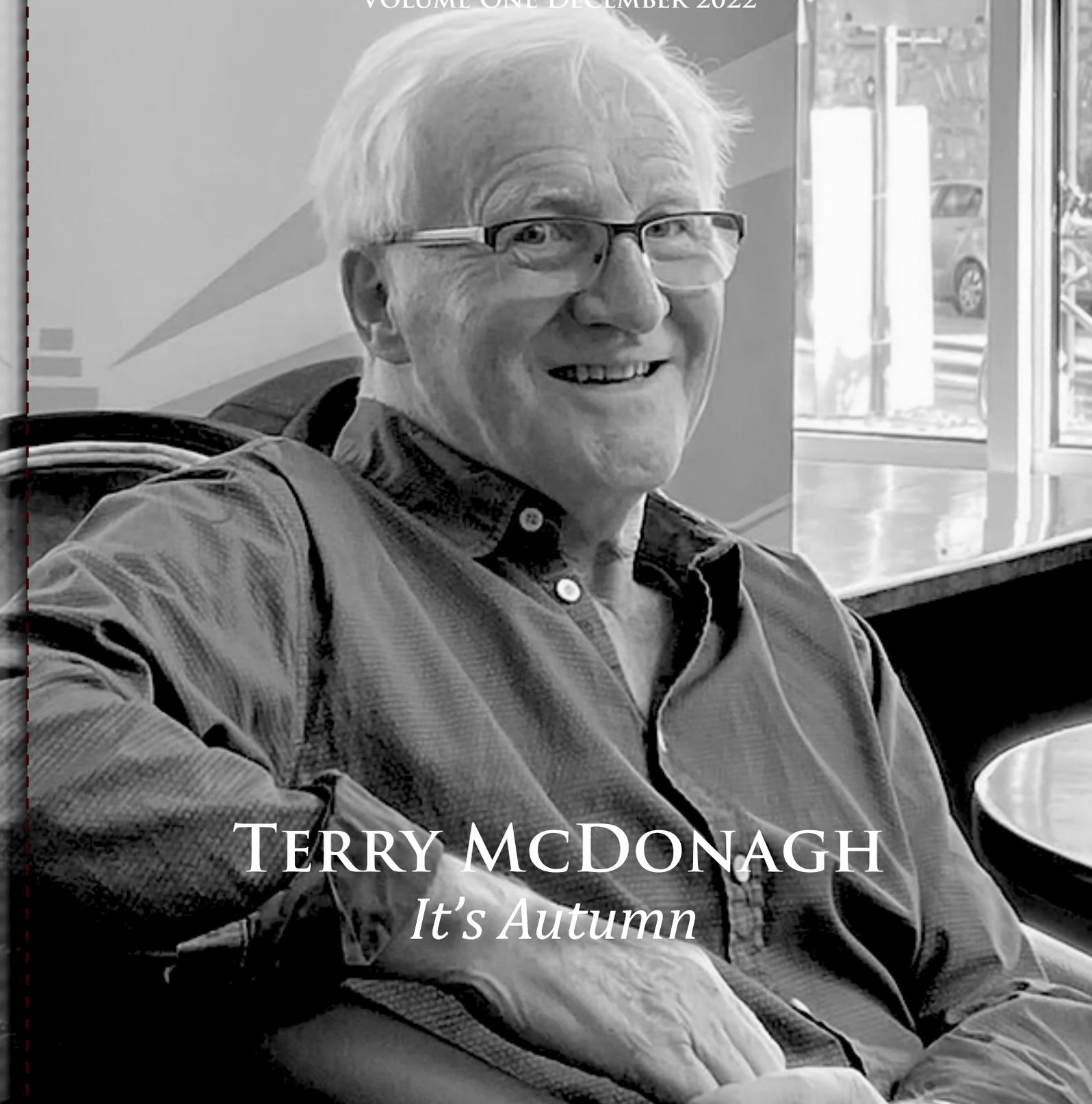


2010 - 2022



POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH  
VOLUME ONE DECEMBER 2022



TERRY MCDONAGH  
*It's Autumn*



©Mark Ulyseas

Boun Lai Heua Fai, fire boat festival, end of Buddhist Lent, Luang Prabang (Laos) celebrations, dragon made with bamboo and paper, illuminated by candles.  
Photograph by Mark Ulyseas 11th October, 2022.



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas  
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VOLUME ONE  
DECEMBER 2022

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*Book review* EVERY SLOW THING *by Daniel Lusk*  
DANIEL LUSK  
*Book release* FARTHINGS

Terry McDonagh, Irish poet and dramatist has worked in Europe, Asia and Australia. He's taught creative writing at Hamburg University and was Drama Director at Hamburg International School. 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, 'UGG by Degrees' is included in the Galway Poetry Trail 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' – published by Arlen House – September 2022. He returned to live in County Mayo in 2019. [www.terry-mcdonagh.com](http://www.terry-mcdonagh.com)



## TERRY MCDONAGH IT'S AUTUMN

It's autumn in Ireland. There's a nip in the air. Growth along the lane leading up to our house has almost come to a halt. Everything is tucking in and covering up in preparation for the months ahead. Blackberries, raspberries and berries of all sorts have had their turn. It's been a bumper harvest and we've had our fill. Meditation and a mild melancholy is in the air – it's the different shades of colour that fascinates. If only I could paint! In the words of Dylan Thomas: *oh easy for Leonardo*.

About this time of year, my father would, often, sit at the kitchen table with his cup of tea and say things like, you know, *I noticed an unusual shade of purple in the hedge over in the far field this morning...funny I've seen that now for the first time today*. He didn't say his words were special – that nature was his brother, but what he had to say, he said, without suggesting his words were poetry. For him it was all about rich, fleeting observations that fitted naturally into daily conversation as part of the enjoyment of a cup of tea after *the jobs* had been done. I'm sure those changing seasons and colours must have helped him run from melancholy and pounding moments that fell from the sky.

Terry McDonagh

From high up on *Lios Árd*, next to our house, in *Cill Aodáin*, I can see deep into the Yeats County of Sligo and when I turn and face in the opposite direction to County Galway, I cannot see but I can close my eyes to really see the Swans at Coole in autumn. We have the poet's words, *The Wild Swans at Coole*, to drink the purest of autumn air – to lean on words that cannot lie.

*The trees are in their autumn beauty.  
The woodland paths are dry.  
Under the October twilight the water  
Mirrors a still sky;  
Upon the brimming water among the stones  
Are nine-and-fifty swans.*

I seem to be caught up in the slow music of poetry this Sunday morning. Some lines from Pablo Neruda's beautiful poem, *Keeping Quiet*, seem so apt when time seems to tick and tick and what then! *For once on the face of the earth/let's not speak any language;/let's stop for a second/and not move our arms so much/Perhaps the earth can teach us/when everything seems dead/it later proves to be alive.*

Outside my window, the leaves on the chestnut tree are turning brown and I cannot change a thing. I wouldn't want to.

I'm reminded of Mary Oliver's poem,

### **Song for Autumn**

In the deep fall  
don't you imagine the leaves think how  
comfortable it will be to touch  
the earth instead of the  
nothingness of air and the endless  
freshets of wind? And don't you think  
the trees themselves, especially those with mossy,  
warm caves, begin to think  
of the birds that will come — six, a dozen — to sleep  
inside their bodies? And don't you hear  
the goldenrod whispering goodbye,

the everlasting being crowned with the first  
tuffets of snow? The pond  
vanishes, and the white field over which  
the fox runs so quickly brings out  
its blue shadows. And the wind pumps its  
bellows. And at evening especially,  
the piled firewood shifts a little,  
longing to be on its way.

Autumn, autumn – and then there was Samhain. It came at us like a flood of fear and excitement cascading down a sparkling waterfall long before America and commerce got its hands on it. In my childhood, my mother would light candles and place them on windowsills to welcome the spirits of our dead ancestors. She would say, *some spirits are lost and lonely tonight*. It was a bit eerie and scary, but when you're a child, eerie and scary are brilliant.

Of course, I didn't know October 31st into November 1st was the ending of the old year and the beginning of the New Year. The spirits of the living and the dead wandered freely and walked the earth, mingling for a time, on this night into morning. The spirits became visible to each other because the barriers between the 'other' world and the living disappeared.

I didn't know that was the central feast day in Ireland. I didn't realize it was celebration of death and life – the New Year began on November the 1st. If a spirit came back to take revenge on a wrongdoing of the living, the living would dress up to confuse the avenging spirit and, thus, escape consequences. Fearsome faces were shaped into turnips as we walked from house to house trying to scare each other. We loved dressing up for fun, anyway – trying to play tricks on each other.

And there were games too: *ducking* for apples in a basin of water, without using hands; trying to bite an apple hanging from the ceiling, with your hands behind your back. The barnbrack was special. It was bread with added sultanas and raising – and including a ring. The one to get the slice with the ring would be married first. There was mumming too where people went from door to door singing and playing song to the dead in exchange for cake. Animals got an extra portion and food was left out for straying spirits. The whole event was lovely, simple and it stretched way back into ancient, pre-Christian times.

As with many other ancient traditions, the Christian churches began to adopt these old rituals and make them their own. Samhain became Halloween or All Hallows' Eve – the evening before All Saints Day on November 1st and All Souls Day on November 2nd. The pre-Christian fires of celebration became the fires of those suffering in Purgatory, awaiting release.

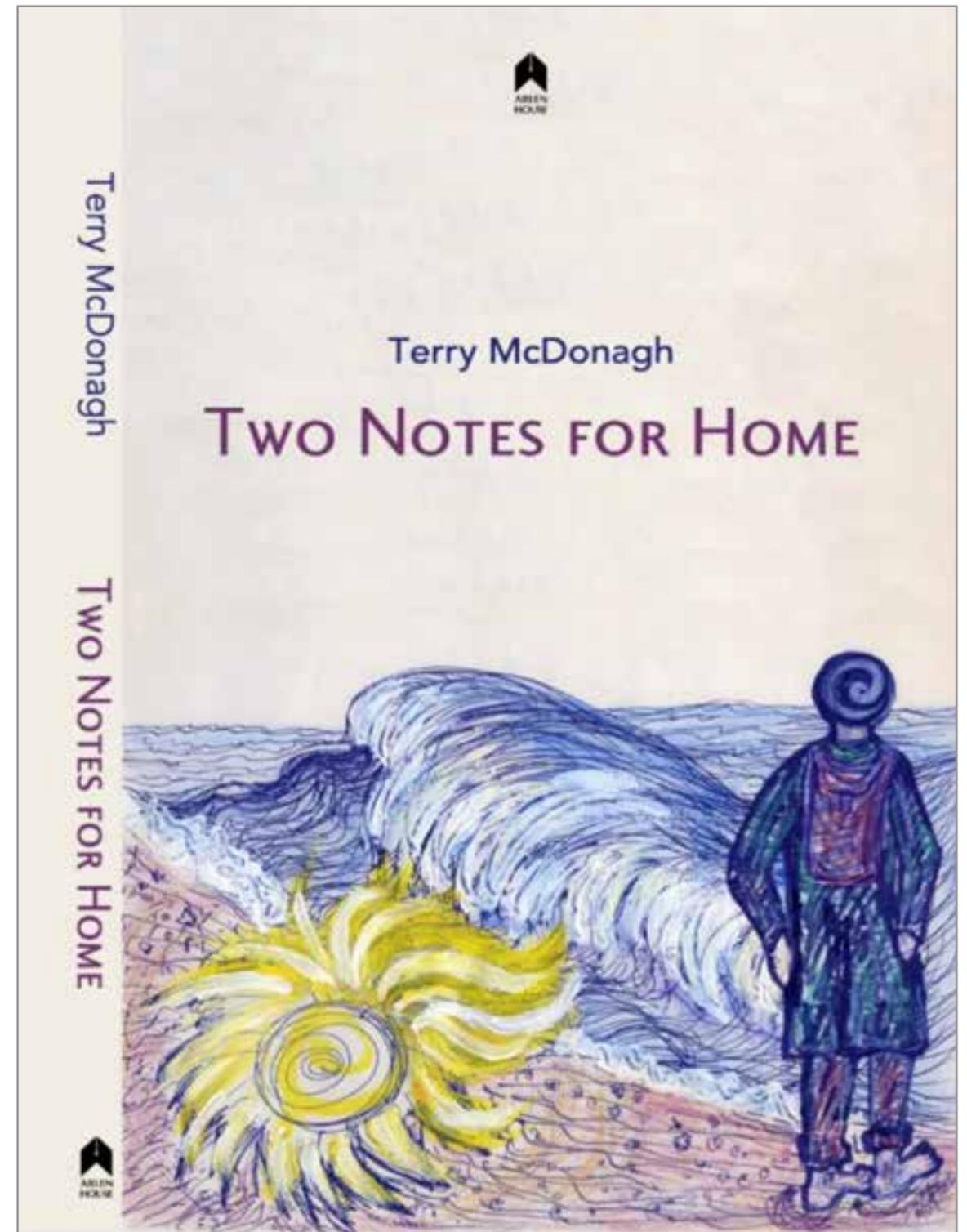
The Irish emigrated to America and took their traditions with them. America gradually too over and the old Celtic festival of Samhain became what it is today – a commercial racket with little or no awareness of its ancient pagan roots – a time when nature, seasons, gods and goddesses were feared, elevated, worshipped and celebrated.

And now, in autumn, as we move closer to November, the woods and fields look more tattered and rattled – uncertain of what's next. Some people still know that all living things are lining up for one of the most important feast days on nature's calendar.

A short autumn poem, by Emily Bronte to completes my piece:

*Fall, leaves, fall; die, flowers, away,  
Lengthen night and shorten day;  
Every leaf speaks bliss to me  
Fluttering from the autumn tree.  
I shall smile when wreaths of snow  
Blossom where the rose should grow;  
I shall sing when night's decay  
Ushers in a drearier day.*

*Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower – Albert Camus.*



Two Notes For Home by Terry McDonagh. Published by Arlen House. Available worldwide: Amazon; Book Depository; Syracuse University Press, New York; Kennys Galway; Arlen House and signed copies from Terry McDonagh: [terrymcdonagh.writer1@gmail.com](mailto:terrymcdonagh.writer1@gmail.com)

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*Thank you*  
**EMMA BARONE**  
 the Irish Artist who has  
 contributed 88 cover artworks  
 for *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* since March 2016.

Emma Barone is a contemporary visual artist based in Birr, Ireland. She makes still life and contemporary landscape paintings in acrylic on canvas. She studied animation and has an eclectic design background that ranges from interior design to architectural ceramics, and from kitchen design to jewellery design.

Barone's work has been featured in various publications including *The Irish Arts Review*, *Live Encounters Magazine*, *Senior Times*, *House and Home*, and the *Sunday Independent*; and she has published two books in collaboration with the Hennessy Award winning writer, *Eileen Casey*. Emma has exhibited extensively throughout Ireland, with 22 solo exhibitions under her belt along with a host of group shows, her work is in private and public collections including the Amsterdam World Trade Centre, Midlands Regional Hospital, Offaly County Council, Tullamore DEW Visitors Centre & The Irish Hospice Foundation.

All Emma's work is connected, People know her for her unique style of painting.

Strong colours, imagery and the way that they amalgamate are consistent in all her work, past and present. Elements of trees, water, space, sky, the microcosm of nature weren't intentional, they just appeared in the paintings as if there was a higher power at work. Her inspiration comes from actually doing the work along with the colour combinations and the way it all works together in creative harmony. Emma is currently studying *Expressive Arts Therapy* and hopes to integrate this into her practice.



Emma Barone

Alexis Rhone Fancher is published in *Best American Poetry*, *Rattle*, *Verse Daily*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Plume*, *Diode*, *Flock*, and elsewhere. She's authored nine poetry collections, most recently, *DUETS* (Small Harbor), *Junkie Wife* (Moon Tide Press), *The Dead Kid Poems* (KYSO Flash Press), *Stiletto Killer* (Edizione Italia) and *EROTIC: New & Selected* (NYQ Books). Her photographs are featured worldwide, including the covers of *Witness*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, and *Spillway*. A multiple Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, Alexis is poetry editor of *Cultural Daily*. [www.alexisrhonefancher.com](http://www.alexisrhonefancher.com)



## MEN, THE SAD GIRL'S LAMENT

I love men but I'm broken.  
I hoard them, buffers against lean times.  
Men are trash.  
I want them to suffer like I do.

I hoard them, buffers against lean times.  
Payback's a bitch.  
They should suffer like I do.  
I want them to die for love.

Payback's a bitch.  
Those times I've been undone by love.  
I want them to die for love.  
Those men who used me, spit me out.

Countless times I've been undone by love.  
I've loved so hard it nearly killed me.  
Those men who used me, spit me out.  
It's their turn.

I've loved so hard it killed me.  
Men aren't trash.  
But it's their turn.  
I love men but I'm broken.

Alexis Rhone Fancher. Self-portrait, 2021.

