba Speciosa*, known in its native South America as *palo borracho*—drunken stick—or *toborocho*—tree of refuge—doesn't seem a likely refuge, at least not to me. Its bulbous trunk, swollen at the bottom as a wineskin, sports cruel thorns meant to strip the skin off any animal bent on tasting tempting leaves or buds, though I might sit beneath its spreading branches on a hot day, admiring the pink flowers drifting down on my bent head if I remembered not to lean against the trunk. The hummingbird alone can hover before its ample flowers, landing on one petal like a bee while managing to miss the thorns on every branch. I know it only as an ornamental, growing in the narrow strip between two lanes of traffic or in a park, a home to wayward parrots, who love to hang from its big pods that resemble deflated volleyballs suspended from narrow stems. Soon enough those pods will be fat purses, full of that pink fluff that gives the tree its name, a substance one can use to stuff a bolster or construct a makeshift mattress. No wonder it's my favorite tree— not just bizarre and beautiful, but useful—the seeds a source of cooking oil, the bark handy for making rope. And if I ever found myself in need of a canoe, the wood would be ideal. Not everything that's beautiful is also delicate. If I should chop one down, I'm confident a seed or two would sprout, growing tall and wide in a short time, like the specimen that grew to ninety feet in ninety years, thirteen feet around. I want to thrive, full of my own virtues, spreading shade on everyone, dropping my pink blossoms to the ground.

IN PRAISE OF EARTHWORMS: *Lumbricus terrestris*

Worms deserve better than they get from us, feeding on rotted leaves, enriching and aerating the soil. We seldom see them, except after a hard rain, when their burrows flood, and they beach themselves on an island of pavement. Or at night, emerging like swimmers from the moist earth, stretching full length on the moon-lit lawn. Who knew that worms might live up to six years, if they are lucky, avoiding anglers or the bird that listens hard for movements under a scattering of castings, ready to nab a worm when he rises into the light? And who could blame them? A great source of protein, once purged of dirt, freeze-dried worms may be added to bread dough or a cake. Worms are neither he nor she. Hermaphrodites, they take on the gender most convenient at the moment. Afterwards, they tuck their eggs into a handy sack around their middles, like a rolled stocking on the ribbed garden hose of the body, studded all over with small bristles.

Let us praise the worm, that earnest explorer, doing as much good by pursuing its own concerns as the most deliberate philanthropist, feeding the world.

THE RHINOCEROS

How ridiculous is the rhinoceros, homely and gray in his baggy skin, two horns jutting from his upper lip like thorns from the bulbous trunk of a pink floss tree. Ill-assembled, as though someone had chosen at random in the dark just this hoof, this face, these tiny eyes, large ears, swiveling like radio telescopes on the over-sized top of his head, covered with coarse dusty hair. It's true: those horns are sharp, and rhinos have been known to charge a person or a car, perhaps because of their poor vision. But for all of that, especially in captivity, where most of the few remaining rhinos can be found, he is rather sweet and vulnerable, munching on a bit of grass with his odd rectangular jaw, his long-lashed eyes blinking slowly in the sun, as though dreaming of an endless veldt where no one seeks to kill him for his horns, imagining a secret power where there is none, a prototype of male virility in a mostly-placid herbivore, no stranger than a cow, oxpeckers riding on his back, drinking from the pool of his mild eye.

Phyllis Klein is a psychotherapist and poet from the San Francisco Bay Area. Her work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies including *Chiron Review*, *Sweet*, *3Elements*, *I-70*, *The Minnesota Review*, *New Verse News*, *Poetry Hotel*, and *Gyroscope Review* among many others. She was a finalist in the Sweet Poetry Contest, 2017, the Carolyn Forché Humanitarian Poetry Contest, 2019, and the Fischer Prize, 2019. She's been nominated for multiple Pushcart Prizes. Her new book, *The Full Moon Herald* from Grayson Books is a newspaper of poetry and has won honorable mention in poetry for the Eric Hoffer Book Award, 2021. During the Pandemic she started a reading called Poets in Conversation to help foster connections between authors and readers.



SHE COMPLETED THIS WORK SHORTLY AFTER SHE DIED

“Music, poems, landscape, and dogs make me want to paint...
And painting is what allows me to survive.”
—Joan Mitchell, 1972

If only she'd had more years. If only she could have taken
a few canvases with her to the Other Side, her raucous
sunsets rendered in strokes of pink and black with semi-gloss
or matte. I hate the idea that death arrives

in the middle. The girl whose dog wanders off might
launch a search party for the rest of her life.
I know people who punish themselves forever.
I might be one of them. How natural it seems
to paint internal winters of charcoal and ash

onto paper. To push myself into over-production,
no time for respite. I don't want to be dead, don't want
to be a statue even if I'm in a museum. I'd rather pretend
that the dog reappears at the door, pretend that my body
isn't aging. But it's going to happen, this hard-stop
into the abstract, even if brushstrokes remain, this ending.

