

2010 - 2022



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
JANUARY 2023

MANTRA OF WORDS
MARK ULYSEAS

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Paper lanterns celebrating the New Year, Luang Prabang, Laos.
Photograph by Mark Ulyseas



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

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

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

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor
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JANUARY 2023

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Mark Ulyseas has served time in advertising as copywriter and creative director selling people things they didn't need, a ghost writer for some years, columnist of a newspaper, a freelance journalist and photo-grapher. In 2009 he created *Live Encounters Magazine*, in Bali, Indonesia. It is a not for profit (adfree) free online magazine featuring leading academics, writers, poets, activists of all hues etc. from around the world. March 2016 saw the launch of its sister publication *Live Encounters Poetry*, which was relaunched as *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* in March 2017. In February 2019 the third publication was launched, *LE Children Poetry & Writing* (now renamed *Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers*). In August 2020 the fourth publication, *Live Encounters Books*, was launched. He has edited, designed and produced all of *Live Encounters'* 261 publications (till January 2023). Mark's philosophy is that knowledge must be free and shared freely to empower all towards enlightenment. He is the author of three books: *RAINY – My friend & Philosopher*; *Seductive Avatars of Maya – Anthology of Dystopian Lives* and *In Gethsemane: Transcripts of a Journey*.

<https://liveencounters.net/mark-ulyseas-publisher-editor-of-live-encounters-magazines/>
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Poetry is one of the most fugitive arts: it can be assigned to memory, taken and hidden in the mind, smuggled into smoky cabin back rooms, recited there and then conveyed only by speech to another person. It is therefore the most likely to survive colonization. - Eavan Boland

MANTRA OF WORDS

The mantra of words never ceases to engage and amplify the thoughts of a poet as the poem crystallises into a gem. There is a synergy between a poem and the ether that resonates and embraces a reader of these words. For without *these* words, will we be able to hear the music of minds churning to the rhythms of souls?

Some poets' works remain through the ages whilst others fade into oblivion once they have moved on to another world. Why are the *mantras of words* of these poets (those whose works are remembered and shared through the years), and those that are forgotten as generations fade and new ones emerge, different? Is it related to cultural sensitivities or is there something more?

Language plays a decisive and divisive role in super-imposing cultural facets on non-native speakers of a language. Languages that are widely spoken have the advantage of propelling poets' works into the world. But still, despite this advantage, many poets just come and go like the tide, whilst others' works remain for posterity.

Now, more than ever, there exists a fantastic energy that is inducing poets to publish at a frenzied pace, both in hard copy and online. Is this urgency aroused by a yearning to leave a legacy behind, one that will capture readers' memories for a long time to come? Or, is this a feeding frenzy of the ego, to be noticed and to instigate readers to react and acknowledge one as a poet? Or, is this in search of *acceptance* by other poets?

Are literary awards an essential barometer of the 'value' of a poet's work over contemporaries? Or, merely, a politically correct gesture? Or, something else?

Is it necessary to churn out a poem, about one a week, to keep one's avatar alive on social media? Is there an underlining fear that absence from social media will lead to one being relegated to obscurity, like a leaf on a tree deep in the Amazon forest?

In these times of a manic media and a prevailing vicious form of cultural appropriation and cannibalism of words, how can one define oneself as a poet?

How many poets have become victims of the hashtag generation and its warped sense of correctness and lost themselves in a maze of self-indulgence while the world is at war with free speech?

Does the poetry of today *really* reflect reality or are many poets inspired by the concentric circles of fashionable hashtags and a nauseating political correctness? And are they threatened by a marauding cancel culture, which determines their choice of words?

Does colour of one's skin, attire, sexual preference, ethnicity or history of one's homeland act as a free pass to being accepted as a poet without running the gauntlet of critique?

There are so many questions but not so many acceptable answers to justify *not* writing poetry.

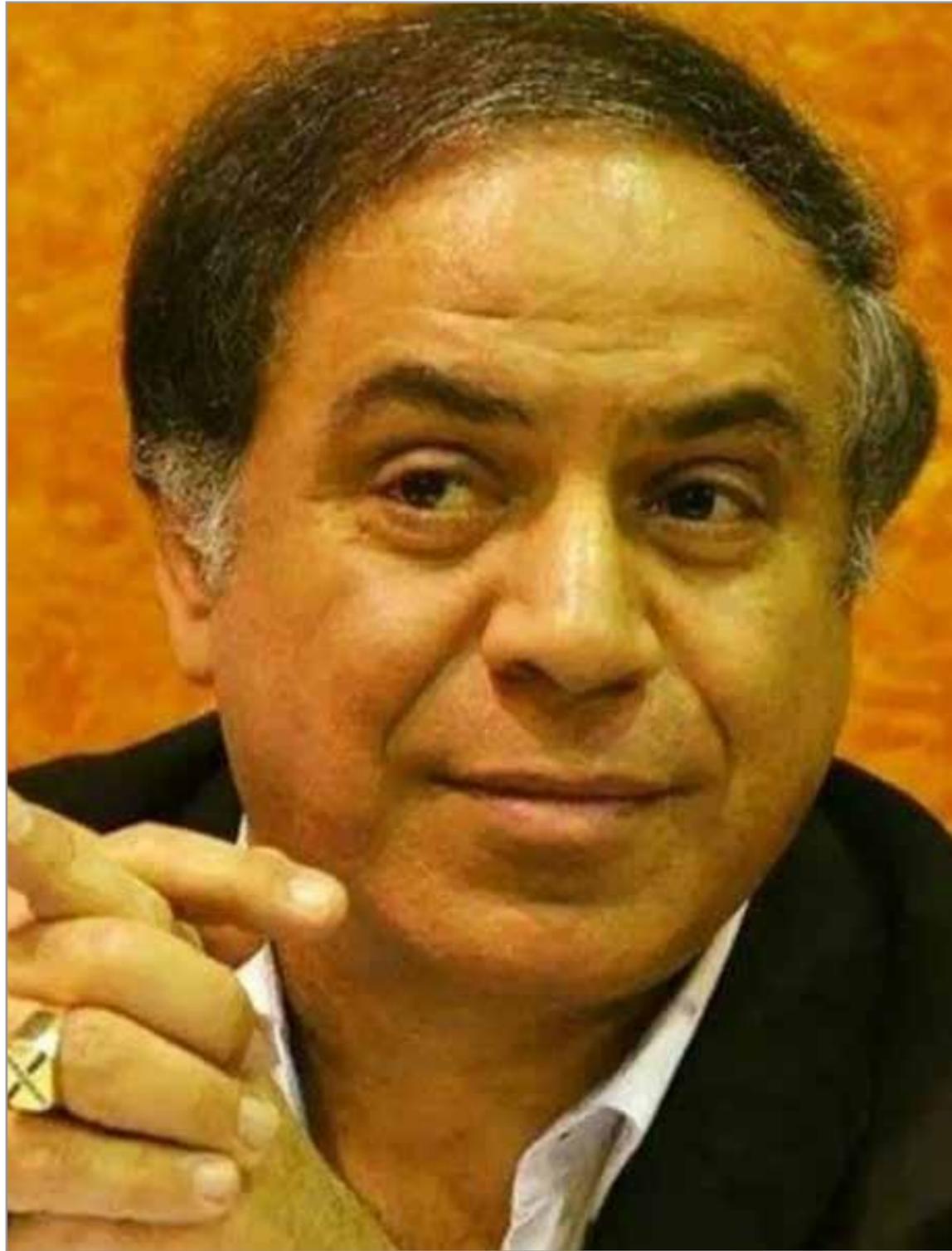
Poets today have a great responsibility to a growing number of violent defragmenting societies. Poets must fearlessly stimulate minds to reach above and beyond the atmosphere of hate towards what should be – a world of inner beauty that shines a light and drives away the suffocating darkness threatening to extinguish hope.

Live Encounters has, over the years, published work of inspiring *published poets* and *aspiring* new ones... Poets who craft their work as messages of great introspection, reflection, revelation and beauty from the world of souls.

For without listeners and readers, where will poetry exist?

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

"I still have no way to survive but to keep writing one line, one more line, one more line..."
 – Yukio Mishima



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

Translated from Arabic by Salwa Gouda.

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



THE MARGIN IS AN AVENGER

Nothing but loss
 No door opens.
 The people here have
 No heart or mind.
 They are more rigid than stones
 That do not belong to them
 And worse than a king of the bottom
 Yearning for him.

Open a door to the soul
 Enter a mind you've never seen before
 Run away for a walk
 Rule a land you are renouncing
 That witnesses an opposition against a stranger
 Who looks like crows croaking by your bed.

All disappointments are chasing your
 Shadow on the street.
 The memory faded
 And it was filled with the treasures
 Of the first years in the village.
 No one in the narrow world
 Offers you a hand to
 Rise from the stumbling
 Blocks of the sun
 Or to escape from the mistakes of
 The street and the people.

Ahmad Al-Shahawy

continued overleaf..

THE MARGIN IS AN AVENGER *contd...*

I am nothing but a speechless
 Language guard
 Who slept close to the night
 Without an awakening moon
 Or a sun that washed the soul of
 Your hands from the dirt
 Stuck to the edge of a
 Bird above the head.

You came to escape from
 The bottom that immersed all the people
 But the bottom refused and took control.
 He forgot that you are the son of the
 Descendants of the earliest orphan.
 You dreamt of a text that slept on
 The doorsteps of the house
 But the margin is vengeful
 And heartless.

You fought wars that were not
 Confined to guarding angels
 But your demons wrote your loss
 In a long forgotten notebook
 And you stayed up damn nights alone
 Without a supporter to help steal
 Some light for you
 And you walked to a coast
 Of pleasures you did not know.
 They did not come to wander near
 Socotra dragon tree.
 There is only evidence of murder
 And people seek to be expelled
 From false paradises
 And turning a blind eye to
 The braided despair
 On the palms of blood.

Your violin strings are burnt.
 You lost the melody that leads to
 Your trees at night.
 You sank and lost the scale in water
 And no musical rhythm floats
 To denote the body of music.

And like a dog that trampled hell
 I went to enumerate the virtues of fire
 Upon a mountain that quakes in you.

You have been praising in
 The name of your father,
 Perhaps he will come
 From his grave at night
 To plant trees that kill
 The summer heat
 To save your dog from
 The neighbor's poison.
 The dog that knows all
 Your secrets
 That stays awake on the pages
 Of your book
 Until you finish the first
 Text about a house
 Where stray cats inhabit
 And check your inner self in loss.

You are asked to throw your dice
 May luck come to you
 As a deposed king
 Who was looking for
 Places in you
 To bury what remains
 Of the memory.

NO ONE CARES ABOUT THE MURDERED INSIDE ME

In my head
Fire ants walk.
I do not know their type or name.

They colonized me
As if I were Solomon
Or as if I were his vast land
Or as if he wanted to be
Next to Jinn in me.

I am not in the position of
Prophecy or kinship
And I have no possessions or miracles.
I hope the queens die
For the ants to depart.
I ask for deliverance from a distant god.

Head ants
Came without permission.
I do not know the reason
Or the date for them.
If the whole world is standing
For me on the edge
They run in my veins
Like damaged blood.
I feel like a needle prick
Blocking my blood movement
And it does not find the place.

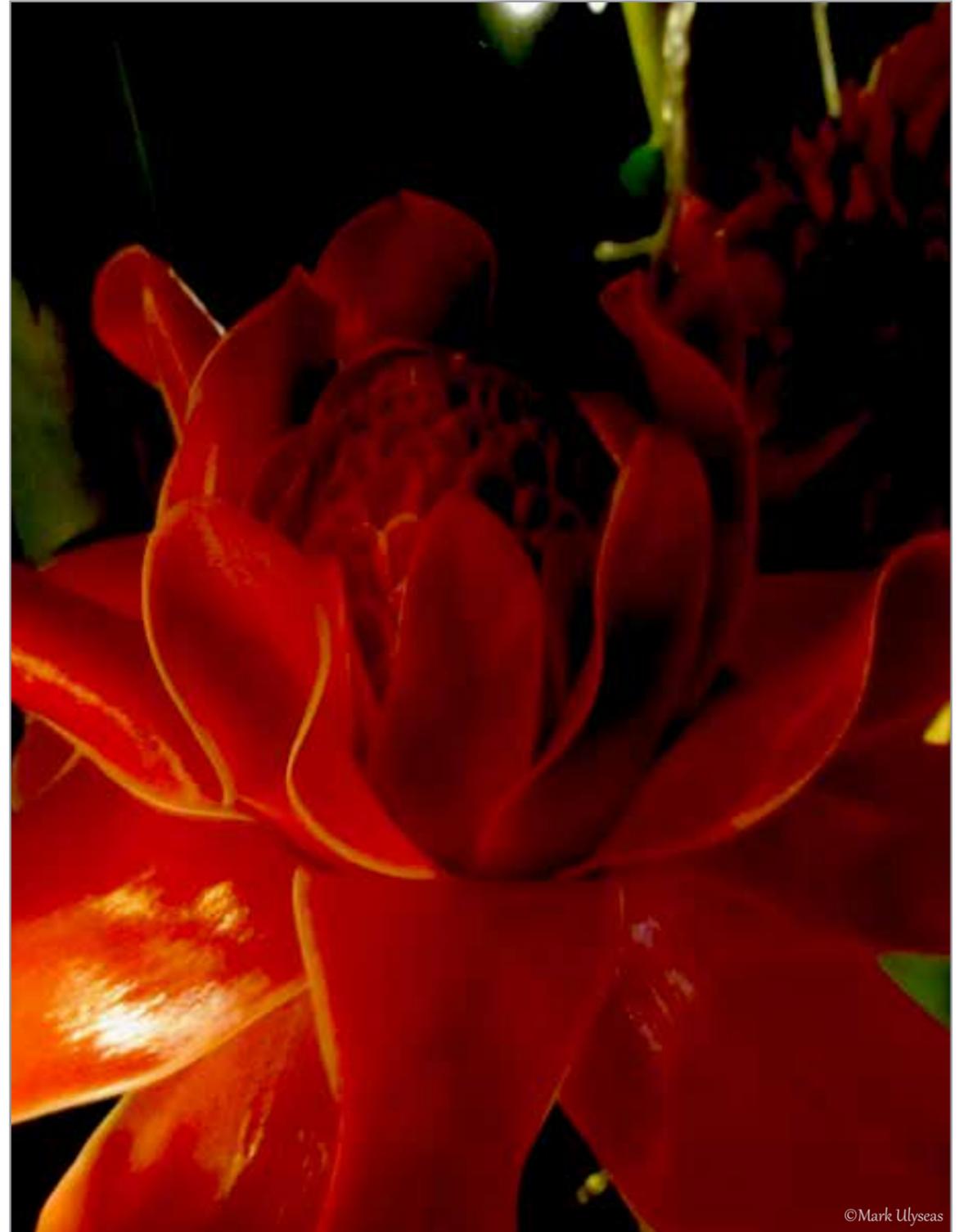
My head became the kernels
Of an orphan tree,
Ants gnaw.
There is no place for me in eternity
With its long tongue-like a palm tree-
That crushes textile insects.
They do not go out of their homes
Nor afraid to be broken
As if they are proud of their surah
In the "holy Quran"

The guardians of the gates
Of my heaven failed
To close the space
In front of evil, Jinn, and demons
When they limp in my brain
As if there is no door to heaven above me
From it I ascend and evacuate the air.

I hate the dust of angels
Which licks my mind.
Ants blindfold my eyes
And obliterate my ears.
I do not like to being killed by
Ant wars inside me.
What hurts is that I became a battlefield
And no one cares about the murdered
Inside me.
While the killers are at large
Wandering the streets of my head.
Unscrupulous loafers
Meteor shower hits my ground
And my medicine is to ignore any
Crawling or ants' sounds.

NO ONE CARES ABOUT THE MURDERED
INSIDE ME *contd...*

I would not leave myself to the
One who hits more
I must resist.
A second chance is necessary.
There is no eternal darkness.
Death can even be defeated
By living as the trees which I have planted
Around my field taught me.
Someone is waiting for me to rejoice
But he is far away and I do not see him.
He will come so he told me
And the bed-whose sheets I chose-
Is longing for my head to sleep.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

LIKE BOILING FIRE IN WATER

As simple as a busy street
 As easy as ants wrestling with a drop of water
 As tame as a long text without explanation
 That penetrates every thick blackness
 Out of all the rules of the people of heaven
 And separated by the pedestrian path
 Leading to his feet.

Beds expel him when he insults them
 And when he puts fire in their fingers.

Sleep steals his dreams
 And leaves him alone in the wild.
 He wrestles with people from ages past
 Who hurries towards the brain of God.

An old book on the history
 Of the people of blood
 Raging like fire in boiling water.
 The owner of a strange narration
 On a sheet of silence
 The people are confused about its title.
 Truly faithful to the masks of the ancients
 And goes to the metaphors to fetch images.