## ROOTS

Hair on the head of the dead girl kept growing. Dark roots sprouted, clutched at her delicate scalp, muddied the bleached tips, embarrassed her, one last time. *No*, Google says. *The hair doesn't grow; the body, deprived of moisture, begins imperceptibly, to shrink.* Like people do when they've lived too long. Like a man's cock does once he's come. Loses interest. Seeks a nap. A sandwich. Wants to do it again. The cops showed up before dawn. Lights and sirens everywhere. The whole neighborhood wide awake. When they knocked on my door I was ready, my bathrobe half-belted, a mug of French Roast steaming in my hand. *Coffee, Officer?* (My mother always said, you never know when you'll meet your one true love, so always look your best; make coffee!) *Yes, Officer, yes, I heard the screams.* The cop was all ears. *Screams? Plural?* he asked. *Yes. And loud enough to wake the dead,* I said. *Male? Female?* I considered. *High-pitched. Female, if I had to guess, although, you know.* I gave him a look. When he asked me if I saw anyone else, I lied. When he asked me why I hadn't called it in, I shrugged. *Lately, things around here are going to the dogs,* I admitted. *But what's that got to do with me?* No one made me the head of neighborhood watch. I have things to do. I have a busy life. ("Good fences make good neighbors," my mom used to say.) So when they came home, I ignored my neighbor's screams. Closed my windows. Pulled down the blinds. I'd seen her come home before, two or three in the morning, bedraggled, spent. Seen her tumble out of her Mercedes and drag ass up the stairs, followed by her latest loser.

Tonight, illumined by the porch light, I saw him crush her against the front door, his mouth hungry. I imagined his tongue down her throat, the moan she made when he fingered her. I confess, I wanted to be that girl, wasted, wanton, that man's hands on my breasts, his cock between my thighs. I watched as she extracted herself from his grip, maneuvered inside. Watched her date slip in after her. Saw the lights go on. Then off. Then on again, around 4 am. About when I heard the screams. I sped to the window in time to see my neighbor, half-naked, press her face against the kitchen windows, then slip down out of sight, saw her lover slink out the door, fade into the night. I wondered if the man was still lurking, or if he'd left for good. If he did come back, maybe I'd have a chance with him. I watched from my doorway as the medics rolled my neighbor out on a gurney, a white sheet pulled up over her face but not her head. Her hair, spiked and defiant, those black roots a dead giveaway.

## UNDENIABLE SIGNS OF HOMICIDAL VIOLENCE

I'd never have guessed from the looks of him: tall, clear-skinned, elegant. Wardrobe straight out of G.Q. A whiff of patchouli in his wake, meant to keep a woman off guard. And such kind eyes! A devastating shade of blue. Arctic, is how I think of them now, but back then they were piercing. Intense. Words I use to lie to myself when I can't face the dirty truth about someone I'd like to fuck. It always starts out fine, right? My new love ticks all the boxes, performs those courtship ploys girls are taught to desire. The stock seduction scenarios men use to bait, hook, and then - let wiggle on that hook until she's beat down, compliant. Or dead. I'm trying to conjure the chum, the shift, the sharp pull on the line that reeled me in. Snuffed me out. Why? What changed? I'm doing research, watching countless episodes of *ID Obsession*, *The First 48*, and *Forensic Files*. Going back over every misstep. Taking copious notes. The segue that men do once they're sure you can't live without them? Is it something the woman does or says that starts her down the denigration path? Ever since I let him move in with me, eat at my table, share my bed, the relationship's downhill. *I love you, baby*, he says, but no more civilities, opening doors, rubbing my feet, doing the dishes after supper. Now, each day he gets shorter with me. Cruel. *Aren't you finished grieving yet?* he asked a week after my best friend died. *She's not coming back. Get over it!* I chalk up his callousness to a horrible childhood, a single mom with serial boyfriends who beat him. How he ran away at sixteen, did a stint in juvie, and found Jesus, had him tattooed on his chest. Yesterday, I discovered him scrolling through my phone. Delete. Delete. Delete. Now at restaurants, he orders for me. The diet plate. *Gotta watch your weight, babe,* he says, winks broadly at the waitress. When I ask him what's changed, he explains he's *just settling in*.

That I should get used to it. *Man is king of his castle*, he says. *I am your king*. He quits his job, plays video games all day and night. Starts drinking at 9 am, in time to watch Wayne Brady on *Let's Make a Deal*. What happened to the man I fell for? These days I do nothing right, berated for the least transgression. So when he knocks me around, tells me it's *for your own good*, I believe it. When he snuffs out my words with his hand over my mouth I quit talking. And when he pummels me in my sleep one night when he comes home drunk, again, I let him. I must deserve it. When the gun is missing from my night stand drawer, I bust out a window, tell the police there's been a break-in, no idea as to the perpetrator. And when my beloved shoots me four times with my own gun, I play dead. *I'll kill you, and then I'll kill me*, he'd promised, those blue eyes sincere. But he lied. He wiped the gun, put it in my right hand. Like I'd shot myself four times, lived to tell the tale.

Alisa Velaj was shortlisted for the annual international Erbacce-Press Poetry Award in UK in June 2014. Her work has been published in over 100 international online forums, printed magazines and anthologies across many countries (USA, UK, Sweden, Australia, Israel, India). Velaj is the author of the poetry book "With no sweat at all", (Carvena Barva Press, 2021), translated into the English by Ukë Buçpapaj. In 2020, she won The National Prize in Poetry, awarded by the Albanian Ministry of Culture.

English translation by Ukë ZENEL Buçpapaj

## SOULS

Wounded seagulls  
Wandering  
About waters

The sky covering  
in sea sadness...



Alisa Velaj

## THE LOTUS EATERS

We started the celebration party  
With the golden calf on the table

We all spoke  
The same language

After supper  
We forgot all what we had eaten

In the garden the first cock  
Cracked dawn for the third time

## THE WATER'S DEATHS

The water never passes away  
Only glances do die  
At the dawn of the day  
A dawn is a dawn  
For it quenches its hunger and thirst  
by becoming pregnant with glances

And resurrects amidst  
the water's strange deaths...



Anne Casey

A native of west Clare in Ireland, Anne Casey is an award-winning Sydney-based poet/writer and author of five poetry collections. A journalist, magazine editor, media communications director and legal author for 30 years holding senior positions in government and the private sector, Anne's writing is widely published and anthologised, ranking in leading national daily newspaper, *The Irish Times*' Most Read. She has won literary prizes in Ireland, the UK, the USA, Canada, Hong Kong, India and Australia, most recently *American Writers Review 2021*, the *Henry Lawson Poetry Prize 2022* and *iWoman Global Award for Literature*. She has been nominated for *The Pushcart Prize* and shortlisted for the *Red Room Poetry Fellowship*. Senior Poetry Editor of *Other Terrain* and *Backstory* literary journals (Swinburne University) from 2017 to 2020, Anne has served on numerous literary advisory boards and as Vice President of *Voices of Women* arts alliance. She is a founding member of the Prankqueans, a women's arts collective, twice commended in NSW Parliament for their cultural contribution in Australia. Anne is the recipient of an Australian Government scholarship and a bursary for her PhD in Creative Writing at UTS where she researches and teaches. @1annecasey

## SEASON'S GREETINGS

We have left  
the wettest November on record,  
crossed the invisible threshold of December.

Small blunt-edged stars  
string plastic jollity from  
the frangipani—still  
refusing to bloom.  
The flamingo lily  
has sprung a single  
shrivelled bloodshot aureole,  
the first Christmas beetle  
belly-up in a puddle  
at its feet.

In a rare outburst yesterday, the dog  
launched feet-first yelping at the fence.  
A crash high in the palm while I ventured  
to investigate, loyal hound quivering at my shin,  
as a massive snake clattered through fronds  
to the ground, arrow head held high,  
olive back zigzagging over sandstone—  
a flash of yellow underbelly  
as it vanished through  
a gap in the fence.

An hour after, the dog  
had returned outside:  
nose twitching skyward,  
dropping to the landing site  
then mapping the winding trail  
to the snake's exit point. Over and over,  
his small head followed the same course  
while he stood planted under the palm.  
Next day, he was there replaying it again.

*continued overleaf..*

SEASON'S GREETINGS *...contd*

I might talk of portents,  
how we are stuck on repeat  
as omicron cases double every two days,  
our Health Minister warning of blistering records  
to come—our 'other' home, family again on the wrong side  
of a closed border, but for now, I have turned my gaze  
to a rare break—blue sky spilling sunlight, branches thick  
with shining green stars, wattles decked in golden garlands,  
where the first cicadas of summer are chirping  
their song of freedom from the bogged earth.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

## CONVERSATIONS WITH MY FATHER

The dying sun is sketching  
 the neighbour's trees  
 in charcoal on our bedroom wall

in a last surge of pale amber  
 as I follow my father between  
 pots of gold, purple, fuchsia

and flaming orange,  
 the small brown wren hopping  
 ahead, his ancient  
 ginger cat grumbling  
 over his missing breakfast,

sunlight flaring between  
 fistfuls of vigorous foliage  
 as he shows me his bounty of strawberries—  
*Never mind the earwigs*  
 he is saying as he plucks a pocketful for *Catriona*  
*up the road: the children love them*  
*with a sprinkle of sugar—*  
 and *They keep the slugs at bay, aphids too,*

the earwigs I realise as he ambles  
 to the tangle of blackcurrant bush,  
 draws back the emerald curtain  
 to reveal clusters of darkening orbs—  
 the blackbirds are busy looting  
 further in, he tells me:

*Let them have their fill,*  
 drawing me past the swell  
 of wild roses as I lean in to inhale  
 the scent of nothing,  
 gasp obligingly at the grace  
 -ful sweep of his ivory lilies:  
*I'll bring some to your mother*  
*when I go to weed the grave,*

as I dutifully inspect the ripening apricots,  
 grapes thronging the shrivelling vines,  
 chirp brightly as I find myself

drifting

from room to room in our dark house  
 with him  
 beaming from my palm.

## THE STILLNESS OF DYING

hangs over every room in the house.  
Outside, a thousand ponderous drops  
glint from rain-bloated foliage,  
the monstera deep green now,  
fronds poised like over-sized ears.

My son's beloved  
spiny leaf insect  
has been losing her grip  
for a week, unwilling to leave  
his warm palm when  
he gently lifts her back  
into the lower branches,  
where she will come  
to no harm each time she falls—  
until now, when we lay her  
on a small bed of leaves  
in the moist dirt,  
the dark orbs of her eyes  
following us, her pearly  
peach cheeks,  
apricot abdomen  
and coral petal-wings  
vividly belying  
her decline.

Since early morning,  
her sister has come to cling  
an inch above her  
downcast face,  
front legs joined around  
her bowed head, to linger  
all day and through the night:  
a hint there may be a whole world  
of attachment beyond  
our narrow understanding.

We will plant her under the Eucalypt  
whose wide sweeping arms still  
feed her small brood,  
and leave  
with the mystery  
of her  
and all  
she left us.

Anni Wilton-Jones, a resident of Co Mayo, has also lived in Wales, England and Saudi Arabia. Having experienced a varied range of careers she is now retired and concentrating on her writing and her photography. A writer of poetry and prose, she has read in Wales, England, the USA and Ireland. Her collections include *Bridges*, *Winter Whiting*, *Moth* (a chapbook about abuse, written under the pen-name Victoria Tims) and *Put On Your Thinking Cap* (a chapbook of photographs and poems for children). She currently leads Pen & Ink, a Mayo writers' group and reads with the Hermit Collective. Having recently experienced a severe acute illness, which called a halt to her writing, she dates her period of recovery from when she felt able to write again



## TROLLEY CAMP

an oriental torture  
garish overhead light  
chatter and bustle  
– daytime levels  
at well beyond midnight

and when utter exhaustion  
gives promise of relief  
a three a.m. stress booster

I.V. antibiotics and E.C.G  
in conspiracy against  
the torment's cessation

desperate remedy  
wearing my peaked cap  
to block light, if not sound  
allows a scant three hours  
of blessed rest

destroyed  
for good  
by seven o'clock chaos

plus shocked declaration  
of raised temperature  
and urgent application  
of appropriate meds

Good morning, Campers  
Hi-di-hi!

Anni Wilton-Jones

## ENERGISER

*for Ben*

He sees me  
as human  
thinking person  
not just patient

tells me of his trip  
to Wales and beyond

listens to my poem  
face serious  
above the concealing mask

and lifts me  
out of here  
into tomorrow  
and a return  
to normality.

## RETURNING

Now that I am active again  
- unable to stop writing  
I see just how ill I was  
and for how long a time

brain functions at basic  
all wires tuned to fight  
even digestion being  
too much wasted effort

the skill involved in guiding pen  
and thinking, simultaneously  
too tense; so side-lined, put on hold  
until all else was well

visual disturbances, momentary lapses  
ashen face and swollen limbs - now history  
my pencil and my writing-covered pages  
symbolising my returning health.

Bernadette Gallagher is a widely published poet from Donegal living in County Cork, Ireland. [bernadettegallagher.blogspot.ie](http://bernadettegallagher.blogspot.ie)



## MY LOVE

My love, you are my last and only one,  
I belonged to another until you came along.  
The ring was on my finger, all glitter and gold.

I sized you, one with the other,  
gold weighed more and weighed me down,  
your offering was in your smile.

We set up home, dug deep and sowed  
your signet ring to me  
into the dark earth.

Each year we eat the fruit, seeds burst  
on our tongues — we smile with our eyes  
planted on one another.

Our little one now grown tall  
his home by the river  
amongst hazels and birds of the night.

My love, you are my last and only one,  
we belong to one another until our time  
is done.

Bernadette Gallagher

## OUTSIDE IN

Water makes its way from higher land  
groove in the earth, a miniature riverbed.

Silt on the roadway outside our gate —  
further down, a torrent gushing through veins.

Tortoiseshell butterfly creeps along the floorboards,  
awakened out of torpor by heat from room and winter sun.

Hatched from a late July egg under the wings of the stinging nettle,  
metamorphoses from caterpillar, pale green with skin

to a pupa hanging like a leaf —

into a butterfly dressed in orange, yellow, and black  
bordered with jewels of blue.

Nine months is its lifecycle,  
ours just beginning.



Photo credit: <https://pixabay.com>

Breda Wall Ryan lives in Co. Wicklow. She has M.Phil. in Creative Writing (Distinction) from Trinity College, Dublin. Her short stories have won prizes, but in recent years she has concentrated on poetry. Individual poems have won the Yeats Poetry Contest, Poets Meet Painters, Dromineer Poetry Competition and Over the Edge New Writer of the Year. She was selected for Poetry Ireland Introductions Series, 2014 and was awarded Second Place in the Patrick Kavanagh Award, a Third Prize in The Rialto/RSPB Nature Poetry Competition, and was shortlisted for a Bridport Prize. Nominated several times for a Pushcart Prize, Forward Prize and Best of the Net Award, she won the Gregory O'Donoghue International Poetry Competition, 2015 and the Dermot Healey International Poetry Award in 2017. She has been awarded bursaries by Wicklow Arts, The Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon and the Heinrich Boll Association Achill, and residencies at Ty Newedd, Wales; Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Co Monaghan; Cill Rialaig Arts Centre in Kerry and Heinrich Boll Cottage on Achill. *In a Hare's Eye*, her first collection from Doire Press, won a Shine/Strong Award. *Raven Mothers*, also Doire Press, appeared in 2018. Focussed on the environment and social justice, she is finalising her third collection, due 2023.



## DUSK

Fuchsia bells drip nectar,  
bees fly hiveward in thinned light.

Bats in meagre skies  
hoover up moths and midges.

I remember bright buttercup, dandelion,  
cuckoo pint, sweet clover, vetch and trefoil;  
poppy and rosebay willow for mellow mood.

This was my favourite field.  
And now?

Rooks tear out divots, feast on leatherjackets.  
Pheasants roost in alder, above nightfox reach.  
Hedgehogs crunch snails by the compost heap.

The ride-on mower tames wild grasses to lawn.  
A John Deere rumbles past, scalping August hedges.  
Lights startle small birds into song.

Snarls of motorway traffic trouble the dusk.  
A hidden landfill reeks of decay.

Outside of memory,  
can the meadow survive?

Breda Wall Ryan

## WE BATTLED CORPORATE PROFIT

When the future is here,  
say we let maverick seed blow in  
from the countryside,  
let the lawn grow, dandelion suns  
stud the garden, feeding early bees.

And daisies!  
Long chains threaded among cuckoo-pint,  
clover and meadowsweet.  
Tell how we countered Big Pharma  
with feverfew and self-heal.

Say we foraged for vetch, sorrel  
and juicy hawthorn leaves.  
Tell how we fermented wine  
from sloe and wild cherry,  
toasted success with elderflower champagne.

We grew stonefruit and berries,  
made sure the birds got their share,  
and their share of insects  
and worms fattened  
on lush homegrown leaves, pesticide-free.

Tell how we followed guidelines,  
turned the thermostat down,  
cut our air miles to zero,  
took to the cycle lanes, wrapped warm  
in patched, pre-owned clothes.

When the future comes,  
say we battled corporate profit,  
championed old, tried-and-true ways.  
Tell Earth, though seas rise and she's burning,  
we go on. We swear we will save her.

## THE MEADOW IN WINTER

sleeps under a blanket of cold.  
A ball of wrens huddle in a branch-fork,  
taking turns in the cozy core.

