

2010 - 2023



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
VOLUME ONE NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2023



TERRY MCDONAGH
Door through Time



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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).

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

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VOLUME ONE
NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2023

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Terry McDonagh, Irish poet and dramatist has worked in Europe, Asia and Australia. He's taught creative writing at Hamburg University and was Drama Director at Hamburg International School. Published eleven poetry collections, letters, drama, prose and poetry for young people. In March 2022, he was poet in residence and Grand Marshal as part of the Saint Patrick's Day celebrations in Brussels. His work has been translated into German and Indonesian. His poem, 'UGG by Degrees' is included in the Galway Poetry Trail on Galway University campus. In 2020, *Two Notes for Home* – a two-part radio documentary, compiled and presented by Werner Lewon, on *The Life and Work of Terry McDonagh, The Modern Bard of Cill Aodáin*. His latest poetry collection, 'Two Notes for Home' – published by Arlen House – September 2022. He returned to live in County Mayo in 2019. www.terry-mcdonagh.com

TERRY MCDONAGH DOOR THROUGH TIME

I loved Colette's NicAodha's editorial, *Between Worlds*, in the September issue of *Live Encounters*. The writer/artist is in and out of exile. She's caught up in a world of art, with the bigger world paying little more than lip-service to its existence...a bit like a mainland might be in relation to an island. Writing is a tiny island and could be regarded as a decent enough place to spend an hour after the 'real' business of the day has been dealt with.

Like Colette, I have travelled quite a bit and always feel close enough to a new line or set of words...even casual phrases that transport me to a place where imagination takes priority and the result might be a new poem or, at least, a collection of ideas and words, leading somewhere of nowhere – often not much further than the paper-bin.

This, *Between Worlds*, feels like intense time out. It reminds me of library visits as a child where I could be immersed in millions of words without ever having to leave that little haven – between worlds in a magical world of books and comics. I'd always wanted to be a cowboy with my very own herd, horses and guns of course – and I loved football. I once imagined a football winking at me before I kicked it. It seemed to say, *go easy on me chum*, and, as a result, I did go easy on it...even cleaned and polished it after the kick-about, I did.



Terry McDonagh

As a former teacher, I still love working in schools. Children will almost always ask *when* and *why did you start writing?* I don't have to think up an answer. My current home and the birthplace of the last of the Irish travelling bards, Anthony Raftery, are only a few hundred metres apart. Raftery was the blind poet of Cill Aodáin, where I was born and grew up. My immersion in legends and tales was childlike, immediate and complete.

Aside: When I, first, met Colette NicAodha many years ago, she said she was *mad jealous* of my place of birth as she had always loved the work of Raftery and had written a thesis on his work and life. Colette and I have become great friends.

There are seven fairy forts in Cill Aodáin and I played on all of them...especially on Lios Árd (The High Fort). It was and is a very imposing sight, crowned with beech trees. Here I lived out some of my dreams because, here, was where the fairies shared the space with our distant ancestors. I was between worlds in every sense of the word. Up here, the blind poet, Raftery was asked by a thorn bush to choose between poetry and music. Thankfully, he chose poetry...word has it he was a bad fiddler, but we can't be sure as his playing has been passed on by word of mouth only. He died on Christmas Eve in 1835 in Killeeneen, County Galway. The story goes, he was buried in darkness on a windy night but the candles refused to go out.

I attribute my entry to the world of magic in books to my mother but, most especially, to my uncle Tim McDonagh. He would visit our house on Saturdays and he would always want to go for a walk 'up the hill'...the hill being The High Fort. He was a very kind person who knew how to tell stories. He showed me the thorn bush that had given Raftery the 'gift'. He told me of Thady Conlon, my great grandfather who had been a source of knowledge and information when 'scholars' came to research the life of the old blind bard. Here I was completely between worlds

This poem, DOOR THROUGH TIME is dedicated to the memory of my uncle Tim McDonagh, whose memory will always remain with me.

DOOR THROUGH TIME

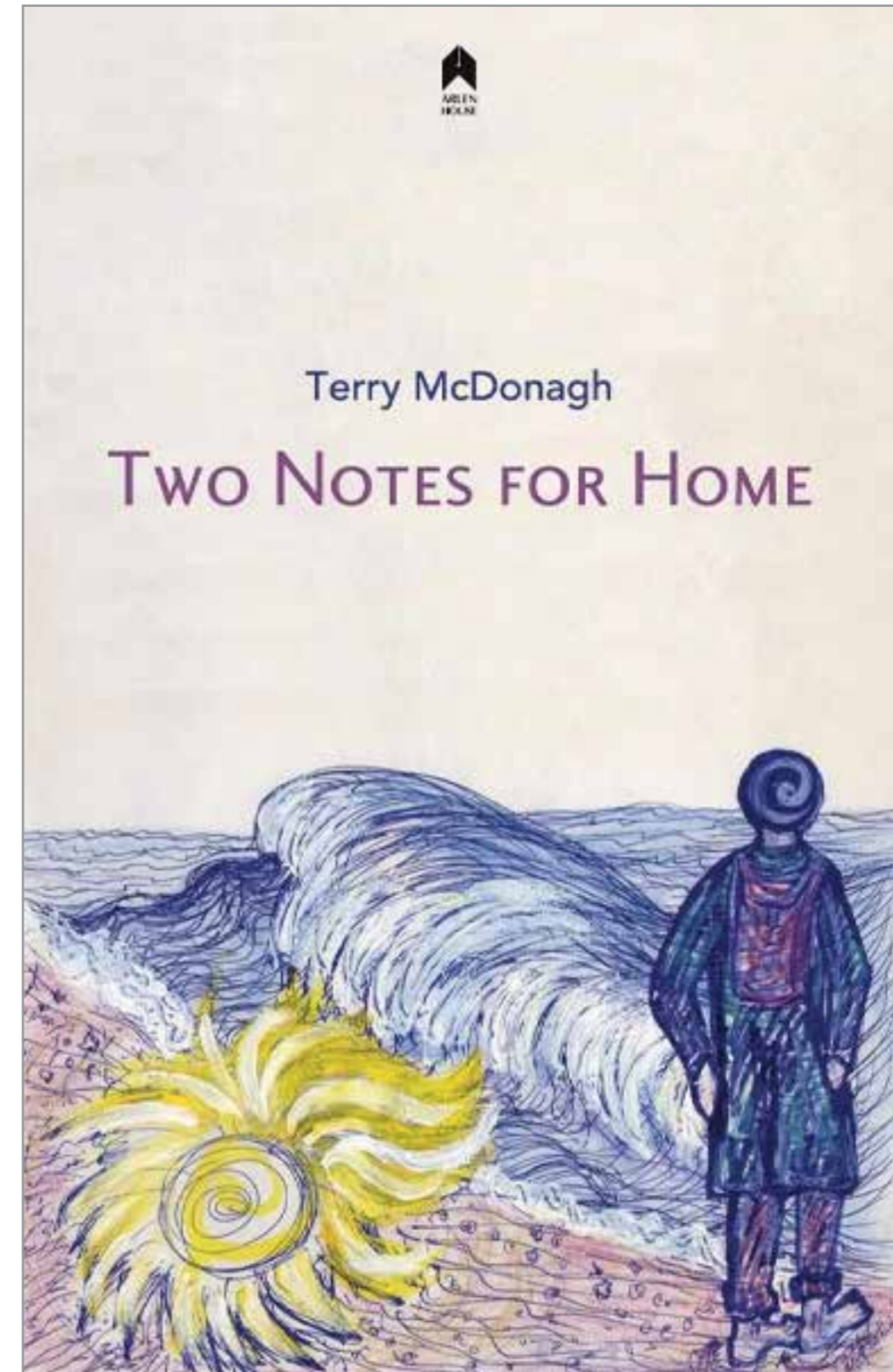
This particular uncle was timid
with a slight limp
that must have grown out of sadness.
He was a teacher
but not in that way.
He used to climb down
into our stolen wilderness
and among centuries
of involuntary tales,
he'd stand on 'the hill'.
We'd listen to the victims of the púca,
peer into the sealed cave
under The High Fort'
and on down to Thady's headstone
in Cill Aodáin graveyard
by the river.
In puddles among the rushes
under the Easter moon,
I saw footprints of the poet.

He's often stand long
as if trapped in something far away.
As he had come he went,
screaming – his voice
only half used.

Those hills and bushes
though smaller now,
Still dance.

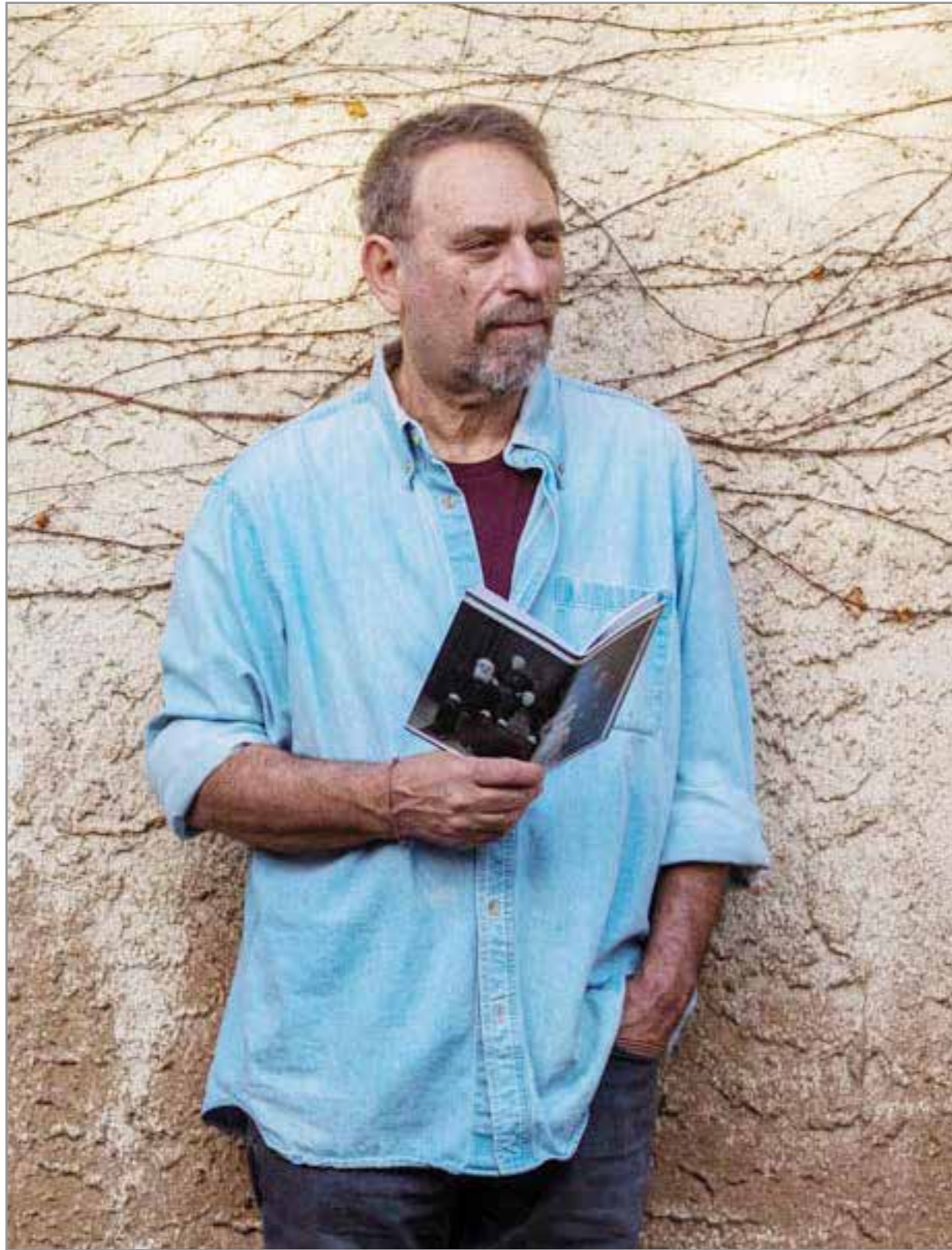
My work as a poet has taken me to many countries in Europe; to Asia, USA and Australia and I have come into contact with poets, writers and artists of all shapes and sizes. My books and work are a record of my journeying. They are a kind of diary. I find it fascinating when I sometimes read through earlier and later work because so many things have changed. My language has changed, somewhat, but the underlying message of being somewhere between worlds has remained a constant. I grew up in Cill Aodáin in a parallel world among the fairies and the legend of Raftery but that Door Through Time, into other worlds of imagination has always remained constant and open.