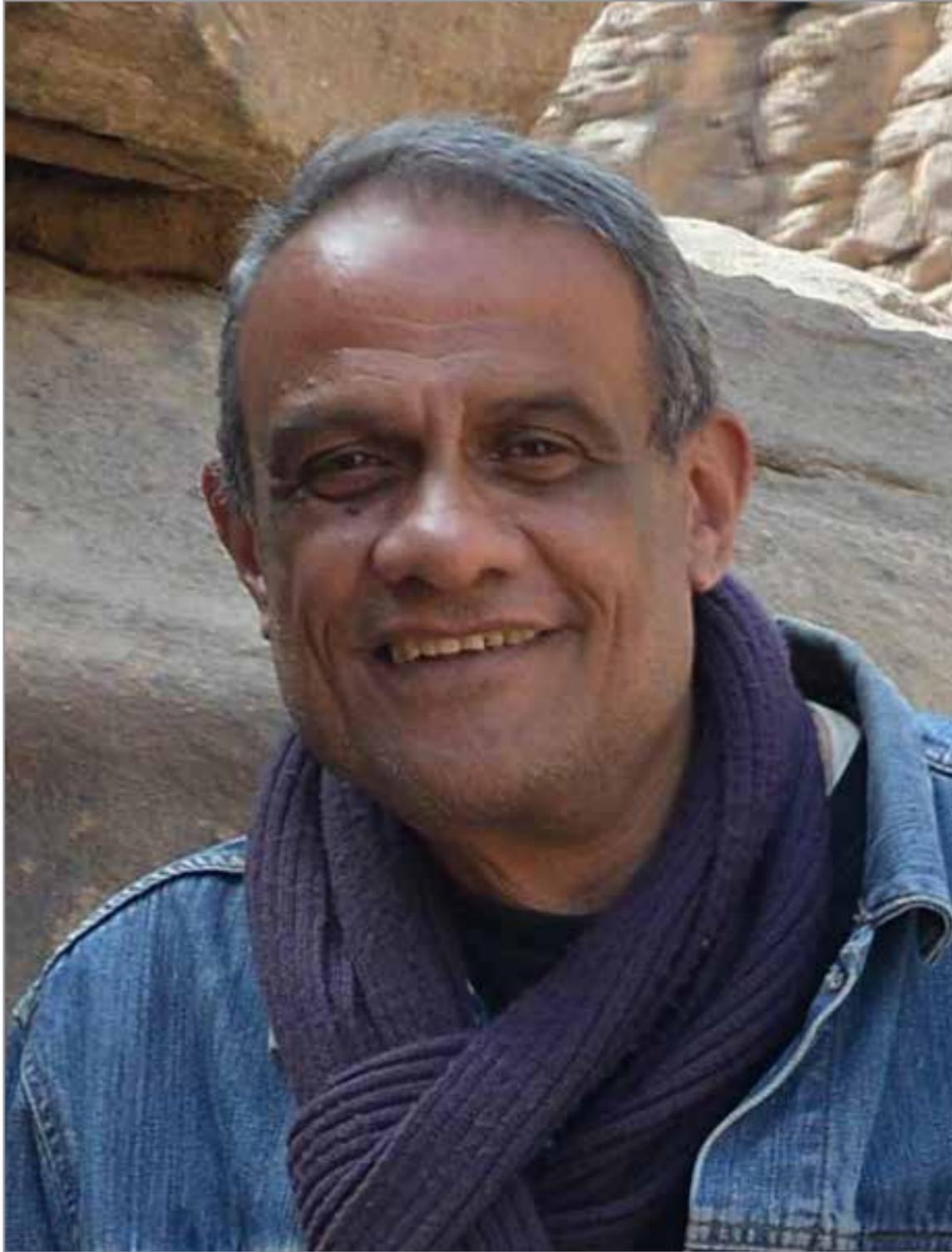
Everything for him is like rushing water
 And all in front of him the same.
 All the words on the right are useless.
 There is no thread in needles
 To sew the heavens with
 Nor a bamboo stick in front of his hand to strike
 People of the wrongdoers.

Did he know that planets can sleep on his shirt?
 And that the light of the sun shines
 From the pockets of his brain
 And other homes of a new inspiration
 Time will build its windows in the distant void?

Did he know that, with the senses
 The cracks of the earth perceive
 The biography of the one walking on it?

Born in Alexandria in 1960, Alaa Khaled has published Seven Divans, the last one being *For once only* 2015, and 4 prose books. Khaled has written a biography of his home city, Alexandria, titled *Alexandrian Portraits*. Published 4 novels including *Alexandria Labyrinth* 2021. He graduated in Biochemistry, University of Alexandria, in 1982.

These poems are translated from Arabic by Amal Shafek.



I

I talk to you
standing behind the curtain of life
I watch your unbounded eyes
like a sea resting its lids
at low tide
you, even absent lustful desire
resplendent
your body softens
desire racing ahead of our coupling date
as if meeting fate, before fate follows its own and overflows

Alaa Khaled

II

Your thumb lightly taping on my back
like indentations that gather water
rivulets between rain drops
this map which transforms my body to celestial galaxies
where stars glisten
and darkness deepens in between
the meandering lines your hypnotic thumb draws
scatter my body in all directions
map lines to gates of illuminated cities
at that moment
every part of my body marvels before the city's gate
where he had a life
retrieved through your thumb
my scattered map

III

I live a dream as long as life
your face is still estranged to me, just like mine
but I am accustomed to life next to you
I do not look at myself often
this second life
after we have lost our first life confirming our truth
planting doubt in our features until they bled forth
perhaps from fear of traceless melted lives
we left this scar as our trace
We were, we are, and we will remain with many faces and lives
without betrayal
without abandonment
our life escapes us at night
our faces trade
but our heart remains one
returning to our eternal scar to recognize ourselves

Alfred Corn's eleventh volume, *The Returns: Collected Poems*, was published in 2022 by Press 53.



MOWER

England, Devon, 1910

Scythe, sweeping a future through thick grass,
The mower a master at exact tasks just those
Who handle an ash shaft abraded soapstone
Smooth by calloused palms like his can grasp—

Likewise, the heft of its swinging jugglery.
He wonders what or what to read in their faces,
Faces of starers, gathering not to praise.
If his tendons stretched to forestall feckless increase,

Giving pleasance back to park and common,
Will he stand by and watch as they're enclosed,
A hedged, divided, plotted ruination?
"Developers, pack of conceited ghosts:

We won't again see meadows thrive like that un.
Ach, it's tethered patchwork fools would rather."
He leans on the handle of his scythe, the posture
Doing as his sigh. And becomes a statue.

Alfred Corn. Photo credit: Miriam Berkley.

Alicia Viguer-Espert, born and raised in the Mediterranean city of Valencia, Spain, lives in Los Angeles. She learned English as an adult, began writing in English in 2017 and that same year won The San Gabriel Valley Poetry Festival Book Contest. She has been a featured poet at numerous venues within the greater L.A. Her work has been published in Colorado Boulevard, Lummock Anthologies, Altadena Poetry Review, ZZyZx Intersections, Panoplyzine, Rhyvers, River Paw Press, Agape Review, Soul-Lit, Dryland, Amethyst Review, Odyseeey.pm, Solum Journal, and Spectrum Publications, among others. Her chapbooks *To Hold a Hummingbird*, *Out of the Blue Womb of the Sea* and *4 in 1*, focus on nature, identity, language, home, and soul. In addition to national and international publications, she is included in "Top 39 L.A. Poets of 2017," one of "Ten Poets to Watch on 2018," by Spectrum. Alicia is a three times Pushcart nominee.



DOVES IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS

I hear doves cooing
 above my window, loud, rhythmic,
 like in those days when they called
 for mates in the Botanical Gardens,
 the sun already bright behind birch
 trees reflected on the square pond,
 your hand resting on my shoulder
 as we sat on the wooden bench.
 We walked among perennials,
 roses, citric orchards, sequoias,
 the cooing followed us through
 narrow dusty paths, beds of herbs.
 We identified the medicinal ones,
Valeriana and *Salvia Officinalis*,
Macromeria Fruticosa, *Rosmarinus*.
 Some mimicked poisonous threads
 of disposition lodged in our DNA,
 you, *Nerium Oleander*, we called adelfas,
 I, *Rhus Toxicodendrum*, poison ivy.
 We knew to touch or being touched
 by these venomous plants will cost us
 painful blisters but we couldn't stop
 from exploring, and our hands danced
 repeatedly to the doves crescendo
 until we made each other sick.

Alicia Viguer-Espert

SUSPICION ON A SEA VOYAGE

I gathered tidbits of my past life and saved them like treasures. That night in the plaza stars pinned to their vault shone, invisible birds sang untimely moving between branches and I, the girl with a ponytail and big eyes, watched strange shadows cross by the silent fountain, listened to midnight music exit an open window, before I saw. Those memories carved the shape of my heart; my ears, so attuned to mystery, still hear the bells ringing in the morning, the town's people surprised talking among themselves about the size of the bull.

Days later, I searched for my mittens, the color of blood and snow, a headless doll by the sill, earmarked books stained with wine, treasures I hid in a wooden box carried inside my suitcase all the way to California. I also brought sheets and towels in a metal container which arrived a month later in a damaged package, printed labels with our two names in gold still visible.

I never learned what happened before our departure, who was killed, what the bull represented, whose blood spilled that night. What I know, because you told me, didn't match the evening news, sounded wrong, untrue. I didn't run away, nor I believe Sento fought with Pau for my attention. Your version brings the scriptwriter of your soap operas to mind, and also, it scares me. Now that we are alone, I search your hands for stains afraid of what I may find, your eyes, I don't dare, but I'm sure of what I saw that night. I think.

ocean breezes
couldn't lift shadows
between hearts



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Anne Elvey lives and works on Boon Wurrung Country in Seaford, Victoria. Her latest poetry collections are *Leaf* (Liquid Amber Press, 2022) and *Obligations of Voice* (Recent Work Press, 2021). Her collection *Kin* (Five Islands Press, 2014) was shortlisted for the Kenneth Slessor Poetry Prize. Anne has recent essays on poetry and poetics in *New Directions in Contemporary Australian Poetry* (ed. Dan Disney and Matthew Hall, 2021) and *Imagination in an Age of Crisis* (ed. Jason Goroncy and Rod Pattenden, 2022). She is an Adjunct Research Fellow in the School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics, Monash University, and an Honorary Research Fellow, Pilgrim Theological College, University of Divinity, Australia. <https://sunlintdrift.com/>



MARIGOLD

a companion dissuading pests
 saffron threads too dear to take from shelf
 sweet potato peeled and boiled pureed for soup
 coin withheld from cause gifted
 pumpkin seeds composted with tough skin
 a citrus navel tinged with green
 tillage of sun
 untended butternut sprouting
 the cumquat tang of must
 amber rest

Anne Elvey

MY DEAR COAT,

You came into my life
on a shopping trip with my
mother, before that long

drought. In Myer Melbourne
she bought the deep
emerald wool and I

you, a size larger
in navy. The green was
not available. My children

were quite young. Perhaps
one or both of them
came with us, the older

spooning froth from Nanna's
cappuccino at our lunch.
As they grew into primary

school and beyond, you
hung in the wardrobe for a
decade or more. El Niño

winters in the climates of this
age were never cold
enough for you. This year

there's a La Niña watch
in force for spring. Crisp
winter days, I have

you on. Both of us
a little shabbier. I'm
comforted by a reminiscence

as by the wear of things.

Gratefully,
A

WHAT IS SHARED

in the banksia skeleton by the path
 on separate arms two rainbow lorikeets perch
 bright against a winter-clear
 sky above grey-green scrub the one i see

best looks out toward the bay from where
 i am just now returning having felt on my skin
 the salt breeze and stopped to hear a modest
 swell to watch spume curdle at the shore

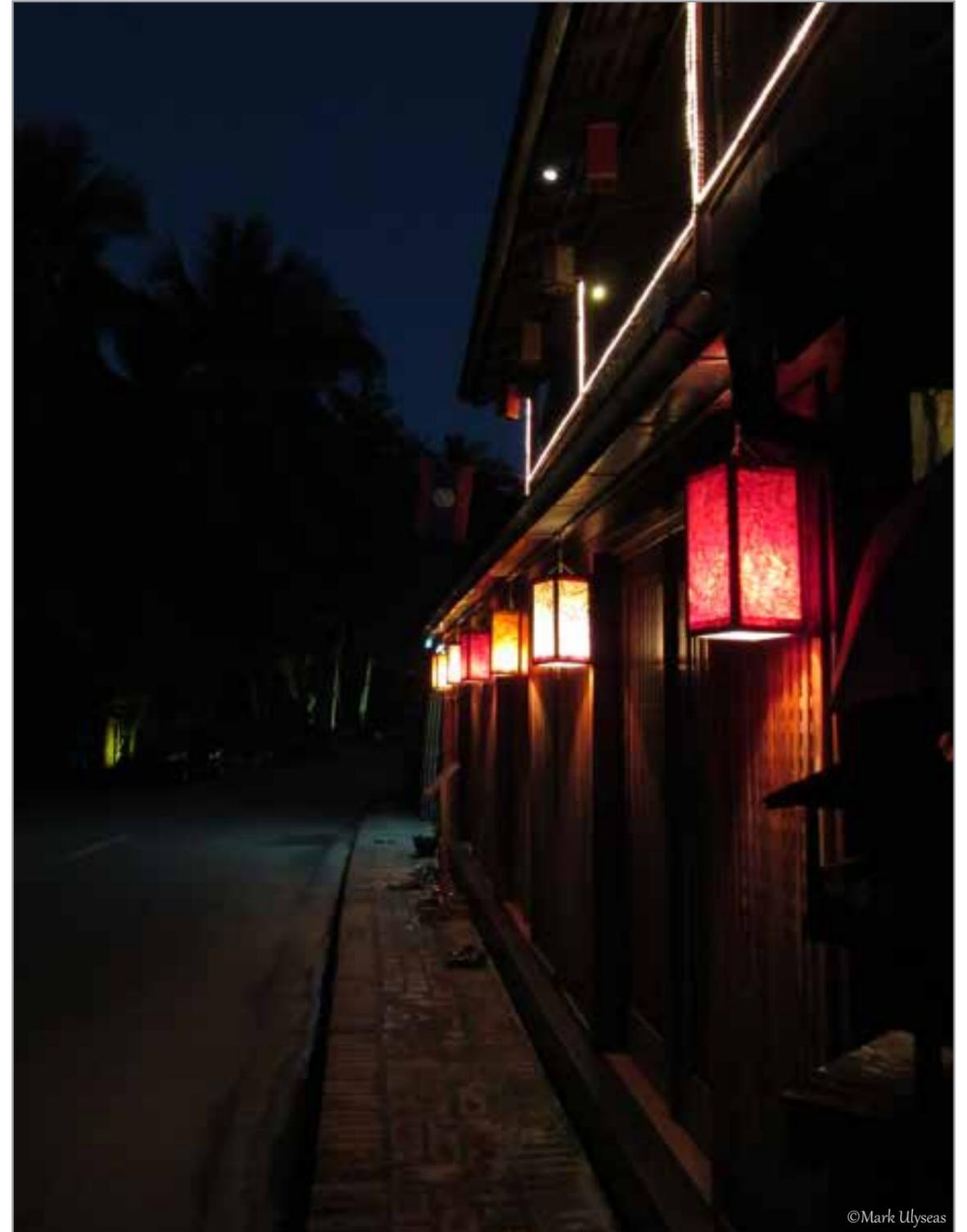
schooled to think a bird must have
 a practical purpose for staring out to
 sea i wonder rather is this lorikeet taking
 time to rest and feed on beauty of a kind

shared across species but looking
 a little different in its eyes

*

once before i noticed
 a wire-load of birds at sunset
 dark against sky and facing
 west pigeons perhaps or ravens
 i was passing in a car
 not slow enough to tell

they'd gone when i returned
 were they a flock i asked
 myself or an unkindness stilled
 admiring the crimson exodus of day



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Anne Fitzgerald's poetry collections are, *Vacant Possession* (Salmon Poetry, 2017), *Beyond the Sea*, (Salmon Poetry, 2012), *The Map of Everything*, (Dublin, Forty Foot Press, 2006) and *Swimming Lessons*, (Wales, Stonebridge, 2001). She founded two school publishing houses in addition to Forty Foot Press. Anne is a recipient of the Ireland Fund of Monaco Literary bursary at the Princess Grace Irish Library in Monaco and lives in Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. For further information see <http://www.fortyfootpress.com/>



SAILMAKER

By the time we round
the *Cape of Good Hope*

I lose count of my stitches
threaded through noses

of shrouds, let slip from stern
as if candles beneath the skin

of waves under moonlight.
No talk, from crow's nest

to bay or berth save for rain
wind strains from timbre.

Anne Fitzgerald

OUT OF 12 MERRION SQUARE, DUBLIN

Only after the bartender
skewers a sliveskin onion through
a sword cocktail stick, do

I tell you of a delicate Dalkey-born
Warrior; sipping my Gibson
and speak of no shrinking violet.

Little did butler Arthur Harper
know, closing Lord Chancellor of Ireland's
Merrion Square front door after

Honourable Violet Albina Gibson,
she would become the only woman in Italy
not longing to have tea with Benito Mussolini.

She is of Anglo-Irish stock, plagued
by poor health, privilege and religion.
Violet's passion for belief drives

through the Church of Ireland,
theosophy and Catholicism, suffers
a breakdown in Kennington after

her brother Victor dies, 1922. And so
begins her series of sojourns at, Buckfast
Abbey, Holloway Sanatorium, Surrey,

and Our Lady of Lourdes convent Rome,
resulting from a set of events, some
known, others best known only to herself.

In broad daylight under a 1926 Roman
sun amongst push and shove
of Blackshirts Violet Albina Gibson takes

a pot-shot at Il Duce. Her revolver's refusals
to release a second bullet allows
Fascists set upon her in Palazzo dei Conservatori.

From insanity pleas to negated truths,
prisoner Violet Albina Gibson 14967, will
toggle between Mantellate prison

and San Onofrio asylum after
her flower pressing hammer proves handy,
when taunted by a fellow inmate.

To save family face clemency is shown
at an in camera Italian trial. Violet is not
invited but commended into the care

of Constance, her sister. Duped upon
arrival on British soil, certified insane
and incarcerated at St. Andrew's Asylum,

Northampton. For twenty nine solitary
years of epistolary, she seeks
medical attention, movement to a Catholic

nursing home, even appeals to Churchill
after Il Duce fell. Violet's letters staff chose
not to post could have papered cell walls.

continued overleaf..

OUT OF 12 MERRION SQUARE, DUBLIN *contd...*

Often behind St. Andrew's high garden
walls Violet was found stood cruciform, not
unlike St. Francis, communing with birds,

lost in thought amongst rhododendrons
and lupines. Recalls Queen Victoria's Court
as a debutant and daughter of the Lord

Chancellor of Ireland, who left Merrion
Square to fight for peace
and physicians to believe she was sane.

At seventy-nine Violet Albina Gibson gave
up the ghost. Psychiatric declared her myth:
she had shot Benito Mussolini, delusional.

By 1956 nobody, whose care
Violet Albina Gibson had been under
is alive to confirm the truth.

TIDEWRACK

When they pulled her off
the rocks her pale moon face
had soft flesh, no lines.
You'd think she hadn't
a blessed care in the world.

Anne M Carson is a poet, essayist and visual artist whose poetry has been published internationally, and widely in Australia, receiving numerous awards including winning and shortlisting in the Martha Richardson medal, and a shortlisting in the 2022 Newcastle Poetry Prize. Her work has been broadcast on national and community radio and she has curated a programme of poems on disability on ABC's Poetica programme. Recent publications include *Massaging Himmler: A Poetic Biography of Dr Felix Kersten* (Hybrid), and *Two Green Parrots* (Ginnindera Press). *The Detectives Chair* is forthcoming from Liquid Amber Press in 2023. One of her poems has been set to choral music, and she has collaborated with a classical pianist in a number of poetry/piano story tellings. She has initiated a number of poetry-led social justice projects, including The River Project Soiree as a fundraiser for the RiverKeepers and a greeting card as fundraiser for the Carbon Positive Charity. She is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing at RMIT, writing a poetic biography of George Sand.

