

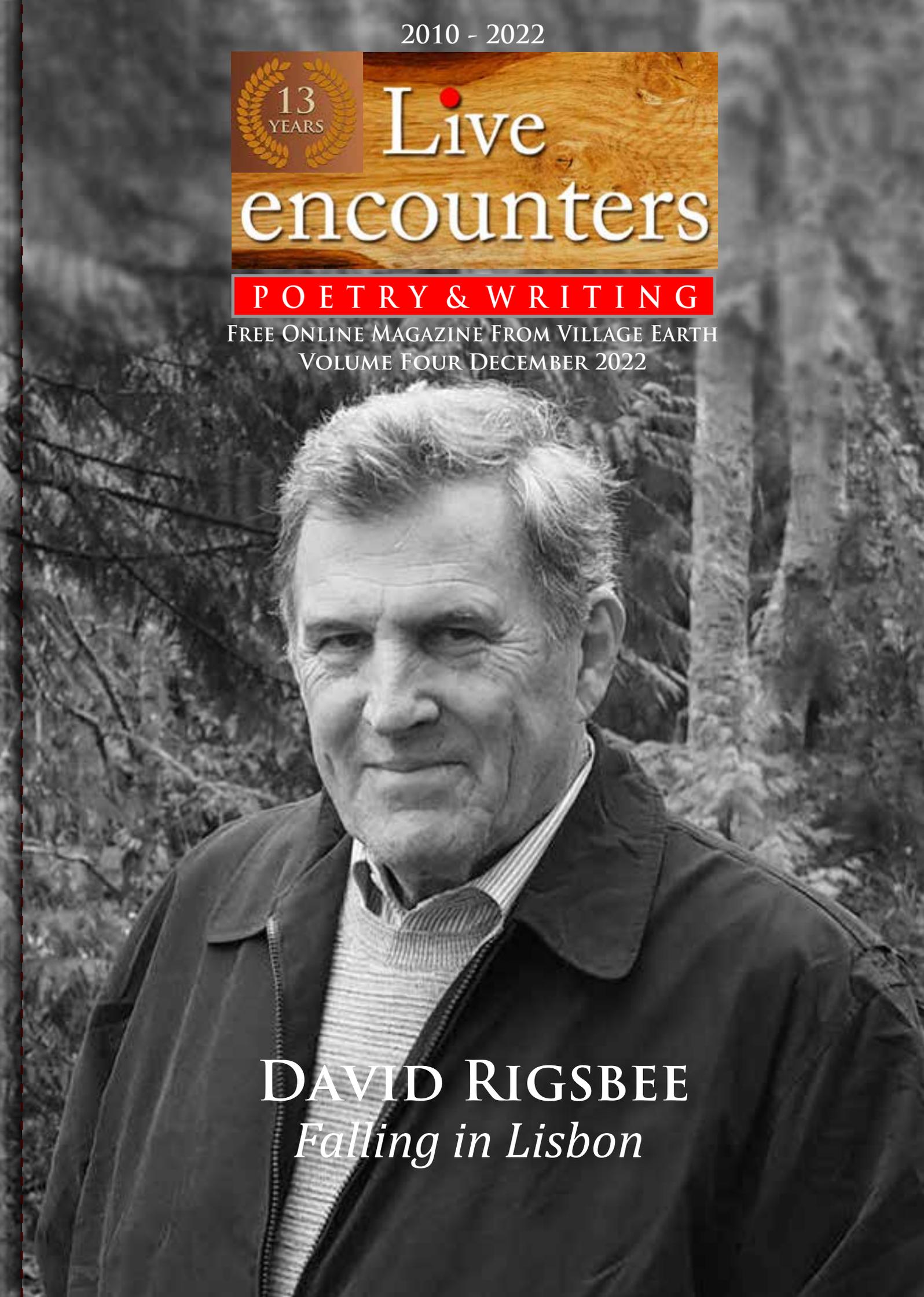
2010 - 2022



# Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH  
VOLUME FOUR DECEMBER 2022

A black and white portrait of an elderly man with short, light-colored hair. He is wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored sweater and a collared shirt. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a blurred natural setting with trees and foliage.

DAVID RIGSBEE  
*Falling in Lisbon*



©Mark Ulyseas

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



### SUPPORT LIVE ENCOUNTERS. DONATE NOW AND KEEP THE MAGAZINE LIVE IN 2023

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  
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VOLUME FOUR  
DECEMBER 2022

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David Rigsbee is an American poet, critic and translator who has an immense body of published work behind him. *Not Alone in my Dancing – Essays and Reviews* (2016), *This Much I Can Tell You* (2017), *School of the Americas* (2012) and *The Pilot House* (2011), all published by Black Lawrence Press, are but a sample. Forthcoming in the fall is his complete translation of Dante's *Paradiso* from Salmon Poetry, and *Watchman in the Knife Factory: New and Selected Poems* in 2023 from Black Lawrence Press.



## DAVID RIGSBEE FALLING IN LISBON

It was my first full day in Lisbon when I tripped on the sidewalk and went flying headlong onto (and into) the pavement. I had caught the toe-end of my Tevas on a bit of upended gravel. Three people immediately rushed to my aid, and a crowd gathered, peering in with concerned expressions. I had not felt off-balance or lacked the requisite spring in the step that everyone else had. And yet, it wasn't as if I had not fallen before. Less than a year ago I slipped on the winter steps out back and with my feet in the air landed on my back. For a moment I feared I might have broken my back, but there was no pain. So I slowly stood, careful to hold onto the rail and got back on my feet. I had done the very same thing a few years before when living in New York with my daughter. That was another snowy day, and the steps were slippery. My daughter shrieked as I took my first steps down to the street and instead clattered all the way down the flight, landing on the door to Canal Street. Again, nothing amiss, except for a few bruises, but I could tell it was horrifying to have witnessed.

Lisbon was fair and sunny. There was a slight breeze off the river. People were in good spirits and on the move in two directions in packs, couples, and alone. All of a sudden, I found myself a stone in the stream, with human eddies around me. It was as if my sprawling outline might later be chalked. So I got up, nothing broken, though I noticed that my hand was bleeding. I'd sheared the skin off the top of my little finger. Three people dashed to a nearby pharmacy and came back with bandages.

David Rigsbee

I was mostly embarrassed, but grateful for the help. Unfortunately, I never caught their names, as I would have written them my thanks. The suddenness of the fall did have the effect of making me shy at once about climbing the cobblestone hills, for which Lisbon is infamous—especially the inevitable climbs down. I also thought: here's a picture of a 73-year old man, an American poet, toppled on the sidewalk. Not a good look. Strangely, I had the sensation of being pushed or launched in the split second before my body clattered with the street. I later realized this was a come-uppance against the expectation that I could keep up with the rush of the crowd. The late poet and art critic Peter Schjeldahl had written, "We exist in the middle of a rush so constant that it resembles stillness."

I have thought a lot about steadiness, about balance and poise, and about the ever-ready threat of vertigo. Although I was an athlete when young and felt vigorous and strong most of my life, I had become aware of how aspirational the vertical can be in a human. Most of us don't think about it. In fact, to think about it is to shift into self-consciousness. I used to remind my students about that moment the cartoon coyote chases the road runner over the cliff. It is only when he realizes he is over the void that he plummets into a puff on the canyon floor. That plunge is always satisfying too, *schadenfreude* at its most innocent. My high school football coach—my first philosopher—used to say, "When you're running a play, don't think! If you have to think you're going to get knocked down."

For a poet, reminders about the dangers of self-consciousness are always to the good. Auden, for whom self-awareness and self-inspection were not even to be thought in the same sentence, spells out the consequences in images that are all the more real for being *surreal*. He famously claimed,

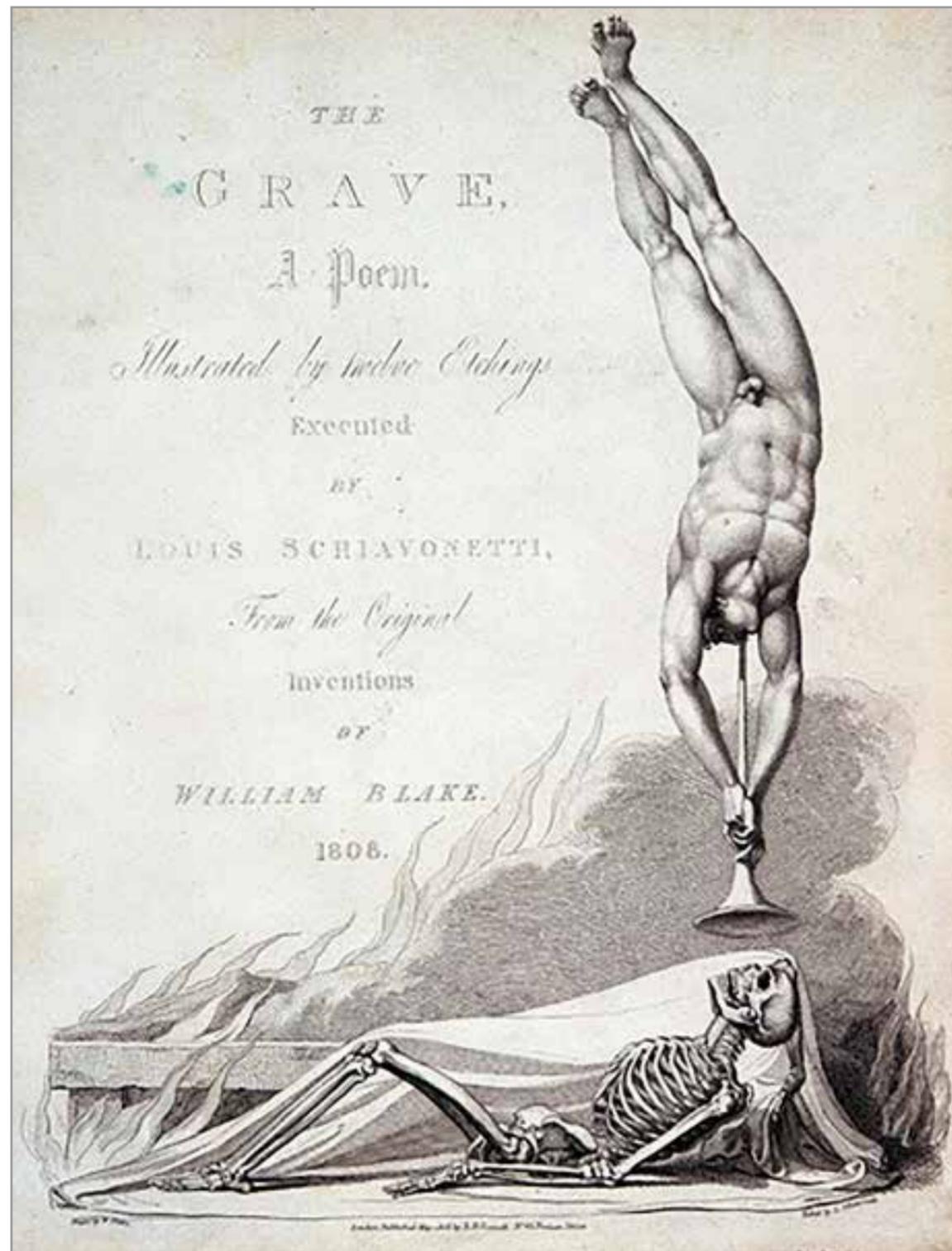
The glacier knocks in the cupboard,  
The desert sighs in the bed,  
And the crack in the tea-cup opens  
A lane to the land of the dead.

It's the last of the three images that gets my attention. The domestic daintiness of the teacup, the shared lane connecting persons, although they may otherwise be forever remote. At the same time, the image is bookended by "the crack" and "the dead," as if to underscore the fact that no life here below can escape the teacup's grim dispatch.

Behind *crack* is also the sound of the word, its sudden announcement. As portents go, this is official. Should we be paranoid? He thinks so.

Back in the 1990s, I was in Rome and climbed Trajan's tower. The claustrophobia that grips some who ascend the stone steps was nothing to me, but stepping out on the ledge, vertigo immediately seized my senses. I wrote about the experience in a poem called "The Apartment":

...I was reminded  
of my vertigo stepping out from the top  
of Trajan's Tower in Rome years ago.  
The guardrail stopped at knee-level,  
and the tower floor itself did not exceed  
three-feet wide. At your back, granite;  
out beyond the eyes: air's abyss. Now,  
a convenience store occupied street level,  
but the air was a void all the same.  
A sculptor, on commission, carved the spiral  
of the Emperor's conquests among the Etruscans,  
the Dacians, and the Goths—like all killing  
utterly repetitious in the ringing iron,  
the screams of horses, the helmeted bodies.  
At some point, the eyes following the spiral  
could no longer take in the scope of victory,  
but the vanishing point was no less bloody  
than the start, the swords no less blunt.  
By contrast, the top floor I saw—tilted  
and tiled—had only a rail and no place  
out from the the window to stand upon. Already  
windows on either side were indistinguishable  
from skylights. Who stood at that rail  
saw boulevards stretching all the way  
to the inhospitable suburbs. Just so,  
saints were said to emerge from their cells  
and pause, before going forth out of the spirit,  
in their rope belts, into the stony forests.



It will not come as a surprise to learn that, as one of the fallen, I am drawn to aerialists, climbers and ledge-walkers, which is to say, to people for whom maintaining balance (or losing it), is paramount. It has something to do with sheer daring too. I was about to write *derring-do*. I was (and am) mesmerized by Philippe Petit, Nik Wallenda, and Alex Honnold and watched their feats closely. We are not like the angels, who float and drift, indifferent to the possibility that many of the mind-forged manacles spring from the compass of Isaac Newton. In *Paradiso*, Dante maintains that angels thrive in a different environment and that flying is the “true country.” An old friend of mine from graduate school, a gifted fiction writer, had fallen from a ladder and injured his arm. He began to withdraw socially after that, according to a mutual friend. This friend added that, in the larger picture, some people are not a good fit for life and that he was overcome to discover that his feelings of unfitness contained a truth he couldn’t evade. I was sad to hear this news, as I had known him for his quick wit. I now began to understand it as a distancing device, disarming engagement while appearing to feign approval. It’s not only one’s ability to stay afloat that registers us, but to stay afoot too.

I wrote about the possibility of falling in another poem, “Ten-Second Delay”:

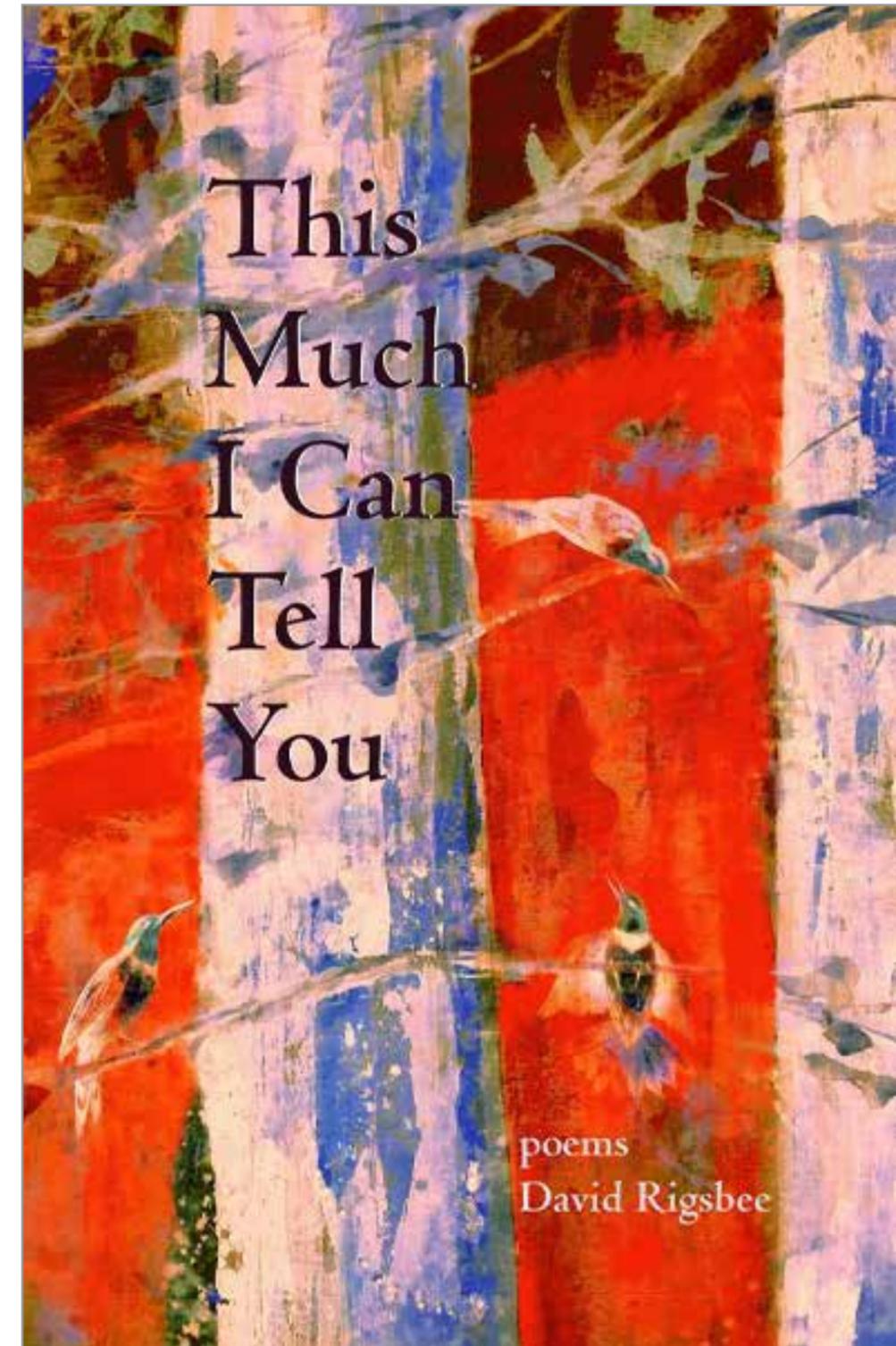
That Blake etching, the angel hovering  
over a skeleton, holding a trumpet.  
We were unable to hear its note,  
or watch the skeleton stir, at first daintily,  
then the winching pull, accompanied  
by sighs and the clicking of bones as it  
sits upright....