My poetry is published in Ireland by Arlen House. My most recent collection is *Two Notes for Home* – 2022.



Available at: www.amazon.com

Alan Walowitz is a Contributing Editor at *Verse-Virtual*, an Online Community Journal of Poetry. His chapbook, *Exactly Like Love*, comes from Osedax Press. The full-length, *The Story of the Milkman and Other Poems*, is available from Truth Serum Press. From Arroyo Seco Press, is the chapbook *In the Muddle of the Night*, written with poet Betsy Mars. Most recently, *The Poems of the Air* is available for free download from Red Wolf Editions.



ASSEMBLY DAY (1959)

We knew our place--
 first by class, then by size, smallest first
 Boys, white shirts, red ties,
 at rear-door left,
 girls--mysterious creatures—on the right
 in skirts and white blouses.
Eyes straight ahead now, Young Men,
 though eager for some grab-ass,
 and desperate to crane our necks and check
 to see who on the other line
 might be wearing a bra
 for this Friday occasion.

But they, who taught us manners before all,
 gathered between us at the center door
 to block our view, stem puberty's onset,
 long as possible, as was their other calling,
 and, at last, their orders:
 soon as God's deputies here on earth
 in their black, lace-up spinster-shoes
 heard the strains of *The Marine Corps Hymn*,
 deemed us finally in place, of serious enough mien,
 and then, and only then,
March.

Alan Walowitz

ROPE-BURNS

From deep inside a message,
 from where a message seldom comes.
 I mistake it for the sound of waves,
 barely discernible, when I bend to this shell,
 and, anyway, too far away to be of comfort,
 the false-rumor of insistent lapping.
 Or the breakers walloping the shore it means to make clean,
 more like a Mayday from a ship in a bottle--
 you have to strain to listen:
 This is not your body
 though you might live in it, pretend to be content,
 a creature without shape.
 Conditions here were always variable, you admit,
 the joists loose and the frame swaying in the wind.

And, then, come the sterner warnings,
 like a dunning notice:
 the rent is past due, papers about to be served.
 Can't this be fixed? the questions ring down to the hollows
 where the joints no longer come together clean,
 even when properly greased.
 Can't an arrangement be cobbled together,
 the way adults talk in hushed tones among themselves
 so the children can't hear?
 Or let a work-order be submitted--
 so plans might be made, parts ordered,
 a permit obtained from the proper authorities.

Truth is, I'm holding on to you like a lifeline
 and you suggest--so cruel--it might be anyone who just paddles by.
 Maybe better to have latched on to a rope
 that would sooner burn my hands as save me.

AT THE POETRY READING

It's poetry, so the crowd is thin--
 more worn and older than last time.
 It's another hot day getting nearer the solstice
 and a few take seats at the ends of rows,
 so they don't have far to go
 when they have to go.
 One lady, old--my age--seems bewildered,
 having only wandered into the library
 to get out of the sun.
 She turns to me quizzically. I whisper,
Poetry reading. She nods and decides to stay.
 Maybe it's the free coffee, though so far only a battered pot,
 a jar of instant, and an old Cremora
 its insides requiring a sharp instrument
 to urge some of the chemicals loose.
 And someone forgot the sugar,
 so one of the assembled
 rustles up some Sweet'N Low from her purse.
 And there are donut holes pre-wrapped for safety,
 four to a pouch. The emcee comes forward,
 describes our intention, our raison d'être,
 how poetry is the life-force,
 and, while he's at it, mentions this summer heat and global warming,
 and how we've all got to do our part
 whatever that is. But a mic's
 only good as the speaker's willingness to talk into it
 and he's a poet-type unused to such conveniences.
He's nice enough, but doesn't rhyme,
and he should speak up:
 the lady takes her tote, stands to leave.
Hey, I tell her, I'm next. I have some poems,
 as if this should have been encouragement.
 She says--and not unkindly--
Can't stay, but I'm sure your mother would be very proud.

Angela Patten's publications include four poetry collections, *The Oriole & the Ovenbird* (Kelsay Books 2021), *In Praise of Usefulness* (Wind Ridge Books 2014), *Reliquaries* (Salmon Poetry, Ireland 2007) and *Still Listening* (Salmon Poetry, Ireland, 1999), and a prose memoir, *High Tea at a Low Table: Stories From An Irish Childhood* (Wind Ridge Books 2013). Her work has appeared in many literary journals and in anthologies including *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*; *The Breath of Parted Lips Volume II*; *Birchsong I and II: Poetry Centered in Vermont*; and *Roads Taken: Contemporary Vermont Poetry*. Born and raised in Dublin, she maintains dual citizenship in Ireland and the United States, where she has lived since 1977. She is a Senior Lecturer Emerita in the English Department at the University of Vermont.



LINGERING OVER IT

Today all sweetness and close-up detail—
the bee abuzz on the last of the roses,
a Monarch fluttering on the milkweed.

Hope in the bright belated flower buds
dangling from scarlet spires
of the pineapple sage

although they bloomed too late to be of use
to hummingbirds, long since shimmered off
to warmer time zones.

The whirling butterfly bush refuses
to die back, intent on splaying
its delicate white flowers

out over the spent coral bells,
the ruined spring-blooming clematis.
Behind the trunk of a bare birch tree

a calico cat crouches still as a mummer,
staring into the undergrowth.
Surprise largesse of sun

on into November causes geese
to muster in gaggles on the lake,
honking their confusion—

Isn't it supposed to be winter?
How to find our cue to flee the coming cold
in all this blinkered kindness?

Angela Patten

A FAREWELL TO MUSIC

*in memory of Turlough O'Carolan, blind Irish harper,
composer and singer, 1670–1738*

Sent off with a harp, a horse, and a servant
to make his way in music, who among us
would have risen like cream to the top?

Not born in Lucca like Puccini
but in Ireland's back-of-beyond,
between his ears a bridge of melody
pitch and measure. He listened to it all—
the clippety-clop of the mare's hooves,
the gliss of her gallop, the churr of wrens
in roadside ditches, animal clamor,
soft spoken syllables in the Gaelic tongue.

First came the melodies, then the words
which he composed on horseback
as he journeyed to the homes
of the good and the great
Protestant squires and Catholic gentry.

Being blind he was permitted to touch
the women, those snowy-breasted pearls.
And everywhere they gave him their hands.
Madam Bermingham and Lady Blarney
gave him whiskey too when he composed
a sportive planxty for a pleasant host—
Colonel O'Hara or Lord Massereene.

They say he met Geminiani once in Dublin
and admired the music of Corelli and Vivaldi
from whom he gathered frills and furbelows
while caring nothing for harmonic rules
or the city's modish music scene.

For forty-five years he traveled the roads
through muck and mist, the harp
like a child in its sackcloth coat
strapped to his back.

He was always wanted at wakes and weddings.
Sometimes a bride would have to wait
shivering by the church door for his arrival.
Sometimes a widow would be asked
to dampen her grief until the great man
came to sound the dead man out.

In the end he grew sick and lost the traveling,
went home to what had never been a home
but was yet a sanctuary of sorts.

He bade farewell to music
and to Mrs. MacDermott Roe,
but saved the sweetest tune for her
although some said his final composition
was fittingly directed to Flinn the butler
who fetched the harpist his parting drink.

GREEN UP DAY AT THE SUPERFUND SITE

Someone found a black magic 8-ball
among the hypodermic needles,
plastic plates, styrofoam containers.
A robin's nest with a hole in the bottom
bobbing on a sea of soda bottles,
scrap metal and crushed beer cans.

We picked and picked,
filling our bright green trash bags
with remnants of old blankets,
a soiled pup tent, twisted spatula,
burned-out frying-pan,
rusted can-opener, paring knife,
while the seagulls circled overhead
screaming accusations in
their own indigenous languages.

Who were the successive waves
of homeless people that camped
on this poisoned land, then left,
shrugging off everything
they could not carry?

When someone found
a tattered copy of *The Giving Tree*
there were calls for the creation
of an altar to incongruous artifacts--
and we did that.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Anita Arlov is the child of Croatian parents displaced after WW2. She lives in Tamaki Makaurau/Auckland. She writes poems and very short prose, hosts workshops and occasionally judges short form fiction. Anita grew up enjoying the cadence of language but didn't begin writing till mid-life in response to the Canterbury earthquake in 2011. Anita has won the Divine Muses Poetry Competition, the NZ Flash Fiction Competition and has placed second in the Bath Flash Fiction Competition. She is widely anthologised, including Bonsai: Best small stories from Aotearoa/New Zealand; Broadsheet; New Flash Fiction Review; takahē magazine; Best Small Fictions and Best Microfiction. She convened a team that ran the NZ Poetry Conference & Festival, a successful three-day celebration of all things poetry including vispo, wordcore, sung poems, cine-poetics and workshops, involving 200 poets and arts activists. For ten years she managed popular spoken word event Inside Out Open Mic for Writers. In 2022 she was selected an Ockham Collective Arts Resident. *"I like to conflate arresting facts with fiction, memory and emotion. Once I get a fix on a tone, I dive in and commit to getting out alive."* – Anita Arlov

THE OOGA BOOGA WOMAN

The Ooga Booga Woman
swings her legs off turntable arms.
She's the sweet hook
in orange almond syrup cake.
She can float over whole oceans, like longing.

The soft charge through your fingers when you
stroke a rabbit's ear? That's her work.
That tide in your head? She's cuing the wash
in and out,
in and out.

Most days she's on a kind of high,
forgetting herself like a loaded paintbrush.
I imagine her mouth a thumb-
smudge of scarlet, her jungle hair
the doppelganger teal of tui wings.

I found her singing in a plot of tulips
– all hot colours from butter to purple –
under a sad cliff quarry.
She turned up at the beach yesterday
seagulling by my side. No one saw.

I know the Ooga Booga Woman isn't human.
She might be made of water, or shade, or dead lovers –
who knows? But she's here now,
twirling like Maria on that panacea hilltop,
arms so wide open flung.

Anita Arlov

Anne Collins writes poetry and creative non-fiction. Her most recent book is collection of poetry and prose with Spanish themes titled *Listening to the Deep Song* (Bright South press, 2022). Her previous poetry collections are *How to Belong* (2019); *The Language of Water* (2014), *Seasoned with Honey* (2008) a 4-poet anthology; and *The Season of Chance* (2005). Another collection of poetry and prose is titled *My Friends, This Landscape* (2011). Anne lives in nipaluna (Hobart) lutruwita (Tasmania). For more information go to <https://annecollins.com.au/>



WHAT TIME IS IT?

I

No appointments or schedules,
the day stretches before me like a blank page,
touches a terror swallowed by deep space
light years from the surface of my life.
I have these hours
and yet I believe the scientists
who speak about the illusion of time
in an ever-expanding universe.

In the Victorian era
a master clock was set exactly when
a star crossed the hairline
in the eyepiece of a transit telescope.
When trains became the way of travel
solar time proved risky and inefficient
and clocks were set to Greenwich Meantime
across the regions of England
and the Queen's colonies.

Those Babylonian units of 60
we call seconds and minutes
grow into hours, days, weeks, months, years.
This counting patterns our movements,
gives us a linear sense of purpose
and the notion of being on time.

continued overleaf

Anne Collins

WHAT TIME IS IT? *contd...*

But some people have resisted
this international imposition
and still live deeply in plentiful
circular time. They feel no urge to count it,
know the elsewhen,
feel the past merge with the present,
as they walk around a pool of possibilities
in any given circumstance.

II

My friends have become grandmothers and great-grandmothers.
How can that much time have gone by already?
Answer: the earth turns on its axis
and rotates around the sun.
These cosmic revolutions grow our bodies
from young to old. If we're lucky
one hundred years, a speck of time.
Would I really want to live forever?
Universal entropy points to a disorderly future.

Time appears to travel faster
for those living at higher altitudes.
Drawn less by gravity their clocks tick more quickly
than the clocks of those who live below.
When trekking at 1500 feet in the Himalayas
it felt rather absurd to ask
"time Kati bajyo?"

The sherpas wore their new wrist watches
to answer this typical tourist's question.
But what did it really mean to be told
it was twenty-five minutes past ten or a quarter to four
in that landscape of clouds and mountains
that stretched into the seemingly infinite distance.
Were we really later in the day than
the people we'd met in the village thousands of feet below?
The sun shone down on us all.

Physicists say that if you could stay still,
time would pass more quickly
than if you spent your life in motion.
And I think about pilots and flight attendants
moving above the globe at 35,000 feet
feeling a kind of slowness in the journey
at 805 kilometres per hour.
And then the physicists go on to explain
how "nothing", that is, "empty space"
travels faster than the speed of light.