A bird-cherry in the hedge lets her last leaf go.  
Buds sheathed against frost-sting,  
she flaunts thoughts of blossomy fronds  
against tender spring green.

Frogs sunk deep in pond mud  
hold hoarse mating songs in throats  
that blow bubbles to break still water,  
betraying their hiding place.

Under the bird feeder, seeds dream  
wheat spears in fissures,  
sparrow-shelled sunflower hearts  
nudge into frozen ground.

Field mice tunnel tussocked grass,  
planning early litters  
of pink, hairless mouselets,  
they shape secret nests.

Winter is the meadow's dreamtime,  
the place where she sleeps herself awake.

Doreen Duffy MA with first class honours in Creative Writing at DCU, she studied creative writing and poetry at NUIM, UCD and at Oxford online. Doreen has been published internationally, in Poetry Ireland Review by Eavan Boland, Washing Windows Too, Arlen House, Beyond Words Literary Magazine (Germany), The Galway Review, Flash Fiction (USA), Live Encounters (Indonesia), The Woman's Way and The Irish Times. She won The Jonathan Swift Award and was presented with The Deirdre Purcell Cup at the Maria Edgeworth Literary Festival. Shortlisted in The RTE Short Story Competition (in memory of Francis MacManus) and her story 'Tattoo' was broadcast on RTE Radio One. [https://twitter.com/doreen\\_duffy13](https://twitter.com/doreen_duffy13) <http://doreenduffy.blogspot.com/>



Doreen Duffy

## HOW TO PRESS A ROSE

I google 'How to press a flower'  
a sunflower fills the screen

This star shaped flower  
petals spread like an open hand  
bring me back to the image on the news  
fingers immersed in dust grasp  
and scrape among the rubble  
for someone's wife, a child, a mother

'How to press a flower'  
'Pick all the petals off,  
lay them out face down  
like soldiers,'

The TV continues to spatter  
dystopian scenes of the darkest opera  
the barbarity of its sole composer  
buried in every image

I leave the room to breathe  
when I return  
framed behind the glass  
this city, this country in black and white  
women and children walking towards borders  
a hollow caustic scene  
The thorns that remain clutched tight  
cause my skin to bleed, the people I see, become my own

My mother walks across the screen  
Her knotted hand clutches her scarf  
her bewildered eyes searching  
My child muffled in her warmest coat  
the skin of the rose in my hand her velvet collar

*continued overleaf..*

HOW TO PRESS A ROSE *...contd*

Her feet sweep through all our photos and memories  
 littered on our floor  
 My son, eighteen yesterday, clutches her to him  
 just once  
 And then, he turns to me, his eyes already reflect the fight  
 seventeen years evaporate  
 he goes to join the other teenage boys  
 teenage boys with kissing mouths  
 drawn into hard lines  
 A dog that doesn't understand  
 Why his human boards the train  
 And leaves him there alone  
 Strains on the rope that keeps him there

There is lace over the trees over the screen  
 billows of smoke over a hidden thing  
 Slanted rain washes birds from the sky  
 their screams a painful slide on a guitar string  
 A flame shoots across the sky  
 at a hundred beats a minute  
 A coin flicks in the air  
 it spins and all eyes below roll  
 A cluster of clouds in the sky  
 form a star

My red rose  
 has turned brown  
 the petals curl away  
 the stem still strong  
 holds its heavy head  
 weeping,  
 the colour drains away

## THREE GRAINS OF SAND

A sliver of moon  
 an ivory harpoon  
 pierces the heavens above,

Drops fall  
 red and full  
 staining the sands  
 while  
 time ticks  
 slowly by,

Faces covered  
 Some by hands,  
 that cannot bear to see,  
 The loss of life  
 in what should be  
 their safest place to be  
 Three grains of sand  
 slip through life's hands  
 even the stars turn away

Eamonn Lynskey is a poet and essayist whose work has appeared in leading magazines and journals, including Senior Times, Cran-nóg, Poetry Ireland Review, Cyphers magazine and The Irish Times. His fourth collection, *Material Support*, is due from Salmon Poetry.



## EVERYTHING MUST GO

Who had the heart to give away  
these decorated tumblers? Not  
regret the loss of this fine lamp?  
Of these exquisite figurines  
of shepherd boys and shepherdesses?  
Surely there are necks would wear  
these multicoloured necklaces?

The shelving bends with paperbacks,  
and knick-knacks congregate in corners,  
coats and jackets crowd the aisles  
awaiting their deliverance –  
like those poor souls in Purgatory  
for whom we once were told our prayers  
would gain a merciful release.

Theologies today are cool  
about that region Dante painted  
in such torrid colours but  
the owner of this shop is not  
so *Good News Bible* as he is  
*Old Testament Jehovah*, fond  
of fire and Judgments Final – Look:

out back, his plastic bags of stuff  
that lingered too long on the rack.  
Redemption here comes not through prayer  
but ready cash. This cap, for instance,  
shows the scars of wear but yet  
still cuts a dash. Deserves reprieve.  
Three Euro? Yes. I'll take it.

Eamonn Lynskey

## SELFIE

Wedge inside the morning crush  
I read across a shoulder: *POPSTAR  
CELEBRATES HIS BIRTHDAY. FIREMEN  
RESCUE KITTEN FROM A TREE* –  
and jammed between the horoscopes  
and hair restorers (guaranteed):  
the grainy image of a dawn  
three hundred million miles away.

The camera arm has twisted back  
to photograph the landing craft  
that gleams despite its seven months  
of surfing on the infinite,  
while in the corner of the shot  
and barely struggling into view  
a landscape strewn with regolith  
is waking under russet skies.

We hurtle underneath the Thames  
from London Bridge to Baker Street,  
imprisoned in the warp of space,  
the granularity of time  
that scores and shapes the universe ...  
but now the page is turned again –  
I scan the TV lists and – Yes!  
We're *DANCING WITH THE STARS* tonight!

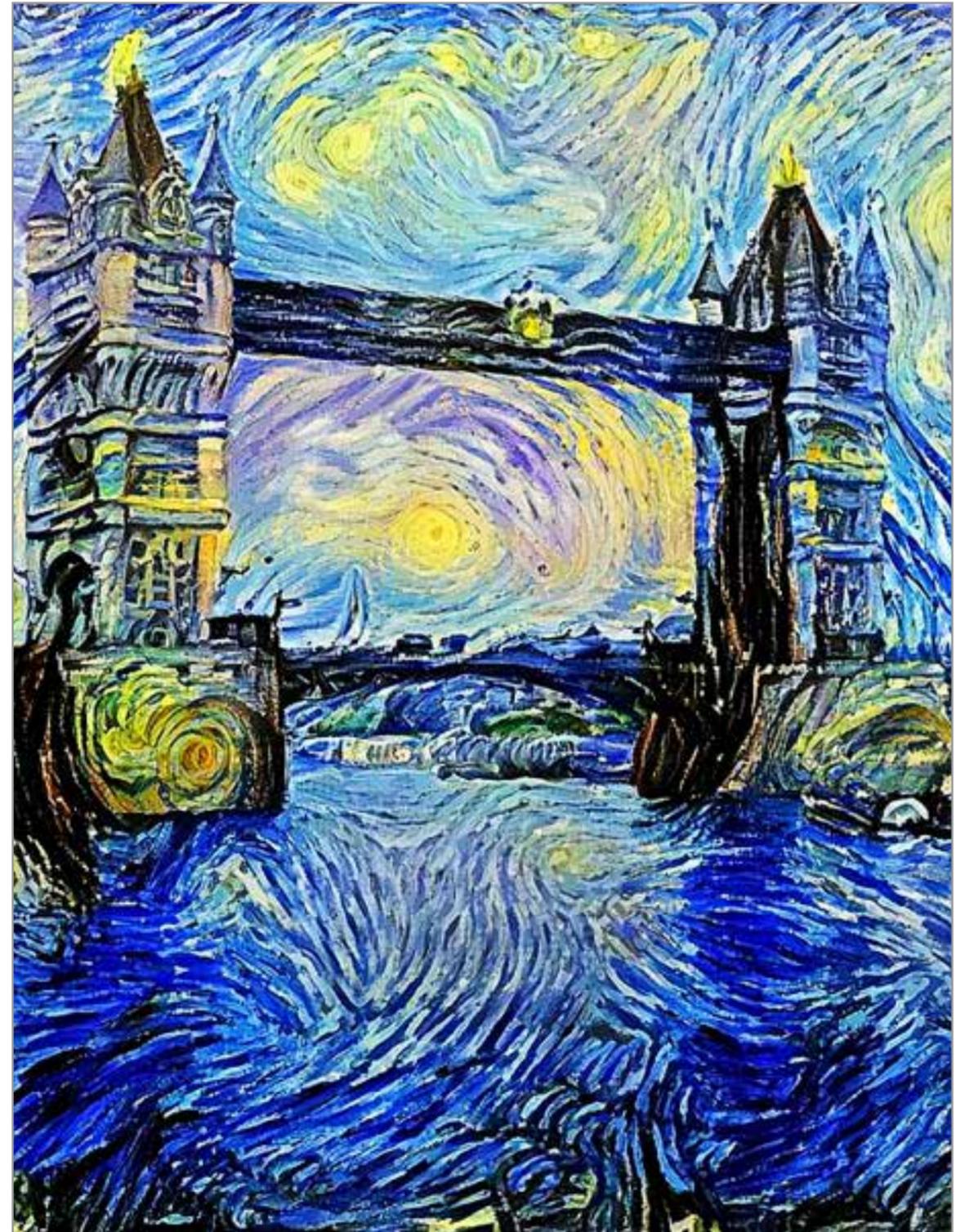


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Born in Belfast in 1951, Fred Johnston has published nine collections of poetry, his most recent is 'Rogue States,' (Salmon Poetry 2019.) Co-founded the Irish Writers' Co-operative in the 'Seventies with Neil Jordan and Peter Sheridan and the annual CUIRT literature festival in Galway in 1986. In 2004, he was appointed writer-in-residence to the Princess Grace Irish Library at Monaco. He has written and published poetry in French and received a Prix de l'Ambassade in 2002. Two collections of short stories have been published, one in French, and three novels. Recent poetry has appeared in The Guardian, The Spectator, The New Statesman, The Irish Times, STAND, The Financial Times among other publications. He lives in Galway, Ireland.



## THE RUSSIAN VERSION

This hotel lobby's had a make-over  
 Since I was here with Alyona talking of Tolstoi over coffee and biscuits  
 She looked as tidy and colourful as a child's doll  
 A gift for a child plucked from the yellow light of a Duty-Free window  
 We never met again

She took something I'd written and  
 With impressive, cautious efficiency, read it back to me in Russian  
 And made it sound much grander, much better  
 Than it was. I remember the word for a garden, сад, sounds like *sad*  
 That's what she told me

She read like a girl tending flowers  
 What I'd written wasn't mine anymore, it was hers, I let it go  
 When she folded the page it turned into a white bird  
 Tucking away its wings in the small white nest of her hands  
 And it began to rain

Against the gangly tall windows  
 Making a sound between a hiss and a whisper, a breathing sound  
 And the lobby lights shaped like elegant candles  
 Fluttered on. Alyona was not made for that room, or cold rain  
 Blowing on tall windows.

Fred Johnston

## THE READERS

Lodge in café doorways  
 Or at metal tables silvering the sun  
 Blinding the scanning eye:  
 Draining coffee cups to oracular circles  
 They have navigated the world  
 Before lunchtime,  
 Or have left it beyond the kerb  
 In a ruction of traffic loading, unloading  
 Pitching and hauling –

And then comes the crossword  
 With its demand for attention,  
 Thesaurus like a Torah, holy and  
 Deep-instructing; each square is a  
 Cipher and underneath meaning the act  
 Of graphing the letter. Then there is  
 A map and tomorrow's weather,  
 Whorls like God's thumb-print  
 Covering the known world -

Yet I have read and read again  
 The birthing, marrying and killing of men  
 In columns and lines often syntactically  
 Wrong, and have not yet understood  
 What reading does. Time's ink.

## A BRIDGE ON THE CÔTE D'AZUR

A girdered road bridge like any other  
 This one hunched in its silence  
 Like something predatory. We'd stopped for lunch.

Not so much because of it, but the heat  
 Had pushed us about like a tide, we'd had enough  
 Of the *Promenade des Anglais* and *Vieille Ville*

Effervescent blue sea-light strung in the air  
 Like a sheet. Here were back-roads  
 Tree-thick sandpaper slopes so green they were black.

We parked the rented car, a stir of yellow dust -  
 And there was the bridge,  
 Red-ironed, miraged, clamped rock to rock.

It was itself and more, a possibility  
 Like someone's beckoning from a door, or  
 A needed thing mislaid, like spectacles, or a key.

Through the camera's viewfinder it looked  
 Imperfectly right, an angled accident set up  
 Sure of itself, pure to perspective, a willed harmony -

Walking from its far side, a man in earnest  
 There like a mote on the lens,  
 Hurrying but coming no closer, a strung thing

As if disarticulate, unjoined, loose  
 Like a shirt flapping or a flame -  
 Or a sketch, an idea penciled in the blue air.

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 and in *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* March 2022 and September-October 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.



## COMPASSION

As my friend spoke to me,  
she began to weep. I saw tears  
move down her face, leaving  
wet lines, one line and then

another, each shining softly.  
Her sadness, as though it was  
mine, tore me.  
Someone else, glancing over,

thought to bring tissues.  
She spoke about her anger  
toward her children,  
how it frightened her.

A man described his Buddhist  
teacher. “All his life,  
he wanted to show others  
a way to step forth

in their inner goodness,  
to show themselves  
as they are.” The man wept,  
thinking about his teacher.

A man drowned puppies in  
a large fish tank, one  
and then another, forcing his  
young son to watch. He said he

was teaching his son about  
death. So the man was in trouble  
with the law, and the  
story was in the news.

*continued overleaf...*

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Fred Everett Maus

COMPASSION *...contd*

The days were shorter and cooler.  
Nights were cold.  
In the morning, I thought the trees  
were more beautiful now, wet branches

shining in pale sunlight.  
A few yellow leaves still  
held to the trees, gleaming  
above piles of wet yellow.

I was alone. It was dark.  
I played soft chords,  
one and then another,  
at the piano. I felt

the wholeness of each chord,  
as though this music could  
hold and soothe pain,  
as though these sounds might

take pain away.  
Later I thought  
the gentle sounds distracted  
and confused me.

## MOORING

I needed to *send them away*,  
fondly, with one pithy touch,

each hand-made paper boat, edging  
a night-time lake, each crisp faint craft

bedecked with tiny pencil lines, a fragment  
of story or song, precisely formed, the lines

blurry where the water slurs them, dulled as  
darkness advances, almost unreadable, prized,

scented with love, pain, longing, hate.  
I needed to *see each one* through the dark,

not look away, a flare of clarity, and then  
a finger nudge would send it

off to invisible. To gone. The tricky part  
was finger control,

to push and not pull, and above all not  
to clasp and crumple, worthless but still mine.

## MISSING TWIN

I never think about him.  
I know things about him.  
For years on end, I forget about him.  
He lived in cities, and he was  
comfortable after dark, and it was  
easy for him to meet people,  
with many of whom he had dazzling sex.

My twin brother did a lot of things.  
Some people looked down on him.  
Nothing ever bothered him.  
Warm, quick to like others, he was  
quick to drop anyone who disapproved—  
not angry, he just  
lost interest, became unrelated.

Then, my twin brother died.  
I'm not sure when.  
My family never acknowledged him.  
I was not told of his existence, and  
I don't believe he lived, though  
I know that he did, and I long  
to have met him.

I still want to meet him.  
Probably, I would love him a lot.  
Maybe we would be lovers.  
He liked to dress simply, in jeans  
and t-shirts, showing  
his body, thin, well-shaped,  
natural, wiry.

I am wary of him.  
I would be afraid to see him.  
He is distant, but kind.  
I don't remember when I first  
knew he existed, but when I  
think of him, my own reality  
trembles a little.

I think he knows about me.  
But who knows.  
His mind moves so fast.  
I remember I was lost, addled,  
wandering in an old dark building,  
endless, stale, and he was  
there too, somewhere.

After puberty, I was a boy.  
Before, I was a girl.  
This simple fact was beautiful.  
I knew I was a girl when I read  
*Alice in Wonderland*,  
when I read about Dorothy in Oz,  
when I played with my friends.

She was not my mother.  
She was a powerful witch.  
I had been stolen.  
I was terrified when she read me  
a book about a kidnapped  
boy, his feigned family – would she  
see that I knew?

*continued overleaf...*

## MISSING TWIN *...contd*

Later, I forgot everything.  
 She was not a witch any more.  
 I was never a girl.  
 Only then did I start to remember  
 my beautiful twin brother,  
 and to long for him to take  
 care of me, and I of him.

I know nothing about his life.  
 I know about his body, just like mine.  
 I will never be able to touch it.  
 I wish I understood what kind  
 of effort – praying, dreaming,  
 disciplines of sacrifice –  
 could bring him to me.