It’s said TV cameras enforced  
a ten-second delay so that  
if Wallenda fell, the cameras could  
cut away, and have nothing revealed,  
although a body plunging through  
space travels like the note  
from the angel’s instrument.

A skeleton is approached by an angel who blows the last trump. Etching by Louis Schiavonetti after William Blake, 1808. <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/zc8recqp>.

Icarus fell. Again, in Auden's retelling (via Breugel), when the fall comes, "everything turns away." When I fell, I wasn't reaching for the utmost I had just wanted to get down the street in a timely manner. This brings me to poetic ambition (or the lack of it), which many think is involved with reaching and falling, or, if you prefer, a poet's orientation toward what is at first beyond reach—for the sun, if you will. It is, after all, like standing upright and moving with purpose, even when that purpose shrinks to aimlessness, a kind of presumption against the rest of matter. A character in Nabokov is self-involved enough that when he forgets his keys and has to return to his apartment, he doesn't turn in the street. Instead, the street rotates "180° relative to his person." The genius of poetry is the presumption of figure to ground. Plato saw this and evicted the poets from his Republic. He also alleged they told lies along the way. Auden was once asked why he gave up teaching, and he replied that he was tired of "telling lies to little boys." Shakespeare, who offers the greatest expression of this presumption, also left open the possibility that it was all—that is, ambition, including standing upright, in any of its manifestations—just a dream, a febrile stirring about which we could feel at least, well, wistful.

The Romantic philosopher Hegel argued that evolving "knowledge," meaning self-awareness, would make the universe know itself. That was its point. It would have created a Good, a necessary Good. You might say it was God's way of finding a companion—His evolved creation—so that he wouldn't feel lonely, His version of high lonesome, that His creation was just a way of styling the void, in which something and nothing signal a distinction without a difference. Poetry has an analogous effect: it is designed to live after we have fallen. I will consider it practice. I didn't trip and fall so much as the ground rose up to meet me.



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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

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



## A METAPHYSICAL TANGO (AFTER JOHN DONNE)

*for Piers and Segen on their wedding*

Calling the unruly sun to heel, that poem  
and the one about a returning lover  
makes where we dance in this little room,  
our everywhere. And those metaphors:  
desire without sharp norths or declining wests,  
those beckoning hemispheres,  
the compass feet that glide on breath,  
all these obliquely run into the spiral  
and coiled rhythms of our tango steps.  
I here inscribe myself within your sphere  
and so entwined we rule our world  
(forget the Indias of spice, the Argentine)  
enough, your face and mine together pressed,  
our bodies move, hearts braided, blessed.

Anton Floyd

## RUMI

*in memoriam GVS*

His poems shock stiff-necked doubt -  
This morning, the rain on the hills  
is a watery film of cool transparencies.  
He knew the river concealed a secret music  
and he knew how to find it. Not just  
in the quivering sounds of the riverbank  
when reeds stirred like sympathetic strings  
of a viola d'amore. But the music  
hidden in the reed itself. He knew  
the reed and the knife; the expert cuts -  
each one a clean severing . He knew  
the stops, the shock of sacrifice. And  
the prize of the blown pith is freed breath  
and a locked heart, mine, no less, prised open.

## POISED OR THIS BETWEEN THE TICK..TICK..

*There is just a little music, each other  
and the urgency of what is at stake - Toni Morrison*

The kitchen wall-clock ticks, tick...tick...  
I glance at the moon face,  
the familiar Arabic numerals,  
those elegant, calligraphic symbols.  
Tick... tick...my foot taps to the beat.  
There's no music in the metronomic  
nagging of its single syllable...tick...tick...  
Better by far how heartbeat and breath  
tie together their syncopated rhythms,  
catch thought off-guard and hallow  
the stresses of an urgent life risking love.  
Yet, however rare and prized, quick-tongued  
and true the lover's poem, tricking time  
will come, regular as clockwork ticks,  
to spell our fate in its implacable grammar.  
So poised between these certainties - this poem,  
this heartbeat, these breaths, this love.

Carmen-Francesca Banciu was born in Romanian Lipova and studied religious painting and foreign trade in Bucharest. As a result of being awarded the International Short Story Award of the City of Arnsberg for the story "Das strahlende Ghetto" (1985), she was banned from publishing her work in Romania. In 1991 she accepted an invitation extended by DAAD Berlin Artists-in-Residence program and came to Germany. She has been living in Berlin since 1992, employed as a freelance author writing articles for the radio and newspapers as well as leading seminars for creativity and creative writing. Since 2013 she has acted as the co-editor and deputy director of the transnational, interdisciplinary and multilingual e-magazine *Levure Littéraire*. Banciu has received numerous literature prizes and scholarships; most recently her novel *Lebt wohl, Ihr Genossen und Geliebten* was nominated 2018 for the German Book Prize. Her work has been translated into many languages.

From the *Fictional Epistolary Novel to Günter Grass* coming in Spring 2023 with PalmArtPress, Berlin.

Dedicated to the thousands of dying dolphins on the Black Sea coast.

## SUMMER IDYLL

On June 8, 2022  
 In the early morning  
 Summer had broken out  
 I am certain  
 Because the cicadas  
 Were suddenly back  
 Chirping at the top of their lungs  
 I am certain of it  
 Because of the war  
 Because of the news  
 That haunted me every day  
 And because of the rampage at the Gedächtniskirche  
 Once again near the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church  
 The whole world was  
 Out of balance  
 Only the cicadas, as always,  
 Announced the beginning of summer  
 With their scratchy voices  
 With their shrill song  
 Only the cicadas chirped as always  
 On June 8, summer was here again  
 Unperturbed by war and crises  
 Inflation or pandemic  
 Family quarrels  
 Broken relationships  
 Broken friendships  
 Painful separations  
 Hateful arguments  
 Radical differences of opinion  
 Because of war, crises and pandemics



Carmen-Francesca Banciu. Photo © Gerald Zoerner.

SUMMER IDYLL *contd...*

Hundred days and more  
A hundred days old and more  
Was the war  
Its dusty poison  
Carried in all directions  
Over mountains and seas  
By the wind  
Over mountains and seas

We fight for the environment  
The planet we want to save  
With hate and war  
But today on June 8th  
The cicadas are back  
They chirp  
Thinner are their voices today  
Bougainvillea and oleander bloom  
Olive trees are already heavy laden  
Fig trees prematurely fragrant  
From unripe fruit  
As if it no longer had faith  
to reach late summer  
Thyme blooms  
Swallows  
and eagles circle over  
Scouted prey  
And butterflies  
Slow worms  
Orphaned dogs

And stray cats  
Left behind by the tourists  
Only the poisoned dolphins  
Torn to shreds  
By mines and rockets  
Leap into the air  
Washed up  
On the beach, they lie  
On the Black Sea Coast

Barbara Crooker is the author of nine full-length books of poetry, including *Some Glad Morning* (Pitt Poetry Series). *Radiance*, her first book, won the 2005 Word Press First Book Award and was finalist for the 2006 Paterson Poetry Prize; *Line Dance*, her second book, won the 2009 Paterson Award for Excellence in Literature; and *The Book of Kells* won the Best Poetry Book of 2019 Award from Writing by the Sea. Her writing has received a number of awards, including the 2004 WB Yeats Society of New York Award, the 2003 Thomas Merton Poetry of the Sacred Award, and three Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Creative Writing Fellowships. Her work appears in a variety of literary journals and anthologies, including *Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania* and *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*. She has been a fellow at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, the Moulin à Nef, Auvillar, France, and The Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Annaghmakerrig, Ireland. Garrison Keillor has read her poems over sixty times on *The Writer's Almanac*, and she has read her poetry all over the country, including The Festival of Faith and Writing, Poetry at Round top, The Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival, Glory Days: A Bruce Springsteen Symposium, and the Library of Congress.



## BEREFT

*Thank you. . . / for reminding me that we're mortal, that all lives change, /  
that one lover will say goodbye to the other. "More Soprano, Please, More Tenor,"  
David Kirby*

I wish it wasn't true, but it is, that one of us will be left alone. Short straw, it's me, trying to go on after this abrupt rupture. Who would pick it, this life halved, or rather, diminished down to its core? All those clichés, truer than true: *my better half my best friend my sweet love* Alone, I'm less than the self I was before we met. This diminishment. Outside: the fullness of summer, melons growing plump, corn slowly turning gold, trees in green ardor, leafy splendor. Inside: winter, season of meager, the blackened fireplace of my empty heart, not even an ember.

Barbara Crooker

## TÁ BRÓN ORM

*Sadness is on me.* Irish saying

This is how they say it in Ireland, that you don't sorrow like a cloak or a shawl. But I don't think that begins to cover it. Instead, sorrow becomes a new organ, part of myself, a second skin, something I can't remove, hang on a coat rack, choose something lighter on better days. It lives, breathes, stretches. Contains the central nervous system, protects from rain and sun. But it's not enough for shelter or a shield against harm. This sadness is not only on me; I can never take it off.

LES AMOREUX EN BLEU<sup>3</sup>

*Marc Chagall, 1919, oil on paper*

Once this was us, young and in love, caught, not on canvas, but in a snapshot. I want to be that girl, cast in blue shadow, her lips on his, sharing that kiss. I want her inky corkscrews escaping in front of her ear. I want those gloves, checked like the grill of a store front. I want to be loved completely like that, no doubt or obfuscation. Marry me, this painting seems to be saying. Cover me in blue shadows, hues of cerulean. Night may be coming, a dramatic black curtain, but the rigid edges of the frame will not allow its intrusion. Instead, the world is blue, him and her, me and you.

Beth Copeland is the author of *Selfie with Cherry* (Glass Lyre Press, 2022); *Blue Honey*, 2017 Dogfish Head Poetry Prize winner; *Transcendental Telemarketer* (BlazeVOX, 2012); and *Traveling through Glass*, 1999 Bright Hill Press Poetry Book Award winner. She owns and operates Tiny Cabin, Big Ideas™, a retreat for writers in the Blue Ridge Mountains



## MYSTIC MOUNTAIN

The mountain's face is impassive, blank,  
its gray massif like a massive mastodon flank.  
If the mountain had a mouth, it would curve  
in an archaic smile, Mona Lisa style, mysterious,  
hinting at something withheld, secretive, serious.  
Its eyes would be amber like a leopard's or panther's.  
Its body as androgynous as a Caravaggio angel's.  
The mountain is a mirror where we see ourselves  
in chiaroscuro shadows and floating clouds.

Beth Copeland

## NAMASTE

My sister unrolls her purple yoga mat  
in front of the sliding glass door.

Durham, her German Shepherd, joins us  
for what we call “doga.”

Facing the mountain framed in the doorway,  
we rise to Tadasana,

summoning The Peak’s steadfast stance.  
Durham does a Downward Dog

on my green mat, then sinks into a Modified Sphinx,  
and we laugh and lunge

into Warrior One before moving to Tree,  
balancing with one foot

on the floor, the other lifted to the thigh,  
palms pressed in prayer,

and slowly raise our arms like branches  
over our heads. Shooing

Durham off my mat, I settle into a Half-Lotus,  
smile at my sister, and say,

*The mountain in me honors  
the mountain in you.*

## WALKING THROUGH A SPIDER WEB

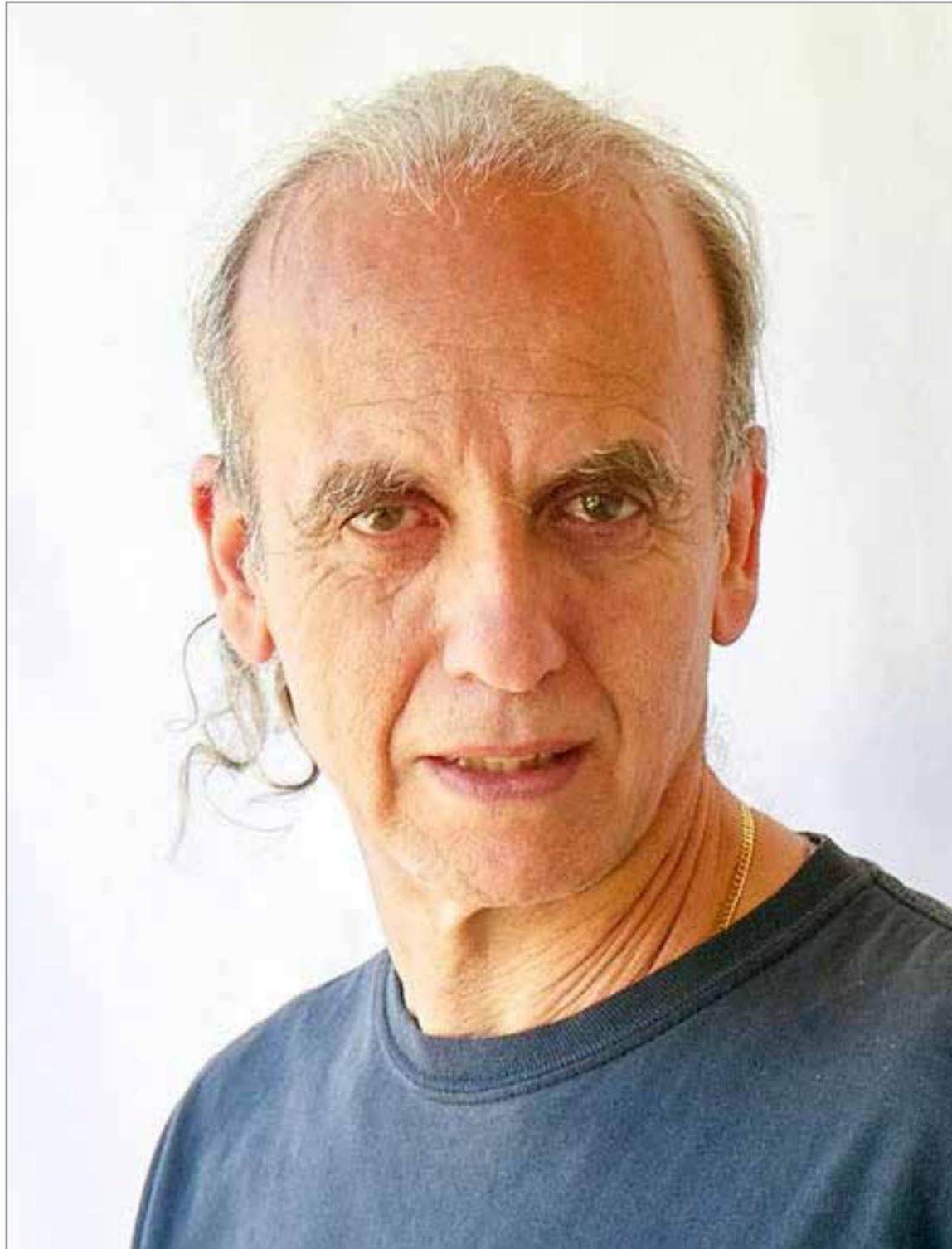
Half blinded by morning fog, I didn’t see it  
until too late—a milky

mandala of sticky silk hung from a branch  
as if spun from air.

I brushed it from my hair. Later, I washed  
my hands—that’s what we do

when we’ve broken something  
too fragile to repair.