Phyllis Klein

IT COULD HAPPEN— YOU COULD DIE NOW

You could give up, or is it your body that's fleeing
a memory, a specter? You stand at the window,
its stealth curtains in shut-down. You lie in bed, sleep
clacking at you from the kitchen. You sit at the laden table,
starving. You, who ate her way through New Zealand
in those two weeks we went from fishatarians to carnivores
surrounded by the best lamb on the planet. Our bone carved
Maori-hook necklaces meant to remind us how generous islands
can be pulled up by spirits from the house of the sea.
Whatever happened to yours? Tell me how to fish you out
of this hole you've slipped into. Whatever you wished for,
lost now in a house's red closet of grief. My friend, I call for you.
It could happen, you could live now. You could trick yourself back
from oceans of freeze, turn back from the blue whirlpool's edge.
You could decide to live, to swim home in a rise of tides,
your watermarked walls stained, as signposts.



Photograph: <https://pixabay.com/photos/koi-fish-minimal-minimalistic-in-4543131/>

Nagat Ali is an Egyptian poet, essayist and a literary critic. She has published the poetry collections *Cracked Wall* (2009), *Like the Blade of a Knife* (2010), *A Superstitious Creature Adores Garrulousness* (2002), *Glass Tombs* (2019). Ali has written about the Arabic Spring in her book *The Road to Tahrir Square: Daily Life During the Egyptian revolution* (2019).

Translated from Arabic by Nariman Youssef.

THE COMPETITION

She did not curse her, never, on the contrary, she recognised her misery. Her beautiful adversary, who watches from centimeters away, with a sharp gaze, and prepares for the next round to win back the precious prey. She was like her in everything; the deep eyes, the senses damaged by love, the body blinded. But anyway, she, her adversary, was more innocent and wrote no poetry.



Nagat Ali

GLASS TOMBS

I like these tombs dark and noiseless, where I can roam at leisure, covering distances and killing time in my own way. I can, for instance, enjoy the company of the dead, 'My father's good neighbors. They –only they – do not interrupt when I talk about him, when I dig their graves in search of his body, for often I tried to guess the spot where I had buried him, to see what remained, when I came to visit him on Saturdays in the winter, the winter that he too had loved – although he died without telling me anything about the purpose of my existence in this filthy place. He in fact gave no clear answers whenever I pressed him about anything, and I inherited nothing but a handful of obsessions, and a few old commandments that my brothers – with amazing consistency – keep hanging next to his big portrait on the walls of the house. For years I confidently awaited the fall of the commandments and his picture and the walls. Would you believe: one wish only occupies me. do you want to know what it is? To lose consciousness – if only for a few minutes – then to wake up and find the boy who betrayed me – shamelessly – a decomposing body beneath my feet, the bones of his skull devoured by these hordes of ants that crawl after me to devour me too; and to forget that old man after whom I ran tirelessly for five long years – in the hope that he would love me. He really did resemble my father, the scratch marks he left on my breast confirmed it. I know I have ruined your solitude with useless disturbing chatter, but we could still talk about better things, a less painful subject.

We could talk for instance about the spiders that swarm around me, whose dreary caves I shall enter to discover why they have eluded me for so long, to watch the ruins of ancient skeletons and the snakes ringing their bells in my head. Talking about spiders has great advantages that the likes of you do not appreciate, known only to my friends, who are fools and poets all. I follow their movements with mounting enthusiasm now; they are predominantly triangular and black, and never look at me when I 'call'them. I am happy when I sense the movement of the fallen in the battlefield of life or when I see the ones lying still in glass-covered coffins. Poor spiders indeed. They are honoured by no one so far, not even me. It is enough for me then to observe – in ecstasy – those scorpions taking their time to sting me. Naked of everything but this whiteness that surrounds me, I observe, and receive the successive stings with an open mind that you envy me for. Although you, like me, wake up to this nothingness with no beginning and no end, and to these indolent eyes, and this body stretched out alone in the dark, and this silence weighing on the chest.

Maybe I have now become a ghost capable of moving lightly in the dark and avoiding the old furniture that filled the house and made a great graveyard of it.

continued overleaf...

GLASS TOMBS

...contd

I will be content with the virtue of lies that I have earned and will praise my sitting here among the bats that drop from neighbouring ruins, and strive towards the much-discussed inferno, and eavesdrop suspiciously on those who say 'If you learn too much you lose all your intense passions'. Maybe because I no longer trust anyone. I will try then to wipe away this dust accumulating on the walls and caress the snakes that ring their loud bells, then inscribe my name on water and fake things to make them more beautiful. And naturally I will rise above all the red stains that made a bloody creature of me, and I will pity no one, not because pity is linked to nihilism – as they say – or because it leads nowhere, but because I don't see it as a virtue in the first place. I will go back to my solitude and become more ferocious and crueler, even though the light in my room has dimmed considerably. I will listen only to heavy hammer blows while wiping away the painful stories that flow from my head. No sense in talking about them now; they will turn into pitiful jokes and take us nowhere. So, I will entertain myself by watching – just watching – these coffins after failing to become even a cemetery guard. You will see with your eyes my real features and know that words are the least deceptive of mirrors. With you I will be released from my body, this 'moveable grave'.