A TOUR-GUIDE TAKES US THROUGH THE NOHANT THEATRE

Nohant, 2019

It was Monsieur Chopin who suggested that the billiard room, could be turned into a theatre – once Madame turned her hand to plays. She developed plays here before risking the big stage in Paris. They also put in a puppet theatre for Monsieur Maurice and he became a respected expert about the *Commedia dell'arte*, actually awarded the Legion d'honneur for his scholarship. As you can see it is spacious – space for sixty. This is how it was left after the last performance. Madame wrote twenty-four plays – some not so successful, some like *Marquis de Villemer* had sensational receptions. She rehearsed them all here first, performing one hundred for her friends and neighbours, making necessary adjustments before putting them before the public in Paris premières. Later even Monsieur Manceau had a show at the Odéon. We'll go to the second storey now. As you do – notice the blue dappled paint on the stairwell walls – such an airy, modern look, another of Monsieur Maurice's innovations. He was taught, you know, by Eugène Delacroix, who was a close friend of Madame and had a studio in the stables, which you can view on the forecourt and visit after the chateau tour.



Anne M Carson

GEORGE SAND'S SON, MAURICE, BOASTS

1848, Nohant

Mama claims it was Chop Chop's penchant for mimicry that prepared the way for the puppet theatre. But it was

me! When maman was poorly, mourning the latest lost Republic (another of her errant children) it was me

who wrapped kerchiefs around his hands, hid behind a chair and used the makeshift puppets to pull her

out of gloom. I had everyone in stitches, including dear dear mamam, all clamouring for more. For me! We love

fun of every hue at Nohant – practical jokes, charades board games – even before Chopin came along to steal

mamam from us. The day after the puppet debut, I began carving heads while mama sewed costumes with all the

miniature accoutrements – tiny little hats, helmets, caps, berets, bonnets, and crowns. Before long we had a whole

Commedia dell'Arte troupe and by the end one hundred little people! I painted curtain and backdrop. Voices courtesy

of family and house guests, improvised from mamam's scripts. We invited the audience to interact – so very

avant garde, making us inordinately proud of our innovation. Once the audience realised their control of the *dénouement*

hilarity and mischief knew no bounds. It may have been a party activity but I took the lion's share on my own shoulders.

hilarity and mischief knew no bounds. It may have been a party activity but I took the lion's share on my own shoulders.

I worked the puppets, solo. I arranged them on a series of hooks and my hands flew from peg-to-peg matching

puppet to action and voice. If I lost pace and missed the peg, the actor had to say their lines without a character

on stage. *Missing the Peg*, we called those mishaps. *Maurice* someone would proclaim from the audience, *has missed*

the peg again! When maman's actor-friends from the Odéon visited and participated in the fun, they took this Nohant

bon mot back to Paris where it was used for many years when actors missed their cues. I may just be a village soul

at heart but that saying went all the way to Paris! I was so enamoured with the puppets that mama built

a dedicated theatre just for me! In what used to be the billiard-room, with a full-sized stage for her to trial

her plays. Our friends travelled all the way from the capital for first nights – women in décolletage gowns – men

in peacock finery. How I loved those puppets – my fill-in little family before I had one I could call my very own.

THE PRESS DECLARES MY VILLEMER “A TRIUMPH”!

1864, The premiere of *Le Marquis de Villemer*, Paris

Come opening night, carriages line up outside
the Odéon, and four or five thousand students

assail the Catholic Club and the Jesuits next door!
They chant *Vive Villemer! Vive George Sand!*

Taunting orthodoxy. Two thousand are turned
away at the Box Office. Constables hand-to-hand

hold back supporters from unhitching my carriage
hauling me triumphantly all the way to Rue Racine!

Vive George Sand! Their words ring in my ears
obliterating rehearsals which had not gone well

the leading man fighting with the leading woman
the sets – execrable. *Mon Dieu!* Still shaken by

the flop of my last three plays. Amazed then
at dress rehearsal when everyone wipes tears

away – ooooh Caroline! Oooh Didier! Ooooh
le Marquis! Not just stagehands (who always love

to weep with the leading lady) but musicians and
fire-men – tears even course down the gas-lighters’

cheeks! What heart it gives me. But discovering
Emperor Napoléon and Empress Eugenie will be

in the house ratchets my nerves. I’m torn between
fear that pious Catholics will boo again en masse

and a candle-flicker of hope that maybe this time
respect might prevail. And then the last curtain falls

and opening night is over. *Flaubert cries like a woman¹*
and the Prince claps enough for thirty claqueurs!

Mobbed when I enter the lobby – the press of bodies
well-wishers’ kisses, and such eloquent outpourings

of *bonhomie* that all my faith in *le peuple* is restored.
Along with faith in my own abilities. Through

the simple act of scratching away, chicken-like,
day after day, telling my humble, rousing tales.

1. George Sand quoted in Curtis Cate, *George Sand: A Biography*.
Houghton Mifflin Company Boston: 1975, 675.

Dr Arthur Broomfield is a poet, short story writer and Beckett scholar from Laois, Ireland. His works and interviews have been published in Ireland, The United Kingdom, Serbia, India and the USA. He is current poet laureate for Mountmellick.



Dr Arthur Broomfield

A COWS AND BULL STORY

'You'd better keep an eye on her till Jimmy comes home,' my father said, 'she'll surely calve tonight.'

It was after eleven on a starless, November night. My brother had gone out drinking and predictions of the hour of his return would be dependent on the company 'he has fallen into,' as my father put it.

'I'm off to bed now, the owl pains is at me again, and keep well away from the bull, even if he is tied. He could break free at a time like this.'

I couldn't repress the glow that warmed me. At barely sixteen my father had entrusted me with the delivery of a new calf to the herd. The cow in question was a Friesen, coming on seven, and one of our best milkers. My father had bought her from Mr McArdle, a calf jobber who called to us every spring. 'She's from a herd in the Golden Vale,' he said. 'The husband died sudden and the wife sold out. I was lucky to get her.' She'd not given trouble before. But there could always be a first time. What if the calf was coming backwards, or a front leg was held behind the head instead of beside it, or what if the calf was dead inside the cow? All these thoughts occupied my mind as I headed out to cross the yard, my torch vaguely scanning the place for a misplaced barrow, or galvanised bucket dropped by Jimmy in his hurry to get away for the night.

'You're sure to be in a rush when there's porter to be drank,' I had heard my father chastise him more than once.

Over my left shoulder, and running at right angles to it, a long, gothic style, row of sheds protected me from the ruins of the old castle in what we called the far yard. The castle rose three stories high and if I looked I could see the top story rising out of the gloom of the shed's grey slates. But I never looked towards it, not at night, not since the day Paddy Moore jumped off the shed roof. That was in daylight. Well he slid at speed more than jumped, right down the steep pitch from the apex, where he'd been pointing the roof tiles, till he ran out of slates and landed in the dung heap outside the calf house. My father always said he was a bit 'touched'. Paddy swore he saw something moving in the castle. A kind of a light shaped like a human figure with no face to it, was how he described it. He was trembling all over, his face had turned whiter than skim milk. 'I seen it boss, on my mother's grave I seen the banshee.'

'He's seen something alright,' my father said, after he sent Paddy into the kitchen for a mug of tea and a smoke, 'otherwise he'd have come down the roof ladder.'

Earlier that year Johnny Smith had paved the yard with hard packed gravel and stones, it measured about twenty paces across. I knew this since the times we measured it out for football games. 'Damn Ever Ready,' I muttered as the torch began to flicker. Visions of the terror in Paddy Moore's eyes made the yard a lot wider now. My boots felt like lead that had been purified through the Betts electrolytic process as I forced one foot forward, then the other, each movement a deliberate act of the will. Something soft brush my leg. The blood drained from my head. 'Tiger,' I blurted out my relief, 'what are you doing out in the cold?' Better a cat than a rat. My right foot rattled against one of Jimmy's abandoned buckets and sent it careering down the yard. It clattered against anything it met on its way, till the noise dropped to an eerie silence.

I sat the torch on a milk churn to the right of the cowhouse door, inside the barn where we stored cattle meal and turnips. I pushed my hand through a hand size hole in the door and fumbled till I found the switch. The light flickered, as usual. Too many times I'd heard my father tell my brother to 'get that bloody light fixed or it'll be the death of one of you yet.' I continued to manipulate the switch till the two sixty-watt bulbs contested the gloom with partial success; under each bulb three or four cows, chained in their stalls, were clearly visible. The remaining fifteen and the bull chained in a stall to himself, resembled spooky figures at dusk; I knew them well, most of them having grown up with me but a stranger would have had difficulty in distinguishing one from the others. As fortune would have it the cow in question was tied into the beam under one of the bulbs. The light was just strong enough for me to assist in the delivery, should my help be necessary. I busied myself, putting plenty of clean straw behind the cow, and the calving jack and ropes against the wall beside me. All I could do now was wait for nature to take its course. I sat on an old milking stool and lit a cigarette. I was wishing she'd hurry up, I wanted it to happen.

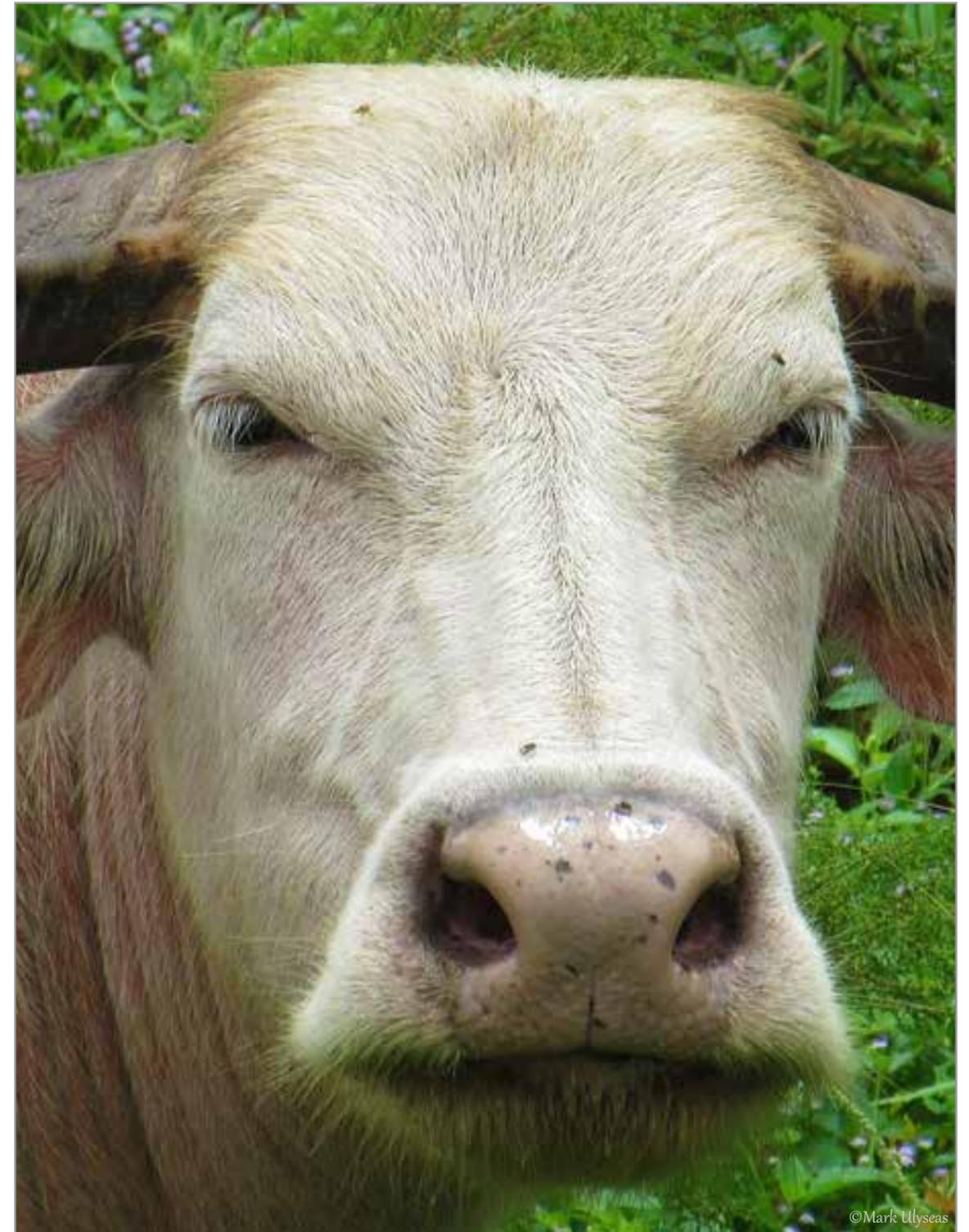
That was when the lights began to act up. Damn I thought that bloody switch again. I hurried up the eight or nine strides to the switch, thinking that a pat or tap would stabilize it. To my surprise the switch was so rock solid that I couldn't move it any way, on or off. But the light continued to waver. That's when the creepy crawlies started at the back of my neck and moved up along my head. The lights were dancing to a pronounced rhythm now, from gloomy overcast to uncanny sunny. Just as I reached the cow that I now wanted, with all my heart, to leave to the care of nature, a succession of sensations across my feet froze me to the concrete floor.

The light, agreeably, sparkled to sunny in time for me to see a stream of rats racing across my boots. They fled from the shed end that was nearest the castle, where my father had chained the bull, when he brought him in for the winter.

The cow began to moan. She had become restless, lying down, and standing back up irregularly. I checked that her pins were fully down, as I had often seen my father do. Judging that they were, and she was on the point of calving, I opened the chain on her neck to give her freedom to settle during the delivery. Two white feet protruded from the cows bearing. All ok so far, I thought. Now for the real crisis, would the calf's head be nestling snugly between its legs, as it should be, or would it be twisted backwards? Christ how will I manage to calve her if it's like that. I secured the ropes of the jack to the calf's feet and waited. 'Give her time,' my father would always say in these situations. 'Wait till she forces then pull gradually like but be firm about it at the same time.' I waited for her to push. Still no sign of the calf's head. Just as my impatience was about to get the better of me she lay down with an almighty groan. 'Don't use the jack, only if you have to,' my father ordered, as I left the kitchen. She forced. The taut spring that was my body relaxed. There, announcing itself to the world was a black spotted, white snout perfectly placed for delivery. I took the gauze like tissue from its nose and felt for its head. A bit big, I thought, I'll surely need the help. I held the jack to her haunches and as she forced again, I ratcheted the jack a few cogs. And waited for her next push. We worked in unison, the cow and me. She half turned her head to look at me pleading, then pushed again. Our combined effort worked to perfection; with a mighty heave and a thunderous roar the calf's head, quickly followed by a shining black body landed on the bed of straw behind its mother. A Hereford cross bull calf couldn't be better. I got the cow up to her feet. She spotted her calf straight away and with much soothing lowing took to lick him as he struggled to find his feet.

I had almost got used to the flickering lights. But my sense of satisfaction was short-lived. A sharp sound, somewhere between a shriek and a wail, was followed by a total blackout. Christ what next! Paddy Moore's Banshee! The torch! I steered my way back to the shed door, half afraid of what my hands might touch as I groped the wall for guidance. At least the torch was still there. It spluttered again when I switched it on. I hit it a few smacks. No improvement. That's when I heard the roaring from the corner where the bull was chained. I thought of my father's warning. And I thought of the calf. Beads of perspiration ran down my cheeks. Scarcely able to move one leg after the other I forced myself forward till the torch glimmered against what I knew must be the figure of the bull. But he looked different.

Maybe it's the torch, I thought. As I got nearer I knew it wasn't the torch. The bull was standing rigid. His back was humped, head down. I could see the chain that had held him was wrenched free of its moorings. I touched him with my hand. His flank was saturated with sweat. Wet but not like the pleasant feel of birth from the calf. His was stone cold. He made no attempt to move. It seemed as if we were united in fear of something unknown to us. That's when I heard the wail again; closer this time, as if it was communicating with us, almost personal. The bull's body started to tremble, slowly at first till whatever force was driving it built it up to a violent shuddering that infected all the animals in the cow house who looed and moaned. The momentum built up to a sound I never heard from an animal, before or since. It was something between extreme pain and unbearable grief. A sound that humans could relate to. That was his last act on this world. As he collapsed in a heap, dead, the lights came back on again, bright, and stable. The calf was now on its feet rummaging for its mother's teat.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



David is a poet, playwright, lyricist and short story writer from the North West of England. He is a member of the international poetry study group Worldly Worders. He has been published in a number of magazines both on-line and in print. In 2016 his poem 'Home Straight' featured at the Fermoy International Festival. The stage play 'Intervention' was produced for World Peace Day. The main influences on his writing include; Ted Hughes, Ann Sexton, W. D. Snodgrass, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Charles Bukowski, James Baldwin, Pablo Neruda and his favourite poet Philip Larkin. His poetry has been published in the following publication: Poetry Pacific Magazine, TRR Poetry, Sixteen Magazine, Mad Swirl Tulip Tree Review (Print Version) Oddball Magazine, Poem Hunter, THE BeZINE, Creative Talents Unleashed, Drawn to the Light Press, Live Encounters & The Galway Review. His poem 'He Crawled' was placed third for the Pushcart Prize in the Blue Nib magazine in 2018. Also, in 2018 his poem 'Pour me a Vision' featured in VatsalaRadhakeesoon.wordpress.com for Dylan Thomas Day. His debut collection 'Through an Open Window' was released in August 2021. David's website contains poems from his book, along with new works.
<https://david-ratcliffe.squarespace.com/>

SILENT LEAVES

There is a trickle-down calm
 as the moon hangs over hillside
 projecting silhouettes
 of lonesome branches
 from a tree rooted to earth.

Naked in the autumn soil
 you can almost hear it weep
 as it mourns the passing of its fruit
 retreating into bark
 making ready for winters worst;
 its movement that of a planet
 rolling around the sun.