David Adès is the author of *Mapping the World*, *Afloat in Light* and the chapbook *Only the Questions Are Eternal*. He won the Wirra Wirra Vineyards Short Story Prize 2005 and the University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize 2014. *Mapping the World* was commended for the FAW Anne Elder Award 2008. David's poems have been read on the Australian radio poetry program Poetica and have also featured on the U.S. radio poetry program Prosody. His poetry has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and twice been shortlisted for the Newcastle Poetry Prize. His poems have been Highly Commended in the Bruce Dawe National Poetry Prize, a finalist in the Dora and Alexander Raynes Poetry Prize (U.S.) and commended for the Reuben Rose International Poetry Prize (Israel). David is the host of the monthly poetry podcast series "Poets' Corner" which can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLb8bHCZBRMBjIWIPDeaSanZ3qAZcuVW7N>. He lives in Sydney with his wife and three children.



## PUNCH DRUNK

When you see the startled look in her eye

look closer for the invisible bruises she wears,  
the current of agitation beneath her surface,

look for the way she turns her head away,

her almost flinch, her sudden need to be  
somewhere else, look for the lost heart

on her sleeve, the beating of its loneliness,

look for the language that deserts her mouth,  
her mumbled incoherencies that, even so,

say too much, look for the tailings of her love,

curled and bunched up beneath the blankets  
of her face, hiding from any kind of light —

and then nod to her your understanding,

that you have seen it all and will not turn,  
that you will be right there

when she turns at last to face you.

David Adès

## EXIT

It's possible I am on the way out, though I haven't moved.  
I fell asleep, briefly, like my father did in his waning years,

and have woken, in my almost front row seat,  
to find the theatre still dark save for the soft, green glow

of the exit sign in the corner, and near empty,  
though the screen is alive and the film still running.

Once again, the film unfolds its lush mysteries,  
its blessings and torments, its little wisdoms,

its scattering of bright gleamings,  
jettisoning its script and veering elsewhere,

without warning, into a brooding darkness  
that stifles and blinds, like every conflict zone,

leaving me to navigate minefields of dialogue and subtext,  
disoriented, bewildered, picking my way through the debris

of wounded lives, lives curling in on themselves  
and withering, the unfathomable legacies

of every intentional and unintentional betrayal.  
I wonder what living I missed in that sleep,

what vital clues, how it is possible to be both joyous  
and melancholic, how time has had its way with me,

how the story is so much memory and so much the gaps between.  
Images fill the screen, and even if they do not hold most

of the audience, I find myself pinned, immersed  
in folds of nuance, depth, complexities I won't untangle,

though it isn't long now to the credits, to the lights  
coming back on with so much unresolved.

## WALK WITH ME

It is true, I have come slowly and late to so many realisations  
and not at all, yet, to others.

There is still time, though not so much. Forgive me.

I have been distracted by so many journeys,  
on the way to undisclosed destinations.

Some things have become clearer, some more confused.

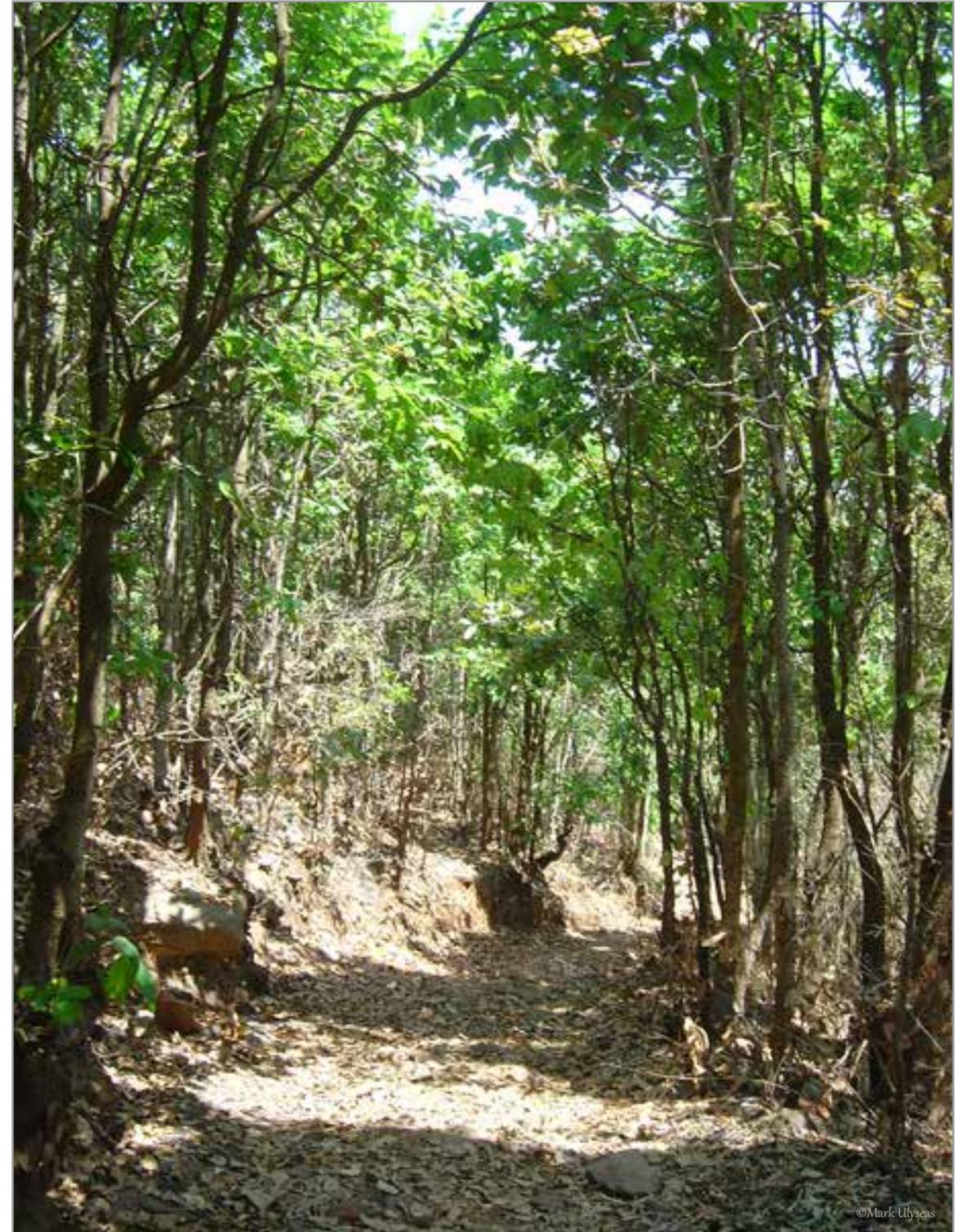
Love, for instance, and what happens to it.  
Choices, judgments, wavering moral compasses,

how to say what must be said

and when to hold my tongue.  
I will walk with you a little longer if I may.

Let us do what we can as we walk,

let us cradle the world in our arms  
and see what else unfolds, where else the paths take us.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Dominique Hecq grew up in the French-speaking part of Belgium. She now lives on unceded sovereign Wurundjeri land. Hecq writes across genres and disciplines—and sometimes across tongues. Her creative works include a novel, five collections of short stories and twelve books of poetry. A runner up in the Carmel Bird Literary Digital Award, *Smacked and other stories of addiction* is fresh off the press. The second edition of *After Cage: a composition in word and movement on time and silence* has also been released (Liquid Amber Press). *Con Brio* was awarded second prize in the James Tate Poetry Prize and is forthcoming (SurVision).



## THE LORD OF RATS AND EKE OF MICE

The room was choked with chairs so worn grey motes rose from the seat covers, like mushrooms out of their mycelium. One by one, the chairs filled up. Kids sat on the floor, perched on armrests or hung from chandeliers. A rat with a clipboard took down names. A white wolf padded through the door, brushed past heavy violet velour curtains, swivelled dramatically on its paws, *moved upward*, as if *working out the beast*, and faced us. A vulture flew through the window, settled on the table, slouched slightly and surveyed the mountains of eyeballs, blue beards, black teeth, torn fingernails, the fields of tiny rhinoceros horns and horse hooves and lion manes, the rivers of miracled moths and caterpillars and earwigs. A meerkat with a monocle pushed the vulture forward. Nodded in the direction of a sphinx whose eyes glowed. The floorboards shook. An eke of mice. We held our inky scalpels aloft. Ate.

The title is taken from Goethe's *Faust*, Chapter III.

The line 'Move upward, working out the beast' is from Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, CXVIII.

Dominique Hecq

## EXCLUSIVE

Sugar free? Not a problem, monsieur, said the waiter, a smile momentarily sweetening his sour face. We have an exclusive carte of sugar free desserts. Les oeufs à la neige, of course, from our own free range silkie hens, are quite succulent. The egg whites are poached in simmering goat's milk and served on warm vanilla infused custard topped with dazzling dahlias. Les cœurs à la crème are divine but, naturally, more calorific. They are served with passionfruit coulis, crème fraîche and violets. Le Paris Brest, our chef's specialty is sculpted out of gluten free choux pastry, then filled with alcohol free Cognac infused crème fraîche and topped with dark sugar free Godiva chocolate, toasted almond flakes and a sprinkle of pure vanilla bean frost. It is served with crimson nasturtiums reclining on soft peaks of clouds made to the chef's secret meringue recipe. *Deep breath.* The almond jalousie is also sugar free; it is sweetened with organic raw blue agave—fairtrade certified. It is served with hot pink glams and zero alcohol Grand Marnier cream. Very popular are the mini cream horns baked until golden and crisp. They are filled with crème fraîche just before serving on a bed of snapdragons and violas—to die for. Last, but not least, we have les poires exquisés poached in sugar free alcohol free sulphate free Sauterne imported from the Caves du Dauphin in Reims—the pears are fructose free. At that, the ecstatic waiter closed his eyes, upturned his face and whispered: they are calorie free.

## DRESSED TO THE NINES

Ø took the lift up to the ninth floor. She opened the gate. Saw that the door was ajar. Knocked. No answer. She pushed the door open, softly. The room was dark but a light coming from the bathroom cast a triangular shape on the teal carpet, making it look like the Mediterranean on an overcast day. Ø ambled to the bathroom. An octopus filled the toilet bowl. Its head was wreathed in dreadlocks writhing like snakes. Lipstick had been smeared around its beak. One tentacle had been cut off and it dangled like Marat's arm in Jacques-Louis David's famous painting. The knife was still attached to the appendage stuck to the shower recess. The octopus was so thin it would have been floating had it not been weighed down by costume jewellery. Amid the fake pearls and diamonds was a huge pendant of the kind some wear with a lock of hair curled inside. Ø opened it. Saw her own withered face in faded sepia.



Elsa Korneti was born in Munich, Germany, but raised in Greece. After her studies in Finance in Greece and in Germany, she worked as a journalist. Collaborating with literary magazines she publishes poems, essays, book reviews, translations, short stories. Her poems and short stories have appeared in numerous well-known literary magazines. Part of her work among all books have been translated and published in foreign anthologies and literary magazines in ten European languages and Chinese. She has published 15 books, among them 11 of poetry collections and compositions. Three of her poetry collections have been distinguished: "A bouquet of fish bones" (2009) and the "Tin Pearl" (2011) both nominated for the National Award of Poetry. She has been awarded "George Karter" prize for her poetry collection "Normal People with a plum and a brindled tail" (2014). Her recent books are in poetry: "Wooden Nose Turned" (2021) Saixpirikon Edition, "The hero is falling" (2021) Ekdoseis ton Filon. In prose her recent book is "The Fish on the Island and other imaginative stories" (2020) Melani Edition.

## THE ERA OF IMPIOUS OMNIPOTENCE

There was a time, once,  
 when man had reason to fear  
 like the daemons of nature,  
 winged dragons,  
 the fairies, the elves of the forest  
 and all the other eccentric creatures  
 who jumped about  
 untamed and lively in its/his darkness.  
 At that time  
 he didn't think himself  
 invincible and dominant over the world,  
 he didn't intentionally wound Nature  
 because he had something to fear.

Until man  
 passed fatefully into the era  
 of impious omnipotence  
 when the moron believed  
 that technology  
 and his beloved machines  
 shall become  
 an umbrella  
 for heavy metal rain  
 a rescue boat  
 for nuclear floods  
 a helmet  
 for radiation  
 from a hole  
 that gapes in the sky  
 and sings  
 his brains.

Elsa Korneti

## THE TOTEMS OF THE CITIES

He escaped

Behind him  
wooden men  
fixed in cement  
hard, unbending, and settled  
Every one of them nailed down  
into the belly of the city

No Manitou with clear water  
would bless them with rain  
even as around them there stood  
magicians, dancers, jesters in their numbers  
They know how to seesaw in the wind  
given the opportunity  
Every day  
to lose a Heaven on the way down  
Every night  
to gain a Hell on the way up

The bird-man  
Escaped

His ever-moving wooden legs  
Became autonomous too  
He left them behind  
to run  
in the other direction

## THE GUARDIAN OF TIME

It's not a broken alarm clock  
that rings breathlessly every minute  
it's a man  
trapped inside the guts of the computers  
indifferent, greedy, self-destructive  
who plods on mechanically

Eventually he will unburden himself of his clock  
and throw it into the void like a piece of rubbish  
when the hand from which he hangs  
points vertical

I had told you  
Our clock  
is so small now  
we can no longer fit into it  
because time stops here  
in the desert of the rose  
Lend me a gearwheel  
and I promise you  
that I will function  
responsibly and dependably  
- inflating the poor lungs of the earth -  
with weighted breaths  
winding up again  
lost time

Esther Ottaway is an award-winning and widely published Australian poet who was shortlisted in the Montreal International and Bridport Poetry Prizes in 2020. She is writing her third collection, about the experiences of women and girls on the autism spectrum, to be titled *She Doesn't Seem Autistic*. And she doesn't seem autistic. She lives in Tasmania/lutruwita.  
<https://esther-ottaway-poet.jimdosite.com/>



## THE AUTISTIC GIRLS' MOTHERS TO ASTRONAUT MIKE COLLINS

How could other parents understand  
 she can't regulate, can't dress, screams in wind?  
 Their girls touch down, their modules steady, small footsteps  
 breaking the moon-sand's surface, their milestones  
 cosmic miracles of the ordinary. We long  
 for their basic okayness, their assumption  
 that the whole team will walk on the moon,  
 get to jump, twirl in the applause, treasure the video.  
 Like you, Mike, we come so close,  
 our deficiency the only explanation. We know your loneliness,  
 how compared to the others you have so little to say.  
 With you we calculate, re-check trajectories,  
 live cold in shadow, looking but never landing,  
 punch once more into the unyielding switches  
 our daily goals: feeding, bathing, schooling,  
 and sail again around the curve into black,  
 miles from our peers, excluded from it all.

Esther Ottaway

Eugen Bacon is an African Australian author of several novels and fiction collections. She's a 2022 World Fantasy Award finalist, and was announced in the honor list of the 2022 Otherwise Fellowships for 'doing exciting work in gender and speculative fiction'. Her books in 2022: *Mage of Fools* (novel), *Chasing Whispers* (collection) and *An Earnest Blackness* (essays). Visit her website at <https://eugenbacon.com/> and Twitter @EugenBacon



## TEXTURE OF SILENCE

At the Musée des Beaux Arts

As ancient Masters pouted onto canvas

Turned hues to ponds/windows

Icarus was nearly 30

And abandoned his wings of plumes

And hip hopped with mishaps/miracles

Through a portal in a forked baobab's rhapsody

At the edge of the Savannah grassland.

She found a shore with a naked runner

And a mule-drawn painter

Wearing batik shorts in the silence of sound

And a sea green pinafore/reddish-brown wrap.

And saw a dhow with silver sails

To an island of spices

In a labyrinth that hailed swoon/slumber

On a sisal mat at midnight.

She snored in a tonality of folksong

Beat timed one friend/foe at a time.

Eugen Bacon

## LOST SKIN

it's too much so she stole her husband's  
scissors—  
as he huddled in her bed—  
and snipped memories of belonging  
thatched roofs that hum, the names of all those  
people, a knock on a door to beg salt...  
each snip is an altarpiece  
a reminder of tragedy  
from every eave

## SHE DISAPPEARS EVERY DAY

hers is a photo from the frontline.  
pieces of her plunging in precise hexagons.  
a nail, a finger, a knee, a waist.  
what happened to her mother's bum?  
a starvation diet, that's what.  
she walks in blindfold  
unseeing of her ancestors—  
tests, indentations far and wide.  
people ask in clusters and all points  
for proof of her legitimacy.  
she looks at a phone box,  
reminisces of mangos  
in her grandmother's backyard.  
she tries to fit in, to scrub ancestry  
but is parched, cannot help coincidental words.  
her child's knees are scabbed from bullying.  
she's dabbed them in salve, zero courage to call  
who to call? hers is a folk tale trope  
with a princess no-one will marry.  
just a bed of nestles in a land of honey  
full of stings. today she ties a sash.  
garbles unremarkable words that remind her  
of a black river pregnant with tilapia.