This language unsettles us.
Our everyday words are left to fend for themselves.

continued overleaf

WHAT TIME IS IT? *contd...*

III

The quantum view sees matter
as complex vibrations. I can accept that I am
a mathematically random event,
a humble chance at life. New cells are born
and die every minute. Humans
like the rest of life on Earth,
evolve from the grit of stardust and return to it.
This is a wondrous, cold fact.

Here I am thinking about all this
as my brain, housed by my body,
works hard to understand this mystery,
to contain this meta-awareness.
It makes me want to jump up,
wash the dishes, sweep the path, make a list.

The sheep on the hill, as far as I know,
never bothers itself with this kind of thought.
Or does it? Some people claim to sense
the thoughts of other animals and plants.
Ichthyologists talk about the cognition of cuttlefish.
A dog waiting for its walk knows it is time.
I too am a scratching animal.
I find those sites of existential torment,
some patch of dry, flakey doubt and I feel
a sense of primitive satisfaction as I pick at it.

In the random drift of sub-atomic particles
with their uncertain probabilities
and the ephemeral agitations of quantum fields
my curiosity drifts towards the void
light years from the surface of my life.

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John Gribbin - Nine Musings on Time

Zoe Zadeh - The Tyranny of Time published in Noema, the Berggruen Institute.

Richard Lewis - How Different Cultures Understand Time

Anne M Carson is a poet, essayist and visual artist whose poetry has been published internationally, and widely in Australia, receiving numerous awards including shortlisting in the 2022 Newcastle Poetry Prize. *The Detective's Chair* was published by Liquid Amber Press, 2023. She is on the final leg of a PhD in creative writing candidate at RMIT, writing a poetic biography of prolific novelist and socially progressive, George Sand.



THE AUTHOR PONDERES THE WEIGHT OF GEORGE SAND'S LITERARY ESTATE

A one-kilogram ingot of gold is about the size of a mobile phone. In 1880, four years after her death Sand's children Maurice and Sol sold the rights to her enormous literary estate for the equivalent of 36 kilos of gold. Imagine 36 mobile phone-sized bars of gold. Surprisingly heavy. 125,000 francs for her entire estate, worth nearly 2 million dollars today. When alive she sold her autobiography for 130,000 francs. One of the highest paid authors in her day, but income was paycheque to paycheque. She had inherited a small château employed domestic staff. Always had a cauldron of soup on the range for the hungry. Even though she didn't believe charity would prompt social change, she gave away over one million dollars during her life but sometimes her shoes had holes or she went without a winter coat.

Anne M Carson

Daniel Lusk is author of eight poetry collections and other books, most recently *Every Slow Thing*, poems (Kelsay Books 2022), and *Farthings*, eBook (Yavanika Press 2022). His work is published widely in literary journals and his genre-bending essay "Bomb" (*New Letters*) was awarded a Pushcart Prize. Native of the prairie Midwest and a former commentator on books for NPR, he is a Senior Lecturer of English Emeritus at the University of Vermont (USA).



MURMURS FROM THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

With a holy host of others standing round me...
James Taylor, "Carolina in My Mind"

Dawn light meager.
Garden bare of melted snow
and pages of a borrowed book open
on my lap gone dim.

My eyes closed to envision how
a school of fish charged by a seal
will flow as one around
the whiskered assailant on account
of sensors called "the lateral line"

even if the fish are blind.

Something about science of the 17th century,
down 200 years and now

I am asleep, rocking on the undersea,
waves of unknowing, away.

Once, gazing at a gibbous moon, I appeared
(she would attest and suddenly awake)
at the bedside of a lover miles away.

continued overleaf

Daniel Lusk

MURMURS FROM THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON *contd...*

What heavy touch upon my hand
recalls me from the depth and distance
of my drowse? What bold stroke
on the parchment of my skin
familiar as my mother's voice?
Not rough: was it sweet, sour,
bitter or salt?

Am I a star-nosed mole to discern
in the glistening soil of daydream
the subtle intentions of such arrest?

Does one die so?
Was I "away" or nearly, to be called back
so summarily to myself?

REFLECTIONS ON A 10TH CENTURY FRAGMENT

—Central India, red sandstone, Davis Art Museum, Wellesley

A discreet elbow of the art museum,
the lower torso of a Yakshi—*semi-divine*,
notes the label on the wall. *Location unknown*.

Also lost, her naked wrists and ankles, their bangles,
her feminine abundances. A sprite fond of trees.

Coleridge in mufti stands transfixed, ignoring
agnostic admonitions not to idolize an icon.
The raddled hem of her garment,
subtle mons, tensile thigh poised as if a moment
in her hypnotic dance.

A goddess manque. Boat of a pelvis
meant to rock. Like the truncated mannequin
at L'Ivresse (a shop in Essex-on-Onion),
also without, except the suggestive twist
of knickers with (imagine) Ashoka flower lace.

Next to the foxy mannequin derriere,
as sister poet blew intoxicating verbal smoke
and veiled allusions, he dreamt eyes
soft as flowers and other figments of desire.

continued overleaf

REFLECTIONS ON A 10TH CENTURY FRAGMENT *contd...*

Mystery, how one fragment implies a fractal,
merges with another (all time being one time),
centuries ancient and at the reading yesterday.
A goddess is a goddess.

Paused a moment. Torque
of heart's rest—nada that follows
each r-wave blip on the EKG monitor when spirit
animates flesh (skips a beat). Augurs admiration.

Look here: We all have a ticket to ride
(mind the gap). An iamb then a prayer.

THE IMPONDERABLES

*...then there came down to the thither bank
a woman of no appearance, James Joyce, Finnegans Wake*

1

A muted commercial on TV:
two young ones in one-pc swimsuits
leap from a dock into a pool

under water bare feet, bare legs—
mask of my face whelmed by the sense of water,
scent of chlorine. I am immersed
in the world of memory, a refuge.

My father was a musician:
for proof, when I was seven
I walked to school in my mother's shoes.

A baritone reassuring, when
he sang us to sleep, as a saxophone.

Musing on the animus of Opera:
the azure and umber echolocation
of the coloratura soprano who quickens
pulses of introverts among us:

will she won't she shed her skin
unbuttoning her climactic C or avian E ♭ .

continued overleaf

THE IMPONDERABLES *contd...*

2

A dream of Paris: picture in your ears
the clunking of my heart
as I enter on descending stairs
of the Musee d'Orsay
to idle among Impressionists with Camus.

In the arching hallways—voices
“Enchanté.” “Enchanté, Cherie.”
The puzzle of Courbet’s “Studio”
laid bare: the painter’s model a voyeur

3

Iseult, to her mirror image
in Joyce’s book—*and everyone knows,*
you do look lovely in your invisibles.

Consider Lady G in our time:
her masterpiece
a walk about the neighborhood.

Old one with an eye for beauty
pruning roses in the front garden
stops chewing his tongue.

A workman with a gold tooth
who had been staring down
into an open manhole in the street
—his flashlight of a grin.

A dogwalker, oblivious
to the woman in a business suit,
small mutt growling in her handbag.

The doorman at the Foley, whistle
in his mouth, withdraws his finger
from the air to touch his cap.

A clutch of bare-chested basketball
players in the pocket park turn their heads
in unison as if she had whispered...

Has she escaped, was never such,
abroad on an errand of no consequence?
Put off her garment to try another
and bemused by the scent of cinnamon?

Would each one swear to what
they saw or keep her close,
an intimacy and therefore holy?

Dimitris P. Kraniotis was born in 1966 in Larissa Prefecture in central Greece and he grew up in Stomio (Larissa). He studied Medicine at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. He lives in Larissa (Greece) and works as a medical doctor (internal medicine specialist physician). He is the author of 10 poetry books: "Traces" (Greece 1985), "Clay Faces" (Greece 1992), "Fictitious Line" (Greece 2005), "Dunes" (Romania 2007), "Endogram" (Greece 2010), "Edda" (Romania 2010), "Illusions" (Romania 2010), "Leaves Vowels" (Italy 2017), "Tie of Public Decency" (Greece 2018) and "Minus one" (Spain 2022). Also he is the Editor-in-chief of the international anthology in English "World Poetry 2011" (205 poets from 65 countries). His poems have been translated in 34 languages & published in many countries. He participated in International Poetry Festivals. He is Doctor of Literature, Academician in Italy, President of the 22nd World Congress of Poets (UPLI), President of the World Poets Society (WPS), Director of the Mediterranean Poetry Festival (Larissa, Greece), Chairman of the Writers for Peace Committee of PEN Greece and member of World Poetry Movement (WPM), Hellenic Literary Society, National Society of Greek Literary Writers, etc. His official website: <http://www.dimitriskraniotis.com/>



ENDOGRAM

Endogram
Of verbal paroxysms
Within letters
Common or empty

In timid sentences
With hidden cries
Spatio-temporal discontinuity
Of exculpatory findings
In guilts of innocent

Illusive adventure
Of innermost conflicts
With defeated winners

Dimitris P. Kraniotis

WORDS ARE THIRSTY

The words are thirsty
And they drink wine
To get me drunk

I plow, I harverst
But now I keep quiet
Don't let them put out
Like dried up curses
On dry grass

I'm breaking pitchers
With wet echo
To rest
In the heatwave
Without water
With a handfull of mistakes

LIST OF SURVIVORS

Decorated dreams
With ideas of achievements
Full of missteps
Mistakes and guilt

You hang for earrings
Like a ghost of waves
That in the shipwrecks
Is lost
In myriad versions

Without ever
To be
On the list of survivors
Without ever
To be drowning
In people's orders

Edward Caruso has been published in *A Voz Limpia*, *Australian Multilingual Writing Project*, 'La Bottega della Poesia' (*La Repubblica*, Italy), *Burrow*, *Communion*, *Kalliope X*, *Mediterranean Poetry*, *Meniscus*, *n-Scribe*, *Right Now*, *StylusLit*, *TEXT*, *Unusual Work* and *Well-Known Corners: Poetry on the Move*. His second collection of poems, *Blue Milonga*, was published by Hybrid Publishers in 2019. In August 2019, he featured on 3CR's Spoken Word program.



BURIAL GROUNDS

Rubber tyres brake in gravel
The sound of water fills a vase
bursting with dahlias

Yeats's Cast a cold eye On Life ...
birth and death dates
the bookends of autobiography

Out of reverence
when I visit my parents' graves
other burial places I've stopped at come to mind
Neruda's and Matilde's at Isla Negra
Paganini's at La Villetta Cemetery, Parma

Vases with plastic flowers
Eucalypts that don't shed leaves
but drop branches on tombstones

Plaques that after twenty-five years
are no longer legible

How I got here
How I got to be who I am

Conversations never ending

Parting
seldom for the faint-hearted

I whisper to my deceased

Edward Caruso

STAGES

*The earth, damp, foliage rust-coloured;
yellowing mosses and patches of clover.
Nostalgia.*

1

The middle years,
a face in October light
on a forgotten Sunday morning.

A figure enters a church,
not to pray, but to admire the silence
and relinquish the futility of commitment.

Reassured, Pia will leave.
If she could wait for love,
choose a favourite saint,
stations of the cross and faith,
her lifelong constant
– to never let go what's so infinitely hers.

2

The ideal encounter never lasts.
When on a train Pia takes to the owner
of a discotheque in Rimini,
the Palestinian who's lived here 15 years
and that one face that sticks in the mind,
fascinated with her words and drawing her to him.

But she almost misses her stop,
having grabbed her things to the call of '*Mi dispiace*'
during a rush to the exit.

3

Pia takes her new lover to her favourite delicatessen,
names half a dozen cheeses with all manner
of red, black and clear crusts,
alludes to roasted chestnuts and tiramisu.

Pia and her partner will feast in a farmhouse with his family.
An admirer will ask from whom she inherited her eyes.

Walks in the cold, oaks and pines covered in mist.

4

Five years pass,
Pia's one true companion is beaten,
even as she stays by his side.

In Lausanne a mask fits over his face,
the critical eye removed and fitted
with a metal overlay before being placed back.

Treatment in a nuclear reactor,
the tumour behind the retina burns away,
yet blindness ensues.

Fear he'll lose sight in the other eye.
Pia and her mother will pray together in church.

Rain, Pia wishes she could dream of it more often,
cyclists riding past with umbrellas.

continued overleaf

STAGES *contd...*

5

Despite the trip to Switzerland,
a second tumour cuts loose in Pia's husband's lung.
Then the sudden stroke and numbers of people
who come from nowhere to farewell
the man twice married and whose children
want to know why Pia is moving away.