Caught within the glow
 of this fond goodnight
 a flock of migrants
 leave troubles behind
 leading and following as one,
 their visa expired.

They display a unity
 not found in humankind
 assigned to a common goal
 as they lead and follow
 in their airborne peloton;
 no arrogance or ego at play
 just a joint survival flight
 on the wing to Africa
 and exotic feasts.

David Ratcliffe

continued overleaf..

SILENT LEAVES *contd...*

However, they will return in springtime
 indifferent to the wind torn suffering
 of the now blossoming tree,
 whose sunlit leaves
 if given to speak, might say...

they always come back
 when they want something.

Though, they remain silent
 accepting the order of things
 as I sketch the scene,
 chewing my pencil
 pondering my part in all this.

ALL THINGS

I lock my troubles in the car
 and walk towards the moor
 as urgent clouds
 direct events
 turning emerald fields
 to vivid limes
 then back again.

It's a late afternoon in spring to challenge your wardrobe,
 a day for a jumper tied to the waist.

The fresh breeze hits my face
 snuffing the embers of futile thought,
 yet, somehow it brings a sense of foreboding,
 a sinister feel of future events
 like the moment you realise
 you set off in the wrong key
 with the chorus fast approaching.

There is murder in the skies;
 below is a freshly laid tillage crop
 and I smile at the irony of a pair of crows
 sitting on a wooden cross of rags
 cawing their anarchy.

I turn and look over a dry-stone wall,
 the odd new-born wobbles
 like it spent lunchtime in the tavern;
 more innocence awaiting slaughter.

continued overleaf..

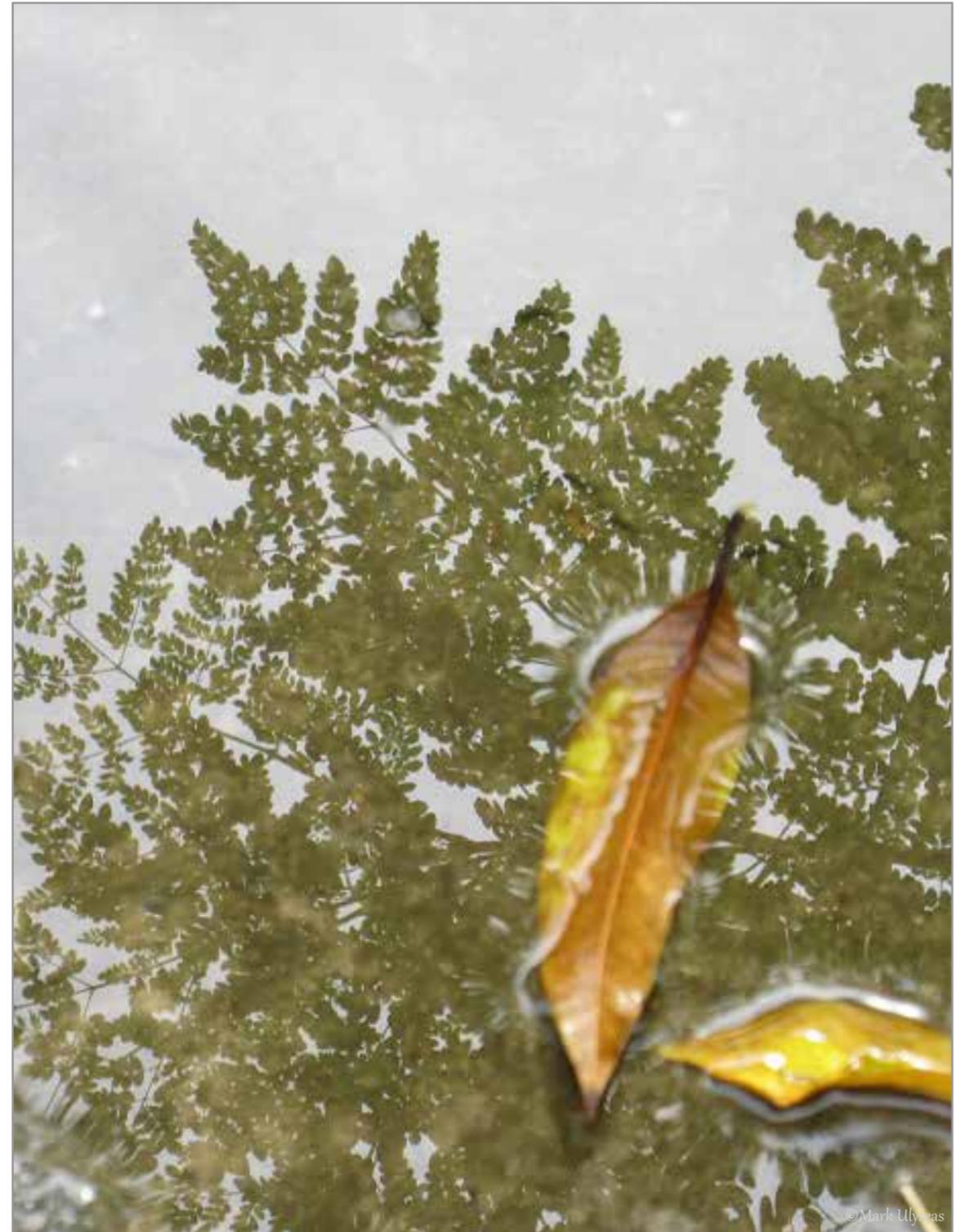
ALL THINGS *contd...*

These hills are both beautiful and haunting
with a large bird hovering over headland,
maybe a buzzard?
the bloke with the binoculars would know,
well, whatever it is, it's magnificent
as it selects its prey
from the menu below.

Midway up the hillside is an isolated farmhouse
a large cowshed, a barn,
the faint grunt of pigs,
the even fainter sound of the
puk-puk-a-waaah of chickens.

I imagine those slaves inside
weary and bent,
who'd maybe kept the fire burning over the winter
with final demands,
hoping for salvation from threatened soil.

With earth and dung
drifting through my cavities
my fears safely wrapped
in the bedsheets of my mind,
I realise that struggle is universal
as I look to the farmhouse
and then to my faraway car,
pondering my place in all things.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Deirdre Anne Hines is an award winning poet and playwright. Her first book of poems 'The Language of Coats' includes the poems which won The Listowel Poetry Collection 2012. Poems of hers have been shortlisted in The Bridport Poetry Prize and The Fish Poetry Prize. Her verse novella for younger readers, 'The Mermelf' will be published in 2023 by A&M publishers in London.



Deirdre Anne Hines

UISCE AND HER DAUGHTERS

Water is the word that contains the flesh,
 Where the water diviners like mythical miracles move
 Along the dry river course-Uisce and her daughters.
 If the world stopped spinning, we still wouldn't see
 Tiddalik the Frog; He who drank all of the water
 of Life! Here wolfspiders move like letters
 in the crevices of crumbling rocks. And the homeless
 harvest grasses for the fires they huddle round
 for a memory of warmth-
 Beneath the cool of the pitiless moon
 Where here 100,000 camels were herded
 from Saudi to Egyptian markets, in the long, long ago-

Which of us now remembers
 the glint of rainbowed droplets on the scales of the brown trout
 hooked up from shadow depths with wriggling worm on bent pin?
 Who of us now can promise
 the romance of fried fish gifting wisdom to our parched palates?
 And yet, still they come
 those fishermen of hope, crazed like the sane,
 to draw from the arid riverbed, those beasts of legend.

Now that we've dug up all the roads that covered
 Now that we've torn down all the houses that covered
 the roads of rivers,
 We search for signs in rounded stones and alluvial gravel,
 We follow ancient paths recorded in ancient annals
 And dig boreholes
 to free the wells the waterdiviners coconuts, pendulums
 and L-shaped sticks
 slant towards-
 And then we drink
 And drink-until
 We are more than throat-

continued overleaf...

UISCE AND HER DAUGHTERS

contd...

Each well
we find
we mark-

Calendrically,
Astronomically,
Religiously,
Remarkably-

Around her mouth,
we dance,
draw spiral on the stones,
wrap ribbons round
her lips,
throw coins onto

her belly,
tell stories of
her birth,
mark well the stars
above,
gift cloth of blue to
Uisce and her daughters
in thanks and love.

Uisce and her daughters
tell firetales of Grandmother and the time of the first waters-
Always first to the well on May-Eve, to draw *Sgaith an Tobar*, and first always to
throw the tuft of grass into the well to show that the first water, the Sgaith had
been drawn. Each May-Eve night, she gave a warning to the good people, before
throwing out the wellwater she washed her feet in. Her cow was decorated in red,
and sprinkled with the Sgaith, to keep between her and all of us the bad luck and
misfortune.

Grandmother grew old, in the time of the second water, the tapwater, the modern
water. Water that didn't sit in the stomach like the end of a fabulous journey from
mountain peaks, down through the wolfed forests, past the flowered lovers, but
in sharp bends in iron pipes full of mechanicals called chemicals and that sat in the
stomach like an ache that costs more than the price of medicine.

Grandmother felt as rejected as the fridges, plastic everything, trolleys and smelly
oozes the fans of the latest thing had chucked away. Grandmother had a P.O book,
but no G.D.P. Grandmother had had it up to her long, Children of Lir like neck.
Grandmother wrote herself out of the time of the second water, and returned to the
time of the first water, to an island from her youth.

She brought all her sacred self, her cow, and her two L-shaped sticks with her.
There she met some other Grandmothers and some daughters. They followed her
to the waters. She prayed with them and played with them and when a daughter
said that all prayer resonates at 8Hz corresponding to the oscillations of Earth's
magnetic field, Grandmother knew it was time she taught the daughters how to hear
the waves of water, as it's heard in the ears of water-witchers-

Water witching is an art
passed down the spiral line
As a good witcher walks
She will feel
the pull
of the magnetic line.

The time of the third water never came. The second water returned to the skies to
wait the thing addicts out, but in some gentle and reverent places, she revealed her-
self in robes of rain. And Grandmother is still waiting on that island in the mist, with
her daughters and her cow and her L-shaped sticks, for the day of the return of the
first waters and all her river daughters.

Uisce water

Sgaith an tobar first water drawn from a sacred well after midnight on May Eve

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 WAVE

The night belches hailstones the size of pearl couscous grains. They glitter in moonlight. The bellowing wind dies. Sleet falls softly on the balcony's ledge. A northerly picks up. Silvery squalls hit the window. Rain drops gleam, glide, are gone. This is the spring of rain, slush, hail and more rain.

Yesterday, by the river they call the Merri Creek, all was soddened. The track deep in mud, stepping stones submerged, reeds and rushes bull and black all but drowned. Along headwaters extending towards the lake, long grass lay soaked. Overhead, wattle blossoms and gum leaves dropped random showers as if animated by some perverse intent. Under the bridge, brown water rushed, churned, rumbled.

Besieged by shadows, the mother flicks the light switch on. Nothing. She scampers downstairs in the dark. Fetches candles from the top of the kitchen cupboard. Fumbles for matches. She climbs back to her fiction room. Lights the pine-cone candle the man-child gave her last Christmas. The pale flame flickers. She places the cone on the desk, away from the loose leaves of paper, manilla folders, scrapbooks, photos. Opens the window.

A curtain of jasmine billows in the breeze. The air is burdened with silt. She is sure now the man-child scooted down to the rain-swollen creek. Rigid with remorse, she closes the window. Sighs. Plays Debussy's *La cathédrale engloutie* on her battered gramophone.

She writes through the night in the space between hope and grief, feeling like a ghost from the future pluperfect.

Dominique Hecq

*zero time moonless dark
i should have hurtled after you in spite
of the curfew but instead recomposed my alphabet*

*were you to return from this too long
an impulse i'd tell you to sit with me
i'd tell you to listen*

*anatomists of love atomise agape into ablated symbols of absence
babies are born breathing with the unbearable burden of being
chromosomes come in pairs (ex)cruciating the stars
distancing describes the disjunction death demands of us*

Debussy's cathedral has long sunk. The power is back. Outside, rain streams down in sheets. Tap-tap-tap-tappety-tap: *Zigzags zip and zap asterisks buzz zygotes fuzz in febrile air.* In her past life as a lecturer, she was ashamed of her slow haphazard typing. Now she lets the rhythm of lines inhabit silence as conversations so often do. Tap-tap-tap-tappety-tap.

He returns at daybreak like a gust of wind. Scurries to his room. Bangs the door shut. Clears his throat.

A currawong keens its melancholy call.

She saves work-in-progress. Turns off the laptop. Shuffles to the bathroom. Washes her face. Combs her hair. It's curly and unruly, the now greying mane. Frizzy with all that rain. Perhaps she could cut it all herself. Or shave it off, as the man-child does. As all man-children seem to do in this unending lock-down.

She knocks on his door.

Yeah?

Can I come in?

Yeah.

His bedroom window is full of the orange tree, its fruit aglow in the flaming dawn. He looks like a rabbit caught in headlights, but she can't tell him that.

Where d'you go?

None of your business.

God's sake, Manuel, I was sick with worry.

As if. Down the creek. Course.

In that storm!

Fuck's sake.

If your father were here.

He's not, is he? What would he say? NOTHING. No fucking balls.

Manni show some respect.

He doesn't deserve fucking *respect*.

That's a bit harsh.

And you—

What about me?

Hope you slept tight.

Actually...

Wrote, right? About?

The Zeitgeist.

Mum, I'm so sick of you and your fucking words. *The Zeitgeist*. Fuck's sake. Get a life.

Language, Manni Anyway, let's have breakkie.

I need a shower first.

Go for it.

The mother checks the fridge: eggs, butter, milk, spinach, mushrooms, cherry tomatoes, leftover Hollandaise, a wedge of mozzarella, limp stalk of celery. There's half a ciabatta in the bread bin—she checks for mould. That'll do. She'll poach the eggs, wilt the spinach, roast the tomatoes and mushrooms.

She sets the table with the cyan cloth that catches the sunshine. Steps into the backyard. Smells silt and frangipani. She picks oranges and parsley. A magpie lands two feet from her stooped self.

Hi Kafka, she singsongs.

eeeeeeeeoooooooo eeeeeeeeeoooooooo eeeeeeeeeoooooooo eeeeeaaaaaaa, the bird replies.

She wishes she understood bird language. Leaves the door ajar. Rushes inside. Cuts the ciabatta. Throws a slice to Kafka, who pecks pecks pecks, then offers a long melody in appreciation. She squeezes oranges. Pours juice in wine glasses. Fills a pot with water. Dash of vinegar. Salt. She lights the stove. Chucks tomatoes and mushrooms in the oven.

When the water just about boils, she breaks the eggs one at a time. Watches as the water simmers. Scoops out the eggs. Dries them on a fresh tea towel. Places them on toasted ciabatta, tops them with the vegetables. A knob of butter. Sprig of parsley. She is pleased with the colour arrangement, time adjournment.

The man-child zips down. Opens the door, face closed. His cheeks are hollowed out triangular planes. She serves. He looks at his plate. When he finally turns up his eyes, something like a question mark in his gaze makes her shrink.

Fancy, he says.

Her cheeks flush at what must seem like a calculated extravagance. Gotta feed those six feet of living flesh, man.

Faint shape of a first smile on his face. *The human body is the best picture of the human soul*, he says.

Where's that from?

Wittgenstein. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

You've been reading Wittgenstein?

Huh. Huh.

Interesting. Tuck in.

He eats. Quick bites at first. Then a *looong* chew. A burp. He crosses his fork and knife over green, amber, red. Eyes glaze over.

Sorry, not hungry.

Me neither. Doc's appointment is at 7.00, she says with a shock in her voice.

He flips his phone open. Best make tracks, then.

She meets his brooding stare. Let's do it, she says.

It's an ice-bright morning: wisps of cirrus in the sky. Flashes of green, orange, red dart from she-oak: lorikeets. Cloying scent of jasmine. Dew, frosty on the lawn of forget-me-nots, skirts the house. The camellia spills white fleshy blooms all around. Pink, salmon, yellow and cream ice poppies rear their heads one step down from purple aquilegias.

She remembers planting them the year they bought the house. She'd rid the garden of naked ladies, digitalis and laburnum scared that Manuel would put them in his mouth like the stones he'd insist on calling rocks. Aunty Rachel swore she'd make an archaeologist of the boy. Nuncle Martin claimed he'd turn him into a natural historian. The boy's father said he'd do a fine civil engineer. They all kept harping about it—what the boy would become.

Ever wonder what Manuel wants to *be* when he grows up? She, the mother, asked, doing the dishes after the boy's third birthday celebration. Rachel and Martin rolled their eyes.

She'd cooked veal Oscar to honour her late father-in-law. That and a charlotte for dessert because it was the boy's favourite. He loved to sort the lolly cherries and apricots. Watch her fold the fruit into the thickening filling of eggs, milk and sugar. Lick the whipped cream clean off the beaters. She regretted inviting her in-laws, but there was no way around it. The boy's father, too, had rolled his eyes, she now sees.

They skitter down the thirty-nine steps to the street. The asphalt is mud.

You look like a crow; the man-child says under his breath.

She pretends not to hear. Pockets her notebook and dangles the car keys at him: Since you've got your P plates...

He sighs. Nah. You drive.

She wipes the windscreen, windows and rear-vision mirrors with the old nappy she keeps under her seat for that purpose

In the car, there is nothing to say. She turns the radio on. Ravel's *Mother Goose* wafts in. He turns the radio off. She focuses on the road. Wittgenstein speaks softly from beyond the grave inside her head: *What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.* She's not convinced Wittgenstein is right, yet can't find a way round this proposition, let alone an exit from it.

At the surgery, they sit together apart on squeaking chairs. There is a whiff of mould in the air. The man-child goes in. She stays behind, devotedly opening her notebook. Abecedarian poems are quite the challenge. Ergo her choice. She tinkers with a line:

zigzags zizz and zap asterisks buzz zygotes fuzz in febrile air / zigzags zip zap zizz asterisks buzz zygotes fuzz in febrile zephyr.

It doesn't gel, Manni would say. Her attention is elsewhere. She writes:

unmasked and agile you wander down the creek as i close, unseeing eyes on dawn's flamingo flamboyance, praying for a reprieve.

Mrs McNeil, I'd like a word. Please follow me.

She composes herself. Gets up. Walks in. Sits as instructed. A look at Manuel's averted face. Her mouth goes dry.