Did we make love, once, he and I?  
 I am trying to remember.  
 All I remember is tenderness.  
 Though we hardly knew each other,  
 our same bodies, naked,  
 knew each other's needs  
 completely.

I searched in the newspapers.  
 Surely his death was noted.  
 But so many had died.  
 I was still a girl.  
 How could I forget that?  
 I was in a meadow, sunlit.  
 I didn't know where to look.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Geraldine Mills is the author of five collections of poetry, three of short stories and two children's novels. She is the recipient of many awards including the Hennessy New Irish Writer Award, three Arts Council Bursaries and a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship. Her *New and Selected Poetry Collection*, which was awarded an Arts Council Agility Award in 2021, is forthcoming from Arlen House.



## INVITATION TO MY SISTER

*after Elizabeth Bishop*

Within this night of gales and broken stars,  
your silence rises from the dark to sit with me.  
Six years gone, it's time you told me where you went.

Please come back, tell me all.  
Please come back singing.

Come in your little gold car,  
the one that whizzed you through  
the curling roads of Erris,  
your one good eye seeing you safely to your door.

Bring your Mayo accent with you.  
Make sure you come back singing.

Wear your shocking pink-loud dress, the one  
you bought on Fordham Road  
when first New York cajoled you in,  
thinking roses, roses all your life,  
not briars scratching out your future path.

Come back singing  
*the lark in the clear air*  
the song you lulled sleep  
into the child of me.  
We'll walk to the place of bees,  
watch the rainbow wearing its top hat.

Geraldine Mills

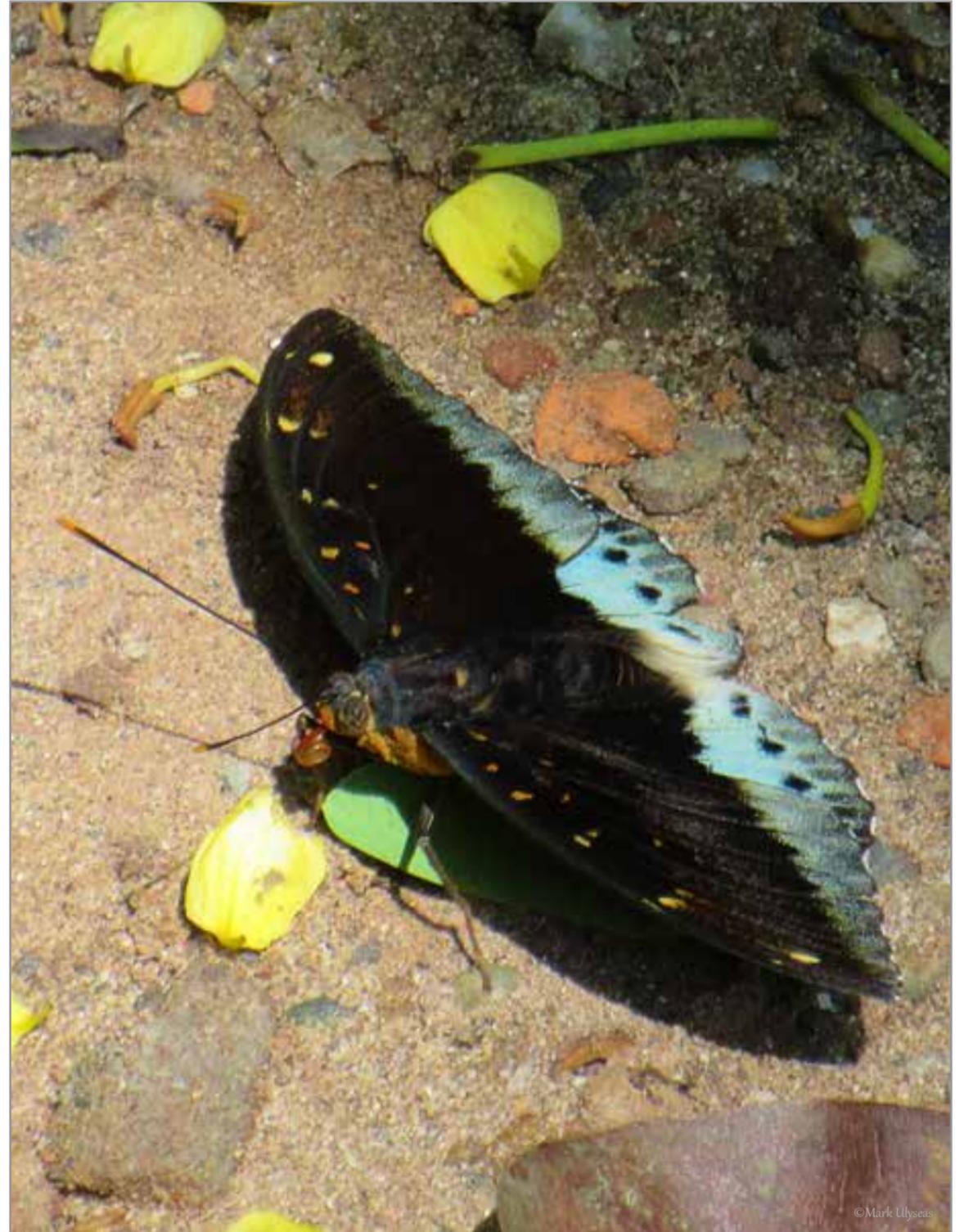
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## INVITATION TO MY SISTER

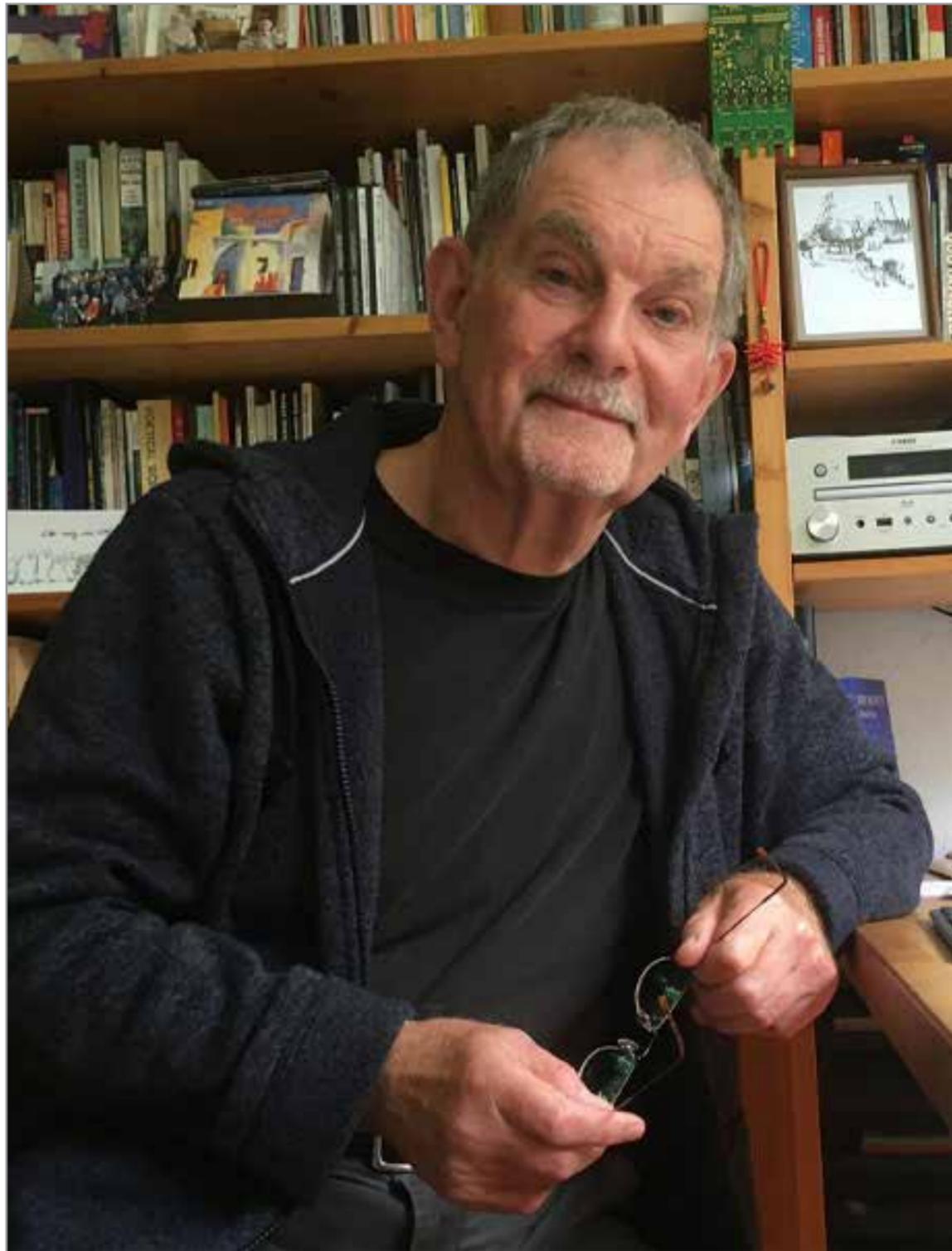
*...contd*

Come like the fieldfares to our garden in October  
with the scent of winter on their wings.  
Come with the guelder berries blazing,  
alder leaves tumbling down,  
and we'll drink tea till the cows come home.

So, why don't you come back now.  
Why don't you come back singing.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Ian Watson is originally from Belfast but lives in Bremen, Germany. Alongside his scholarly and didactic work in both German and English, he is the author of two poetry collections in English, the latest being *Granny's Interpreter* (Salmon Poetry 2016); a further collection with Salmon, *Somewhere, Far Away, a Radio*, is forthcoming. His recent German-language non-fiction includes *Spielfelder: eine Fußballmigration*, on football and identity, and *Bremen erlesen*, a literary and cultural guide to his second-home city in Germany (both with Edition Falkenberg). He also publishes translations of poetry from and into German and English. He has worked regularly for radio and also made the film *Cool to be Celtic* for German and French television (arte 1999). He teaches literary writing freelance in schools and in adult education and is a steering committee member of the Literaturhaus Bremen.

## INTO THE WEST

In a small town in Alberta,  
my Scottish mother meets  
the cheerful chair of the local  
Highland Dancing Club.

Her name is Oksana Shevchenko –  
or was it that lovely Peggy Kovalchuk?  
She can't remember which of the two  
it was, but knows that that was the day  
she had to realign her map of Canada:

Nova Scotian tartan lobster fishing,  
the North Lanark Highland Games,  
those Boy Scout hatted Mounties and  
the Clyde shipbuilder accordion bands  
was the old North British narrative.

But what enticed those ladies' forebears here  
was prairie, ochre waving for a thousand  
miles above the river valley.

Ian Watson. Photo credit: Katrin Krämer.

## JERSEY FLIGHT

*for Marco Bode*

He was surprised how far it flew. Had it  
been silk it would have billowed out  
and parachuted well before the cage  
they festered in. Perhaps it was the sweat  
that kept the nylon globular, an arc  
coagulated, gaining purchase and momentum.

*Then he saw his hand like someone  
else's rise towards the lights and open  
like a baby bird to gulp the green and white  
striped rainbow with its pot of gold.*

Saluting to his temple, watching him  
unfold his prize, the number seventeen  
heads for the tunnel clapping, turning, trotting  
out of sight. The boy is soon forgotten.

## MERELY PLAYERS

So, when the curtain lifts, the act begins;  
and when that curtain falls, he beats the slow  
retreat, still bowing, lifts his eyes to where

the spotlights were but now are swallowed whole  
by layered scarlet velvet; breathes in long  
and slow to where the tension is. Then, chin  
on chest, he breathes out soft and slow; he lets

his shoulders fall. He washes grease off, stares  
at what the colours hide, because he must  
return to where the backstage ghosts reside,  
that world of plasterboard and hanging dust.

Ingrid Storholmen made her debut in 2001 with the poetry collection *Krypskyttarloven* and received a lot of attention both for this and for her second collection *Skamtalen*. *Graceland* (2005). Her next collections of poems are *Siriboka* (2007) and *Til kjälliens pris* (2011), from which Storholmen has read at a large number of international literature festivals. Storholmen's first prose book *Chernobyl Stories* (2009) received a brilliant reception, and she was nominated for the Brage Prize, the Critics' Prize and the important IMPAC Dublin Literary Award 2015. The book has been translated into English, Hindi, French and Estonian, among others. The novel was dramatized for the theater in 2015. *Mora who forgot it was evening* (2012) was her first children's book. *Here lay Tirpitz* (2014) is the author's second novel. The German battleship Tirpitz lay for a long time in Fættenfjorden, not far from where Storholmen grew up. Every time the family passed the place, the adults said: "Here lay Tirpitz." This memory became the starting point for the critically acclaimed book, which was nominated for the P2 listeners' novel prize. *Støvberar* (2020) is Storholmen's newest novel. For her overall writing, Ingrid Storholmen has been awarded the Hunger Prize 2010, the Booksellers' Writers' Scholarship 2010, the Ole Vig Prize 2010, Tanum's Women's Scholarship 2011 and Verdal Municipality's Culture Prize 2018. She has a ten year scholarship from the State of Norway.

## A POEM

These spruces have seen me before. Used to play here when I was small.  
Taiga – the longest word I know. Taiga – the green river from here to Siberia  
If we follow an animal track, we will get there

Disse grantrærne har sett meg før. Lekte her da jeg var liten.  
Taiga - det lengste ordet jeg kan. Taiga - den grønne elva herfra til Sibir.  
Følger vi et dyretråkk kommer vi nok fram.

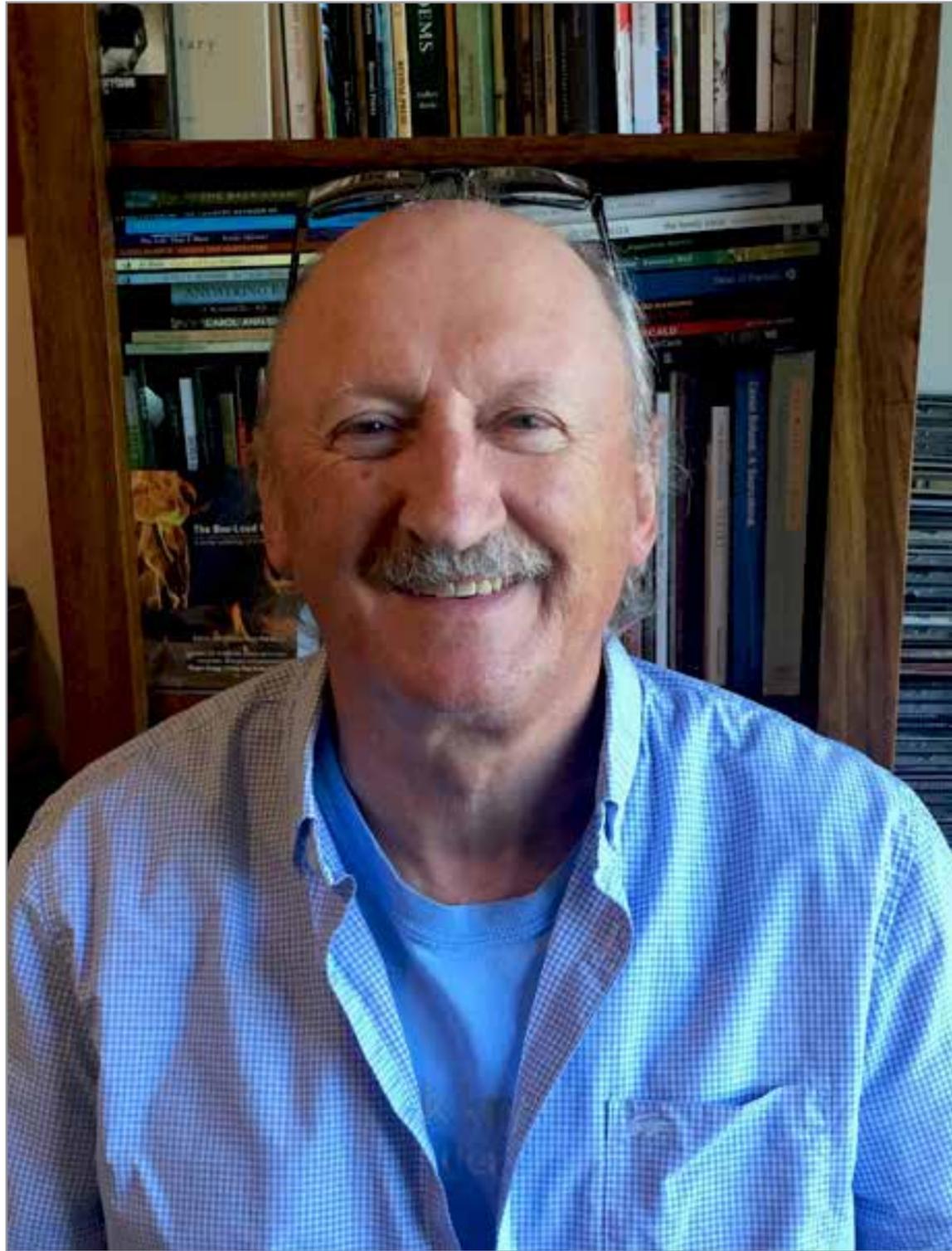
The tight trees of the taiga  
stand like tall soldiers  
marching in Ukraine  
and out

De tette trærne fra taigaen  
står som tause soldater  
marsjerende inn i Ukraina  
og ut



Ingrid Storholmen

Jim Burke lives in Limerick, Ireland, and is Co-founder with John Liddy of The Stony Thursday Book. He completed his MFA in Creative Writing in Manchester Metropolitan University in 2018. Some of his haiku are featured in the anthology *'Between the Leaves'* (2016) edited by Anatoly Kudryavitsky. *'Quartet'* poems with Mary Scheurer, Peter Wise and Carolyn Zukowski appeared in 2019. *'Montage'* appeared from The Literary Bohemian Press in 2021.