Believe me when I tell you openly that I am like you, I have share fingernails that will soon deface you. I will scream as I remove my lover's picture, now a terrifying skeleton, and then destroy my senses as I must do to become all-seeing and all-knowing. I will see my hanging body half-Christ and half-Judas and, like you, will mock all the tragedies of life and confidently repeat 'What doesn't kill me makes me stronger'. I will laugh contemptuously at that drunkard – who is rarely awake – when he calls to me from the next room, and will proudly tell him how I have become like grave worms that turn on each other after feeding off a lifeless corpse.

Jonas Elbousty holds an MPhil and PhD in English Studies from Columbia University. He has taught at Emory, Georgia Institute of Technology, Al Akhawayn, Columbia, and Yale. He is a writer, literary translator, and an academic. He is the (co) author of three books, and his work has appeared (or forthcoming) in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *ArabLit*, *ArabLit Quarterly*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Banipal*, *Prospectus*, *Sekka*, *Journal of North African Studies*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Middle Eastern Literatures*, *Comparative Literature*, among other venues. His translation of Mohamed Choukri's two short story collections, *Flower Crazy* and *The Tent*, is forthcoming from Yale University Press.

Translated from Arabic by the poet.

LEAVES

Leaves fly in autumn,
disrobing trees.
Branches are cold, ogling their covers on the sidewalks.
Sounds of rakes, screeching of tarps, noises of leaf blowers.
Passersby tread on leaves, so cautious of the wrath of trees.



Jonas Elbousty

RESTLESS

Despondency, loss
And anguish
Wrap around my bones.
Sleepless
Restless
Anxious
And on edges.
I implore you!
What could cure this malady?

TURMOIL

There are no words for what we experienced.
Seeds of conflict
Divisiveness
Dissent
Disharmony...

I see seeds of division
Rampant in my beautiful nation.
Shooting and looting are the parlance of the day,
Crimes are ubiquitous.
Why do they tell us that the worst is behind us?
When all I can hear is mom's shouting from a distance as I walk away
"Be safe, my son..."

ORDERLY LOVE

You come in
Chaos flees
Order dominates
Animals rush to welcome you!
Squirrels shake their tails
Birds compose songs
Pigeons coo
Everyone hovers.

You come in
Order seeps in
Love abounds
We all witness your magical touch.
They say there is order in chaos,
But when order seeps in
Chaos disappears.

SINFUL LOVE

She walks in singing
Her melodies floats in the air.
If my love for her is a sin
Then I won't be asking for redemption.

You captivate my dark side
And you steal my senses
As I walk into the night
Thy image lurks in.
My eyelids cast a stare
I descry
A rose
Rubicund
With a soothing voice.