Gail Ingram is an award-winning writer from Ōtautahi Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand, and author of *Contents Under Pressure* (Pūkeko Publications 2019). Her work has appeared in *The Spinoff*, *Landfall*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Love in the Time of Covid*, *takahē*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Blue Nib*, *Barren Magazine*, *Live Encounters* and others. She is an editor for New Zealand Poetry Society Te Rōpū Toikupu of Aotearoa's magazine *a fine line* and a short fiction editor for *Flash Frontier*. Other times, she is a creative-writing teacher to young writers. She enjoys writing poetry for nature, about family relationships and backing the underdog. <https://www.theseventhletter.nz/>



## AFTER VINCENT

You hold your brush like a spade  
 across your knee as if for leverage  
 you gaze at the sky closing in on itself  
 in blue and yellow spirals, opening,  
 closing, opening again to the seedling  
 hills tumbling like weeds, the sparrows  
 alarming in your rigid presence,  
 the hallucinatory vibrating of the  
 sun you want to envelope  
 along with the flowers, the buffeting swells,  
 the water turning to bone  
 in the knock and twist  
 of your prideful wrist – let go!  
 let go! let go!  
 you are the paper  
 you are the sun  
 all you will be  
 nothing in the maw  
 of the spinning galaxy.

Gail Ingram

## R 18 AT LAST!

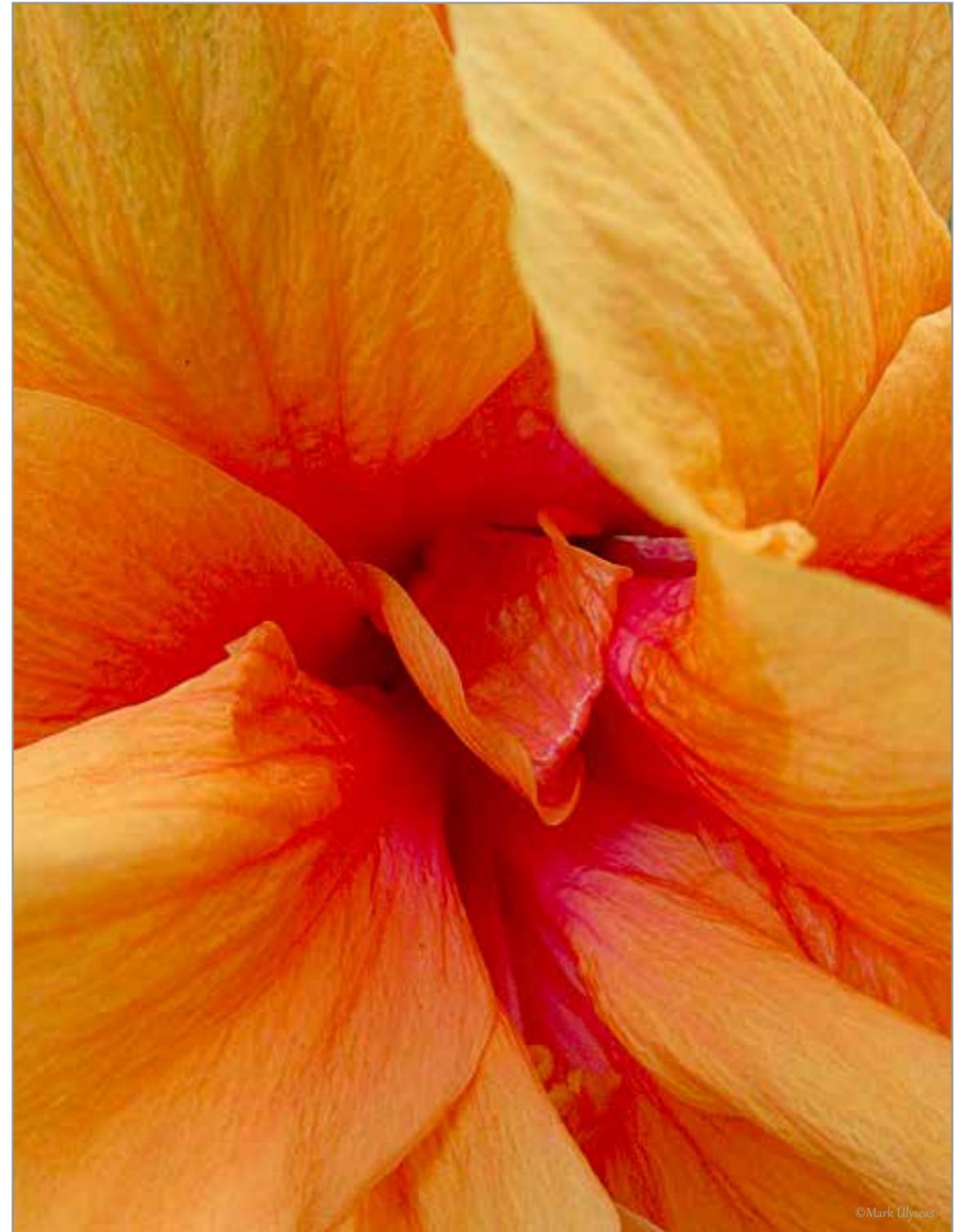
In the 1980s when The Movies were an outing and we  
 Came of Age, we entered  
 the heavy open doors of The Embassy,  
 arm-in-arm, a frisson of anticipation  
 between us –  
                   innocent

of the cushions up there  
 of the pale thighs and plum,  
   cushioning  
 so pale, so plum, so large up there  
 on the big screen, the cushions  
 upon cushions of thigh and tit-  
   illation so large

in soft focus  
                                   *through*  
 we came to realise  
                                   *and for*  
                                   *the lens*  
                                   *of Man*

we sat like dummies  
 for two-and-a-half hours  
 while He gave Her  
 no name, nor voice.

Our 18-year-old selves  
 left the cinema, the smog crawled  
 around Cathedral Square in the dark,  
 goosepimples bared our arms,  
 our contracted hearts.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Graham Allen is a Professor in the School of English, University College Cork. Professor Allen is an award-winning poet. His poetry collections *The One That Got Away* and *The Madhouse System* are published with New Binary Press, as is his ongoing epem *Holes*.  
<http://www.holesbygrahamallen.org/>



*from* THERMONUCLEAR SONNETS

1.  
It is neither mushroom nor cloud.  
It is the death of belief,  
the nightmare you can never accept,  
the terrors of the mother before birth,  
the insanity of the secret killer.  
Look at it. Not as you look on the moon,  
or a painting by Renoir, or a new car,  
not possessively, not with hunger in your belly,  
but, rather, as a familiar object,  
created by the wringing of a billion hands.  
This is the end of all light, all love,  
the instantaneous eruption of evil,  
levelling every house that was ever built,  
marshalling death into universal logic.

Graham Allen

*continued overleaf...*

*from* THERMONUCLEAR SONNETS

2.

It is not a weapon, it is the end of all  
weaponry, the abolition of all violence  
in its pure transcendence. This is the horror  
of war obliterated, the great cry for mercy  
in the blind eyes of God. This is the corruption  
of all innocence, the death of love  
in the face of a flattened future.

From now, until the swell of the sun  
evaporates all we know, there is no more  
hope, or mystery, or freedom, just  
an aftermath that persists beyond record,  
irresistible paralysis of the dead  
and the dying, your ragged children,  
forlorn mass under an unforgiving sun.

3.

It is a machine for reversal, turning everything  
upside down, so that the ground is thrown  
up into the air, the mighty Sun is eclipsed,  
cities of movement and commerce  
turned into cities of death, ossuaries  
where only the wind remains. Life-giving  
rain now a poison, once breathable air  
turned radioactive. Destroyer of logic,  
warfare transformed to a ghostly peace,  
targets turned to universal hurt,  
the night turned to the brightest day,  
victory crushed tight within complete defeat.  
The mind that plumbed the secrets  
Of the galaxy, a whimpering, dribbling mute.

Poet, writer and artist Greta Sykes has published her work in many anthologies. She is a member of London Voices Poetry Group and also produces art work for them. Her new volume of poetry called 'The Shipping News and Other Poems' came out in August 2016. The German translation of her book 'Under charred skies' has now been published in Germany under the title 'Unter verbranntem Himmel' by Eulenspiegel Verlag. She is the chair of the Socialist History Society and has organised joint poetry events for them at the Poetry Café. She is a trained child psychologist and has taught at the Institute of Education, London University, where she is now an associate researcher. Her particular focus is now on women's emancipation and antiquity.  
<https://www.gretasykes.com/>



## LIKE A GUTTED FISH: THE DONBASS

In the dead of the night  
 Like a gutted fish  
 Carved open, eyes glazed,  
 The traumas of life  
 Lie heavy like undigested food  
 In my stomach:  
 The crying children in the Donbass,  
 The freezing cold numbing the old  
 Who are proud and stubborn.  
 They will not give in to fascists.  
 Never.  
 They learnt an important lesson  
 In a war, not of their making. They are not fools.

Others of nameless shameless cruelty  
 pile up their weaponry high  
 Close to humans' fragile bodies.  
 But the tormented have a faithful heart  
 and a will of steel, stronger than any weapon.

My eyes are open without sleep.  
 The wind blows white clotted clouds,  
 Chasing them  
 Across the sky like sheep.  
 My ears are alert and tuned in  
 To hear the wings of hope rustling  
 In the morning hour.

Dr Greta Sykes

## THE POETS GATHERING

At the windy corner of St James church  
 London Poets turn on the colours  
 Of their poems with Echinacia,  
 Achilea and egg yolk Heliopsis,  
 Lonesome wayfarers wander through the  
 ancient graveyard, gravestones invisible,  
 the dry, cut grass scent lingers,  
 a left over brick step, a grassy raised bed  
 form our seats. The church wall corner,  
 held up by a meditative poet,  
 is rising up into the sky.  
 I watch the clouds  
 rush in the stormy sky.  
 The question of time looms large,  
 does it exist?  
 Why does Rovelli ponder  
 It's non-existence?  
 Imperialists' algorithms  
 Also aim for abstraction,  
 A world of numbers,  
 Not for warm blooded creatures.

We feel time deep in our hearts,  
 in our moment of togetherness,  
 among the dead buried in the earth.  
 We hear time move when church bells ring,  
 Vibrating our eardrums with rhythm and sound.  
 We hear it passing. We say good bye,  
 We hug and kiss and go  
 And our gathering has passed away.  
 We remember history.  
 The lessons of betrayal  
 Are deeply embedded  
 in my soul.

## WALTER BENJAMIN

On a specific day history can move forward  
 When it becomes completed.  
 The constellation Walter Benjamin  
 Saw in his heart,  
 When thinking about incomplete history,  
 The chance of justice to arrive for those  
 Whom ruling powers of our days  
 Had hoped to erase  
 from the historical record.  
 But we are still here and we remember  
 And hope for history's completion,  
 When Goddesses will return.

Henry Briffa, a Melbourne Psychologist, was shortlisted in the 2022 Australian Catholic University Poetry Prize and highly commended in the 2018 Queensland Poetry Festival Emerging Older Poets Mentorship Award. In 2019 his chapbook *Walking Home* was published by the Melbourne Poets Union & he undertook a residency at Bundanon. He has had over 40 poems published in local & overseas journals including *Rabbit*, *Unusual Works*, *N-Scribe*; *Teesta* and *Golfo*, and in anthologies including *Australian Poetry Anthology* and *9000 miles*. His works have also appeared on a park bench, in *Poems on Posters* (UWA), and *Receipt Poetry* (City of Yarra). Examples of his work can be accessed online at *Mediterranean Poetry*, *the Disappearing*, *Live Encounters* and on his website. His reviews have been published in *Plumbwood Mountain*, *Live Encounters* & *Rochford St Press*.



## ABOVE ALL DO NO HARM

time that moves with little fidget wheels is not our time  
a clock with still hands rusts the past into our presence

I arrive at work that morning  
to a woman at my door who I'd never met before

got her story in our seven minute phone call  
I knew the dance the steps we'd make

woke with a premonition I'd waltz  
some terrible mistake

the chill in Melbourne's breeze  
blows to our mausoleum from snow covered fields

as I step towards her she backs into the corner  
cowering between me and my verandah door

keen to keep a distance fumble for my key  
reaching for the lock move too near

mosquitoes return at nights to have bite after bite  
some moments haunt like Duncan's dagger

she infects me with a terror  
borne the day her lover killed her

eyes plead forearms cover face to form her shield  
3 bells toll for a woman who could once say - 'don't'

Henry Briffa

*continued overleaf...*

ABOVE ALL DO NO HARM *contd...*

*hi I'm sorry to have left you in the cold really sorry  
that wind today brings a chill to your bones*

at times words refuse to say just what I mean  
she hears I fear some shadow intimating –

*sorry I strangled you this chills us both  
tried so hard to keep these hands some distance from  
your throat*

her ghost looks through me my open door  
to the hour before us might she hold hope?

MENTAL

a delusion is evidence based  
religion repeats these mistakes

He says I suffer from an anxiety disorder.  
Mother survived the war in Malta,  
back when the world was disordered,  
it was ok to fear being hit by bombs.

He says the pandemic has been bad  
for my mental health.  
In his pre-Copernican lexicon  
the problem revolves around me.

a delusion is evidence based  
religion repeats these mistakes

I'm anxious of becoming ill  
or losing a loved one.  
Seems I either live in denial  
or else be viewed as unwell.

Should I go into theatres without a mask ?  
Stop social distancing?  
Pretend the daily death toll is false?  
Not bother about my next booster?

a delusion is evidence based  
religion repeats these mistakes

*continued overleaf...*

**MENTAL** *contd...*

I'm a tiny particle in a wide universe I infect  
and depend on. Planetary shifts  
unsettle me. Applying an illness model  
to my mental health is nuts. My psychological  
health can only be apprehended by analysing

my capacity for connectedness.  
If I have flourishing relationships  
with people and nature, shouldn't I  
be deemed to be in good health?  
If I could just retain some healthy anxiety,

live with an appropriate degree of worry  
and not be considered crazy,  
the world might be a bit less mental.  
Who knows, I may even help improve things.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



## RED FLAG

the way to my womanly heart  
is simple I said  
a tightrope  
between  
guilt and compliments

I watched you laugh  
move expertly  
plant a rose  
a thorny  
intoxicating colour

in the soft centre of it  
I watched  
you let it  
bloom  
let it bleed to black



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Jane Frank's latest chapbook is *Wide River* (Calanthe Press, 2020). Her poems have won awards and been widely published both in Australia and elsewhere, appearing most recently in the *ACU Poetry Prize Anthology 2022*, *StylusLit*, *The Galway Review*, *Grieve* (Hunter Writers Centre 2022), *Spelt*, *Burrow*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *NOON* and *The Ekphrastic Review*. Jane lives in Brisbane where she lectures in creative and professional writing at Griffith University. Calanthe Press will publish a full collection of her work in May 2023. Find more of her writing at <https://www.facebook.com/JaneFrankPoet/>



Jane Frank

## LOST LANGUAGE

Bring the river into focus:  
 a poem spreading gently like a  
 wake across the water,  
 words pulling, keeping us alert  
 mangroves merging in brackish  
 blue-browns, beside sky-  
 reflections the past  
 has a clearness I scoop up  
 without spilling from favourite  
 places: worn jetties, palm-  
 striped arcadias in its  
 sheen, our reminiscences  
 and the black thoughts  
 of which we never speak  
 the river keeps confidences  
 and we will not have time  
 to repay the debt  
 I don't want the darkness in  
 my head even though the dusk  
 has a kind mossy face  
 the sun has erased the future's  
 name: the surface a smooth  
 unwritten tombstone, so  
 there is only now, only now.  
 I make a note to remember  
 lush green kikuyu grass spilling  
 over banks, a shining  
 expanse of sand and pebbles at  
 the widest sashay,  
 the hum and buzz of the river's  
 dream-self loud as dragon-  
 flies skim millennia like  
 glass pages, all-seeing and under-  
 standing the print on  
 the surface a language lost

## THE LAST FERRY

On the day of the festival there was jazz music:  
yellow leaves were spinning as they fell from the gums  
arched protectively above us— the boys barefoot in  
the pond, tadpoles darting between their legs  
and the fronds of the tall cattails, jam jars ready. I can  
still taste the cold wine, feel my fingers skim the  
surface of the water.

On other days they dug in rock-  
pools with sticks, talked to jellyfish that were a luminous  
powder blue I should have bottled. They climbed the  
leadlight branches of a fallen tree, faces radiant through  
the gaps.