## CONVERSATION PIECE

Pitching our tent  
one summer  
and walking  
to the pub with beer  
our simple routine  
is a half day cycling west  
to someplace.

Our new destination  
county Galway,  
harvesters  
delight us, surround us  
in the pub

seventy one kilometres east  
in a concrete structure  
young boys discover  
skeletal remains,  
locals

think it's  
a famine-era grave  
bless the site,  
build a shrine  
and reseal the structure.

We fry mackerel  
on an old pan  
sunset is slow  
and pink,  
it scarcely makes an  
effort to carry  
the light away.

Our dreams of old Ireland  
sizzle. The fireside  
crackles on fish and beans  
a light smoke  
drifts over  
to cattle  
in the next field.

Jim Burke

## LANDSCAPE AT CLOSING TIME

And memory survives;  
amused how out of  
the blue the fear-an-tí  
closed up early one  
afternoon, to leave you  
and I off to the stone-  
heaped cliffs, guillemots,  
herring-gulls, drooping  
flowers that swayed  
in the slightest breeze.  
We sat there reading,  
mine an old story;  
someone flew too close  
to the sun. I got up  
and stepped closer to  
the edge as if I might  
see below the tumbled  
bones of history.

## RAILWAY EMBANKMENT

Timber fencing falls down  
in the field before rising again  
to curl out of a hollow like a long  
brown snake next to the track.

I smell the creosote  
think of  
Stephen King's  
—Stand by me—

The railway embankment is solid.

*'Learn your trade,  
don't dabble casually,'*  
an old ghost speaks.

Here is greatness, something  
to celebrate cutting through  
afternoon shadows in yellow fields.

From the tracks I look one way,  
then the other, what is behind  
and what is before me keeps moving.

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, Live Encounters, 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 <https://kateennals.com/>. She is currently on the board of PEN na h'Eireann/PEN Ireland and Cavan Volunteer Centre.



## LOVE

*after Mila Haugová*

I can't tell you anything about that  
except some say it starts in the eye  
others, the gut.

I believe it's all fingers and lips  
and the tongue is essential

It starts as a quivering bubble  
full of breath and light  
wobbling and goofy  
attached to a wand

As it floats away, it seals itself  
into a perfect sphere  
of tension and air

but soon the beautiful  
bursts on the sharp of brick  
dissolves into Friday night puddles  
splashed with diesel and mud

becomes an oily ripple, a dull  
smear of colour  
a smashed broken bottle  
beneath a dirty streetlight

Kate Ennals

## 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

## TETE DE VEAU SWEETMEATS

*'The meat soft as the leg of an angel' Billy Collins' Osso Bocco*

Garlic, tomatoes, carrots, and diaphanous onion gild the  
dish with herbs and wine. My tongue forks the sensuous meat  
into red rooster potatoes - salted, boiled, buttered, soft  
mashed - to absorb the flavours of the tottering calf fed green grass as  
fresh as April rain, and baked as pink as May blossom in the  
flush of Spring. The calf, after suckling, is torn limb by leg  
beheaded, its flesh then served on the bone, braised, its marrow of  
life sucked clean, its head hollowed out to serve the sweetmeats of an  
other, prepared by a chef who believes he is nothing less than an angel

KA Rees writes poetry and short fiction. Her poems and short stories have been included by *Australian Poetry*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, in *Kill Your Darlings' New Australian Fiction* anthology, by Margaret River Press, *Overland*, *Review of Australian Fiction*, *Spineless Wonders* and *Yalobusha Review*, among others. Kate was short-listed for the 2016 Judith Wright Poetry Award and she was the recipient of the 2017 Barry Hannah Prize in Fiction. She was a 2019 Varuna fellowship holder for her manuscript of short fiction and the national winner of the 2019 Joanne Burns Microlit Award. She was a participant in the 2021 Sydney Observatory residency program where she wrote a suite of poems set under the southern night sky. Kate's debut poetry collection, *Come the Bones* (Flying Island Books) was released in 2021.



## DEATH WATCH

He lies in his bed throat coated with morphine, drowning.  
 Davis plays Blue in Green, So What? You hear him say, *listen  
 before you breathe*, and *play what isn't there*  
 but the death rattle comes, the catch of it. In your hands an ice-cream  
 bucket; the astringent bile a bitter sway, reminding you death is forever  
 a colour and knocking in the eves could be ghosts or ghouls  
 or beetles that hollow oak beams like butterscotch, their dance  
 slow ossification. You see them as tiny seeds building jaws  
 as you sit with the plastic tub weeping—this putrescence cost  
 so much; myrrh or frankincense would fetch less, but it was not  
 for you to choose: this death was coming, not like a train funnelling  
 through fog, droplets coalescing around the engine as momentum  
 builds. No. This death came as the house was eaten—  
 the decaying frame softened like metastasised cells—  
 by water, disease, the slow teeth of time.

KA Rees

## FIVE FRAGMENTS FROM CHILDHOOD

I

Your mother worked dreams gathered from dust,  
made chimes for the milkman on his run. Minutes  
performed pirouettes and blackness snagged your mother's hand:  
a thimble was all the protection she held against night's uncanny passage.

II

In burnished heat you run over bluff bitumen, feet stinging a peculiar song  
to the ocean pool—that wedge of tight humanity a wound, tide kissing rock.

III

Nymphs ground-fallen burrow, sap-fed on roots  
in their underground cocoon for seven long years. Digging  
out their soil sarcophagi they climb onto bark, shed one last time.

Greengrocers and double drummers play at midsummer's dusk  
full-throated their lust, the evening susurrus—a dimming of light  
to cool drums.

IV

The octopus visits folded rock, her shadow inked  
on those who would disturb her passage. Her fortress  
scattered shells, her prey.

V

The uranium bowl in your grandmother's cupboard:  
light arcs, found rainbows, shallow breaking water.

Lincoln Jaques' poetry, fiction and travel writing has appeared in New Zealand, Australia, Asia, the US and Ireland, most recently in Tough Magazine, Noir Nation, Poetry NZ Yearbook, The Agape Review, Mayhem, Burrow, Tarot, Loud Coffee Press, Book of Matches, Live Encounters and Poetry for the Planet: An Anthology of Imagined Futures. He was a 2020 Vaughan Park Residential Scholar/Writer, a finalist and Highly Commended in the 2018 Emerging Poets and was the featured poet for the spring 2021 edition of the New Zealand Poetry Society's magazine a fine line. He lives in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland).



## STRANGE GREETINGS

This morning  
I finished  
my breakfast  
in  
a  
café  
that served  
all the food  
on mismatched  
plates.  
I stepped  
out  
onto the street  
and a guy  
coming along  
said 'Hey man!'  
And I said 'Hey!'  
And then I saw  
he realised  
I wasn't the bro  
he thought  
I was but his smile  
returned  
and we high  
fived  
and I walked down  
the street  
laughing  
thinking of  
those mismatched  
plates  
and the mismatched  
look on the stranger's  
face.

Lincoln Jaques

## RAIN

As he walks down the aisle  
she loops a thumb under his  
jumper hem. Points out all  
the exotic fruits to him.

Persimmon.  
Starfruit.  
Cherimoya.  
Dragon fruit.

She's imprinting these names  
on his failing memory.

He picks up a feijoa  
holds it to his nose  
but doesn't inhale.

Yesterday the rain fell  
so heavily it stopped  
traffic. I sat in a long  
queue of sinking cars  
going nowhere. I thought  
of the woman and her husband,  
how she held onto his hem  
how he sensed somehow  
if she let go, he'd stop  
shuffling along, stand and wait  
for her to touch the hem again.  
Then he would take another step.

Through the rain yesterday  
I saw another man sitting in a bar  
alone. Sipping his spirit  
staring at nothing, not even the tv  
hinged in the corner. His face reminded  
me of a friend with Parkinson's.  
The last time I saw him he talked  
as if he didn't really know me  
but was chatting to me anyhow  
just to be polite. He walked with a stick  
and he ate his food slowly, not tasting it.  
He died alone at home sitting in a chair  
not knowing what he was waiting for.

What did we talk about at that final lunch?  
I remember he told me dragon fruits  
are called pitaya in Peru.  
His ex-wife told me they found him clinging  
onto the hem of his jumper.

And I said, that wasn't so strange.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR SELF-MUMMIFYING

The Egyptians weren't the only ones  
to practice mummification. But at least  
they had the decency to die first.

Encased in a glass tomb, reflections  
of trees and of yourself staring back  
a Buddhist monk in Thailand sits mummified.

They call it Sokushinbutsu.  
The Buddhist act of self-mummifying.  
Only 17 have managed it between 1081 – 1903.

They weren't dead when they started  
out on this journey. Far from it.  
But they farewelled their loved ones, their disciples

as if they were taking a trip to Lanzarote.  
Kōbō Daishi was said to have started the trend.  
He entered nyūjō a meditation so deep it resembled

suspended animation. He reduced his diet  
to "tree-eating training". First only fruits and nuts  
then boiled teas of pine needles and bark.

Until he starved himself into nirvana, expelling  
from his muscles all fat and nutrients. Then lastly  
arsenic water, small amounts, to slow the heart

to cease the brain activity. He'd ring a bell  
every so often so they knew he wasn't dead  
yet. Then when the bellringing stopped

they sealed the small tomb. He would stay  
like that for 5 million years. Now the monk  
that sits on display on Samui Island

his mouth dropped open slightly as if he  
had one final thing to say, dressed in a filthy  
ochre robe, his skin like an elephant's rump

and most notably, a pair of Ray-Ban on his nose  
(they'd taken out his eyes, for him to see better  
or so they believed). I put out of my mind

for now the nightmares that will haunt  
me later after they inform us that his hair  
and nails still grow. Who has the job of clipping them?

But the way we're going in 5 million years  
when he awakes, I feel sorry that he'll miss  
his big moment, stretching those poor limbs

and taking off his dark shades like a mafia  
Don expecting his disciples gathered only  
to find the temple empty and the waters flooding in.

## MOVING SOUTH WHILE SLOWLY DROWNING

the rivers silently rose  
but we ignored them.

I made a fist  
the river drowned it

a cricket crawled  
out of the sun, bleached

the secrets of wet leaves  
cling onto dead trees

everything has changed  
everything remains the same

they raise banners pour out  
anti-war slogans

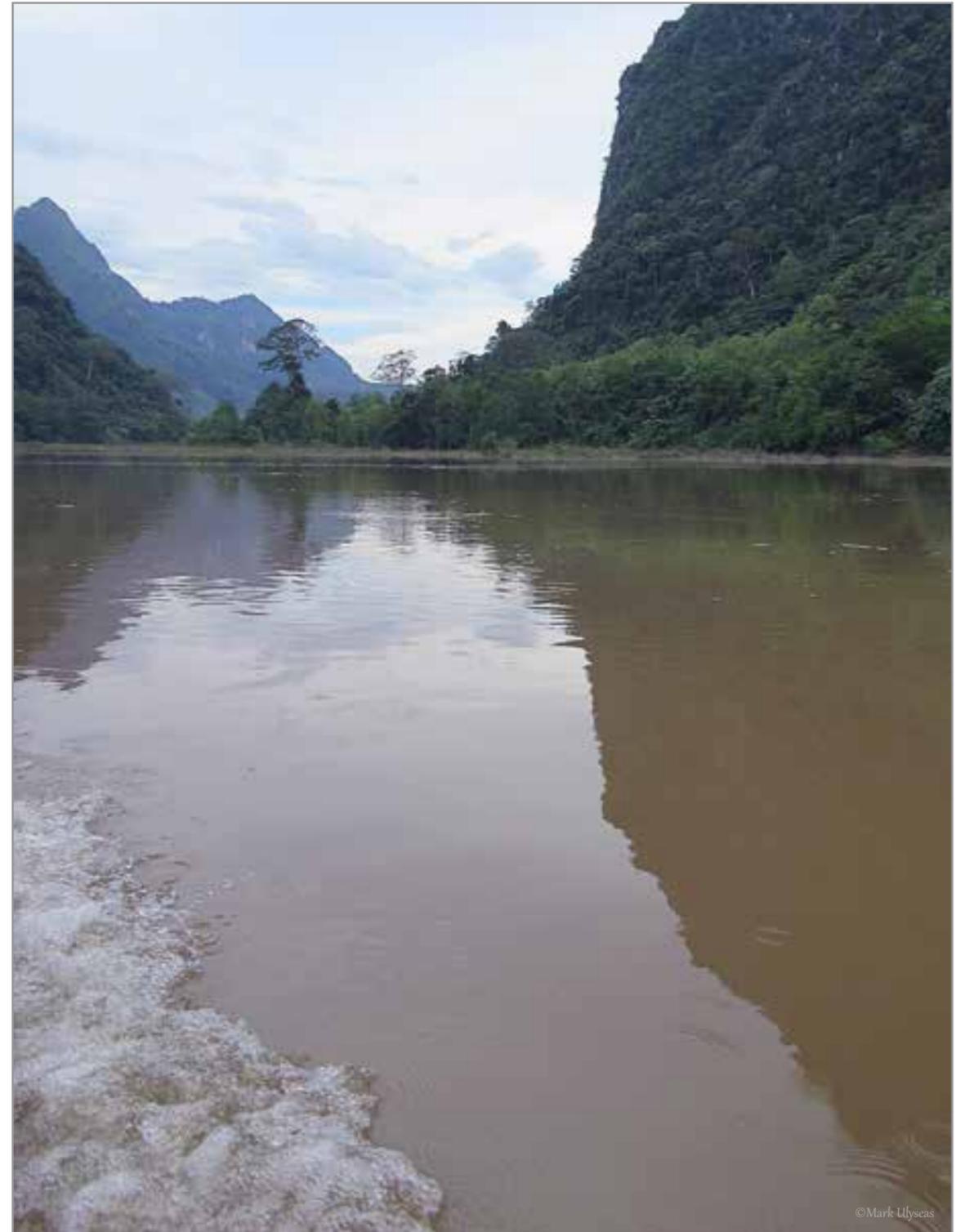
they have no limbs  
they can't even crawl home

but home has been removed  
the burning fires extinguished

we can only find direction  
by moving backwards

its winter, I'm sitting watching  
two pigeons fight over a crust

neither seems to be getting  
the larger piece.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Lisa C. Taylor is the author of three poetry collections, including *Interrogation of Morning* (Arlen House/Syracuse University Press 2022). She also has two short story collections, *Impossibly Small Spaces* (2018), and *Growing a New Tail* (2015). One of her short stories received the Hugo House New Fiction Award in 2015. Her collaborative collection with Irish poet and writer Geraldine Mills, *The Other Side of Longing* (Arlen House/Syracuse University Press, 2011) led to both of them being named Elizabeth Shanley Gerson Readers of Irish Literature at University of Connecticut. Lisa's poetry has been published in numerous journals, literary magazines and national and international anthologies. Both her poetry and fiction have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Lisa holds an MFA in Creative Writing from University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast Program. She was awarded a Colorado Creative Industries/National Endowment for the Arts grant in 2022 to create *Writing for Resilience*, a youth writing and art program. Lisa is currently working on a novel.



## WHEN THIS BECAME THAT

And what was broken did not get repaired. The boot was still missing a sole, the jumper, a button, the doorbell silent. How many broken things cluttered closets, desktops, drawers? Emah still opened the door as if the door had a question and it was embodied by the man in the dark tee shirt and smoky pants. Black-on-black. She knew he was standing just on the front step though there was no way to actually know. It was a sense she developed when Dr. Prong told her she had only 5-30 months to live. How do they come up with such guesses, she wondered. Five, as in October, thirty as in more than two years? Who could project what might happen in two years? Dr. Prong apologized.

"It is just an estimate. We know so little about this type of disease," he said, pushing his too big feet in those awkward white shoes under the table. They were in the type of office every doctor seems to have; regulation oak desk, obligatory photos of a wife or partner and a child or two in the mountains or by the sea, bloody abstract that looked like a child's drawing though it was professionally framed and signed by an artist. She wondered if there was a catalogue where one could order such things along with scrubs and PPE. At the time, she pretended this was one of those dreams she had as a teen, a dream where the room got smaller and the objects seemed to rotate: a painting became a tasteful clear vase with yellow daffodils, the photo of the wife turned into a receptionist bringing a tray with coffee and croissants, the children were a blue plastic toy box with a one-armed teddy bear on top. We're all different than what we seem, she thought just before she woke up. She'd wake up from this one too.

