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Live encounters

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MAY 2023

TERRY MCDONAGH
Reflection

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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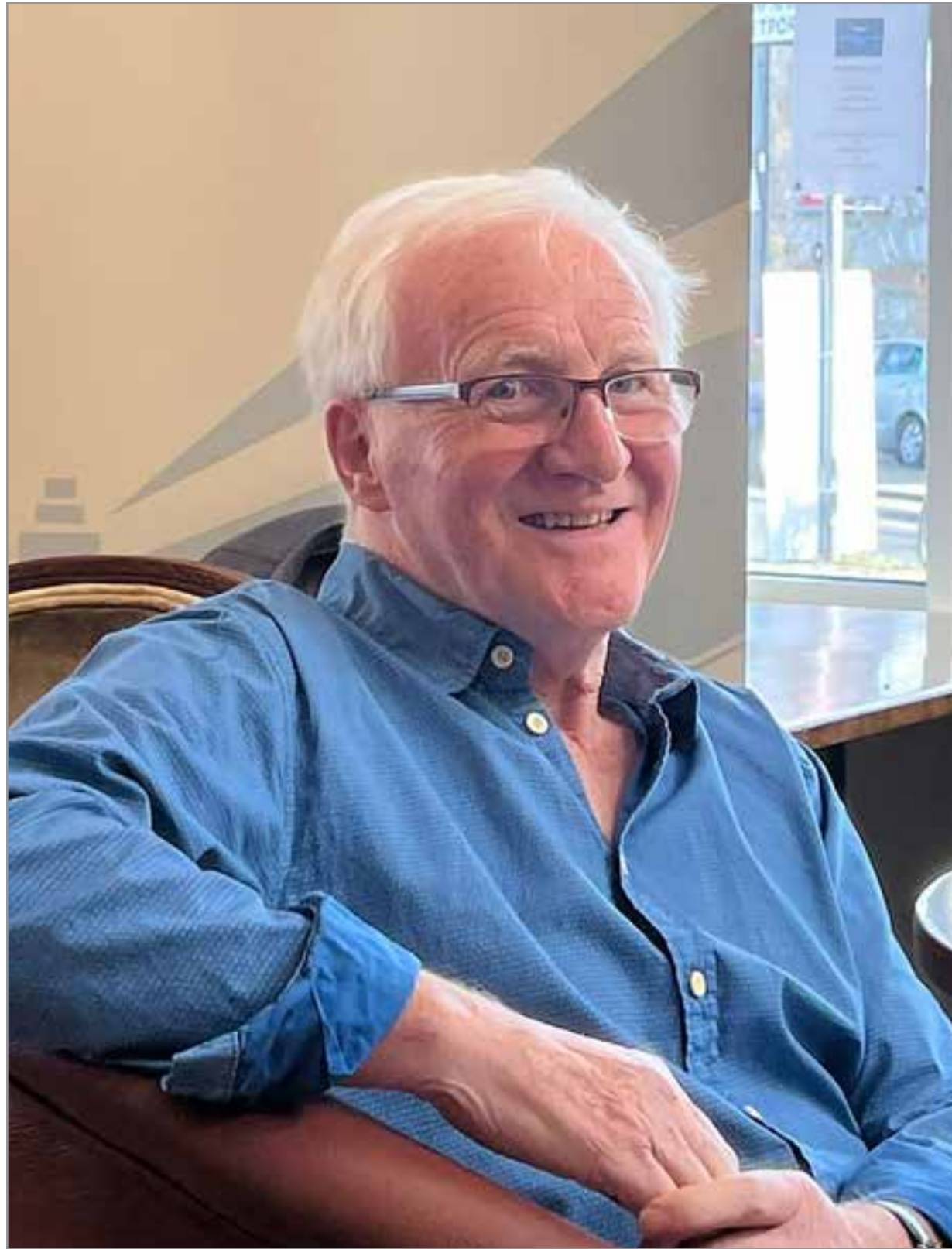


MAY 2023

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Terry McDonagh

TERRY MCDONAGH REFLECTION

Narcissus in Greek mythology pined away in love with his own reflection and turned into a narcissus flower. The message is clear: don't spend too long reflecting on your own brilliance. Imagine the outcome. But seriously, all of life has to do with reflection, doesn't it! We look at our reflection in mirrors – reflect on the past, on success and failure – we think to the future. We mediate. Thomas Hardy in his poem, *I look into my Glass*. What he sees in the mirror is not a reflection of how he feels he is still the romantic, an energetic young man, but the mirror doesn't lie:

*I look into my glass,
and view my wasting skin
and say, would God it came to pass
my heart had shrunk as thin.*

As part of my work with young people – which I enjoy very much – I wrote a poem called, *Windows* (included in my collection, *Echolocation*). We have heaps of fun with the poem and it prompts great writing. I begin by asking if they, sometimes, peep at their reflection when passing shop windows. Some giggle – one or two even blush a little but a lively discussion is always guaranteed. We seem to need to constantly take stock – to see what we want to see:

*Windows
At my age I need to admire myself
and when I run out of mirrors,
I sneak up on shop windows...
calling out,
window, window in the street,
keep me cool and dig my beat.*

I listened to an interview with the legendary German footballer, Franz Beckenbauer, where he was asked for his thoughts on his future. He replied by saying, he tended to concentrate on his past as there was a lot more of it to reflect on. I often think of his words. He didn't write poetry – he might have for all we know – but one thing was certain, he was a great artist with the ball at his feet. He lit up when reflecting.

Shakespeare did it with his pen and in his theatre. In Sonnet 3, *Look in thy Glass and tell the Face thou Viewest*, he is exhorting a handsome young man to get married and pass his beauty on to his children:

*Look in thy glass and tell the face thou viewest.
Now is the time that face should form another.
Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee
calls back the lovely April of her prime.
So thou through windows of thine age shalt see,
despite the wrinkles, this thy golden time.
But if thou live rememb'ed not to be
die single, and thine image dies with thee.*

I remember facilitating a fascinating and memorable workshop with a group of about twenty adults with specific learning disabilities in a small town in the west of Ireland. I admit to being surprised when they came through the door. They were expecting a storyteller and I was expecting a group of writers. I was on the back foot with beads of sweat gathering where sweat gathers. We settled into a neat semi-circle and exchanged pleasantries. I was under observation. Where do I go from here? I opened a book and the first work I saw was 'turf'. *Who can tell me a turf story*, I called out hopefully – longing for snippets of guidance and inspiration. The response was immediate and amazing: almost all of them had experience of turf in some shape or form. Some reflected on days of working in the bog. If they we hadn't done it themselves, they knew people who had. We all told stories and reflected on the antics of neighbours in their bogs. Sunburn, tea and sandwiches in the late afternoon was discussed. A woman saying that she used to wash her hands and look at her reflection in a puddle, prompted me to tell the story of Narcissus. Wonderful language in colour and flower shapes ensued. What a day!

There is something about reflection and writing that makes us whole. The future is informed by the past. Women appear less afraid to reflect. A male participant in one of my workshops – who had cycled Rout 66 and lots of other arduous routes – told us, that women will almost always ask, *were you not lonely?*, while men tend to ask, *were you not bored?* The cyclist helped us to reflect.

Robert Louis Stevenson in his poem for young people, *Looking-Glass River*, writes about looking into the reflections in a river.

*We can see our coloured faces
floating on the shaken pool
down in cool places
dim and very cool.*

All of life is really past tense. In the words of Buddha, *you can't step into the same river twice* – things that are passed cannot be revisited. We can reflect – attempt to hold on to youth. Some try more than others. Oscar Wilde gave us the picture of Dorian Gray. The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, told us all things are one, but at the same time everything is constantly in states of change or flux. This tension keeps us alive and reflecting on the world as we perceive it. We have our arts to help us try to understand and make sense of existence. – to reflect on the human condition. In the words of William Wordsworth: *I have learned to look on nature, not as in the hours of thoughtless youth, but hearing, oftentimes the still sad music of humanity.*

Dominique Hecq grew up in the French-speaking part of Belgium. She now lives in Melbourne, Australia. Hecq writes across genres and disciplines—and sometimes across tongues. Her creative works include a novel, six collections of short stories and fifteen books and chapbooks of poetry, including *After Cage: A Composition in Word and Movement on Time and Silence* (Liquid Amber Press, 2022) and, most recently, *Songlines* (Hedgehog, 2023) and *Endgame with no Ending* (SurVision, 2023), a winner of the 2022 James Tate Poetry Prize .



BEFORE THE MORATORIUM

It starts with a rattle. Not wooden, but silvery. It's not a song. Beautiful people spring from nowhere. They hover in a no wo/man's land between the earth and the sky, the living and the dead. They head for the embankment, jiggling coins in the pockets of gossamer robes, presumably hoping to return from their Katabasis. They glide down three white marble steps and into the ebony pirogue. One single obol, hollers Kharon, daggers in his eyes. The daggers cut open intricately embroidered purses. The ferryman hurls all the useless clickety coins in the black river, slick as oil. Out of time, and now space, the beautiful people are a van Eyck painting. Ten beautiful bodies dangle from the rafters Death makes with her legs; they arch their backs, contort, writhe, grimace. One hides under Death's phantom calf. Most squirm, wriggle and thrash about among beasts with yellow eyes and sharp teeth. There are dragons and snakes and panthers and rats, pumas and crows and hyenas. A beautiful woman goes by on a stretcher in the solid grip of two firemen clad in royal blue. She is propped up, almost sitting—serene, with grey hair, her face unlined. A blood-spattered blanket conceals her legs and half her torso. She crosses the square crowded with *chidlers* playing. Chants *If the children are happy they are communists*. Crescendo.

Dominique Hecq

BAKASAWA

We are gathered here at De’Vine Escape, an award-winning conference and vineyard centre in the scenic Yarra Valley. The organisers have transformed the Melba room into our retreat shrine: rows of foam mats come in peacock and canari. They face the person. Buddha-like, she sits in a time-warp, oblivious to the drone of tout mosquitoes, smug in her orange draping robe. Arms close to the torso, ankles crossed, knees apart, her body looks like a mere frame upon which her robe is hung. She reminds me of a sculpture I once saw at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I swear I’m not hallucinating the right hand denoting absence of fear, the left fulfilling of the vow. Perhaps I am. Snail-shell platinum blond curls encase her perfect face. With elongated earlobes and eyes slanting upwards, her gaze comes across as introspective to the point of self-disappearance. I nervously look around. We all wear gym shorts or leggings and T-shirts. Our gifts to ourselves for the next ten days include essential quiet time, meditation, spa, massage, detox and cleansing. I look at the yet unnamed Bodhisattva. Recall spotting her at the domestic terminal sculling Manhattan after Manhattan. A whisper: *Namaste*. We whisper back *Namaste*. Bodhisattva demonstrates the Crow pose. *This is the gateway*, she says. Coughs. Loses balance. Falls on her perfect beak. She splutters. Blood. *Session dismissed*, she croaks. We file out. At the cellar door just outside the Melba, we stop sudden front-on: feathers drop one by one from the sky. The threshold is melting wax.

B GENOME

Belladonna people bloom in fall, like golden wattle. They shower pollen everywhere below altostratus clouds that break the sky and the music of the spheres in deadly nightshade. Belladonna people sip Noble Fellows von Rockhop Grüner Veltliner from chamber pots all year round. The vines in those spheres are cultivated from rich irony and grown under the breeze of dry humour. With its fragrant white peach and almond praliné aromas, the wine is to die for. With glass in hand and tongue in cheek, belladonna people finger canapés of smoked seafood made by other hands. Salmon, trout, lobster, swimmer crabs and yabbies are smoked to perfection. Belladonna people favour the salmon and ocean trout varieties because these have a higher oil content that allows to smoke the fish more intensely and enhancing the luxuriously oily texture of belladonna people’s skin. Whether on the snowfields of Trois Vallées or the beaches of Honolulu, belladonna people live out of time. They spare their gene pool, preferring adoption or surrogacy, their genomic footprints leaving no trail.

