

2010 - 2022



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
VOLUME TWO DECEMBER 2022

A black and white portrait of a woman with long, wavy hair, wearing a dark jacket over a dark top. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape.

ANGELA PATTEN
Hurry up please its time



©Mark Ulyseas

Boun Lai Heua Fai, fire boat festival, end of Buddhist Lent, Luang Prabang (Laos).
Photograph by Mark Ulyseas 11th October, 2022.



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

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

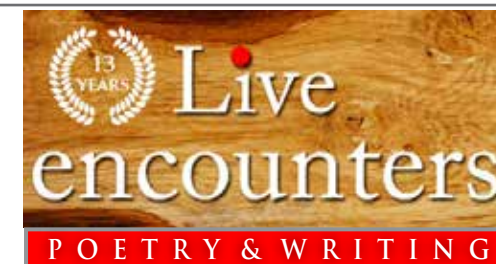
We are appealing for donations to pay for the administrative and technical aspects of the publication. **Please help by donating any amount for this just cause as events are threatening the very future of Live Encounters.**

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor
markulyseas@liveencounters.net

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VOLUME TWO
DECEMBER 2022

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Angela Patten's publications include four poetry collections, *The Oriole & the Ovenbird* (Kelsay Books 2021), *In Praise of Usefulness* (Wind Ridge Books 2014), *Reliquaries* (Salmon Poetry, Ireland 2007) and *Still Listening* (Salmon Poetry, Ireland, 1999), and a prose memoir, *High Tea at a Low Table: Stories From An Irish Childhood* (Wind Ridge Books 2013). Born and raised in Dublin, Ireland, she now lives with her husband, poet Daniel Lusk, in Burlington, Vermont, where she is a Senior Lecturer Emerita in the English Department at the University of Vermont.



ANGELA PATTEN

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

For years, my old friend Peter used to phone me on my birthday to tell me how many hours I had lived so far. At his memorial service earlier this year, I learned that he had done the same thing with other friends. We all admitted that it was disconcerting to consider the number of hours we had already lived, how much or how little we had accomplished, and how many more hours we might have left.

To mark this 13th anniversary of *Live Encounters Magazine*, I have been thinking about the concept of time.

Ever since people began to notice the regular movement of the sun and the stars, we have wondered about the passage of time. Humans have been devising ways to measure time for thousands of years, inventing water clocks, sundials, candle clocks, hour-glasses, and large mechanical clocks which appeared in the towers of European cities in the early-to-mid-14th century.

I became fascinated with these mechanical devices after seeing the Prague Astronomical Clock and the Zytglogge in the Old City of Bern, Switzerland. In June of this year, I traveled to Wells in Somerset, England, to visit the Wells Cathedral clock. Dating from 1390, it is the second oldest working clock in the world. Its dials represent a geocentric view of the universe with the sun and moon revolving around a central fixed earth. On the quarter hour, the wooden figure of Jack Blandifer, the Quarter Jack, bangs the bell above him with his hammer and two more below him with his heels, setting the mechanism in motion and animating the jousting knights who charge at each other above the clock.

Angela Patten

Like its European counterparts, the clock is a fusion of art, science, and craftsmanship, and it also serves as an allegory for the brevity of human life. The Prague Astronomical Clock registers an even more somber allegorical note with “The Walk of the Apostles,” an hourly show of moving apostle figures and other sculptures, including a skeleton that represents Death, striking a bell.

Before the proliferation of clocks, the alternation of day and night and the changing seasons determined most human activity. Our modern concepts of time and punctuality would have been inconceivable, not to mention absurd, to 14th century people. Even the fabulously decorated astronomical clocks of medieval Europe were not terribly accurate. Their initial purpose was to mark the hours of prayer. Ordinary people were not concerned with minutes so the clocks featured a 24-hour single-handed dial. As a result of new inventions in clockmaking in the latter half of the 17th century, more and more new clocks had 12-hour dials, with an additional minute hand.

Wells Cathedral, called the “most poetic of the English Cathedrals,” must have been an awe-inspiring spectacle for medieval peasants who could not read or write. The West Front of the gigantic building has around 300 of the original 400 statues on view, including two six-winged Seraphim who flank Jesus in the Judgement Day centerpiece at the top, supported by apostles, angels, and saints. On feast days like Palm Sunday, this theatrical vision would have been reinforced with trumpet music and singing to accompany processions of bishops and priests in their ostentatiously rich regalia.

When it comes to religious iconography, duplicity abounds. During my visit to Wells, I walked into the Cathedral grounds through Penniless Porch, a historic entryway where the poor were permitted to beg for alms, next door to the walled enclave of the Bishop’s Palace. I looked up to see a couple of irreligious pigeons canoodling in an alcove, unbothered by the passage of tourists or the passage of time.

In an essay on Dante, T.S. Eliot wrote that “Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood.” In the elaborate façade of Wells Cathedral, which was originally painted in vibrant colors, the images communicated the power and promise of the Church and evoked a sense of wonder in the faithful even before they entered the building. Likewise, the power of poetry often lies in its suggestiveness and the seductive power of its imagery. While it may sometimes achieve timelessness, I’m glad to say it rarely promises redemption.

The passage of time has been a perennial theme of poetry, whether John Milton’s characterization of time as “the subtle thief of youth,” Robert Herrick’s exhortation to the virgins to “Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,” W.H. Auden’s “Stop all the clocks” lament, or Mary Oliver’s provocative question, “What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”



The Triumph of Love over Time ca. 1780-90. Photo credit: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/194458>



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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.

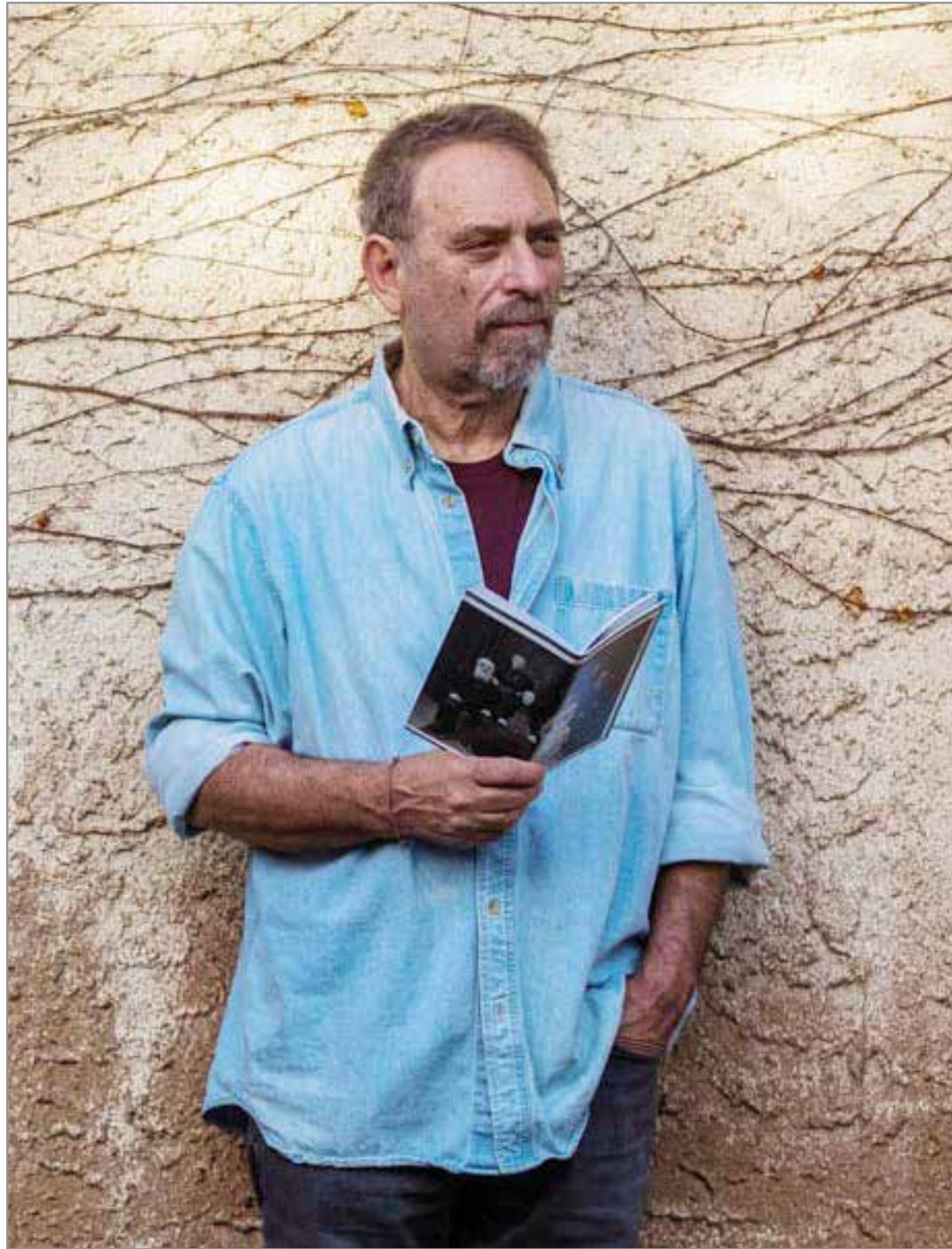
Barone's work has been featured in various publications including *The Irish Arts Review*, *Live Encounters Magazine*, *Senior Times*, *House and Home*, and the *Sunday Independent*; and she has published two books in collaboration with the Hennessy Award winning writer, *Eileen Casey*. Emma has exhibited 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

Alan Walowitz is a Contributing Editor at *Verse-Virtual*, an *Online Community Journal of Poetry*, where his poetry is featured every month. His chapbook, *Exactly Like Love*, comes from Osedax Press. The full-length, *The Story of the Milkman and Other Poems*-- the title poem of which was featured in *The New York Times* in April, 2019-- is available from Truth Serum Press. Most recently, from Arroyo Seco Press, is the chapbook *In the Muddle of the Night*, written with poet Betsy Mars.



SEEKING HOME

What could I possibly know of their manifold ways, the trees?--
how at last light of day each thrush and wren quietly rush
to a shaky branch, but of a sturdier limb, every knot and knee
close-in to the trunk, issues a solemn creak, as if an ancient heart, flush

from its own beating, tucked in the in-most ring, moves toward
every breathing thing and offers, gratis, just enough abode.
This is as it ought to be. How guileless we're lured,
no matter when-- to the place we belong. It might've rained, snowed,

the ice made this world wobble, as if every branch,
weighed down in its place, sometimes home to a bevy
of starlings, whose current calm belies their well-known need to stanch
the silence, itself--by their mere presence--made more dark and heavy.

Later the wind might up, and all will fly, as if fanned
toward waiting day. Despite our woes, like the trees, we stand.

Alan Walowitz

SLEEP

*When you get to be my age,
you don't need to sleep,
my mother would tell me.
She knew a lot about baking and human nature
and, sleep, which she read about
and never got much of,
working and dreaming and riding the subway home
and making dinner when she arrived.*

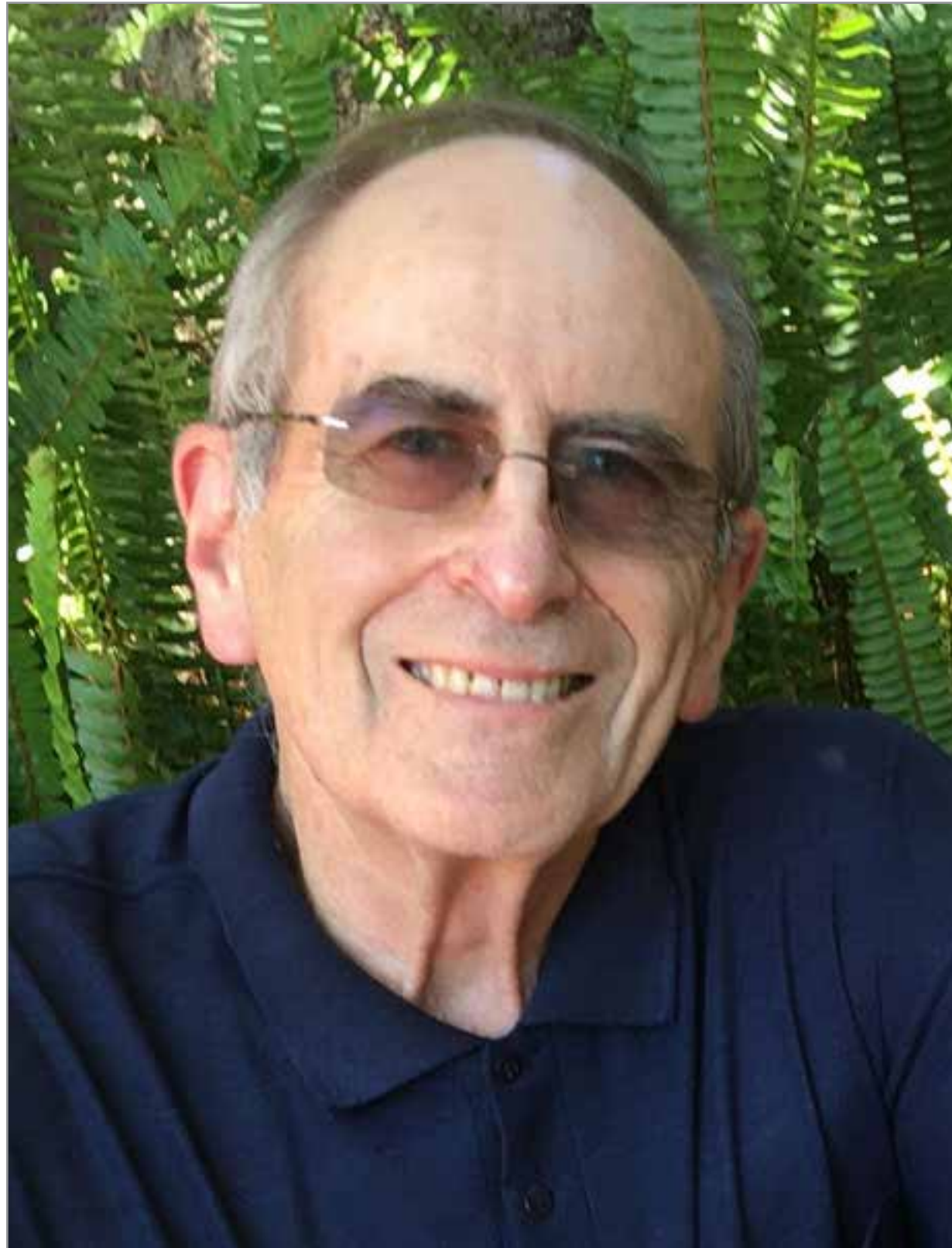
*After, she'd fall asleep on the sofa
and get up in time for the 11 o'clock news,
taking special note of the weather
though she would never do anything about it--
I had high expectations of her.
Then, she'd make a blueberry buckle,
or think about cleaning the counters,
or comb through *Good Housekeeping*--
though keeping house was not a specialty
she especially took joy from
or did very often,
she would, herself, admit.*

*I once saw her nap on the bed
right in the middle of making it.
Should I wake her? I didn't know--
so I let her sleep and went out to play.
Years later, she denied this ever happened.
By then I was smart enough to tell her
that, much like this poem,
I just made it up.*

IN A BOX AT THE CURB

*My baby shoes never bronzed,
nor put up for sale unused.
Just this portrait in muted gold,
I was told, though I have my doubts,
it might have had some worth
to distant kin, though by now I can't find one.
Looks enough like me
to feel some bitterness in my bones,
the lines made so deep
by the artist's skill and zeal.
Perhaps destined to remain apart,
but will remind any poker-through-the-ruins
who might have me appraised,
perhaps I was real. Real value? No.
Still, you might keep this version of me.
You'll never know who I am,
but this is nearly who I was.*

Alex Skovron is the author of seven collections of poetry, a prose novella and a book of short stories. His most recent book of poems is *Letters from the Periphery* (2021); his earlier volume of new and selected poems, *Towards the Equator* (2014), was shortlisted in the Prime Minister's Literary Awards. As well as bilingual editions of his poetry translated into French (*The Attic*) and Chinese (*Water Music*), Czech translations of his novella *The Poet* (2005) and collection of stories *The Man who Took to his Bed* (2017) have recently been published. Alex's work has also been translated into Dutch, Polish, Macedonian and Spanish. His numerous public readings have included appearances in China, Serbia, India, Ireland, Macedonia and Portugal. He lives in Melbourne.



NIGHTHOUSE

A creak, a tic of the clock? A flicked match could explode
the odd free-to-air ghost casing the corridor.

So no, no need to jump—just a slack tap's needle tattoo,
clicking water, or maybe the mind

dripping? Tug on the cord—what the drape had shuttered
is beaming like that pared nail men walk upon

not for a while now. Nothing forever phases it,
page on cratered page, this megalegendarly she-sage,

or chaperone—or super-simpatika granny ready to host
a tryst when a girl feels her tides collide.

But mind the corridor, its arthritic age much tiptoed upon
and vigilant for the merest whispered aside.

Alex Skovron

THE HOURGLASS AND THE PLEDGE

‘the ocean seldom repeats itself’
— Stanisław Lem, *Solaris*

Or make that never. Channelling Herakleitos,
I look up from the book: Nor does
a grain of sand, each one a crystal totally unique,
I remind myself (tautologies aside)—
then hear myself elucidate a fresh conceit:
‘An hourglass should possess a built-in bell’:
to warn the watcher not to be distracted
just as the stream accelerates
for the concluding grains to carve the rising cusp
to its destined geometry. Until the tables
are turned ... A new quote comes:
‘The cost of flight is landing’—that’s Harrison (Jim
not George), and the poet should know.
Those specks of dust, trajecting in a quantum
beyond count, would have intrigued the atomists,
but Blake finessed the case. Not so the sea.
It dances on its bed of sand, a skin concealing
a pledge never to reveal what it is thinking,
while its warning remains the same:
Read in my undulations the fluid glass of time,
and dare to fathom the poem I never repeat.