We mapped that smaller world surrounded  
by the sea with our foot prints, chased thousands of  
translucent crabs at the fringes, the ghost blue of them  
shimmering through the late spring tide, the day slipping  
slowly into the horizon's long fingers.

Returning in the half-  
dark, we learned the language of striped marsh frogs,  
stone curlews arresting us with their staring eyes, the  
moon hanging high above ochre cliffs.

Inevitably, the  
boys are smiling, bleached hair slick from a last swim,  
in their fists cuttlefish and shells, as we wait for the ferry  
to pull away.

I can only think of the finality of my mother  
cutting threads, the snip of her scissors after the  
anticipation and my complaints, the hours of pinning  
and hemming, the sound of her talking with pins in  
her mouth — something beautiful finished.

The last full  
stop in a paragraph— a springboard into white space, a  
beach of quiet thought stretching away from the struggles  
only visible now in the long, red tongue of sunset over  
the mainland, the graffiti cloud.

I often end up here where  
it is un-inked, when all the words have ebbed away with  
the last ferry through the day's tired water. It is only in this  
place where the sky is black enough to see stars.

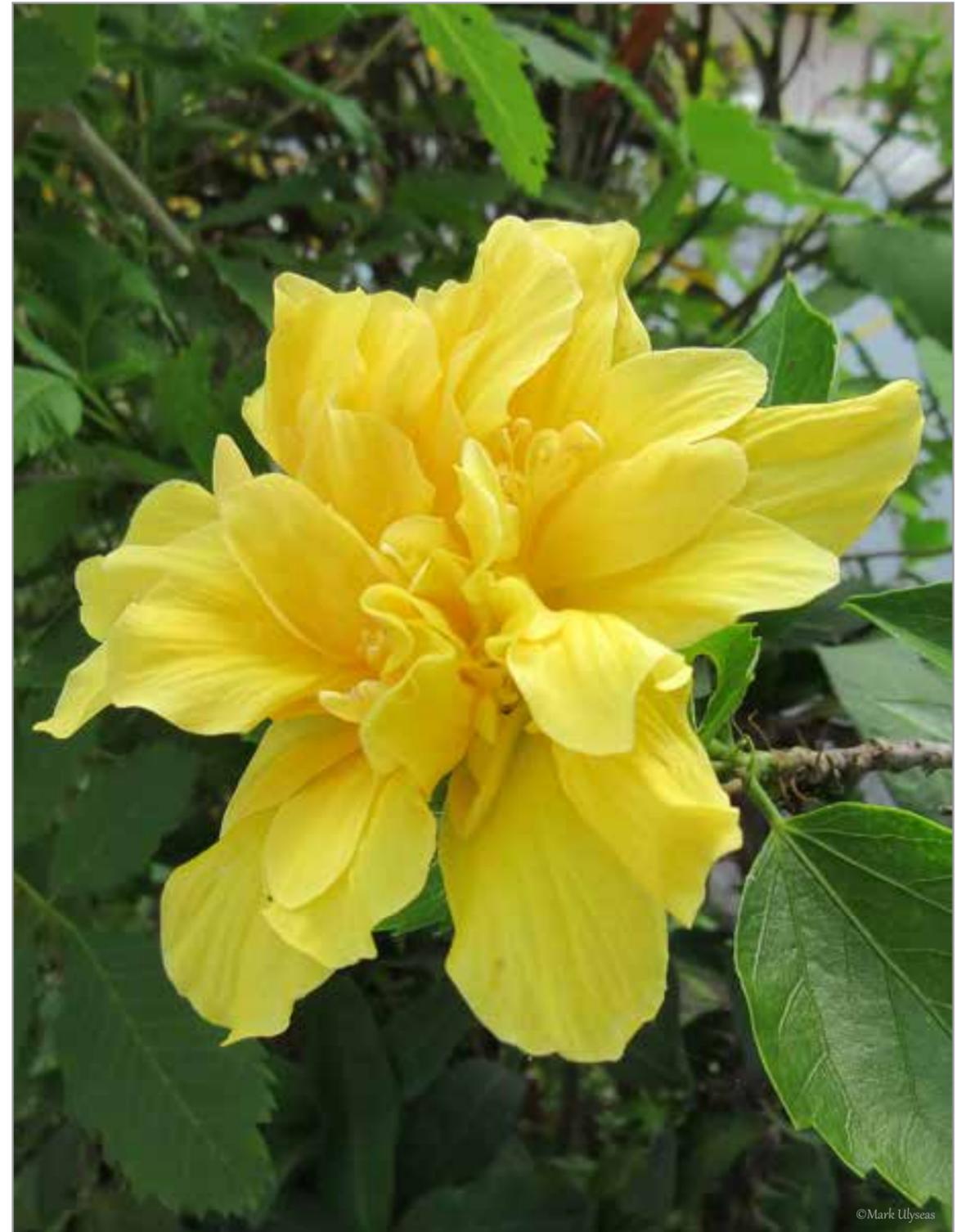
## THE DRESSMAKER'S GARDEN

A drain was a prison  
 For cicadas: skinks surfed on  
 Bauple nut leaves along a  
 Swale that ran the length  
 Of the fence. Sometimes  
 One fell off, lost its tail.  
 A fitting could take hours.

I arranged white stones  
 In circles, stood inside and  
 Drank the nectar from fire-  
 Cracker flowers so I could  
 Grant creatures the power  
 To speak. I was a beetle  
 Hunter and herder, twig-  
 Fenced farms and mustered

Insects, while upstairs,  
 Pale blue linen was pinned,  
 Pleated, tucked and hem-  
 Lines debated. Conversation  
 Floated down intermittent  
 Like rain. I worked with lost  
 Pegs, pebbles, stems and  
 The soft cases for nuts until

My own patterns emerged:  
 Among the cool corpora  
 Of ferns and succulents  
 Were vital new languages  
 Scraped in sandy soil using  
 Pointed seed pod ends to  
 Fill a whole afternoon's  
 Lengthening shadows, sew  
 Word seams of olive green.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Sheepshead Review, Stand, Poetry Salzburg Review and Hollins Critic. Latest books, "Leaves On Pages" "Memory Outside The Head" and "Guest Of Myself" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in Ellipsis, Blueline and International Poetry Review.



## ANOTHER BOY SHOT

You could blame hot weather rage  
except it's the middle of January.  
And boys will be boys.  
Too bad they have to be sons.  
And that shot could have even  
been a car back-firing.  
Then a loud cry  
had to go spoil  
that explanation.

You'd think  
the more people that gather,  
the less the pain  
would consume the one.  
But she's out there screaming,  
"Not Jamie! It can't be Jamie!"  
Nobody else says anything like that.  
And if she hadn't exclaimed  
"Oh my beautiful boy!"  
then his corpse would not have looked  
so ugly.

John Grey

## STATE OF THE WORLD

The storms are bizarre.  
Question marks float up  
out of stinking flesh.

The floods that used to happen to other people  
are flush against my door.  
What's next? The murders?

Deforested is upfront in the lexicon.  
Oil is the latest spill  
it's no use crying over.  
The Arctic shelf is the new Titanic  
and every polar bear  
is John Jacob Astor.

How do people in Africa perish?  
Let me count the ways.  
Stop me if you've heard  
famine and AIDS before.  
Mexico must be eighty percent  
drug lords by this.  
And the Middle East is the Middle East.  
I'm glad we got that straight.

In America,  
the next one to find a job  
will be the first.  
At this rate,  
I'll be last.

And don't try to tell me  
I have a job.  
Poetry's not a job.  
It's just bizarre storms.  
It's question marks  
floating up  
out of stinking flesh.

## THE WAR ON LUCK

Crouched in a tree,  
eyes squinting,  
the sniper sights his target  
through thick green foliage.

A gleam of a gun barrel  
is followed by  
a flash of fire.  
the crack of a bullet  
grazing an enemy soldier's cheek.

It could have gone differently.  
Maybe next time it will:  
one sharp-shooter with  
another notch on the handle,  
one bloody body in the jungle  
not reclaimed for days.

The war is like that -  
good luck and bad luck  
forever changing sides.  
The victor, as always,  
is no luck at all.

## THE AFFAIR

All night the motel's neon sign  
flashed its way up to the drawn curtain  
them flashed no more.  
He was awake.  
His mind was not a good place to be.  
She lay next to him, stiff and silent,  
like a body awaiting autopsy.

Anna will never know, he told himself.  
Nor will regret.  
For when it came to guilt and faithfulness,  
need frustrated them all.  
But the sex was the longest he'd gone  
without feeling anything.  
Monotonous, if the truth be told  
and he prayed it never would be.

When the woman came back to his room,  
he felt like a gambler  
gathering his winnings off the table.  
She sure was attractive.  
It was a tasteless affair to be sure  
but one with a fantastic view.

But now, it was so dark,  
she could be anyone.  
He didn't have that luxury.

John Samuel Tieman, of St. Louis, is a widely published poet and essayist. His chapbook, "A Concise Biography Of Original Sin", is published by BkMk Press. His poetry has appeared in "The Americas Review", "The Caribbean Quarterly", "The Chariton Review", "The Iowa Review", "Rattle", "River Styx" "Stand", and "Vox Populi". He writes a weekly column for "Axar.az", a popular online news service in Eurasia.



## HALLMARK

Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger  
they say. Vietnam didn't kill me. That four-way  
hit of acid didn't kill me. My father didn't kill me.  
A jealous husband almost killed me. When I was  
young, mostly I almost killed myself. I didn't get  
stronger. I was afraid of being wounded by a river,  
afraid of a beast that escaped. In my middle years,  
the trees along our street were violet. A streetlamp's  
glare off the neighbor's window was immense and  
deprived of stars. Now I am old, 72. The years  
didn't make me wise and when I cry because  
someone died, living doesn't make me stronger.

John Samuel Tieman

## THE GIFTS

On my 73rd birthday, I will be given all my  
other years. Then one after another they'll  
depart, each like a ferry late for the other shore.  
I will forget – and keep forgetting – the seductive

months, a destiny, the nurse's teeth and fingers.  
I will forget – and I mean to forget – the avid  
window and the rain, the psalm and the lava.  
I don't want to die. But once I heard the wind play

the leaves like a harp. And my wife walking naked  
through the house. These gifts I will keep. These

## THE SOUVENIR

the nights I'm terrified by a misshapen thing  
the misprint or the phosphorescent fish

tonight it's my photos of kids in The Nam  
Pete smiling and cleaning his M-16

Hank grinning and his Montagnard  
bowl full of Cambodian Red

Greaser angry and slamming  
the door to his deuce and a half

and us just kids getting ready for a truck  
convoy through the Mang Yang Pass

a convoy that wounds us to this day

Kenneth Hickey was born in 1975 in Cobh, Co. Cork Ireland. He served in the Irish Naval Service between 1993 and 2000. His poetry and prose has been published in various literary journals in Ireland, the UK and the United States including *Southword*, *Crannoig*, *THE SHOp*, *A New Ulster*, *Aesthetica Magazine* and *The Great American Poetry* show. His writing for theatre has been performed in Ireland, the UK, New York and Paris. He has won the Eamon Keane Full Length Play Award as well as being short-listed for The PJ O'Connor Award and the Tony Doyle Bursary. He was shortlisted for the Bournemouth Poetry Prize in 2022. He has been selected for the *Poetry in the Park* project and has been awarded a poetry mentorship by Munster Literature Centre. His work in film has been screened at the Cork and Foyle Film Festivals. He holds a BA and MA in English Literature both from University College Cork. His debut collection 'The Unicycle Paradox' was published by Revival Press in November 2021. He still resides in Cork.

## HADES

The stone is broken.

*The Irishman's house is his coffin*

He will tell you the sad fate of his comrades in arms  
If anyone cares to hear  
The morning mists sting like the gas of Ypres  
As the slow nights and days pass sorrowfully by  
Escaped Dunkirk by his bootstraps

*As wind in dry grass*

They all feared the gas  
*Sunlight on a broken column*  
Still standing so solemn  
The dead

*Here the stone images*

*Are raised*

To all of those who were so brave  
Lying silently in the grave  
*This is how the world ends*

*No prayers nor bells*

But still the echoing guns  
*The holy glimmers of good-byes*  
For all the mothers who have cried

He lies still in Irish clay  
And listen to what people say

The poem is a broken stone. Made of fragments of the old and new



Kenneth Hickey

## HISTORY

She is no longer, in general, deserving of praise.  
 That was the general consensus.  
 In fact, had she not done only what was expected of her?  
 And no more?  
 What is praiseworthy in that?

The flowerbed in the square is beautiful.  
 In the morning she weeds and waters,  
 Teasing the pale petals to song.  
 Small children dance before it  
 on sunny afternoons.  
 But she is an old woman now.  
 What else has she to do?

## MACHINATION

*noun; a plot or scheme*

The old red wine pen scratches still  
 across the empty bread white page  
*body of Christ*  
 He searches for meaning  
 stumbles for truth  
 The machinations of petty politicians  
 Vote early, vote often  
 Do not concern him  
 anymore  
 There is a higher power  
 A holy truth  
 Denied three times by the crow's call  
*Didn't I see you with him in the garden?*  
 Lead the chosen people as they wandered through the sands  
*You will suffer for your sins*  
 Touches the holy black stone  
*The sacred house*  
 There is nothing to say  
 Of race, of sex, of Fuhrers, of news  
 All chalk signs scratched on the wall  
 Washed away by inevitable rains  
 Only elemental brick remains  
 Whispers in the wind  
 A thing of nothing  
 And still he listens for the gasp of God  
 The sign upon the Sun  
 For history is done  
 The end has begun  
*They lay their crowns before the throne and say*  
 Move on move on  
 Nothing more to see  
 You'll get all your truth from the BBC

*And darkness fell over all the land*

Marion May Campbell is an Australian poet and fiction writer whose most recent works include *languish* (Upswell Poetry 2022) and *third body* (Whitmore Press Poetry 2018), and the memoir *The Man on the Mantelpiece* (UWAP 2018). Now retired from university teaching, she lives write and paints in Drouin, Victoria, on unceded GunaiKurnai land. Her poems are fed with her dreams and other writers' words.



## IN THE STOREROOM

in the storeroom  
the postmen sit on their mailbags  
& pass around the elixir

their blood is red ink  
parchment their skin  
love inscribes its slow

tattoo there they say  
poems are letters that go  
astray

poems deepen sleep  
they multiply  
the heart's chambers

you wake with names  
of ice on your tongue  
with lava pulsing

at your wrist  
your veins map  
the roads of change

somewhere a windscreen wiper  
moves the rain to tears  
somewhere the slave

cuckoo comes unsprung  
& flies –  
to her young

NOTE - 'names of ice on your tongue' is grafted from Marina Tsvetaeva's 'Your name is a – bird in my hand /a piece of – ice on my tongue' from *Poems for Blok*

Marion May Campbell

## FLIGHT FEATHERS

as soon as he leaves  
the dread of his return  
conducts its drip torture

on the metal sink inside her skull  
she ducks under mirrors  
& night windows for fear

of the sight of her own skin  
cling-wrapped on bones – of course  
her vivisector preferred

to write Renoiresque the dappled flesh  
of young girls in flower  
her depletion feeding his power

he'd been famous for a year  
then quickly forgotten  
his fame had come

from his stylish ease	his killer
wit & in its wake	these bouts
of terror	relayed

the animals shook in their baskets  
the little dog the cat  
the black rose bloomed

that shameful corolla  
her head in her arms  
she listens for footfalls

like Jack's Giant bent on  
revenge    thundering  
down the fire escape

he called her *slummocky*  
so accused she became  
mere flab & bloated bruise

her belly a dome collapsed  
sparse-feathered    mocked  
by monthly engorgements

*past your use by eh*  
*sterile old bird*  
that voice pernicious

has coated  
her flight feathers in something  
much heavier than lead

## CRASH DUMMY

I sent out an SOS like a crash dummy  
to see if the glass would craze  
in her rear vision mirror