6

An apartment overlooks a riverbed of stones.
Pia will walk to town arm in arm
with a neighbour and recall
a film seen on a date forty years earlier,
and that first cigarette smoked when her then boyfriend
asked why she'd smoked it alone.

Future menthols. To hold the fumes down,
caress her companion's cheek,
allowing his hand to reach her breast.
To inhale once more,
exchange looks and inhale again.

Recalling the priest who spoke
of the martyrs and Saint Sebastian.

7

Pia's last visitors:
the stepdaughters who come back briefly,
but she recognises nobody.

The sight of Pia fifty years earlier strolling through
two urchins' ball games in piazza San Francesco, Bologna.
In those figures the desire
to save the best of herself for those she loved,
handing out 100 lira coins,
giving all she could for the fortune
Pia wished was hers to give.

Gail Ingram is an award-winning writer from Ōtautahi Christchurch, Aotearoa, and author of two poetry collections, *Some Bird* (Sudden Valley Press 2023) and *Contents Under Pressure* (Pūkeko Publications 2019). Her work has appeared in *Landfall*, *Turbine/Kapohau*, *The Spinoff*, *The Poetry Shelf*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Blue Nib*, *Barren Magazine* and others. Committed to the writer's life, she supports herself through teaching at Write On School for Young Writers and by freelance editing, including working as managing editor for *a fine line* (NZ Poetry Society magazine), and a short fiction editor for *Flash Frontier: An Adventure in Short Fiction*. She has an MCW (with distinction) from Massey University. <https://www.theseventhletter.nz/>



WATER BUD

after Wisława Szymborska

like the shape of a gentian bud, trembling
 before opening, this water drop
 on my finger came through 100 year
 pipes from a wellspring out west
 where the suburbs are spreading,
 trickled along eaves, concrete
 elaborate facades, porches, driveways, re-sealed roads
 and byways, rushed in a brown mess
 through wider drains, poured onto
 a patchwork of farms, seeped
 through the sewage, ran nitrous
 into the shingle of braided rivers,
 stayed silent
 through the bush, reflected
 on the hoards of overseas tourists
 gone missing from the edges
 of mirror lakes, once flashing
 their apertures to name her
 in so many tongues, so many syllables
 running into the mouths of still drowning
 children, so soundless
 she slipped underground into hidden
 rivers, carved boulders and down
 through trees turned to stone

continued overleaf

Gail Ingram

WATER BUD *contd...*

until she bubbled up and
up, where the mist and the clouds
soaked her up, until she burst
from the sky into millions of
long liquid lashes, ran off the back
of a humpback whale come up for air
the Tasman, hissed at, then
then quelled the bush fires ravaging
Terra Australis, dipped
her toes into the Indian Ocean,
splashed onto the hands of African mothers
weeping, she swept the Atlantic
whipped with the North wind around the heads
of fracking drills in the land of the free, a cemetery
of seeds, I catch
in my feed
and wherever
and whatever happens
in this small globe
will be measured here
come summer, come
the rise of moisture,
come the business of spiders, of
insects through the dew-
beaded tussock, please come
the flower.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Geraldine Mills is a poet and fiction writer. She has published five collections of poetry, three of short stories and two children's novels. She is an experienced facilitator and is a member of Poetry Ireland's Writers in Schools' Scheme. Her most recent publication is *When the Light: New and Selected Poems* (Arlen House, 2023).



Geraldine Mills

THE SEDUCTION OF STORY

Just beyond O'Brien's bridge,
she tight-roped her way above the water,
drawn by the flute music soaring
towards the Atlantic
long after it became something else.

Her bare soles read the tense of the wire
and sure-footed she worked her way
across to the music maker,
became his brightening sky.

They lived together in rapture days,
he drew the crowds in the Galway market,
there among brown soda bread, floury potatoes,
featherbone bowls,
she perfecting her balancing act
(tight as a lemon thorn)
in their field outside the city walls.

Until one Saturday while he was away
she read from the intensity of her foot against line
that a woman can get hungry for something
more than a raptor's wingspan gliding
in a skein of blue and know that she must go.

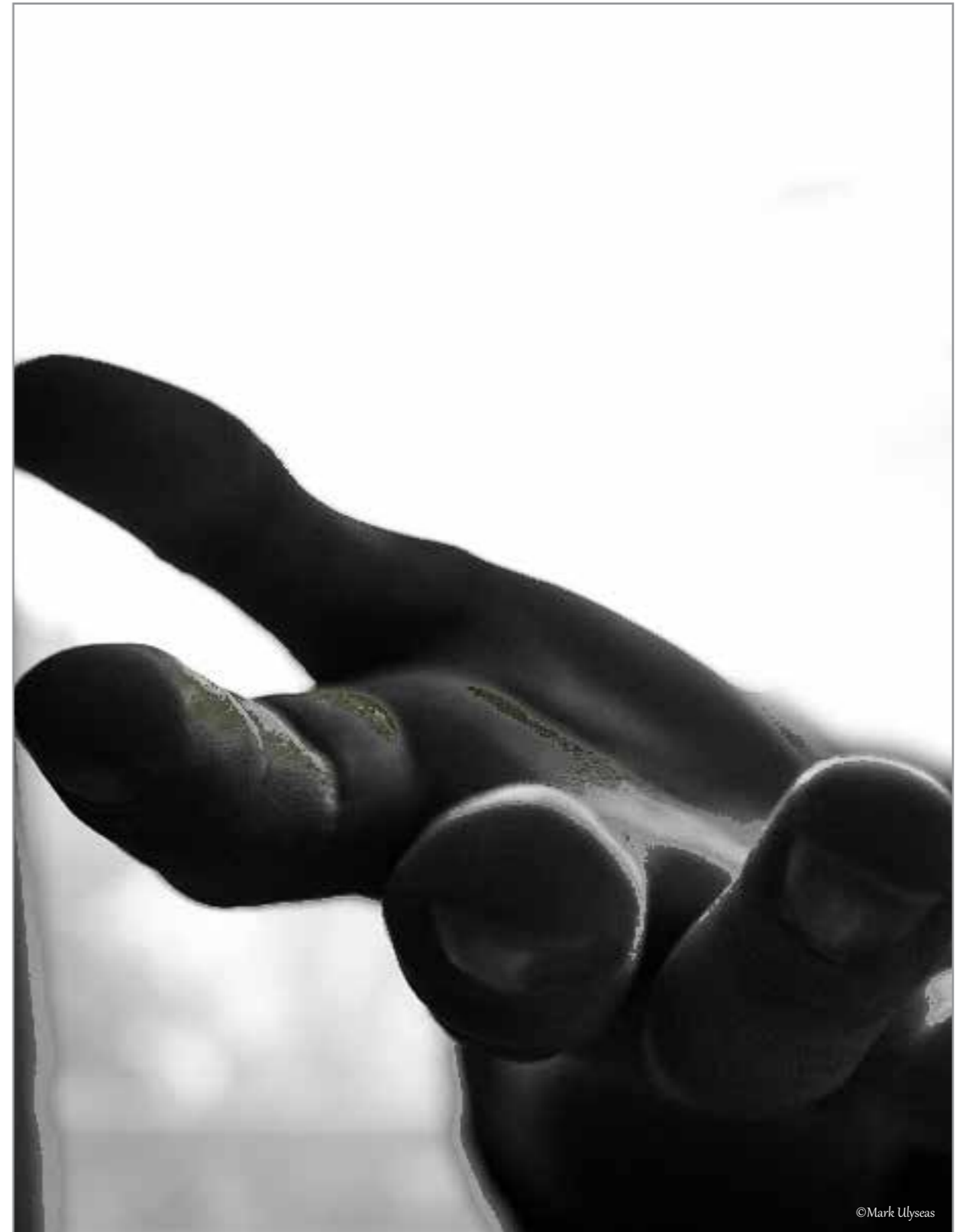
The truth is, there never was a tightrope,
lemon thorn, a featherbone, but
there was a woman who heard
the morning open up its mouth,
urging her to turn her back on
polished concrete floors, onyx worktops,
leave the door wide open as she left.

Outside the purple alliums became new planets
spinning off their axes around her.

POLTERGEIST

What we did was
sleep through
the noise of the baskets being pulled
from under
the still warm kitchen range
as we did for
the clatter of plates against the walls,
socks and underwear
scattered across the red and black lino,
our mother
sitting up in bed, shivering.

Next morning at the breakfast table
her hand shook
as she cupped it around a Gold Flake,
her tea untouched,
blaming the ghost, ordering us to marry each sock
to its mate
refold our knickers, vests, slippers,
return
the tidied baskets to their sooty retreat
a catkin of ash
fluttering onto her toast.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Jonathan Cant is a Sydney-based writer, poet, and musician. He won the 2023 Banjo Paterson Writing Awards for Contemporary Poetry, was Longlisted for the 2023 Fish Poetry Prize, and the 2022 Flying Islands Poetry Manuscript Prize, Commended in the W. B. Yeats Poetry Prize, Highly Commended in the South Coast Writers Centre Poetry Awards, and twice selected for the Ros Spencer Anthology *Brushstrokes*. Jonathan's poems have appeared in *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Otoliths*, and Booranga Writers' Centre's *four W thirty-four*. His short stories have featured in publications as diverse as *Playboy* to Australia's leading flyfishing magazine, *FlyLife*.



DALAI LAMA ON SPEED DIAL

HE chuckled as he tipped the cab driver. There he stood marooned on Petrie Terrace in his maroon robes—but he wasn't there to barrack for Queensland. He had an art gallery and minds to open. I watched him float along the red carpet, reaching beyond the bollards to shake people's hands. I was high on speed that day; I've since wished I hadn't been. False happiness?

*Winter's cold crystals:
artificial paradise—
the snow melts too soon.*

HE then gripped my hand and I felt a warm, electric shot of energy enter my system. He nodded knowingly—eyebrows raised—and continued to shake other hands as he maintained a firm, reassuring hold on my right hand; while giggling to the crowd. I still sense his presence. I call him up telepathically from time to time. He usually answers; and always has the answers:

*Happiness is not
something readymade—it comes
from your own actions.*

NOTE: "Happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions." is a quote from *His Holiness, The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso*.

Jonathan Cant

THE GREYHOUND

Anubis: Ancient Egypt's God of the Dead,
Nubia's jackal-headed embalmer.
This cursed dog, a god reversed by time.

Dynasties today are built in different ways.
The Pharaohs' holy guard dog is reborn into
a hellish kennel where live rabbits are dangled

before him to drive him rabid. Possums
and piglets wriggle and squeal on the lure
so that bloodlust will give him the winning edge.

This canine king, once noble and pure,
is running to live and living to die
for the profit and sport of owners, trainers,

punters, race callers, and so-called battlers.
Anubis, how much would those cold souls weigh
against the feather on your scales of justice?

Trading one Underworld for another,
an Undertaker forced to preside over
backyard burials in betting's mass graves.

And now, at the rescue shelter, racing a bad
memory—the name "Phoenix" on your cage—
you cringe and cower in the corner

when the vet enters the enclosure.
The sour smell of stale piss hangs
heavy in the air. You glance sideways

with watery eyes and ears tilted back.
For an eternity, you ran in circles
pursuing this impossible prize: an afterlife.

STASIS, 2020

for family and friends

Dotted... dashed - - -
the Queensland
State border
travels dead

straight—until
it reaches the
One Ton Post
near Mungindi.

Then rivers and
ridges run it east
to the Scenic Rim
of sacred Wollumbin,

before dropping down
from Mount Cougal's twin
peaks toward the Tweed
and the sea.

But a fence is manmade,
its meaning imaginary,
and now, accomplice
to a tragedy.

On Google Maps,
this hardline
semi-splits a nation...

like a perforation...

the tearable divide
on a ticket
to somewhere
you're not welcome.

Kate Mahony is a long-time writer of short stories and flash fiction with an MA in Creative writing from the International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University of Wellington. Her work has been published in anthologies and literary journals internationally and in New Zealand. Her short fiction has been short-listed and long listed in international and national competitions. She has previously worked as a journalist in both London and New Zealand, and in communications roles. Her debut novel, *Secrets of the Land*, published by Cloud Ink Press in September 2023, came in at number two on the Aotearoa New Zealand weekly best sellers list shortly after publication.