I TOLD HER SHE WAS FULGENT

it was another episode more or less
in our lusty twistory
like the memails we used to shoot
to ourselves never
to be shared *nemos* we called them
& when we made out
we dubbed it *closing up* because
(she glossed) *love* is no more
than a fully open art once
i told her she was fulgent
a real gem a pearl to which
her viscous retort pearls
are congealed oyster spit
she’d dug that jewel out of
the handmaid’s tale &
when i shucked a chuckle
she confessed her dill mother
zany father had grown a habit
of swiving in his & hers
bling they adored the jangle
nihil obstat i indulged so
long as they adore each other
like us she interrogated
lifting off me a moment
i’m sure they do & i licked
her crumpled elbow bless
them your dum & mad
i said lusting for a grimace

Angela Costi is the author of five poetry gatherings/books including *Honey & Salt* (Five Islands Press, shortlisted Mary Gilmore Prize 2008) and *An Embroidery of Old Maps and New* (Spinifex, 2021). Also, nine produced plays/performance-text (five commissioned and funded). Her poetry has placed/shortlisted in a number of prizes including Woorilla, Meniscus and Joanne Burns Microlit Awards. Since 1994, she's been published widely in Australia and overseas. In 2021, she received the High Commendation for Contribution to Arts and Culture, Merri-bek Award. She is known as Αγγελική Κωστή among the Cypriot diaspora, which is her heritage. She lives on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung land.



RETIRED

after 2020-21 Melbourne lockdowns

During those months, our house protested
with leaks draughts sudden fumes
we persisted without consulting
as bedroom became office, alcove
a schoolroom, carport a playground,
as family grew to include the manager
issuing maintenance tips, then home
lost its memory
invited the possum to screech
Remember Remember
all through the night.

Now, our house sleeps
during the day
and barely rouses to mornings
of coffee grinding, toaster popping, shrieking
to catch the tram at 8.05. When we
return with our bags and hunger
it utters no creak
like my father who is 86
sitting all day listening to his thoughts
of what he was
to so many.

Angela Costi

ECLIPSED

No accident of time has brought us
to this one love
of space and light

 Your body my instrument
 to play my game of pose

The sun is your mother
preening your strength
my fault is picking the second
to expose what is left

 Many call it a holiday
 a chance to unwind

There is the challenge
to change what is you and me
into the us
become the species
of both.

They call me your wife
 let them believe
 I am your shadow

You who know
our true sickness
to wake with this thirst to search for body
caught in the grip of unknowing
hair teeth nipple open and wanting
 and then there is me
 absorbing your heat of ambition
 my obsession
 to capture you
 yawning or shouting.

One will never know
there is more
there is your shape
 locked into my key
 see how we match.

Anne McDonald is a Irish based spoken word poet and artist whose work is centered on the challenges we face in a society that is changing rapidly and how we respond or react to those changes. Through her writing she explores themes of parenthood, aging, death, loss, inclusivity and response to the human condition. Through her art she explores our connection and sometimes disconnect with nature, and the effect mankind has on nature. She is interested in the power of enabling people who would otherwise not be considered “writers or artists” to find ways to give voice and space to their own creative experience. She was awarded The Irish Writers Residency in Cill Rialag, Kerry. She has had work published in *Women’s News*, *Hot Press*, *Electric Acorn*, *Woman’s Work Anthologies 1 & 2*, *The Blue Nib*, *The Strokestown Anthology*, *The Waxed Lemon*, *The Storms Inaugural Issue*, *Fragments Of Time*, *Blue Mondays’ Anthology 2021*, *192 Magazine* and *Live Encounters Magazine*. Her work has also been featured on collaborations with musicians and animators and reviewed and broadcast on RTE Radio. Anne has an M.Phil in Creative Writing. Her first collection of poetry *Crow’s Books* was published in 2020.



DEAR BILLY

Hello Billy, what do you want?
I can hardly hear the phone
I have just sat down.
Are you finished work?
Are you coming home?

Hi Marge, If you are putting a wash in
-I’m not!
But if you are putting one on later tonight,
Billy, I’ve just poured myself
a vodka and white. How come
every single time you ring
you ask me to do something?

Marge, can you not put my work jeans
in the machine,
there is a lotto ticket in the pocket.

Dear Billy,
I hope you are well.
Its very hot here.
The beach is lovely.
Sorry.
Marge x.

Anne McDonald

KINGDOM HALL CALLING

In December in her fiftieth year
 Mary made a decision
 to be Jehovah witness
 for the coming festive season.
 Neighbors stopped to read the card
 tacked to the front door heralding
 the cancellation of Mary's Christmas.

No tinsel tat, no tree to shed its spines
 across the carpet clogging up the Hoover,
 no cards from people never seen
 no being a consumer of stuff she didn't want
 and definitely no Roses in a tin,
 they being a million syns at fat club.
 Her house and mind would instead
 focus on Quality time, without the sugar.

No socks, jocks, bath sets, nets of easy peelers
 no sprouts from Brussels slopped
 into gravy on a plate.
 At the front gate a sign addressed
 the postman directly,
 "No cards here.
 Bills and junk mail welcome."

It was a witness at Mary's fat club that sparked the idea.
 Not the finding of Jehovah so much,
 as the shedding of the stress, the spending,
 the never ending putting up and taking down
 of plastic angels and tinfoil baubles
 or balding birds, claws of wire bent with arthritic years
 of gripping the aforementioned tree.

"Listen to me," Maggie said
 "Are you mad Mary? We don't do Christmas."
 The lights went on in Mary's head.
 She said, "This year, Maggie, I won't either."
 So neither women wasted hours wrapping crap
 for people who didn't want it
 trying not to cry when adding up the bill.

"This year I will spend the day in silence
 Or in nature, or learning to play the ukulele
 by tutorial on you tube."
 Maggie handed her a copy of *The WatchTower*.

"Bolognese will do for dinner, garlic bread a sure fire winner
 being a family tradition for the curing of hangovers."

No bobbed festive wool pullovers which scalded
 under Mary's underarms doing nothing for her figure,
 (each year she knew she needed a size bigger.)
 Why did she not think of this before?
 Maggie pushed some leaflets through the
 letterbox of the front door.

So for the festive season Mary signed her name
 as Rachel, kept her money in a tin,
 rang the New Year in from the comfort of her home
 being perfectly alone and smiling as the first baby born
 made the papers front page, screaming her arrival
 with incandescent rage
 her mother smiling for the camera.
 They called the baby Saoirse,
 the Irish name for freedom.

Brian Kirk is a poet and writer from Dublin, Ireland. His first poetry collection *After The Fall* was published by Salmon Poetry in 2017. His poem "Birthday" won the Listowel Writers' Week Irish Poem of the Year at the An Post Irish Book Awards 2018. His short fiction chapbook *It's Not Me, It's You* won the Southword Fiction Chapbook competition and was published in 2019 by Southword Editions. His novel *Riverrun* was a winner of the Novel Fair 2022 run by the Irish Writers Centre. He blogs at www.briankirkwriter.com.



SHADE

with apologies to Yeats

A rift has grown between the mind and body,
one is tough, the other prone to virus.
If we could extract the brain, that bloody
meat might make a home in a new locus
embodied in a perfect man-made form,
the soft machine discarded for the worm.

Some people's heads are frozen when they die,
stored in a refrigerated warehouse
in Phoenix, Arizona, hoping by
and by that new technology will rouse
them to a new life of the perfect kind,
far better than the one nature designed.

Others believe death will be overcome
and man become a kind of god on earth,
science will let us live beyond our time.
With cheap supply the days may lose their worth,
boredom might set in, breed fresh demand
for death, a simple flourish at the end.

Once out of nature I shall never take
for granted all the things the body taught
me, the marks that living and dying make,
the empathy of touch, nervous and fraught
with rash desire that tells of wishfulness
and smacks of absence, loss and loneliness.

Brian Kirk

EVERYTHING

then
summer
was a lifetime
and winter
an endless
night
in which
we longed
for sun

later we knew light
long days and shorter nights
the honeymoon of life
and love that never ends
until it does but
starts again

everything that breaks
can be repaired in time
everything
is movement and return
time fixes in its folds
the fracture of the bone
re-formed and schooled by
memory's failure to embrace
the new day knowing it is old

the kids are people now
and they have lives beyond what we
can ever know and knowledge far beyond their years

we disappear into the background of their lives
become bit players delivering occasional lines
of little consequence
background noise or filler in a scene

we are a dam against an evening tide that rises
all the time unable or unwilling to be moved yet restless
in a way we can't describe

we want to go back to the glory
days that memory has devised in lieu of actual experience
those times when we were vital to some cause or aimed
to be the selfless person at the centre of events who always knew
when words were not enough and actions were the currency of change
in a world that was reflected in our eyes day in day out

we will find a voice to decry
the cost in human terms and – oh the pity of it all – a frail voice
crying in an empty house

the neighbour's dog barking in the dark
night of the soul cannot be signalling an end to anything but sleep and sleep
is not our friend
being too close to the other one
the one that we know signifies
the end of
everything

THE FACTS OF LIFE

We are waiting for something to happen,
the cat to be sick
or the doorbell to ring

but it doesn't. The sound of clapping
drowns out the words
of the singer before he can sing,

and it doesn't matter so much anymore
since it's not real –
the gig ended more than a year ago.

The song plays on repeat – encore! encore!
Stamp those feet,
get to the bar before it closes.

We haven't been outside in weeks,
not that I mind –
there's nowhere to go anyway,

no engagements or places to meet,
just the park.
Now I sleep through the day

while the TV relays the world of events
to our home.
We can see what we lack,

watching crowds on the street giving vent
about stuff, shouting:
you can prove anything with facts!



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Chad Norman lives and writes in Truro, Nova Scotia. In 1992 he was awarded the Gwendolyn MacEwen Memorial Award For Poetry, the judges were Margaret Atwood, Barry Callaghan, and Al Purdy. His poems appear in journals, magazines, anthologies around the world. A new book, *A Matter Of Inclusion*, is out now.



IN LOVE AGAIN...

I am in love again...the Black Crows.
I hope you know them,
if you don't I hope you will.
Other than that I continue
chasing the filthy lucre
workin' a saw mill job,
shutting down the poet.
So will the costume changes
lead me to where the poems can't?
There is no low, low enough,
no lower than today's low anywhere.
However the garden says
pick me no matter!

Chad Norman

DOVES IN THE FEEDER

for people in Ukraine who love the sanity of the bird-world

After a night of no sleep
due to the inability to shed
the words of a stranger, how
he had seen me on the street
in front of the house he bought
a few years back, a house I
hardly noticed until he spoke:
“It is illegal to feed wild-life.”

On the sidewalk I chose a response
first to investigate the accusation,
asking why he hadn’t chosen another
when the world is at war, really,
what kind of man are you,
confronting me about the peanuts
I was feeding the crows following
me each day I threw them
to spots carefully chosen without
any suspicion anyone was watching,
or poised to leave his little spray-paint
hobby, revealing how the choice
of mine was about the neighbours
he pretended were displeased also,
both I knew well as strangers once too.

In the morning unrested I saw
a way to avoid him and his kind
by reversing my route, feeding
the followers first, knowing they then
will stay where I learn with them,
far away from the precious lawn
owned by the stranger, and those
he feels will be on his ignorant side.

Over a coffee and news of the war
I let go of him, never admitting
out loud he kept my mind awake,
just sitting like so many mornings
seeing clearly how birds aren’t wild-life,
both the crows he whined about, and
the trust there in front of me, choices
he wouldn’t know of, doves in the feeder,
needing no human other than one
unworried about what is left
after hunger is helped to an ending.

WE'KOPEKTIK/COBEQUID/TRURO

for Stephen Augustine

I want moon-swayed fiddles,
I want all tides,
touched with now,
what the bay
will turn to thrill, all of us
out there, distant marshes,
nobody turns back, everybody
allowed beyond that dyke.

How could water
not find our faces,
a way through
to all peoples, ready
to rinse their pasts too?

To catch tidal bores
we must forget jobs,
nothing but waves,
agedly brown, coming in,
pleased as we are.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Charlotte Innes is the author of three chapbooks, most recently *Twenty Pandemics* (Kelsay Books, 2021), and *Descanso Drive*, a full-length book of poems (Kelsay Books, 2017). Her poems have appeared in many publications, including *The Hudson Review*, *Rattle*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review* and several anthologies, including *The Best American Spiritual Writing for 2006* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006) and *Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond* (Beyond Baroque Books, 2015). A former newspaper reporter, freelance writer and teacher, she has written on books and the arts for many publications, including *The Nation* and the *Los Angeles Times*. Originally from England, Charlotte Innes now lives in Los Angeles.



THIS PICTURE

Your map is on my skin, my right foot,
scarred at two, I'm told, by a bucket of
boiling water I dipped my foot in, when you,
doing the wash, turned away for a moment.

At four, my hair cut short upon your death.
Ribbons and dresses taken or stored away.
What did I think? What did I know? Did I
really believe you were gone for good? Or was

your love still there somehow, invisible,
as in this picture of me at three staring
intently at my hand, the flowers I've picked,
knowing you're inches away, watching me.

Charlotte Innes

A STARLIT SKY TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

It's Christmas. Time to decorate
my living room with seasonal
reminders. Last year, a tiny
potted cypress, sequin-covered.
Now, poinsettia. My green vase
(a family relic) filled with
twigs of blazing winterberry.

What to call them? Dissenting flags
to wave in winter's face? Color
to keep the dark at bay? Last year's
sequins, stuck to my kitchen floor,
won't be brushed away. They twinkle,
a starlit sky turned upside down.
It's where my cat would eat. Something

lifts. *Glitter on!* I say. It's odd.
I've felt at peace for hours. Echoes
of twenty years ago when I
moved in. My haven. Till shadows
crept inside. Now peace? Pleasure once
was *Stille Nacht* around the tree,
in the glow of clip-on candles,

faces tipped to the cardboard star
up top, foil-wrapped, a battered thing
my mother made not long before
she died. My father made no fuss
but liked to see it glimmer there.
After turkey and Christmas pies,
by bowls of tangerines and nuts,

we sang the German carols that
he'd kept inside, as I still know
O Little Town... and *We Three Kings*.
On Christmas Night, beneath the tree's
small warmth, we sang away his flight,
those killers, the poison they left,
the pain we still give each other.

STOP SIGNS

Red chairs. Red cushions. Red throws. Red
flares all over my living room,

as if to signal something. I lie
on the faded rug, favored spot

of my cats once, stare at the white
ceiling, dreaming of heaven. If

there were such a thing, it's where
my cats, good little souls, might doze

forever. My thoughts stop in their tracks.
Maybe I'm like my dad—something

I'd never admit before—who'd say,
I'm old and stupid, a kind of joke,

as I shrug off the cold with my
coat of dreams. I'm exploring fog,

not so far from the fog stalling
traffic that jammed his scrambled brain.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Gordon Ferris was born and raised in Finglas, a North West suburb of Dublin. In the early eighties, he moved to Donegal where he has lived ever since. He started writing in 2014 and has had many short stories and poems in publications including Hidden Channel, A New Ulster, The Galway Review, Impsired Magazine, and Lothlorien Poetry Journal. He has also won prizes in the summer 2020 HITA Creative Writing Competition for his poem 'Mother' and won the winter competition for his poem 'The Silence'. Gordon was awarded a Poetry Town Bursary by Poetry Ireland.



Gordon Ferris

PLEASURE AND PAIN ARE SISTERS

sometimes when you go after something that
makes you feel good

you sacrifice what
you know to be right (or. The right thing)

because something feels good
doesn't mean that
it is good.

watch the black cat
changing colour
before it
crosses your path

or watch the old woman
walk under a ladder

watch the lady
blessed with beauty

make the sign of the cross
at the mention
of someone in pain

and shed a tear
for the stranger
who suffers loss

THE POOR MAN'S LOVE

Being in love
is like a poor man
begging for alms

a man in love
sits upright
cup in hand

begging for the
the subject of his desire
to look in his direction

you sit, hand on his arm,
He has no nervousness at your touch
it elicits no thoughts or impulses
It feels just natural
you constantly push and encourage him
He has often thought of being with you

In his head, in his imagined conversations with you
there is always found
so many reasons why
you wouldn't be interested
in someone like him
He goes on to think about why

He should and deserves to be on his own
convinces himself
that being on his own is
the best and most natural way for him to be
He has no wish to have
someone become his possession

or for him to become a possession
he prefers seeing the world
through his own eyes
not having the view
reflected through the lens of another
so doesn't ask her out

But sometimes he still
dreams they are together
but always has
that fear of rejection
showing its ugly face.
He accepts all that he is.

Hedy Habra is a poet, artist and essayist. She is the author of three poetry collections from Press 53, most recently, *The Taste of the Earth* (2019), Winner of the Silver Nautilus Book Award and Honorable Mention for the Eric Hoffer Book Award; *Tea in Heliopolis* Winner of the Best Book Award and *Under Brushstrokes*, which was a Finalist for the Best Book Award and the International Book Award. Her story collection, *Flying Carpets*, won the Arab American Book Award's Honorable Mention and was Finalist for the Eric Hoffer Award. A seventeen-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the net, and recipient of the Nazim Hikmet Award, her multilingual work appears in numerous journals and anthologies. <https://www.hedyhabra.com/>



CHIAROSCURO

Now they speak in long silences. Side
by side on the wooden bench overlooking
the creek, they stare at the broken host,
transparent in the opaque sky. A flight of starlings

flutters breaking the stillness, crowning
a tall twigged tree with Bruges lace
in lieu of fallen leaves. The black burgeoning
foliage, a haunting vision of Spring, stands domelike

against the Prussian blue. "Life is simpler
loving you," she thinks. "All the words
evading me in imperfect combinations, I find
in a single prolonged touch." As he rests a hand

on her knee, she hears an inner voice, deep
as a caress: "This night is splendid." "We have
been together for so long, in our wordless
world," whisper the stream, the birds, the trees, suffused

in moonlight. A living sculpture heavy with
trills sings of love in Dante's visibile
parlare, erasing the memory of the suicides'
gnarled trees. His restless fingers mark a beat, humming

an interior tune. She'd enter the movement,
pose her hand over his. Fearful he'd lose
the musical phrase, immobile, she watches the
dance and invents notes of her own.