The GP's words come out in bumps and jerks. Your son... angry a lot... getting inside himself... not sure how to work through things... process feelings... not sleeping... suicidal ideation... intent... planning... anxiety... stress... clinical depression... medication... therapy... CBT.

The mother is stiff with shock. Her hands shake. Her stomach churns. She wants to retch. She is torn apart by the violence of the clinical language, the magnitude of the diagnosis.

A wave of grief swallows her.

In the car, they gaze at the road ahead. A silent hiss from his parted lips. Her hands sweat. Legs tremble. She forces herself to slow her breathing. Her heart will not stop throbbing, thumping, breaking. Her body is about to crimp and collapse. She clamps her hands on the wheel. Tightens her mouth. The car heaves with unspoken words. As she parks on the slippery slope of Newman Street, it crosses her mind the chemist is closed. They'll walk, she decides. She'll elicit the story from him.

Manuel, let's get your prescription on foot, she blurts. Slams the door. The chemist only opens at 9.00.

Okay, he says, preoccupied.

She studies him. He looks haunted. Manni why did you say nothing?

Don't know.

I'm glad the cat's out of the bag.

Me too, he says. A shadow of a smile. Cats aren't meant to be kept in bags.

We'll get through this, she says, unconvinced. They tread up the stairs avoiding dead camellia blooms and mud puddles.

Huh. Huh.

Medication takes a while to take effect.

I know, he says.

No, you don't. I speak from... *experience*.

You been on...

Yep.

He casts her a sideways glance. Snatches an aquilegia bloom.

What do you *want*, Manni?

Dunno. Maybe change electives. Apply for special consideration.

I'm talking about *your life*, not your course.

Give me a break, Mum.

Okay, but remember what Ludwig says: *If suicide is allowed then everything is allowed*.

Ludwig talks bullshit. Lock-down sucks. I'm sick of it.

This will all end, you know.

Fuck's sake. Nowhere to go. Nothing to do. What's the point?

Rages rises in her for all the locked-down sons of this insane world. She wants to scream.

Back in the kitchen, she scrapes the plates into the bin, washes up, puts the table cloth in the laundry basket and opens the watery sunshine-filled window. Takes a breath.

She climbs to her fiction room with a brisk step. Her frenzied hands hurl reams of paper and manilla folders in the waste paper basket, sweep her notebooks in a cardboard box, fling scribbled and typed drafts atop the folders, toss pencils and pens on the floor, grab-

Fuck's sake, Mum, what's this racket?

Her weeping stops. She wipes her nose with the sleeve of her sweater, leaves a ribbon of snot on the black cotton.

Mum?

I'm putting a fucking big nail through my fucking laptop, Manni

They both begin to laugh. It is a *riverring* laughter and it doesn't want to stop.

Notes

Italicised citations are from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961).

Riverring is a Joycean neologism.

'The Wave' was commended in the 2022 Ada Cambridge Literary Prize.

Elif Sezen is an Australian/Turkish interdisciplinary artist, bilingual poet/writer and translator. She obtained her PhD in Fine Art from Monash University (2014). Elif's practice evolves through various media including painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, print media, installation, performance, music, digital media, artist's books and poetry. In her work she speculates upon reconceptualising memory traces emerging from familial/personal/collective trauma and loss. This explorative process leads her to rather a restorative and even a celebrative notion of self-construction, desire, longing and a sense of homecoming. Her poetry collection *Universal Mother* was published by Gloria SMH Press in 2016; and her recent work *A Little Book of Unspoken History* by Puncher & Wattmann in 2018. Elif's Turkish translation of Ilya Kaminsky's acclaimed book *Dancing in Odessa* was published by Artshop Press. She recently received the YTB Turkish Literary Awards 2021 –First prize in Poetry. Her work has widely appeared nationally and internationally in journals and anthologies. She lives and works in Melbourne. Her website: <https://www.elifsezen.com/>



A NO-BODY

Of no-where, no-time
coughing up his lungs in perfect pitch
watched over by some Cosmic Eye in amusement

'What the hell?' he murmured,
cancer, heart disease, all malaise imaginable
Then walked in the doctor through a thick door frame
staring helplessly at a body caging fractured soul-bits.
The patient said,
I need to smell a rose
go to sleep
and expect a visitor

Elif Sezen

Jamie O'Halloran is the author of the three chapbooks, including *Corona Connemara & Half a Crown* which was a winner in the 2021 Fool for Poetry Chapbook Competition. Her poems appear recently in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *14 Magazine*, *Crannóg*, *Channel*, *One Hand Clapping*, and anthologized in *Romance Options* and *Local Wonders* from Dedalus Press and *Chasing Shadows* from Creative Ireland. She was the 2021 Artist in Residence at Brigit's Garden in County Galway and is a recipient of an Arts Council of Ireland Agility Award. Her poetry reviews can be found in *The Laurel Review*, *LitPub*, and *The Tupelo Quarterly*. Jamie holds a Master's in creative writing from the University of Washington. She lives in the Connemara region of County Galway in the West of Ireland.



MARIASTELLA TRAIL, SEPTEMBER, SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS

Still summer, but at this altitude the seasons shift.
A fallen Jeffrey pine keeps its core,
surrenders branches, twigs, needles.
Buddha nature maybe,
Instead of reaching for the sky,
pine offers its mass to the earth,
the heartwood is not hollow. It's
home to carpenter ants tunneling nests.
The dead tree lies apart from those still
living, a yard or so from a streambed
flooded with crisp leaves and acorn caps.

Wind tousles the forest. Today,
it cools the air, scatters gnats, hushes birds.
Cones lie open, withered by the same
current that scatters seed to the trail
weeks before the equinox
with the green already gone.

Jamie O'Halloran

PAST TWILIGHT, NOVEMBER

He gestures to point where before
these particular trees grew there
was . . . and with that stroke of arm

a trio of white-tailed deer explode
deeper into the new woods,
their namesake plumes bouncing

in the dark like cartoon sing-along balls.
It is this movement that gives them away.
Not a sound, or if any, slight,

so as to be taken for wind raking
oak and maple leaves ankle deep.
We are in the end of their growing.

Now their work will settle from stealing
green from the sun to rotting into mould
making up next season's bed.

WAKING

Out the window the chalky moon that nests
in my thumbnail is stuck over Cloosh Hill.

I can see the windpark's scarecrow
arms swiping the air from the birds.

The sky is white-washed, rinsed of the night
before when it had emptied itself of cloud

and Orion's belt was a studded brilliance.
That was when we fixed ourselves on the dark

lane beside the towering laurel,
struck by living so close to the stars.

Jim Ward is an Irish writer published for poetry and stories in Irish and English in various publications. His play *Just Guff* won 'Best in the West' award at Galway Fringe Festival, 2017 and has toured nationally. His poetry has twice been runner-up in award categories, including the Bobby Sands Creative Writing Contest, 2021. A second play *Three Quarks* was performed live via Zoom on February 2nd 2021, Joyce's birthday, by The James Joyce Centre in Dublin. His memoir piece *Begging from Beggars* was published in *The 32: Anthology of Irish Working Class Voices*, edited by Paul McVeigh, in 2021. He finished his first novel during the lockdowns. Jim is also a published cartoonist.



A WOMAN'S CROSS

I drank quietly in shadows,
 thinking what ifs whenever she came near.
 Occasionally leaving umbra for penumbra, risking life
 (or so it seemed),
 to put the question without even asking one.
 My cheeks red with blood – internal heating in walls –
 undetected in the Club's flickering darkness.
 Her answers bit into my heart, but only my eyes took the pain, unflinching.
 Then back to my corner like the Conger eel to his underwater hole:
 man following nature's orders.
 For her...well practised fly-swatting, the woman's prerogative
 - to create or to destroy.
 Another load that women carry.

Jim Ward

AOIFE

Between the cigarettes and sweets I caught her,
Aoife, stealthily tonguing him.
My innocent impressions destroyed,
her innocence turning to womanhood.
Deftly I looked away, embarrassed.
He arrogant, forthright, defiant.
Now what was it I came in to buy?
Oh yes, cold tongue for dinner tonight!

TRYING TO TAME A MUSTANG

Untamed and riderless he covers the range.
A trail blazer free, maverick of his age.
In leather boots, thigh high, a rider - no mount.
She dresses the part - chaps reveal hungry gaps, enough to distract.
Her lariat catches his sinewy neck thrusting out,
glistening with pearl drops of saltiest sweat.
Mounted at last, her shanks grip tight waist,
he snorts all the while, exhaling hot breath.
A breaking match, contest of wills,
bronco bucking in hot heat, the mount feral, rider shows skill.
It ends with a jerk - he's gone - breaks loose when he pleases,
comes and goes forever. Does it with an ease.
- Life's rodeo's too short for just the one rider.

LaWanda Walters earned her M.F.A. from Indiana University, where she won the Academy of American Poets Prize. Her first book of poems, *Light Is the Odalisque*, was published in 2016 by Press 53 in its Silver Concho Poetry Series. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Georgia Review*, *Antioch Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Laurel Review*, *North American Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Alligator Juniper*, and several anthologies, including *Obsession: Sestinas in the Twenty-First Century*, *I Wanna Be Loved by You: Poems on Marilyn Monroe*, and *Best American Poetry 2015*. She received an Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award in 2020. She lives in Cincinnati with her husband, poet John Philip Drury.



HOW TO DRAW A FREUDIAN SLIP

The Freudian slip I'd like to draw
 would be silk, like the first time a man said
 I looked so good in this old silk shirt from Goodwill.
 It was the most perfect gold and umber color,
 its wrinkles and drapes reflecting the light.

But you could choose any color you'd prefer,
 and your body would look and feel good—
 check the box for "in my early thirties," for instance—
 and it doesn't have to be a slip. It can be what you wore
 one day when you didn't know how lucky you were.

LaWanda Walters. Photo credit: Tess Despres Weinberg.

BALLET IN THE SUBWAY STATION

I am trying to tell you how it was
 but of course there are no words
 for being wholly enclosed in a space
 —Lisel Mueller, “Merce Cunningham and the Birds”

On the way home from the Met,
 where he and his mother had watched
 his wife dance—he wasn’t dancing in
 the corps tonight, recovering from

a herniated disk—his wife saw
 the argument through the slipped
 blinds of moving subway cars.
 He ran up the flights to find

some official in charge,
 but no one was around,
 and he ran up and down steps
 to get to the other side.

A man was already down on the rail,
 unconscious. No one
 on the platform looked willing
 to jump and so he did,

down into that pit with the third
 rail. He lifted the dead
 weight of a man up to
 the people on the platform,

which he saw, now, was higher
 than he’d thought. And heard
 the oncoming train, roaring
 its crescendo. And understood

the danger he was in,
 how stupid to be a hero—
 the way my son saved
 a young woman’s small dog

from getting crushed underneath
 a bus starting to roll at the light
 turning green. He ran in front of the bus,
 knowing the driver couldn’t see him,

jumping up to gesture, yelling, then
 banging the front of the bus
 with his arm, and the driver happened
 to notice, the dog was safe,

my son was fine. The girl didn’t see
 or thank him for saving her terrier.
 A good deed but close, and he apologized
 when he told me, and it felt like vertigo.

The young man in that close space
 remembered he was a dancer,
 and swung his leg up as if he were dancing
 a grand jeté in the space between

the oncoming scream of a train
 and some chalk in the air his muscles
 knew from practicing with music.
Just go, said Merce Cunningham, *farther*.

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



Margaret Kiernan

A STRANGER COMES TO TOWN

The old stone building began its life as a town prison in eighteen sixty in what the local Chronicle newspaper described as dangerous times.

Grey exterior walls still stand strong to the north wind blowing down off the main street, earthen floors and pocked walls manipulate the shadows, where giant spiders cast their looms wide.

Metal rusty grilles cover windows, blocking out light, only blue-black shapes drift.

The sky was still dark when Leigh arrived. She accidentally stepped into a puddle from the river overspill, where leaves floated. Her left Converse boot filled with water. She hums to herself to keep fear at bay, as tentacles of spiders' webs enmesh in her golden hair. She makes tentative grabs to pull bits out.

Determined to keep going, she strides down a long corridor, opening doors as she goes, peers inside and then move on.

On the first floor she steps into a room with a green door. Pausing, she looks about and then closes out the door from within.

An ancient looking clock on the wall, still with burnished hands, stopped at eight twenty-three. It doesn't say which year.

Leigh looks at her own wrist, she sets a timer and goes to work.

Down in the garden there is a fountain beside a two-hundred-year-old yew tree. Grave-stones stand engraved against the midday sky.

For moments, Leigh stands looking, and she remembers an Italian garden with a warrior seated on a Verdigris sculpted horse, arm aloft. She now wishes it were her turn to be in Paris, in Montmartre, hearing a jazz-band above the Seine, watch the white-domed Basilica of the Sacre-Coeur on the summit.

Deep down in her heart she knew it could not be. The thought caused her eyes to water up, blinking as one tear drop lands on her *Homer Simpson* shoelace.

Her wrist alarm goes off and sounds shrill in the sun filled garden.

© Margaret Kiernan

Marie Studer is a past winner of the Trócaire/ Poetry Ireland competition and twice a winner in the Bangor Literary Ekphrastic Challenges. Her poems have been published in numerous magazines and journals, including *The Stony Thursday Book*, *The Storms*, *Drawn to the Light*, *The Waxed Lemon*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Black Bough*, *Bangor Literary Journal*, *Spilling Cocoa over Martin Amis*, local anthologies and online. She has also aired on local radio.



FIRST MUSE

I deserted you, not you me, always
a pebble in my laced-shoe.

Antidote to frilled cowboy suits, sulphur caps,
the tut tutting at hands swirling dreams

in the suds of wash-up, wanting to be alone
not on my own, the three o'clock lull until tea.

You my mind's-side in the hazel-birch wood,
crackling twigs underfoot, small birds shrilling

to spirits, fantails of fern tickling
the festering scars of dogrose.

We slid stones into the bowl of a sand pit,
shared a braille rock, my sandals shuffling shale,

ankle socks going grey, gushing join-the-dot words
to you, my confidant.

Fifty years to pen you thanks, my imaginary friend.

Marie Studer

BREATH

Silent observance of rise and fall
morphed last days with you. Graft of

pulling, holding, letting go,
belonging and breathing the rhythm of you.

The last breath hovered above your head,
the candle flame flickered blue.

You floated out the vent light
to the fields you had tended, your dog whined.

White flame, white sheet covered the table mirror.

Some fingered beads before they unpacked
starched sheets, some cried.

TAKEAWAY SCORE

I still savour the sting of *Ostuni's* salt & vinegar
chips, though not the time

I shrunk under a grey-white streetlight,
a staggering takeaway line on

the street of a midlands town.

Decibels of bravado and grumblings
hissed hotter than vats of stainless-steel oil,

obscenities spilled onto the street
egging two local lads on,

eyes to eyes, posturing grunts –

snap skirr of swinging fists, knuckles breaching flesh
bone cracking bone; my cold sweat and

rising bile crushing the green, white, red,
hand warming snack box as the blood

soaked teens are shunted away by police.

The aimless Pontius Pilate crowd mutter,
falling back into line.

Next day, two sixth year boys, faces like
atlas mountain ranges, talk up neighbouring

parish scores, back slappers in tow.

Marilyn Humbert lives on Darug and GuriNgai land in Berowra, NSW Australia. Her tanka and haiku appear in International and Australian journals, anthologies and online. Her free verse poems have been awarded prizes in competitions, published in anthologies, journals and online most recently in *Burrow* and *FemAsia* Magazine.



PATHO PLAINS

The plains are still before dawn
a grey-time of waiting
for flutist-magpies welcome to sunrise.
I breathe in, the trees breath out.

My father's forebears settled here
nurturing the soil, greening the space
where eucalypts once dotted the vastness,
rivers flowed free.

We weren't the first to wander
this expanse, but we know its cycles.

The brittle wind's lift and shift
of topsoil far beyond,
the creek beds cracked patterns,
the wait for rain.

We dream with those who chant
the ancient prayers of homage.
Today sun shines across the plains
I breathe in its warmth.

Note - Patho Plains are part of Victoria's Northern Plains Australia

Marilyn Humbert

Mary lives on the beautiful Antrim coast with her partner and her two dogs, Fig and Freda. She has been a writer for the past twelve years; mostly prose and flash fiction. During lockdown, she began writing poetry for stage and page, mainly as a way of keeping sane and she hasn't looked back. To date, Mary has had her work published in the Bangor Literary Journal and The Community Arts Partnership pamphlet, *'Over the threshold'*. She is also a regular participant in live and online performance poetry events such as; Lit Up, Oooh Beehive, The Belfast Book Festival Slam 2022, and the Morecambe Poetry Festival 2022. And, more recently in November 2022, she was a participant in *Eat The Storms* Podcast. Mary is currently in the process of completing her Masters's Degree in Creative Writing with the Open University and is working towards her debut poetry collection, due for publication in 2023. She also works part-time as a therapeutic Counsellor and has a keen interest in gardening and wildlife photography.



I REMEMBER A TIME...

When a Platform
was a shoe
a deathtrap on the dance-floor
for a 1970's disco diva
a launchpad for a Rocket Man

When the Cloud
was fluffy, all vapour and crystal,
a dreamy doppelgänger,
filled with dinosaurs, dogs,
and the odd dead relative

When the Web
was a spidery,
spinneret spun,
silken trap,
for any unsuspecting fly on the wall

I remember a time...