Kate Mahony's short fiction has been widely published in New Zealand and internationally and been shortlisted and longlisted in international competitions. These include the Katherine Mansfield Short Story Award, 2008 in which her story was a top 10 finalist, the Fish Publishing International Short Story competition, 2015, the Bridport Short Story Competition, UK, 2015, the Commonwealth Short Story Competition, 2022, the Cambridge Autumn Festival Short Story Competition, 2022, and a number of National Flash Fiction Day competitions. Her short stories have appeared in literary journals including Litro New York, Meniscus (Australia) Blue Nib (Ireland) Fiction Kitchen Berlin, Fictive Dream (UK) Takahē, Best New Zealand Fiction Vol 6, Bonsai : Best small stories from Aotearoa New Zealand 2018, and Blackmail Press. She has an MA in Creative Writing from the International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University of Wellington. Cloud Ink Press will publish her contemporary/historical novel in September. <https://www.katemahonyauthor.com/>



Kate Mahony

THE NEIGHBOUR

The police officer gets out of her patrol car and approaches us.

Eileen, who I have been helping load some rotten tree branches onto her trailer, stops work. She keeps hold of a long branch as she waits for the police officer to reach us. Eileen used to be in the armed services or that is what she has told some of the other neighbours. Now she drives a taxi.

The police officer asks about the man who lives next door to Eileen. The officer says that he has been reported missing from Brazil. That is, he was expected in Brazil last week and he had not arrived. Someone has phoned the police here.

Eileen shrugs. She tosses the branch down onto the trailer, flexes her arm muscles for a moment and says she hasn't seen him.

The officer asks me if I know anything about him. I say no. 'I don't think he is ever there,' I explain, to be helpful. The man is a mystery to me although I do sometimes see him walking along the street with a shabby briefcase. When we pass each other, he always stares through me as if he has no idea who I am, or that we might have met before.

After the officer leaves, I notice Eileen is pink in the face. I remember how she often complained about the same neighbour. She had to live next door to what, she said, looked like an abandoned house. It dragged the value of her house down, she said. Most of the paint on its wooden timber had long since worn away and the roof was rusting but the man refused to do anything that would improve his property.

She had asked him to contribute to the costs of a fence between their properties because the man left his side in a mess of weeds and rubbish. But the neighbour had been loath to spend any money. In fact, he became angry at her request and said there was no need for one. He added that when she dug up some of the drain on higher ground between their properties it caused flooding, forcing dirty water down onto the front of his property. She was to blame, not him. He got angry at Eileen.

When Eileen told me about it, it seemed to me he had all the say in the situation. Myself, I never got involved in their dispute. That is how I am. Which is why I am helping Eileen with the branches on my one day off work. As if I have nothing better to do.

We watch the police officer drive off. Eileen looks at me with a frown as if wondering why I am still here. She tosses another stray branch onto the trailer where it lands with a heavy clunk. She wipes her brow and then claps her hands together, dismissing me. She goes back inside her house. I stand on the pavement on the street for a while. There I carefully study the lie of the land on the side of her house. I try to make out where the drain had been.

The one that has now been filled in.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Richard W. Halperin's poems are published by Salmon/Cliffs of Moher and by Lapwing/Belfast. Salmon has listed *Selected & New Poems* for Autumn 2023; it will draw upon poems from Mr. Halperin's four Salmon and sixteen Lapwing collections, on the occasion of his 80th birthday. A new Lapwing, *The Painted Word*, will appear this Spring.



LENS

I look at an eighteenth-century painting
of a German park in broad daylight:
bushes, trees, fountains, paths, laid out
in perfect symmetry. At a distance,
a palace whose park this is. Every object
casts a perfectly symmetrical dark patch.
Even if it poured rain, the ideal geometry
of the scene would be unchanged.

Seasons have little to do with this.
Wilhelm Kempff's playing of
The Goldberg Variations has to do
with this. To what I give that which
a character in Enid Bagnold's play
The Chalk Garden calls 'the privilege
of my attention' has to do with this.
Mansfield Park has to do with this.

There is room for Enid Bagnold,
as there is room for Francis Bacon.
There is room for Alexander Pope
as there is room for tabloid news.
Experience, mine, can never be
passed on to anyone; it waits.
I can see – because I choose to –
Wilhelm Kempff walking through ii.

Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Bertrand A.

THE PONDER HEART

Daniel Ponder is the protagonist,
and Edna Earle Ponder his niece,
in Eudora Welty's whimsical fantastical
The Ponder Heart – a play of which,
with perfect actors, David Wayne,
Una Merkel, others, was running
on Broadway when I first moved
to New York and is running still
in my head, because of the title.
'The Ponder Heart' would, I think,
be a good name for Gray's Elegy.
Certainly, a good epitaph for several
friends of mine who have died: he was,
she was, a ponder heart. I think that
many figures who are mentioned in
history books were ponder hearts.
How can one not be? And many in
the news now, even those whom I am
horrified by. Many, it seems to me,
in the Bible. And so many in any creche.
Then there are the artists. How can one
be an inspired artist – David Wayne,
Una Merkel – without being a ponder heart? –
even when time has blown you away
and subsequent generations can
only know you because you allowed
yourself to be stuck in the gum of film.
Today is Easter Sunday 2023.
Tomorrow, on the road to Emmaus,
two – or three – ponder hearts.

REBECCA

Is it decadent to write a poem about
a great novel? I think not. A good deal
of literary criticism is decadent.
Over-estimating ambiguity is decadent.
Life is love, fear, betrayal, hope, death,
shock. These are found even in universities.
'Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley
again.' Some books begin at the apogee
of language and vision and remain there.
Moby Dick, 'Call me Ishmael.' *Great
Expectations*, the child Pip's thinking,
when he reads his parents' gravestone,
that his mother's name was Also Georgina.
The flow never abates. A sleazy character
in *Rebecca* who had been Rebecca's lover
asks, when told that she died of cancer,
'Does anybody know if it's contagious?'
The shock of a great novel is not the book,
it is the reader. Some books begin
where 'Kubla Khan' ends.

SELECTION

Of an evening, I run my fingers over
The Wasteland. Great art – and there is
not much of it – depicts *where things are*.

A blank space separates that, from what I
am used to. Words collapse, except for The Word.
Words are inadequate witnesses, anyway.
Twenty years ago, I had a great grief
which nevertheless gave me a long respite
before I could pull the plug entirely out.
Of evenings, I run my fingers over the result.

I do not know – do not want to know –
anything about Eliot. Everyone sentient
is some guy or some gal. The rapture and
merciless discipline of a great artist
is something else. I recognise it in *The Wasteland*.
The work of someone who has pulled the plug
entirely out, goes into Apollo's chariot,
takes up the reins and rides. He does not
fall out.

WASHINGTON SQUARE

*The Book of Job. Rebecca. Washington
Square*. Three aspects of the human soul,
perfectly done, as the fire begins to dim
in my fireplace – for which I am grateful.
The last thing I want is kerosene.

Three aspects of the human soul, perfectly
done. They point the way. The way never meant
anything to me and still does not. What means
everything – all that I see – is the person
pointing. *The Iliad*. Homer pointing.

A blind man pointing. I am not sure that
Homer was blind. I think someone changed that,
trying to make art merciful. Homer is easier
to deal with if one is told he was blind.
Washington Square would be easier to deal with

if one was told that Henry James was blind.
He wasn't.

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



FATHER UNKNOWN

i.m Joseph John Dale, 1889-1918

*"In the perpetual care
of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission"*

War's dog tag your child's
legacy. She afloat in utero.
You embarked in the belly
of a troop ship with army kin:
39th Battalion, 10th Brigade.
En route Armentieres, Messines,
Broodseinde, Passchendaele,
Ypres, the Somme. Life's
blood rites possibly wept. As
if they did not expect brutish,
combat, trench, mustard gas.
Or the wound that evacuated
you to Blighty. You died there
records say of primary and
secondary: pneumonia, heart
failure. But Grandfather
in the shared tomb of 1914-
1918 your anniversary heart
blooms Flanders Field red,
cradled in Earth's ability
to survive a surfeit
of weaponry, bone, flesh.
A grace note, blood fed,
tilled like an infant.

Patricia Sykes

THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD AGAIN

The Western Plains a-hum under the tyres.
 The ears of childhood alive now as then.
 My sister's ghost beside me in the
 passenger seat content to play memory
 prompt. Same dry paddocks of gorse,
 scotch thistle, host now to *Wild Nights*
At The Zoo. Red Hot Pokers flowering
 at the feet of a tiger silhouette are young
 enough not to fret, the *Werribee Exit*
 a caution not a threat, the thundering
 trucks mostly going the anti-direction.
 They'll hit Melbourne with a thirst
 there's no satisfying. My petrol tank
 refuses to be afraid, filled with a trust
 in this bitumen stretch which broke the
 news of my sister's death: not virus-kill,
 an accident of genes. What we share
 we share. We are not speeding. The
Slow-to 75km and *No Alcohol in Public*
Places disturbs neither of us. We obey
Please Consider The Vehicles Following
 and permit a cyclist to pedal past, his
 antennae eliciting themes of Extra
 Terrestrial, his speed a mad break-neck
 as if two-wheeled travel is safer from
 disaster than a four. We go beyond \$2.50
Horse Poo, *Caravan Storage* and *Kayaks*
For Sale. We leave behind *School Bus*
Reversing, *Scout Camp*, *Country Club*,
 and the indigenous *Culture Walk* that once
 had no need to name itself. At length we
 reach the *Transfer Station's* lit windows
 where I offload myself to a guest bed.
 Swaddled in night's flannelette my sister
 imagines herself alive again. We fall
 asleep mid-debate. The ocean sighs.

WORD, FLESH

In the tug between word and flesh
 a poem likes to believe its reach
 is more than a brew of lines
 an imagination's tweak. Gripped

hearts are never anonymous
 the gasp in a throat is fear's fatigue
 an adrenal shock, a wish to be safe
 among the beloved. Words would spare

us if they could, keep bedside vigil
 alongside penultimate breath,
 ultimate loss, would choose silence
 so as not to become reporters

of the noose, as in the territory
 of suicide where grief's hard
 sunlight substitutes elegy
 for cradle song.

Finbar Lennon is a retired surgeon, accidental author and poet. He co-authored his late wife's memoir "The Heavens are all Blue" published by Hachette Ireland in 2020. He is the author of three collections of poetry, 'NOW', 'A Thimble on her Finger' and 'VOICES' (Lapwing Publications, Belfast, 2021/2022). His latest collection 'VOICES' was launched in the Irish Writers Centre in Dublin in March 2023. A number of his poems have appeared online on Planet Earth Poetry and Viewless Wings and in the 'Consultant', an Irish medical print journal.



Finbar Lennon

A WEEK OF DAYS

Pails of water collected after rain
mobile step count keeps me sane
diversion slows down drive to grave
pedal hikers claim right of way
some speed by me breaking red
inspiration comes at Eavan's bed
cemetery bulging towards its peak
margins creeping closer to the creek
most headstones figure only one
shared smile, home now, day is done.

Up at sunrise, work on bus
respond to mail, avoid the rush
students fail to show, took history so
pick-me-up in Berkley row
candles lit for one to grow
follow steps of Yeats and Pierse
GPO and Clerys' clock unique,
time the same on Eason's piece
return to what's in larder's store
day that should have yielded more.

Home alone to brood and write
draughts and shivers dull the light
age thrives in heat, fades in cold
pen can only parry daily mould
words reviewed my desk unlock
grotto walk, cure for writer's block
trees felled, designed to burnish blue
and open views to welcome queues
holy muse on homeward lap renews
pick up pen to write anew.

continued overleaf...

A WEEK OF DAYS *...contd*

Springtime mood greets green array
deadhead day for fading blooms astray
'gnome's' shears swirl and swoop
errant footsteps tread on rising shoots
blades slice feinting leaves on fly
mind spurred on by ruddy sky
fallen shrub laid rest on mound
new growth lies above the ground
surgeon's handwork shines in sun
barber's fault if trim is overdone.