Kate Mahony

A MAN OF SUBSTANCE

At first, Molly wasn't sure what the woman on the phone – Dan's former office administrator – was saying to her. She sat down in a deckchair in the garden of their holiday home and tried to concentrate. 'I'm sorry,' she said. 'Can you repeat that?' At the other end of the phone the woman took a breath.

Ever since buying the holiday home in Waikanae, Molly had been encouraging Dan to retire from his accountancy practice in Wellington city. 'We could move here permanently.'

Dan hadn't been keen. 'I've got a lot of work on right now. I can't just leave. And I've got my staff to think about. After all, it's their livelihoods at stake, too.'

Dan had recently lost two good clients – Rodney and Anita, a couple whom Molly considered were her friends. She had introduced them to him long ago when she and Dan first met. When she bumped into them in the city they told her Dan's charges had got too expensive.

Dan was annoyed when she told him this. She felt he was blaming her. It wasn't like him to be angry. Most people commented on what an easy-going personality he had. It had won him clients.

'It's not easy at the moment the way things are.' He meant all the new competitors starting up in their fancy modern offices with their huge floor to ceiling windows and flashy coffee machines. People were taken in by things like that. That was why, Dan told her, he had been heading to the golf course on Fridays to network among the business owners. Some might be looking to switch accountants. It wasn't easy getting old, Molly thought. And especially so for men. There was that expression: stale, pale and male.

Molly suspected he also didn't want to be at home all the time with just her for company. Friends from tennis often complained how annoying it was to have their now retired husbands always asking, 'when's lunch?' and flipping between TV channels with the remote. It was not as if she and Dan had adult children and grandchildren to spend time with. Both had been childless when they met and by then it was too late for Molly to have children.

#

Dan had just opened a bottle of Sauvignon in the garden at Waikanae on the first weekend of spring when he suddenly looked terrified, staggered, hand on chest and slumped to the ground. A massive heart attack. When the ambulance arrived, the ambulance officer and the driver struggled for ages conducting CPR. It was horrendous to watch, but there was little Molly could do.

Dan had been slowly putting on weight - comfort eating, she thought. Molly had been aware of it, but when she saw the two ambulance officers doing all they could, she realised how truly heavy he was. Obese really.

The ambulance officers phoned the funeral director for her. After he and his assistant took Dan's body away in their van, Molly sat on her own in the garden she had planned to redesign. She had hoped Dan would help her with the new plantings once he retired. Tears flooded down her cheeks as she thought about this. Somehow she had never imagined Dan leaving her alone like this. And to cope with everything.

It was dusk before she stirred herself and messaged some of their friends to tell them. She called Dan's office assistant. He said he'd let the staff know. A huge bouquet of flowers and an offer of help with anything that was needed arrived the next morning.

Dan had been dead three days when his former office administrator phoned Molly. Hilary had left the previous year. Molly waited for the other woman to offer her sympathy. She was surprised when Hilary took a deep breath and said there was something she had wanted to tell her ages ago. She was sorry she hadn't. She asked her if she knew Dan had been "seeing other women."

Dan? When? Who? Molly wasn't sure which question to ask. They all seemed to tumble into her mind at once. Instead, she asked the other woman to repeat what she had said.

Hilary did so, only this time she clarified her statement. 'He's been seeing young women,' Hilary said, more clearly this time.

Molly remembered Dan saying Hilary had left because she was offered a better salary, one he couldn't or didn't want to match. She was silent, processing this.

'But it's worse than that. He was paying for them through the company,' Hilary said. 'Cash, apartment accommodation, restaurant meals. And not just through the company, I suspect. Maybe go through what accounts you can find.'

Hilary began apologising again. Molly hung up. She went inside to the small room Dan had taken over as his office. One time she had seen him fiddling under the too-big oak desk. She knelt down to find a key attached to the underside by a wad of sticky tack. Dan had never been that imaginative, he was more of a paperwork man.

She held the key in her hand and thought of the dark old-fashioned office near Parliament buildings in the city. Could Hilary mean the one or two intelligent-looking girls with heavy, black-framed glasses who she had seen working industriously at their computers when she visited Dan's workplace? Part timers doing university degrees. These girls, they came and went, on to other jobs in other companies once they had their qualifications. Hilary couldn't have meant them.

She remembered then the Christmas function. She had turned to catch a young member of staff, a girl really, who was reaching up to touch his tie, admiring it. She was from Manila, she told Molly when she saw her standing there. In Manila, business people thought it important to dress smartly. In New Zealand men dressed rather too casually. No ties. Open shirts. Molly, busy looking around for somewhere to off load her empty wine glass, hadn't paid her much attention.

She unlocked the old filing cabinet in the corner of the room. As she pulled a drawer out, a stack of bank statements fell through the broken hanging files onto the carpet all around her.

She ran her gaze down pages she had never seen before. A list of payments: restaurants she had never been to, with unusual and exotic names, businesses that meant nothing to her, and here and there, boutique hotel accommodation. Her heart sped up. She thought she might be sick as she read everything through again, hoping to make sense of it.

Finally, she pulled herself together and made a call to her nephew who worked in the head office of one of the major banks. Something to do with forensic accounting. He listened as she read out an account of what she had seen on the paperwork. 'Call your bank manager,' he said. 'Though it doesn't sound good. I fear you may have...'

'What? Lost everything?' Molly could hear her voice rise, almost to a squeak.

The nephew sighed. 'I'm afraid so.'

The bank manager was equally sombre. Dan had re-mortgaged their house in Wellington. It had always been in his name. But there was something else. He had also cleared out some of their investments.

'Dan looked after all the financial stuff,' Molly said. 'Being an accountant.' She could hear herself sounding so plaintive. She cursed under her breath. How could she have been so gullible? She wasn't sure if she had said this aloud.

If the bank manager heard her, he didn't comment.

The funeral director had begun calling her with possible service times. He needed to know what she wanted. 'A cremation,' she said. 'No wreath.' Type of casket? The cheapest, she said. She no longer cared.

#

There were people who thought the service rushed although no one said anything in Molly's vicinity. The lack of eulogies was strange, they murmured quietly among themselves afterwards. Of course, that was Molly, a no fuss kind of woman. Now Dan, on the other hand, was a man of substance. People would have had stories, surely. He was known to have a circle of friends at the golf club, wasn't he? He had put at least one young girl from the office through university on a scholarship. And there had been other generous donations.

But if Molly wanted the service to be as short and unsentimental as it was, that was how she was. They had always seemed an odd match, hadn't they?

As for Dan's photo on the Order of Service. By gosh, some of the men said, the angle of the photo showed him with such a big gut. Had he been that overweight? His sharp business suits and big smile had overshadowed the stomach. But now that was all there was to look at.

Magdalena Ball is a novelist, poet, reviewer, interviewer, vice president of Flying Island Books, and managing editor of Compulsive Reader. Her stories, editorials, poetry, reviews and interviews have appeared in a wide number of journals and anthologies, and have won local and international awards. She is the author of several novels and poetry books, most recently, *Bobish*, a verse-memoir published by Puncher & Wattmann in 2023. Find out more at her website: <http://www.magdalenaball.com>



Magdalena Ball

CHRONOTOPE

The body is always in motion
even prone, at constant speed
the trajectory of all positions, fluid

like water, the body is water.

At a particular point
hooked by date and time, your watch
ticking inaudibly, that is to say

now, or now, or maybe now

you might feel you are in a place,
let's call it home,
the co-ordinates of time and space

invoked by narrative.

The motivation for leaving
where you think you are safe
is fear. Pay up and go

is what they tell you, don't mention fear.

It's profitable for someone, not you,
but if you pay now you won't have to
pay more later.

That's the whole story

so you hand back your identity card.
That fear was always an illusion,
the only reality, motion.

The only home is here.

RADIATION DEAD FOREST

Like a radio station broadcasting the future
red, ginger brown, death forest
in the alienation zone alone.
All those counters, dosimeters, clicking.

Blurry vision, dry eye, memory of human
life beneath moss steps, dust motes, debris,
haunting the city, an albino barn owl,
swoops low.

Wildlife is returning. What do brown bears
and boar know of evacuations,
safe distances, grazing beneath twisted
branches, ghost pine, tubers and roots.

The past is disappearing into a different
kind of forest, Strontium-90 scarred
empty buildings, jagged towers
returning to origins: rock, sand, gravel.



Photograph credit: <https://pixabay.com/photos/chernobyl-pripyat-ukraine-abandoned-4901421/>

Mark Laurent is a professional musician, composer, record producer and author. He's recorded over 20 albums, published 4 collections of poetry, an illustrated children's storybook, and is currently working on a memoir as well as an anthology of work from the last 45+ years. Mark has written articles and reviews for New Zealand and international magazines. He lives in Auckland.
<http://www.marklaurent.co.nz/Home.html>



I MET AN ENT

I met an Ent today in Albert Park
 "Uncommon sight in Hobbiton", you say
 Perhaps he's waiting there 'til after dark...
 Stopped to rest in Auckland on his way

I stopped to chat as politeness requires
 Though this may take some time, I'm sure you know
 For Ents are not the quickest of repliers
 I had some ease, and nowhere else to go

I chirped in with a Hobbitish "Good day"
 Then waited there and waited there some more
 And when his Ent-ish answer finally came
 It wasn't quite what I had bargained for

"Herumph, yes it's an Entish day my dear
 And hotter than I'd bargained for, I'll say
 I really need a fountain full of beer
 Is there one near, can you point the way?"

"I'm sorry sir but Hobbiton is dry
 Our fountains only have water on tap."
 His leaves rustled, or was that sound a sigh?
 After quite a long time he barked, "Crap!"

Next time I meet an Ent in Albert Park
 I think I'll smile and quietly go my way
 In case his bite is worser than his bark
 - You don't get sworn at by a tree most days.

Mark Laurent

MASKS AND CHAINS

I'm not superstitious
There's a black cat standing at my door
I'm going to let him in
He just wants some fuss
We all need a friend

And if the sun should rise
In the middle of the night
I won't close my eyes
That's just fine by me
Must be how it's meant to be

I'm not superstitious
Though this world weaves a web of chains
And we all live like slaves
But I'm rattling my cage

Ever since I was quite small
They told me "this is it" and "that is all"
But I don't believe that
I don't believe that

You can take away the veils and shadows
Because I won't fade away
I'll be the same as today
There's no reason to be afraid

Though life is just a breath
Still I'm not dead
And breathing is enough
When you're in love with life
The masks and chains fall off

I'm not superstitious
There's a ladder standing in my path
I could walk under it
Maybe I'll climb it
just because I can.

Michael Minassian is a Contributing Editor for Verse-Virtual, an online poetry journal. His poetry collections *Time is Not a River*, *Morning Calm*, and *A Matter of Timing* as well as a new chapbook, *Jack Pays a Visit*, are all available on Amazon. For more information: <https://michaelminassian.com>



INGAPIRCA, ECUADOR

Ten thousand feet above sea level
we walk hand in hand
among stone toppled ruins
of the Inca empire.

Above us blue sky
and a few fast-moving clouds—
white puffs skirt the tops
of mountains we look down on
from our vantage of sloping time.

Black and white sheep,
green terraced farms,
reaching back a thousand years,
dotted now with pickup trucks
and satellite dishes.

A few notes from the *zampona*
the blind musician plays
reach us above the constant
whistle of the wind.

The thin air
making each breath a gift,
cold and sharp
as a blade of ice.

Michael Minassian

THE BIG CRUNCH

I imagine what the last day
of the universe will be like
the one they call the Big Crunch—

the world and all the stars explode,
disappearing in a giant black hole—

With sirens blaring and lights flashing,
and solemn civil defense announcements
before the President of the World
gives a short inspirational speech—

I hope the universe itself
would send some sign—
God's billboard flashing an alert
on the cosmic highway
as if children or seniors were missing in cars,
or a giant hand piercing the sky
and clouds parting in thunder and light.

Next, the moon will explode
sending the seas overhead
and the sun flare white
then red then black.

I might feel hot or cold
or perhaps feel nothing—
all of existence pressed and ground
down into one dark spot
like a single coffee grind
at the bottom of your empty cup.

THE MERMAID

Taking a bus from Miami
to Orlando, Ophelia
decides she will never
fall in love again,
or write postcards
she never mails.

Tired of princes and queens,
taxi drivers and acrobatic sex,
she takes swimming lessons,
the only adult in the class.

At Weeki-Wachee,
she gets a job
wearing a bikini top
and fish tails,
green and blue scales—

Surrounded by undulating
plants, Ophelia's
thick golden hair,
drifts above her
like the long drowned.

Tourists ooh and aah
from behind the glass.

Day dreaming while she swims,
her tears salt the aquarium.