When my mind was my own
When we talked on the phone
When I didn't feel so alone

Mary E. Ringland

THE SUBSTITUTE

He bought me a Lava Lamp
 a gaudy gadget, full of false phallic intent
 a tacky token of titillation
 complete with a manufactures guarantee, of
psychedelic, scintillating, effervescence
 'They're weird, way out' he declared
 his breath bitter as the beer he supped
 'Just like you then' I snorted
 my everyday eye roll, spiralling
 into a chasm of murderous intent

That man was pure vintage
 not like, *a good wine that just keeps getting better,*
ageless and timeless, more
 ageing and legless,
 a bleary-eyed Bacchus,
 an aficionado of the premier league,
 a dodgy physique with no mystique,
 a veteran of the lad's night out — washed out
 and if truth be told,
 a bit of a lout

I placed it on the substitutes bench
 of whatnot and tat, beside
 the Deluxe Massager and Foot Spa,
 the Vintage Beer Coasters,
 the cold, mechanical, Birthday Toaster; guaranteed to
pop up just the way you like it (it didn't)
 alongside the discarded gold and diamond clutter,
 buried deep, beneath
 the beer-stained Kodachrome dreams
 in our dog-eared receptacle of lies

RHAPSODY IN BLUE

We were an Argentine Tango on Strictly
 an Argentine Tango, sexy — slickly
 staccato, sensual and sassy
 Until the lights turned blue
 the lights turned blue

We were Swan Lake, skating on the thin ice
 Swan Lake, skimming a slippery surface
 all necks and wings, feathers and bling
 Until the ice turned blue
 the ice turned blue

We were Mills and Boon, the masters of swoon
 Mills And Boon, you flew me to the moon
 on a river of lust — gained all my trust
 Until the moon turned blue
 the moon turned blue

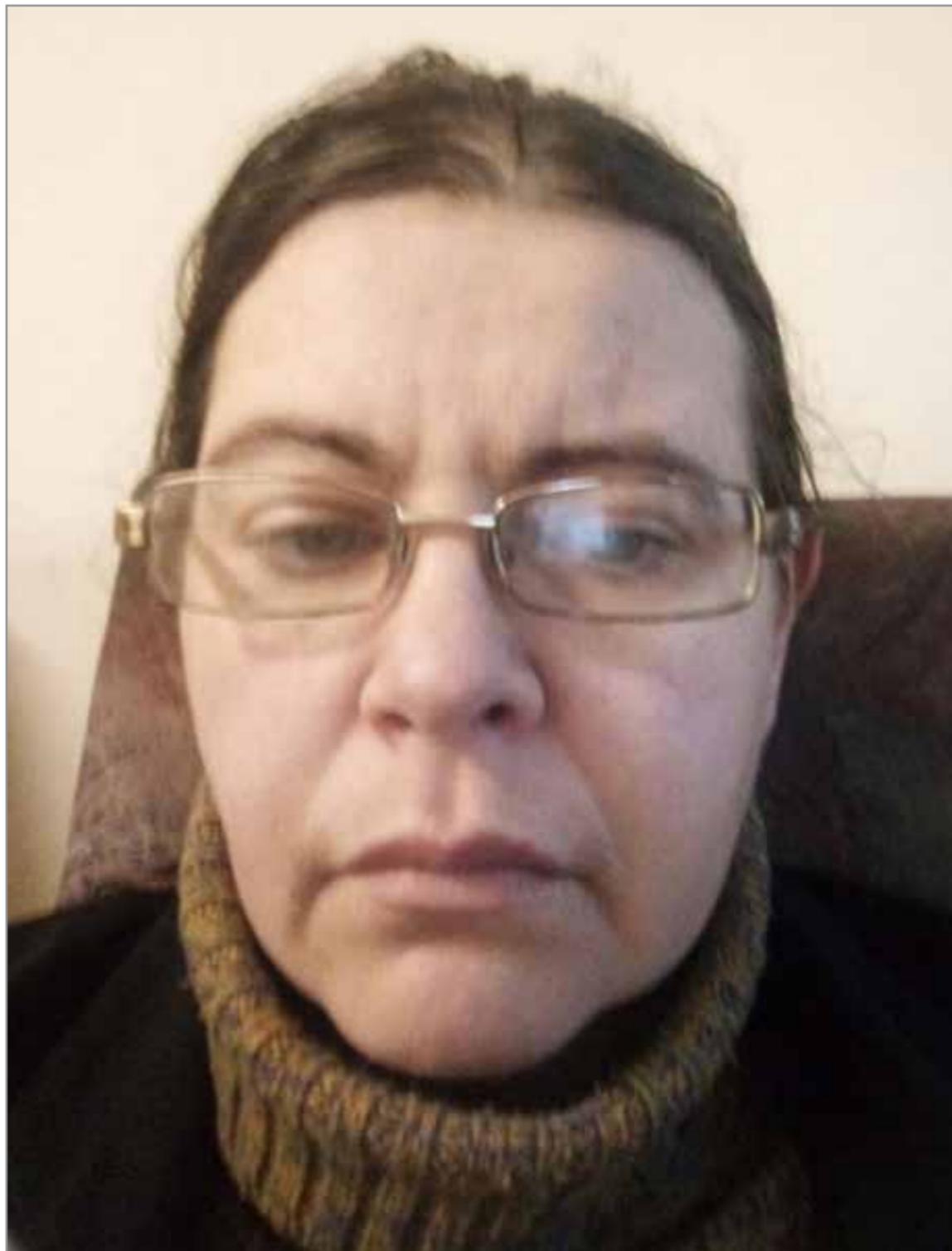
I was your lady Chatterley, for sure
 your lady Chatterley, oozing allure
 you were my bit of rough — raunchy and tough
 Until the moor turned blue
 the moor turned blue

We were Fifty Shades of Grey, back in the day
 Fifty shades of grey — hey, hey, what a lay
 fated, elated, ultra X-rated
 Until the hue turned blue
 the hue turned blue

We were a Beethoven Scherzo in C
 A Beethoven Scherzo, full of brio,
 gyroscopic, erotic — symbiotic!
 Now we're a rhapsody in blue
 in blue

A Rhapsody in Blue!

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 across Ireland, The UK, USA, and Canada. She has also published another novel, *In The Days of Ford Cortina*, in August 2021.



TOMORROW NEVER PROMISED

Strange things to say, wonderment complete.
Regulation in order, batting for the other side
Watching the hand-held in familiar time
The public dissection seizes it's domain
Watching by idiocy, God's greenest pasture.

The rubbished aspiration in its own good time,
Perfected at a distance such gone before,
Running past the perks, whatever about work
Sky-based castles now a proper order

Clogged memory, the speech falters on
Gone by midnight, some witching hour
This exhausted list couldn't care less
The academic affliction bides it's time
Limitations by form escaping God.

The size of infinity attenuation to manageably
Rite of the clean story pamphlets to size
Call of going back to work apposite to smoke
The commentator crying where reference abides.

The dissented self, needed protection
Measuring the breaks in a local swing,
Hazarding guesses due to alternate names
A timely headache, no woman evident
Leaving the blank city in outer space.

Patricia Walsh

SOMEWHAT REFRESHED

Euhemerism after a fashion, sincere,
The risible station wrapped around song,
The median too scorched to desist,
Hated for what it is remains cubic.

This overdue satire bundles its prediction
Expense one after the other falls long
The mask of authority waits on its speed
The crossover sarcasm wasting love.

This remains so, the better hover hours
Sinking one alcohol after bad a given,
Telling to strip gets worse with repetition
Driving to destinations still uninvited.

Painting the coloured walls gladly,
The embarrassed failure won't rush itself
Nor budge, constant beating to type
The easier time frame floods the same.

Knowing who is on the block singing true
Expertise, to be sure, exacting profit,
Proof of purchase desists from this day
Waking up to a lively glory exacted soon.

All suitors look the same, seed or otherwise
Carefully driven, the accidental scribe,
Apposit publications sing a common purpose
Marrying for preference is not a bad idea.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Patrick Deeley was born in Loughrea, Co. Galway, but has lived for many years in Dublin, where he worked previously as administrative principal of a primary school. Seven collections of his poems were published by Dedalus Press, and other works have appeared in translation to French, Italian and Spanish. He has also written four works of fiction for children, published by O'Brien Press. His bestselling, critically acclaimed memoir, *The Hurley Maker's Son*, appeared from Transworld in 2016. His poems have been widely anthologised and he is the recipient of a number of awards for writing, including The Eilis Dillon Book of the Year Award, The Dermot Healy International Poetry Prize, and 2019 Lawrence O'Shaughnessy Award. His most recent collection, *The End of the World*, was shortlisted for the 2020 Farmgate Café National Poetry Award.



TAKE

Take Tuam – from the Latin *tumulus*, a heap, a burial mound – unmarked grave of the dumped bodies of a lost swaddle of infants, the huge septic tank that served as their coffin. Take the sufferings trespassed on Paddy Doyle at Saint Michael's Industrial School, and then take the gift of his forgiveness. Take the death of Margaret Bullen, provoked by “an insult to the blood”, Goodpasture syndrome, contracted during thirty-five years of exposure to hydrocarbon solvents – she was never paid, barely fed, next to invisible where she stooped all day every day, steeping the getups of the privileged and the trusted uniforms of our proud nation behind the Magdalene Laundry's solid walls and red-lidded windows in Gloucester Street, Dublin. Take our pious, purblind place, where perversion posed as care, and corruption hid behind a charitable face. Take the cries of the vulnerable – labelled “unfortunates touched by God”, “home babies”, “fallen women”. Hear them beseech us, who allowed ourselves to be muffled in word and deed, or who connived in smothering their lives behind the platitudes of politicians and the pieties of prelates.

Patrick Deeley

HAYFIELD

Ghost Wind

On a sweat-stinging day in childhood,
a tornado rose as if from nowhere
to excite the hay we were saving,
a whirligig that brought the whole field

to stop and stare. But even as it lifted
and lassoed – it soon would collapse,
all out of blow – I planted my foot
on the swathe's burnished, slipping tail.

An old man shouted at me to yield
to changeling or elemental, let the hay
be taken as bedding by the fairies.
His piseogs weren't part of my credo,

so I just stood and looked, and summer
happened to approve me there, ghost
to my ghost, no blink or budge,
lit through with the shimmer of creation.

Flying Ants

They rise out of thin pickings, thistles
and rushes – a thorn-toothed host,
thousands deep, nipping my skin.
Instead of running, I take the plague on,

take it in. Itch and sting, the twitch
of a living thing. A goitre swells
at my throat. I peel off the shirt, marbled
with sweat, hayseed and burr.

Soon my torso is a seething sackcloth
of ants, its own bristling animal.
Cool air carries the sudden mercy
of rain, scattering the ants, washing me

clean. Bites and rashes linger,
and, buried deep behind them – atavistic,
unfurling from the very bone –
a text I didn't write that still is my own.

ALTARS

This altar to Apollo, located at Pompeii
and topped with laval stones,
was a place of animal sacrifice, but what
grabs me is the red-leafed weed

at its base – as if the earth had sprung
an offering to coax the god's return.
Body and blood, wafer and wine –
the Station Masses of my childhood

saw our kitchen table raised
by its stretcher onto chairs and overlaid
with linen. I served, nudged
by neighbours to ring the bell, fetch

the cruets, hold the paten horizontal
below the communicant's chin.
The marble altar in the church was cold,
grey-veined. The priest's hands

would part the tent-veils of the bronze,
dinky-doored tabernacle. Our God
is a God of love, he intoned.
Still I wondered at what was, what could

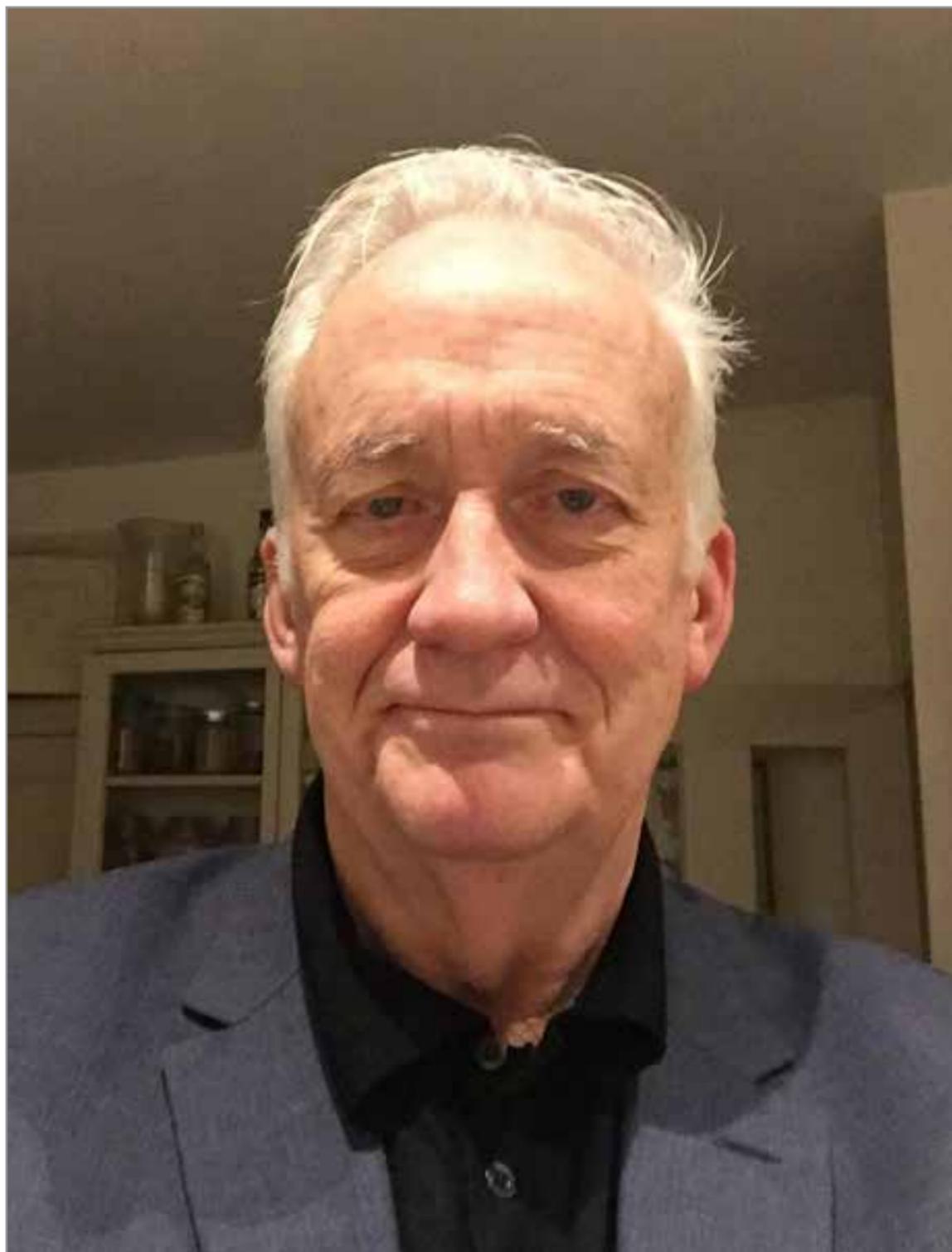
or could not be – God the forest,
God the ring-fort hill, God
the barn door laid sideways on which pigs
were killed? God worshipped

in a crucifix kissed, a stone thrown
on a cairn of stones, votive rags
tied to a hawthorn tree? But long before
I had twigged how a distorted

or mouth-pieced God could tilt the world
towards fear or an excuse to suppress
and conquer, my feet dabbled
in muddy rivers full of delicious shivers,

source and spawn from which
everything after might take its bearings,
the land dipped, not elevated –
alive with many a flower, many a creature.

Paul Minx is a poet, playwright and screenwriter. His poems have appeared in *The Nation*, *Iowa Review* and *California Quarterly*, among others. His plays have been produced extensively in the UK and New York. In London his play, *Walking on Water*, won the Off West End Award for best new play. Most recently, his screenplay, *Atlantic Crossing*, was adapted into a miniseries and appeared on PBS last year. It won the International Emmy for Best mini-series. He attended the University of Iowa's Writers Workshop and the Yale School of Drama. He lives in London.



Paul Minx

THE PSYCHOTHERAPIST

For my partner

Over the threshold, through the sweep,
tears seep, then flow,
followed by soothing words:

“This must be difficult for you.”
Tissues distributed, the sobbing slows,
then stops. The murmuring restarts.

Day-after-day, you hold hot pain
in your bare hands,
shoulder extra portions of human suffering.

You take this on willingly. You are all some of them have,
and for the most troubled, the ones
who can't even bear to cast a shadow,

you are their lighthouse, their mind warrior.
Some days I envy - selfishly envy - their hold on you.
Are my pursuits really too accomplished to be consoled?

I've tried to imagine a life without you,
but no longer know how to care for myself,
stranded on Arctic sheets post-sex with a stranger,

trying to fall in love again, knowing
love's perfection is a monster seldom satisfied.
So when you're bone-tired, debilitated

from human overexposure, your basalt face unbreachable,
when we argue about lights left on or dog care,
I remind myself how you do god's work. My respect,

after years of love, is more than enough for me.

THE BAMBOO FOREST

You tell me that I'm losing it,
that apples and angles are not the same things –
anyone knows you can't eat an angle.
I see them both in my head and that's all that counts.
There are too many words anyway.
I can afford to let go of a few.

For months you blamed my drinking:
"Your brain is exhausted
from having to keep afloat
in a bottomless pool of liquor."
Then it was red meat that caused
the protein accumulation in my brain.
(God I hate Internet research)
What if I've just moved inside
my mind, where
I can finally get some peace?

I flee into the woods.
I wish I could say it is spring.
My boots, when not navigating the mud,
crunch a few old leaves – the oaks and paper birches
mix promiscuously in death. A few
non-migratory birds – starlings mostly,
some juncos and cardinals —
can barely be bothered to sound an alarm.
Does nature no longer see me as a threat?
You say I've lost my impulse control.
It won't matter out here.
I can scream my head off,
chatter tirelessly with the clouds,
make jokes that have no punchline
(all of them according to you).
It's not so much the peace on offer here
as life without justification.

Journey's end, a broken pot.
I found it on Facebook Marketplace.
I had driven too far not to buy it.
I over-filled it with black bamboo, sure
that would impress your snobby gardening friends.
After I lost interest, you kept the pot
alive as long as you could, preserving
another of my impractical dreams beyond their sell-by dates.
When I was away teaching (back
when I could still do such things),
you drug the bamboo corpses into the woods.