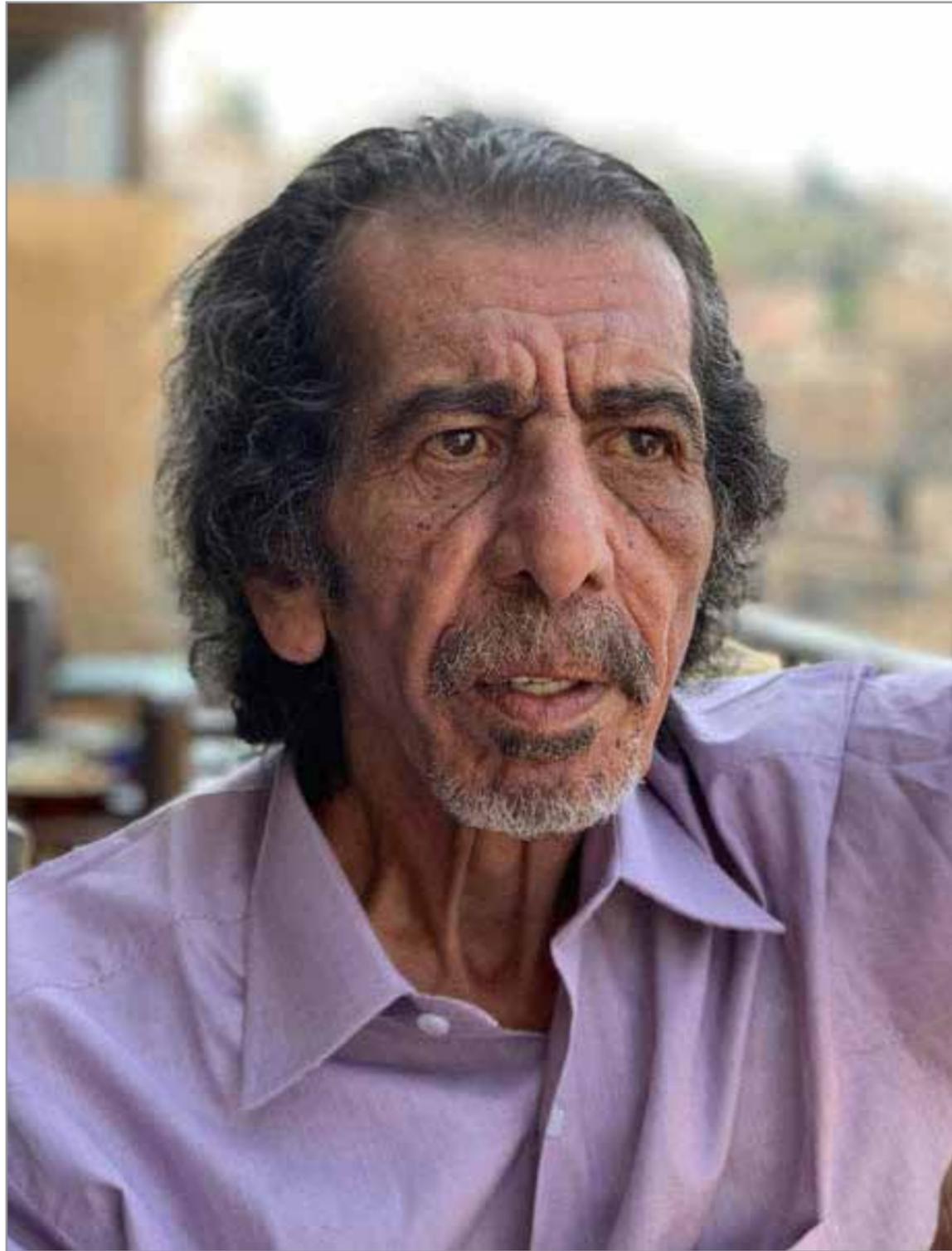
CREATION

I feel the earth between my toes
I insert mine and yours trickle.



Bank of the Mekong at sunset, Laos. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Shabanah was born in Amman in 1958, to parents of Palestinian origin. He studied Arabic literature at the Jordanian University and started working in journalism in 1983. He has published seven collections of poetry. He has written numerous literary articles and critiques. He is a member of the Jordanian Writer's Association and the Union of Arab Writers



Translated from Arabic by Lama Sakhnini.

SONATAS FOR DEPARTED RASHIDA...MY MOTHER

From the book of her memories, from her old and new notebooks.

1

O mother, mother of all people

she is our mother
She is the mother of all people,
all immortals,
of the fedayeen
and the martyrs,
mother of the prophets
And mother of all believers
Rightly and humbly

2

O mother of the forests

Oh mother of days
And rivers,
a mixture of a fable and a legend,
walking on two legs
of pain and music
of water and fire

3

I see you in "Al Arroub¹"

in the night of the camp
in farms and fields,
In mosques and sanctums
In the chants of the fedayeen
You are an assemblage of children and prayers,
Your mother is Liqa², she is a queen of her own kind
and your father is a martyr of the land of God,
preaching struggle and salvation,
With a peasant's dagger ...

continued overleaf...

Omar Shabanah

SONATAS FOR DEPARTED RASHIDA... *contd*

4

She knows what she needs

as a garden
 Her colors are dull
 mighty in her weakness
 weak in her firmness
 She knows what she needs
 She needs what she knows
 With no obvious question
 Her lucidity is her questions

5

My mother is the homeland

My mother
 Have bid us farewell
 she entrusted us
 with wild thyme wishes,
 And the thirsty Kubbayza
 And palm trees in the camp
 Our faithful refuge
 she bid farewell
 With her wounds, with her laments
 by the leanness of the phoenix of life,
 And the enchanting mother's soul

She bid farewell by her singing
 a distant land
 by the meekness of the torn bird
 in the age's nets
 tumbles without feathers

She bid farewell to a legend
 to live with others
 in a thousand epic
 With a thousand mantle and a tale,
 to live in our dreams,
 And stay in the dreams of her homeland
 And we dream without fear,
 And we move on, in the same tale,
 From the beginnings/visions,
 To the new ends of the homeland

A mother is, the homeland that
 As we walk, it carries us to it,
 to its end, its temptation,
 And we carry it to its dreams

A mother with an infinite dream
 Lives

there you are
 You remember childhood
 Of all the girls' games,
 I know you are the first
 Among games and girls,

I feel your pain
 I'm still alive
 And life became torment

continued overleaf...