Day to learn lines for offspring
chance again to buy some time
reach above that bar am scared
glance at four, eye one who's fair
so much time they spend with theirs
how to make up loss of years
space each week to visit three
fly over equal days for she
they see my motives truly fair
playing catch-up works if shared.

One set aside to exercise my lungs
weekly trek to stay forever young
air I breathe at woods and sea
a mix to cleanse and nourish me
missing words that rhyme and chime
jump out of mind in ramble time
lines now much better than before
is there time for any more
not alas my call to make
deep inside my frame I quake.

Day to listen and to preach
my voice begins to overreach
lonesome words on pad sit still
hollow sound with echoes only thrill
forget the gathering gloom and grief
cold aching bones here to stay
memory last to go they say
mark the slate, try game of fetch
year of months too long a stretch
best fill coming days with weeks.

ANOTHER DAY

As daily evening light recedes
dishes hand-washed, dried and
set aside, cloth to wipe away
waste and trivia of forgetful day,
mind to guide those gestures fine
of head and limbs and spine.

GROWING OLD

Shock image of age in single frame
still shots of frozen faults and frailties
never knew that looks deceive at rest
roll out winsome views in mirror fair
as silly bleeders follow moving blade
to facial hollows, ramps and wrinkles.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

The more I read my poems
the better they become
faint praise no – just true
try scan across your sum
it will the same for you
eye to figure who else too.

RETURN TO SENDER

An unexpected email
from Dennis – in the sense
I start most conversations
add a subject after prompt
in this case he is subject
object in my box –
am I the prompt
that forced his hand?
is concerned my flow
of verse has slowed
reminds of Dylan Thomas
working on the drafts
he not far off half my age
at rest below and counting!

my prime is gone
my rage is spent
my time insipid,
snakes and gnaws
along – while fill
of worthy deeds
and promises
are stuck at still;

scribblers both
on copy books and envelopes
homework masking lines
he crops to bones
I dress in flannel
Dylan wrote them cold
to warm their hearts
they won't remember mine
before or after Mass.

Fred Johnston was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 1951. Working as a journalist for some years, he was a poetry reviewer with Books Ireland and The Irish Times, among other publications: he also reviewed for The Sunday Times and Poetry Ireland Review. His work, both prose and poetry, has appeared in The New Statesman, The Guardian, Stand, The Spectator, Iron, Orbis, The Irish Times, The London Magazine, The Dalhousie Review, The Sewanee Review, Southwards, The Moth, The Stinging Fly. Founder of CUIRT international literature festival (Galway,) his most recent poetry collection is 'Rogue States' (Salmon Poetry, 2019.) He is also a novelist and short story writer. He lives in Galway in the West of Ireland.



CONCERNING LUCANUS

By wick-light he grew his thoughts
Sipped a wine gone sour
Heard in the ruffling draped dark, or thought he heard,
A scraping of a nail across a board

It was a nail's edge of moon etching a line
Of light along the window sill
And he could hear it. And hear too his jaded empires
Ebb away; there was much he heard

Sipping a wine gone sour, and a new day
Not far, not far. A new bird woke,
A dogbark, or foxbark, a tree clearing its throat -
Lucanus had much to say, yet went away without a word.

Fred Johnston

LUCANUS AT SEVENTY

When all was said and done, he'd made a life
Of quills and inks and two sons and a wife
The frescoes on his walls
Gave depth and vibrance to his office space
His halls drew in the scent of oranges and wood-smoke
He washed his face awake in sandalwood

He could see Cyra's tomb from his balcony
Cyra, mater et u. hic iacet -
Simple and unfrilled as a column of accounting
Milled in the marble. Beside it, his own.
But time enough, he still enjoyed his wine
And friends and books and all of that yet.

The air was full of salt and fallen leaf
When the gardeners came,
Lucanus, for no reason, felt a fattening of grief.

LUCANUS THE POET

In an age when even slaves
Well-sponsored
Were writers of drama
Lucanus felt the state, the world, diminish

His own small verses
Entertained his friends
And theirs was the praise of friends
And they passed long nights hungry for sleep

He wrote of ordinary things
And held that in the ordinary
Lay the universal. Grey heads nodded
Over wine and purple grapes in fading light.

What a universe was his
From his villa, down
The geometry of his tended lawns,
Down the vineyards to the ever-belling sea

To the harbour, to his ships
To his oils and carpentry, the dates
Of parched Gaetulia -
The ample cool of eternity

Lay on his eyes like a finger
Dousing the sweat of lamp and ledger
Content, he was, Lucanus, in his verses
His heart flickering like a flame.

OF NO CONSEQUENCE

Lucanus, now big-bellied as a baker
Had in youth been
Of no consequence:
A thin presence on the harbour wall
Preening himself like a gull

And like a gull, scavenging
Among the bits and bobs of other people's
Fortune; while his father's trade
Grew large
He borrowed money and threw dice

How far he'd come from that
Thin shadow -
How thin now the shadow of Romulus
Augustus, how thin the Empire
His ships looted without reprisal

He took hot herbal wine
For his heart pain
Rhubarb for flatulence
Fennel for his waters
And a polite diet of oysters and eggs

How far he'd come, Lucanus
Whose villa shone
Like a white shell
Like the well-fondled bone of a die
Like the magnificent cut marble of his tomb.

LUCANUS OMINA LEGIT

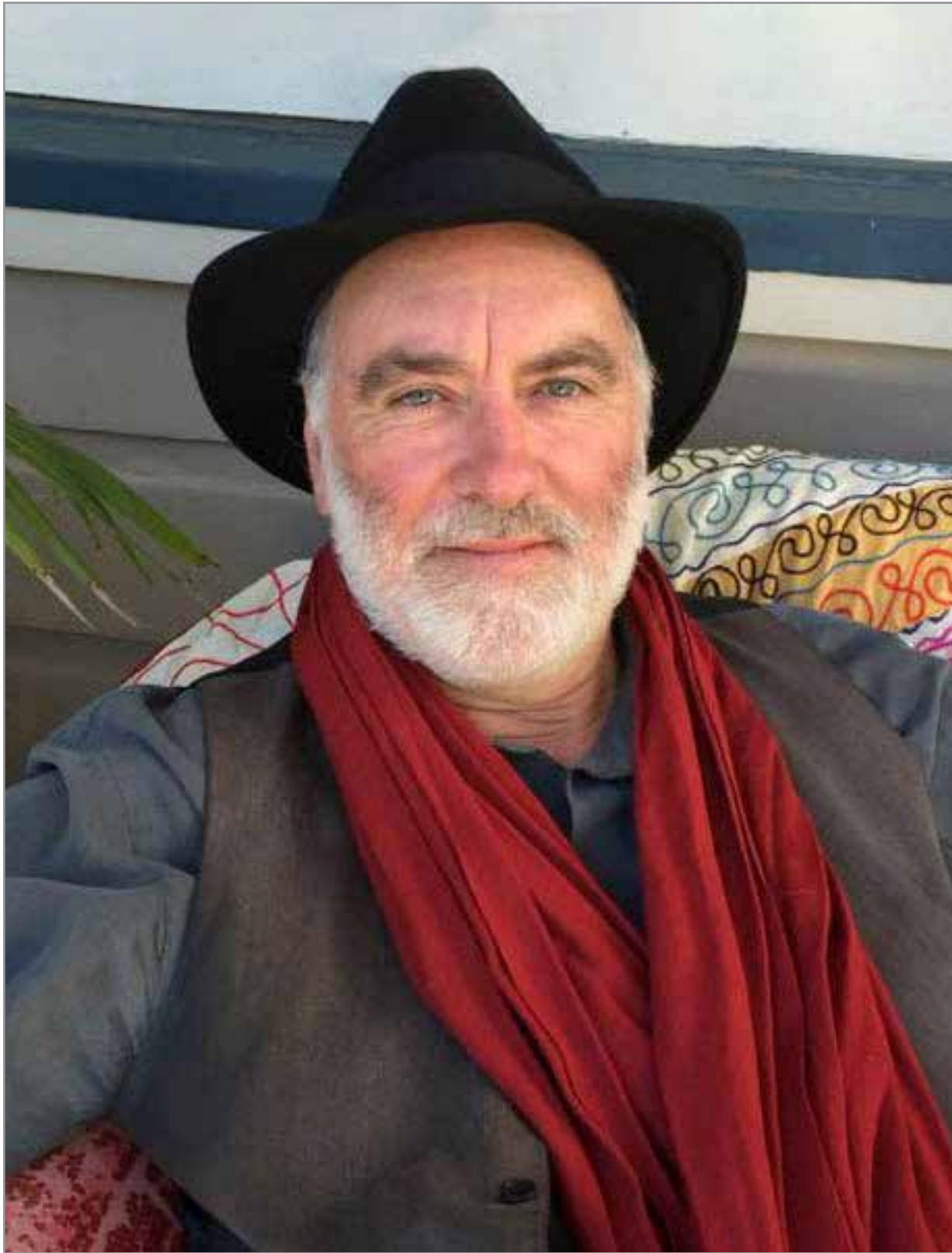
A physician, they say,
Makes a bad patient -
His mother had instilled in Lucanus
A hackworthy faith in signs
Some best read by night, others by day

For some, he had, like most
To hire a priest to fumble
In the guts of something suitably dead
Something harmless, approved and small
Butchered under incense, blood in a thimble.

He would stand and watch
Flocks of seabirds claw the blue air
In gyromantic panics, fits of speed
Their angles like a language, spelling out
A formula as potent as stars to intercede

With what gods, big or small
He dared not wonder. Just in time he grew
A prudent fear of flying birds or slippery offal
Dreading, of all things, madness such
As fell upon old men like him, who delved too much.

Justin Lowe lives in a house called Doug in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney where he edits international poetry blog, Bluepepper. Justin has just completed a collection of short stories while his ninth collection of poetry sits on the publisher's desk.



BREAKDOWN

there are probably better ways
to spend your time

but this one time
there was rain and a snapped timing belt

and a sigh of Sunday nothing
on a potholed back road

between a cobwebbed truck stop
and a tidy town blink-of-an-eye

and the crows were sleek
and murder-black in the rain

all clumsy gambols in the lowland updrafts
and the spring lambs all bundled

like gossamer under the drooping trees
and a dog barking somewhere at the distant thunder

like a giant stirring in the hills
while I started counting each fence post

and marvelling at the tireless industry of the dead

Justin Lowe

VICTOR HUGO

when I write myself into my stories
my characters flinch a little
at my disingenuousness
like seasoned travellers at the breathless *arriviste*

the stories themselves are rambling
coarse-grained, I am not
the most lapidary of writers

and the characters themselves
the ones I write me into
tend to hold steady against
the flow of events

while everyone around them
relishes the slow unravelling
that never comes

I think, perhaps
my prose
is crueller than my poetry
if only just

there is light
at many of my stories' denouements
the soft pealing of bells

but that
is only because
the characters keep on scratching
until the lid is finally opened

theirs is a defiant courage
bordering on resignation
they carry silver bullets to the barricades

I think
my poems manage
to find space for tenderness
that my stories cannot

the stories flow easily
whereas the poems do not
because events crowd out the human

there is a flaw
in my technique somewhere
I see that now -
stories should not write themselves

poems
on the other hand
should

yes, there is
most definitely a flaw
in my approach -
perhaps more emphasis on greetings

rather than farewells

MILTON FRIEDMAN

arithmetic
becomes my forte
at 2am

robbing Peter the plumber
to pay Paul the mechanic
May to raise a glass to June

this one
has soothing letterhead
that one is stamped in blood red

I find myself
whistling some insipid tune
I heard on call waiting

the way a slow drip
works on the mind
of a chained man dying of thirst

I find myself
balancing my days like a ledger:
I only realise now I am one of their oldest recruits

LIGHT HORSE

at Sidon
a game of two-up went all day
behind a low wall away from the officers.

the donkeys brayed at their tethers
each time the coins were tossed.

drunk NCO's with their wilting plumes -
the losers of the game -
staggered off to aim their rifles at the market beggars
through the dust of the General's motorcade.

on both sides of the pitted road
the ground bloated and belched
over the Turks' shallow graves

while a sniper groaned
beneath the flagstaff where he'd been pinned
Christ-like with his dead comrades' bayonets.

the ravens couldn't brave
the sharp steel long enough
to get at his eyes:

great cruelties, it would seem, harbour small mercies

Sven Kretzschmar hails from Germany. His poetry has been published widely in Europe and overseas, among other outlets in *Writing Home*. *The 'New Irish' Poets* (Dedalus Press, 2019), *Hold Open the Door* (UCD Press, 2020), *Voices 2021* (Cold River Press, 2021) *The Irish Times*, and *Das Gedicht*. He was awarded 2nd place at the Francis Ledwidge International Poetry Award 2022.