Hedy Habra

HOW I WISH I COULD TURN THE HOUR HAND BACK TO THAT AFTERNOON

I can still see you in your wheelchair rolling forward, backward, always there to help with whatever you could, a repository of invaluable unwritten legacies, yet your words could have sharp edges and we learned to bear the sting of flying needles that once pierced me deeply, though you were probably right to say what you said, whatever it was, and the way you said it was probably not harsher than when you'd reprimand your own daughter, so why should a child in smocks complain about words that didn't leave a dent in her memory but would unearth such an unexpected response from an eleven years-old who didn't think twice in denying you, a long-time diabetic, that thick creamy yogurt ripened in terra cotta and deliciously cooled in the fridge, how I abruptly placed it on top of the upright piano where your wheelchair couldn't reach and though I can't remember the deluge of angry words that followed, I can only feel its flow like a silent movie that keeps reeling over and over because you won't get to know how sorry I still am even if I ended up ceding to your pleas but don't know how long it took since you never told anyone and that afternoon was erased from our daily lives as one flips a page past an unpleasant paragraph, but never from my mind even now that I'm in turn, a grandmother who would like to rewind the tape to replay an edited scene, though you also tasted my shifts in mood when I was six and helped you slip your rigid legs into tight stockings, a painstakingly difficult way of the cross punctuated with your directives to go left or right to pull harder or less, till we reached a little above the knees, you heard me say, *ok, if you don't like it, I'll unroll them* while two round bagels rolled down your ankles and you started laughing and crying, crying and laughing and I remember it so well because you would always tell the story to friends and relatives, always laughing and crying and I still can't figure out what you felt when I withheld the yogurt that afternoon since you never ever brought it to light and never laughed or cried about it. Did you ever forgive me, and how long did it really last only until you can help me remember since I can't ever forgive myself.

COUNTERPOINT

My eyes rest on two inverted shapes,
symmetrical wedges united in an invisible
point, frozen in *medias res*, like a snapshot
of silhouettes in a dancing floor.

And I wonder how could the sculptor capture
the muted blue-gray tones of certain cloudy evenings,
then polish and wax them with the filtered light
of a winter day? And how static yet suggestive
of an *escorzo* is their repressed gesture
in opposite directions?

I suddenly see myself seated by your side,
on a bench, shoulder against shoulder,
forehead bent, lost in pages filled with echoes,
your head, erect, resting over the rugged maple's bark
and the air flowing between these wedges
penetrates this angle of light separating us
as if we were pillars sustaining the imaginary arch
of a temple uniting us.

And this slight touch through the lining of our coats
anchors us to the stone bench more than weariness
as the body surrenders to its own weight of steel
while a dream hides its imperceptible trembling
under lowered eyelids.

And I think of the other day, of our attempts
to walk together sheltered under the same umbrella,
my shoulders against your bent chest,
we ran through the slippery sidewalk,
soaked, struggling between bursts of laughter
trying to raise or lower this useless protection
entangling our steps.

Jean O'Brien's sixth collection *Stars Burn Regardless* was published this Spring by Salmon Poetry. An award-winning poet, her work is published widely in magazines and anthologies. She holds an M. Phil. in creative writing/poetry from Trinity College Dublin, and tutors in creative writing from beginners to post graduate level. <http://www.jeanobrienpoet.ie/>



VICISSITUDES

My 'not so old' older brother
caught the virus
of old age,
decrepitude seemed to take
hold, full possession if you will,
as if his inner compass
wavered and could not
correct his bearing
and memory lapses.
Instead he walked about
in circles,
true north forever lost
and out of reach.
About him the air
seemed to compress
and then collapse.
We liken him to
an ancient tree,
exposed and weighed down
by leaf and branch,
its secret concentric circles
telling the weather
of years.

Jean O'Brien

PERSEVERANCE

The year has turned yet again
the sun and moon duet, day and night
again we have travelled beyond our atmosphere,
gone to Mars, the inhospitable planet,
all red and runnels that Lowell speculated
were Martian canals. Some say they were no more
than an observation of his own eye blood vessels
magnified. Mote and beam come to mind.

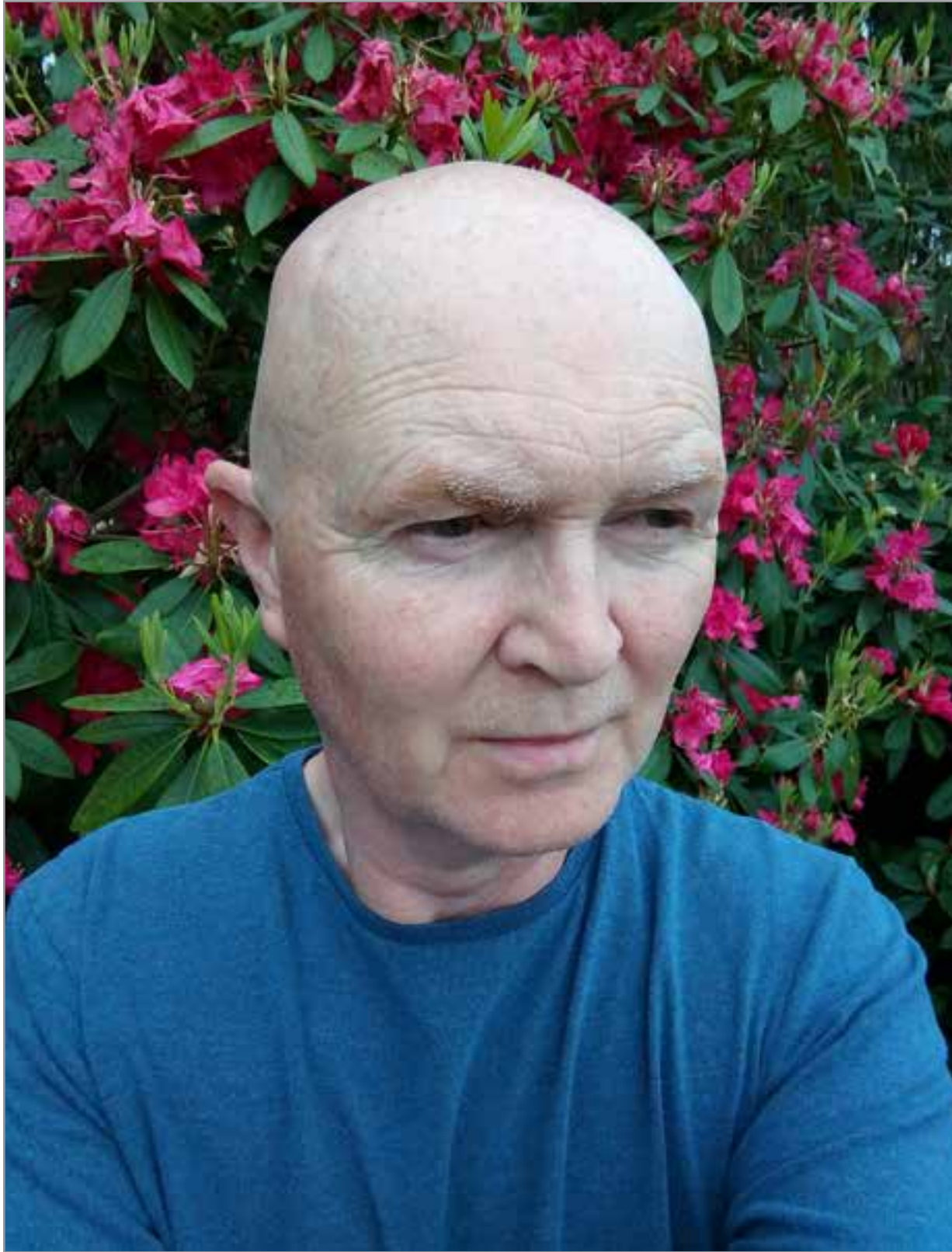
We have places we have wrecked here
on our blue planet, although Pripet
denuded of humans seems to flourish,
burning the Amazon forest
is wiping out our fragile habitat,
our seas are awash with plastic and dead bodies.
We are living in our own dreck and squabbling
amongst ourselves. In my small patch of city garden
near the Grand Canal in Dublin heavy rain is making
a confetti storm of the cherry blossom's brief blooms,
I hone my focus. blink my eyes. It is enough.

FINDING HER FEET

For Annie

Fanfair - life's soundtrack, like her mother's heartbeat,
she knows so intimately. Now she is pulling herself up,
resting her weight on her own two feet, planting herself
deep, claiming her place on this earth. She is shaky,
unsure, wobbling a little, but W A L K I N G.
Annie is walking alone
then abruptly her balance goes and she plonks down
on her well padded bottom, as her proud parents'
cheer and congratulate and she takes matters
into her own hands and gives herself a round
of applause. Three hundred and eighty eight days
after she dived head first into this world
she has finally found her feet.

John W. Sexton's poetry is widely published and he has been a regular contributor to *Live Encounters*. A collection of experimentalist poetry, *The Nothingness Kit*, is due in December 2022 from Beir Bua. In 2007 he was awarded a *Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in Poetry*.



A GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY LESSON

In Fourteen-Hundred and Ninety-Two
Columbus sailed the ocean blue
his task to prove the world was round
but the opposite case is what he found

Some said the world was contained in a tin
floating inside, held tight within
Some said the world was surely square
its inner core composed of hair

But Columbus discovered the world
as flat as a page
the oceans pouring
at every edge

Of course, when he got home
he told lies by the pound
and swore to God
that the world was round

But every cartographer
since those days
has drawn the world
as flat as a page

John W Sexton

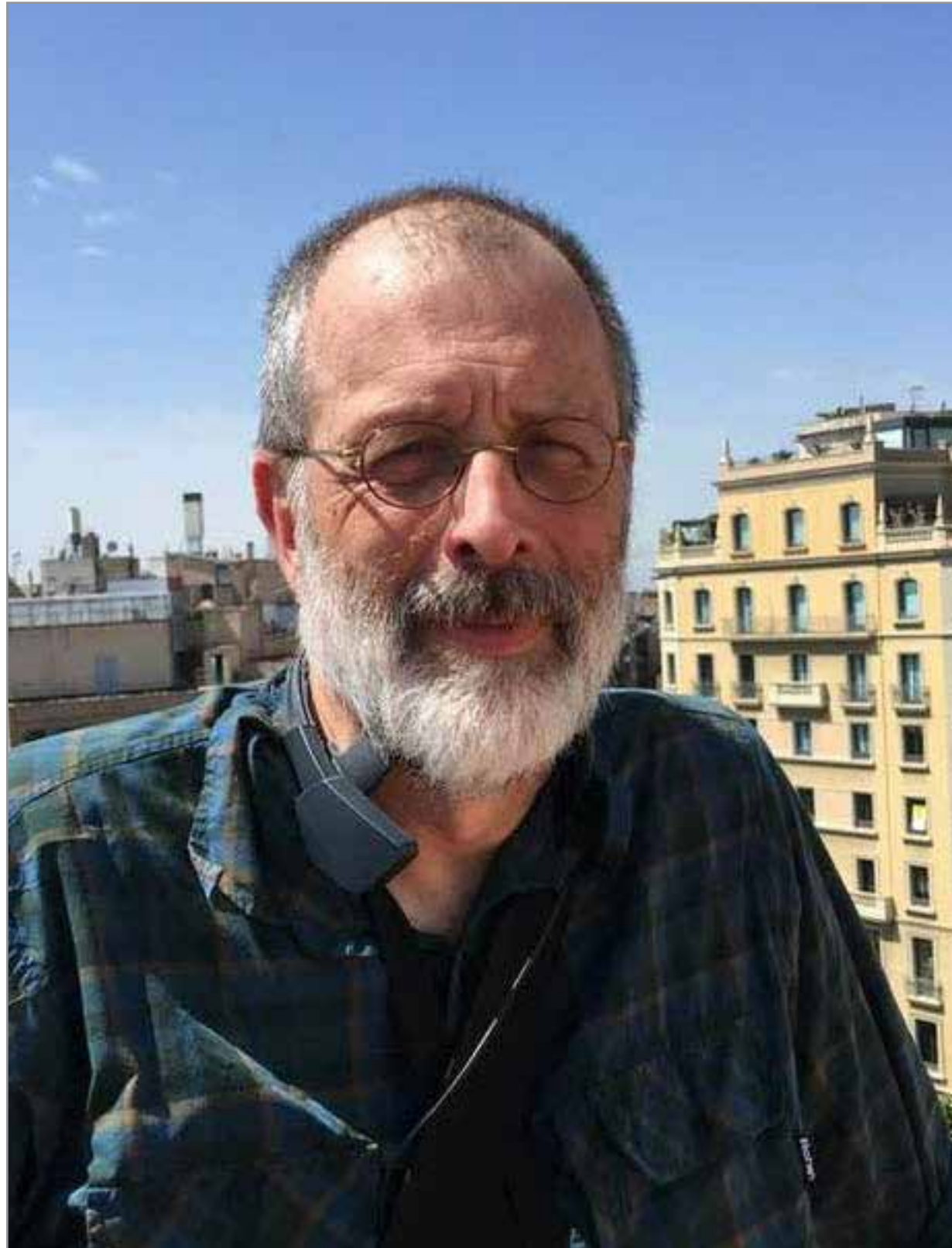
CONTENTS OF THE SEVEN DAY WARDROBE

Monday’s dress is made from dust.
On Tuesday she wears a coat of rust.
Wednesday calls for boots of stone
and Thursday’s the day for a hat of foam.
Friday is cold, so a coat of fire,
and Saturday’s feet have socks of wire.
Sunday she spends all day in bed,
snuggled under a blanket of lead.

THE SIMPLEST ACCESSORY
CAN SAVE YOU MONEY

Observe the fly
upon the ceiling;
his swagger wondrous
and appealing.
Not one black coin
falls from his pocket,
for velcro fastening
does tightly lock it.

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



DRAFTS

The paper of the notebook was, as he preferred it, gray.
The ink, gray, only a little darker.

The notes in the margins blurred into the text;
The commentary into the writer's distractions.

He has crossed out *facetious* where he meant to write *fractious*,
Or *fractal* or *fragment*.

Is that last *F* a capital? And the *X* that follows,
A number,
An abandoned pseudonym?

So faint the contrast, so idiosyncratic his penmanship
Even he had difficulty reading it.

And the early revisions, each
Only the slightest variation on what came before.
Any one of them would have done as well as any other.

Craft was never the problem he thought it was.

Not compared to his fondness for subtlety,
Refined with each page, and the sentiment more obscured,
The moral diffused, the ink thinning until...

Well, why do you think we have studied him for so long,

With a frustration that has come to seem
Like love, if love is like this.

Jordan Smith

DRONE

I am listening for the drone under everything.

Not the white noise of the ferns in a little breeze,
Not the broken percussive hush of pine needles on the wide path along the ridge,
The (de)crescendo of tires on Kinns Road.

If there was a chord in the wind through the oaks
And then another, I might have guessed
Where all this was going.

If there was certainty like that, I could have stopped listening



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Katie Burke is a Primary School Teacher living in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. She has a huge passion for the arts which led her to study 'Speech and Drama' teaching at the Royal Irish academy for Music in 2011. She has written poetry since her early teens but until now has kept all her writings private. She completed a six-week creative writing course in 2022, which ignited a hidden passion.



FIELD OF HOPE*

Oh sweet majestic soldiers dazzling all that you meet.
How you make our hearts sing!
Enveloping us with your gleeful giddiness in your vast golden sea.
Towering over us, a lofty six feet tall & more.

Who would have known we'd see ourselves in your bright bold faces,
a shiny mirror for us all to behold.
No two the same but nevertheless standing tall, side by side,
bowing and bopping their heavy heads in sworn solidarity.
All the while knowing it was the same path that surely brought them
together by a sweet serendipity.

There was something in that air that day, a kind of magic meant to be.
A cosmic shift in thinking, for the first time seeing the wonders of tomorrow
that might well be.

One final glance over my shoulder as we depart,
to watch you smile your radiance out towards the glimmering sea.
Now we clutch our long stems in excited chatter of fruits
to be harvested in time, tenderly.

** dedicated to Geraldine Mullan and her beautiful family-John, Tomás and Amelia,
whom she lost in a tragic accident in Co. Donegal, Ireland during the Summer of 2020.
Along with family and friends, Geraldine planted a field full of sunflowers as a loving
tribute to the memory of her family and to mark the 2nd anniversary of their passing.*

Katie Burke

THE BENEFIT OF HINDSIGHT

And it's got to make you wonder,
Will we ever learn?
Will a Russian ruler one day speak of such regrets,
round tall tables in their finest with neighbours in their midst?
For now we vow a prayer of 'Never again' with the benefit of hindsight.
Never again! Amen! At least until the next time.
At home, we press onwards to Tomorrow,
forging ties and building bridges over tidal waters.
Wondering above all else, if that's where our sorry song gladly ends.

THESE HANDS

Blessed are those splintered hands dear dad, bestowed with a grit and a glory
that hails from higher yonder.

Those restless hands of a third born, stretched wide with a coo and a yawn.

Hands, that once herded the flock and hammered the hay high, conceding only
then in heavy, heartened sigh.

Hands, that many a time delivered the prized penny with puffed out chest into
an-others, a faithful test.

Hands, having rung the last bell of play, from hence on became their working day.

These hands that bode the familiar farewell to toil the sites of London and
taxi the night away.

Hands that entwined with anothers in a faithful loving vow, ready to welcome
a family now.

These hands that juggled so many balls in life, as much as in sports halls.

These hands that raised a pint goodbye to a Country that raised a man.

Hands that in early August led a flock of his own across waters to harvests of home.

These hands that carved unsung wonders from wood and always did the damn
best that they could.

Hands that of late, find fresh wonder crafting on a chopping board or swinging
a well worn club on a green.

These wizened hands that now cradle two sons of a new dawn, whose hands
out-stretch with a coo and a yawn.

Hands, oh blessed are we to know these hands.

Maeve McKenna lives in Sligo, Ireland. Her work has been placed in several international poetry competitions and published widely. Maeve was a finalist in the Eavan Boland Mentorship Award 2020 and third in The Canterbury Poet of The Year, 2021. She was part of a collaboration with three poets which won the Dreich Alliance Pamphlet Competition. Her debut pamphlet, *A Dedication to Drowning*, was published in February 2022, by Fly On The Wall Press.



SINGING TO HIMSELF

11am. Two potatoes vying in the pot —
halved to attempt a coup. The scalded water
evaporates steadily. Time for the fork assault.

On the second ring, bubbling remains
of mushy peas, green juice boiled off.
The meat's exposed; one lamb chop defrosting

on a plate, dribbling a stringy brown juice. Scattered
over the lean bits, a sachet of salt. On the table, two place
settings and half a glass of low-fat milk.

It will be over by midday if the jelly sets.
If not, he'll sing to himself — each chorus a reply —
as you do back to the radio at 1am when the house

is occupied by the family of paper flowers
caught bickering by the moon's wide scope, detaching
each other's heads from the sitting room wallpaper.