© Omar Shabanah

SONATAS FOR DEPARTED RASHIDA... *contd*

6

A mother with dreams

before the beginning of the Torah
 the Bible and the Qur'an,
 The country's dreams are her secret book
 She writes what you like every day
 from his old notebooks,
 in the book:
 the steadfastness of her village with the revolutionaries,
 In it are her siege and her downfalls

Her book is her secret Qur'an.
 The morning Qur'an, and the night of the scars' Qur'an
 And her book is a house and a field
 In the hills of "Manshiah" and its "Iraq"³

Ooh mother
 O My mother
 O Mother of Christ,
 You gave birth to me to be the redeemer of men,
 However, they all betrayed and deceived

Should I mourn you
 Or should I mourn my steps
 following your own steps

O daughter of the Qur'an of life
 Your life is the Qur'an
 in my permissible blood,
 My blood is readings for your soul

I cry for you in poetry
 No... not to cry
 but to sketch
 a picture of history
 in your palms
 in the prayers of your heart

In the field of your soul
 You oh Rashida⁴
 Prayers used to start with you,
 In prayers I existed
 I see a country in your (Thiab⁵)
 in the almond fields
 Blooming in your youth,
 in the range
 My eyes drink
 From your own waters

1. The name of the camp in which the poet's mother lived after the 1948 misfortune
2. *Liq*a is the poet's grandmother name
3. *Iraq Al-Manshiah*, is the village where the poet's Mother lived
4. *Rashida* (the name of the poet's mother) which means in Arabic the wise one
5. *Thoub* (and plural Thiab) is the traditional Palestinian dress.

Tarek Eltayeb was born to Sudanese parents in Cairo in 1959. He has been living in Vienna since 1984. He has published five novels, two collections of short stories, five collections of poems, a play, an autobiography and a book of essays. His books had been translated into German, English, Italian, French, Spanish, Macedonian, Romanian and Serbian languages. In 2008, he was appointed Austrian Ambassador for the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue (EJID). In the same year, he received the Decoration of Honor for Services to the Republic of Austria. He is a faculty member of the International Writing Program (IWP) *Between the Lines* at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, USA. He was awarded the International Grand Prize for Poetry 2007 at the International Festival *Curtea de Argeş* in Romania. His awards include the Elias Cannetti Fellowship from the City of Vienna.

Translated from Arabic by Wolfgang Astelbauer.

THE DONKEY

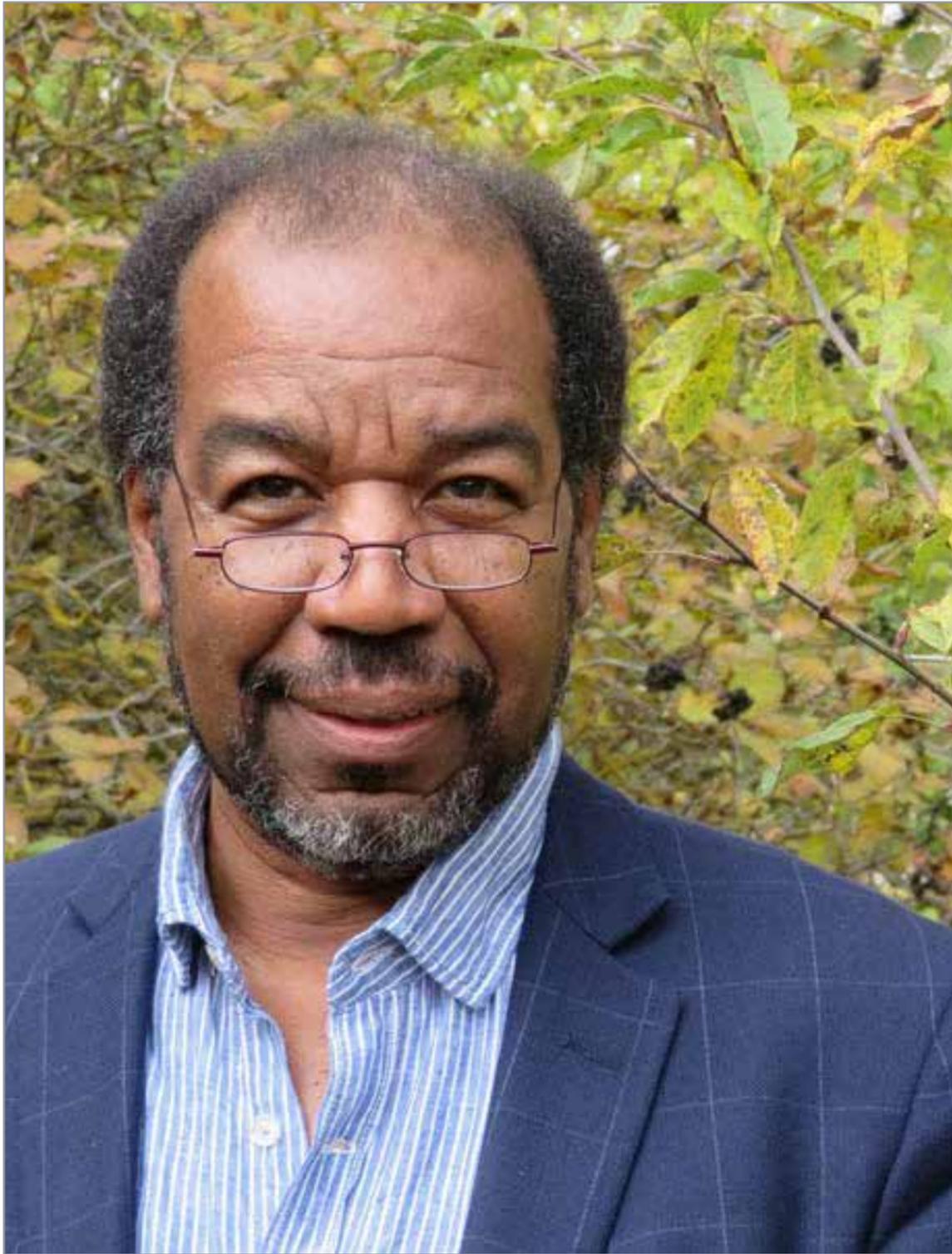
With his crude hands
the man pulls
the donkey
from the womb's shadows
into the red of the sun.