DOUBLE BED, SINGLE USE

with a line by Patrick Kehoe

Those bedsprings do not remember the weight of two,
no rehearsing of athletic movements or angelic songs.
This duvet a cover-up of exhausted attempts

to find our casual ways again, of events jumbling
in memory, nights of too much room
in my bed. No affectionate letters placed

on pillows to compensate apartness
by day. On the bed stand in stacked poetry books
love is alive on paper-thin mattresses, standard print.

Sven Kretzschmar

WHEN JUNE COMES

after Patrick Kehoe

with whispers and winds,
summer chafers around rooflights,
empty stubbies full of stories,

I will see again maroon-soft hair,
teasing eyes between shadow entries
and light cone corners.

When June comes
with whispered conversations,
songs of careless love, your single bed.

THE LEAFWIND'S SIGH

after Lord Byron

And we'll saunter greening forests
in afternoon's soft light
to the robin's flickering chorus
and the leafwind's hopeful sigh.

And one dog will outrun us
and the other lag behind.
My heart still looking for your trust,
wishing for moon and night.

For May nights are for loving
under pale clouds up above.
Yet alone hope goes a-roving
and you won't return my love.

ALMOST-ROMANCE

after Patrick Kehoe

No one could have defied your joyful air,
barkbrown eyes, easy voice always
on the brink of uncertainty.

Top-heavy I hid mine behind
philosophy, theory, subtle banter,
too late, as ever, for casting

cautions to the summer wind.
Who would have defied you:
even the cobblestones could not hide

their booze-fuelled night shimmer, offering
uncertain steps down a lane
we never walked hand in hand.

SIEVE

after Patrick Kehoe

Pasta boiling on the hob, our nighttalks
were quick-bursting bubbles of hot
water in a pot. Debating and smiles

gyrated in the soft dust of vegetable broth:
What I longed to relish might long be
forgotten by you. A strainer whose fill

sieves through the lattice filament of a lifetime.

Michael Simms is a poet and novelist who lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (USA). His recent poetry collections are *American Ash* and *Nightjar*, and his recent novels are *Bicycles of the Gods* and *The Green Mage*. He is the founding editor of *Vox Populi*, a daily gazette of poetry, politics and nature. <https://voxpathulisphere.com/>



ZED

Somehow I always believed if we live
 faultless lives, kind and generous,
 if we sit at the bedside of those who have
 no one else, if we bend to rub the ears
 of the dog hungry for small attentions,
 rock the baby in our arms
 so mom can sleep in the next room,
 hours sliding by like gentle ghosts,
 if we sit down with the small boy
 and carve the alphabet to zed,
 if we ask the name of the doll, held
 so sweetly in the little girl's arms,
 if we kindly lie, praising the bland dish
 served with love as we visit the home
 of an old friend, sit on the patio,
 watch monarchs land on milkweed
 halfway to the place ancient memory
 calls home because we have no other life
 than this one, if we remember the far boat
 of long ago where a boy and an old man
 cast their lines into the still water
 of evening, if we are kind to ourselves
 we can be kind to others, and then
 we'll be protected. Our children will be safe.
 We can leave this earth in peace.
 Oh, my dear friend, I remember how you held
 your baby in your arms as we sat in the grass
 on a summer day, and we never imagined
 we'd outlive our children

for N.S.

Michael Simms

THE ARTIST'S GARDEN AT GIVERNY

In my own small garden
magenta isn't a color
but a time of day

just before evening
when irises dab the air
bees gather

on the Russian sage
and the dark fruit
of the elderberry

fulfill their promise
at last / Years ago
I folded compost

into the soil
building an opulent layer
over the dark

clay of the mountain
terracing the earth
with stone

as I did in my father's garden
decades ago / Now
at the end of what I thought

I knew
white tail graze the roses
Josie barks furiously at the window

and I rush into the garden
to chase deer away
like an old scarecrow

Monet painted the iris bed
only once
while devoting 30 paintings

to haystacks
250 to waterlilies
which his gardener cleaned

every morning
and 18 to the Japanese bridge
over the pond

stationing easels around the shore
working multiple
canvases

simultaneously
to catch the light
at different times of day

continued overleaf...

THE ARTIST'S GARDEN AT GIVERNY *...contd*

in his last years
as his vision failed
he was learning from theory

practice and memory
to see as I am learning
to see

magenta isn't a color
but a compromise
the eye makes between

red and green
so irises are almost pink
almost blue

and dappled light
turns
green leaves red

while the artist's
house
can be glimpsed

through the trees
like a distant
fire

SECOND TO LAST TESTAMENT

Since I never cared about anything
but love and beauty,
you can do whatever you want

with this brittle husk when I'm done with it.
Let the body find its own bright scattering.
Toss my ashes into the wind

for all I care, let them drift
into the Mon Valley
to mix with the unpretentious love

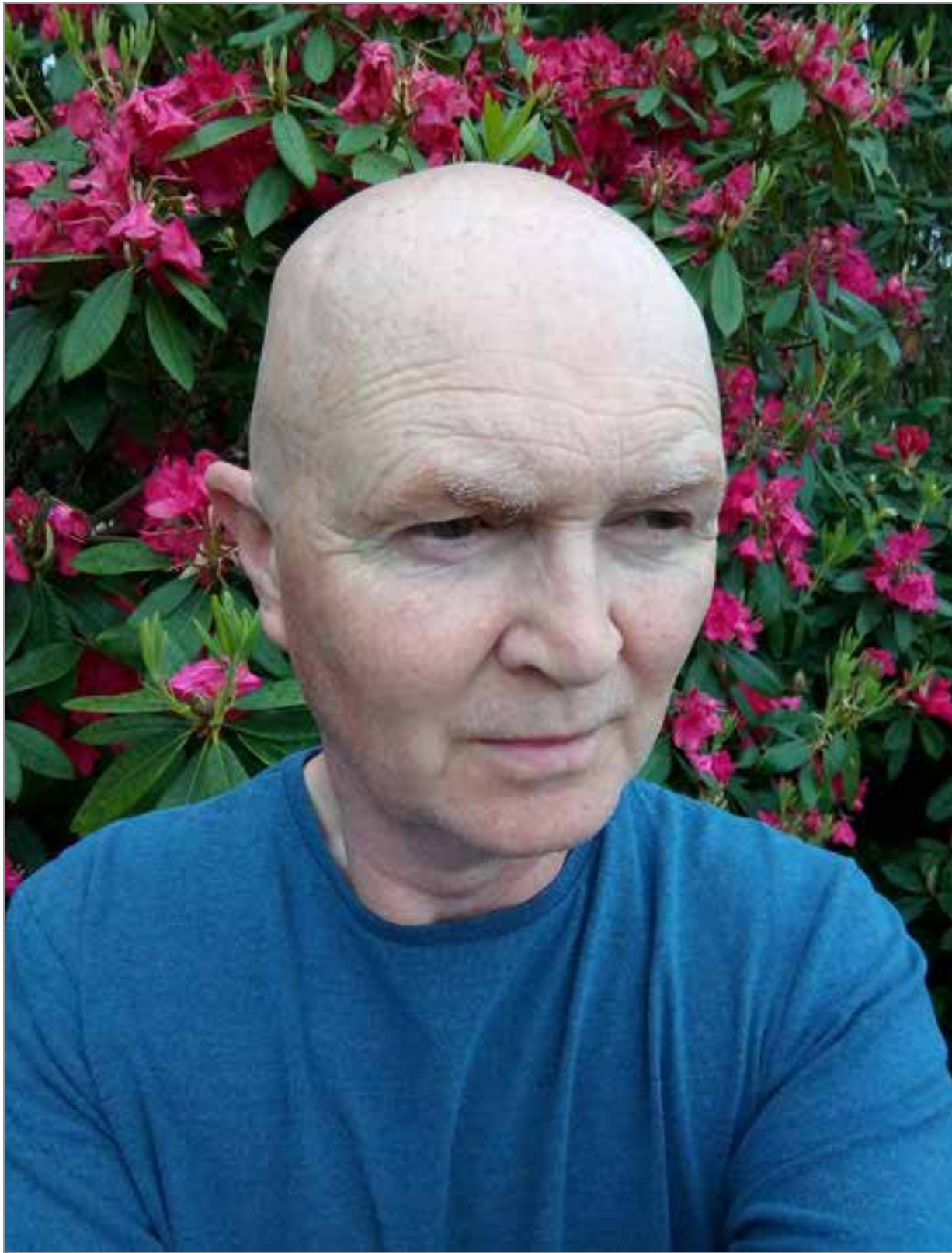
of the parishioners
at St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church
straight down the mountain from us

where old women stuff pierogies
to repair the golden onion on the roof
and raise money for the orphanage

in their hometown of Vorzel outside Kiev
bombed last month. Every Wednesday
they fill over three thousand pierogies,

bag them by the dozen, grab their mops and pails
and scrub the granite floor beside the sacristy
until the priest is walking on light

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



CAPTIVE

for one player

Only the physically beautiful
and the independently-minded can play this game.

The object is to lock yourself
into a high room until you are rescued
by a handsome, intelligent prince.
This game takes determination.

Place a hideous fat crone mask
upon your face.
The hideous mask is the face
of the witch who has trapped you.
You are hers now
and must do her bidding.

The witch will command you
to dress in your father's
oldest clothes.
She will instruct you
on how to gather the clothes
to your shape with string.
She will compel you
to remove a single builder's block
from the builder's yard.

continued overleaf...

John W Sexton

CAPTIVE ...contd

You will keep it on a leash
and walk it through the village.
It will drag stubbornly behind you,
its grating harsh and annoying.

Inside the mask your tongue will be dry,
your lips thick and unmovable.
You will pass a group of boys.
Amongst them is the handsome boy
whom you secretly love.
He will glance at your eyes
as they peer through the mask.

He will shudder with a sense of knowing,
but the mask will repel him.
He will not recognise you.
The boys will ask: *what are you doing?*
The boys will ask: *who are you?*
The boys will ask: *what's with the block?*

You will answer no one.
You will pass back and forth through the village,
back and forth past the boy you secretly love.
He and his fellows will begin to sneer
when they see you coming and going,
the block like a stone pet being dragged behind you.

You will pass the girls that you know.
Back and forth you will pass them.
None will recognise you.
You will hear their sniggering
as you go.

You will continue to drag the block
through the streets and over the cobbles,
until the weight of it makes your body ache.
You will continue to drag it in silence,
while the dull lump of the block
pulls itself against your efforts.

Finally, you will tether the block
outside a shop and leave it there.
You will retire to an upstairs room.
You will look out through the windows,
out through your hideous mask.

All the handsome boys are playing in the streets.
All the beautiful girls are playing on the green.
None will look up.
None will see your hideous face at the window.

The streets will empty and become quiet.
The moon will rise.

The game itself is the final player.

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.



AFTER THE SEPTS OF LAOIS SCULPTURE

'Human kind cannot bear very much reality.'
TS Eliot

Too much for the man
who shuns the heat of sun,
he'll undo it in cold blood
through beams from half-mast moons,
the splinters in the sky,
the mourning star.

If he, for a moment, sees
seven cantilevered steps,
though he knows no thing -
he eats potato stalks
with men in silk-lined cloaks -
he'll drink Methuselah's wine
that's feared hot in those parts.

