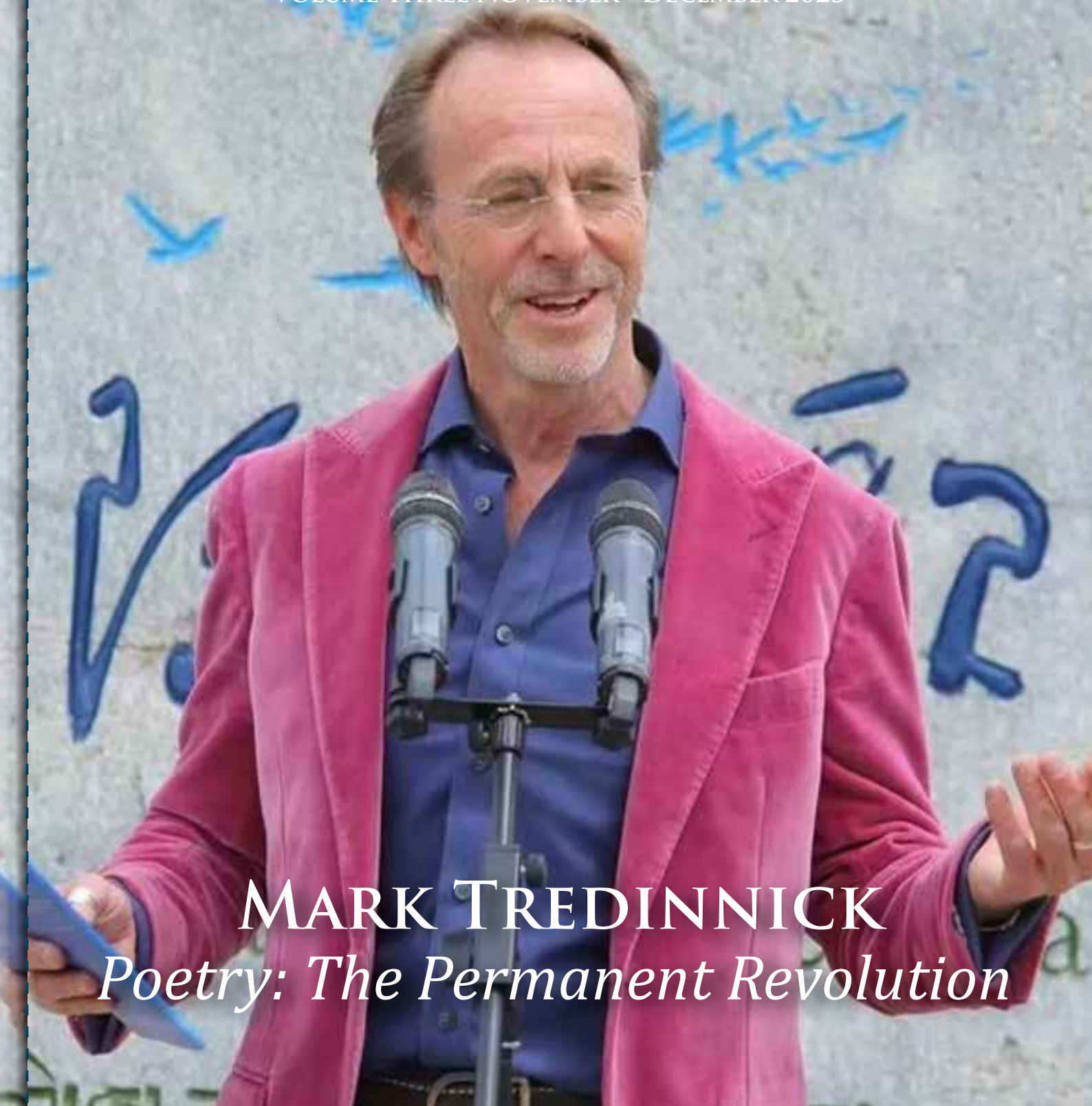


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POETRY & WRITING

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VOLUME THREE NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2023



MARK TREDINNICK

Poetry: The Permanent Revolution



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

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NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2023

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Mark Tredinnick

MARK TREDINNICK POETRY: THE PERMANENT REVOLUTION

Revolution is everywhere, in everything...
—Yevgeny Zamyatin

1

It didn't work out well in the end for Yevgeny Zamyatin. It rarely does for the true revolutionaries, which is who the truest poets are.

Revolutions begin by resisting and overthrowing old regimes, corrupt and moribund and bound in orthodoxies; but revolutions end, in time, in entropy, hardening themselves into new dogmas and orthodoxies, opposing the very freedoms they began by asserting. Literature, Zamyatin knew, is a revolution that never ends, like life itself. Dogma, hegemonic ideology, no matter how enlightened in its aspirations, kills the freedom that literature practises, embodies, promotes, and depends upon.