Maeve McKenna

Margaret Kiernan has a background in Public Policy and Social Justice. She writes poetry and short stories. She also paints landscapes in mixed media. She is published in, The Blue Nib Literary Journal, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Burrow at Old-water-rat publishing Australia, The Galway Review, Poet Head, A New Ulster, Anthologies, and Cultural news magazines. She is listed in The Index of Contemporary Women Poets in Ireland, 2020. She writes with the Thursday Group of poets, at Over -the-Edge, Galway. Is also a member of Ox Mountain poets.



Margaret Kiernan

CONVERSATION WITH THE BODY

after Anna Swir.

I wouldn't swat a fly
or waste a spider in my bath.
My hands are those of my tribe
I eye the inheritance
to scoop that spider
in cottonwool
place it on the windowsill
outside
my instinct to survive
a memory from sometime
save the scorpion
but do not touch.

Those fingers do all the work
sometimes unbidden from
commands or a reflex
following on from thought
a sly pain now heralds rain
signs of age.

Or when I hold beads of pearl or glass
or ropey plastic ones to excise sin.
Or write on any vacant space
painted canvas colour base.
Or hold my food
save snooting rude
a famine upheld
by having fingers
that once flowed pus
from a nailbed
punctured by thorns
while harvested ripe blackberries
wilt in a pail.

TWO BITES ONE TIME

after Boris Slutsky

It isn't done that cut flowers cry
 or talk to you
 given time
 they shrivel
 and die.
 It isn't done to suck the bones
 at table or above the ground
 It isn't done to bite the apple
 then place it back in the bowl
 or cry to the plants
 in perennial beds
 It isn't done to laugh at your neighbour
 their politics or wealth
 that failed economic plan
 in fear it might follow you home
 or your lot might copy it down.
 People are alike
 watch for miracles
 afraid they'll land on a Kerch Bridge
 arrive somehow on a postage stamp.
 Karma is about
 don't doubt
 somewhere.

**Kerch Bridge linked Russia to occupied Crimea. It was blown-up days ago, October 2022.
 The Ukraine postal service are to create a postage stamp to commemorate the event.*

I BELIEVE

After, Wislawa Szymborska

Time is fluid
 celestial spheres shape shift.
 Mesopotamian myths
 inscribed on stones
 found in caves with bones
 clay tablets with parables exist.

I believe in archetypes
 cycles of the sun
 sacred appeasements
 crop circles in barley fields
 pigeons' home to roost.

I believe in democracy
 from radical Athenian Pericles
 from the lost art of being my brother's keeper
 to Zaporizhzhia holding out to Putin's war
 the leak gapped, resists implosion
 holds Europe in its thrall.

Excess toil is careless, I believe
 time is better spent gazing
 at the moon.
 I believe twenty-three thousand years, B.C.
 sin and evil myths arrived at our earth
 then shattering fiery comets
 fell to the ground.

I believe, Christianity became an Empire
 in three hundred Anno Domini.
 A Roman State proclaimed
 decrees about unholy things

Mark Tredinnick is a celebrated Australian poet. His honours include two Premier's Prizes and the Montreal, Cardiff, Newcastle, Blake and ACU poetry prizes. His writing and teaching over twenty-five years have touched the lives and influenced the work of many; in 2020 Mark received an OAM for services to literature and education. His books include *Fire Diary*, *A Gathered Distance*, *The Blue Plateau*, and *The Little Red Writing Book*, and *Walking Underwater* (2021). His fifth collection, *A Beginner's Guide*, is just out.



APOTHECARY

I LEAVE the dogs with my boy, and I go to the counter
 Of the pharmacy, an old-school apothecary, where Bronwyn
 Keeps the scripts my father and my mother depend on
 These days. Dad's asked me to pick up the meds
 For them: painkillers, blood thinners, ironisers. Most
 Of their diet now. She comes to me from speaking to Dad
 By phone, shaking her kind head and saying, he's such
 A sweet man. Yes, but isn't it a shame, I say, it didn't carry
 To his children. She laughs. Sometimes these things skip a generation.

My son outside—awkward and loyal and handsome—holds
 The dogs, who keep him busy, waiting, with all the strength
 In their sweet hearts at the very end of their long leads, for me,
 And I think of Ted Kooser feeling in his ageing cells how his mother (no)
 And his father (yes) still keep their kitchen vigil over him. First,
 I think, they carry us, and then we carry them, and so on ...

Mark Tredinnick

THE AFTERNOON & THE NIGHT AHEAD

NEAR THE END OF a Sunday in summer
That had worn itself out all day doing its best

Impression of winter, the wind coming hard from the south,
The clouds darkening and breaking up, the sunlight

Billowing like sails and having its bright way
With them, I took a break from long hours

At the desk, and I pulled out a book of poems,
Trying to read the shrillness from me. In *A Book*

Of Luminous Things, I came on “Irises:”
They hold their breath all their lives and open, open.

And *all that an iris ever prays, when it prays: to be.*
That’ll do. I send the poem to my friend, and I make

A plan for the evening ahead: A walk by the river
As dusk falls, rehearsing the steps the river wants

To teach me, finding my way in the dark. I’ll shop
For dinner. Later, I might watch the cricket

While I work on an affidavit that I hope will bring
My children home one day. Some emails to set up

The week. I’ll eat perhaps. I’ll wish I had her body
Next to mine on the couch and later... I’ll miss

The children, as I do every night, every morning,
Every midday. One day soon, I tell myself, I’ll

Miss them less and, in their company, begin to miss
Myself again. Who knows what season the weather

Will want *to be* by then—by tonight, for that matter,
When I take myself too late to bed, calm at last

At midnight, the cat like a semicolon at my
Feet, a soft full stop between one day

And the next, and most of my work ahead of me yet:
The dishes in the sink, this poem, and all the others

That had wanted me like children all day, left for another
Day, to open and open through all the years ahead.

Note: “Irises,” Li-Young Lee, in *A Book of Luminous Things*, Czeslaw Milosz.

Mary Scheurer feels very privileged to live close to the Alps in France and is able to enjoy wonderful mountain and lakeside scenery on a daily basis. A retired Philosophy teacher, she enjoys walking or cycling around her home and is often inspired to write whilst enjoying the rich silence she finds amid local vineyards, woods or riverside. Her poetry has been published in Ireland, England, the Czech Republic and Switzerland and she is delighted to see her poetry once again in 'Live Encounters'.



DENISE'S LINGERIE

Through a blue door, time lapse staggers you in
to enquire about a swimsuit (azure, pink trim)
perhaps in my size? She rises from her seat
approaches with wise smile, perspicacious eyes.
The way to know is try it on. There is only one.

Delicate fingers slip off the maillot
from its tailor's dummy, naked cyborg now,
as she bids you follow her, cubicles ahead.
While shedding clothes, elegant tones invite
monsieur to sit. The costume is a perfect fit.

Approving nods. As she removes the tags
we praise the boutique: she, chic and confidential
unravels her story. For years this was her home
Denise. Here stood a fireplace, kitchenette there
Note manicured nails, slim waist, impeccable hair.

Denise, it seems, is eighty-two. Climbs stairs
three by three. We gasp and her eyes gleam. Never
would she wear flat shoes, husband refuses.
Once drove a tractor in stilettos. Half a century
of expertise in lingerie, seamstress, pro.

How she delights in the presence of a spouse
to aid a lady choose. This flattered husband
settles back in the sofa, as Denise selects
a choice of small boxes for Madame to inspect.
An hour later we leave Denise's Lingerie

laden with many ribboned packages.
Out of that filigree *Tardis*, into the now.

Mary Scheurer. Photo credit: Nikola Kotrasova.

NO CHICKENS

But the green wheelbarrow
starts to rust

lacking purpose
forgotten

under its covers
just

dreading
that junkyard

J'AIME PLUS PARIS?

We fell out for years, no tears from Paris
didn't give a damn, sweet promises sham.
So I packed my anger, left in a huff.
It was the rough treatment and tantrums
irate taxi drivers, the rush of it all
don't call me and I won't call you.

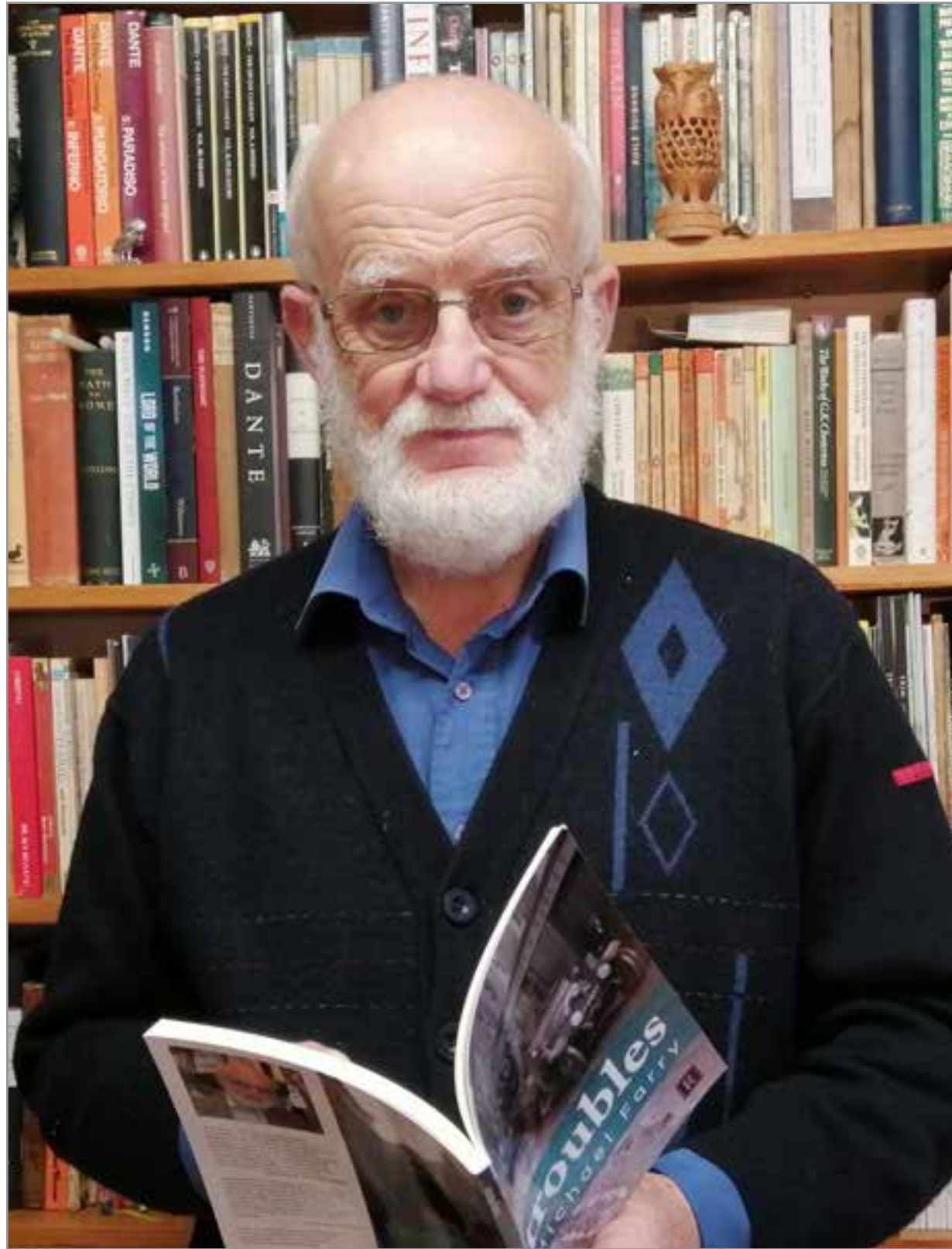
Forty years on, much bitterness gone,
treading the Tuileries gardens. The ground
sends up tendrils of fleur de lys, patterning
my legs like exquisite silk stockings some
favoured courtesan would wear for her king.
Alleys of trees sing, gently drop their leaves.

Crackling autumn carpet, its percussion
crisp, leads on brisk steps to the Seine's banks.
Pathways and tunnels invite the eye; graffiti,
street art. A new courtship has started here.
The river runs on, watchful chaperone,
only a cloud or two over the isle of St Louis.

Notre Dame breathes once more beneath healing
hands and a tarpaulin shelter. Later on
in Place Vendome, my skin begins a lambent
transformation. Gems from the pores, Cartier
sparkles, Van Cleef and Arpels gift me a glow
known only by the beloved at betrothal.

Morning on the Boulevard Saint Michel,
ground coffee, fresh bread, hope in the air
is it fair to say its over? Sparrows twitter
dissent in the trees. Piaf agrees, *'For the times
that we have known here, I will sing a hymn
to love.'* A table comes free. Paris and me.

Michael Farry's latest poetry collection, *Troubles* (2020), is published by Revival Press, Limerick. Previous collections were *Asking for Directions* (Doghouse Books, 2012) and *The Age of Glass* (Revival, 2017). His poetry has been widely published in Ireland and abroad. He has also written and published widely on the history of the Irish war of independence and civil war. A retired primary teacher, he lives in Trim, Co Meath, Ireland.



PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

They all remember the one of me in Saigon
February sixty eight, walking head down towards the airport
while the police chief executes the guerilla
and still ask me why I didn't show more interest.

I deny it's a uniform, insist I was a tourist
caught up in the offensive, rushing to get out of hell.
They believe me, or say they do.

A few remember the one in Comber, County Down,
November seventy eight, outside the Peacock Room
rushing through approaching diners towards the main road
wrapped in topcoat, gloves and hat.

I tell them I was an innocent, unaware of depths to come,
had just enjoyed a steak on a chilly northern afternoon.
They look at me again, say nothing.

But no-one remembers the one on the holiday pages,
summer eighty two, with her, strolling by a still lake
somewhere in the west, heads bowed in earnest conversation
the sun setting behind a darkening horizon.

In truth I almost forget that day myself, the heat,
the overflowing bins, the fuchsia on the lane.
They think they know me, don't they.

Michael Farry

SACRIFICE

*"I had a dream recently. I was begging in the street.
When I awoke I cried and cried."*

Andrei Tarkovsky - *Sacrifice*, (1986)

The apocalypse begins on the public street.
The spooked public rushing by ignore my lines,
my trimmed beard, my varifocal sunglasses.
but stare at the yellow stain on my shirt front,
my crooked tie, clumsy knot, undone zips.

The questions I ask are far too difficult.
What do I know about economic recovery,
neoliberalism or the standard of service
in the best restaurants in the capital city?

The directions I'm asked for are always
to a part of the city I'm unfamiliar with,
financial, shopping or red light districts.

Beggars I encounter seem genuine, have
what I regard as an honest look in their eyes,
the misspelling on their pleading placards
a signifier of their deserving honesty
but the coins I put in their coffee cups
never seem enough and notes an extravagance
so that even my giving makes me unhappy.

The ambulance sirens make me feel my age,
my weak heart, vertigo, inherited darkness
so I give up on reaching sanctuary, instead
look for a final resting place, a cobbled street
where the blinds are down to show respect
for all who died, are dying, are about to die,
who cared nothing for balance sheet, lived
for life alone, daily drudge of love and care,
hope and promise. That much I owe them.

It may of course be another false alarm.

SAINT MICHAEL AND THE DRAGON - LADY LEVER GALLERY

Spanish artist, 15th century, oil on panel

Shining in silver leaf at the side of the Catalonian altar panel my neat wings, gold breast-plate crusader shield and sword reassured the faithful fearful about their south, their future successes foretold by the dragon's dimmed flames, helpless wings and those three heads trampled underfoot.

Styles changed. I was too primitive but determined not to waste, they cut me down to fit a doorway, added hinges and three strong locks, hung me to safeguard with clipped wings and blunted sword their treasury, those shelves of precious vessels, rich embroidered vestments, massing stuff.

When metal took over I was redundant, reduced to an object of admiration, sold to businessmen, part-time collectors hankering after the simple faith they helped destroy. Here I am now, resplendent, recovered, cleansed of the accretions of centuries, the weight of veneration, expectation, hanging

happy here with magician, laureate, scapegoat.

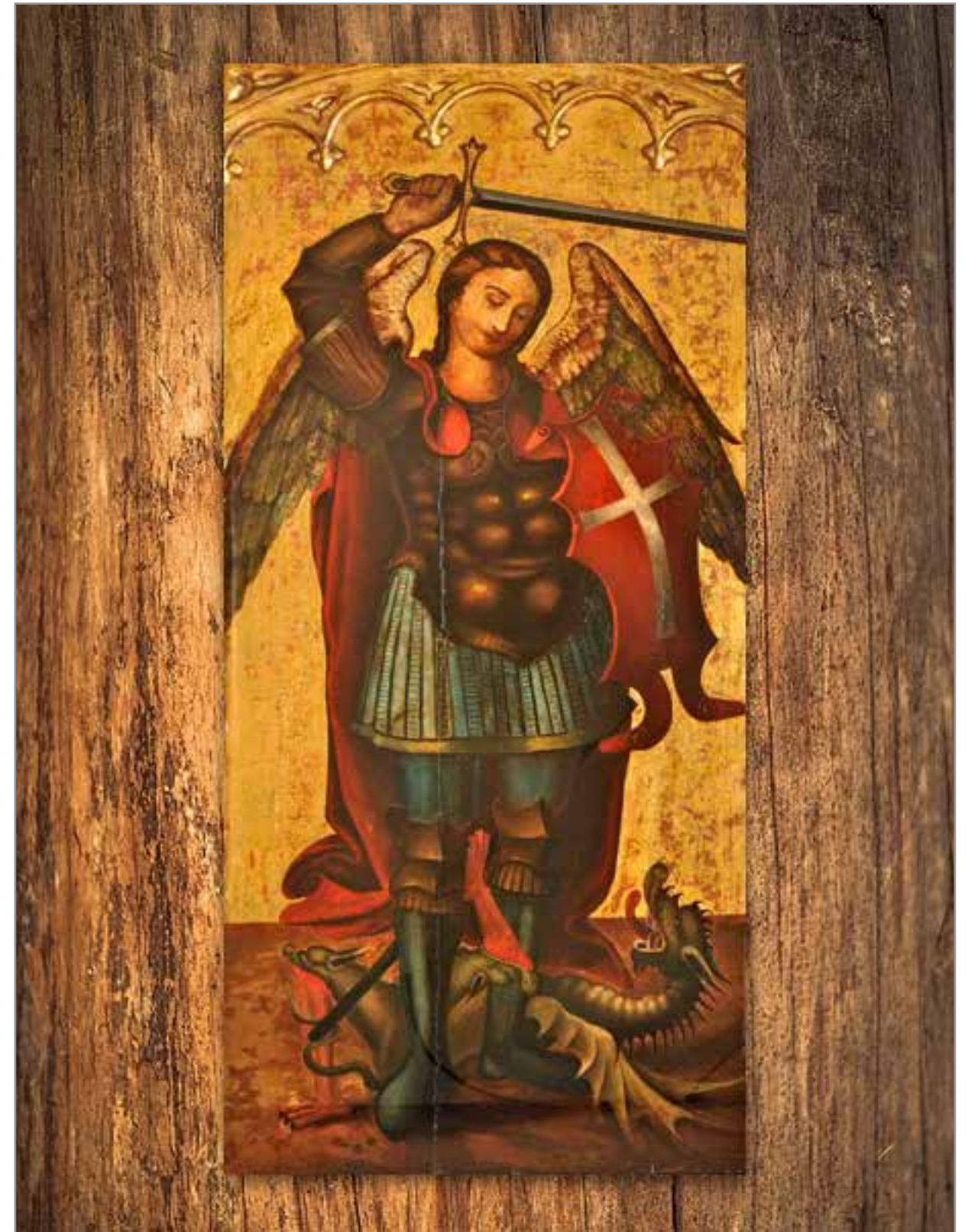


Photo credit: Lady Lever Art Gallery

Michael Simms is the founding editor of Vox Populi: A public sphere for poetry, politics and nature. His latest publications are two books of poetry, *American Ash* and *Nightjar*, and a novel *Bicycles of the Gods: A Divine Comedy* released in August 2022.