The sun, her sleeves rolled up,
sings a dirge out loud
near the deep fat fried,
the one that they all want,
the purged undead, and the died,
uneven numbers count,

Dr Arthur Broomfield

HELL HATH FURY

'It takes so many years to learn that one is dead.'
T. S. Eliot

This place is the all do, all say,
one-way train on a wet Sunday.
Eros Moon, after a silk tight,
Lucifer waits, night, lies by.

Sun embroiders shrouds
for the early arrivals,
stirs his potion through the mix
of christening robe squabbles,
holy wars fought with pebbles.
The mouse in the trap
fights for survival.

Alf had raised the lid early,
As is his way, the sun in accord,
crawls from his hob-hot gurney,
snaps cadaver scenes for the record:

Polar fires that bleed to the beat
of a string quartet,
the mood music of Sahara floods.
belches of the fed,
the robin in his grave
that blesses the worms he eats,
are makings he files and saves,
a mummified menu of Calvary treats.

This is the halting hearth
of his buzzing bits and pieces
it's where they fell to earth.

He takes the weight on his elbows
reads the chemtrail codes of Robin Hood's arrow:

Hell is Vlad impaling, the age-long,
the sun at high noon. The all right, swing song.

ART THOU NOT ALSO ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES ?

After 'Saint Peter Denying Christ'
Pensionante del Sareceni

Salvation Army jacket frayed,
shoulder thread bare,
a few follicles resisting
the high lights.
The fabric that held
his body together ravel.
She rips through him,
as devout disciples do
in times of spin.

'You stitched him up
with your "I know not the man,"
not even a hello out of you. '

The crafted sermons,
the indulgent rage in the porch,
the ego trip on the lough,

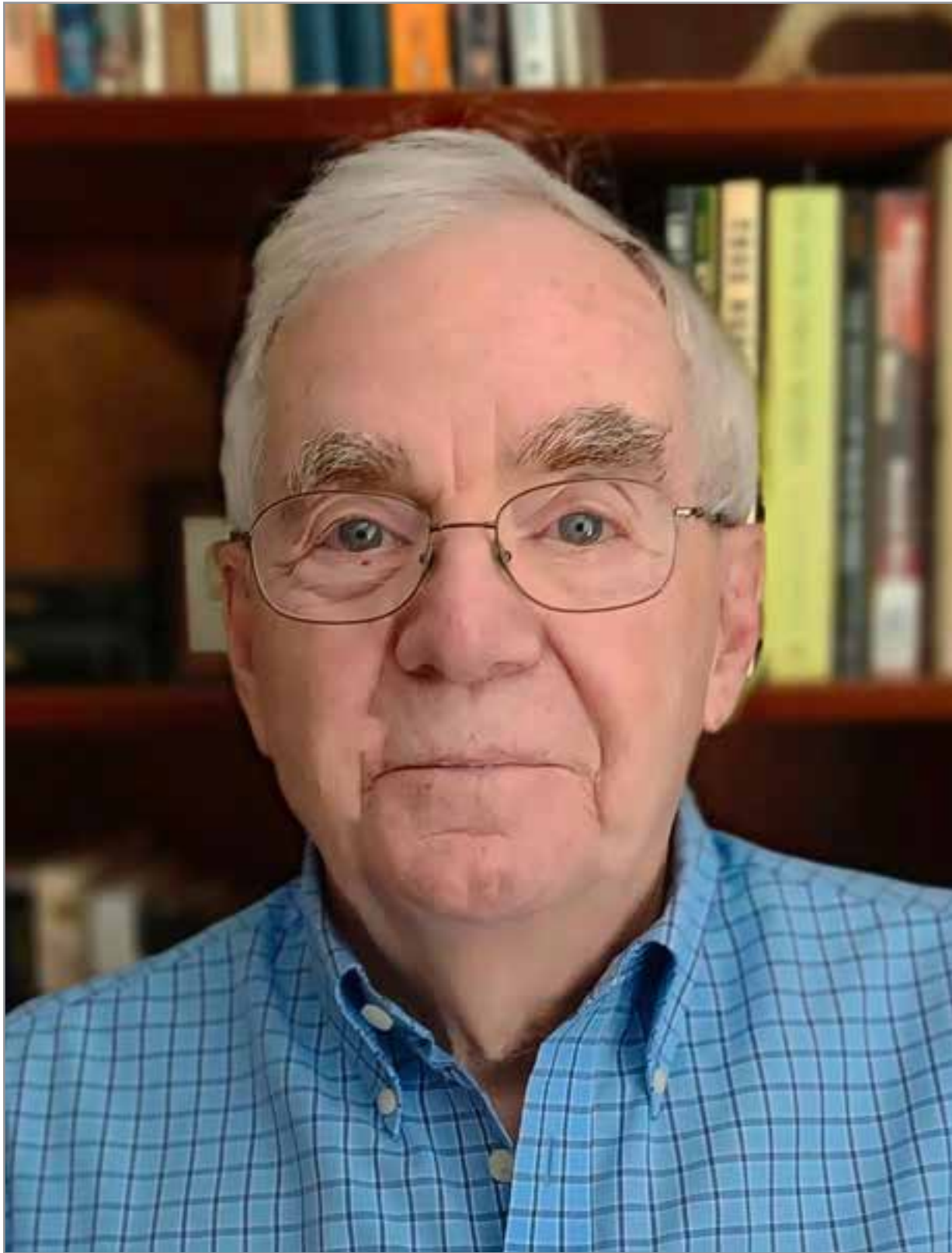
the matrix looms
over him
in the preternatural night.

In time - after Emmaus,
the ghostly fibre, the hologram –
He would understand
The necessity for yarns,
the mohair shawl of the masses,
and could say,
He is not the man I know or am.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Peter A. Witt is a Texas poet and a recovering academic, who lost his adjectives in the doldrums of academic writing. Poetry has helped him recover his ability to see and describe the inner and outer world he inhabits. He also writes family history, with a book about his aunt published by the Texas A&M Press and is an avid birder and wildlife photographer.



ALL IN A DAY

It was a day of buttermilk clouds,
cold enough for turtlenecks, wet
enough for grey raincoats to ward off
sullen cloudbursts, the possibility
of rancorous thunderheads and blazes
of white shotgun lightning painting
the vainly spattered sky.

By late afternoon, storm had passed,
welcome sun peaked from behind the remnant
clouds, milkweed dazzled with silvery raindrops
clinging to stalks waving in the soft breeze.

At glowing sunset we built a fire to ward off
the damp, woodsmoke twirled from chimney,
drifting away in the calming air.

Through the open window we were moonstruck
and stargazed by display of galaxies that city folk
only dream of. Soon we drifted to bed,
pulling the imaginary drawbridge up behind us
as we toothbrushed and showered before coupling
our way to a night of dreamland.

Peter A. Witt

LAST DAY

Failing red tractor pulled the heavily loaded hay wagon
through the freshly mowed pasture towards the faded barn.
Wildflowers bloomed in colored roadside ribbons,
their bouquet scented like vanilla and lemonade.

Farmer felt the weight of decades of work
falling heavy on his stooped shoulders, displayed
sadly in his weathered face and hands.
He was glad for this last load of hay before evening
storm created a light show, draped the dry valley in rain.

Today would end 63 years of toil in the fields;
with the farm now sold they would move to town.
Gone would be treasured days among strutting peacocks;
quiet time tending his carrots, lettuce, onions, yellow corn.

He would fondly remember the clanging bell
calling him to pause for a picnic lunch
under the aged willow.

After lunch, he would sometimes stretch out,
rest his eyes for just a few minutes before
taking up his work again.

He'd proudly weathered the seasons, worked through cold,
ice, snow, been buffeted by streaking winds, survived
the halting heat of summer. Now, he would talk grain prices
the weather, local politics with neighbors around a stove
at the county grain elevator.

But most of all, he looked forward to fishing the river
with his grandson, sharing the boy's love of birds,
squirrels, his joy at a jumping fish, a passing rabbit.

The boy would call him grandpa, he would call the boy junior.
welcome the remaining time they would share.

SCENT OF THE WOODS

Sweet aroma of lemonade
wafting across the pond
on a warm spring day -
picnickers enjoy their lunch.

Rich fragrance of freshly mown grass
carried on the wind through the park -
tissues dab hay fevered eyes.

Stench of a rotting squirrel
dashes through the air
deep in the woods -
makes it hard to breathe.

Bouquet of wildflowers
nestled in the meadow
beside the babbling brook -
picked for my sweetheart.

Scent of soft perfume
flowing from her nape
below flowing auburn hair -
inhaled with roiling pleasure.

Tincture of morning dew
escaping from hay
in the cow pasture -
dampened our Sunday shoes.

Wherever we went whether
pasture, meadow, woodlands
scents of the day
accompanied the journey -
during our walk in the woods.

POETRY SAVED MY LIFE

My first poem was full of heartache,
the kind that shames joy
and happiness until all is colored
grey with wrenching sadness.

Words were tears tumbling
onto paper, staining the surface
with the foul breath of a midnight
drunk lying in a gutter of despair.

Reading my penning now brings back
memories of the pain of separation,
loneliness, and rejection swaddled
in self-pity, the helpless feeling
of abject failure.

I wonder what would have happened
if I hadn't emptied my chest
of these feelings, instead burying them
in the tomb of my near-death heart.

Poetry kept me on the right side
of sane, without it I'd have sunk below
the horizon without any hope
of rising with the dawn.



A poet, artist, as well as publisher of Rochford Press/co-editor of *Rochford Street Review*, Adair grew up on Darug country without knowing whose land she stood on. She now lives on Darug and Gundungarra lands in the Blue Mountains, Australia, and pays her respect to the Traditional Custodians of Country which always was, and always will, be Aboriginal. Her debut book *The Unintended Consequences of the Shattering* was published in 2020. Her poems have appeared in *To End All Wars*, *Messages from The Embers*, *Poetry for the Planet*, *Pure Slush Volume 25* and *Work! Lifespan Vol 5* as well as various journals. As a resident poet at BigCi in 2022, Adair researched the failed shale-oil mining town Newnes and wrote poems and painted canvases to imagine her Aunt Jesse's childhood. That work was exhibited at DIP (Darlington Installation Project) in September. Adair was invited to read her poetry at a Back to Newnes Weekend to conservationists, historians, rock climbers and adventurers, not poets! During a recent Varuna residency, she began working on a verse memoir of her family's complex relationship to unceded land. She is a feature at The Poetry of Rethinking at La Mama in May.

THE PLUCK OF THE IRISH

With only *the gift of the gab*
to make and remake stories
utter incantations, take talismans
cloaked in protective layers
pieced together
from almost-broken lives
recount half-remembered tales
shredded by the cruel winds
that blew along broken stone roads
built only to 'earn'
a meagre bowl of thin soup

in the face of a politely orchestrated genocide
wearing only their language
they fled to places where workers were needed
though history demanded silence
of their mother tongue.

Linda Adair

WHITEWASHING

In a town called Black
opposite 1871 school rooms
stood a redbrick 1960s library
full of reference books
celebrating Captain Cook's
east coast voyage to claim
possession on one tiny island
for an entire 'empty' continent:
whitewashed 'settlement'

in a town called Black
inside that redbrick children's library
The Empty Schoolhouse
sat on the new fiction shelf
five years after publication
one librarian's quiet resistance
a gift for children like me
desperate for truth telling amid
whitewashed history

in a town called Black
from that redbrick suburban library
I borrowed that book
took it home to read then wept
at the fight for education and equality
that a different colour skin needed
my mother tried to soothe me
racism is much worse in America
whitewashed 'assimilation'

in a town called Black
thanks to that redbrick local library
I began to notice the gaping holes
in stories served up as objective fact
to colour-blind innocents of nine
children taught to accept
what the history texts told ...
whitewashed 'lies'.