She learns to hold her breath
for minutes, then hours,
preferring the underwater
world to life on the surface.

Having no need for gravity,
she floats among the fish
learns their language:
the flip of a fin or tail
the shape of the mouth
the vibration of a gill—
eyes wide open
in sleep or dreams.



Noel Monahan is a native of Granard, Co. Longford, now living in Cavan. He has published seven collections of poetry with Salmon Poetry. An eight collection, *Celui Qui Porte Un Veau*, a selection of French translations of his work was published in France by Alidades, in 2014. A selection of Italian translations of his poetry was published in Milan by Guanda in November 2015: "Tra Una Vita E L'Altra". His poetry was prescribed text for the Leaving Certificate English, 2011- 2012. His play: " Broken Cups" won the RTE P.J. O'Connor award in 2001 and *Chalk Dust*, a long poem of his, was adapted for stage and directed by Padraic McIntyre, Ramor Theatre, 2019. During the Covid-19 lockdown, Noel had to reinvent his poetry readings and he produced a selection of Short Films: "Isolation & Creativity", "Still Life", "Tolle Lege" and A Poetry Day Ireland Reading for Cavan Library, 2021. Recently, he edited "Chasing Shadows", a miscellany of poetry for Creative Ireland. His ninth poetry collection, "Journey Upstream" will be published by Salmon Poetry in 2024.

This poem deals with the historical topic of *The French & Irish defeat at Ballinamuck, 1798*. September 2023 was the 225th anniversary of the battle. It will be in my next collection due for publication in 2024.

BALLINAMUCK, 1798

It all happened in the long ago,
Weeks before we dug the potatoes.
There were rumours of liberation everywhere:
The French Are On Their Way.
Today we are left to remember
Ballinamuck and the ghosts of '98.

We recall the chaos of it all,
Clash of metal ringing out, soldiers shouting,
Cavalry charging,
The wounded shoving moss into their wounds
The dead and the dying
Abandoned in bog holes.

Listen:
Can you hear the hills shout their goodbyes?
Let the familiar place names ring in your ears:
Kiltycreevagh, Shanmullagh Hill,
Fearglass Lough, Dromgort,
Gaugue.

Pain still endures here
These fields continue to spark our memory,
Our hearts are filled with mixed emotions:
Love, fear, sadness, anger ...
Trees wail with the sorrow of rain,
Blackberries bleed on thorns.

continued overleaf

Noel Monahan

BALLINAMUCK, 1798 *contd...*

Slow breath, last breath of the hanged and drowned
 Bubble of bog water coming up from below
 Underworld of prayers in Irish,
 Old women gather round:

*Sé do bheatha, a Mhuire,
 Atá lán de ghrásta ...*

Yet there is solace here.
 Our heroes live on: The Gunner Magee,
 General George Blake, Brave Robin Gill of Fardromin ...
 Ballinamuck
 Continues to connect with us
 To inspire us.

It's a place to be creative,
 A place drifting in and out
 Of the rhymes and rhythms of fields,
 A hare's corner
 To endure
 The withering winds of winter.

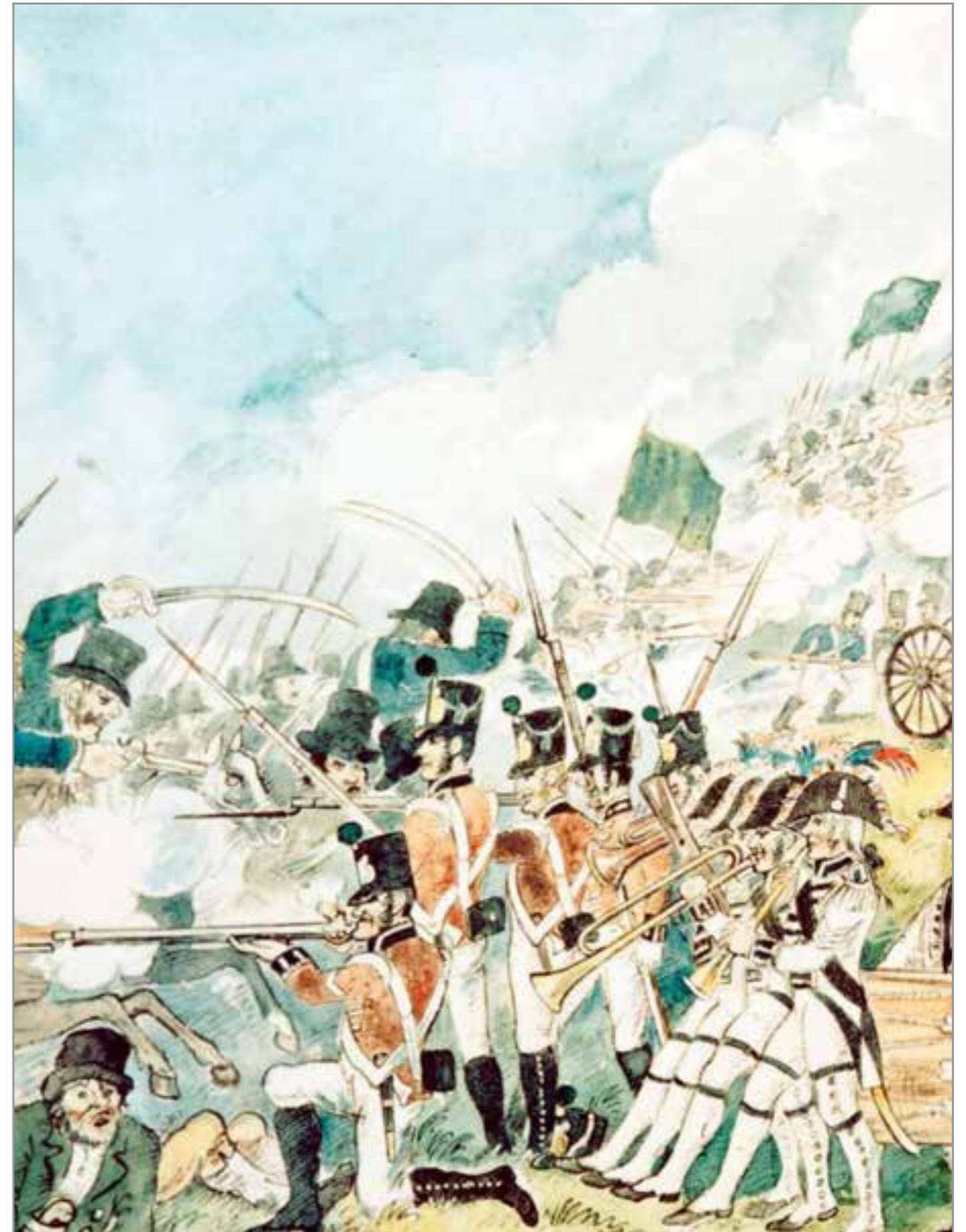


Image courtesy: <https://www.ballinamuck.ie/the-battle-of-ballinamuck/>

Rachel Coventry is a Galway-based poet. Her poems appear in, The Guardian, The Rialto, The North, Stand, and The Moth. Her second collection, "The Detachable Heart" (Salmon Poetry), was published in 2022. Her book "Heidegger and Poetry in the Digital Age: New Aesthetics and Technologies" (Bloomsbury) is due for publication in 2023.



STRAWBERRIES IN DECEMBER

I wanted men
forced like rhubarb
in the dark
without work
without sun.

In the old days, when men knew everything,
no one wanted the hubris to be true
more than I did.
At twenty-two, I'd believe anything.

I knew a man who could roll the sun in his hand
I thought him a god;
it was the green eyes.
I grew
even though it was always winter.

He developed a drink problem,
and married another woman
the last time I saw him was in Montpelier
pretending to be OK, nonchalant even.

You can have all the strawberries you can eat
but you can't eat anything.

Rachel Coventry

FRANCIS BACON IN GALWAY

Connemara at dusk; its creeping sadness
too much for the Anglo-Irish
but dawn will tap, bring worms to its surface,
exuded, godless, grimacing
again.

I sick sought alone and can't go back
my father, who art
does not partake, does not sign nor sigh.
and roll myself alive
again.

I can't bear the morning
and how it takes a long second
for this drab room
to announce itself
again;

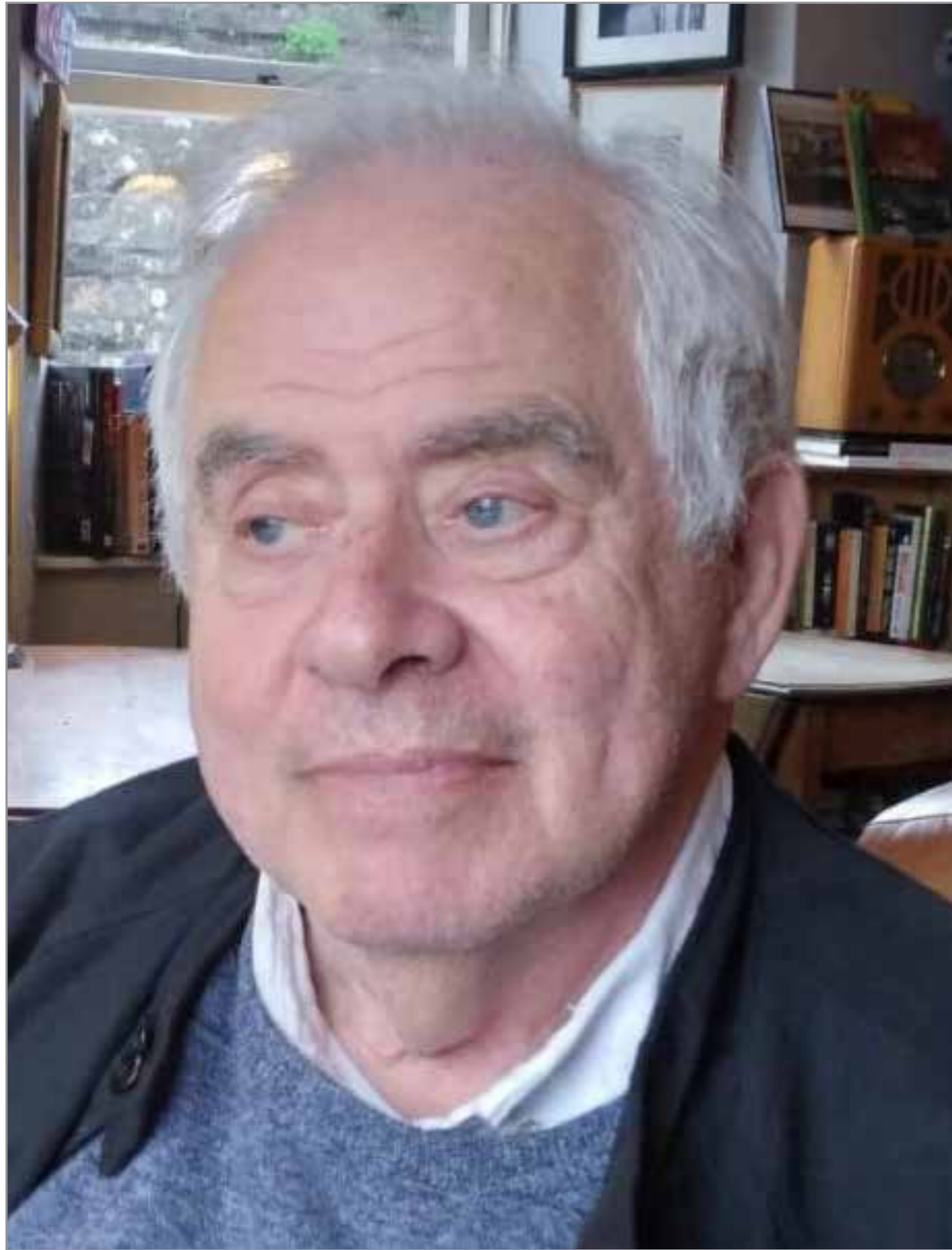
a tortured pope, a tortured Christ,
another tortured soldier,
the boys who killed a dog on social media.
What are protons made out of
again?

I have understood the death of God
but now the champagne is gone.
Oh, Francis Bacon if you saw him
you'd understand.

Again, it's inappropriate
some things are always forbidden.
(I prefer the German verboten)
All of it in a blind blue second
and again,

life does not end
but if this were to lose its promise
Francis, what then?

Richard W. Halperin holds Irish-U.S.dual nationality and lives in Paris. He is published by Salmon/Cliffs of Moher (four collections since 2010) and Lapwing/Belfast (sixteen shorter collections since 2014). In 2024 Salmon will bring out Selected and New Poems, drawing upon the twenty collections and including thirty new poems - Introduction by Joseph Woods - on the occasion of Mr Halperin's eightieth birthday.