HATRED

Out of spilled coffee grounds
and banana slime
beside the compost bin

a gangly vine grew
twisting
out of shadow

into slats of light
between the boards
of the deck above.

I hated the way tough thorns
of Rubus drew blood
whenever I passed,

the way a suckering root
held clay and stone
in a thousand fingers

never letting go, choking the softer roots
of elderberry and cherry,
stealing water from roses and sweet shrub

and milkweed that fed the monarch.
This bramble, this briar patch
of demon weed was killing my garden

Michael Simms

continued overleaf...

HATRED *...contd*

so I investigated
poisons: *Triclopyr* kills
dicots, leaving grasses alone

but would kill the roses
and azaleas as well, and maybe
me, but still I was crazed

with hatred for this weed.
I scythed, mowed, axed
hoed, trimmed, yanked

and eyed with vicious intent
this intruder eating my garden.
But the satanic bramble would not die.

Then, in the spring of the fourth year of my war,
the arching canes ventured small white blossoms
whose yellow stamens attracted bees.

And in midsummer, green berries
turned red, then black –
and a tanager perched on the compost bin

feasted on the dark
drupes. The berries tasted sweet,
the hard seeds insistent on my tongue.

I resisted pleasure, then succumbed.

PERSIMMON

Nothing changed the first year
although I felt the white net
of mycelia spreading

around the roots and the leaves
learning to move through sunlight
and shadow the way I was learning

to move easily through the seasons
because I couldn't speak. Each October,
the leaves fell, joining

the layer of humus. The wet leaves
froze in the fall, decayed in the spring,
fed the new leaves in March

and all summer crickets sang
and also robins, and in high pines
a crow called. In the third year

I saw a spoonbill fly overhead
forming words out of air but no one listened.
The sapling spread until it filled a corner of the yard

and we had to move the tomato patch
to the sunlight, and later the garlic and parsley.
I was supposed to be baptized

continued overleaf...

PERSIMMON *...contd*

but refused, believing only
the dark and light of the garden.
Each year, *Diospyros*

filled out, growing lush and tall.
In the sixth year, flowers appeared
then green fruit which yellowed.

We spat the astringent flesh
and placed the basket of fruit in the cellar
to ripen. After a week the persimmons

hard, crisp, and sour as crabapples
darkened, sweet as peaches
dusky as plums, and we ate them

greedily, all but one
I left on the windowsill, an experiment
in sunlight. The last persimmon

was soft, a small black sac
I bit open, and my mute tongue
welcomed dark honey

Note:

*The persimmon described here is the *Diospyros texana*, a species indigenous to Texas and northern Mexico which produces a small black fruit similar to a plum. I was raised in a house in Houston with a large garden where I was expected to work every day. I didn't mind because in the house there was always shouting and hitting while outside I could enjoy the peaceful song of cicada and chickadee, the beauty of azalea and flowering pear, the scent of sage and laurel, and the taste of fig, pecan and persimmon. For me, autism was a gift of silence and solitude. I didn't speak until the age of five and then only with a heavy speech impediment, so I developed the habit of observing and listening to the natural world.*



©Mark Ulyscas

Photo credit: <https://wildedible texas.wordpress.com/2011/07/25/texas-persimmons/>

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

Translated from Arabic by Michele Henjum



THE ROAD TO TAHRIR SQUARE

Like someone writing on water. That was the situation for anyone who criticized corruption in the last years of Mubarak's regime.

We were in one valley and the ruling regime was in another, boasting with confidence that Egypt was living one of the most splendid ages of democracy and freedom of expression. Many of us knew full well that Mubarak had given the people freedom of speech in the manner of "let them have a good time," and in return deprived them of their right to live a dignified life.

I had started waking up each day with a fright. The fear came from my anticipation that a great eruption was about to happen, but I didn't know where the fuse of the revolution would be lit. Would it come for example from the hungry people filling Cairo's streets or from the intellectual elite, divided amongst themselves, the majority of whom were content to theorize inside air-conditioned rooms?

I thought perhaps the revolution would come from the youth, as they are always the vanguard of the nation, especially university students—but where was the university? It had collapsed like all the country's other institutions.

Hope edged me forward a little, while following the well-known Egyptian Kefaya ("Enough!") movement that began in the summer of 2004 and shook up the stagnant waters of political life at that time.

I was optimistic despite the elite character of the movement, as it was formed of a group of intellectuals, university professors and lawyers that opposed the principle of extending Mubarak's term. They also stood firmly against attempts that were in full swing inside the palace for the president's son to inherit his rule. At the time Mubarak came out with a comic statement when asked in an interview about his opinion of this movement: "Look... I could just as well get people to come out saying "Not Enough!" The response of his adherents was even funnier: they sought to make another opposing collective called "Permanence for the sake of Prosperity."

Nagat Ali

Anyone walking in the streets of Cairo a few months before the revolution would have been convinced that hunger had driven many poor Egyptians mad and their patience had run out. Workers that had been laid off by some companies started to carpet the sidewalk outside the buildings of the People's Assembly and the Shura Council for many days in January, at the height of the cold, while the honorable representatives in the People's Assembly passed beside them in their luxury cars without even taxing themselves with the burden of glancing in their direction.

The successive protest movements that had become common in Egypt became messages of hope to everyone who loves Egypt and feared its collapse. There were the Ghazl el-Mahalla workers striking in 2008, whose successive actions and strikes cleared the way for other workers to find ways to protect their rights—later the April 6 Youth Movement joined their strike in solidarity. I said to myself at the time, maybe this is the beginning of a larger revolt. Maybe it's the beginning of the road.

The Tunisian revolution came to give us Egyptians hope in the possibility of changing the ruling regime in Egypt. The people's anger had reached the point of no return and was about to erupt, especially after the rigging of the last parliamentary elections in 2010 and the removal of every semblance of the opposition from Parliament.

The calls to demonstrate on January 25 started on the "We are All Khaled Said" Facebook page set up by Egyptian activist Wael Ghonem as well as from the April 6 Youth Movement page.

My Egyptian friends spread the news of the announcement on their pages. Some commented that the choice of this day as the date of the revolution coincided with Egyptian Police Day and would be a form of protest against the brutal practices of the police apparatus against Egyptian protestors. Others rallied around the day enthusiastically saying: We're not less than Tunisia. But we also had those who laughed at the whole thing, saying there was no such thing as a revolution by prior appointment. It would be no more than a day where the traffic in Cairo's streets was held up.

January 25

I woke up in the afternoon under the pressure of a headache and high temperature. It seemed to be the first signs of a cold. Before eating anything I called a friend working as a journalist to ask her: Are there demonstrations in Tahrir Square? She told me that demonstrations had left from various neighborhoods in Cairo, and they were all going to meet in Tahrir Square. I said to her, ill and embarrassed, "You mean everyone went and I'm still at home? I must come immediately!" I ended the call with her and called another friend, an activist living in Shubra near our old house to find out where the demonstration leaving from Shubra heading to Tahrir had reached, in order to join them. She told me they were now at the edge of the Tahrir Square. I said goodbye quickly saying, "I'm on my way!"

I put my clothes on and got on the metro at the Hadaik Maadi station bound for the Sadat stop to join the demonstrations there.

When I reached Tahrir Square I was astounded. I found that the numbers of demonstrators were very large, larger than I had expected, nearly filling the square completely, and increasing as the time went by.

I walked with crowds that were repeating out loud in one voice: "The people want to topple the regime!" Repeating with them in spontaneous enthusiasm, I tried to find something that would indicate something about the demonstrators' ideology, but the people were very diverse. Most of them were young, belonging to different social strata; that's what I guessed from their clothes, but most of their faces were not familiar to me. They weren't the political activists I was used to seeing in demonstrations nor did they belong to some of the cartoonish parties that called themselves the opposition. In some of their faces there was a touch of innocence, and purity that stunned me. I spoke with some of them and discovered that many were students at the American University in Cairo.

Abruptly, smaller groups broke away and returned a little later, bringing back bottles of water, sandwiches and containers of koshary. They began distributing them to those standing around insisting, "You have to eat. The day is still long."

From time to time, skirmishes broke out between the Central Security Forces and the demonstrators. Each time security sensed that the demonstrators had almost broken the security cordon they had placed tightly around us, they threw enormous quantities of tear gas, causing me to choke.

Time went by and I spotted some fellow writers in the distance.

I kept marching and the chants of the demonstrators—"Revolution til victory! There in Tunisia, here in Egypt!"—then I spotted in the crowd, from a distance, some well-known individuals such as Ayman Nour, Chairman of the El-Ghad party and the journalist Ibrahim Eissa. The writer Mohammad Shoair appeared suddenly. He said hello to me as he pondered the square. Then he showed his pleasure at the large numbers of demonstrators and said confidently, "If the demonstrations continue with these numbers for three days the regime might fall." I smiled, agreeing with his words despite my conviction that the regime wouldn't submit that simply and would use every dirty means at its disposal.

I spotted from a distance my friend the activist Viola Fahmy with some journalists. She called out to me and urged me to go with her to her office near Isaaf Station to get something from it. I went with her giving in to her wish, and on our way toward Talat Harb Street we saw a group of Central Security forces, carrying large quantities of weapons and going towards Tahrir Square. I guessed that they were planning to attack the demonstrators and perhaps they were waiting for the numbers of demonstrators to go down as it got later, and thus they would be able to arrest and quash those that remained.

An hour later I returned to the square with my friend and told her I wouldn't be able to stay the night like she was, with the demonstrators who had decided at the end of the day to hold a sit in, perhaps due to their sense that they and their demands were not taken seriously. The Mubarak regime had looked on the Tahrir demonstrations of January 25 as if they were child's play and would be over at the end of the day. For that reason it didn't bother to reply to their demands, the most prominent of which was, as it appeared in the slogan that we raised in Tahrir Square: Freedom, Dignity and Social Justice.

I had to leave Tahrir and go home when it was after midnight, because I had gone out without informing anyone that I was going to the demonstrations. My younger brother might have gone out and left my sick mother alone.

I reached the house close to 1 am and called one of my friends who had decided to remain at the sit-in to check on their situation, but he didn't answer. I was stricken with worry and decided to call another friend. He told me what the security forces had done. They had arrested a large number of demonstrators after shooting rubber bullets and tear gas and beating them with clubs. He was now hiding in one of the side streets downtown.

This is an excerpt from the book *The Road to Tahrir Square* by the Egyptian writer and poet Nagat Ali, narrating her daily life during the January 25th revolution.

Nidhi Srivastava Asthana worked as an instructional designer in the computer software industry in India, loved sharing historical stories with her students in Myanmar and Thailand, lived in the USA as a student and has been an accompanying spouse to her peripatetic husband in five countries. Her stories have appeared in 'Manushi' and 'Literally Stories' and another is due to be published by the Sahitya Academy in 'Indian Literature'. Her essays have been published by Kitaab.org, 'India Currents' and liveencounters.net. Similarities and differences between cultures, especially linguistic, have always fascinated her. Here are links to Nidhi's writings available online:

Personal and Travel Essays - liveencounters.net, indiacurrents.com, kitab.org.

Short Stories - <https://literallystories2014.com>, http://manushi-india.org/pdfs_issues/, <https://kitab.org>



Nidhi Srivastava Asthana

WHEN A MAN LOVES A WOMAN

Being deep in a pedestrian zone, my small hotel was surrounded by narrow lanes flanked by homes. So, traffic noises were replaced by sounds with a human touch: people running up and down steps and side lanes, a hawker calling out the names of what he had on offer, families laughing, a mother and her son descending some steps in sync with loud counting to make a game of it...

Mornings were especially pleasant because, like all places in the mountains, Guanajuato amplified sounds. It was fabulous to wake up to cocks crowing and church bells ringing *somewhere*. The plazas there were much smaller than I had seen in other historical centres in Mexican cities. There was not much flat, open land to go around. The various squares were essential to life there, and the goings-on in the plazas were the closest I was going to get to seeing how the locals lived.

Every morning those commons came alive with people having breakfast. The restaurants catering to tourists arranged chairs outdoors and got their hot cakes act together. But the people who belonged to the city, especially in the smaller of the small courts, seemed partial to corn based breakfasts with steam rising from the thermocol glasses they raised to their lips. Hawkers set up stalls or open baskets full of freshly baked goodies. Some of them doubled as newspaper agents.

Later on in the day, I saw children chasing pigeons in Plazuela San Fernando. Was this the apogee of activity there? Or was the dog chasing two girls as a sport the highlight? One of the kids climbed up a tiny tree to safety; she was undecided between fun and fear. A couple of old men sat around on benches looking completely relaxed and moved every once in a while only to feed the pigeons. Till it was time to earn something. Which is when they would get up, revealing that they were actually especially dressed for their profession, and sing in one of the restaurants surrounding the plaza. A few numbers ... and it was time to relax again. Not a bad life at all!

The most insipid seemed to be the square closest to my hotel. It had its fountain and ornate wrought iron benches. But it also had very incongruous stadium style seating stalls in one corner, which left me wondering. Till the time I crossed the plaza one afternoon.

One of the buildings flanking it had always proclaimed that it was an *escuela primaria*. But what this implied became apparent only during my last afternoon in Guanajuato as I walked back to my room to pack my suitcase. Happy and eager little people ran into the safety of the open court for their recess. An apron clad assistant watched over them from the shadows of the school door. The vendor of breakfasts, who had set up her stall earlier on a trestle table, finally became active. The children got busy paying serious attention to the business of eating as they sat down on the parapet circling the fountain, on the benches or on the ugly stadium-stand. I did not see even one boy fighting, pushing or being violent, which used to be the prime occupation during recess of the boys that I went to school with. So, either humankind had evolved in the last 30 years or Mexican boys were little angels. I saw the beauty of this plaza as a safe haven for these remarkably well behaved children. I slowed my pace a little to savour the innocence in the air.

The *Museo del Pueblo de Guanajuato* was housed in the home of a former silver baron; it was interesting without being too pedantic. In the three halls upstairs, I found caretakers or assistants, spanning three generations, doing work that I imagined to be humdrum. Yet, I was fascinated by the differences in their attitudes to it. Middle Age had acquiesced in the monotony of life while managing to maintain a business like demeanour. Youth hadn't realised how long 40 years of sameness would be; meanwhile, his earphones were pleasantly relaying music to his ears. The pretty American women crossing the courtyard were not a poor distraction, either. Only Old Age moved with considerable effort, leaning on a cane, to check whether I had seen an adjoining gallery. And to point out the portrait of the wife of the famous local painter: Hermenegildo Bustos. Another painting by Hermenegildo was a family portrait with the parents seated on either side of their daughter with their arms around her shoulders. The girl, Bustos's daughter, had actually already passed away when he had painted the picture. I would have never got to know this if Old Age had not spoken. Thankfully, he was of a generation that could not imagine *not* reaching out to people.

That Guanajuato was a university town was obvious from the dazzling – if you got taken in – or garish – if you didn't – façade of the University building. But more so from the number of youngsters walking in the streets or patronising the obviously cheaper food joints tucked into the back lanes near the University. A book exhibition was housed in a canvas stall winding down, centipede-like, the slope of a lane.



Basílica Colegiata on Peace square, Guanajuato capital. © Photograph by Hector Teco Rivera.

And an incredibly large number of people seemed to be having conversations with ‘*maestros*’ or ‘*maestros*’ on their cell phones. How could I tell? The magnificent Mexican obsession with titles! I had known no other country where an accountant was addressed very respectfully as an accountant: not as *Señor* Perez but *Contador* Perez!

I met two young students with a sense of humour. Holding small paper cups of very bitter poisonous coffee and sucking hungrily at their cigarettes, the young ladies laughingly pointed out to me the irony of being yoga students. I had decided to go to a rather out of the way place called Cristo Rey: a more than 20 meter high bronze statue of Jesus atop a mountain said to be at the exact geographical centre of Mexico, making it ‘Jesus in the heart of the country’ kind of apt. I requested the girls to help me figure out where the bus stop was. They first gleefully pointed out the bus I could take if I just happened to want to visit someone in the local jail. They did eventually manage, after the necessary consultations, to point out the correct bus stop if I had only Jesus in mind.

It was a teeth rattling ride over unpaved roads in what eventually proved to be pouring rain. But the driver and the conductor – or both – had a fantastic taste in music that added a lot of Latin American flavour to the journey. Since the windows soon got misted over and the sights were blocked out, my ears took over the task of keeping me amused.