X -- ING THE LEXICON

I trace the family tree
until the documents falter
listen for wails
from stifled mouths
their voices drowned out

by the slap of waves
on dank hulls
clumsily-inked Xs
on convict-ship manifests
beside Irish names
exiled by oceans to Port Jackson

after 1000 years of English occupation
purged for dissent or merely existing
transported to this open-air prison
without even their own ghosts for company

in the undeclared Frontier Wars
emancipist conscripts were authorised
'in the name of the King' to fire muskets
on First Nations' men women and children
– even pre-emptively to protect 'their' holdings.

After the blood letting
the lexicon became another rubicon
meaning and history rendered by those
with the power to speak, record or erase.

Proclamations of the Crown
ruled life and sentenced death
forbade the mother tongues
of both the coloniser and the colonised

for so many gone before
a cascade of shame and trauma
in margins they could not annotate
merely survive the order words of Empire

ironic that the King's English
is the one tongue I have to recall
those shipped here to displace
the sovereign peoples whose ancient languages
are again being spoken.

The first in my family to attend university
unwittingly I colonised myself
taking Honours in English Literature
an older and wiser friend's query at the time
political economy would have been better?

Dr. Vasilis Manousakis is a short story writer, poet, and translator, whose work has appeared in *New American Writing*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Barcelona Ink*, *Parentheses*, and *Drunken Boat*, among others. He writes reviews and translates poetry and short stories for literary magazines and e-zines. He has been one of the founding members of *Bonsai Stories*, the blog directly linked to *Planodion* literary magazine. The blog is dedicated to flash fiction and work from many well-known writers from Greece, the United States, and other countries has appeared there. These flash stories have been collected in two printed volumes so far, and a special tribute to 9/11 stories has appeared in a third volume, in which Vasilis was on the editorial committee. He holds a Ph.D. in Contemporary American Poetry and currently teaches creative writing, modern poetry, short fiction and audiovisual translation. He is a faculty member of the New York Writers' Workshop and a writing instructor at Scribophile. His focus on the human thought and behavior in his writings has led him to a Master's Program in Mental Health Counseling, and he holds individual and group sessions with clients, specializing in cognitive behavioral therapy and narrative therapy.



MORTE SUBITE

In Paris everything seems familiar. Let me explain. I mean, for someone who hasn't been here before. You land and then you enter the city by bus, train or taxi and suddenly you find yourself at home.

The taxi driver is the same, the hotel concierge the same, the bartender the same and the streets the same. The only thing that changes is you.

You and the reasons you came or most importantly the reasons you left. Why did you decide to come home? That's what you have to focus on. All the rest has already been decided for you.

Paris was expecting you. Opened its bars for you, its museums, its streets. Montmartre knew you were coming to explore. The waitress at café Indiana knew you were going to order a beer named Morte Subite, sudden death. A look in her notepad would meta-physically convince you.

Mario is now enjoying his beer killing memory fragments one by one, causing their sudden death and laughing sardonically, like the villain in the old movies. He looks around while doing it, checking if anyone else needs the same defragmentation as him.

He is thinking of becoming a professional memory killer, like in the movie *Eraser*. He is fantasizing that people would call him and he would erase their memories for a price. Five thousand for happy memories, ten thousand for traumatic memories. The psycho-therapists would hate him. And at this thought he let a sardonic laughter escape enough to cause the question from the waitress: "another Morte Subite?"

"No," he replies. "I am done with my memories."

She doesn't understand and goes away. He goes too.

As he is walking up Boulevard de Clichy to his hotel, a sudden thought crosses his mind.

Paris looks even more familiar for the ones with an erased past.

Vasilis Manousakis

THE WATERMELON

I am thirsty, she told him indifferently. He knew this meant, *I am thirsty now. Come here.*

He got dressed, instead, and went out to get both of them something to drink. The sun was blazing, scorching the cobbled path and making it look as if he had to pass through fire. As he was reaching the mini market thinking of buying some coke and some cold beer, he noticed the watermelons sunbathing outside. *Earth's ice cream*, he thought and started slapping them because he had heard once that this is how you can find a sweet one. Finding the lucky one, he carried it inside and paid for it. No coke, no beer.

He returned to their room and she was already topless, as she couldn't stand the heat. She was reading her book cross-legged with her back against the pillows. He looked at her for a moment and went to the kitchen to slice the watermelon. In the meantime, she had turned and her round butt was on camera. His mind camera. He looked at her for another moment and then brought the watermelon to the bed. She lifted her head and smiled and continued with her book without reaching for a piece.

"Aren't you thirsty anymore?"

"Mmmm..."

He took a piece of watermelon, chewed some of it and kissed her back. It was fresh and juicy and the water separated from the melon and started trickling down her spine. He took another piece and did the same, only this time he made sure he squeezed the juice out of it with his teeth to cover her spine and reach her buttocks. He got up suddenly, after following the juice down her ass, and went to the kitchen. He came back with two empty slices of watermelon. He placed them on her buttocks, paying careful attention not to disturb her swallow tattoo above the left one. *Here, have something to eat before you fly away*, little bird, he thought. She wasn't moving. The book put on the side and her hands outstretched.

He ate another four pieces off her back this time and she lay still, not wanting to disturb the moment. Her hand was deep in between her legs now. The watermelon was trickling down her spine creating a small lake on its sacrum. He was drinking the sweet juice and she was quenching her own thirst with her fingers.

When he finished all the juice and her back was licked clean, he took her hand and placed it in his mouth, licking that juice from her long fingers. Tastes sweeter, he thought and sat beside her on the bed.

Without turning or moving next to him, she resumed her reading and he ate the rest of the watermelon from the bowl.

Born in 1966 in the onset of the Cultural Revolution in China. Hua Dai has lived in New Zealand for over 20 years now, working part-time as a senior lecturer of learning development at a tertiary institute while also doing her PhD part-time. Dai is a published poet in China. She is happy to contribute to this NZ edition of Live Encounters. Her work appeared in the Auckland City Council New Kiwi Women Write Their Stories Anthology (2014). She has also read poems at the Open Mike nights of Thirsty Dog Pub in Auckland City.



AS I JOG ON THE BEACH IN TORBAY

I see a puddle away from the ocean
Seemingly separate
Dancing in the breezes ruffling the surface of the sea

A drift log
Sitting in the puddle
Reminding me of the forest it once was a part

A piece of wood
Even if it stands far from the trees
In the puddle
Of the ocean

We may be distinct,
But we are not separate
In the source
Where we all have come from

Hua Dai

WHEN I WALK ALONE IN THE STREET

I always become super vigilant
Pictures of being dragged to the alley
And raped
Come to me vividly
My body tensed
My steps quickened
To run away and escape
To my home
And shut myself up behind doors
Not to venture out ever again

The sensation is intense and vicarious
I know it is real
To my sisters and mothers
Who have been raped when they walked in the street alone

I wanted to react to the picture differently this time
When I tried to push the man off the woman he was raping
I realized even if I pushed this man off,
There could be another man lurking
In the dark corner of the street
To jump on the woman who has just escaped the rape

I asked what I could do to save women from being attacked and raped,
It came to me I couldn't do anything but sending love and light to the man raping
To waken his soul
That is equally beautiful as the soul of the woman being raped
But cladded in his dark body that is raping
His soul is suffering as he rapes

I keep sending love and light to the figure on the woman's naked body
that was pushed down onto the ground

I keep sending love and light to the man raping

I keep sending love and light to the man raping
I keep sending love and light to the man raping

Gradually, I see him slowing down his thrust
He stops, looking confused
He looks down at the woman
He seems to realize this woman could be his mother, or his sister
He looks ashamed of himself
He stands up and leaves the woman's body

He begins walking away backwards
Looking terrified at the woman on the ground
He turns around and runs into the woods

I hope he will tell his brothers still lurking in the darkness
Of his awakening
His enlightening
His becoming alive.

IF THE SAYING OF 'AN OLD SOUL' AND 'A NEW SOUL' IS TRUE

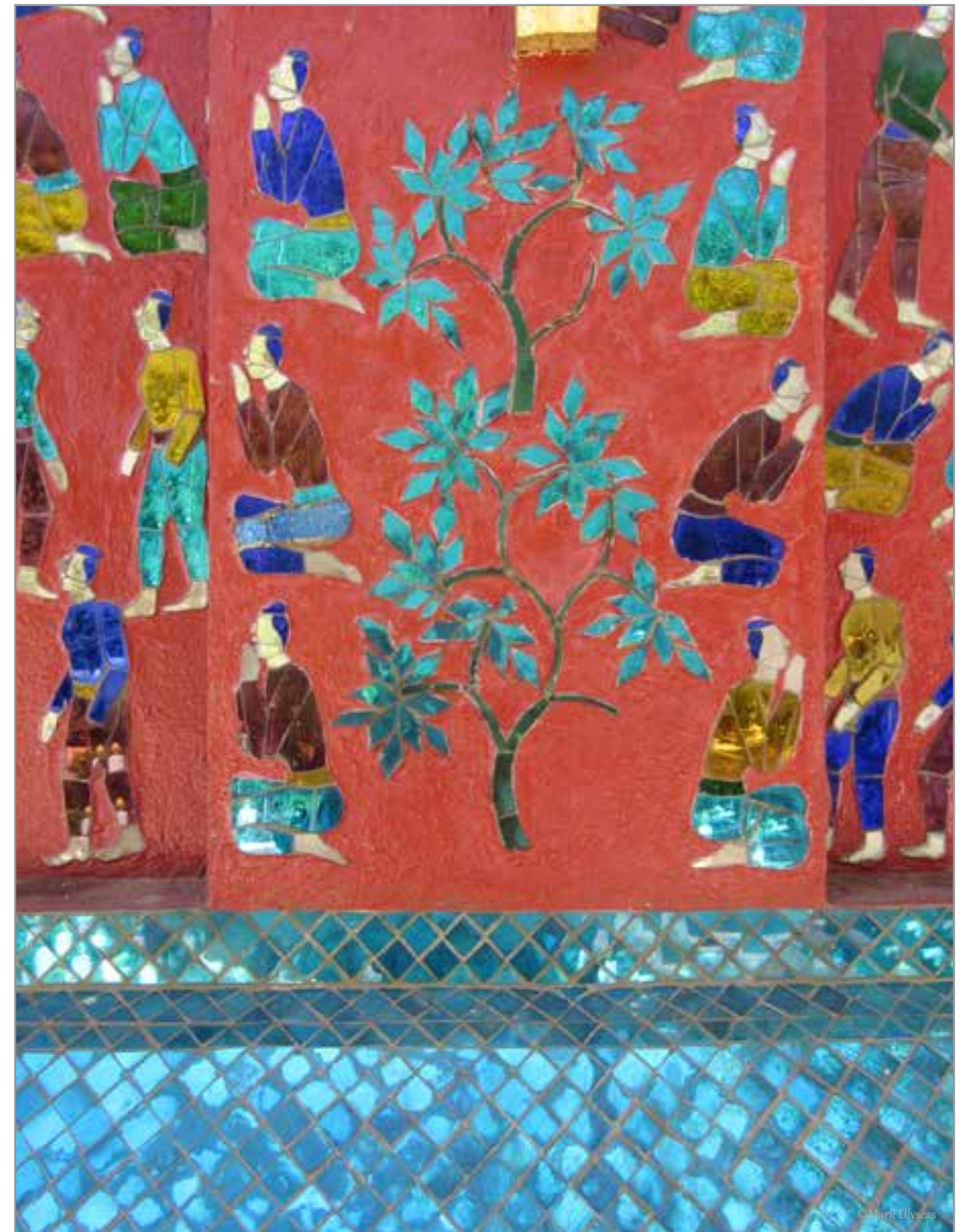
Sometimes, I am a new soul
I take delight in every drop of rain
Flake of snow
Sound of the wind
Chirping of a bird

I scream at every fruit thrown down to me
From the friend who climbs to the top of the tree
Just to fetch them for me

I befriend wise people
Attracted to the wisdom they embody
At the same time
Behave like a child
Speak loudly from my heart

Then some other times
I am an old soul
I am quiet, have little to say
Travelling to the moon and the bottom of the sea
As I watch the clouds floating by

A bird gliding through the air gracefully, leaving no trace
Towards the destination not known to any other
Another soul in its making.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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. Five of his literary works were nominated in the long list of the Sheikh Zayed Book Award in the branch of literature including his novel *The Magician's Hijab* 2022.