THE WOODEN PALETTE

After a year, the oils of the pigments
one has used on a good wooden palette
have penetrated the palette so that
one wipe of the cloth can make it clean.
But the palette remembers. The oils
are within, and some stains on top are
permanent. Some of the writing I live with

is that. Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*.
Yeats's *Purgatory*. Macdara Woods'
letter to me about *Sunset Boulevard*.
Pentimento has something to do with it.
Oil and wood, which are my siblings –
Saint Francis stopped too soon –

have something to do with it.
The painting is there. But I am the palette.

Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Joseph Woods.

AVENUE DUQUESNE

This morning I exchanged hellos and good wishes with a young fellow who last summer had briefly been a waiter at my usual café. He was passing en route to wherever he was going. This time when I saw him, I thought: May he, with his optimism and cleanness, and others of his generation, work at dragging a little further into the light our dysfunctional race, as some in my generation and in all previous ones have worked at doing – and if we are outnumbered, so what? Waking this morning – so, before the avenue Duquesne – I remembered Hudson River light: mellow, full, quiet. There it is, without anybody. All the best, young fellow.

THE RIGHT LADY IS THE WRONG LADY

I am having breakfast on the terrace of the corner bakery, rue d'Estrées and avenue de Villars. I see at a distance a very old lady, bent nearly double, walking with a cane. She and I always wave when I am on that terrace.

Closer, she is not that old lady, she is another old lady, and in fact she turns a corner.

Neither lady is The Bread Lady, as I have come to call her: a slim middle-aged woman always in a simple frock, bicycling each morning to the bakery to take yesterday's unsold bread to those in need. She rides away with the wind blowing her hair, which she keeps short and fluffy as did so many ladies when I was growing up.

The right lady is the wrong lady.

They are all the right lady.

Sinéad McClure's writing is published on radio, and in anthologies, magazines and online including; The Honest Ulsterman, The Stinging Fly, Southword, Live Encounters, Poethead, Drawn to the Light, The Cormorant, Dodging the Rain, A New Ulster, StepAway Magazine, Sonder Magazine and many other fine publications. Sinéad has two chapbooks published her first solo chapbook The Word According to Crow and along with her collaborator Cáit O' Neill McCullagh their chapbook The songs I sing are sisters published by Dreich in Scotland.



MY FATHER LOOKS OUT FROM MY EYES

He said my eyes sparkled;

*Spiralling eyes
whirlpools to wash me in,
this is the way they kill me.*

A brume of morphine patterned
in the film of a badly lit room.
My eyes shone blue haloes,
caught fluorescents, birthed tiny stars.

I trapped him there.
Somewhere between Orion
and the Milky Way.
Heard him sing
I only have eyes for you
more Jolson than Sinatra

These days I catch him
watching me more
then I watch myself

*Whirlpools to wash me in,
this is the way they kill me*

Sinéad McClure

SHE TOOK HER POEM AND CUT IT 15 WAYS

First she held words at the mouth of a bird box.
Wood, against wood, against tree.

Then, tacked in at the edge of a birch,
she left a note for the carpenter bees.

Some floated to the forests,
left exclamation marks in the plantations,

others were a prayer on the fallen alder
split into pieces by the late November winds.

Invocations became a blush on the blueberry,
the hot fire of autumn.

A stanza pinned on sheep wire
marked ways through to the other side.

Some rotted in the compost,
became worms for birds to peck at,

sung into the air

or knelt in the damp of the wintered
condensation of mourning.

She took her poem and cut it 15 ways,
a ticket-strophe on windscreen wipers,

couplets left on the dead honeysuckle
now a roof for sparrows

words for windows.

Wheels spin invisible spokes,
nobody speaks,

there is only wet leaves to hold her words up.
They fly to winter,

catch in leafless branches,
fall again.

SPRING FOR THE WELDER

A sword of light straight-blades the railway line at dawn,
double-edges blackthorn, makes voles blink, wakes mice

who scurry tail-high to sail the calmest days when owls lie-in.
We follow it as children, the light a piper thrumming the green.

We wear oversized seats and fogged up windows
packed with smiles, leave rain stilting behind us, an echo.

In the foundry a man beats steel into sheets of hot reflection,
behind weary eyes bloom orchids, celandine and primrose.

He welds himself a spring too hot, and like the now weather
flames ignite, lash back, hot-talons no creature can out scurry.

The fury cooled only by a child's soft fingers wrapping,
looping, overlapping damp bulrush into Bridget's crosses.

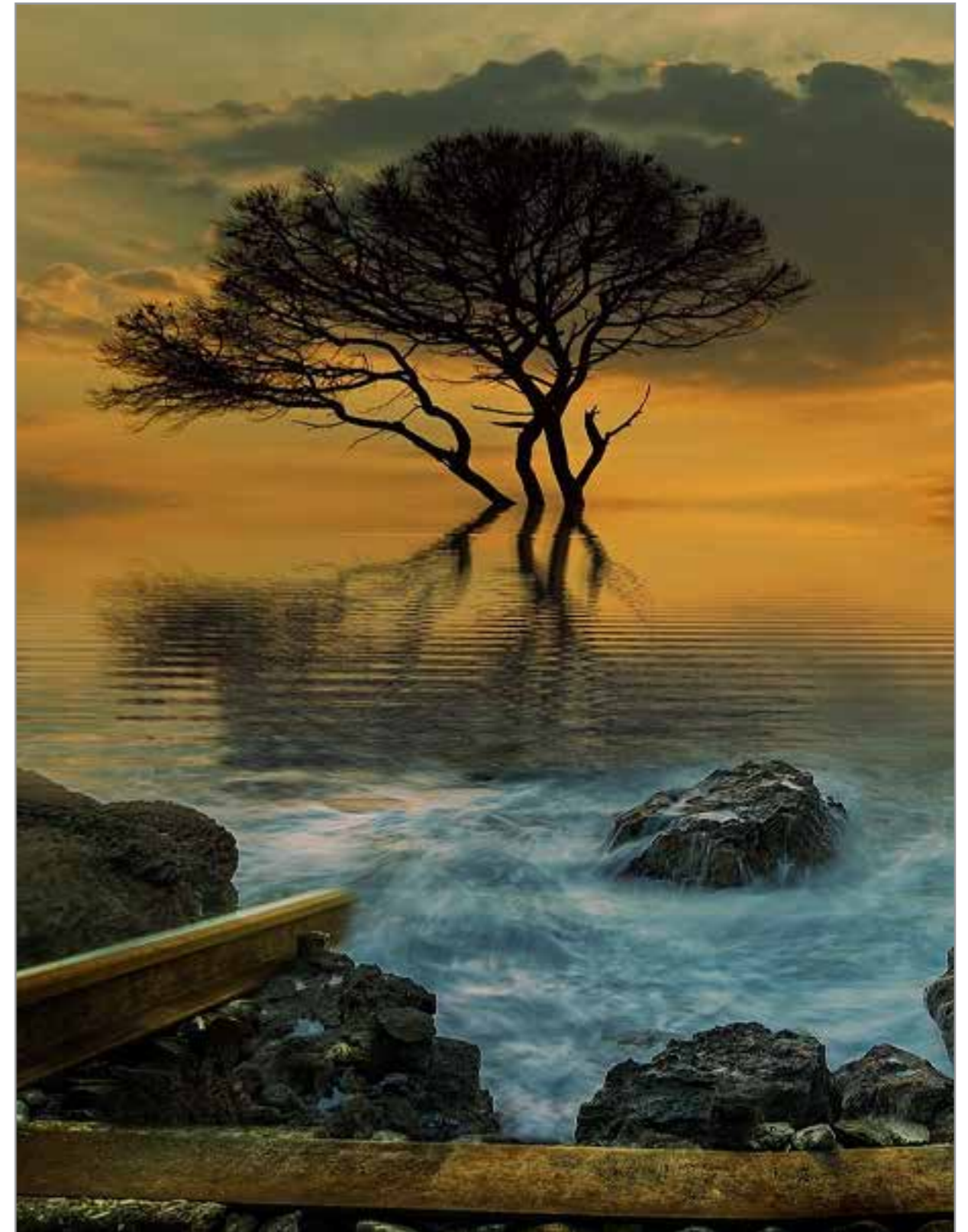


Photo credit: <https://pixabay.com/photos/landscape-fantasy-fantasy-landscape-3128819/>

Stephen Edgar's latest book, *Ghosts of Paradise* (Pitt Street Poetry), has just been published. He has published twelve previous collections, the most recent being *The Strangest Place: New and Selected Poems*, which won the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Poetry, in 2021. His previous three books, *Transparencies*, *Exhibits of the Sun*, and *Eldershaw*, were all shortlisted for the same award. He was awarded the Philip Hodgins Memorial Medal for excellence in literature in 2006 and was joint winner of the Colin Roderick Award in 2014 for *Eldershaw*. He lives in Sydney.



THE LONG AND THE SHORT

In the event, however, it was brief.
Causes there were, and reasons, decades long,
That claimed him like a corporal belief,
A siren song

That must have started calling him way back,
Back in the war. But in the end, at least,
Only an hour or two from the attack
Till his heart ceased.

But her, felled by a stroke, as we assume,
We watch her blank eyes wander as she seeks
Some terrifying question through the room,
For five long weeks,

But does not die. And still she will not die.
Oh she will live, despite what living means,
And is condemned to go on living by
Her mindless genes.

Stephen Edgar

TIME PIECE

Female figure, Romania, 4050-3900 BC

Or—one of dozens—take this figurine,
A stylized female body of baked clay,
Incised with swaddling lines which furl
Torso and tapered legs, while, in between,
Each roundly swollen buttock bears a whorl
Stamped like a thumb print. What were they
Elaborated for? What did they mean?

In some of these exquisitely patterned sets
The women are sat down on tiny chairs
Placed in a circle. At one site,
A sort of conference of statuettes
Was found, arranged inside a bowl, which might
Depict a building. What affairs
Called them to order there? The earth forgets.

Some say that they were goddesses, and on
Their cult the culture flourished. Some demur.
Indeed, why should they represent
The clone of some Hellenic pantheon?
There is no proof. It could be they were meant
To wear a humbler character:
Toys, dolls, whose little playtime is long gone.

Experiments apparently have shown
That simply fashioning diminutive
Models drawn from the world can slow
The sense of passing time, and even hone
Perception. Did they make these forms to know
Themselves more closely, and to give
Their lives another life beyond their own

That they could stand outside of and compose,
Like gods themselves, beliefs of what is real?
If you could lift from its vitrine,
Among the clay and copper curios,
And place between your palms this figurine,
You might imagine you could feel
The pulse, almost, of still time that still flows.

Based on "At the Ashmolean" by Neal Ascherson, a review of the "Old Europe" exhibition at the Ashmolean Library, Oxford, London Review of Books, 5 August 2010.

CARRINGTON FALLS

The scrub stands back and there: the river tosses
Its megalitres down in a double flow
Divided by a clump of green,
Plaiting its losses
While plunging, like a crocheted guillotine
Unravelling in the pool below.

Neither before nor after. Even then,
Outlasting all the futures you might call
And spread out like a mappemond,
When nine or ten,
And those to which no dream could correspond,
Too far to picture or forestall;

And even then, back past the most remote
Sand-flooded dynasty, or finger joint
Appended to prehistory's page
Like a footnote—
The headlong and perennial haemorrhage
Cramps those perspectives to a point.

Like gravity made visible, and time,
It sweeps your mind and sight from the gushing summit
To dash them in that haze of spray,
From which they climb
Again, again, and cling and fail to stay,
Dragged down in the relentless plummet.

But if you concentrate and on one square
Of water fix your vision and attune
Your focus there, it seems to slow,
Woven on air
Almost, almost to float, and float down so,
Clear as that feather on the moon.