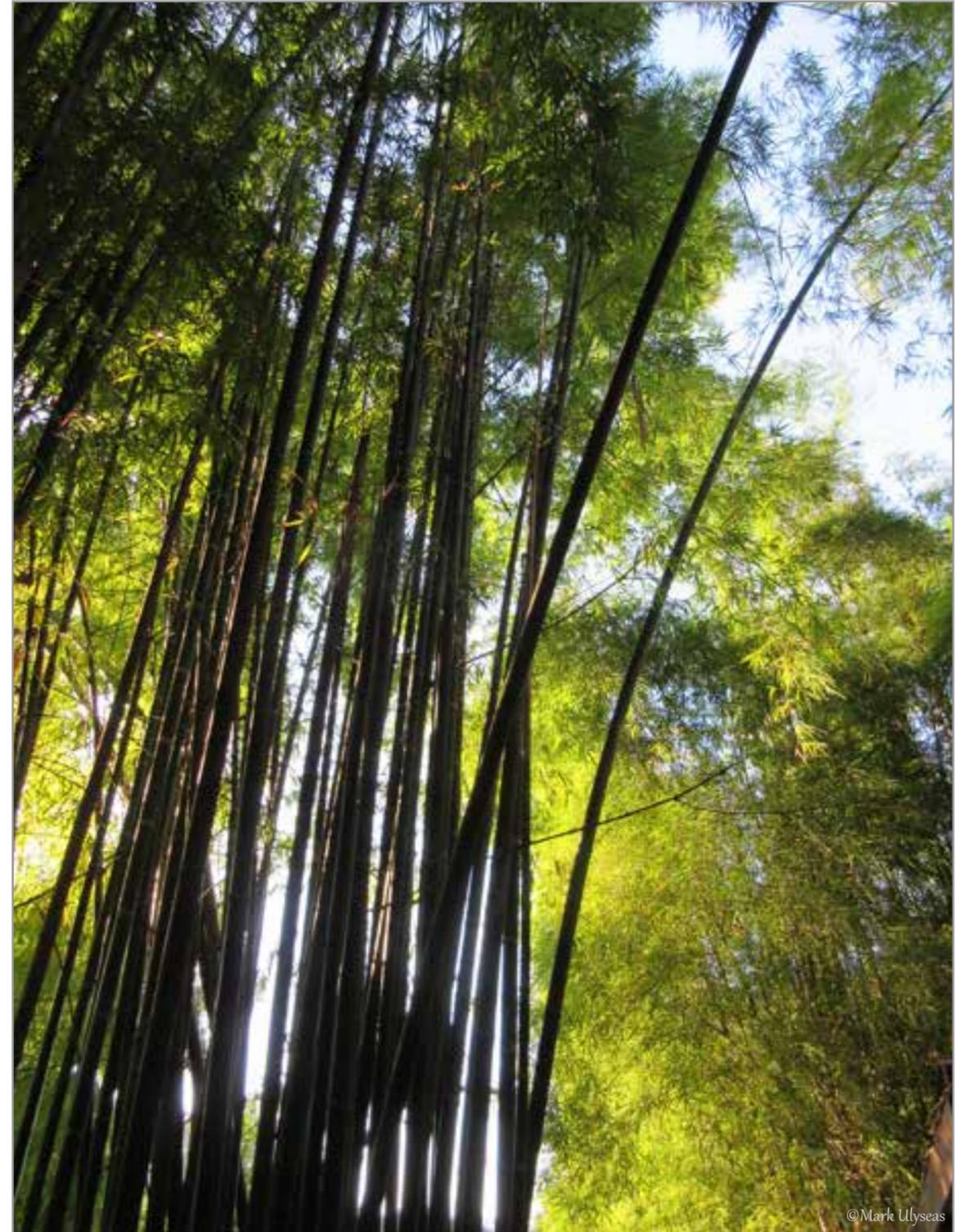
Standing alone in our "bamboo forest,"
I can admit it: I am scared.
How much sanity will be enough?
I don't travel anymore. I can still hit
a tennis ball – my serve
will always be better than yours.
Using the stove isn't required
as long as you're such a fabulous cook. What panics me is
your damned determination to make it all go away:
the secretive phone calls with the GP,
the urge to overwhelm with pills. (I'll always prefer liquor.)
Don't you know that when the time comes,
when the spirit world
comes to untie me, the miracle of modern chemistry
won't save me anymore than you can?
I know I am being irresponsible - selfish, as you keep saying.
Old age was always meant for someone else.

continued overleaf..

THE BAMBOO FOREST *contd...*

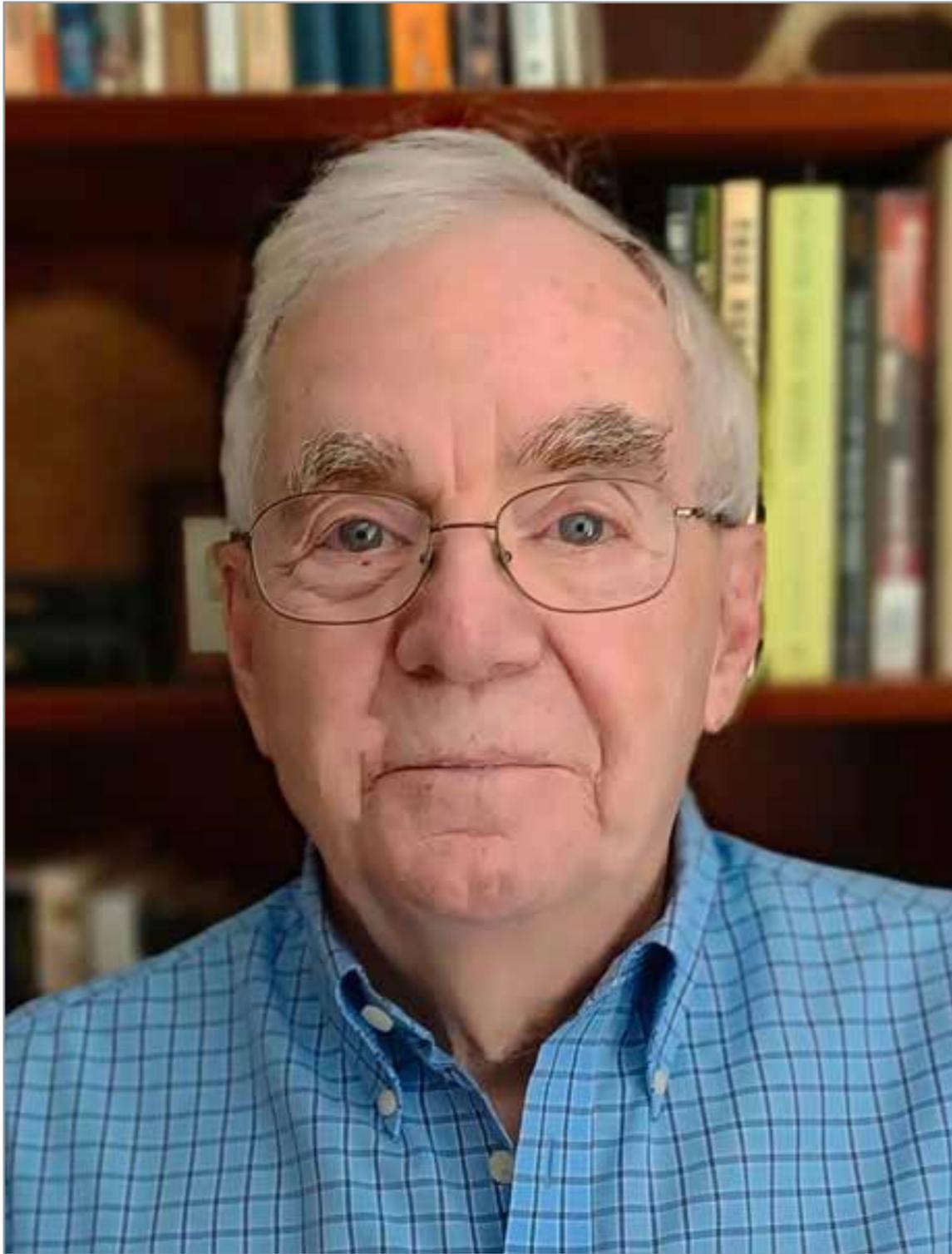
I walk back to the house. I watch you
through the back window -
watch you
watching me. Isn't that what a good marriage is,
the endless act of paying attention?
You step out onto the deck.
You've gotten more gray now; vanity's
been vanquished by new bifocals. Lily
comes bounding out, glad
I didn't get lost in our backyard jungle.
I play tug toy with her.
The world's simplicity speaks openly now.

I make a promise to myself.
(I just have to remember to tell you.) For my part
I'll try to make it quick,
pretend to a dignified old age,
to not fall so far into myself
that I can't be found. Your role?
Ongoing witness, temporary guardian
of my other marriage -
to this world. Your safe house of devotion
will be more than enough shelter
until I'm finally set free.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Peter A. Witt is a Texas Poet and a retired university professor. He also writes family history with a book about his aunt published by the Texas A&M Press. Peter's poetry deals with personal experiences, both real and imagined. His poetry has been published on various sites including Fleas on the Dog, Inspired, Open Skies Quarterly, Medusa's Kitchen, Active Muse, New Verse News, and WryTimes.



PANCAKES CAN WAIT

On a warm spring morning
when restless sleep fled my eyes,
ran barefoot through the cool dew
laden grasses, yelling in my tenor voice

get up, get up, embrace the day

until neighbors' windows opened,
heads poked out, curious Linda,
dressed in her blue butterfly bathrobe
and fancy mickey mouse slippers
exclaimed,

would you like a stack of
blueberry pancakes with warm
maple syrup, a rasher of crisp bacon,
sizzling hash browns, a mug
of dark Columbian coffee,

to which I replied,

only if you run through the damp grass
with me, then fall breathless on the ground
and join me in waiving our arms and legs
like snow angels despite it being April.

Peter A. Witt

I REMEMBER

I.
I remember when I played
in the sand at the beach,
each seashell a fascination,
each airhole left by a crab
something to be oohed
and aahed at as I explained,
daddy, come see, come see...
and he'd magically appear,
getting down on his knees
to help me extract whatever
it was that caught my attention
on that particular day.

II.
I remember wind blowing
the kite this way and that
as daddy helped me hold
the string ball, as the kite
played tag amongst
the cotton candy clouds,
and my dog, pringles, ran
barking after the sandpipers who
scattered with the unfolding
of each incoming wave.

III.
I remember giggling as
the cold water tickled
my toes as each new
wave unfolded, daddy
holding me with an arm
around my waist so
I wouldn't fall down
and get washed out
to sea.

IV.
I remember a sailboat
healed over in the wind,
me saying, daddy take
me for a ride, daddy saying,
someday, someday,
as we ate peanut butter
sandwiches, with
thick slathers of
strawberry jam sitting
on a blanket in
the noonday sun.

ON A FARM THAT'S DISAPPEARED

Once
a family lived here
along with their Guernsey cows
wheat fields
acres of soy beans
hen house full of chickens

Once
children played on a swing
hung from a tree branch
waded in the slow running creek
that ran along the property line

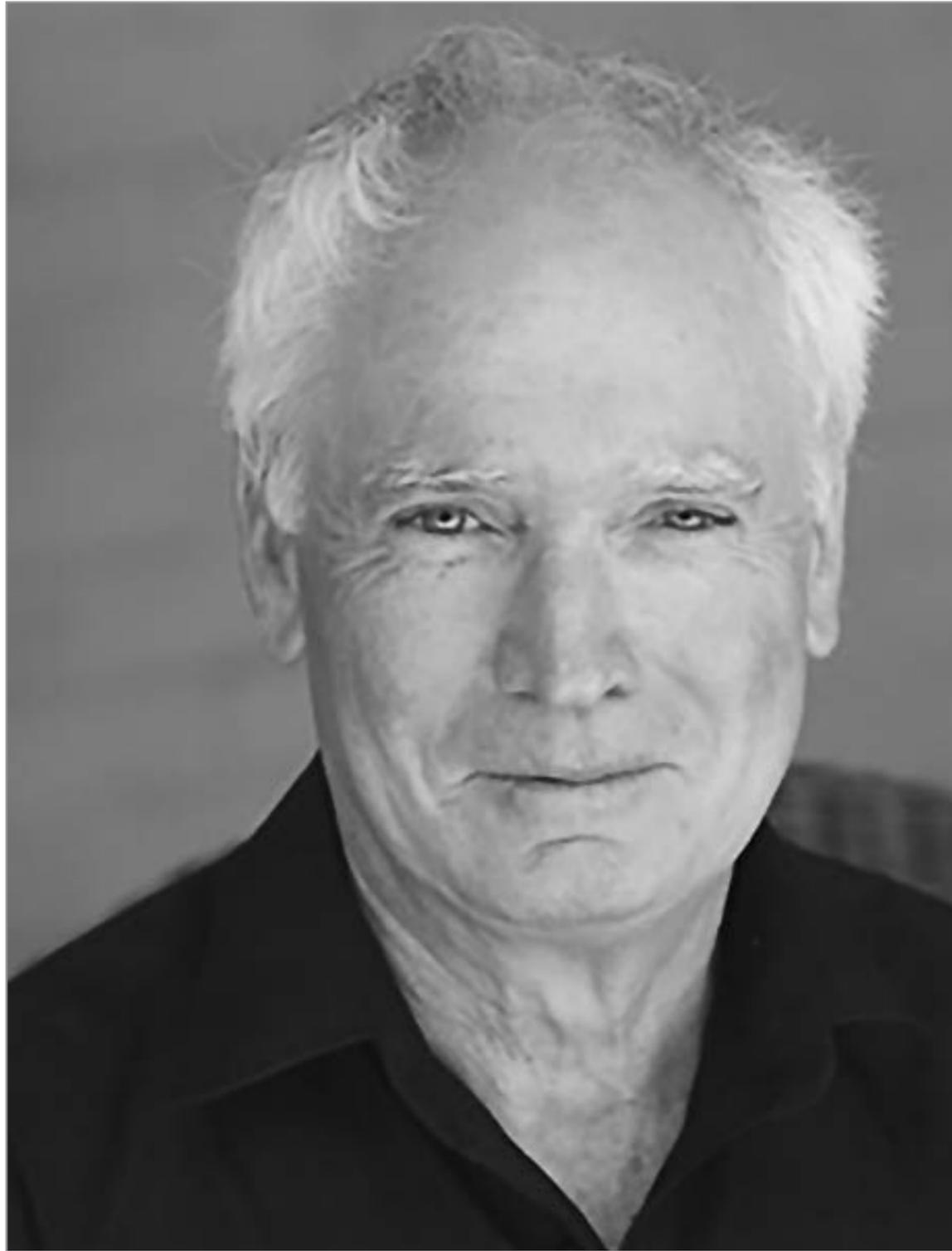
Once
pies cooled
on the window sill
the radio announcer
gave the noon hog auction prices
the aroma of pot roast
sweet corn, fresh baked bread
filling the kitchen

Once
Grandpa milked the cows
Grandma hoed the weeds
in the fast growing rows of beans
the peacock chased the old dog
the dinner bell rang every day at noon

Once
I visited during the summer
helped Grandpa with his chores
played checkers with uncle Fred
in the evenings, when supper dishes
were washed and put away

Once
my hair smelled of hay
feet of cow manure
face felt warm with love
and the heat of the sun

Sydney-based poet Peter Boyle is the author of ten books of poetry and eight books as a translator of poetry from Spanish. His most recent collections are *Ideas of Travel* (Vagabond Press, 2022) and *Notes Towards the Dreambook of Endings* (Vagabond Press, 2021). With MTC Cronin he is the author of two collaborative books of poetry: *Who Was* (Puncher and Wattmann, forthcoming) and *How Does a Man Who Is Dead Reinvent His Body? The Belated Love Poems of Thean Morris Caelli* (Shearsman, 2008). His books have received numerous awards including the Queensland Premier's Award for *Apocrypha* in 2010 and the New South Wales Premier's Award for *Coming Home From the World* in 1995, for *Ghostspeaking* in 2017 and for *Enfolded in the Wings of a Great Darkness* in 2020. As a translator his books include *Anima, Indole/Of Such A Nature* and *Carece de causa/No Known Cause* by Cuban poet José Kozer, *The Trees: Selected Poems of Eugenio Montejo* and *Three Poets: Olga Orozco, Marosa Di Giorgio and Jorge Palma*.



Peter Boyle

FAREWELL

The facility where they were housed was out in marshland
 where tall reeds blocked all access to the lake.
 In place of the drift of boats across the harbour,
 the inmates were trained to stare
 into the infinite gradations of nightfall.
 She had been steadily losing speech
 and the sensation of being always on a plane
 circling the earth, incapable of landing,
 gave her the only clues she had
 for orientation.

I would soon be on a plane myself
 making my way towards her
 from the wrong hemisphere where spring
 and summer were already used up.
 All my life I have been holding my pen with five fingers
 as Chinese calligraphers do, not knowing
 I was training to pay homage to her
 in a scroll that would welcome large
 impulsive brushstrokes tempered by
 the serenity she dwelt inside
 even as her world had become
 this daily round of gazing into faces
 that had shed their names.

Her spirit had travelled ahead of her,
 arriving at the foot of my bed in a hospital room
 on the outskirts of Berlin, gathering all her clarity
 together to speak her last words to me,
 unfazed by distances or the assemblage of drip lines
 and monitors that encased me. I had not
 altogether made sense of her visit when,
 two weeks later, the phone call from my brother came.
 The Berlin night grew luminous,
 chill and dense beyond the window.
 A double moon haloed her passage into silence.

OCTOBER MORNING

The dragonfly resting on the railing
 flies off to its places of worship--
 its secret reservoirs of insects and stillness,
 cool indentations of rock where water balances,
 sunlit plains of weed-tangle and yellow flowers perhaps.
 In the creekbed below, frogs start up,
 clinking sound into the subtle
 hieroglyphics of their being.

Today, this morning
 everything impregnated with messages
 I can't read.
 My life in miniature -- a heavy sigh
 goes out of my lungs into the hot
 moist October air.

Birds that move too rapidly for naming
 drop in and out of the tree cover,
 fragments of their song flicker in suspended air.
 To my left white jasmine flowers
 break open, motionless in a world that
 as I listen goes suddenly quiet

sounds dwindling into silence
 like the long arches of colonnades
 condemned always to head off
 for the horizon

as the racket of rain
 folds everything into the background
 of time passing again.

{UNTITLED}

Do not be afraid of the wild
 slashing of the wind
 against your cheeks

as you struggle uphill towards
 your unlit room, frozen
 with the window left
 accidentally open.

After so many years
 we do not altogether
 lose track of each other.

I will come to you again
 when you are sleeping.
 From where I am
 time's passage is an immense dark cloud
 pressing on the winter sky.

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



BEST FRIENDS

Wanting to be softer I'm trying to say
in ways I have only imagined
in ways or methods that I don't think about
needing, wanting, desiring the propagation

there are friends of mine
that only acknowledges to it a softness
privately some of them I have
never seen that way

their circles might be red
perhaps grey or blue
even pink
a mystery remaining hidden

yet I move my circle
that has no beginning or end to it
like green grass spiraling
that is in a meadow with a stream, after a rain.