With his crude hands
the man drops
the sack, filled to bursting,
full force
onto the donkey's back.

The man curses,
curses his father,
curses his grandfather.

Then a second sack,
a third,
...

I can't see
the donkey's legs
anymore.



Tarek Eltayeb

AND GOD WILL BLOW INTO THE FIRE

The sparrows' and doves' wings
will shiver with fear.
Flapping their wings,
they will circle in the gunpowder's smoke.
Trembling, they'll accumulate
more and more dirt.
When they land,
they will not find their branches.
For these dumb woodcutters
will have broken them off
and carried them up
to the summit of the mountain,
as a sacrifice.

The sparrows will devour
the doves,
the gunpowder will feed on
the sparrows,
and the woodcutters
with their crude, sore hands
will try to dispel the smoke
before they will trip over
the branches
of the lighted sacrificial offering.

Then
God will
slowly descend
and blow into the fire.

I HAVE TRICKED THE LIGHT

I could trick the light
so that I did not get a shadow,
became transparent,
the sun, the moon, and the light penetrating me
without having to overcome any hindrance or resistance,
and I left all things around me
as they were.
I thought
I had achieved something wonderful,
but nobody noticed,
nobody could see me,
everybody just ran into me
and was frightened.

This is why I started
jumping to and fro
like a grasshopper
in front of them.

When I hated
what I had done,
I wanted my shadow back,
but it was too late.

I turned into a frog,
then into a grasshopper,
then into a flea,
and, finally,
into a nothing.

AUTUMN PANIC

Each preying eagle
passing by
in autumn
made the ants panic
with its shadow.
They got confused
when gathering supplies.

They began
to shrink back from the shadows of bees
and butterflies,
and watched out
for clouds even,
until they finally did not come out at all
when the sky was overcast.

SINCE

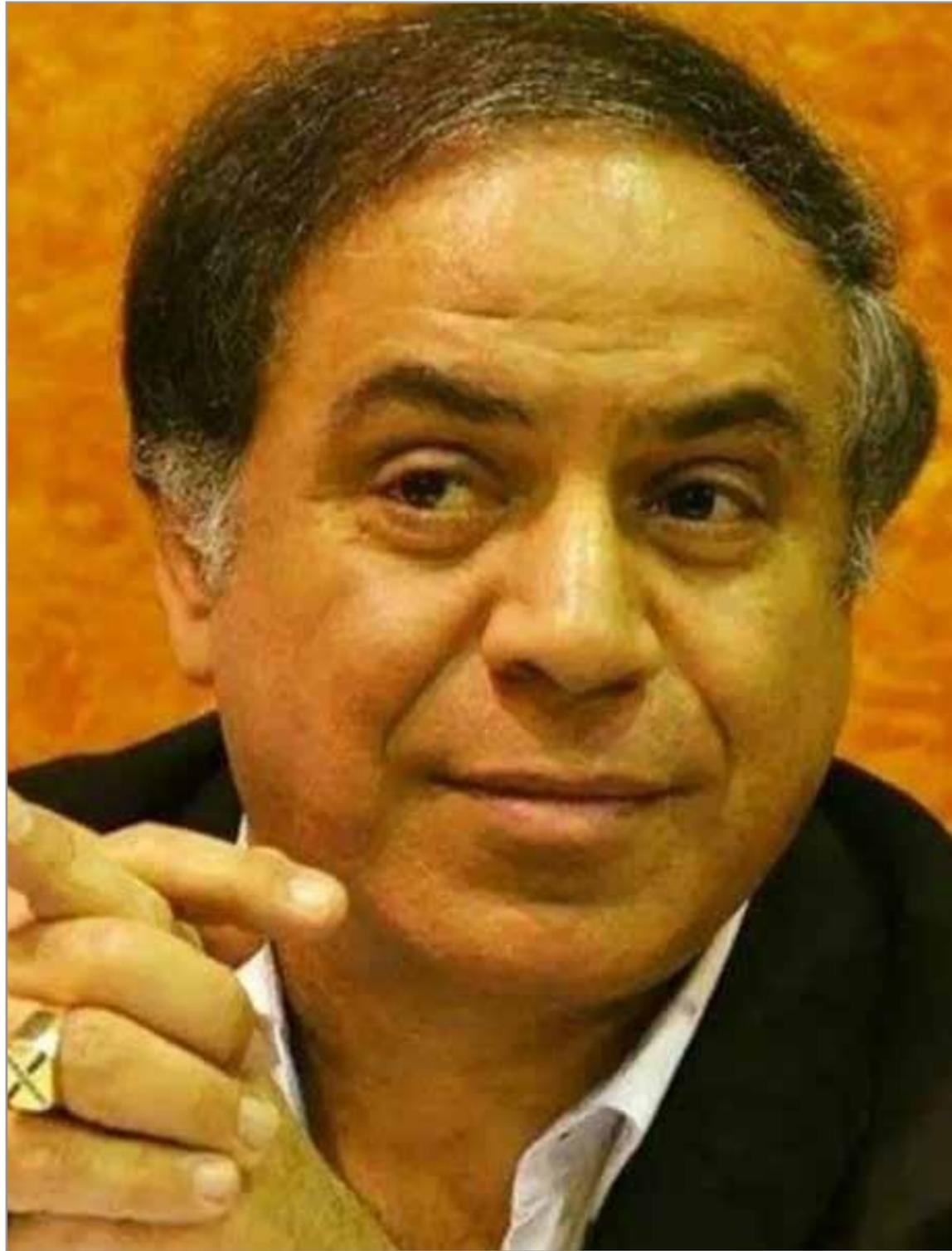
Since these many hard words have been written,
these letters left unfinished or lost,
since the writing of my hair has begun
to lose its ink and fade,
since names sink deeper and deeper into my memory
and I must almost close my eyes
to see them,
since I have begun
paying attention to the shadow of the second hand,