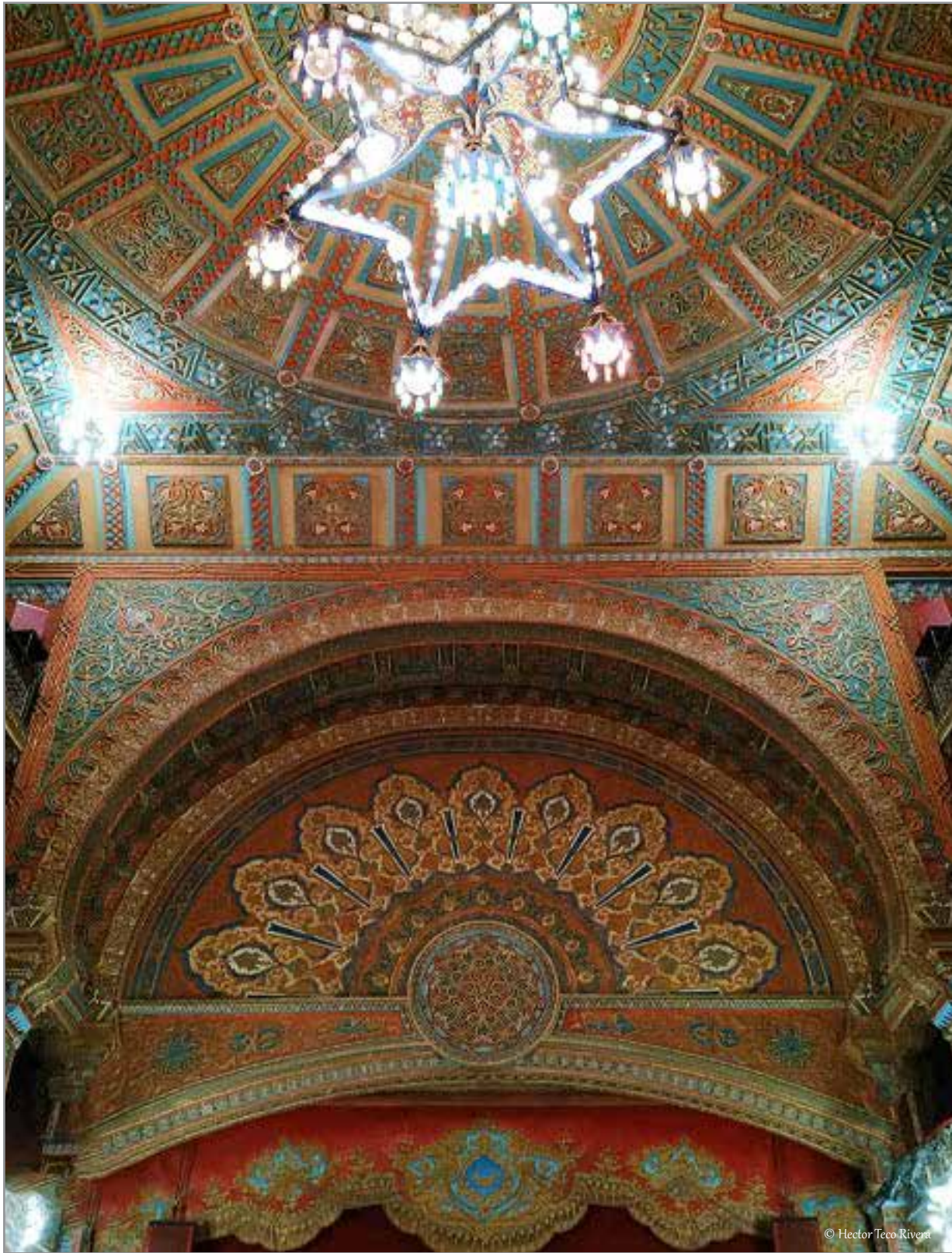
As I stood facing Christ, my shoes were full of water and the hems of my jeans soaked through despite the umbrella that I ineffectually held over my head. A shivering moth on the wet floor of the covered arcade seemed to share my discomfort. We were the only two non-microscopic creatures in Christ’s presence. In the chilly and foggy air, all I could see were the outlines of Christ as a huge apparition hovering over us. I rode back in the same bus. More good music. So, the whole trip had never really stood the chance of being a spiritual experience.

The house that Diego Rivera and his twin, who died as a child, were born in is a museum that was inaugurated because of Diego’s son’s vision and interest in the project. This made me wonder about the probable struggle to accept parents who behaved like teenagers in their adult years and to share their foibles with the world: the 11 am screening of the documentary based on Diego’s life was not eulogistic but very honest and balanced about the scandalous aspects of his life.

A victim of its success as a centre of silver mining, commerce and agriculture, Guanajuato drew people from other parts of Mexico as workers: at the cost of its natural ambience. The Valenciana mines once added hugely to the wealth of Spain. I had really looked forward to ‘going down a mine’. What we did descend was a mine strictly for tourists, which reached 50 metres below the surface of the earth; while a real mineshaft can go down to even 500. Our climb down was using a staircase with handlebars down the sides. It ended no sooner had it begun. The warning at the entrance pointing out the risks to ‘the aged, unfit and faint-hearted’ seemed like a joke in hindsight, as did the helmets we had donned with great expectations. But I did get a sense of how tough life was, and had always been, for those who mined for a living. Not surprisingly, there was a shrine to Saint Ramon near the mouth of the entrance. Of course, we heard about the tough and short lives of the diggers of yore. Miners of today don’t earn very much for their pains, either.

I was part of a guided tour, and the group had at least three couples of *tercer edad* who got suitably intimidated by the cautionary advice and decided against climbing down. A pity because they were lively and really young at heart. I was proud of the fact that I was ‘getting’ the jokes of a very local flavour that our guide was cracking: of the mother-in-law and alcohol variety. It really made me belong. There was another couple that looked Mexican but spoke English with an American twang. Throughout the trip, the wife would translate in rapid fire English what the guide had just explained in Spanish; even though this helped *me* fill in a few blanks as well, I felt so *superior* to the Latino man from Los Angeles who spoke no Spanish.

Our group was taken to a silver jewellery store and a traditional sweets store. We had our priorities right. Everyone became really animated looking at the food: even the Japanese who had had few opportunities for showing animation because just one of the four spoke Spanish. The other three had only had a chance to offer themselves as volunteers in the Inquisition Tortures Museum of Valenciana because that role required no speaking. They had just needed to be good at pretending to be tortured to death in one of the fancy contraptions while our group bid them goodbye. The guide at this private establishment had reminded us after the tour that we could offer him tips if we wished. If not, he *did* have all those instruments of torture at hand!



Inside the Teatro Juárez, Guanajuato capital. © Photograph by Hector Teco Rivera.

Since I had left my *salwar* suits at home, the guide was one of the very few Mexicans to guess correctly that I was from India. He told me that he had watched *My Name is Khan* and loved it. I confess that the movie's philosophy of tolerance and respect for religious diversity had strongly resonated with me. Yet, had he said that he *hadn't* liked it, I would have happily blurted out that we tortured people in India by showing them *My Name is Khan*: the embarrassingly poorly told story that it was. I just kept silent, marvelling at the phenomenon of a Mexican having watched a Bollywood movie in Mexico.

For a statue that the entire city literally looked up to, I found the Pípila to be distastefully lumpy and ugly. Nor did I care for that particular shade of pink. During the 1810 independence movement, the Spanish powers that be and their supporters locked themselves into the Alhóndiga, a granary, for safety from Hidalgo's forces baying for their blood; it was a solid and severe building that now housed a museum. Pípila had been a miner and is said to have worn a shield on his back to dodge the Spaniards' bullets and set fire to the gates of the Alhóndiga: making the colonised people's victory possible. In an interesting twist, the local hero's very existence had also been contested!

I chose not to ride up to the pink statue in a bus or the funicular. I walked up a series of steps and narrow lanes that wound between the houses painted in all kinds of fantastic bright colours. The walls of the houses were often sprayed with graffiti, and the landings or places for getting one's breath back were marked by plenty of garbage. The climb was neither too arduous nor too long, but a climber still needed some compensation. This came in the form of two human statues fully coated with shiny paint – including their attire and helmets. The two young men as miners had achieved excellence not just in their makeup but also in the perfect stillness they achieved. The one bathed in gold moved just once in robotic jerks to amuse a child. I was more than happy to ignore the pink monstrosity to concentrate on the human figurines instead.

You couldn't blame a middle aged woman for feeling flattered when a man left a poem titled 'When a Man Loves a Woman' on her table just as she was easing herself into a chair at a restaurant for a longed for meal after a rich but tiring day of visiting tourist sites and seeing museums. Well, the man simply left a photocopy – a single sheet of paper – on my table and disappeared into the crowd at the triangular plaza at the Jardín de la Unión before I could register him as more than a receding blur. A grill separated my table at the restaurant from the common, and it was easily accessible to anyone from the pedestrian area.

Suitably fortified after a banana and kiwi smoothie, but still mystified, I picked up the sheet of paper. And read the poem slowly and carefully: savouring not just the words but the sensation of being able to understand it. There were some accents missing in the text; a fact I gave myself a pat on the back for noticing. It was also time for second thoughts. Was this a way to rub salt in the wounds of a lone (and lonely?) woman travelling and eating alone? The waiter placed a plate of enchiladas on my table and gave me something else to think about.

‘Did you read it?’ demanded someone from the other side of the grill, but almost standing at my elbow. He had stolen up, to where he stood, absolutely noiselessly. The voice belonged to a man sporting a Brad Pitt hair do that sat a bit incongruously on his slightly wrinkled and definitely-not-youthful face. ‘Sí. ‘Well, I wrote it,’ he said with such a swagger that his locks swayed. I took an instant dislike to this man who was very obviously putting on artsy and superior airs. It took me just two seconds to feel a deep disappointment. The poem had not been bad *at all*. Its biggest virtue, to my mind, had been its comprehensibility. But that aside, it spoke of a no doubt clichéd truth, but a truth all the same: the pointlessness of life without love. If only this boor hadn’t written it (had he?)! ‘What did you think?’ he demanded. The only thing that I was thinking at that moment was that I did not wish to speak with him anymore. So, the simplest, and not totally untrue, way out was to claim that my Spanish was rather limited. ‘But did you understand it?’ came the aggressive enquiry. ‘*Más o menos*’. It’s almost as if he was not interested in the answer. ‘Well, if you want to keep it, you’ll have to pay,’ he said in a self-satisfied way. At this point, I had probably started looking put off. ‘Do you want to keep it?’ he said in a tone of utter disbelief. Who would be stupid enough not to keep the world’s greatest poem as their most treasured possession? At which point, going totally against my basic grain while resolving simultaneously to never feel guilty later about discouraging a creative being (him??!!), I uttered a firm no while handing the sheet of paper back calmly and started eating. ‘When a man loves a woman, he writes poems for her for free,’ I thought to change my mood and to amuse myself.



Fountain memorial of 16 September from 1810, San Miguel de Allende.
© Photograph by Hector Teco Rivera.

Noel Duffy was born in Dublin. He has published four collections of poetry to date, most recent *Street Light Amber*, a narrative sequence of love poems located in his native city. His work has appeared widely in Ireland and beyond (including in *The Irish Times*, *Poetry Ireland Review* and *The Financial Times*) and has been broadcast on RTE Radio 1 and BBC Radio 4. 'The Pattern of Rain' and 'The Ouroboros' are taken from *The Harvest Sorrow*, a novel in progress.



THE PATTERN OF RAIN

The rain comes at last, the storm clouds
that had gathered on the horizon all afternoon
arriving finally and swelling to a downpour,
the smell of dampened earth and the dulled light
calming her spirits somewhat after
the endless heat of June, its long days
and humid nights that made her listless
in her sleep. It reassures her current state,
these patterns of rain on the window-glass
that form and hesitate then streak
in sudden, fleeting cascades before her –
like the pattern of her own thoughts, still
in one moment and in the next a rush,
the momentary, branching tributaries of it
like the veins on her pale blue wrists.
She sits and listens in the darkening room,
the rain softening now to a dulled metronome,
she thankful that her fretful thoughts
had been escaped and forestalled, if even
just for the length of a summer rainstorm.

Noel Duffy

STORY

One morning, out of boredom,
God took an axe to the World Tree
and carved two simple figures
from it: Man, Woman.

To complete his morning's work
he gave them stones for eyes,
and about the holes that were their mouths,
he gave them figs for lips.

And so, they stood before him,
mute like two guilty children,
the expression on their wooden faces
fixed, by his axe, in animal puzzlement.

God observed them for a time,
toy-like, almost beautiful –
imitations of life, but *not* life –
and he was dissatisfied.

So, he cut out his tongue
and gave each a piece for their mouths,
pulled out his hair in clumps
so that their heads would not be bare,

hacked off his ears and nose,
ripped out his own two eyes
with his bloodied hands,
cut his wrist with a knife

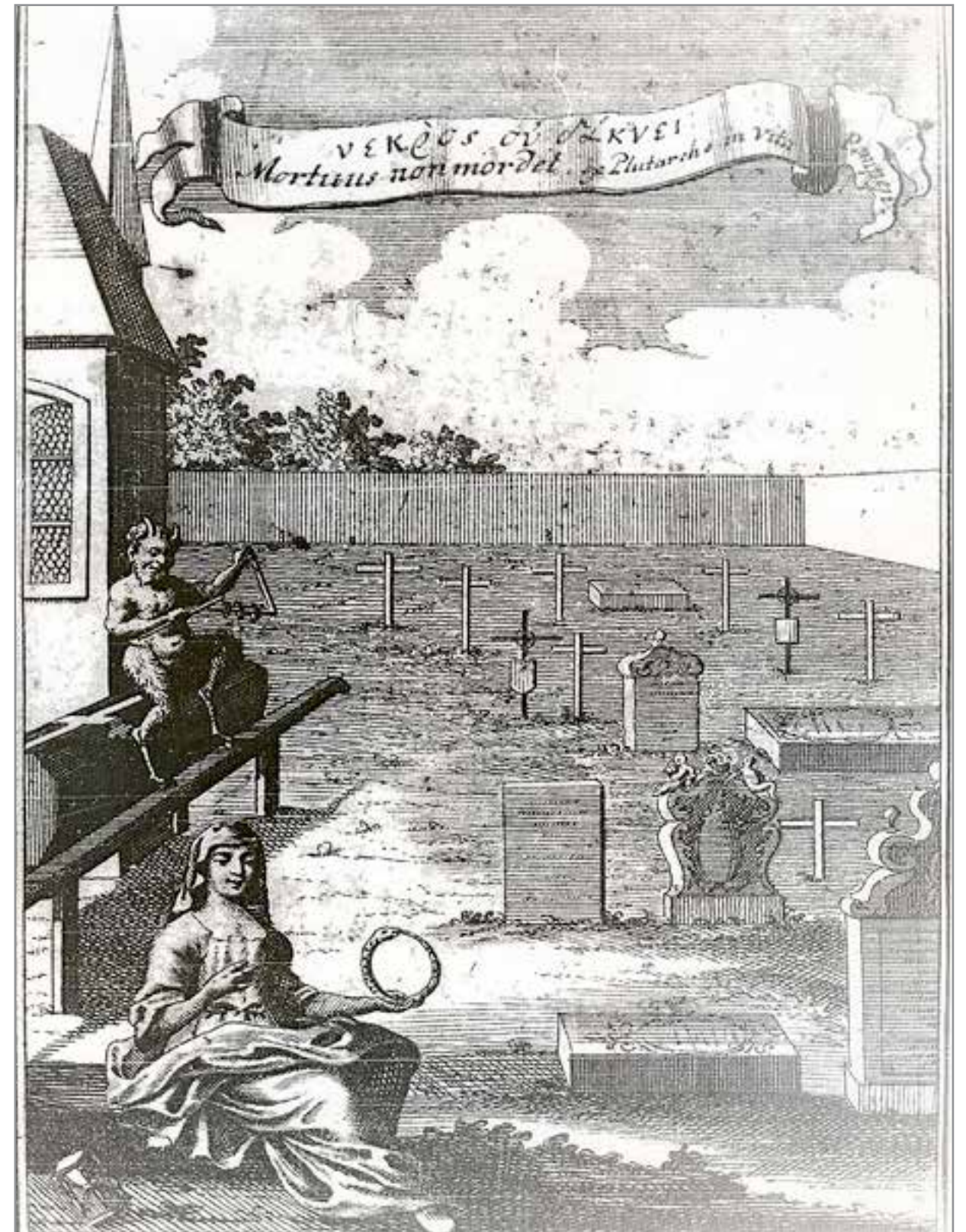
so that they too would have blood,
and veins for blood, and arteries
and fibres and muscles for blood,
and the history of all Creation in blood.

And there, lying in the sawdust
of the World Tree, deaf, mute,
blind and dying, God knew his work
was done.

THE OUROBOROS

She lays out her paper, her inks and pens, tries to prepare herself for the work ahead but finds instead a blank place in her mind as blank as the off-white sheet of parchment on the table laid out before her. She is distracted, she thinks, not quite ready for the task. A fly lands by her hand. She observes it absently, the cantilever of its two tiny back legs working to clean some invisible stuff from its wings, before it takes to flight again to perform its urgent errands, plotting the room and the kitchen's alcoves. She returns to her mission: to draw for Mr Lovegrove, the apothecary, a fabled creature of the primordial deep, a snake circling back upon itself and biting its own tail, an image, he said, of chaos and time's beginning, this snake that must in turn be sundered and scattered to the four corners of the world just as Tiamat, the ancient god had done, so that life might be restored and grow and multiply again across all the lands and seas, the forests and streams...

She eyes the old man's crudely drawn sketch begins with a simple pen-stroke for the eyes, then to the split tongue and scales, it a great O unto itself, complete at once – hungrily so. She warms to her endeavour, the ink flowing easily now on paper rendering an intricate vision of the monster that seems now to awaken and recoil at her touch, a muscle tensing beneath the water's surface.



An engraving of a woman holding an ouroboros in Michael Ranft's 1734 treatise.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ouroboros#/media/File:Tractat_von_dem_Kauen_und_Schmatzen_der_Todten_in_Gr%C3%A4bern_001.jpg



Noel Monahan is a native of Granard, Co. Longford, now living in Cavan. He has published seven collections of poetry with Salmon Poetry. An eight collection, *Celui Qui Porte Un Veau*, a selection of French translations of his work was published in France by Alidades, in 2014. A selection of Italian translations of his poetry was published in Milan by Guanda in November 2015: “Tra Una Vita E L’Altra”. His poetry was prescribed text for the Leaving Certificate English, 2011- 2012. His play: “ Broken Cups” won the RTE P.J. O’Connor award in 2001 and *Chalk Dust*, a long poem of his, was adapted for stage and directed by Padraic McIntyre, Ramor Theatre, 2019. During the Covid-19 lockdown, Noel had to reinvent his poetry readings and he produced a selection of Short Films: “Isolation & Creativity” , “Still Life”, “Tolle Lege” and A Poetry Day Ireland Reading for Cavan Library, 2021. Recently, he edited “Chasing Shadows”, a miscellany of poetry for Creative Ireland. Noel adjudicated The Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Award 2022. His ninth poetry collection, “Journey Upstream” will be published in 2023.