Sven Kretzschmar hails from County Saarland, Germany. His poetry has been published widely in Europe and overseas, among other outlets with *Poetry Jukebox* in Belfast, in *Writing Home. The 'New Irish' Poets* (Dedalus Press, 2019), *Poets Meet Politics* (Hungry Hill Writing, 2020) *Hold Open the Door* (UCD Press, 2020), *Voices 2020* (Cold River Press, 2020), *Voices 2021* (Cold River Press, 2021) and *100 Words of Solitude* (Rare Swan Press, 2021), in *The Irish Times*, *Das Gedicht*, *The Banyan Review*, *The Bangor Literary Journal*, *Studi Irlandesi*, *Culture Matters*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, and on *RTÉ Radio*. Sven was awarded 1st prize in the 'Creating a Buzz in Strokestown' competition in 2018, 2nd place at the Francis Ledwidge International Poetry Award 2022, and he was shortlisted for the *Allingham Poetry Award* 2019, the *Over the Edge New Writer of the Year* 2019 and the *Saolta Arts Annual Poetry Competition* 2020, special mention in the *Desmond O'Grady International Poetry Competition* 2020. See more at: <https://tracking.wordpress.com/> and Instagram: @sven_kretzschmar_poetry



HOUSE SITTING

On the brink of a summer evening when daylight retreats, the hour's with me. Outside, bushes wait to form berries. Branches scratching the windowpane in a wild move to keep last rays from flickering onto floorboards. They brighten the first drops of amber blonde in my glass. Somewhere on different premises, neighbours are racketing around a BBQ while I shovel cold food and a pill into a feeding dish. For a black tom who's yet to appear. Once he's done – feasting, grooming, purring round my ankles – nothing remains. Still, everything is here. I will carry his light with me into darker times. I'll feed on stronger amber as the days grow cold.

Sven Kretzschmar

COOLANT

after Andreas H. Drescher

When autumn gloom dropped through the car window she spoke images of other times into me, futures in which we'd cover the darkness, thousands of square kilometres of night, to eventually dissect the light and take the first deep breath of any given morning.

The jolt and rip of the seatbelt cutting into my soft chest brought me back and to my senses; a rocket shooting through the windscreen. Time vanished, the driver's seat empty in the corner of my eye, also, the absence of sound and glass

and caress around me, only square kilometres of night. I awoke on a hard shoulder, covered in morning-wet dew and coolant. I had turned into a teddy, damp, and knowing a girl would sorely grieve her loss in some hospital.

IN THIS INSECT'S EYE

of mine they are mirrored, pierced red awnings withering away while sunlight still rays through them fervently: beech leaves, fallen, soon gone,

but for now, they are dry flames; their heat: protection on grounds cooling down in autumn. Mushrooms serve us as broken umbrellas,

steady still. And sheltering, housing us beneath their gills. On rare afternoons of sunshine and last warmth we climb

into dandelions. Holding fast we wait for their reversed chutes to carry us up and away into wintering.

Valentina Teclici, Romanian born, immigrated to New Zealand in 2002. In 1999, she completed a PhD in sociology at the University of Bucharest, with a thesis about street children. Her debut book, *De la noi din gradiniță (From our Kindergarten)*, Ion Creangă Publishing House, 1986, was awarded a national prize. Poems and excerpts from her books for children are included in the bibliography and textbooks for primary and secondary education in Romania. She has published several books of sociology, poetry and stories for children in both Romanian and English. Her work has been translated into French, Te Reo and Spanish, and published in many magazines and anthologies in New Zealand and overseas. In 2016 and 2018, Valentina edited and translated the bilingual collection "Poetical Bridges – Poduri lirice" (Vol I & II), Scripta manent Publishing House, Ltd., Napier, that includes the work of 24 Romanian poets and 24 poets from New Zealand. Valentina has been a member of Writers' Union of Romania since 1993 and of the New Zealand Poetry Society since 2013.



BIRDS' JOURNEY

Every song has their own birds,
 sounds of forests' flute,
 breeze of poppy fields,
 shouts and swipers of the ocean.
 Every flight has its own wings
 soaring high, under the sky's armpit and,
 even higher towards the soul's home,
 or descending towards the ridge of the sea's waves,
 the field's lap or homely bushes.
 Every bird has her own journey
 of faraway travels or sedentary life
 of nests built every year
 of new chicks, new commitments,
 perpetual routines.
 Every cage has its own bird
 empty of joyful songs
 full of useless wings,
 empty of real freedom
 full of sorrow of captivity,
 full of flightless desires.
 Who has designed the first cage?
 Does the first bird trapped in it
 still remember her song?

Valentina Teclici

FALLING FOR GALATEA

Pygmalion fondly looked at Galatea
with all the love of his creative spirit
and... not only with that.
He caressed her cold and shiny shapes
with his rough and hot hands
of a man full of desires, and kissed her
with his lips, thirsty like a dried oasis.
Galatea, with her body still full of suffering
from the bites of the chisel,
looked at him from above, motionless, and
cold... a statue.
She told him with her mind:
'If you transform my stone body
into the flesh and blood of a human being,
you will be the slave of your lust
for a mortal woman
who might make you temporarily happy,
but eternally unhappy.
Think twice about your choices, Pygmalion!
The goddess Aphrodite
has her eyes on you.'

MEDITATION

I close my eyes...
I'm only dream, energy,
longing songs, sorrow, joy, hope,
and poetry.

Particles of my energy history
remember my previous names
and all my previous lives...
I lived in a cave,
in an abode dug into rocks,
a palace, a boat house, a marae...

I carry within images and scents
of exotic places unrecorded in novels,
travelogues and maps.

I walk on the velvet moss in the forests,
and kneel in front of a sunset and pray,
I surf on the mirror of the sea,
taming my awareness
then I climb a hill
and hug an old rimu tree
that hugs me back.
A curtain of silence
connects the vibes.

I open my eyes
and I am one with everything.

Yan Kouton is an author, poet, lyricist. He also runs the creative writing website Les Cosaques des Frontières. He lives and works between Brest and Paris.



SYNOPSIS

Its a story
Of speed

And times
Who meet

Big engines
And opportunities

Of neighborhoods
In construction

And cities that
Fall into disrepair or
make up
Again

Aesthetics
All new

Of websites
And territories
Prohibited

Its a story
To energy

Of a moment and
An attraction

Yan Kouton

Cathy Altmann's first collection, *Circumnavigation* (Poetica Christi Press, 2014), won the FAW Anne Elder Award. Her second collection, *things we know without naming* (Poetica Christi Press), was published in 2018. Cathy's poetry has appeared in journals, anthologies, websites and on Melbourne's trains as part of the *Moving Galleries* project. She holds a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Melbourne and currently teaches English and Latin.



CATHY ALTMANN

The four poems by young poets from Melbourne, Australia, were recently awarded in a student poetry competition judged by poet *Anne M Carson*, poet and teacher *Anna Hayman-Arif* and myself.

Amishi's eco poem, 'Nautilus', uses careful lineation to convey the journey of a nautilus. The imagery is striking: 'clear as porcelain and soft as sand'. The poem uses evocative sound in a condensed, passionate elegy. It is an exceptional poem.

Bella's powerful poem, 'reflection', explores identity with compelling imagery and a strong personal voice. Language is vivid and original: 'the unwarranted confidence I clutch like a purse'. A brave poem with a strong, confronting final couplet.

Charlie's poem, 'Growing Pains', resonated linguistically and also emotionally. Stunning sensory details and similes, such as 'shed my heart like a snakeskin', give this poem its impact. Hurt and pain are explored both literally and figuratively. Flashback is used to great effect and the blunt ending brings the meaning home.

Zara's poem, 'their fire, Your Flame' has rhythm and pizzazz. The title is developed through the poem into an inspiring message: 'I will always let you sing your song'. The slam poetry style is used to great effect. There is some striking sibilance and imagery in the opening stanza in particular. This is an ambitious, energising poem.

Cathy Altmann

Amishi is a student from Melbourne, Australia. Her poem conveys the metaphorical journey of a nautilus shell, exploring society's emphasis on surface beauty over substance by acknowledging the inner struggles of the female experience that we often keep hidden.

NAUTILUS

Raging waters carry your shell to shore,
Shining like milk and pearls,
You hide your chamber deep inside,
Unbeknown to all.

Clear as porcelain and soft as sand,
Crescent within crescent,
Lies the mettle of your voice,
Echoing inside.

Lost within a maze of its own,
It yearns to be heard,
From the darkest chasm into the sun,
Against the sea's sodden thrum.

Shards glisten in the onrush,
Picked away by small hands,
All that remains is the grim pink body,
Rotting and left behind.

Bella is a student from Melbourne, Australia. She enjoys music and songwriting, which is how this work originally began. Her poem was inspired by her background; being of Nigerian and Australian descent. She has always possessed a complex surrounding her lack of knowledge regarding her ancestors and relevant cultural heritage. This feeling of incompetence has only been exacerbated by her conflicting features and inability to be recognised as her own race, a concern which is explored primarily through her poem: reflection.

REFLECTION

how did the sun that burnt my father black
birth skin so light it glowed under the moon?
beneath the heaping pounds of skin and flesh,
i am as black as the sister that grew beside me.

to sit here and admire a sickly pale yellowbone,
unable to represent those that gave me life,
is to hardly love the people from which i am made.

i know that better than anyone.

and yet, do i make proud
my enthroned ancestors that watch over me?
or do my vainly shed tears of passion
poison the earth that buried them?

pale as the sands on a dusted shore
like i've been washed and stripped of my father's image
born a child who bears no resemblance to either parent.
(so, my dear mother, i ask that you be kind.)

your suddenly darkened complexion next to mine;
i'm a fool to think your freckles are laughing at me
but they mock the scars on my arms
and i feel myself fall again.

i am repulsed by my own cultural inadequacy.
the privilege afflicted upon my whitened hue
taints the very image that manifests on my looking glass.

but the unwarranted confidence i clutch like a purse,
the acceptance of my awkward appearance
evokes a peculiar familiarity.
if this is joy, is it deserved?
if this is self-love, is it earned?

Zara is a student from Melbourne, Australia, who enjoys a variety of activities from dancing, theatre, and springboard diving, to writing poetry. For Zara, poetry is a form of expression, and they find that the act of spilling emotions through words onto a page to create a poem, is in itself, quite poetic.

This poem was inspired by the conflicting passion of youth to the desires of adults and of society, explored through the imagery of fire. It begins with a spark, symbolising the creation or finding of an individual's passion, following this spark as it grows and becomes confronted by the violent wildfires of society. The contrasting imagery of the raging wildfires and a delicate flame imitate how young people's voices are often ignored and enveloped by the more powerful voices of society. Yet despite the fragility of their single flame, and the oppression and condescension that they often face, there is also a surprising strength within youth, a 'fiery' determination, if you will, that can both be fuelled by the larger wildfires, but also gains strength in solidarity with the flames around them.

THEIR FIRE, YOUR FLAME.

Silence...
A small spark starts
softly sizzling in the dark.

Precious light,
one you hold tight,
right by your pulsing heart.

A sacred source,
that runs its course,
and burns a little brighter...

~

But then it's discovered.
by buzzards, it's smothered.
They unknowingly raise a fighter...

... or recluse, it can be either-
for the emotions will run deeper,
'cause while being scarred and fragile... a fire kindles deep within.

Why do they smother precious flame
yet let the wild, fires, rage?
They just won't admit their actions are conflicting.

~

They have the power, enough to rule a nation,
yet they choose to crush the next hopeful generation?
They saw one small spark, and considered it a threat...

to their wild fire and reputation.
Some kid's passion, education,
because to 'some kid' they will not be in debt.

But I will hold your spark,
keep it safe while we embark
on a journey, to keep it burning strong.

I will always let you sing your song.

Charlie is a student from Melbourne, Australia. Her poem discusses the awkward transitions from childhood to adolescence and the painful apathy that comes with growing up. She mourns the loss of innocence, childish joy and nostalgic memories.

GROWING PAINS

My chest aches when I breathe.
I didn't know that when the weight was gone,
The air would fill my lungs too quickly,
That the oxygen would burn my throat.
I didn't know the absence was worse than the fingers pried around my shoulders.
Not an expectation,
But a guarantee.

I didn't know the trembling was voluntary,
That I would beg for the shaking tears,
That I would miss the hoarse cries,
The sandpaper knees stuck together with kisses and dinosaur plaster.
The rosy tambark, the hot asphalt.
I miss holding hand-sandwiches with my mother and my father,
When their palms became sweaty and I squirmed to get away.
I wish they'd held on a little tighter, refused to let me escape.

I didn't know I'd miss sticky fingers or silent sleeping classrooms.
Replaced by the textbook-shaped dents in my forehead,
Replaced by oily keyboards and awkward goodbyes.
The joy of youth, the gluttony of the young.

I used to long to scrape away the excitement,
Shed my heart like snakeskin.
Life doesn't seem to care, so why should I?
If only someone had told me,
Suppose they tried,
I didn't know it would hurt more to hurt less
Whoever said 'growing pains' lied.

Doesn't hurt a bit.



Untitled by unknown.

2010 - 2023



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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