since then I started to realize
the lost words,
the faded hair,
the names lost sight of,
I, grey and stooping,
started to at least pay attention
to these circular repetitions.

Ahmad Al-Shahawy is an Egyptian poet and author of more than 20 books and poetry collections. His poems have been translated into many languages including French, Italian, English, Turkish and Spanish. He participated in many international poetry festivals organized in many countries of the world. Al-Shahawy was also the recipient of UNESCO literature award in 1995, and Cavafy Poetry award in 1998. His poetry collection "I DO NOT See Me" was nominated in the long list of the Sheikh Zayed Book Award in the branch of literature.

Translated from Arabic by Salwa Gouda.

Salwa Gouda is an Egyptian university staff member at The English Language and Literature Department in Ain-Shams University. She is a PhD holder in English literature and criticism. She received her education at Ain-Shams University and at California State University in San Bernardino. She has published many academic books including Lectures in English Poetry, Introduction to Modern Literary Criticism and others.



SUPPOSITION

Suppose you were not born,
You are not Ahmad,
And you are not a poet.

Suppose you didn't see anyone in the sky,
All women were not the ones you love;
You are disgraced by vanity,
And the world is a comma in a semi-sentence.

Suppose that the shadow was not
Your enemy in childhood,
And there is a Jinn on earth
Who reads the names.

Suppose the road does not end,
And that night is not the brother of sorrow;
Suppose she did not come,
And did not drink water.
Your bed is a street of words,
And you are devastated by abandonment.

Suppose you never drank the light,
Darkness was a way to the sun,
The book you are carrying now
Has walked to its owner,
And became a bird with two heads.

What will you do with the heart at night
When drowning calls?
And what will you write
A few seconds before the end?

Ahmad Al-Shahawy

DOGS PASS THROUGH MY FINGERS

Never ask again about the poem,
About me in the wind,
Nor about my image in the clouds.
Don't ask me about my book
Because I closed the ink factories;
I sold the paper stores to the fire
To satisfy its hunger.

Don't talk to me about dreams
That I raised in the bed of rest,
And when they grew up,
They denied me.
Nor about the boat which the fish
Chased in the Nile
Until rescued by a sleeping blue lily.
Nor about the dictionaries
That burdened me
And didn't save my languages
From their doom.
Don't talk to me about the shadows
Because I spent my life sitting
Under its trees,
To be as ascetic as my *sheikh
But I sold my illusions
To no one but me.

The sun has left its place in the house.
I was left with nothing but dust.
Even the mouse I thought
Run away from my cry,
Come back in a wolf's guise.
He gnawed what was in the rooms for me.

I am the only traveler
Without food or luggage,
No name for me,
No passport,
No road beckons at night,
No meaning leads to a sentence
That starts and ends with me.
No wind gives the sea
The freedom to die.

Silence has become an insulating wall.
It prevents people from asking me
About the dogs that pass
Through my fingers,
The crows that fill the streets
And I don't see them,
As if my eyes have lost their articulation,
And about Noah who didn't come.

continued overleaf...

DOGS PASS THROUGH MY FINGERS... *contd*

I only see my life as a sea
 The fish drank its water,
 And died of thirst.
 Death sleeps in my bed
 So that I didn't get tired of calling.
 It is closer than words that are not mine,
 Than a vein devoid of my blood,
 And music that climbs the walls
 To be strong in the battle
 Of ant armies in my brain.
 I lost myself in battles;
 I became a thousand people,
 And I wondered which one am I?
 I'm afraid to live in my mask
 It is ruthless,
 And it gets hard at nights.