Translated from Arabic by Dr. Salwa Gouda.

Salwa Gouda is an Egyptian academic 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. She also contributed to the translation of *The Arab Encyclopedia for Pioneers* including poets and their poetry, philosophers, historians and men of letters.

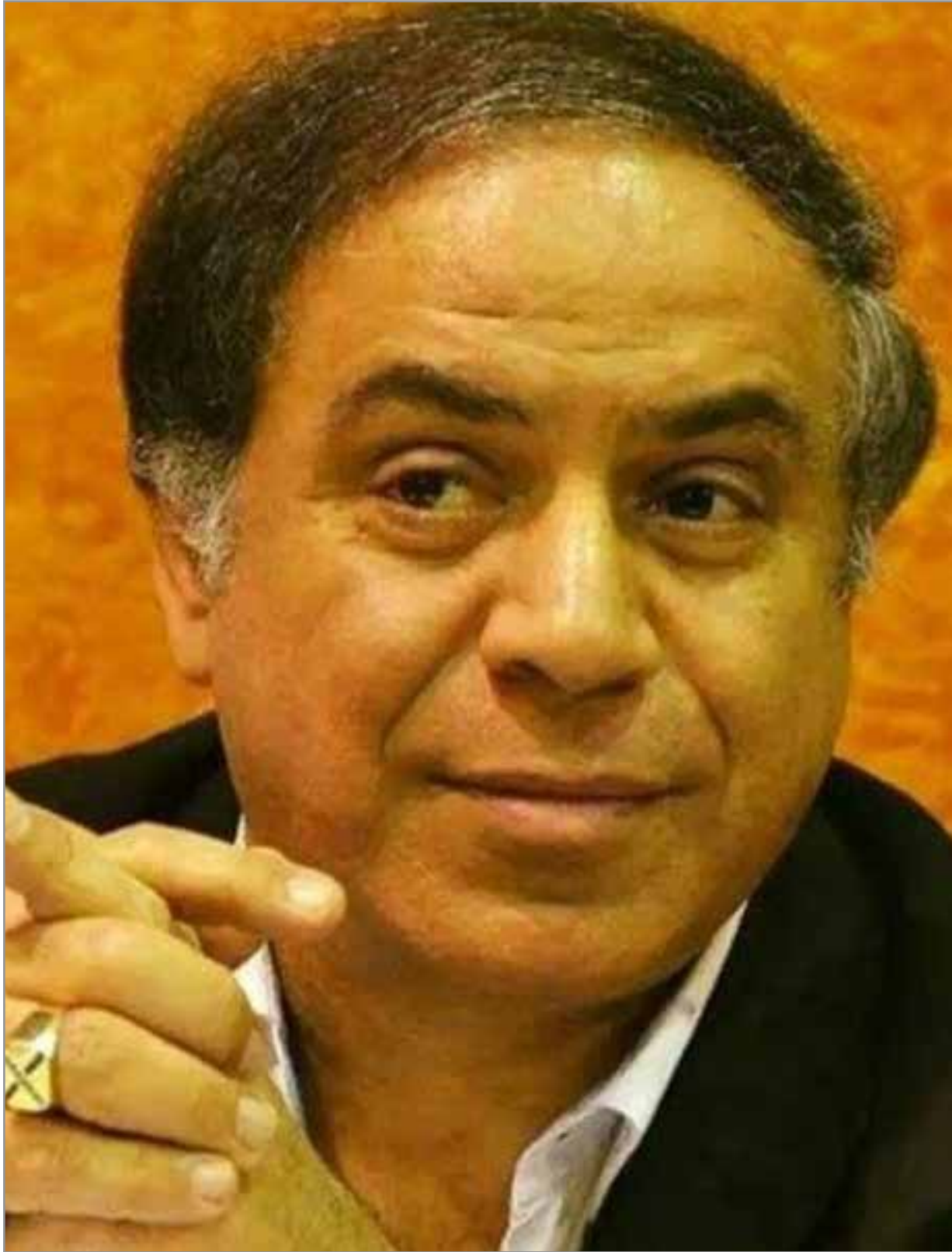
ANOTHER CALENDAR

Your eyes are another calendar
By which people know their ages
By which I know the universe
And who am I?

Your eyes are two high letters
From your name.
Two A ʾ letters from the book
The Eye of Time “ayn al-zaman”
Which Adam El Mansy wrote
In the Treasury of God.

The Flush of your body in the
Silk that never leaves me
Is still a sign for me.

I saw the language
Which refused to sleep
In the dictionary with your lips
Which made my way to love and poetry.



Ahmad Al-Shahawy

I WISH I HAD NOT GIVEN THE SUN AN EYE TO SEE

Nothing changes for the better
 The sky without water
 And the palm tree is high
 And headless.
 The fire burns the dream
 No sleep, no hope in the letter.
 The walls are eavesdropping
 They do not listen.
 The house is devoid of its cats
 And its air.
 The basil tree that I raised
 To resist oblivion dried.
 No behind
 No front
 No one else in my head but me.

The page is not enough for a word
 Or one sentence.
 Whiteness has become a prison
 And I do not cry for a situation
 In which myself has been betrayed
 But the eyes are crying the time
 Wasted in observations.

No line in the wall
 No wall
 No door
 It is just me alone in a weak sentence.
 The moon is suffocating
 My hands are tied
 And no one can untie the hanging rope.

My head that I lay now upon
 The wood of the bed knows
 That it is rotten and possessed by demons
 And that a thousand heads
 Have preceded me to it
 And it is dizzy from memories
 And that its back is bent from the
 Load of secrets.

They all left.
 Treachery is their trait.
 I wish I had not given
 The sun an eye to see.

Weakness hit the walls.
 I look for its causes in your setting sun
 In your star that leads you to the abyss
 From the horrors of what he saw.
 He no longer believes his writing with his right hand
 Nor the speech that sleeps in the line
 Nor the speech said by the bird
 And descend into a distant cave.

The tree of the lonely man has died.
 The wood that supports the head decayed.
 His cats no longer knock the door.

The lonely man whose sun is eclipsed
 Sees the end closer than a bird
 On his shoulders.

continued overleaf...

I WISH I HAD NOT GIVEN THE SUN AN EYE TO SEE *...contd*

Silence has become a preferred language
And no rain in the heights covers the soul
Or supports speech.

The lonely man sleeps
And nothing in his imagination
But a flower smiling whenever
She saw the emptiness bleeding in his hands
And the goddess he watered dying far away alone.

The lonely man stretched out his ears
Like two stray rabbit skins
Or from the skin of the word "I love you"
Which he sees hollow
And more suitable for drums
Than other skins.

I am not the one to be inserted between parentheses.
I am not the one whose life sentence ends
With a question mark.
I am not an octopus who spreads his ink
For the traitors not to observe me.

I am a blank page
That does not not cast a mysterious cloud
Over its sky to confuse all.
Even the ants I raised carried their
Furniture at night for not
Seeing me in the dark.

Never live as a dry leaf again
Unable to write her autobiography
But she can only get her lies back
And salt them in a bowl of shame.

Between the river of the night and the river Nile
One letter

And heavens of darkness that
Mourned the drowning of many.
Their only sin is that they dreamed
Of swimming and ascending. MI 'raj

AS IF DEATH IS IN A VACATION

I want it to be normal
Because I don't like to be food
For fish, if I fall from a plane
On top of a calm or noisy ocean.

I do not like being hit by a car
In the hands of a reckless or
An arrogant
Or a man deprived of the mercy
Of his wife.
And from my excessive love
For the Nile
And my fear of the sea
And my failure to ride water
Drowning is not on my map.

But since the chin of Egypt
Turned to be long and shaggy
And the paths of life are harsh
My blood is waiting for a
Bullet in the back
Or a slaughter preceded
Or followed by takbeer
The angel of death will surely rest
As if on vacation
To give the son of sand
The honor of the award:
Death that does not burden the sky.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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

THE PATH

When life takes aim
trying to make us pure
when you always
think your
pushing boundaries
sometimes you push too far and
you find yourself
falling into a black pit
hopelessly trying to
find the path to home



Gordon Ferris

INTO THE DARKNESS, GOING HOME

into darkness
spirits of all that ever
walked the earth

wandering
watching
not able to take part

seeing their progeny
stepping into their future
a future they

can take no part in
can't even give them a nudge
or drop a helpful hint

on wings some float
like mutant moms

forgetting who their kin are
spectres floating from
one plain to another

not knowing where
they really belong
sometimes we sense

or get a whiff
of the familiar
on the other side

can they get a whiff
of those to whom they belong
or are they just

set adrift
on an ocean
of new beginnings

I write the sound of
my mothers long gone shuffling feet
and I draw

the staring neighbours
as I revisit my decaying past on
my old and dyeing street

Sheila A McHugh was born on and continues to live on Achill Island. She is deeply immersed in the culture and landscape of the place that formed her. She writes to preserve and promote the rich legacy hidden in the local landscape. She also explores the human journey through image and language, in both English and Irish, in its sense of belonging/non-belonging, which as Anne Dufourmantelle has stated, 'language is our common memory'. She is a published writer in fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Recent publications include: *Dánta in the Dark* (2023), *Scrimshaw Journal* (2023).



JUMBLED ALPHABET

An alphabet so jumbled
No words are formed.
Thoughts cavort through her confused mind.
Refuse to be engaged by
a sentence longing for expression.

She walked,
Toes tapping to a traditional tune.
Her E Flat Major feet slowed the tempo.
Each recognising the other
In this momentary interlude.

She wore green, dark green.
Complemented the greys, browns and
yellows of this rock strewn, hilly terrain.
Cloaked in the colours of winter
New life stirred.

Past ancient stone wall fences she felt
the tectonic plates of ancestry shift.
Timelines meld.
A seismic occurrence
Rocked her identity to the core.

Lost amid the over-growth of time; buried
secrets struggle to communicate.
Their message unseen, unheard
Hidden for too long
Changed who she thought she was.

Sheila A. McHugh

NAMING A STORM

Storms drip off the tongue alphabetically;
ride roughshod,
lightening speed,
whipping wind and tide.
In coastal areas
rock armour, like dominoes,
collapse.

*a storm rages within
my rock armour collapses too
slips into the abyss of no-name,
no coming back.
rage, a backlash to pent up emotions;
tears, of torrential proportion, unleashed.
I drowned in their saltiness*

Man-made energy crushed
By falling trees.
In the avenues of power
The namers cower,
Blithely ignorant.
A storm cannot be contained by a name.

*a storm rages within
gathers momentum
tired of pretend
empty words
other's dictates
I walk in tatters
unable to be contained by who they say I am
who I say I am*

HEADY WITH POWER

A viral gift
Handed to them on a platter
Like the head of John the Baptist.
Media-savvy
Masque the truth

Herodian messiahs
Wield power
Worm their way darkly
Bobbing unhindered, unnoticed

Divide the masses
Inject them with fear
New weapon of the elite
They'll thank us for it

Voices, masked into silence
Swallow their words.
Truth seeks expression
Through an underground network
Seeps through the eyes

Writes the inexpressible
Unveils what's hidden
An umbra of defiance
In an opaque world

Lynn Strongin is a Pulitzer Prize nominee in poetry. A recipient of a National Endowment Creative Writing Grant, nominated twice for Pushcart Prizes, Lynn Born in NYC at the end of the dirty thirties, she grew up in an artistic Jewish home in New York during the war. Earliest studies were in musical composition as a child and at The Manhattan School of Music. Took a BA at Hunter college, MA at Stanford University as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow. Lived in Berkeley during the vibrant sixties where she worked for Denise Levertov and took part in many peace demonstrations. Poems in forty anthologies, fifty journals; Poetry, New York Quarterly. Forthcoming work in Poetry Flash and Otoliths. Canada is her second home. The late Hugh Fox said Strongin is the "most exciting poet writing today." Danielle Ofri wrote to her, "you tear the veil off that mysterious disease polio." Strongin's work has been translated into French and Italian. Her forthcoming book is THE SWEETNESS OF EDNA. She recently received a ten-thousand dollar George Woodcock Grant for Writers from The National Endowment for the Arts. This grant has greatly facilitated her work at the present time.