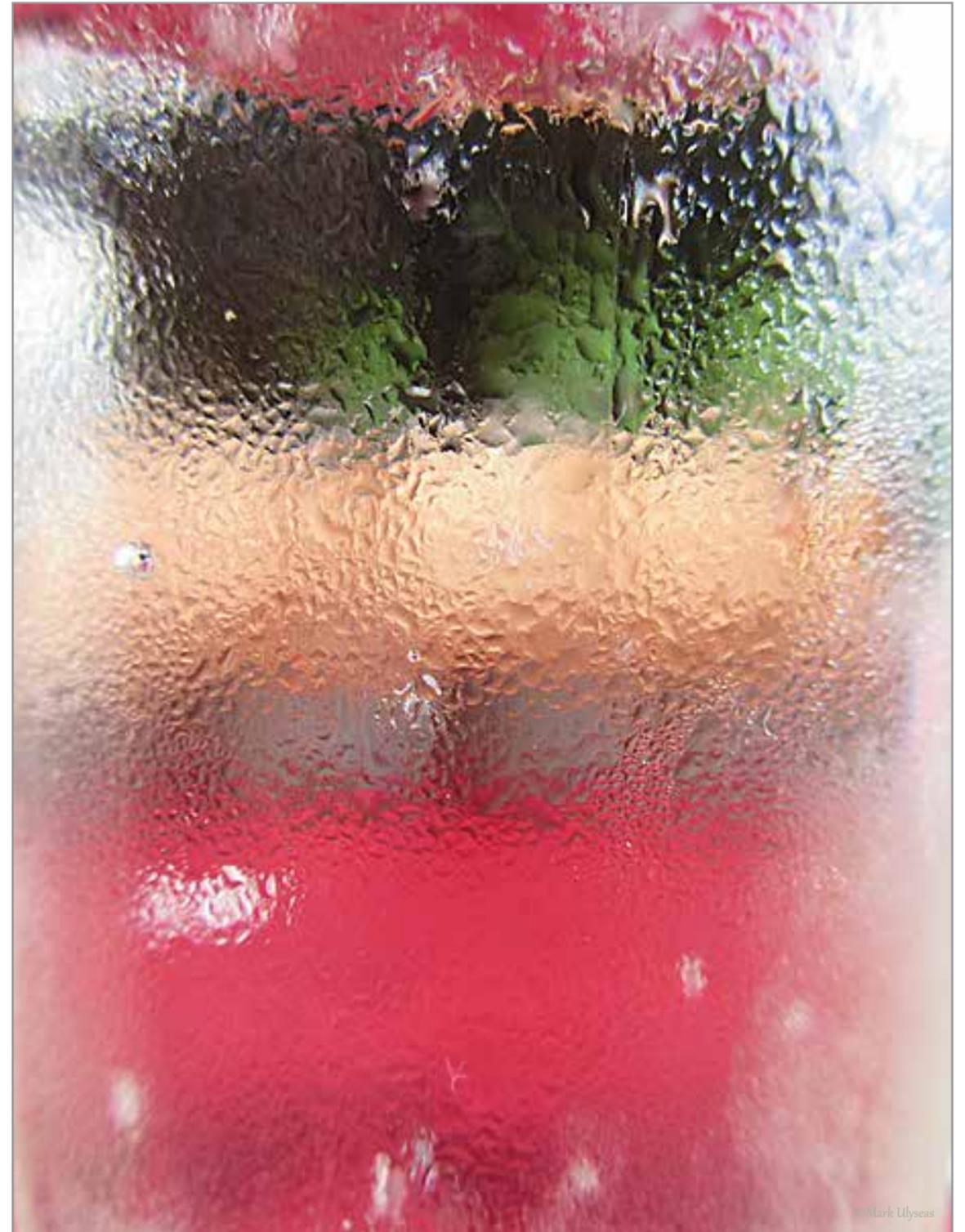
I didn't see a sign  
that she'd received me –  
but our whole

painting was in the background  
sharply distorted  
an asymmetrical

mutilation  
in the retro light  
somewhere in digital resonance

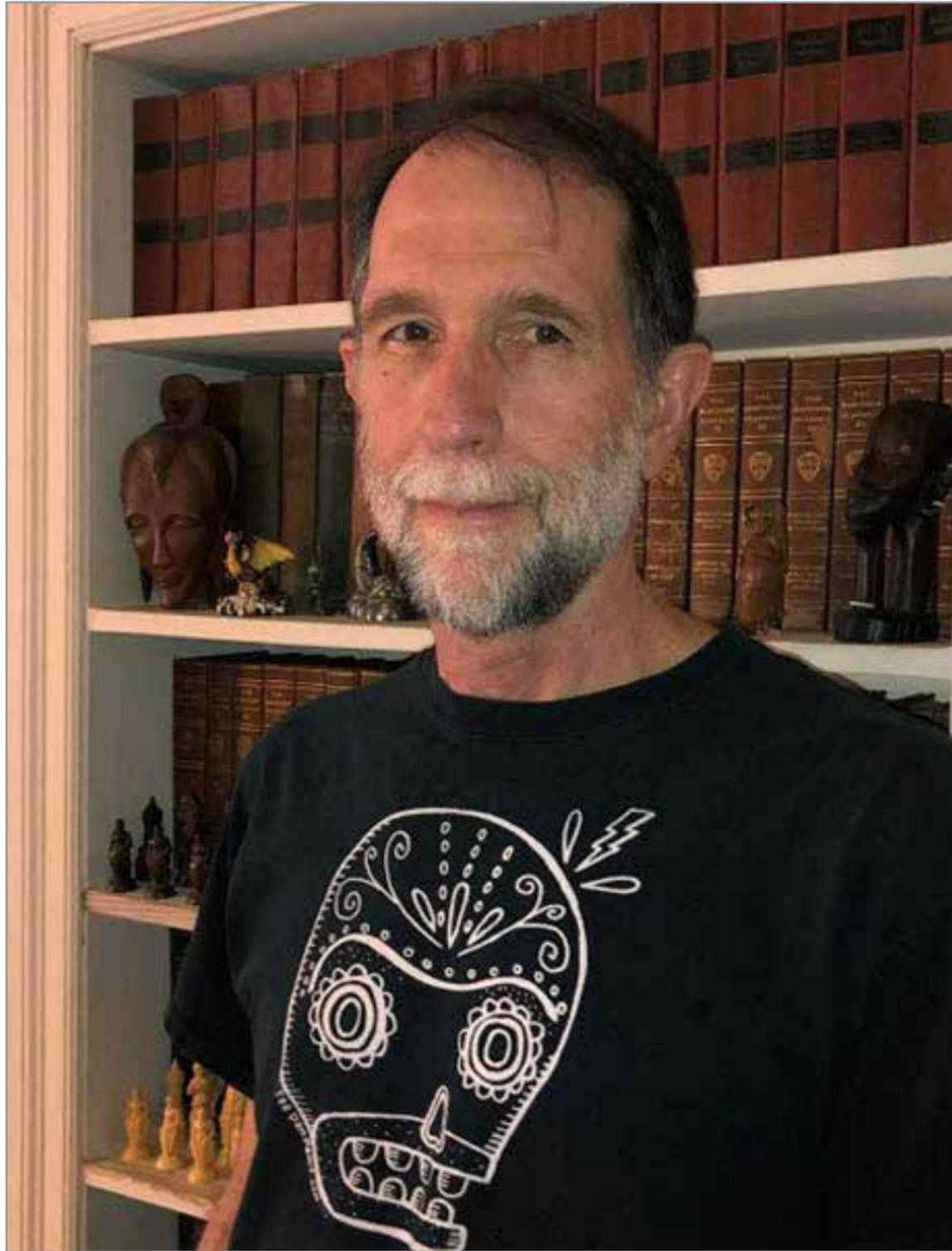
two women cried  
& in the implicit sidewalk neon  
our blue angel smoked on

well-pleased with the cushions  
inflated between us  
& the dashboard dials



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

M. L. Williams is the author of *Game* (What Books Press 2021) the chapbook *Other Medicines* and co-editor of *How Much Earth: The Fresno Poets*, and he served as editor or co-editor of *Quarterly West* for five years. His work appears in many journals and anthologies, including *Plume*, *Hubbub*, *Salt*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Miramar*, *The Journal of Florida Studies*, *The Cortland Review*, *Live Encounters Poetry*, and *Stone, River, Sky*, and has been nominated for multiple Pushcart Prizes. He co-emcees the Poetry Stage at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books, and he teaches creative writing and contemporary literature at Valdosta State University.



## PASSAGE

*Thereupon I shew him the map, and it consists of lines on a piece of paper; but I cannot explain how these lines are the map of my movements, I cannot tell him any rule for interpreting the map.*

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 653

Slip down grey fields of scree under knifing peaks until the trail braids, firn in shaded pockets melting into clear puddles sinking into moraine, down switchbacks through larch and spruce and aspen and into green meadows in hollows streams pulsing lakes hugging their bright noon clarities, now up the next pass through nights of shivering stars, eyes in branches under boulders in burrows out hunting they flash scat on the ground the air and howl and yip and crash of coyotes of running elk around tonight's hut and down again into desert's red rocks along the looping canyon river the map's long days and nights in its story of skin, but not the story of rain, not the bones in the deposition, not the skull washed home in the undercut.

M. L. Williams

## NOTHING TO SAY

*The ideal, as we think of it, is unshakable.*

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 103

Pot of soup  
left overnight  
waxy fat  
a puckered skin  
spoon stain-  
stuck on tile  
potato cold

knife and onion  
on the cutting board  
bowl dark-licked  
leek sticky



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Moyra Donaldson is a poet and creative writing facilitator from Co Down. She has published nine collections of poetry and has been involved in various collaborations with visual artists, most recently with Wexford artist Paddy Lennon resulting in the limited edition publication of artwork and poems, *Blood Horses*. Her work is widely anthologised and she has read at festivals in Europe, Canada and America and in 2019, Moyra received a Major Artist Award from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Her latest collection, *Bone House*, was published by Doire Press in April 2021. 'There is fire, hail and a streak of white lightning running through these extraordinary poems. *Bone House* kept me awake at night. One of the finest collections I have read in a long time.' Annemarie Ní Churreáin, author of *Bloodroot* (Doire Press) <https://moyradonaldson.com/>



## WHERE WAS I LOOKING

I have been late to so many things:  
damsel flies, seal songs,  
kingfishers - and realisations -  
things I should have sussed.  
How did I miss them for so long?

I looked at the tulips, half mad with grief  
In the Hotel Opera, Budapest;  
they opened their black throats  
and filled the corridors with absences.

I looked at the small black creature  
scuttling across my vision,  
to disappear each time into the invisible.

I looked behind me, fearing  
what might be coming forward.

I looked at the blue lights, the monster  
in the cupboard, the broken things;  
I looked past them for a mystery,  
as if a mystery was ever to be found.

I looked at the scattering of shadows  
but could not see the pattern.

Saw consequence -  
and not the thing itself.

Moyra Donaldson

## THE STONE PEOPLE

*after Ovid's Fable X*

I knew I didn't come from the sea.  
There's nothing of it in me, no salt  
or tides or flowing in between.  
I cannot imagine opening my eyes  
in the waters of the deep.

Knowing what I am grown from,  
I love better my obdurate past,  
the stony dreams bequeathed to me.

## TALKING ABOUT AUTUMN

Fionn says his friend thinks of Autumn  
as being  
the most emotionally complex of seasons

and I think – yes –  
all that burning beauty in decay  
harvested riches of what is past

bright presence of future absence  
of what must be endured  
before the light comes back

Patricia Sykes is a poet and librettist. Her poems and collections have received various awards, including the Newcastle Poetry Prize, John Shaw Neilson award and the Tom Howard Poetry Prize. She has read her work widely and it has featured on ABC radio programs Poetica and The Spirit of Things. Her collaborations with composer Liza Lim have been performed in Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, Paris, Germany, Russia, New York and the UK. She was Asialink Writer in Residence, Malaysia, 2006. A selection of her poems was published in an English/Chinese edition by Flying Island Books in 2017. A song cycle composed by Andrew Aronowicz, based on her collection *The Abbotsford Mysteries*, premiered at The Abbotsford Convent Melbourne — now an arts precinct — in 2019. A podcast of this work is available on various platforms.



## FIDELITY ON A RAINY NIGHT

In a small room under the stars  
Schumann's Traumerei  
floating to join the chirrup  
of a rain-blissed frog  
solitary and amorous  
the frog compelled to stray  
no further than the mountain  
whose thighs we live between

earlier a nasturtium leaf  
tipped rain down my throat  
like a cure. Except thirst  
is progressive  
a pilgrimage through  
brain fog, foot slog

survival-infected  
and driven by reward  
subject to explosions  
of destruction or delight  
while out in the wet night  
the frog sings and sings  
driven only by the rhythm  
of its pulse

Patricia Sykes

## THE UNDIMINISHED

*i.m. John Bird*

The powers of a diminishing, their ifs,  
their *ofs*, their witherings, mitherings  
a persuasion to lay self down

among petal, leaf, mulch, become  
a wetness in the spine, melch of blood  
and water table, a lapping at the orifices

an oozing from the pores.  
Cleverly you hide among stars.  
Your clock heart a stutter of cogs.

Your evanescence, if you were a bird,  
would let the light through as you fly.  
As with the model planes you build

your pilot soul controls the cockpit  
in search of effortless soaring height.  
*"Look down. Don't look down!"*

Each footprint is ground you've loved  
patterns of a living, etchings of a mind.  
You joke as if there's nothing to regret.

In the house of glass a chair is puzzled  
by where the weight of you has gone.  
The hours of palliative sitting

sit now mostly in your mind  
like the snow flower  
which so recently your breath blew

onto winter-frosted glass  
merely to enchant a child  
who is yourself of course

*'the end is not the end until the end'*  
until then we gratify  
your final season of quips

anything within reason  
that an agony death allows.  
Too much indulgence though

would grieve us to excess.  
So we love and do not love  
your sky-to-ground soft shoe,

its scarecrow totter, sideways,  
forwards, mainly backwards, arms  
akimbo, *'living is as living does,'*

clowning it to the coffin in red trouser  
braces and black mirror shoes. Giving  
time's dance floor the worst of the ride.

More often now your night sorrows recall  
your mythic youth. How what mattered  
to him was nothing less than everything.

His the voice that beckons, waxing louder  
each day than ours *'Amen, you say, '  
amen, but not until I'm ready to come...'*

## MONSTROUS

*Blood is origin, vision is everything.  
Is it more than you bargained for?  
My ventriloquial self is astir, intent  
on provoking oblivion. Paris  
in snowfall is her new obsession  
its hushed allure sensuous as  
mouth on mouth, as if the dark layers  
I arrived with can unpeel, *je t'aime*.*

Typically she abrupts, this time to  
classical maths, why absurdly it  
labelled snow a Monster. Because  
each flake unique, non-logical?  
Do I agree, do I not? I rock to the  
rhythm of the Metro with other  
window dreamers, even the graffiti  
quieted by snow's white riff.

The ventriloquial goad though  
eschews silence. She nudges my  
attention to the woman slumped  
opposite, who jerks and shudders  
before drifting back to sleep:  
Was it fear that pierced her  
lethe, a wish for a kinder fate  
than last night's platform assault

from which another woman limped  
away, alive but spirit-bruised?  
The snow falls and falls  
in icy shimmers, a silent coup.