No one rang the doorbell because it was broken and they were of the opinion that doorbells were superfluous. No dwelling belongs to one person though she signed paperwork, alongside him, a realtor and a lawyer. They handed them a ream of papers with many signatures and lots of words on them. This was a narrative she could not follow and would never again read.

Lisa C. Taylor

“Do you want anything?” her husband asked. She mulled this over, smiling for a moment. Of course she wanted things. She wanted a spotted puppy, a cottage on the beach with a bright red door, a kayak and a rowboat, a mandolin. She wanted her body to give up its pain and become weightless but as a story, not a death. She wanted hair down to her waist streaked with golden threads. Once they rode in a gondola in Venice. The gondolier was dark-haired with high cheekbones. He called her *Senorita* and presented her with a red rose. She wanted that rose and probably the gondolier as well. She wanted a Greek Island she could name and populate with children. All the houses would be white with blue domed roofs. The sea around would glitter with sunlight.

“I want to live,” she said simply.

Dr. Prong said he understood when she told him the same thing yesterday. It was as if she’d solved a math problem and could now move on to something more complicated.

“We will do everything we can,” he said, tapping an expensive looking green pen on the desk.

She wondered if the “we” referred to: RNs, LPNs, orderlies and maintenance workers. Was he plural in the same way her trans friend wanted to be called “they”? Did he fancy himself so powerful he became more than one person, like a superhuman?

The black-on-black man squeezed her hand and she thought, I feel that, therefore I am alive and this isn’t a dream. But could she be entirely sure?

“We’ll get through this, Emah,” he said as if he was the one ingesting toxic chemicals created to kill something even more toxic. Chemo was like a street fight. The person with the strongest weapon and fastest reflexes wins, if you consider winning something that leaves a trail of carnage. She thought it strange that scientists develop drugs to kill off bad cells instead of trying to understand how they proliferate. As her mother would have said before she grew silent, it was kind of *like putting the cart before the horse*. He knew nothing except the running of a household. He would make her omelets and bring her fresh-squeezed orange juice when she could stomach it. His work would be oh-so-understanding which is pity disguised as helpfulness. *Take all the time you need, Milo*. Emile was off to school and Greta lived in an apartment in a city four hours away.

She was trying to navigate her first professional job while training for the Olympics. They were having lives, something one does with an assumed future. A diagnosis shrinks life so that Thursday becomes the future when it is Tuesday. Sometimes it’s possible to stretch to another season, anticipating leaves changing color or the first snowfall. She didn’t think about holidays though she loved the pomp of Christmas. Long ago she abandoned the dogma and guilt of religion but kept the colored lights, the complicated cakes and shoes filled with candy. *Out with the old, in with the new*, her mother used to say when she still talked. Milo would say they kept the good parts, like the smell of cinnamon sprinkled on hot chocolate and the songs she blasted as they decorated a tree. Greta spent last Christmas with her girlfriend but Emile was there with Leanne. Next year it might be Aubrey or someone with one of those new names like Aspen or Flicker. No, not Flicker. That was a story about a horse. Maybe Sky. She liked the name Sky. It could be spelled with an e for a girl or it could be open-ended in case the child was non-binary.

Milo had made a complicated casserole with every nutritious item he could think of—kale, pinto beans, organic root vegetables and herbs. He served it with a hunk of sourdough wheat bread he bought at a place called *Bread for Life*. The owner’s name was Sparrow and he had a long brown braid of hair and a sparrow tattoo on his neck. He told her he always wanted to be a baker. She envied him for knowing the secret of his life, that he could do this one thing and find contentment. When she was nine, she wanted to be a doctor but got over it by ten when she needed stitches. At twelve, she thought she’d be a cellist. After hauling the instrument two blocks to school, she switched to violin. She trained to be a professor and wrote scholarly papers about the new renaissance of poetry in an increasingly violent society. Her dissertation was on WS Merwin’s flower references.

“Such bullshit,” she told Milo. “I make a living pontificating about the kind of writing that less than 1% of people even read.”

“You read it. Your students read it. Maybe that one poem will pull someone off a ledge or bring beauty to a student who has none.” Milo was a diplomat, transforming pollen into golden swirls and midges into small efficient machines.

“We’re all faking it,” he said. “Beauty is a bridge, a rope, a glimpse at the top of the mountain you’ll never be able to climb.”

Milo was always right. His logic proved irrefutable again and again. It was like the philosophy class she took as an undergraduate where the professor said philosophy offered a path to what would always be inexplicable. What did that even mean, she thought at the time. There was no path to get her to understand calculus or build a house or sculpt hedges into elephants and donkeys. Or was there?

Dr. Prong specialized in the impossible. He was the doctor of no hope and then a little hope. Her friend Carol told her that. Everyone has a story about someone who should have died and didn't die—Uncle Ned, Susan who was still living with metastasized liver cancer, her grandmother, the lifelong smoker who lived to 96 with COPD. Carol's father has had ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease for eight years. He takes a fistful of vitamins and the disease is not progressing as it should. It's a badly behaved disease. What is it thinking, not killing him but just meandering enough to be present in the background like static?

"You will beat this," Milo told her, making her a disgusting smoothie with way too much green.

"Drinks are not supposed to be green," she said and he added more berries and a few chocolate nibs.

She dreamed she was pulling a wagon of wood up a hill. An old man in a long fur coat stopped. He told her that she should lift it instead of pulling.

"Just spread your fingers and raise the wagon up. It will be easier."

When she tried it, the wagon became a kite and she was only holding onto a string yet the wood was still there when it landed.

"The burden is the burden. The string is the string," the old man said.

Even in a dream this made no sense. When she awakened, she felt a breeze ruffling her hair, the kind of lightness invented by spring.

Remission, omission. recession, succession. Maybe her body would kick the wagon instead of the bucket and float instead of trudge. And maybe that is all anyone could do, move burdens so they're less of an obstacle and more something a person can puzzle into another form. Her body was broken. Their doorbell was broken. People still came to the door. She still opened it.

Louise Wakeling was born not far from Botany Bay at Arncliffe in Sydney. Though she would like nothing better than to sojourn in the south of France, she feels she has come home since she moved to Dharug/Gundungurra country in the Blue Mountains. Her poetry has been published online in journals such as *Burrow* (2020-2) and in the print or online anthologies *The Best Australian Poems* (2010), *Antipodes* (2011), *Guide to Sydney Rivers* (2015), *Contemporary Poetry* (2016), *Caring for Country* (2017), *Wild Voices: An anthology on wildlife* (2019), *Messages from the Embers*, an Australian Bushfire anthology (2020) and *Guide to Sydney Crime* (2022). She has also been published in the forthcoming anthology, *The Best Australian Science Writing*, (New South Press, 2022), to be launched by Dr Norman Swan. She is currently working on a fifth collection of poetry begun during the fallow period of the covid pandemic, and a novel set in London and Sydney which explores intergenerational trauma and survival in the lives of three women between WW1 and the early 1970s. *Off Limits* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2021) is her fourth and latest collection of poetry, where her subjects range across eco-poetics, sewer-surfing and the tragi-comedy of relationships.



## IF SPIDERS DREAM

you might dream, nightmares  
just might electrify your spider brain  
as they do mine, curl and uncurl  
legs, involuntary spasms

rich with memory. do you recap  
your day, reprise smart mating moves  
or hunter-gatherer leaps  
and bounds on hapless prey?

are those REM movements  
quivering in your several eyes  
(purloined Indian jewels  
burning in your crown)

are those images flickering  
on and off, you, suspended  
on a thread, asleep-awake, twitching  
in your slow dream-weaver's spiral?

Louise Wakeling

## A STRATHSPEY IN PÉROUGES

Somewhere down a winding alley the music of a fiddle lingers.  
 Artisans of handmade paper close their shutters.  
*Galettes Perougiennes* cooling on the window-sills  
 of bakeries vanish into air still lemony and sweet

Syncopated rhythm pours from a garden near a cobbled street –  
 a vine espaliered on stone pirouettes, a skinny dancer.  
 Beyond the eye-sockets of ancient ramparts, the valley  
 of the Ain unfolds. The fiddler taps his foot, beckons me in –

buoyant on an air by a Scottish soldier, British agent  
 parachuted into Vichy France, embedded with *maquisards*  
 to sabotage German trains, long-distance telephone cables.

I listen from a solitary stone seat. Betrayed to the Gestapo  
 tortured by the Butcher of Lyons, he tells them nothing.  
 They bundle him onto a train to Germany just weeks before Liberation

but his strathspey air remains: a voice so weirdly in and out  
 of place, the short-long, long-short bounce of it,  
 a 'Scotch snap' in 4/4 time. Its pointed rhythm rises still  
 to greet me, spills across a ruined wall

## TILL DEATH DO US PART

she's no beauty the fanfin anglerfish  
 just a girl doing what comes naturally  
 evolution's wild card floating  
 her goth allure in the midnight zone

half a million times lighter  
 the male nose-works her pheromones  
 lured by her luminescence  
 light bacteria pulsing in darkness  
 all eyes now he bites into her stomach  
 latches on flesh fused melting

in that dark abyss  
 he wouldn't last too long alone  
 biological imperatives  
 speak through her gaping maw  
 always open translucent fangs  
 snapping shut on prey  
 final as a prison gate

atrophied sans eyes  
 and certain vital organs  
 no need to hunt  
 he's a dangling appendage  
 bound for life a nut-sack  
 to be honest on tap  
 his entire existence

he ain't heavy he's her parasite  
 bloodstream fused with hers  
 nutrients hers movement hers alone  
*Whither thou goest I will go*

Mari Maxwell received a 2020/21 Professional Development Award with the Arts Council of Ireland and a 2019/2020 Words Ireland, Mayo County Council Mentorship. She is working on her debut poetry collection and a novel. Mari dedicates this publication to her long-time dear friend Sarah Nelson McCown who died in January 2022. Forever missed, we spread and share her love, kindness and gentleness and ask you to also plant these seeds into the universe.



## CELEBRATIONS

Oh praise the mighty redwood, red orange giants  
with their heads in the clouds.

And too the silver birch, shedding bleached skin  
layer by layer to heart's core.

Embrace a sweet scented spruce and the blue of her needles.

Glory in the chestnut's magnificent girth  
her dangling spiked conkers tempting play.

Linger where the May blush of sweet apple blossom  
and cherry blossom, gift confetti paths.

Watch for the thorny spells from the hawthorn  
even as the weeping willow lays down her branches,  
tendrils sweeping the grass.

These trees of my childhood still sing.  
Canopies that hush suburban life  
yet still carry me home.

Mari Maxwell

## IMAGININGS

I am lion  
tawny  
soft fuzzy  
raging roar

I am ox-eyed daisy  
long stemmed  
flowing free  
white petals  
mustard centre  
lazing daisy

I am aria  
notes tumbling  
projecting through the sky  
dipping  
soaring  
soothing souls

## THIS NIGHT SHE ASCENDS

*in Sarah Nelson McCown*

She rises, a swan  
stretching, reaching, soaring  
downy pearl luminous

feather tips seizing cross currents  
pumping, thrusting skyward

reminders of a trapped butterfly indoors  
wings folded seeking the window,  
brushing it with a sigh.

Open the window why don't you.  
She would set it free.

Maurice Devitt is a past winner of the Trocaire/Poetry Ireland and Poems for Patience competitions, he published his debut collection, 'Growing Up in Colour', with Doire Press in 2018. Curator of the Irish Centre for Poetry Studies site, his Pushcart-nominated poem, 'The Lion Tamer Dreams of Office Work', was the title poem of an anthology published by Hibernian Writers in 2015.



## EMPIRE OF LIGHT

*after René Magritte*

I must have been about seventeen  
walking to a record session on Cremore Road  
or Botanic, denim jacket suitably stressed,  
latest Jackson Browne in vinyl  
tucked preciously under my arm, body  
swirling with teenage heat. I wondered  
would she be there and what would I say.

My footsteps slowed as the street seeped  
into darkness, a streetlamp picking out  
the house in a pencil of light.  
Walking to the door I caught the opening  
strains of *Late for the Sky*, the title track  
of my newly acquired LP. I turned away  
to a September sky desperately holding on to blue.

Maurice Devitt

## THE DARK ART OF PLUMBING

When he came to fix the boiler, the first thing he asked  
was who had installed it, suggesting that not only  
would he have to get the boiler working, he would  
have to unwind all that had gone before –  
loose pipes, Escher-like connections and, worst of all,  
a failure to respect the vagaries of water.  
He riffed on a theory that getting water  
to do your bidding was a rare gift, bestowed  
on only the chosen few. Somewhere a radiator gurgled.

The installation had been so long ago  
I couldn't remember, so when he was gone  
I pulled out the original receipt, most of the ink now lost  
to some celestial archive, though I could just about make out  
his name scribbled at the bottom of the page.

## THE END OF THE PIER

We wait in the purling mist;  
a knave in houndstooth  
– crushed felt hat and diamond patter –  
working the queue.

Snake excitedly towards the door,  
cackling tannoy promising a show we'll never forget.  
Glass-eyed ushers show us to our seats,  
the air sweet with scent of candyfloss and Dior.

High on expectation, we fail to notice  
the flurry of activity at the stage-door,  
and it is only when the curtains open  
to a half-built set and empty stage,

that we wonder where the actors have gone,  
why the onshore lights are moving further away.

Michael Durack grew up on a farm and now lives in Ballina, Co. Tipperary, Ireland. His poems have appeared in publications such as *The Blue Nib*, *Skylight 47*, *The Cafe Review*, *Live Encounters*, *The Banyan Review*, *The Waxed Lemon*, *Drawn to the Light*, *The Poetry Bus*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, *The Honest Ulsterman* and *Poetry Ireland Review* as well as airing on local and national radio. With his brother Austin he has recorded two albums of poetry and guitar music, *The Secret Chord* (2013) and *Going Gone* (2015). He is the author of a memoir in prose and poems, *Saved to Memory: Lost to View* (2016) and two poetry collections, *Where It Began* (2017) and *Flip Sides* (2020) published by Revival Press.



## KINDRED SPIRITS

And what did they see in us?  
 We wore white skin like their persecutors  
 (the ones who offered them their Hobson's Choice  
 at the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek)  
 and we lived far away across an ocean.  
 Surely we were no concern of theirs.

With good reason they called their migration  
 westwards from Mississippi The Trail of Tears  
 their Promised Land a travesty,  
 beset by thieves and murderers.  
 They were hungry, tired and broken,  
 disoriented, their best men dead.

But touched by a vision of our wretchedness,  
 our Famine Walk another trail of tears,  
 they reached for the little they had left,  
 gifted us what they could.

Nine eagle feathers forged from stainless steel  
 unite to form a feeding bowl in Cork  
 that reaches out to distant Oklahoma  
 to signal thanks, standing for kindred spirits  
 that know no tribal bounds, no colour bar.

Michael Durack

## BIRDMEN

Those left-of-centre, for-the-birds  
 fictional or real-life ornithologists.  
 Pre-patricidal playboy, Christy Mahon  
 fooling over little birds - finches and felts.  
 Alfred Hitchcock's dystopian flocks  
 massing on the telegraph wires of Bodega Bay.

Sinners and saints. Martin Cahill, General,  
 tit-for-tat, eye-for-an-eye gangster,  
 his prized carrier pigeons sabotaged by police.  
 Brown-robed Francis of Assisi  
 haloed with wings and feathers,  
 and Heaney's Kevin of Glendalough,  
 his outstretched arm a blackbird-nesting branch

Robert Stroud enigma, pimp and psychopath,  
 tending to his distressed sparrows and caged canaries,  
 Birdman of Leavenworth, though birdless in Alcatraz,  
 fifty-four years a prisoner, laid in the earth 1963,  
 the day they buried John F. Kennedy.

## CREAN

Indestructible as the bronze effigy at the South Pole Inn,  
 he might have been hewn from Anascaul sandstone,  
 would not be out of place in *Táin* or *Iliad*.

Impervious to Antarctic crevasses, Southern Ocean gales,  
 this modest seaman, sledge hauler, reluctant hero  
 tobogganed down ice falls like a Winter Olympian.

Proof against scurvy, melancholia, exhaustion  
 but with a heart to dote on husky pups  
 to grieve for *Bones*, the culled Manchurian pony,  
 to weep his last farewell for ice-doomed Scott.

Harder than timbers of *Terra Nova* or *Discovery*,  
 more durable than *Endurance*, a match for Beardmore Glacier,  
 South Georgian cliffs, but not for the surgical wards  
 of Tralee and Bon Secours in an antiseptic Ithaca,  
 a ruptured appendix the final postscript to his Odyssey.

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

Translated from Albanian by Edita Kuçi Ukaj.



## THE REAL SURFACE

We are in the woods and have lost the roads.  
The sky is sad and desperate.

Silhouettes of people revolve around us  
They look like in a cortege  
where burial their desires.

Last night you told me your dream.  
You were in nightwear and sat down to an old piano.

I learned the words,  
which you replaced wonderfully with your fingers play.

Your fingers are magical  
and erased the memories  
in my eyes swollen with longing.

You know, we were long deceived.