Two extracts from the long poem: *Maynooth Calling*, due for publication in Noel Monahan’s 9th. Collection: *Journey Upstream*, 2023.

A GROUP OF STUDENTS, BIRETTAS ON,
STAND LIKE STATUES, FACING HEAVEN

(strophe	antistrophe)	(spoken as if in choir)
Long corridors	many doors,	
God took us here	or did He?	
To be marked out	a chosen one	
Took our names	assigned us numbers instead	
All searching	for something lost	
Loved by our mothers	Pueri Aeterni	
Word in the womb	the word made flesh	
Converting myths	into day-to-day living	
Carrying our heads	in our hands	
Seminarians	behind a high wall	
Seminarians	A seed sowing race	
Inside the	Pomerium	
Bells toll	you are only a number	
The holy rood	fish on Fridays	
Rules are rules	auto-da-fé	
Birettas in our hands	birettas on our heads	
Better reign in heaven	than burn in hell.	

Noel Monahan

PHOTOS HANG ON THE WALLS

Faces on the wall,
Clerics like mice smiling
Look down at us,
We look up with curiosity.
We look up at them.

With Fantasies about their faces.

Reading into their lives

Dressy fellows in soutanes

Faces about to make the sign of the cross,

Faces about to sing a *Hymn to Mary*,

Up *The Catholic* faces

Praise the Lord faces.

Laus Deo

Fleur- de- lis faces.

Lines of faces in carved oak stalls,

Rotatory faces in the dust grains of sunlight,

A face attached to suffering,

A face with a poem on its lips

Ethereal faces,

Gravitational faces,

Faces singing from the same hymn sheet,

A rose window is caught in a curve of light,

A thurible sends smoke down the aisle,

A white surplice dances in the draught of an open door.



St. Joseph's Cathedral, Hoàn Kiếm District of Hanoi, Vietnam. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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



THIERRY'S TICKET TO FLY

I

5:30 am. I'm having coffee, reading the last pages of *Normal People*. I can't put it down. I don't want to. The story of Marianne and Connell and the effects of the coffee are waking me up.

A Facebook notification on my phone. Thierry has sent a message. Thierry is Luc's (my future ex-husband) twenty-something year old cousin. I'm surprised. He's asking me how I'm doing. I write back that I'm pleased to read his message, that all is well. I ask why he's writing.

I remember Thierry had struggled with drugs some years back. I found out when Luc and I visited Thierry's family's estate in Bordeaux. We spent the weekend in the garden. The air was cool, pregnant with pollen. No clouds in the sky. Drinking wine, eating cheese and talking about literature and politics. We also discussed Thierry's struggle when he was not around.

The whole family thought of me as a wise man who had a way to talk to younger generations. That I could relate to them. I hadn't tried meth yet. I was still pseudo-sane. They asked me to talk to Thierry and have him come to his senses. Thierry and I went for a run in the forest. Twenty minutes into our run, we stopped to rest under a tree. The shade kept our body temperatures down. We caught our breaths and talked. I didn't know what to say. I listened. He swore he was off drugs then. I assumed he was telling the truth. He probably was. We both weren't aware of the insidiousness of addiction. I assured the family he was not using.

Maybe he was writing out of sympathy, or camaraderie.

Rafael E. Fajer Camus

He replies. He wants to come to Mexico. I tell him he's welcome. He sends a smiley face emoticon. I reply in kind. I leave the phone on the counter and continue sipping my coffee and reading. Marianne is asking if Connell is in love with a peer at work.

A new notification. Thierry again. He's asking for a thousand euros to buy the ticket. I'm baffled. Before I reply he explains he "no longer has a family". That he needs the money to buy the ticket and he'll pay me back in a year or two. That this amount of money to me shouldn't be a problem. He's using, I think. He continues telling me that he has serious issues and needs the money to take care of them. What about the ticket? methinks. FUCK! My fingers are trying to write back something. What? I don't know. My mind is blank... red more like. HE'S USING.

I decide to let him think I might lend him the money. So I do. I tell him I will write back tomorrow. He likes the last exchange in the feed. I close the phone.

I walk around the apt, trying to outpace my mind. I need to let Luc know what's going on. Luc and I haven't spoken for more than a year, not since I burned down my apartment in Paris. He has a new life, a new boyfriend. He's happy. I don't think he wants to hear from me. This is more important though. I write to him. I explain the situation. I send him the screen captures of my exchange with Thierry.

He's silent for a minute. Two. Five. Ten. I'm not thinking. I'm stressing. Pressure in my lungs, inside my skull, behind my eyes. I step out and smoke a cigarette. The air is crisp, all the pollutants resting on the street floor at this hour. I can almost smell the sea. The air helps me calm down. I go back to my coffee. It's cold now, more bitter. I gulp it down and prepare another.

Luc replies. He thanks me for warning him and his family. Thierry's parents immediately left to look for him. They'd already suspected he was using again. He'd sent requests for money to many people asking. Our exchange had been the last straw. His family sends me love and gratitude. I'm touched. Luc asks me never to hesitate to write to him for any reason. That I'm always welcome in his life. That he wants to know I'm happy and doing well. My eyes well up. I didn't expect this. After all I put him through, he's still tender with me.

I need to get my mind of what just happened. I drink more coffee. I delve into *Normal People*. It doesn't help.

II

4:15 am. I'm nervous, really nervous. I find a text message from Ada, Thierry's mom:

- Ada: Eli. Can Thierry bring his laptop, telephone, books? He's very attached to his books. We've already packed the clothes you specified. Is there anything else he can bring? Does he have access to the postal service? A few days ago he received LSD by mail! He's very cunning. He found a way to use in the last psychiatric hospital. Are you sure Playas is a better option than Rosarito?
- Me: He can bring his phone but he won't have access to it for at least 7 months.

The staff will keep it locked. He can't bring books because at the beginning only authorized literature is allowed and because people who use LSD transport it on the pages of books by adding drops of the substance on them and then eating them.

I had done so, transported LSD to Coachella on the pages of my book. I had meth sent by mail (regular, governmental) from NY to Paris. Why would I pay 250 Euro for a gram of crystal meth when I could get 15 for that amount?

- Ada: Ok. Bise
- Me: See you tomorrow. Beso

Thierry texted me last Thursday. He wanted to talk. He needed help. I asked Luc if Thierry was with his family and what they thought about us talking. They wanted me to speak to him. They felt lost.

A few hours later Thierry and I connected. He was walking through the forest where we'd run years before. He answered happily. He apologized about asking for money. I told him it wasn't a problem, that I was happy he wanted to talk. I wanted to know how he was doing. He went from happy to sobbing uncontrollably, almost immediately.

- Thierry : Eli, I can't. I.. it's been years. I use LSD everyday. A few times a day. I heard about your story and you... you are family to us, to me. I'm sorry. I can't stop. Tell me how. How did you do it?



© Photograph by Hector Teco Rivera.

I ask Thierry when was the last time he used. He'd used the day before. I know the state he's in. That hopelessness when you think there's no way out, stuck forever in wanting to stop and not being able to. His crying intensifies.

- Thierry: I heard you burnt down your apartment because you were hallucinating and hearing voices. I'm starting to get lost in my days. I sometimes can't tell what's true or not.
- Eli: And today? Can you tell what's real and what's not?
- Thierry: I don't know. I just know everything is different.

There's this idea that if you can tell you're crazy then you're not. It doesn't necessarily hold true every time. Thierry was going through what I went through a few days before I burnt down my apartment. I knew everything was so unlike the reality I had been living in years prior (I could remember it perfectly) and that I had been using drugs for so long, that it made sense to be hallucinating, to be out of touch with shared existence. And I thought that if I could tell that I was crazy then I wasn't.

I called my sister and asked her if I was a cyborg built by Elon Musk destined to colonize Mars. She said go to the nearest hospital. I went. There wasn't a psychiatric ward. I returned home, called my psychiatrist. He asked me to come in the day after. At that point I knew I was wrong but desired deeply not to be. What would this mean for me? That I wasn't the star of a TV reality? That I was imagining things? That I was crazy.

Thierry was losing or had already lost his ability to ascertain objective reality. I asked him if he truly wanted to stop. He said yes. If he was willing to do anything and everything necessary to do so. Yes! If he trusted me. YES. I told him to go back home and ask his parents to call me with him listening. He did.

The conversation with Ada and Gabriel, Thierry's parents, was intense. I explained to them the danger he was in. The urgency of his needing help. My experience with the clinic and how I recommended Thierry come to Tijuana for treatment. Then:

- Eli: Thierry. I know you are willing to come to treatment, to do anything and everything to stop using. How many hits of acid do you have there at your parents'.
- Thierry: 32

- Eli: Please go with your dad and give them to him
- Thierry: Ok
- Eli: Gabriel, please go through all of his stuff. Take his passport, credit cards, money and telephone. Thierry, are you ok with this?
- Thierry: why the...?
- Eli: You know why. You've fled (I assumed this to be true) so no money or credit cards. Your dealers are on your phone and they deliver (assumption), and your dad is going to need your passport to reserve a plane ticket for you to come to Tijuana (I'm pushing here). Remember you said you trusted me. Then trust me.
- Thierry: Ok

I talked to Ada for a while longer explaining the treatment. It was the best choice, she agreed, and they were going to reserve a plane ticket. Gabriel and Thierry returned with more drugs than Thierry had admitted to (no surprise). We agreed to talk later. Thierry needed to sleep, he was emotionally spent.

III

The following is an account I've gathered from all the sources involved in Thierry's transfer from Bordeaux to Tijuana: Thierry, his parents, my sisters and I.

Friday:

Ale, my sister and Luc's very close friend, writes to me. Ada and Gabriel are afraid I'm using, that I'm utilizing the clinic as a ploy to bring Thierry over so that I can disappear with him into a drug binge or maybe to kidnap him and get some money. Ale is trying to laugh, but I hear nervousness in her voice; a sliver of doubt. She doesn't want to think this could be true but after all I put my family through, she knows it could be. I understand. I would be afraid too. I would do anything to reify my state of consciousness and the reality of the rehab proposal before getting on the plane to this forsaken city of perdition.

I'm worried. How can I prove I'm sober? That I'm really working at the clinic? I start sending selfies of me in the facilities, wearing the shirt with the logo. I Facetime my sisters with the same intention.

They take screenshots and send them over to Luc who in turn transmits them to Ada. I get the admissions director to send them the contracts from an official clinic email. I write to Luc and we have a good and coherent conversation. They're all relieved. They decide to go ahead and trust me. They now trust me wholeheartedly.

Saturday:

A message at 4:15am:

- Ada: Thierry is having a crisis on the train (from Bordeaux to Paris), he keeps insulting me, screaming at people around him and smoking cigarettes. What should I do?
- Me: Tell him he's right, that you understand and that it's unfair he has to live through this but that you're working on making it right and that you'll be there for him even if he says all those horrible things. Don't contradict him, don't engage.

I call Thierry. He answers my call (why does he have his phone with him? Big NO NO) as if nothing is happening. We hang up. Ada lets me know he's calmed down. I tell her to prepare sleeping pills for him on the plane. He won't refuse them.

After Thierry insults his family, people on the train, people on the taxi queue, the taxi driver, the airline ticket counter personnel, people at the airport, they get on the plane from Paris to Mexico City. Thierry smokes 4 cigarettes on the plane. Airplanes, and this is new information for all of us, have smoke detectors that signal the closest control tower on land. The control tower instructs the plane to land at JFK. Ada and Gabriel plead with the airline staff explaining Thierry's situation, that he's on his way to get treated for drugs and that he's going through withdrawals. The control tower allows the plane to go on its way. The staff changes attitude from confrontational and angry, to friendly and understanding. Thierry's attitude also shifts. They all become friendly.

Sunday:

They land in Mexico City and connect to Tijuana with almost no incidents. I'm waiting at the airport. Thierry exits the arrivals terminal. He's tall, very thin. I can barely see his chiseled face under the cotton wrap covering his head and neck (visualize a mid-twentieth century female movie star driving a convertible in Malibu). He hugs me tightly, warmly, and cries. I tell him he's in a good place, that he made the right decision and that this is the beginning of the end of his suffering.

He wants to smoke a cigarette. His parents are getting the luggage. I step outside the terminal with him. He takes off his shoes and walks around barefoot on the pavement. He explains it's way too warm for shoes. He takes off his headscarf. His hair is blonder than I remember. He sees my confused look. He explains he bleached it for rehab.

Ada and Gabriel come out carrying 5 bags. The image I had of them is of two strong, thoughtful, calm persons. They look downtrodden now, demolished. Unsure, eyes red and drooping. I help them with the bags. The luggage is incredibly heavy.

- Gabriel: He brought a lot of books and a few clothes

Maybe I hadn't explained myself clearly.

- Gabriel continues: We know... but he wouldn't get in the car without them
- Me: No problem. Thierry, you know we're sending these back or tossing them, right?
- Yeah ok

We drive to the clinic and take care of Thierry's intake. He's angry, arrogant but willing to do everything we tell him. He gives us his earring, bracelets and necklace. He throws his scarf at his mother. As we're walking out of the intake office (I'm taking Thierry down to detox 1), he tells Ada and Gabriel he doesn't want to see them for 10 years. Ada and Thierry, whose eyes had been tearing up, break into sobs. I take Thierry away before he can do more damage. He sits on his bed, not after thanking me but demanding a private room. Oh.. the surprises that await you!, I think. I let him know there aren't any such rooms in the clinic, that I told him so many times on the phone, that it's normal not to remember given the state he's in, but to please trust me and be patient.

Moises walks in. He's a burly man with dark brown skin and severe features. He's the guard. He introduces himself to Thierry and asks him to undress (Thierry speaks Spanish as well as English and his native French). Thierry looks at me with pleading eyes. I tell him it's necessary. He complies. His body is all skin and bones, all the flesh has melted from years of drug use. He squats three times. Nothing to declare. Moises leaves. Thierry lies down on his bed, closes his eyes. I leave him in peace.

I return to Ada and Gabriel who want to go rest at the hotel. I send them on their way.

Ray Whitaker has been writing both prose and poetry since he was seventeen. What Ray is writing now is very different from what he wrote those so many years ago. All writers and poets are writing out of “the Self” however there are directions that the self speaks into, that change. Now Ray’s writing is to put foremost in his work, just who he is writing for. He intends on writing for the everyday man and woman. He firmly believes that poems need to reach into the everyday person’s pictures in their minds and engage with those. This is where he aims to make a difference in his creative writing. He’s fulfilled when he sees that his work is provoking thought in his readers.



A GOOD DAY TO DIE

Driving my car up as far as one could go
in these Idaho wilderness mountains
up roads that I likely shouldn’t have driven
switchbacks the regularity here on forest service roads
and the “up,” always past slopes covered in pines, perhaps going where it
can both be described as existing and not, or neither existing nor not existing
no deciduous trees at all there, no aspens with their snow-white barks,
or red oaks with their unique as a fingerprint leaves.

The tripods all set up
to record the aura, and maybe the occasional raptor
the Olympus camera seemingly right at home
atop this River Of No Return Wilderness mountain
watching the mist move in and over the scenery across the valley floor
the river seems so far below
yet the clouds were moving across, in their wispy way
all to be captured for a posterity only in the eyes of the beholder.

My friend has come with me
he simply wouldn’t be anywhere else
having ridden along with his head out of the window
tongue flapping in the winds blowing by as we climbed
he is nearby the tripod
having explored around the nearby trees, slopes and smells
his German Shepard nose catching it all
now he is waiting, watching me shuttering the view.

Ray Whitaker

continued overleaf...

A GOOD DAY TO DIE *...contd*

After enough photos taken
 in hopes that at least one would have captured this glimpse
 of a view that extinguished the fires of greed, hatred and delusion
 one that we seem to have lost appreciation of, in our regular lives.
 My friend goes to full alert, standing up
 body rigid, nose pointed, ears at attention forward, up the rise
 having learned not to ignore this sign, I look as well, agile to the view
 now seeing what my friend has noticed.

There are wolves above us.
 Several. Arrayed out in a downward fan,
 brown and grey shapes held still standing, watching us
 possibly deciding how good a lunch was before them
 the wolf assessment of risk management
 the white-furred pack leader stands more in front
 they are in the sparse pines above us
 near the top of the mountain.

Even tho they were a couple hundred yards away,
 my friend now standing right beside me
 I locked eyes with that pack leader
 seemed like an hour we stared at the other
 however was only likely minutes
 this gestalt, perhaps this wild's way therein calling out
 of a sinner riding into hell, all the while
 the grey mist coming nearer, about to swallow the entirety of us.

Put my friend in the car,
 camera too,
 and walked around to the driver's side.
 I stopped,
 fingering my holstered .45 on my leg
 touching that security, a mode of self-preservation
 the wolves were steady in their quietude, not having moved
 waving to the pack, more of a loose salute really

the mist covered the wolf pack just then
 there was the loudest silence on the slopes
 my friend startled me, nudged me from the open car window
 he, having performed his dog version of risk management
 reminding me that I was only one
 and they were many
 ever so slowly, I got in, started burning fossil fuel
 heading down, away from that dose of reality.

Up there, really for the view
 the looking out over the world, and as well, perhaps
 a looking searching for the supramundane experience
 like that of an Absolute Truth,
 that feeling of closeness to Heaven's meant
 away from the internet, or cell phones
 perhaps looking for the feeling as it were a signpost
 of where to stop, for a place giving sanctuary.

Mists are everywhere, covering the things we do not want to see.

I would run with the pack if I knew how.

VIEW FROM WEBB

We are concerned with
measuring our lives
in tens of years

now the astrophysicists
are measuring our universe
in billions of lightyears

we see our short lives
thru lenses of earthly dictates
and as if this our vision, this only

is the magnificent
way it is
as if there was no other.

How do you get your head around
a billion light-years
or 13.7 of the, or even more

white dwarfs do not refer to a small Caucasian
black holes do not refer to manhole covers
red giants do not refer to very tall Native Americans

blue stragglers do not refer to a Buddy Guy blues tune
mass isn't a cancer in the liver
and a Type1A Supernova isn't a personality trait/

Did the Big Bang
have a baroque choir accompaniment,
or did laughter sound out
among the stars at our earthly ideas, that presumption
of our best human being minds
are the brightest
among it all?