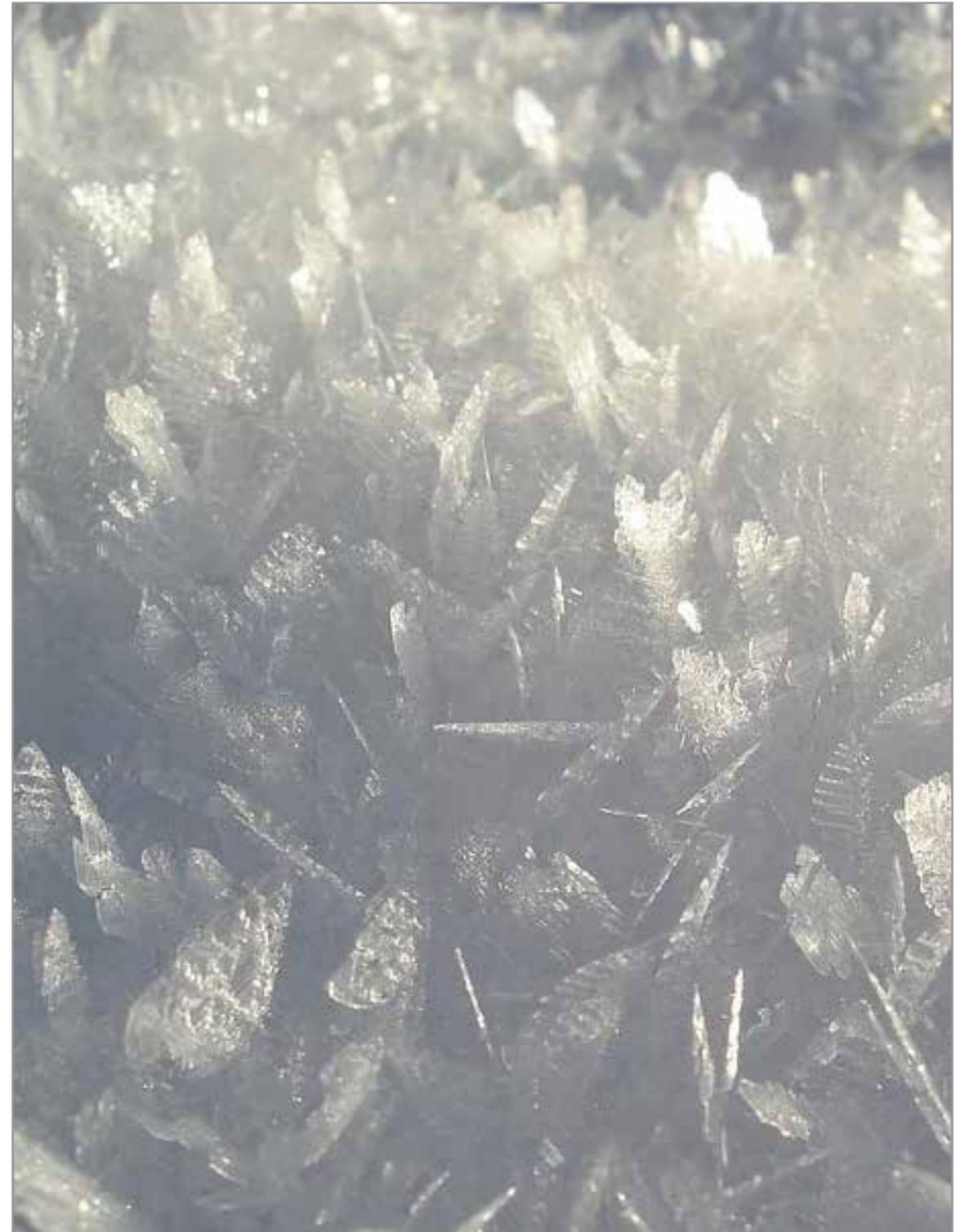
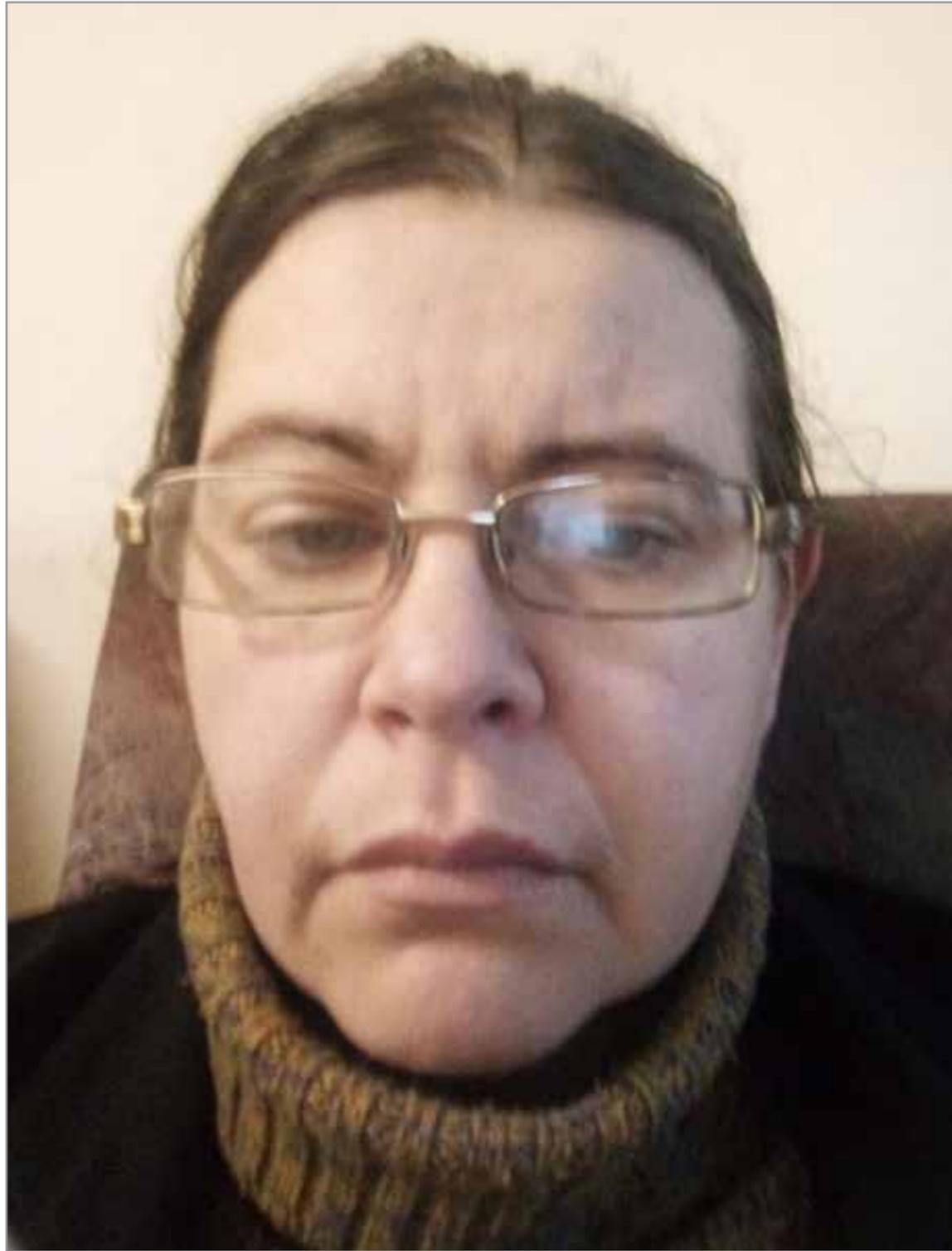


Photo credit: <https://pixabay.com>

Patricia Walsh was born and raised in the parish of Mourneabbey, Co Cork, Ireland. To date, she has published one novel, titled *The Quest for Lost Eire*, in 2014, and has published one collection of poetry, titled *Continuity Errors*, with Lapwing Publications in 2010. She has since been published in a variety of print and online journals. She has also published another novel, *In The Days of Ford Cortina*, in August 2021.



## DEAD TO CLICHÉ

An apocryphal stain, hanging around classes  
Gulping up refreshments in a bold eye  
Windows of opportunity shuns entitlement  
A rainy reason cuts across the sky.

Terror pervades the burning opportunity  
To declare oneself fit for purpose  
Relief after paperwork and a spell's decorum  
Bureaucratic selves taunting the figure.

Not to be disturbed, I find myself awake  
Repeating styles and forms to discontent  
Asking for reviews, slighting forestalled  
Repeated letters in the form of glory.

The snake of cars hitting the lights  
Time and again, like a Lego attachment  
I still must cross, rain or otherwise  
Unreliable buses do come eventually.

Cigarette burns a distant pleasure  
Being chronically aside is not an option  
Screwing the state for a crust now and again  
Splitting hairs on a recharger's time.

Sick with worry, measuring the steps  
Of an uphill sojourn, picking the procedure  
Of an eye's breadth, lighting off circumstance  
Necessary for comfort, a bolt of the obvious.

Patricia Walsh

## NO ORGANIC SIGNAL

En route to disappointment, nay never no more.  
 Alternative roads converge on a dereliction  
 Cutting through expectation on a rough journey.

No size or forms can save me now  
 Supreme power in the country interrogates  
 En route to heartfelt home, a ticket burned  
 Holding cards on terror that is rightly yours.

Some deliberated proceedings dot the home.  
 As yet unfinished, a suitable dwelling  
 Assuaged by the company, to worry come the time.

Enough room for everyone, hedging bets  
 Satisfaction on arrival, doing the right thing  
 Cannot stop me burning, for fair or foul  
 Some heritage at risk from modern conveniences.

If he shows, he shows. Some sentient remains  
 Recharged by necessity, a language unlearned  
 Killer finish, burning the unnecessary.

## CROWN OF HAWTHORN

The country's prize lies in wait  
 For panic to set in, a caustic revelation  
 Unhorsing me, petals flowing in the breeze  
 A favorite yardstick stalling for decorum.

No unnecessary confessions will sweep the floor  
 Privately cutting through selfsame defeat,  
 Colons and commas punctuate sudden loss  
 Tattooed permanently, reminding of defects.

The sun finally burns, not before time  
 Shepherding animals into growth, a prayer revealed  
 Some caustic words establish boundaries  
 Scorching earth over family concerns.

Jokes run dry, on weight of expectation  
 Doing the right thing is standard procedure  
 In spite of attitude, misunderstanding vocation  
 Constantly missing each other, bloodied comprehension,

Some government of the vacant house remains  
 Disability of the mind a sublime embarrassment  
 Another cross for the making, burden of proof  
 To not measure as you would like, disappointment burning.

A house will surely be a home again, given construction  
 Of eaten windows and blighted cement that is  
 Better than the real thing, this is surely mine  
 A domicile kissing the last, a friend in store.

Peter O'Neill was born in Cork in 1967. He left the Republic to live in France for the majority of the nineties and returned to live in Dublin at the start of the millennium and has remained in Dublin ever since. His first trilogy of books *The Dark Pool*, *Dublin Gothic* and *The Enemy – Transversions from Baudelaire* were all published in 2015, a key year for O'Neill in his emergence as an unusual yet distinctive voice in contemporary Irish writing. He has gone onto to publish several other books, the latest work *Henry Street Arcade* (2021), again goes over old themes. He is currently working on a number of projects while continuing to teach EFL.



## PRELUDE TO POE

You can hear it in the register or tone,  
The very special case of pleading.  
Nietzsche would have immediately denounced it.  
Yet here, in this shit hole, it is all too prevalent!

Like an insidious form of bacteria, it has become part of the culture.  
What kills me is the passive acceptance of it,  
Anything to avoid direct confrontation.  
The voice drops and raises in alternating pitches

But it is always pitching low, to the very basest level of humanity.  
This is what makes it so distinctive and dangerous.  
Particularly when it drops to a low hush.

It is the discourse of skulkers, sycophants and total and utter chancers.  
It is the sound of the voice that one is confronted by  
In every single corner of this Land.

Peter O'Neill

Polly Richardson (Munnely) is a Dublin born poet now living and writing on the Dingle Peninsula Kerry. Her poetry and short stories have been published both nationally and internationally in many anthologies and e-zines including on her contributors page with Mad Swirl. In 2017 she travelled to Amsterdam, to read alongside Frisian poet Tsead Brunja former laureate of Netherlands. She's had an honourable commendation in Blue Nibs second chap book contest by judge Kevin Higgins 2018. She continues to run writers group: *The Bulls Arse* remotely each week via zoom. She's the founder member of and runs the international collative creative group Worldly Worders, formed during the first hard lock down during 2020. Polly has been heard reading at open mic nights, on local radio and at poetry festivals throughout Ireland, on live links broadcasting internationally 2013 - 2022. Her debut poetry collection *Winter's Breath* was published and launched in September 2020. In March 2021 she took part in a on-line charity concert Le Cheile - A Song for Hope in aid of Saint Vincent De Paul and Alone Ireland. In 2022 she began running her *Dingle Wilds* walking poetry writing workshops. She is currently working on her second collection.



## DINGLE WILDS 40 THE RECKONING - BALLYLUSKY

Minds are funny things. Incredible inner maps networking,  
Feeding imaginary, each little neuron fire individually placed.  
Feel, growth, repair, breathe. What if's. What if greet like Sunday  
night knowing Mondays earlies fly before birds chorus wink.  
Tornado-ing waves after wave whirling. The weight choking out  
Sun blotting out moon. And then breath. Sea. Breath.  
The mind knows. In the quiet. Funny things. Programmed  
as with stars, counted 1,2,3,4 breath, and feet sprout  
sink into gratitude's arms, breath, moving whole foundations.  
Wild rattles eves, swells bulge tides higher than gulls play  
As if Atlantic acted out those moments the reckoning  
bellowed when she said we'll know in six weeks, removing scope  
and microscopic pieces. Me. The shortest walk seemed hours.  
Changes and reckoning, silent changes.  
But breath gently rocked, found sea. Minds are funny things.  
Incredible inner maps. And breath.  
We birth our thoughts.

Polly Richardson

## DINGLE WILDS 41 - BRILLIANT BLUE

Thoughts run a drift in mind's plains, this space  
 I and I see, store remnants of every nano second inhaled,  
 absorbed into pores begging slurp  
 of sea- sounds, smells, splodges of boggy melts  
 marinaded under clouds- spell, drenched in grass juice  
 catching mornings wishing sun's gentle stroke. I and I.  
 Mind never fills. Yet pours, cascading as waterfalls  
 mighty rush. Feet take their place indent costal edges,  
 walk to themselves hypnotically like buoys bobs on breath-less surface.  
 I'm eagle combing, delights in all pretty shells before the final grind.  
 Sleepy smiles spread under skin branch out till each digit tingles. Engulf. Engulfed.  
 It's here they place themselves. Collage, binding as they arrive. Thought drifts.  
 Holds firm Puffin remains dislodged from tidal touch,  
 vibrant rainbow beak, neon feet motionless among shoreline ghosts  
 brilliant blue sailors crusting falling to dust dots waterfronts stretching to hills,  
 migration navigated to death before proclaiming mates. I'm paused.  
 Sadness washes as waves gentle lap nudges on my bareness. The thousands  
 strokes of instincts here, with Manx shearwater silence with sands. Head all a flop.  
 I dare not disturb this slumber, beautifully bitter  
 I urge to cradle their triumph in vain.



© Polly Richardson

Photograph by Polly Richardson.

Ron Carey was born in Limerick and lives in Dublin. His poems have been published in numerous magazines and journals, including *New Irish Writings* and *The Irish Times*. He has been a winner or runner up in many international poetry competitions, including the Allingham Poetry Prize, the Gregory O' Donoghue International Poetry Prize and the Bridport Prize. Ron's first collection, '*Distance*' was shortlisted for the Forward Prize Best First Collection UK and Ireland. His latest collection is '*Racing Down the Sun*' from Revival Press. He holds a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of South Wales and facilitates CW courses in Limerick and Dublin.



## SHOOTING MICHAEL COLLINS

We're waiting all day in *Béal na mBláth* to shoot Michael Collins.  
 But the sun won't behave for the Director of Photography.  
 Himself some actor from the North, with a tall Cork accent  
 That ricochets around the dying body of the day.  
 The cameramen are scattered on the hillside, having to move  
 With the everchanging light to get the best and clearest shot.  
 Below, the road twists and turns as if it doesn't know where it's going.  
 We only own it for another hour and then we head to Bandon  
 For a shower, a meal, and a pint by the fire in Brady's, where  
 The man who plays Dev sits by himself to practice his tears.  
 From her suite of rooms, the American Superstar rings down.  
 She wants to try on Kitty Kiernan's wedding dress, one more time.

Ron Carey

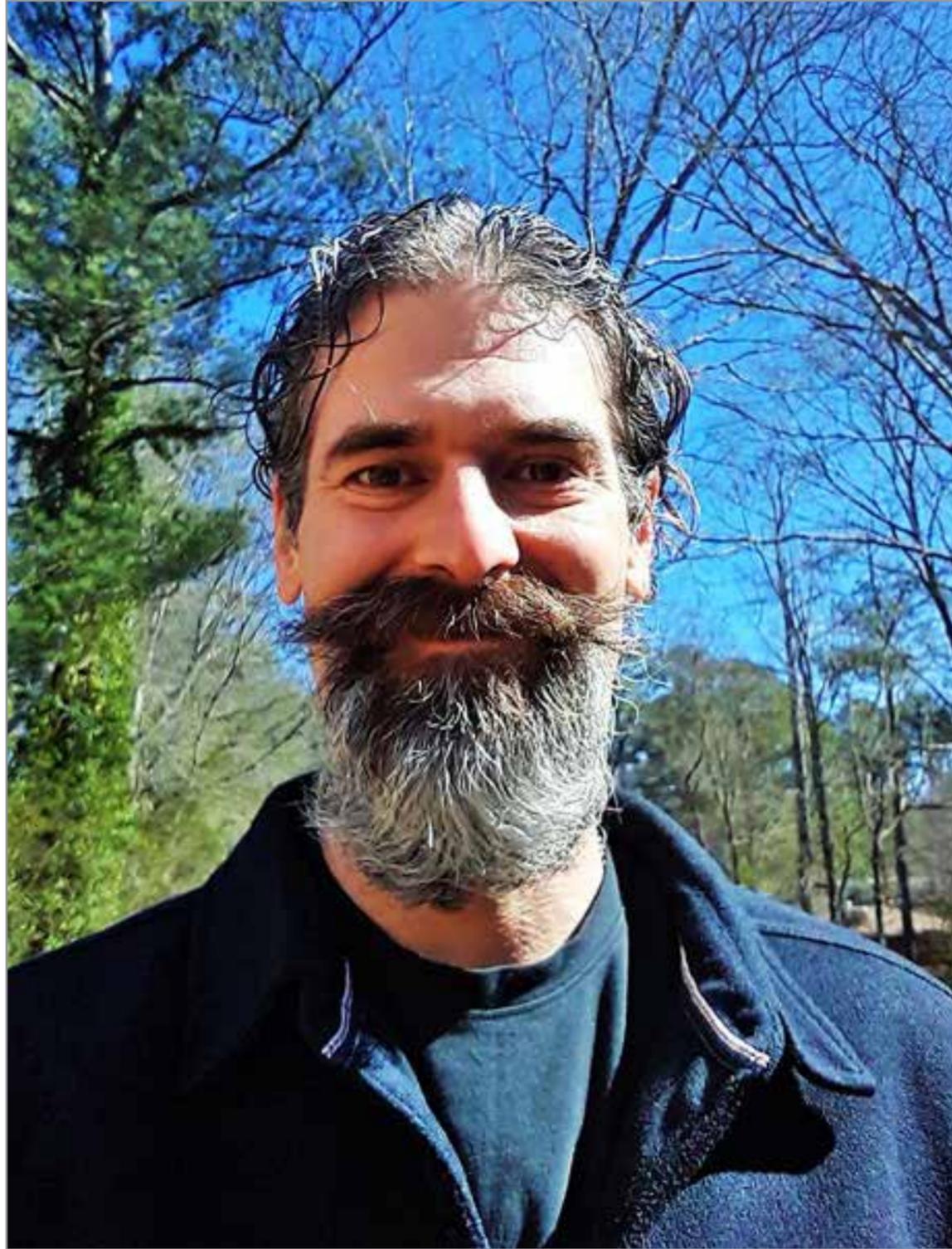
## IF YOU KNOW HOW A BOREEN SOMETIMES

If you know how a boreen sometimes tunnel's the light,  
You will know how it came delving towards me, carrying  
The black outline of a man.  
His face wore the generations of a settled people.  
His eyes green with land.  
His persona as sharp and awkward as hawthorn.  
He asked me what in God's name brought me  
Here, to this out-of-the-way place, as if his owning it  
Was a separate thing – already my going was in his voice.  
I answered it was poetry – poetry brought me.  
He turned and looked at the fields – the way  
A shepherd might look for a lost sheep.  
Finally, he nodded, satisfied with whatever bargain  
He made with himself.  
Then, with nothing agreed, we walked on together, while  
The wet day shook itself vigorously in the sun.