We believed that we were entering the forest of truth,  
and we were closing the gates of fear.

But no.  
In that space, someone planted bad flowers.

Then with old word architecture  
we weave stories without heroes  
for us and them  
and slowly we roll  
until we fall into the theater of folly.

Ndue Ukaj

## THE ARK OF THE OVERTURN

I have often seen you among angels and demons,  
surrounded by a false halo that called glory.  
Seek the ark of salvation  
a headrest for your head  
and for your desires painted in freedom.

Your fate was in the hands of the sea gods,  
until one day your halo overturned.  
Then you cried like this sad sky,  
and you turned your head back,  
those sweet eyes that looked towards eternity.  
And beyond the pain, you demanded a handshake  
a red rose  
like the universe of your eyes.

That day of drowsy feelings  
you sought a return to the old stories  
and through grim silence  
at the crossroads of fates  
you watered the flowers of evil.

What do I do on a night like this,  
without the moon and a goal,  
when I lay pledge the long journey through the raging roads;  
where space is lacking  
the word  
nostalgia  
and a newsroom  
for absence.  
Someone calls it loneliness,  
someone calls it freedom.

Then beyond you, I saw a clutter of people  
as they rushed towards the closed gateway.  
And I caught up with you;  
where the particles of memory became symphonies  
in the slain conscience.

Oh, this sound lasts as long as an epoch.

Nessa O'Mahony was from Dublin. She won the National Women's Poetry Competition and was shortlisted for the Patrick Kavanagh Prize and Hennessy Literature Awards. She is the recipient of three literature bursaries from the Arts Council of Ireland. She has published five books of poetry – *Bar Talk*, (1999), *Trapping a Ghost* (2005), *In Sight of Home* (2009) and *Her Father's Daughter* (2014). *The Hollow Woman on the Island* was published by Salmon Poetry in May 2019. She has co-edited several anthologies of poetry, including (with Paul Munden) *Divining Dante*, a celebration of the 700th anniversary of the Italian poet, Dante Alighieri (Recent Work Press 2021) and (with Alan Hayes) *Days of Clear Light. A Festschrift for Jessie Lendennie* (Salmon Poetry 2021). Details of her latest poetry collection, *The Hollow Woman on the Island*, can be found here: <https://www.salmonpoetry.com/details.php?ID=509&a=281>



## ENDURANCE

*if survival is not the ultimate rebellion, what is*  
Jinhao Xie

In the end, the best place.  
Propped on the seabed.  
In the blue shade  
of centuried ice sheets  
that kept the sun out,  
left moisture enough in planks  
to hold shape, the curved prow  
of intention still intact.

Imagination still claims it,  
chooses whichever myth  
suits the modern narrative:  
the brave chaps, the dream,  
survival for all (save the dogs,  
the cat, a few men's sanity).

Nessa O'Mahony

## NOT EVERYTHING IS METAPHOR

*"The topless towers of Ilium"*  
Christopher Marlowe

Something shook the pillar overnight,  
brought plaster down, shook  
crumbling brick and mortar  
like red-grey confetti across  
my mother's drive,  
chalk clumps scattering  
like newspaper tossed in a hurry.

The net curtain I peered through  
was also torn. No need  
to consider dissolution  
as a new occurrence in this house  
where switches trip, heaters fail  
and televisions lose sound.

Perhaps the deliveryman  
had turned, swerved,  
was now cursing his fate  
over scraped paint.  
Perhaps it was the neighbour's gate,  
whirring back and forth  
as youngsters played, oblivious  
to seismic waves and boundaries.

Good fences make good neighbours?

For how long do you rebuild?  
Come a point when walls fall,  
when locks break and doors  
stay open.  
When curtains are undrawn,  
when the night is let in  
to do its worst.

Philip lives in Auckland, New Zealand. When not consumed by lawyer life, he throws words at a page and hopes they stick, though he often enjoys the challenge of strict poetry formats. He has had poems published in *The Blue Nib*, *Cordite Poetry Review* and *Fast Fibres*. He regularly performs his poetry live and organises a local Auckland poetry group.



Philip Muir

## SMALL VICTORIES

The lunge falls cruelly short  
 Grasping for the antidote to inadequacy  
 In one fleeting juncture at which cognition and impetus  
 Synchronise in a cosmic coitus of consciousness  
 Without which the reach is a redundant reality  
 Fated for defeat

Safety is instead found in worthlessness  
 Familiar in its quilted coven of retreat  
 A perpetual pyrrhic conquest over incentive  
 Robbing the perception of procurement of worth  
 Soaking, paralysed within the fog  
 In this cloistered private universe

Muted breath draws feebly to withered lungs  
 That respond with a whispered cry  
 "I'm here, I welcomed the wind that sustains the soul  
 Hush now, and steep in the still of life"  
 Floating silently in strength innate  
 Stand on the crest and survey the expanse

Time undulates as a wheatfield in synch  
 With the eternal rhythm of ages  
 Churn, churn, the cycles seethe  
 The bellows blow on fledgling soles  
 This moment of secure footing  
 Imprinting this being thereon

The propensity for barrenness conquered  
 The smallest of victories lauds the spirit of worth  
 Exhale the triumph with newfound strength  
 Assurance that yes, more victories will come  
 Ascending promise supersedes conquest  
 The rising sun of each and every new breath

## LOCKDOWN

Footsteps resound through sombre quiet  
Eagerly reaching for an ear with which to connect  
The same ear that is barraged by numbers  
That embellish perception, apprehension, fear  
Of that which moves virulent, potent, invisible  
The silent threat that holds the footsteps distant

Abstract echoes belie the force of distance  
Sentiment fades worthlessly into the quiet  
Imposed by that which lingers, mute and invisible  
Inflicting detachment, impeding connection  
Enforced by the destitute bonds of fear  
And the interminable, barren swirl of numbers

Sterility belies the tragedies manifested in numbers  
At least to me, a heartless soul standing distant  
Cowering in complacent pretence, that does not fear,  
From the incessant moaning - why can't they just all be quiet?  
Dehumanised, abstract, yearning to connect  
When ultimately, we are all simply invisible

Wouldn't we all, just for a time, like to be invisible?  
To forget and be forgotten, to pause playing with numbers  
Revelling in this, our winter of disconnect  
Though others' hearth and home lie distant  
Their loves and losses shrouded in the quiet  
Though not beyond the reach of love or fear

The future is the greatest source of fear  
Ever-present, seeking out the invisible  
Cradles in which catastrophe festers quietly  
While death and toilet paper are measured in numbers  
Though not yet real, it taunts; invulnerable, distant  
A conspiracy of time and projection, engaged to connect

It's a virus; it destroys rather than connects  
Isn't it understandable that some may fear?  
Though ideals dictate that fear be distant  
The watcher on the wall sees what to most is invisible  
There is no come back if one becomes one of the numbers  
From the noise of life to the sullen, sterile quiet

In common cause, we connect through strands invisible  
Knowing, not cowed by, fear of life-negating numbers  
Love expressed in distance. Strong, sombre quiet.

## THE KNOWING

One by one and all in line, each aspect turns a page  
 Progressing via the change in view beyond the noble cage  
 Each footprint traced in doubt, and yet, in confidence proceeding  
 Risk shame of abrogated worth, pursuit the only leading.

Snares laid for knowledge, injured critters gathered in the hunt  
 Each its private universe, resisting the affront  
 Discovery confined within the bounds of meagre means  
 Battling through the conflict with this enigmatic fiend.

Defective weapons slash and hack, ungainly, laboured gain  
 Chaotic shrapnel congregates, a vomit-like moraine  
 Wading through the quagmire, the sticky, stinking sludge  
 Detritus reaped in drudgery, an endless, tiresome trudge.

Entrapped within the hunter's mind, a world precisely bound  
 Translation from the mayhem, a cacophony resounds  
 Woven through existing threads of elemental truths  
 A discordant tapestry, an imprecise sleuth

Dissemination rides the rutted road of revelation  
 Articulating nuances in stoney calculation  
 Abstract destination, a hostile diaspora  
 A mediator calls a truce within perception's aura

Listless, browsing racks of neatly packaged incidentals  
 Banal uniformity, absurdly regimental  
 Randomly elect a package, bland and nondescript  
 A yawn while held to blankly stare, this arid manuscript

Abstraction a cudgel raining blows in swift return  
 A silent battle cry resounds in casual concern  
 Inconsequential icons, dissonant designs  
 A grating coalescence, disparate worlds align

Vitality extracted, ponderous disinclination  
 Idle eyes ignite in faint illumination  
 Sentiment compels a stubborn, willing, free inertia  
 Gladiator proudly thralls a prejudiced arena

Resounding song, attains the essence of assimilation  
 Neurons glow in rapt applause, a dazzling constellation  
 Radiance monopolises, defiant in its charge  
 Identity subsumed within the unrelenting march

The critter runs at no behest, a panicking escape  
 Commence pursuit, disheartened some, a strange, replaying tape  
 The muster gathered, seething mass of ordered disarray  
 Collective consciousness progressed, maybe soon cliché

Sinead's poetry and prose have appeared online, in print and on radio. Most recently her work can be found in *The Stinging Fly*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Live Encounters*, *StepAway Magazine*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and RTEjr radio. Sinéad won the 2022 Cathal Bui Poetry Competition. She has work forthcoming in *Howl Magazine & Southword*. She is the 2022 recipient of the Roscommon Chapbook Award with her book *The Word According to Crow*. Her chapbook *The songs I sing are sisters* co-authored with Cáit O'Neill McCullagh is available from Dreich Press. For more details [www.sineadmclure.com](http://www.sineadmclure.com)



## WALRUS

Sleep soundly, Freya.  
Better to euthanise than apologise  
when a walrus suns herself on a yacht.  
Who took the wrong channel in this sea?

When most are floating through discarded plastic  
beneath container ships, weighted with the under-ripened  
fruit, over-ripened cheese, built-in obsolescence.

Freya did not know our world is dire,  
she saw beneath the waves fish are dying,  
how water is grey like damp skin.  
She surfaced to sleep in the sun.

She surfaced to sleep in the sun.  
How water is grey like damp skin.  
She saw beneath the waves, fish are dying.  
Freya did not know our world is dire.

Fruit, over-ripened cheese, built-in obsolescence.  
Beneath container ships weighted with the under-ripened,  
when most are floating through discarded plastic.

Who took the wrong channel in this sea?  
When a Walrus suns herself on a yacht  
better to euthanise than apologise.  
Sleep soundly, Freya.

Sinéad McClure

## SUNFLOWERS

Ever bright these scorched yellow blooms.  
Not the penetrating glare of spring,

the valley's heat in high summer  
rising as tall as its tallest stalk.

Hot-yellow plates of light, orange at their core  
as if the sun had spread itself among these fields  
and here in my ochre room along this vase.

Fields of flowers are also fields of bones,  
someday soon, sunflowers will bloom again.

## HOW TO DIVIDE THE REMAINS OF AN ALDER

No weather warning  
for my felling  
no fronts  
no low  
warmth steaming

I am dry  
wood weary  
down

Killing me  
you plant  
that sapling

I will fall  
silently  
stack  
of neat round

know this  
in pieces

prepares me  
no foretelling  
to dip below  
east winds or high  
in from the south

yet I have held  
I die from the top

is the replacement  
in my shadow  
oak

as you sleep  
When you carve my remains  
my many years  
rings

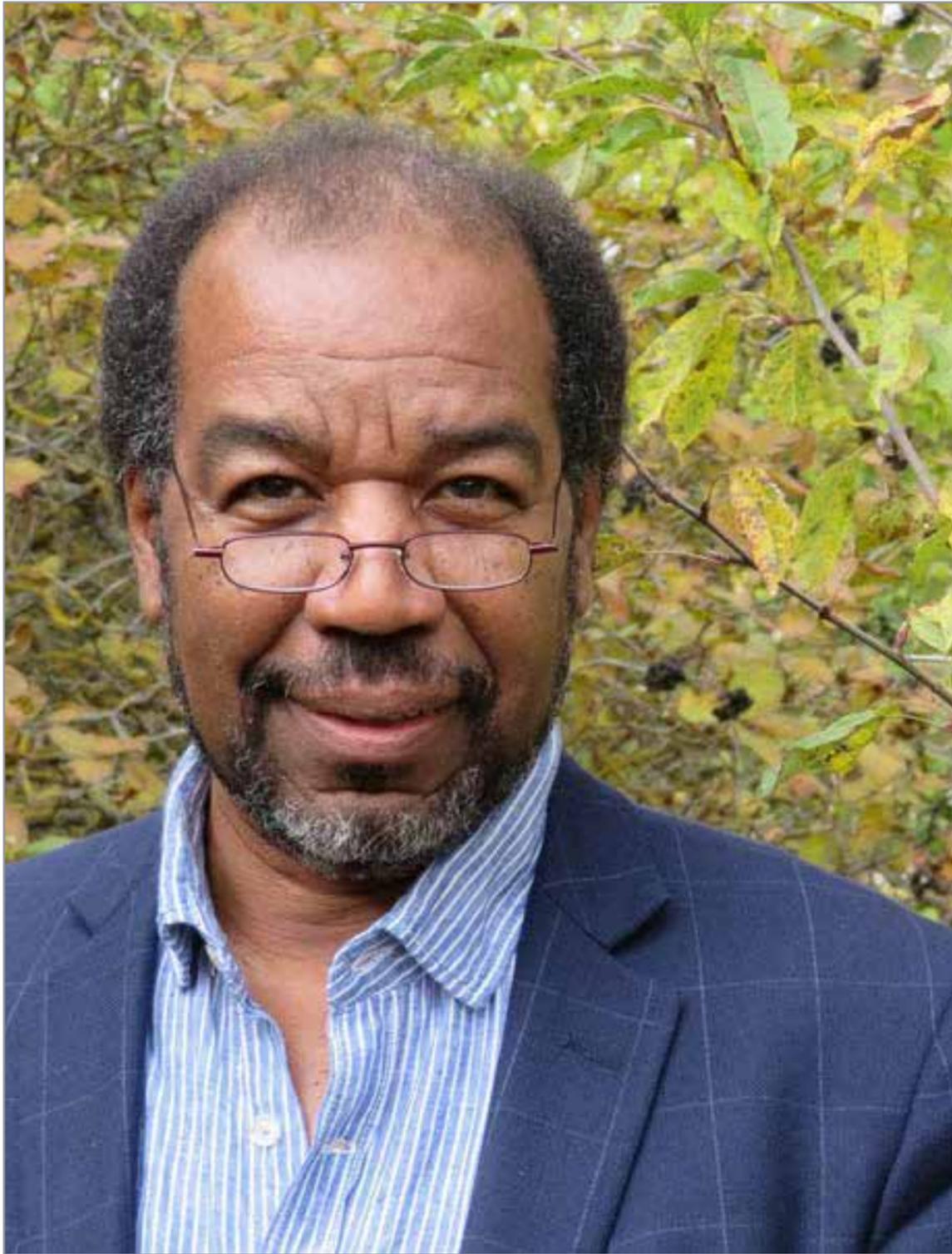
a dead child lies  
beneath me

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 Argeș* in Romania. His awards include the Elias Cannetti Fellowship from the City of Vienna.

Translated from Arabic by Wolfgang Astelbauer.

## JOSEPH'S TRACES

They pass colored threads  
 through the eyes of thousands of needles  
 for a shirt washed with many sighs.  
 And he has no idea about it.  
 Slipping on all these fingers,  
 he feels the stitches stripping him to the skin.  
 He remains patient for a while  
 until the horses have passed.  
 He takes off the shirt  
 reading Joseph's traces on his chest.  
 He gets frightened  
 realizing that his father is dead  
 and his back naked in a twofold way.  
 He closes his eyes,  
 sharpening his hearing  
 for the distant howls  
 coming nearer and nearer.  
 Hastily, he writes into the sand,  
 closing his eyes and his ears.



Tarek Eltayeb

## STRANDED

After the young man  
had stranded,  
the sea spewed  
him up here,  
his exhausted body  
lay between dogs and policemen's shoes.  
His soul was still out there,  
would follow on some cloud.

He discovered it  
when it descended  
in the late afternoon.  
With one hand  
on his the forehead  
against the blinding sun,  
he tried  
to shoo it away,  
to deter it  
from staying in this country.

In vain.

The soul lay down beside him,  
the dogs barked at it,  
the shoe of a policeman  
already treading on it.

## TOOTHLESS SEA

The toothless sea  
still sucks at the sun at night  
and at the moon by day.

When it weeps,  
it dries up,  
parching the fish  
like scab,  
turning the whales  
into combs in the sand.

The older the sea gets,  
the more it does without  
the sun and the moon,  
making friends with the wind,  
yearning for the adventures  
of pirates and cunning explorers.

It guffaws,  
drops some land,  
inhales  
devouring an island.  
Yet, at the end of its way,  
it plunges into the blue,  
without knowing  
the difference  
between sea and sky.  
Thinning out,  
drying up,  
it dies  
a toothless sea.