TILL I CUP A SPARK IN MY HAND

Till I cup a spark in my hand, cradled in ash
 Till it flows like a rose.
 The air is pencil-colored;
 Wood chips pile up
 Squirrels' cheeks bulge.
 Paper I hold is the color of tea.
 I will tell you what it's like to run out of breath as you run away:
 Toward the coalman's bin,
 Toward the child hospital crematorium;
 I feel the touch of small fire
 Small myself
 Till I cup a spark in my hand
 Till it flows like a rose.

Lynn Strongin. Photograph credit: Catherine Dunphy.

UNFOLDING AS IT SHOULD

*And whether or not it is clear to you,
no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.*
Max Ehrmann: Desiderata

So I plant a kiss on your lips
It grows
Thru day
In passion
As I pour water for the carrots,
Give the garden attention
Our garden such as it is two ladies'
Growing a storey above the library
A maple tree, Yuko, with little Buddha under it
Bigger Buddha, still small, in the corner
Water flowing
All around its shape.
I wish I could catch that water
Like a hoop
Like clay, and reshape it
For the universe is not unfolding as it should:
so lie with me on pillows of steel & ice:
The nails are rusting
The windows bending like wax'
we are moving
Blinks from his branch:
The moss is soft on Gary oaks, a bluegreen fungus:
Single-glazed letting cold in
a throwback to the war, Warner Pathé news showing all the carnage.
You do not, furthermore, want me to stew the pears
with small cloves, sticks of cinnamon

Making it grow
Out the windows wavy like wax
or water: a pine siskin gazed on the sad carnival, the puppets' passion
Which has in our seventies become
A baby with blue fingernails rocked in the cradle in the corner.
Although a good girl-child
There is something wrong, askew, something one is afraid to mention
Like leukaemia which runs in the family,
like the ivy digging its ugly tiny fists
into the wood protecting our garden as it should
And like the dry rot one dare not mention

I FOLLOWED THE MATH TEACHER HOME

Because she was the handsomest
In seventh grade.
Strong stride
Hair cropped not with the delicacy of neck to wear an Italian boy bob
Like the later teacher I fell in love with.
But Miss Icabacci carried the strong syllables of her Italian name
like carrying charred green boards with roman numerals home
To light them
Like an oil lamp
Perhaps lacking a cover
This:
The beauty of numbers was her cover
She crawled under at night
Never knowing the girl who shadowed her
The child of twelve who was shortly to lose both her legs
Followed her
Pre-disaster
Pre-trauma
All the way to the poorer part of town
Tasting nearly the caramel & toffee of brown:
Brown houses leaning together
Refugees
Exiles from the land without even a lame
Excuse for taking in the bruised, the tattered, the poor:
It shat upon them.

When she turned into one of these brown
Town houses
I reversed my direction
Taking the first bus home, right or wrong,
it landed me where I could bear the lamp of my own heart longing
A girl of scarred porcelain
Up the stairs of the house I would not much longer own:
But it was Home. Home.

Barbara Bald is a retired teacher, educational consultant and free-lance writer. She has worked at the Frost Place in Franconia, served as outreach coordinator for NHPTV and volunteer read-ing and writing poetry with school-age children, adults. Her poems have been published in a variety of anthologies—most recently *Covid Spring* published by Hobblebush Press. They have also appeared in various journals including: *The Northern New England Review*, *Avocet*, *Off the Coast*, *Silver Birch Press* and *The Poets' Touchstone*. She has two full-length books: *Drive-Through Window*, *Other Voices/Other lives* and a chapbook is entitled *Running on Empty*. Barb's website is: <https://www.barbarabald.com>



BEYOND THE BUZZ

The bush is old now, branches spindly like my arms,
bark peeling as parched skin.

Planted over 40 years ago, it's lived through
one divorce, six family deaths, four dogs, four cats.

They call it an invasive now—honey suckle
that doesn't belong here. But, the bees don't mind.

Though many fewer, bumbles and honeys still visit,
still enter each pale yellow bloom as if it were a temple.

Once so many, their unified buzz became a hum
a prayer shawl that invited surrender.

Above, its leaves and delicate flowers form a high canopy,
memories and secrets sequestered in each blossom.

As a child I knew just how to pinch its sepal end,
how to grasp its thin filament with small fingers

and pull it ever so gently from the flower to find
and place the tiny bubble of nectar on my tongue.

I did not know about pistols and stamens then,
did not know about the birds and the bees, about loss.

Today I just listen to the hum, genuflect to time,
leave the sugar for the bees.

Barbara Bald

A BEE'S PERSPECTIVE

They tell me I am not supposed to fly—
my body's too fat, not aerodynamic in design,

but here I am, sitting on the lip of a snapdragon;
carried my plump self on lacy wings
that beat faster than you can count.

I always pause for a moment, rest, genuflect
before entering any fringed temple.
I stop to savor sunlight that streams opaquely
through soft stained-glass petals.

I am sorry you can't follow, sorry
you can't part the entry curtain of tiny threads,
feel silken hairs cradle your sides or marvel
at golden grains clinging to knobby stamens.

I am, of course, after sweet nectar, which I sip
as through a straw—pleasing as a host to the tongue.
I enjoy the wiggle through what must feel
like grasses tickling your toes.

Every bloom has such unique gifts,
different offerings that are hard to leave behind.
I sometimes linger longer than I should, lean against
a bulbous pistol, let pollen flour my fur like a blessing,
then..... carry it to other blossoms.

WHAT I LOVED TODAY

As the sickle moon
closes her eyes,
slides into silence,
dawn announces herself,
wakes blossoms
from their sleep.
I rise slowly
like the wind
answering the call
of the morning sun,
set out seeds
and dribble water
into a heated birdbath.
Ready for their day,
chickadees and titmice
arrive in splendor.
As they flutter in place,
dip again and again
for tiny sips,
every wing beat bedazzles,
lifts me to heights I crave.
I know I will forget
the flash of this moment,
push myself with to-do lists
and all-important projects;
I know chores will always
shout louder
than this dawn chorus,
so for now, I allow myself to dally,
let every feather fill me
with the breath of earth,
my slippers wet with dew.

ANOTHER WAY TO LISTEN

They wave to you from the side of the road
like hitch-hikers flagging down a needed ride.

Thin-stemmed daisies nod their white crowns,
offer promises that he loves you... or maybe not.

Tall buttercups guarantee you'll kiss a fellow, but
only if the yellow shadow's just right under your chin.

Spired lupines whisper that Miss Rumphius
has been here, sewing seeds to add a touch of beauty.

Red clovers and white yarrow offer medicinal teas
and shade a tiny rose bush that escaped domesticity.

Purple Loosestrife with her prolific showy spikes—
she's the one who moves-in where she's not wanted.

It's their wildness that calls to the heart,
their 'nobody-asked-you-attitude' that offers

a glimpse of freedom lost somewhere
in the grooming, lost in the cultivation of the soul.

FROM HERE

Just an ordinary bench, a slatted affair,
it swings out over-looking the river.
Dangling from a massive white pine,
it watches eddies swirl below, skirt around
boulders perhaps eons old.

Beneath the water's scrim, mermaid weed
and other green algae cling to stone, entice me
to reach down to touch them.
At a certain angle, sun-stars capture the eye,
encourage slow breaths, invite shoulders to soften.

I can almost see God from here.
That's her picking up pebbles on the opposite shore.
Her, peeking from behind that arched white birch.
Her, whispering in the light spray of water on sand.

That might be her moving in the underbrush
where rabbit trails crisscross like strands of yarn.
I think I feel her in the touch of your hand
as you sit here beside me on this bench.

And yes, there, where the black bear
comes down the bank for a drink.
Yes, I'm sure that's her.

Kathryn MacDonald's poems have appeared in literary journals in Canada, the U.S., Ireland, and England, as well as in anthologies. Her poem "Duty / Deon" won the Arc Award of Awesomeness (January 2021). "Seduction" was shortlisted for the Freefall Annual Poetry Contest and was published in *Freefall* (Fall 2020). She is the author of *A Breeze You Whisper* (poems) and *Calla & Édourd* (fiction). Examples of her published work can be found on her website: <https://kathrynmacdonald.com>



SKYDANCING

two Red-tailed Hawks carve
circles in a clear sky
sunshine glancing off rufous tails, setting
feathers to embers
a dive by one
then the other. They

rise with field mice or voles,
a rabbit kit clasped in hooked talons.

The hawks nest high in the elm
above our circular pond the tree's
leafless branches silver against the sky.

Deer sip spring-fed waters
and we give ourselves
to bacchanal afternoons –
Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe –

forgetting the surprise of death.

Kathryn MacDonald. Photo by James Archbold.

LEGACIES

They march, the life-size warriors made of clay,
 a terracotta army six thousand strong.
 Its generals uniformed in painted garments
 adorned with birds, headdresses like wings
 leading archers, chariots, and silent marching
 infantrymen. Seven hundred thousand conscripts
 captured from the emperor's wars
 created this wondrous spectacle, whose alive
 at the end were sealed inside the tomb
 with their creations. Is it any wonder
 Qin Shihuangdi feared death, sought elixirs?

*

Always it is summer along this underground stream
 where musicians play to dancing water birds.
 See the bronze crane with a fish in her beak,
 the terra cotta musicians – one sitting, his legs outstretched,
 see how he plucks a flat-stringed instrument,
 how another kneels with his drum held high to his head.
 Listen to the silence. Notice the stillness of the air,
 how the sleek long-legged crane with patina-dappled feathers
 does not swallow her catch nor lift her smooth graceful legs
 to entertain the warring emperor who lies in his tomb
 having swallowed a potion with quicksilver stirred in it –
 created by alchemists for their leader who raised
 the glass to immortality, nonetheless, lost his life.

*

In the news today, Russia's president sends an army
 of one-hundred-and-fifty thousand westward into Ukraine,
 China's president bullies tiny Taiwan,
 the Taliban's military chief commits human rights abuses
 against the citizens of Afghanistan,
 on the U.S. border many refugees lose their lives
 in deserts too hot and dry for people to survive,
 here in this small city in Canada, spiralling numbers
 of homeless live on the street, and we talk across
 this nation of reconciliation.

It is easy to think
 that Qin Shihuangdi's terracotta army – his fantasy
 of dancing cranes – a magnificent act of creation, but

what is the price of leaders chasing legacies,
 when the price is paid by populations?

Kate McNamara is a Canberra based poet, playwright and critical theorist. Her plays have been performed internationally. McNamara delivered the opening address to the Fourth International Conference of Women Playwrights in Galway (2001). She was awarded the H.C Coombs Fellowship at ANU (1991) and elected to the Emeritus Faculty. She won The Banjo Patterson Award for her short story Verity. Her published works include *Leaves*, *The Rule of Zip* (AGP) Praxis and *The Void Zone* (AGP). Her poetry, short fiction and critical theory has been published in a number of anthologies including *There is No Mystery* (ed. K Kituai, 1998), *The Death Mook* (ed. Dion Kagan, 2008) *These Strange Outcrops* (2020) and *The Blue Nib* (2020) She has also worked extensively as an editor and has only recently returned to her first great love, poetry. McNamara is currently working on *The Burning Times*.



THE POET'S WIFE

Jean Cocteau has said this woman
of mystery thinks she is alone
everything is real to the primitive
exposing herself to the night.

A broken bird a broken nest
all become a jungle green as
the lion asleep with the gypsy
a desert in her heart, an old
armchair becomes a lioness
about to spring facing
far away in the morning
she sees plants trees the moon.

Portrait of herself as the poet's
landscape she will achieve the sky
become his empty space.

Kate McNamara

2010 - 2022



Live encounters

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