Why do frogs sleep in water?
 And bats leave their homes to the trees?
 I got out of the corners and angles,
 Circles can no longer tolerate whispers,
 Those which hate obsessions and vanishing.
 It only knows the severity of points and lines.
 I'm the one who went to solid geometry
 To nurture the imagination of my head,
 But it betrayed me.
 And it spoke to strangers to rob me.
 Every time I leave a letter
 Unchecked here,
 It kicked me,

Every time I leave a space
 Between two lines here
 The devil slept in it.
 Whenever I forget a word
 Without Points
 It rained heavily.
 And the sky thundered with surahs
 "By the heaven, and At-Tariq
 "When the earth is shaken
 With its (final) earthquake....
 From the holy Quran

I run in the streets,
 It is as if I am on pilgrimage,
 Circumambulating around my head.
 No pilgrims behind
 But strangers continue to occupy me.

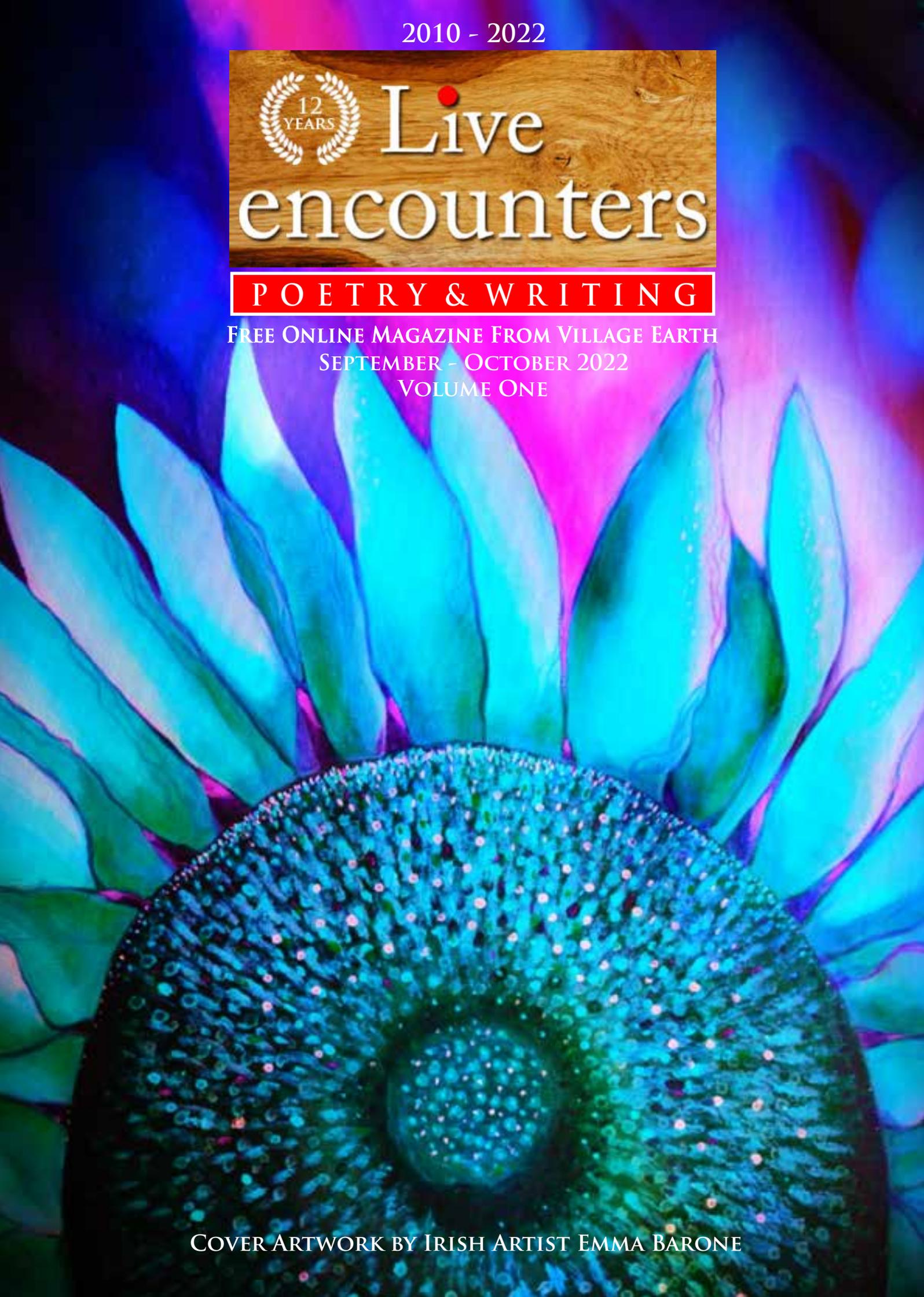
**Sheikh is a venerable man in Arabic Islamic countries*

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