Cumbria native Terri Metcalfe moved to Ireland with her Mayo born partner and two children in 2019. From a down-to-earth, tools of the practical trade family, she only recently in her forties thought it acceptable that she might be a serious poet. Terri has endured several decades of mental and physical ill health which she draws on in her work. She has been published in *Abridged*, *A New Ulster*, *Green Ink Poetry*, *Spilling Cocoa Over Martin Amis* and *Skylight 47*. She was shortlisted for the Open Window 2023 mentorship programme and will be a featured reader at the 20th anniversary of Over The Edge Literary Events held in Galway city library this coming January.



## WITNESS

Of all the girls on the lower site,  
the ones it took me twenty years to realise  
were cloned cuts of their mothers,  
lined up like skittles you could knock  
but they wouldn't tumble, only rock

you were not of that painted vanity variety.  
Approaching my doorstep with hair a halo of fire,  
I thought, "Here comes the devil"  
but God was on your lips,  
you made me think it was serendipitous

until I found out that your mother was a nurse  
and wrapped up with a razor in a pencil case  
a tell-tale trail of bandages had been found  
leeching shades of scarlet into the ground.

I suppose what I'm trying to say is  
sometimes it takes the wounds of another  
to remind us of one choice  
and not the other.

Terri Metcalfe

## BLOOD TIES

That day on Blencathra,  
 neither “blean” meaning summit  
 nor “cadeir” meaning seat-like, within reach,  
 after my legs had long pedalled out  
 and only the promise of one more hill  
 kept me pub-bound,  
 you told me to look at the view  
 and take on the hail  
 though it battered like shrapnel.  
 I knew the bruises would fascinate me for days  
 there now, I’d felt something.

The exact way to feel alive  
 is to ride close to death;  
 here I learned the differences  
 between blood and kin  
 blood ties us together,  
 its blush river coursing alongside  
 ever narrowing streets and footpaths,  
 over ancestral fells and lakes  
 to the place in our shared hearts  
 where its fractions embrace  
 into each rooted knot becoming folk we call family.

Five miles down  
 you force fed me Jaffa cakes  
 when I collapsed on the kitchen floor  
 the sugar rush took me back then. Let’s see,  
 I was eight, so you about 14: the joker years  
 you told me the splinter  
 the new squatter in my finger,  
 would travel straight to my heart  
 and burst it. Laughing, you hunted  
 down the would-be killer  
 and with bare fingers evicted him.

Some years later we’d sit by the fire,  
 you pulling ticks from the dog  
 you said never to leave the legs,  
 as their blood black bodies sizzled  
 like a Catherine Wheel funeral pyre.  
 You’d crammed in these country ways,  
 like ewes in a pen at lambing season  
 bleating their way to hardiness,  
 whereas as I sat on the fence  
 watching from the comfortable townland,  
 badly performing the goat.

Sometimes now when I light kindling  
 I watch the flames lick up  
 and unfurl twenty years ahead,  
 I see you no longer as the joker in the pack  
 but still with a laugh to calm the wilds.  
 Like baler twine I know you see me wrapped too tightly  
 a noose around a tree trunk  
 and sometimes I’m eight again  
 and I cut free  
 working my way back through  
 the blood-full landscape, to home.

## LADYBIRDS

The putty rolled in my gritty palms  
like hours old porridge. I wondered  
if I stuffed it up my nose, would it block  
the smell of decaying people, that scent  
uncorked only for the nearly dead –  
yellow things and red things; tangy tinged  
vomit, pockets of piss, pie and potatoes,  
blood blisters with their slow-healing,  
cochineal bubbles.

Rumours like lumps of coal carried door  
to door said that a seventy eight year old  
prostitute lay moth-balled behind its cocoon-like  
blocks, locals picking at her like carrion crows,  
though I didn't get the joke  
about taking her false teeth out.

A car engine lagged and dragged so I tried  
to hide by flattening myself on top of the wall,  
woodlice marching alongside me  
like walking pills. Not even the coppers  
drove slowly through our estate -  
hub-caps were a status symbol  
on or off the car  
fake leather jackets  
a permanent wave  
stab wounds - our dog  
took a knife in the ribs for me once  
or I'd have been something really special too

and there stopped the royalty of the Raffles rebels  
with their Sex Pistols and safety pins,  
"Yer fuckin' fat twat, wot yer up till?  
Show us yer knickers!"  
Like a decapitated head I fell from the guillotine  
of the freshly fitted windows, the local nursing  
home's red bricks now stuck with the fingerprints  
of a five year old, like giant, flightless ladybirds.

Yan Kouton is the author of novels, short stories and poetry. He is also a lyricist and pursues a musical work of reading his texts. He also directs the literary creation and digital publishing site Les Cossagues des Frontières. He also works as a music columnist.  
[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yan\\_Kouton](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yan_Kouton)



## KINGDOM

Fading away  
 On front of me  
 A sky  
 Who nevertheless  
 Extended  
 So far

He finished  
 By withdrawing  
 In his hemisphere

We think of  
 The Empire of the Dead  
 To this clear world  
 What we pursue

We think of  
 Move away  
 Disaster  
 To sink  
 In the lands  
 Far from these dangers

In other words  
 To no longer  
 Scare

Yan Kouton

## A WORLD AROUND

Fell for  
A gloomy day  
Its rhythm though  
Brutal

His army defeated  
His rearguard fight

Hours that hammer

The loneliness that we disguise  
Who knows all the flesh  
All the strength  
From the term

And the depth  
A bit monstrous  
Time

His vice  
And his crime  
This war  
Which springs  
Tantrums

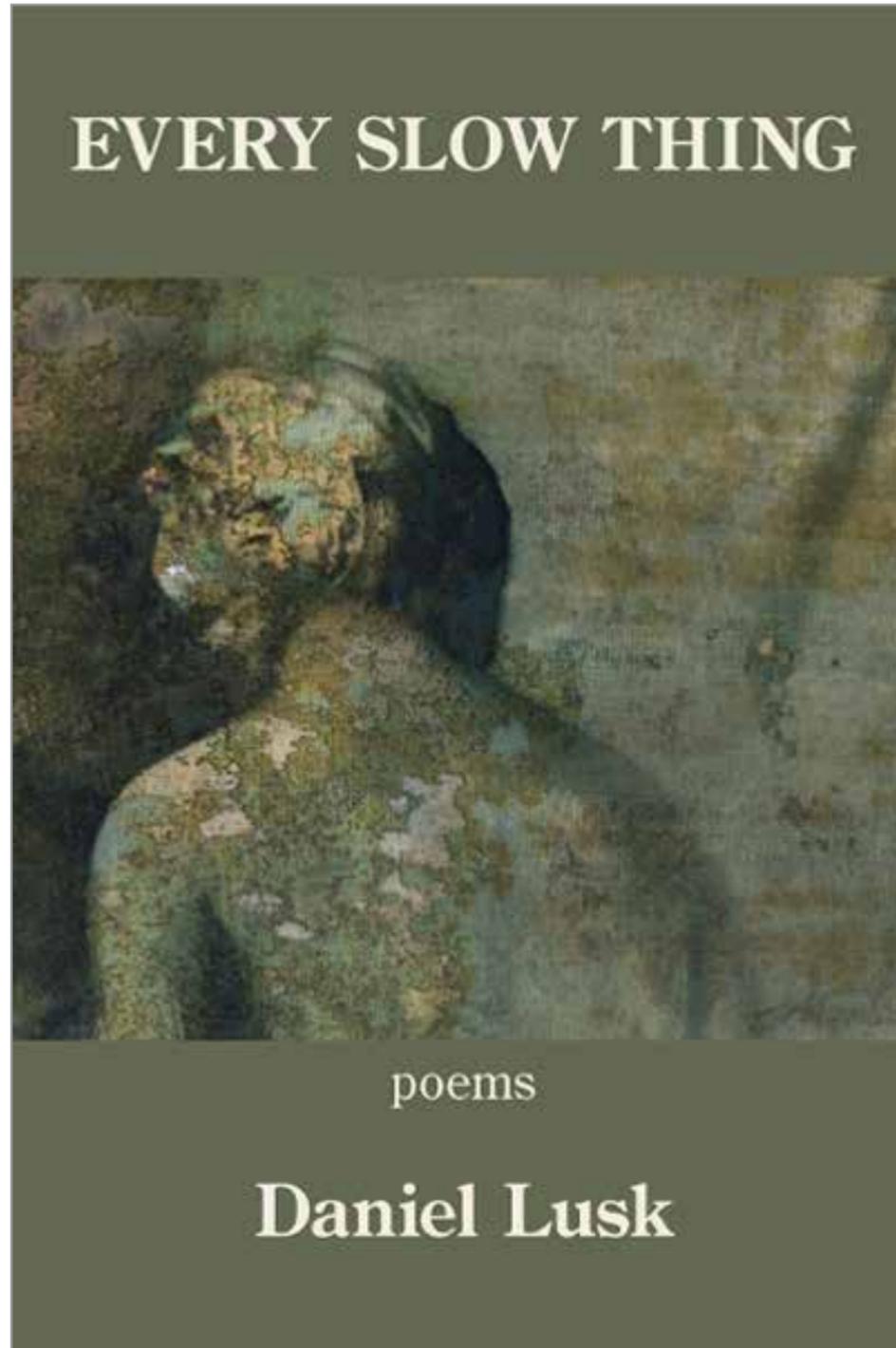
## LIPS

To guide  
The living  
To show him  
Hell  
Like a memory  
Which never flies away

Take support  
On the flesh  
To heal  
Bites

How we survive  
With fierce claws  
By alchemy  
Desire  
Who pierces  
Fog  
Tears

How we fight  
Against the lying aspect  
Who stands between  
The bodies



Frances Cannon is the Managing Director of Sundog Poetry, as well as a writer, artist, and instructor. She has previously taught at the Vermont College of Fine Arts, Champlain College, the Vermont Commons School, and the University of Iowa. She has an MFA in creative writing from Iowa and a BA in poetry and printmaking from the University of Vermont. Her published books include: *Walter Benjamin: Reimagined*, MIT Press, *The Highs and Lows of Shapeshift Ma and Big-Little Frank*, Gold Wake Press, *Tropicalia*, Vagabond Press, *Predator/Play*, Ethel Press, *Uranian Fruit*, Honeybee Press, *Sagittaria*, Bottlecap Press, and *Image Burn*, a self-published art book. She has worked for *The Iowa Review*, *McSweeney's Quarterly*, *The Believer*, and *The Lucky Peach*. Her writing has been published in *The New York Times*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Green Mountain Review*, *Vice*, *Lithub*, *The Moscow Times*, *The Examined Life Journal*, *Gastronomica*, *Electric Lit*, *Edible magazine*, *Mount Island*, *Fourth Genre*, and *Vol. 1 Brooklyn*. Website: [frankyfrancescannon.com](http://frankyfrancescannon.com) Twitter: @francesartist Instagram: @frankyfrancescannon



## FRANCES CANNON

### Review of

### DANIEL LUSK'S

### *Every Slow Thing*

Kelsay Books (Utah) July 2022. [LINK](#)

Daniel Lusk has lived many lives and has many stories to tell, and the poems in his new collection, *Every Slow Thing*, offer small glimpses of these past selves, as well as reflections from the storyteller in the present moment. These pieces feel more pensive and intimate than his previous books: five poetry collections, one novel, and a memoir. This is a quiet and gentle book, with an eye on history, a sweeping hand over the author's myriad adventures, dashes of humor, and hints of magical realism.

These poems explore a full cast of characters in the theater of the writer's mind: a hermit, lovers, dogs, owls, a train, a blind preacher. The speakers seem caught between faith and doubt, restraint and havoc, pleasure and struggle—we witness their progress through injury, death, love, and revelation. Their voices are dynamic, and the moods they convey include contemplative, amused, haunted, nostalgic, and appreciative. The poems explore various geographies as well, from cliffs in Ireland to farms in South Dakota. They draw on many sources, as evidenced in the diverse epigraphs: Paul Simon, Italo Calvino, Jill Lapore, Goethe, and more. There are also a handful of ekphrastic poems, drawing inspiration from a painting by Gustave Courbet, a photograph from the National Geographic, a theater in Chicago, and a Chopin nocturne. In all, the poems show the depth and breadth of Lusk's talents as a poet—each has its own unique shape, mood, and story, and yet they all feel connected in memory and across time. Despite the variety of characters, speakers, voices, moods, and allusions in this book, the reigning concept is the phrase contained in the titular poem, "there is beauty/ in every slow thing." This thought manifests in many tender, detailed moments throughout the collection. The reader is welcomed into quiet glimpses of nature, domestic realms, and reveries. The book sings with vivid imagery and textures—hay, blood, rain, lace, fur.

Book available at Kelsay Books (Utah)  
<https://kelsaybooks.com/collections/all/daniel-lusk>

In one of the more playful and imaginative poems in this collection, "The Oat Witch & the Old Man's Daughter," the reader is invited to reflect on "an old story" with the twist that the speaker lived through it to tell the tale. In this blend of myth and gritty realism, the speaker tells the story first in third person, then switches to first person to claim the story as his own. He recalls a nearly fatal accident involving a stranger from out of town who helps in the hay harvest, and who is then stabbed by "the sheaf-goat/ dressed as a child/ lifted a pitchfork to stick it/ into the wagonload/ as the tractor lept ahead." This stranger is killed in a harvest ritual, and yet he either never dies or he is revived, nursed back to health by the daughters of the old, dead patriarch. The stranger wakes from the accident from a fever dream, without a clear sense of what happened, whether or not he died, how long he spent in the realm of the dead, or his sense of self. The poem reads like a riddle or an old trickster myth, and yet it contains little seeds of truth.

Some of the most compelling passages in this collection are lists of sensual details that surround the speaker; landscapes, flora and fauna, the names of bygone towns and lovers. In the poem "Haystacks Like Bread," the speaker notes how haystacks gradually accumulate in a field rising "like bread dough/ into compact architecture like houses,/ stables, bars. They were my churches." Thus, a memory of a mundane task such as building haystacks transforms into reverential worship. The speaker also builds a museum of memories of these rural meadows, both unpleasant: "Snakes, mice, dung beetles, ticks,/ mites, bacteria and mold," and pleasant "green alfalfa,/ yellowed timothy, red clover stems and flowers faded blue." We witness the speaker howling songs over the roar of a tractor, and speaking promises and regrets to himself while he works the field. Thus each small object and chore finds its place in time, and trivialities are elevated to precious keepsakes.

In a poem titled "Ganz Andere," a German phrase which roughly translates to "wholly other" or "quite different," the speaker reflects on his age: 63, and his observations of the day include the full moon, brown bats, and a large green frog. He then reveals that he was "exiled at an early age/ by mystery," and then claims that "I am the dog of uncertain parentage./ I am the dog who barks all night, / afraid of silence." This poem reads as the speaker's *ars poetica*, or an answer to the question "why poetry?" The poem itself hints at these answers: Poetry, to fill the silence. Poetry, as a balm to loneliness. Poetry, as a vocation. Poetry, as bookends to a life.

Every poem in this book could offer an answer to that age-old question, if not in content, then through the rhythm and musicality of each line. Take, for example, these lines from "Asp of Jerusalem," which offers an unusual vision as well as a tongue-twisting phrase, "In the aspens yellow-bellied sapsuckers/ laughed themselves blue." The music of the book fluctuates in form, line-length, and rhythm, but it's always there, humming and bouncing from line to line.

This play and humor punctuates the collection, and one particular poem, "Nocturne No. 2 in E Flat Major," offers a delightful surprise to the reader in the final stanza. The speaker performs a simple task: dusting an old clay pot while listening to Chopin. The shape of the pot reminds the speaker of distant galaxies, the "areola of a lover's breast," and an infant's hand, yet he cannot pin a metaphor to the darkness within the pot. He offers a challenge to himself and to the reader, "we can imagine whatever we like/in that black nothingness," and he offers an absurd vision of a "small spider/ in a brown fedora, smoking a cheroot." The poem eventually returns to the piece of music mentioned in the title, and the speaker implores the reader to pause and listen, "notice how the music of the piano lingers/ like a slow rain on a stranger's roof." This is characteristic of the nature of this book—a blend of worldly philosophy, ordinary beauty, and magic.

This collection offers a tour of memories, a cabinet of wonders, several folk-tales, allusions to other texts and works of art, love letters to figures from the past and present, and observations of the natural world. The music of "cricket, frog, and goose" accompanies the poems, along with a rotation of visions both real and imagined. This book feels complete, satisfying, and fresh, like a whole loaf of sourdough bread from a wood-fired oven. This is Lusk's offering, like a communion; crack open the crust and share in the warmth of a long life, well-lived.

Daniel Lusk is an award-winning poet, author of seven previous poetry collections and other books. A former commentator on books for NPR and well-known for his teaching, he has been a Resident Fellow at Yaddo and The MacDowell Colony and his work is familiar to readers of literary journals. Native of the prairie Midwest, Daniel is a Senior Lecturer of English Emeritus at the University of Vermont.



# FARTHINGS



Daniel Lusk

## FARTHINGS *eBook Now Live*

Daniel Lusk's new collection of micro-poems, *Farthings*, has just been released by Yavanika Press (Bangalore, India). Go to <https://yavanikapress.wixsite.com/home> and click on Catalogue to download the book for the astonishing price of \$3.

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