There isn't an encyclopedic presence
to a space time before the Big Bang
no thick, heavy bound volume

needing to blow the dust off an individual page
as they are turned, to view the next color plate
of the creation, that energy field of our God.

Mindboggling

faster than the speed of light
able to leap tall building in a single bound

pale grey, insignificant our sight only fifty miles on the clearest day
when comparing our view off the tallest mountain in Colorado.

Can you wipe your humbled tears away?

Serena Agosto-Cox, one of the first featured poets of the DiVerse Gaithersburg reading series in Maryland, coordinates poetry programming for the Gaithersburg Book Festival. Poems are in *The Curator*, *Poetry X Hunger*, and more. Work appears in the anthologies, *The Great World of Days*, *This Is What America Looks Like*, *Mom Egg Review's Pandemic Parenting*, *The Plague Papers*, H.L. Hix's *Made Priceless*, *Love_Is_Love: An Anthology for LGBTQIA+ Teens*. She also runs the book review blog, *Savvy Verse & Wit*, and founded *Poetic Book Tours* to help poets market their books.



SURRENDER

I.

The dark sea rolls over you
pushes you down, down;
your arms windmill,
lungs bubble and burn with salt.
Where's the hand, the arm to hold?

II.

We spiral through classrooms, halls
alphabet lines redden, as you lure
others with anger and hate.
We're all drowning, holding hands, screaming.
You're here, strapped with tentacles crushing your neck.

We're little leaves ripped from branches
by torrents that pulled you down.

Serena Agosto-Cox

WHAT I LEARNED FROM SHARK WEEK

Sinews stretched under your steely skin,
gliding beneath the glassy surface. You gain speed,
waves undulating like four-chambered circuitry of birds.
Launching an arc above the sea — predatory need drives you —
allowing breath beneath dorsals. Breach of watery contract
as you fly — if only for seconds — like birds diving
just below the surface for fish.

Greatness is not the catch, but the act of leaping
to become weightless.

AIR WEAVING

Thin strands ripple,
crisscross, knot,
untangle, a groundswell.
Wind passing over and through
my hair. Quilts over my eyes.

Air weaving against the break inside,
swell in my breast, upsurge of emotion.
I want to close my eyes against the flood.

Roads fade into the wake --
a predictable drift,
as undertow threatens to pull me under.

Sven Kretzschmar hails from Germany. His work has been published internationally, e.g., in *Writing Home. The 'New Irish' Poets* (Dedalus Press, 2019), *Turungalila-Palestine* (Dairbhre, 2019), *Hold Open the Door* (UCD Press, 2020), *100 Words of Solitude* (Rare Swan Press, 2021), *Das Gedicht*, *Loch Raven Review*, *The Irish Times* and more.



ELSETIME

This downpour falling is more
than sound on our cagoules,
despite a canopy of black alder leaves
still dense in September. Gales
tear cracks to bombard moist ground,
squirrels, and surprised saunterers taking
to their heels, wet heads on home.
Evening town, open roof deck door,
it is rusty jaded robots banging,
no gentle steady rain. Sewers are alive,
something pains its way into my gut,
cruel the fading of your warmth
against me.

Sven Kretzschmar

WHEN THE EMPTY ARE GONE

Soft barbarians dangling on twigs in red
and orange, some still green, some others
already on toward a raid of moist earth,
undergrowth, gravel paths, mingling

with hoof prints and hollow cupules.
This early October undecided as of yet,
its good-days sky a remorseless blue
with honey-coloured hedges hiding

the sinking sun. At times, their shadows
seem more real than you. And I uphill,
past fields that, after rain-batter, appear

fen-like and bare. When all backs have been
turned, where does emptiness linger
when the empty are gone?

AT HOME

after patrick kavanagh

She passed me on rustling forest floor, a maroon-soft lady
leashing two brisk dogs on a path attended
by the ditches of our own Rosselwood. Between her lips passed
the decline of a surprise dram I proposed. They wandered on,
the tree of them a ten-legged bundle. Her soil-sensuous smile
left me standing, pondering had I gone ahead more crisp
then comical? Days later, late winter,
a primary-school boy is catching the virus, the weather grey, cold –

appropriate for quarantining, for board games with
a maroon-soft mother and two brisk dogs, for the taking
of a pause. A taste for thought is not a waste
in the void of a silent tv, dark phone screen, and only snuffles
or the sniff of a snout reminders of a turning world,
of forests growing thick again in time with green
prickly husks in the crips air of ever-becoming,
parted, like eyelids, by occasional smiles of soil-sensuous irises.

Susan Condon is an MA in Creative Writing student at Dublin City University. Susan's short stories and poems have won many awards, including first prize in the Jonathan Swift Creative Writing Award. Publications include *My Weekly*, *Boyne Berries*, *Ireland's Own Anthology*, *Flash Flood Journal*, *Spelk* and *Flash Fiction Magazine*. Susan blogs at: <https://susancondon.wordpress.com/> and Tweets @SusanCondon.



SPEED DATE

According to my mobile, I've arrived!

Crushed Velvet is a hidden gem in Dublin's city centre. I stand at an oak pan-elled door, set between a book shop and a vintage store selling pre-owned clothing. According to reviewers, the interior has been revamped to reflect the on-trend vibe of those lucky enough to gain entrance. I take a deep breath, run my fingers through my long hair and pull my shoulders back. It's time for my game face.

I push through the door, give my name to the supermodel at the desk and step inside an interior of dark, warm, opulence.

The familiar chords of *Wonderwall* brings tears to my eyes. That used to be our song.

"What's your poison?" a barman asks, waving a glass in the air.

Taking my Chablis, I find a seat close to the door, inhaling the eclectic mix of men and women who enter.

"Is anyone sitting here?"

I shake my head at the young woman.

"Slim pickings tonight," she says, removing her hat. A red mane cascades down her shoulders. "Ruby," she says, extending a manicured hand, "hopefully it'll improve."

The noise levels soar.

I tune back in to the chatter.

Susan Condon

“... no more than six months, then I’m back again.”

“Ladies and gentlemen,” a voice booms, “choose a number, then follow me.” The George Clooney lookalike is the Pied Piper.

“That’s more like it,” whispers Ruby, “to your right.” She throws her head back, as if laughing at something funny I’ve said.

I turn to look, spilling my wine when I see his face.

I hear a gasp from the two designer clad ladies he’s entertaining.

Then the bell rings.

It’s begun!

I’m unable to concentrate. The hours I spent rehearsing what to say are wasted. I never expected to see *him* here. Now all I can remember is the weeks and months after he abandoned me. I left social media behind so that I wouldn’t have to see photos of their wedding, their kids, their life and know that it should have been mine.

The bell rings again.

The guy sitting opposite me mutters under his breath before he moves.

Rob arrives at my table – still as handsome as ever. He’s wearing an expensive suit, his right hand in his pocket but when he moves the sleeve droops as if there is nothing there.

“Sam!” he says, his eyes lighting up as he smiles.

I find myself smiling back, but I can’t prevent my gaze returning to his arm.

“A shark attack,” he grins, lifting his shoulder.

“But you hate water,” I say. “And why are you here? Where’s Melanie?”

He pales. His voice a whisper. “She’s dead, Sam. A car crash: two years ago. My lower arm was mangled.”

All this time, I’ve been hating her - the woman who stole the man I was due to marry. “It’s great to see you. C’mon, let’s get out here,” he says, the boyish charm that won me over all those years ago trying to shine through.

“That’s not how it works.”

“You know me, Sam,” he winks, “always been a rule-breaker.”

I remember: drinks, driving, the rows that followed ...

Melanie saved my life - it should have been me in that car!

“My name is Samantha,” I say, leaving him behind.

Outside, I take a gulp of polluted Dublin air and watch the traffic. A bus drives by, *Begin*, emblazoned across the side.

With a confidence I’d once taken for granted, I stand straight, shoulders back and plant a smile on my face.

It’s time for *my* life to begin.

Susana H. Case has authored eight books of poetry, most recently *The Damage Done*, Broadstone Books, 2022, which won her a third Pinnacle Book Achievement Award. Her books have previously also won an IPPY, a NYC Big Book Award Distinguished Favorite award, and she was a finalist for the Eric Hoffer Book Award and the International Book Awards. The first of her five chapbooks, *The Scottish Café*, Slapering Hol Press, was re-released in a dual-language English-Polish version, *Kawiarnia Szkocka* by Opole University Press. <https://susanahcase.com/>



TELENOVELA 4

His parents worry—Patrizio sleeps
too much. He needs to be forced out
of the crumpled sheets. Clara
has broken up with him.
So sad over this obsession, his words slur.
His career making sandwiches
in the restaurant is in shreds.

General Conrad von Hoetzendorf,
architect of the apocalypse during WW I,
was also obsessed with love—
a married Italian aristocrat,
Virginia von Reininghaus—
he was more distraught over her
than the killing surrounding him,
the death in battle of his favorite son.
Another career in shreds.

Clara has a baby with Alberto.
Now she doesn't want anything to do
with Alberto. Patrizio hates Alberto, pushes him
down the stairs, hopes to thus win back Clara.
Alberto lies that his bones
were broken in the fall. Everyone rolls their eyes.

Conrad wrote more than 3,000 letters
to Virginia, some over sixty pages long.
He couldn't attack her husband, but hoped
a victory in war would lead to victory in love.

Susana H. Case

continued overleaf...

© Susana H. Case

TELENOVELA 4 *...contd*

Alberto swears he won't take Patrizio to court
if Clara moves in with him so he can see his son.
Clara says no, then yes, then no, then yes.
She wants a separate bed, a wall between them.

War and eros, like Ares and Aphrodite.
Ares was bloodthirsty
and Aphrodite was beautiful.
Her husband ensnared them in bed
with golden threads and the other gods laughed.
Ares, Conrad, Patrizio—all of us—
humiliated with love's inevitable losses.

TELENOVELA 5 (DUPLEX)

The course she's following seems useless.
She no longer wants to be his mistress.

Of course not. She was the mistress
of a man who repeatedly stepped out.

The narcissistic man who slept out
now wants her back—we've all been there.

We all know he doesn't have her back.
They have a child, so she'll go live with him.

We scream at the TV like children—*Don't!*
With her small demands met, she feels in charge.

She's not in charge. Hopelessness and irrationality
move the plot forward (Italy's favorite soap).

To move the plot forward, she'll make other poor
decisions. Misery is not commercially useless.

TELENOVELA 6

Note the lines around her eyes, as she shoots an episode in the main square of Procida, first time on the island. Her lover kisses her hand again and again, as they redo a scene in the sun, his white shirt becoming more rumpled, she, remaining cool and crisp, not needing her makeup refreshed, as she twirls in her skirt for photographers.

Her husband is a drunken lout.
Too many promises, too many excuses—
she's done with *discussioni bruttissime*.
Perhaps, he, too, will look on Dream House
for a new home. No—instead, he downs pills
with whisky. This is a family in which
all is not fine. Note the flashbacks—
other abusive men in the family line.

Her lover schemes, wants her to come back
to him, pleads this time will be different.
Note the sheared beaver collar on the coat
she puts on at the end of the episode.
She's preparing for a cold season.



Unknown traveller with hand under overheard lamp. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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



SO LONG, DIVA! AND THANKS FOR THE KISS!

My dear friends,

One cigarette before I go, I heard her stimulating voice ringing in my ears as I lay crammed in the pack. I made a dance move, like a constipated rapper, but that would do for the time being. The others did not move, they couldn't care less, but me I cared. I don't know why. Maybe it was that I heard stories about her from other packs stacked alongside mine in the newsagent's. The two hump Camels, the Silkiest of Cuts and even the unscrupulous Drum, all of them were humming about her beauty, her style, the way she held you, the way she put you in her mouth. *She is the source of life in the universe*, I heard one day my uncle Reg Marlboro saying from inside his soft pack, where he had retreated for years, for nobody would buy him. She is certainly my source of life, or that's how I feel now that I am getting ready to meet her breath.

I was jumpy when her burgundy nails appeared and her long thin fingers started searching the pack for one of us. *Pick me, pick me*, I was nonsensically yelling, as if a woman like that needs prompting to do so. I looked at her green eyes focusing on me and realized that a woman like that is your destiny. If she picks you, it is because you were chosen or the chosen one, not because you were wriggling or dancing or jumping up and down. That wouldn't move her. If it is you, it is only you.

With her warm fingers clasped softly around me and her nail polish that made me think that blood was dripping from my heart, the day that really changed my life came. I saw her butterfly lighter approaching me and I felt a sense of exhilaration rushing through me. I was hanging from the lips of the source of life, I participated in her pleasure, I was even assisting her think what she would do next. She controlled lives, she definitely controlled me. I closed my eyes to feel her inhale me. I was smoking myself, clouding her judgment, or so I thought. She opened the car window and hung me outside. The man beside her wasn't smoking. She did it for him despite the cold that was freezing my butt outside. She must love him, I thought, and a sting of jealousy made my tip almost feel snubbed.

Vasilis Manousakis

SO LONG, DIVA! AND THANKS FOR THE KISS!

When she pulled me inside to take one more puff of me in her luscious lips, I was able to see what he was doing. He was observing her. He was loving her with all his might. He was giving her space to smoke me. I loved him immediately for letting me experience what my friends had never dreamed of.

One, two puffs and I was growing shorter, smaller. I felt no pain. I was only watching her lips as she drew the smoke in to cloud my own thoughts. From the man to my mistress, to the window, to myself disappearing, there was no distance. I felt nothing but peace, nothing but ecstasy being smoked by the lady of light. I remember I was dying between her lips, feeling as if she lit me up with her eyes.

Yes, I sound as if I am in love, but no, I am not. How can I be in love with my murderess?

As my ashes are being vacuumed from the floor of the car now, I see her one last time. She reminded me why I became a cigarette back in the factory. I was telling the other folks there that I was destined to be smoked by a blonde diva. Well, here I am beneath her black toe nails, waiting to be reborn like Phoenix. So long, diva! And thanks for the kiss! See ya...

Yours truly,

Light Marl



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

THE WINGS OF DESIRE

“We’re going to be late!” her melodious voice woke him up from his daydreaming. “Get dressed! The show starts at 21:00. We’re going to miss it!” It was the 50th anniversary of the *Wings of Desire*, the day the most envied angel fell on earth. They would go to an independent cinema to watch it, as they have been doing for the past 15 years without fail. He wanted to go. It was before he met her that this movie already meant a lot to him. Nick Cave singing about a girl on stage in the middle of the movie. *From her to eternity, just like I told her the first time I told her I love her*. Crime and the City Solution lamenting a love affair. The angels listening to our thoughts. Bruno Ganz, dead now, becoming the most human character ever portrayed on screen. There was nothing not to like in this movie. She felt the same and that was a quite a relief. So, they would go tonight. They would perform the ritual as well, as agreed. He would dress like the angel and she would dress like the protagonist he falls in love with. They would listen to Nick Cave on their way there and they would replay the original soundtrack for exactly two days non-stop, just like they did when they first watched the movie together. And they would make love at the sound of Cave’s words. On repeat, their union and the song.

She was a delicate creature. Looked fragile, but had an inner power, a flame that burned ceaselessly. He was not as delicate as her. They shared the flame, though. But what he loved most about her was that she could transform into anything she wanted, like an actress. It was no surprise, then, that she looked exactly as if she popped out of the movie, when she came out of the bathroom. An erotic desire ceased him. He wanted sex, but she didn’t let him. “Later,” she said, “we are late already now.” And she opened the door.

The ritual drove them there and when they reached the cinema hundreds were waiting dressed like angels or like the protagonist. In this crowd, he could see that she clearly was an angel. In a few minutes, the movie started and he couldn’t help but stare at her. He knew the dialogues by heart anyway, so there was no point looking at the screen. She was looking at the screen and her eyes flickered with excitement. He could tell she was replaying the dialogues in her head and was singing the lyrics. And that made him stare more intensely. She knew, but didn’t bother. This way of expressing his love for her now excited her. Let him stare, she thought. *I love him too*. “I know,” he whispered. “I want to write a story about a girl. You are the girl.”

It was at that moment she realized he was always dressed like an angel and her desire grew.

Wendy J. Dunn is an award-winning Australian author, playwright and poet. Her first Tudor novels were two Anne Boleyn novels: *Dear Heart*, *How Like You This?* and *The Light in the Labyrinth*. Wendy's most recent publications are two novels inspired by the life of Katherine of Aragon: her *Falling Pomegranate Seeds* duology: *The Duty of Daughters* (a finalist in the 2020 Chaucer award) and *All Manner of Things* (2021), Silver Medallist in the 2021 international Readers' Favorite Award for historical personage, Silver Medallist in The Coffee Pot Book Club Book of the Year Award (Tudor and Stuart category), a finalist in the 2022 Eric Hoffer Award and a first place win for Tudor fiction in the international 2021 Chaucer Award. Wendy tutors in writing at the Swinburne University of Technology. She's currently writing a novel set in 2010. Of course, it includes a Tudor story. She is also writing her first full length Tudor biography, commissioned by Pen and Sword.



DIGGING IN THE SAND OF MEMORY

Digging in the sand of memory
Bubble and Jamie
Play on the beach
While Tim hunts
pirate's treasure.

Clouds drift over a
Lowering sun
A chill wind blows
At day's end

Bubble's smile
Embraces me
with love
Tim brings me
A feather
And calls it treasure
Jamie dances
on the beach
My children safe and happy
My heart is full

These moments I remember
Best.

Seize the day

Nothing ever
Remains the same

Wendy J. Dunn

MY FATHER'S FULL STOMACH

I'm a cockney
through and through
raised in the Isle of Dogs.

A dog's life
I lived there, too.

I tell you true

We
never had
enough food

Swallowed by hunger
Heart and soul

Mam tried her best –
but what could she do?
We were dirt poor

I tell you true

M'mam feared the doctor
and his gladstone bag
with its promise
of yet another mouth to feed.

Heart and soul,
she feared my father
and the workhouse too

Heart and soul?
bloody hell
You don't think of that
when you starve.
each bloody day

I tell you true
one day
a lorry drove
over m'little brother,
like a beetle underfoot.
I was six
I don't remember
grief
only a full stomach

I got his dinner
that night

Hunger had swallowed me
heart and soul.

2010 - 2022



POETRY & WRITING

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