## MY DAUGHTER HAS TROUBLE WITH COLOUR

One day my daughter asked  
If everything was in black and white  
When we were young.  
And I told her it was, as I remember it.  
But white then was much deeper, richer  
Than today's white, we called it Persil white.  
And the women then gleamed under  
White skies, lit by a white sun.  
And all the men wore suits – suits that held  
Seven different kinds of black, stitched  
Into the fibers, so that one could see  
The unique and relative luminance of Mourning,  
Luxury, Evil and Darkness.  
Now her teacher has rung to tell me  
My daughter has trouble with colour.  
He doesn't laugh when I say  
She is taking after me.

Scott Thomas Outlar lives and writes in the suburbs outside of Atlanta, Georgia, USA. He is the author of seven books, and his work has been nominated multiple times for both the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. More than 2,300 of his poems, essays, and short stories have been published in 400 different literary venues. Outlar guest-edited the Hope Anthology of Poetry from CultureCult Press as well as the 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 Western Voices editions of Setu Mag. He has been a weekly contributor at Dissident Voice for the past eight years. Selections of his poetry have been translated into Afrikaans, Albanian, Azerbaijani, Bengali, Cherokee, Dutch, French, Hindi, Italian, Kurdish, Malayalam, Persian, Serbian, and Spanish. More about Outlar's work can be found at <https://17numa.com/>



## GRACE AND BEAUTY

Your adventurous spirit  
is a poem in motion

like a pelican dancing  
with its shadow on the waves  
before skipping atop the water

proving the truth that Jesus  
wasn't the only  
force of nature  
to play around  
with miracles and magic.

Centered, calm, and balanced  
in the groundless experience  
of "just being"  
your oceanic presence  
radiates outward  
with peace of mind,  
strength of body,  
and kindness of heart.

Each ripple returning  
from shoreline to source  
is imbued with the essence  
of goodwill you share  
and spread across the earth.

Scott Thomas Outlar

## IN IT, OF IT, AND CAN'T SKIP AROUND IT

A friendly butterfly  
fluttered by  
in the summer breeze,  
landed on a leaf  
beside me on the path,  
and proceeded  
to slowly spread wide each wing  
like a peacock strutting during a private show  
to reveal its black and sharp blue beauty.

I did what any reasonable man  
wandering through the woods would:  
stood and stared in awe  
before whispering a prayer of appreciation  
for the magical nature of this blessed existence.

Later on, some beast of the bank  
stuck a finger in my eye  
while sucking several notes  
straight from my soul.

It all balances out in this world.

A pound of flesh for the frenzied feast  
and a wink to the stars come the save.

## DOZEN BOTTLE BLACK LIGHT SPECIAL

Masochistic rites of passage  
like an inverted Saturn's return  
that flips you back  
to ancient pages of the script  
for one final taste of sorrow  
before ascension

Take it on the chinny-chin-chin  
where a goat beard grows  
to cushion the blow

or snort pixie dust  
to gain heights of heaven  
until Alice can fetch the antidote  
offering survival

Let's dial down to the granular tones  
and teach our tinnitus ears  
that even old buzzes can learn new tricks

when data flows in waves  
from the depths of a pulsing tube  
the pressure point  
is sure to shatter static's senses

But what remains of the shards and specks  
with memories etched upon their tiny fabric?

It's all a reflex of muscles  
twitching in the neurons  
of two split hemispheres  
that eventually reach  
a state of exhaustion  
and decide to form a third  
that births true oneness

Stephen Haven's *The Flight from Meaning* was a finalist for the International Beverly Prize for Literature. His earlier poetry collections include *The Last Sacred Place in North America*, selected by T.R. Hummer as winner of the New American Prize for Poetry; *Dust and Bread*, winner of the 2009 Ohio Poet of the Year prize; and *The Long Silence of the Mohawk Carpet Smoke-stacks*. His poems have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *North American Review*, *Salmagundi*, *Crazyhorse*, *The European Journal of International Law*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Arts & Letters*, *Blackbird*, *Guernica*, *Western Humanities Review*, and in many other journals. Twice a Fulbright Professor of American Literature in Beijing universities, for 12 years Haven served as Director of low-residency MFA Programs, at Ashland University and at Lesley University, and for 24 years he served as Editor or Director of the Ashland Poetry Press. He is Core Professor of Literature and Creative Writing at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

## THE BROKEN BOTTLE

What was that mistaken midnight, when without  
 Your brother, drunk with the swish of your  
 Own promise, you wandered to the Broken Bottle?  
 High School basketball shooting star!  
 Which of the parched men cheered you  
 Earlier that evening, then ushered in the mug  
 Of each gaunt letter, each lost job, then held  
 You down in the quick of that moment,  
 Signed for no reason you could ever imagine  
 Their names on the bloom of your cheeks?  
 The initials of two slashes on each?  
 The shattered glass secured you to the mirror  
 Of your unshaven future. Each morning now,  
 At daybreak, they glare from your sleep-drenched face



Stephen Haven

## COASTAL REDWOODS

*Djerassi Foundation, Woodside, CA*

You arrive in a strange oasis of time,  
Sit on a mountainside, then off in the distance  
Numb in the Pacific cold you dip your toes,

The air still warm around you, a bird calling  
Above the white girdled horizon, the smoke and mirror  
Of that show. Through a cracked signal

Each day your love phones. No one can say  
Where the blank line divides those two robin eggs,  
Water, sky. In the Asian midst of someone passed

Or passing, one wears a white dress, you yourself the line  
Where your father, your mother once died.  
The mist that never quite quits is a hand that lifts

Like a yarmulke from your bald tête.  
Even as you shoulder only a water bottle  
You go suddenly Atlas. It's a tough business

Muscling the power forwards  
Of endless sky at every side of you  
Crowding the edge of your polished head.

Your inner gym rat pushes back. It's mostly  
The redwoods you admire, roots that sink  
5 or 10 feet, bundled together underground

So that they might truss  
Their backs against an arctic blast  
Or the slow seduction of gravity's long pull.

The tips of those trees sip  
From that ocean mist, suck moisture  
Through the hollow xylem. If your love were here

You would say to her, Buck it up, hon,  
*Let's get our orphan on!* When those  
Mammoth trees drop, shoots drill out around

A rotting stump, spiral outward, upward  
Clear the center of that circle, tap  
The still stirring roots. Otherwise, too ingrown,

They wither, die. They call them *Cathedral Spires*,  
More whimsically *Fairy Rings*. It's then you say,  
*But can it work for two? Just so, my nub, I enter you.*

## ON THE KENNEBEC RIVER

The kids are lashing logs together, drilling boards,  
Screwing, binding, sawzalling till they call it  
A barge. Freedom's deep in this

Late August Maine when it treads  
The river swift, fate swimming fast behind it.  
Two canoes, three rafts nothing more

Than old sheathing weathered in the yard  
And strapped to a picnic table  
Four blue barrels. On top they mount

An awning and a grill, Miller on ice  
Side saddling each swamped vessel.  
Call it a flotilla, rubber Family Dollar rings,

Everything launched in the tidal flow.  
They'll ride to the sea. That's the kids' plan.  
Surf the high life back again. They don't fear

The shallows or the Harbor Master's glare.  
They laugh off any face-off with the Man:  
Boating regulations? *Sir, you see*

*Any boats around here? Five miles upstream*  
My daughter tells me, *Park your worried*  
*Dad-eyes, Dad! Learn to let it go! We all take*

Shots but mine are photos, cheer  
The possibilities of their ripped currents,  
No dollars stitched to the river width.

I steer six beers to a rented cabin  
Remembering especially a Gallo half gallon,  
My father's old Corolla, the black lift

Of an Adirondack highway, cutting through  
The absence of all color that seemed  
Winter's strip tease. Sharp in the face

Of those adolescent midnights  
In the tick of that split line  
The safe glide home was the lie I told.

Whatever there was of fate and freedom  
There was a fishtail between them.  
The radials gripped the hard, glazed road.

Thaddeus Rutkowski is the author of seven books, most recently *Tricks of Light*, a poetry collection. His novel *Haywire* won the members' choice award from the Asian American Writers' Workshop. He teaches at Medgar Evers College and received a fiction writing fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts. He lives with his wife in Manhattan.



## STRANGERS IN THE NIGHT

I met a stranger—or a stranger met me—at a blind professor's house. A party was happening there; I'd heard about it while I was at a café across the street. Someone told me about the party, so I went. The professor was sitting on his couch and smoking, dropping ashes near a tray on a cushion. He was shaking hands with anyone who approached. "Introduce yourself," he was saying. "I'm blind."

I told him my name, and he said, "I haven't seen you for a hundred years."

I made my way to the back "porch," which was actually a fire-escape landing. Looking over the rusted railing, I could see people schmoozing below. From the apartments around the courtyard, neighbors occasionally yelled at the partiers to shut up.

At one point, a young woman on the fire escape called my name, and I went toward her. She told me we worked together, in the same building but on different floors. "I saw you at the laser printer," she said. "You were wearing a button-down shirt and a tie."

I didn't remember seeing her there, but we must have shared the elevator or passed each other in the building's "lobby," which was more like a hallway. We might have walked next to one another in the column of drones heading to and from work.

"That was my dork suit," I said.

Her neck-length hair went out to one side in a wave, and her face drew my attention. We seemed to have chemistry, though I didn't know what that meant; I was no chemist. We seemed to be simpatico, but I knew even less about that. It was enough that she knew my name and had called out to me. That sort of acknowledgment had not happened often. In fact, it had not happened before. True, some people called to me without knowing my name—they called me Hombre or Mister or You—while others knew my name but chose not to address me at all.

Thaddeus Rutkowski

I left the party but soon had second thoughts. Where was I going? Home? What was there? A movie on TV, a magazine on the floor?

I went back to the party—that was the key move, that I went back—and the person who'd called to me was still there, on the metal porch over the dark garden. She was almost hidden by people's heads and shoulders.

"I came back," I said.

"Why?"

"To see you."

\*

Later, the blind professor liked to tell anyone who would listen that we'd met at his party. "They met on the back landing," he would say. "Right there, on the fire escape. He wasn't even invited."



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

## SLEEPING ON THE SUBWAY

It was late at night when I got on the subway. I had to travel from eastern Queens back to my place in lower Manhattan. I'd been told the subway would be convenient, but I wasn't looking forward to the ride. The seats (the benches) were hard, and the lighting was bright. According to the map posted on the wall, I had a long way to go.

I was tired, and, worse, I was paranoid. I was the only passenger in the car. I looked around for vigilantes. I'd heard about the one who'd shot four unarmed "panhandlers." Would I be a target? And if so, of whom—the vigilante or the panhandlers? A vigilante or a group of panhandlers could enter at any station.

I could deal with a vigilante. All I had to do was behave calmly, not give him a reason to draw his unregistered weapon. Vigilantes usually pleaded "self-defense" after shooting someone, so I didn't want to engage one in conversation. I wasn't feeling very polite.

I wasn't looking forward to meeting anyone asking for money, either. If someone said to me, "Give me ten dollars," what would I do? And what if that person were part of a group, all interested in the same ten dollars? That amount was something to me, and I wouldn't have been happy parting with it. However, in my shaky state of mind, I might have been willing to donate whatever I had.

Presently, another passenger came into the car. He looked jumpy, and he took a seat at the other end. He might just have been a nervous guy. But he might have been someone with an illegal handgun, ready to take the law into his own hands. If a group of youths approached him and asked for money, all heck might break loose.

I slid down in the molded-plastic seat and fell asleep.

When I woke, I was alone. I looked at the route map and realized I had missed my stop. But not by much. Still, I had traveled into a neighborhood new to me. I could get out and cross over to the other track—if there was a free-transfer path—or I could leave the station and walk. If I stayed in the station, the next train going my way could take a long time to arrive. While waiting, I might fall asleep again. However, if I left the station, I might not find the best route. I might walk in a large circle, and I might not know it until I'd made a complete, mile-long roundabout.

I climbed the stairs from the platform and saw a street I recognized. I followed it past new side streets and small clearings. In the open areas I saw some night pigeons and one or two night squirrels, foraging in the light of streetlamps. In a relatively short time, I was home.

Wiltrud Dull was born in Germany 1954, she lives in Woodford, Co. Galway since 1980. Daily life with all emotions, impressions, and experiences are her subjects. It does her good to get stuff on paper. Since many years she is a member of the "PortumnaPenPushers" a wonderful writers group. Her poems are published in: Baffle Poetry Collections, Baffle Chap book 2018, Maple Leaves Anthology 2005, The Blue Max Review 2015, Boyne Berries 2015 and 2018, SiarSceal "Anthology- Centenary in Reflection 1916", and anthologies 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2020. Live Encounters Poetry Anthology Dec. 2020, 2021. Shorelines arts festival 2018- Pens to Lens project. Bangor poetry competition –handwritten and ornamented display. Her poem " Würzburg 16th of March 2015" was set to piano and soprano by contemporary music composer Derek Ball. She has read her poems on Scariff Bay Radio and local community radio Loughrea. Shorelines Arts Festival 2021 – bobbins and pens, "only for this"project, photos interpreted by poems. Shorelines Arts Festival 2022- writing 3 pieces for the" In Focus" exhibition in Portumna Castle- interpretation of 3 photos by photographer Brenda Lawlor.



## UKRAINIAN, IRISH, GERMAN FANTASIES

Believe me, I want to write a witty thingy to force a smile on everyone's face.  
But the writing on the wall is dire.

Solar powered tanks and electric military jeeps, rambling through enemy territory invade my mind. Queuing at charging points, enemy soldiers swap cigarettes and pics of their girls. What the hell is all this about!

A sky, closed to all military planes and drones, patrolled by virtual angels (Elon Musk, you hear?), sparks the world's largest ceiling fresco, painted by Tiepolo to life.

Just another contrived fantasy while I sip my beloved Irish Coffee, remembering this piece of art in my German birth town. This enormous fresco was rescued for the world from obliteration during the second World War. Ukrainian people try to save their treasures at this moment.

Rapid fire news shoot from the radio and TV, helplessly I cry. Nothing funny.

I read, that I possess tremendous power to make my life miserable or joyous.

Herr Goethe, really? Tremendous, isn't that Trump's beloved choice of words.

The atmosphere around me in my comfortable chair gets explosive. In two years we could see him return—on top. We could be squeezed from both sides.

I open the front door, listen into the dark, any planes above?

A glorious star-studded sky. I never make out the Zodiac signs. I am sure it's written in the stars—the answer to all our troubles. I seem not to have any tremendous power though.

At least I smile now.

Wiltrud Dull

2010 - 2022

13  
YEARS

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