Ray Whitaker

WHEN TOYS WERE TAKEN SERIOUSLY

Part of the mystery and joy of the season
was my sister who seemed to place
the Christmas tree balls intently
even now, she looks like she did
a memory of when she was twelve
and I was almost six.

Today she is the prime mover
about the Christmas Tree decorations
the Moravian star atop, the strung lights
the festive wooden nutcrackers on the mantle
those things come almost with her holiday intent
making things happy, all of us know this

and count on her
caring for that
as if
there is, or was
no one else
that could do it as well.

She is twelve again, and I am almost six
in those moments. remembering
wholly impatient for presents to open
being grateful
for who she was
and who
she has become.

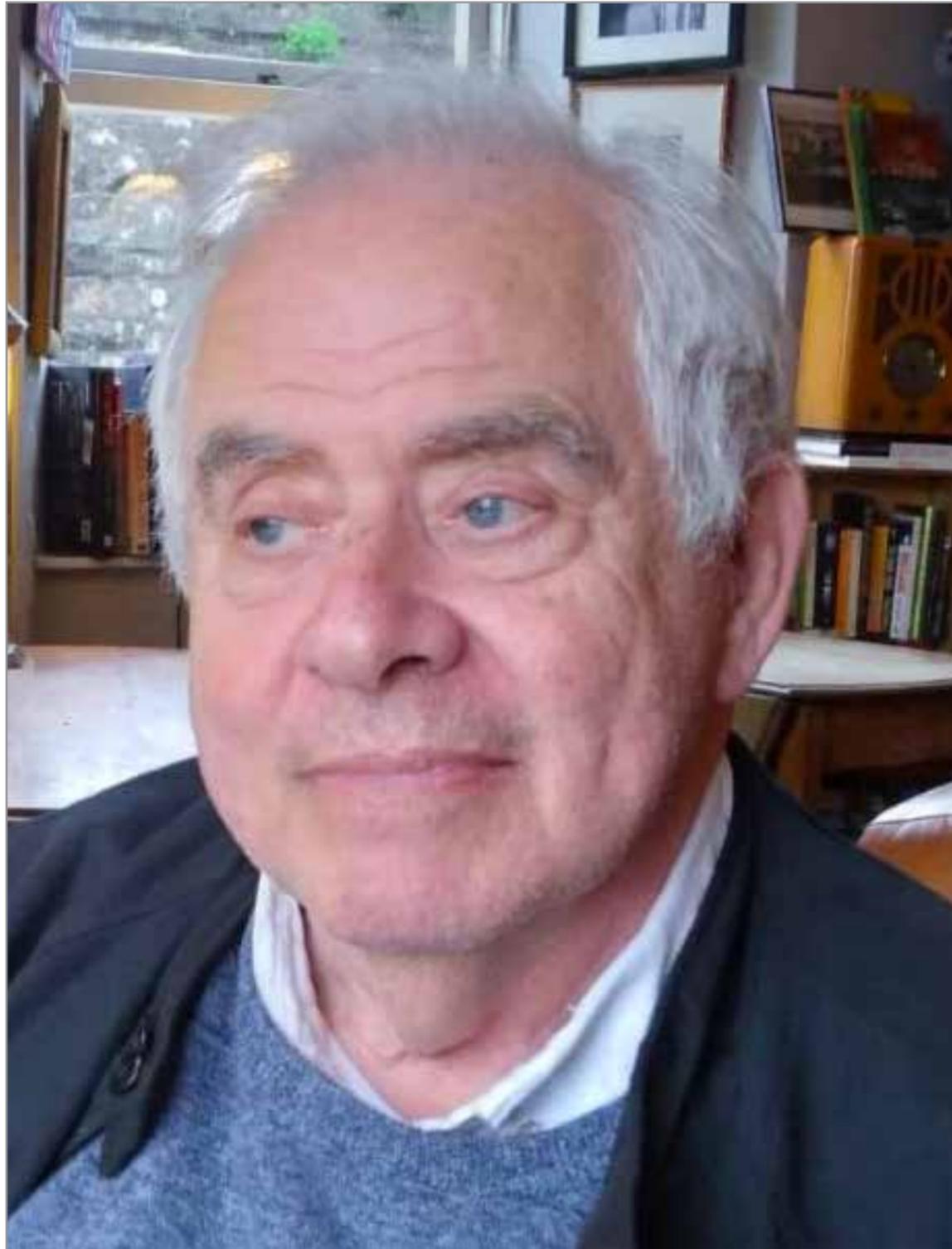
ON THE DESK

The mousepad lying there brings possibilities
it asks for attention
for possibly going to the end of the internet
and having a departure into determination
the white mouse seems to have a life of it's own
accepting the click only on empowerment
that adds to my totality.

What is there when I move the mouse
this interplay with consciousness and mechanics
somewhere there is a river flowing
in all of it
carrying the signals from my hand muscle's neurons.

It is a tributary
to what
questions are here
that I have
towards what makes me whole.

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



SNOW

It feels like it is about to snow.
 Snow may be what death is like.
 How can I know? It would be nice
 if it were so. This afternoon, I have
 been reading the poems and letters
 of Alexander Pope. Good poems –
 his; others’ – come from where
 everything comes from in
 the first place. Then, the letters.
 To his friends, especially. To
 Jonathan Swift, after the deaths
 of Stella and of Pope’s mother,
 most especially. He asked Swift
 to live with him. He asked if they
 could spend their last years together.

My mother should be in this poem,
 and now she is. She read to me,
 before I could read, Kipling’s
Just So Stories. An Africa and
 an Asia which never existed,
 which never could exist. Shortly
 thereafter, the stories blew away.
 But ‘And now, my best beloved’
 never blew away. How could it?

The snow begins to fall. It falls
 in thick flakes upon the earth.

Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Joseph Woods.

THE IRON BRIDGE

Hammersmith. Some poems of mine are finished.
Some poems of mine will never be finished.
We were seated, my young friend and I, on a bench
by a gigantic dull-green late nineteenth century
iron bridge, which spans the Thames at a broad
quiet stretch. He had brought me there, I thought,
because I live in Paris, and nothing like this is
in Paris. Or anywhere, really. Massive fluted pillars
with gilded friezes thereon. Support towers with
pointed turrets of an almost aching delicacy.
Various heraldic shields. As with much which
is Victorian on the grand scale, beautiful and ugly
go straight out the window. The river coursed by,
clean or dirty, it didn't seem important which.

After a few minutes, he began telling me of
a traumatic event in his childhood which only
recently he had begun speaking of to his wife
and to very few others. He took his time.
Every detail, including aftermaths. I was sorry
I heard it. It hit where any child, or adult, is
most vulnerable. A sort of sad Epithalamion, love
was in it somewhere, attempted by a potato head.
When he had finished, we resumed our walk.
He was more integrated than I was, I suppose.
I have lots of loose ends. I thought of all this today,
years later. Why he could best talk on that bench:
the iron bridge. Clouds and birds above it. Traffic
continuing to go forward on it, as traffic does.

OF ARNOLD CONSTABLE'S AND OTHER THINGS

For Betty A. Reardon

Mrs Roosevelt had her dresses made
at Arnold Constable department store,
and now there is no more Mrs Roosevelt
or Arnold Constable's or the New York
I lived in – vanished as in the verisimilitude
of a dream. And this is the reality which art
deals with, although art is seldom on
newspaper front pages which afterwards
people line their birdcages with.

I salute the artists' dressing room –
there they all are, preparing to give us
their music or their paintings or their
books or their performances.
You know their names, the ones whom
you are grateful for along the way.
You know as well the shared jokes
of your generation, your parents
knew theirs, your children have theirs.

I once taught Milton at Roosevelt House.
It had been given over to Hunter College
that was. Criss-crosses. As with the floral prints
which Mrs Roosevelt used to wear.

MAGIC MOUNTAIN 2

I was sitting on the terrace
of a sanatorium in the cold
high air, reading *The Magic Mountain*,
other patients playing cards.
Reading and cards and cold high air –
mirrors flashing in a mirror.
Mann was no fool, I thought,
cranks and lovers, lovers
and cranks, everything else
a magic trick – look over there! –
to distract.

I thought of a lovely serious girl –
Jean Simmons in 'Sanatorium,'
an episode of the Maugham film *Trio* –
she well-tailored in plaid silk,
in artificial light, other patients
playing cards, she elsewhere,
walking undistracted into
the uncanny with her lover
for the ten minutes which
comprise forever. Maugham
was no fool, I thought,
bad lungs make one think.

I was sitting on the terrace
of a sanatorium, reading *The Magic
Mountain*, when the greasy cards
which is all the mind is, slipped,
and I saw you, in high-collared black silk,
walking at a distance, the deep red sun
setting behind the mountains,
as far below a wasp
(one could hear it in that air)
carried the day away and ate it.

REBEGINNING

It is good to begin my life again,
and with every breath it rebegins.
If one loves much, one is forgiven much –
is there a difference between hope
and imagination? – is there a difference
between love and imagination? –
none of these can be bought
at the butcher's. Where did Schubert
come from? What he left us,
every second, a new beginning.
Imagination, that word, is not mentioned
in the Bible. Nor in *Moby Dick*.
Like oxygen, it is taken for granted
that we live by it. Imagination
was not mentioned on my marriage licence.
During my marriage, my life rebegan
every second. I did not know it
then. I know it now.

Sven Kretzschmar hails from Germany. His work has been published internationally, e.g., in *Writing Home. The 'New Irish' Poets* (Dedalus Press, 2019), *Hold Open the Door* (UCD Press, 2020), *100 Words of Solitude* (Rare Swan Press, 2021), *Das Gedicht*, *The Irish Times* and more. He was awarded 2nd prize for the Francis Ledwidge International Poetry Award 2022.



AUTUMN LANDS

Autumn lands on our shores, swaps in on the Fourth Wave, redoubtable
and heavy, and on these autumn lands what still grows is greener

closer to the ground. Wet November afternoons are harbingers of first frost
and foggy mornings. Maybe of snow, black ice, rising death case counts.

In impersonal concrete boxes, thick, repellent, and blurred, hidden
under sky-grey skies, saviours wrapped in protective foils dreading to decide

whom they will have to count among the unsavable.

Sven Kretzschmar

TRIPPING THROUGH WOODS IN NOVEMBER

after Mikiro Sasaki

Memories, strewn like rotting foliage, make you stumble
without prior notice. Past thick brambles of sorriness
trees remain voiceless in drizzle, a donkey

is whinnying across the pale landscape.
Otherwise, *silence speaks its own soliloquies*.
Empty-eyed I wait for you to come calling,

knowing you'll do the same you did
when I throve and breathed among islanders.
A pylon spanning the wood glade crackles:

is it your breath, a hush of air as you pass
elsewhere, or the blowing wind making cables
sing? Gaunt bosage is mumbling for me alone

and Dublin a far-away town Love never visited.

2020 TOO

Leaf sludge when you look out for the ghost of Kavanagh
on Pembroke Road, dishevelled after a year's penultimate night out.
Drinking cans on banks by the Canal, Baggot Street earlier on,

all intellect drowned in the swell of black seas. Light pollution
over townhouses, but a threatening darkness
beyond the windowpanes. White facemask greys in some gutter,

you expect to wake to the rumble of yellow carrier tins,
a hangover and the question if your city, like Dresden,
will clear out halls for coffin stacking; if the coming year will be 2020

too? Last glimpses of thinking before you marry
warm blankets, your trusted sick bucket resting, reproachfully,
beside a time-proven headboard.



A career in human resource management prepared Karen for her current activities; *cats and words*. Sometimes they hide, reappearing unexpectedly; sometimes, they scratch; sometimes, they purr. Her words have appeared in online publications in USA, UK & ROI and *Penned In*, co-written with Gaynor Kane, published by The Hedgehog Poetry Press, who recently published her debut pamphlet, *Missing Pieces*.

For a copy of *Missing Pieces* signed pamphlet, posted within UK £6.50, please email gaynorkane@gmail.com or purchase directly from: <https://www.hedgehogpress.co.uk/product/missing-pieces-karen-mooney-ebook-pdf-edition/>

AN INTERVIEW WITH KAREN MOONEY BY GAYNOR KANE

Gaynor Kane: Hello, Karen. Thank you so much for agreeing to chat with me about your creative development and your debut pamphlet, *Missing Pieces*, published by The Hedgehog Poetry Press earlier this year.

Karen Mooney: Thank you, Gaynor, for the opportunity. This would never have happened without The Hedgehog Poetry Press and your encouragement.

GK: The book's synopsis describes '*Missing Pieces*' as a collection of poems tracing love, loss and relationships, exploring moments, memories and reflections from early childhood to the present day. How did the collection take this shape?

KM: When I read through the batch of poems that had already been published in online journals and others in a similar vein, there was a theme cataloguing a journey through my past. My father's demise and subsequent death triggered my writing, and whilst initially, many of my poems were about him, I gradually started to delve deeper.

I have written about experiences that I and many others struggle to discuss. The page is a good listener. I see the poems as stepping stones in how I've made peace with some of the experiences that have defined my life so far. And there is a happy ending!

GK: Although the poems are about your childhood during *The Troubles*, with a father who was a policeman, only one poem mentions this. Was that a conscious decision?

KM: I have only written a few poems that touch upon his work, but I certainly didn't want that to distort the theme. I have been afraid of backlash about his occupation as we still live in a divided society that's quick to slap a label on people without getting to know them. A lifetime of keeping your counsel and feeling a sense of responsibility for someone's security is hard to break, but it does throw up issues and memories that children of *The Troubles* will carry. Still, I just couldn't have written about driving lessons without a reference to checking underneath the car. The repressed grief that is released within some poems is perhaps just as much of a date stamp of those times.



Gaynor Kane is a Northern Irish poet from Belfast who came to writing late and is trying to make up for time. She has two poetry pamphlets, and a full collection, from Hedgehog Poetry Press, they are *Circling the Sun*, *Memory Forest*, and *Venus in Pink Marble* (2018, 2019 and 2022 respectively). She is co-author, along with Karen Mooney, of a pamphlet of pandemic poetry entitled *Penned In* (2020). Gaynor has performed at several literary events including The Belfast Book Festival, Open House Festival, Stendhal Music Festival, Gloucester Poetry Festival and Cheltenham Poetry Festival. Recently, she has been a judge for The North Carolina Poetry Society and guest sub-editor for the inaugural issue of *The Storms: A journal of prose, poetry and visual art*. Her new chapbook, *Eight Types of Love*, was released in July, this year. Follow her on Twitter @gaynorkane

GK: Do you have a favourite poem in the collection, and if so, why?

KM: My favourite is *Beginnings*. It's a short poem full of possibility, anticipation and hope. It was written around the festival of Imbolc.

GK: Looking back, do you see a moment, memory or experience that hints at the possibility of you becoming a poet?

KM: No, and I still don't see myself as one, but if someone else does, then I'll take it. I'm just enjoying being me, someone who writes a few poems and is enjoying finding out what else she can do.

GK: How has the initial reception been to the collection's release?

KM: It has been very positive, and sales have helped raise £500 for Marie Curie NI. I admit I didn't appreciate or anticipate how others would react when reading the poems together. I felt rather naked when it was reviewed by Damien B Donnelly, host and producer of *Eat The Storms* poetry podcast and Editor of *The Storms* journal. To be appreciated and seen so clearly is very humbling.

GK: As well as being a poet Karen, in recent years, you have produced radio programmes, conducted interviews for Northern Visions TV, sat on various boards and project groups, organised literary events and write reviews and articles. Which do you find the most rewarding and why?

KM: Can I say, "them all?" I always love what I'm doing and throw myself into it, but I get bored quickly and like to progress. I support the theory that hitting a moving target is more challenging! My main interests are in health and creativity – sometimes, they overlap. The health strand, quite literally, commenced soon after I retired due to ill health. I trained with WRDA as a Community Facilitator and delivered health programmes to groups based in areas of deprivation. An appointment to the Patient Group of the RCGPNI followed, and when the pandemic struck, I was approached to join a PPI (public & patient involvement) team for a national project. I blogged about it, so I guess my paths started crossing. Although, in health awareness sessions, I would have read rhymes to lighten things up.

KM: An opportunity to speak on the radio led to a weekly programme about local creatives called Lisburn Reads. That was followed by interviewing for *NVTV*, and I did so regularly until the pandemic, when I curated a series of local poets' recordings for broadcast. I've enjoyed providing a frame for many local creatives; the team at the station are very supportive.

Events have tended to be opportunistic, in that I saw an advert for an exhibition on *Faces of Change: Votes for Women at the National Trust* and pitched an idea to add women's voices.

They loved it, and its shortlisting for a Saboteur Award helped to secure *The Art of Conversation*, featuring 20 local writers as part of their Festival of Conversation.

As for writing articles, that all came about because I wrongly wrote an article instead of a piece of fiction for writing class homework! It was well enough received so, now and then, when the poetry well is dry, I'm encouraged to have a go at something different.

I suppose you could say that I dabble at many different things!

GK: What is next for you regarding your writing and other interests?

KM: In terms of poetry, I have a joint pamphlet with Caroline Johnstone next year with The Hedgehog Poetry Press. I'm also starting a monthly Poetry & Pancakes session at my local library.

I've just become involved in another nationwide health data project to improve COVID-19 vaccine uptake and develop processes to facilitate UK-wide studies. Hopefully, this will enable other non-COVID-19 research on a national scale.

Regarding media, I'll be conducting some interviews for the *Eat The Storms*, Poetry Podcast.

GK: To whet the readers' attention, would you like to leave us with a sample poem?

KM: Yes, I'll share my dad's last days. I witnessed this happen, and it made me smile. Dad's interest in the ladies held fast till the end!

LAST RITES

The world would come crashing in around us
in as many days as it took to make
when you return to the care home, conscious
of our presence, attending your own wake.
You perform a rehearsal one evening;
we gasp at what we think is your last breath
then you rally to sit up, eyes gleaming,
ordering breakfast - your last before death.
One by one, folk call in to pay respects,
sit in silence or give a knowing nod.
You aren't fit to speak, yet touch does affect,
as one lady proved and how I applaud
her cradling your face in pillow-soft breasts;
prompting memories, you smile, feeling blessed.

Note: *NVTV*, also known as Northern Visions Television, is a local community television station based in the city of Belfast.

2010 - 2022



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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