Not many people remember him now, but Zamyatin was influential, as a poet and essayist and novelist, as teacher of creative writing and as an advocate, before and after the revolution in Russia, of independence of mind and freedom of spirit, of art that had about it the conditions of nature, of life itself. You can find the influence of his thinking in Orwell and Hannah Arendt, in their critique of the drift toward totalitarian thought, whether left or right, control of minds and freedom of action, practised chiefly through the constriction and dehumanisation of language, and every generation we forget what Zamyatin lived to see in Russia, and Arendt in Germany, and Orwell among his bedfellows of the left. We forget, each generation, because we imagine ourselves free of the egregious errors of the past, the chauvinisms and solipsisms and myopia of those who came before us, unenlightened as we suddenly are. But we should never forget. For we are still human, and in us run the old Animal Farm tendencies of the righteous, the newly enlightened, to become autocratic.

We are all, let's face it, little monopolists. I guess I'd like, as you can tell, for everyone to see the world and poetry the way I see it too. And so it goes these days, as it always did. And because we need literature, poetry in particular, to carry on the revolution of life, the insistence on freedom and love and integrity and diversity, we must do what we can, as poets and readers and arts bureaucrats, to keep our language free of how our times and ideologies will inevitably seek to constrain it.

Zamyatin was an early Bolshevik. And the Bolsheviks loved him while they, too, were working to overthrow the old regime, with its thought control, its patriarchies, its hierarchies and intransigence, its injustices. They liked him much less, when, after the revolution and after Bolshevism became the new regime, Zamyatin kept insisting in his allegorical novels and teaching and essays on the same freedom of thought they had all been fighting for before 1917. Here's the sort of thinking that got him blacklisted and exiled: "Heretics are the only (bitter) remedy against the entropy of human thought. When the flaming, seething sphere (in science, religion, social life, art) cools, the fiery magma becomes coated with dogma—a rigid, ossified, motionless crust. Dogmatization in science, religion, social life, or art is the entropy of thought. What has become dogma no longer burns; it only gives off warmth—it is tepid it is cool." That's from his essay "On Literature, Revolution, Entropy, and Other Matters," published in 1923, and had he not been so close to Lenin, it might have cost him his head. For revolution had become terror and autocracy by then. In an earlier essay, "I Am Afraid," he wrote: "True literature can exist only when it is created ... by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels and skeptics."

2.

The world itself, Robert Bringhurst asserts, happens in poetry—a wild order, a constellation of tongues, as old as time. What we call poetry, I'd say, with Bringhurst, is how, occasionally, in human language, we catch some of how Being goes, how the earth spins, the way of things, and say something so freshly, with such integrity, you'd have to call it alive. In this way the best poetry affirms life, and earth, and all being in it. And because so much of the language that transacts itself around us, does not embody such wildness and freedom, we desperately need poetry, so that we can feel what freedom feels like and so that we can, some of us, try to keep language in the kind of repair it needs to be in to bear adequate witness to the experience of life, which will otherwise, most likely, be too much for us to bear.

3.

Zamyatin, a revolutionary, a heretic and a sceptic, lived to see his fellow revolutionaries become the apparatchiks of an autocratic state. But the moral of his story pertains even where the purveyors of orthodox thought are not also state-based terrorists.

We are always in times when the freedom of the human heart and mind and of the living world are at risk of being ignored or denied; radical thought ossifies into orthodoxy; the arts will be recruited to the causes that prevail—the old regime or the new. But no matter how fine, art should best not join. Poetry is for what life is for; it goes well when it stays loyal to life; the perpetual recreation of the real is what poetry through the ages has mostly witnessed and stayed faithful to, as politics come and go. Life itself goes on varying, dying and rebirthing, adapting to time and season. The conditions of life are the conditions of revolution: one moment always ceasing to allow the next to begin, day passing into night and el nino into la nina. Time is tidal. Transformation is the way of things, metamorphosis—sometimes slow, sometimes fast. The way of things, the living and dying, the coming and going, the persisting and the fleeting, are a perpetual revolution. Being is beginning, again and again; life prospers when things vary and diverge, ecologies prosper when they are layered and multiple, manifold and various; and poetry goes best, and literature flourishes, when it is not asked to articulate codified thoughts and images. Poetry is for freedom, and it keeps us free when it keeps its language free from cant and cliché and orthodoxies of idea and speech.

4.

Poems are soft bombs, small incendiary devices. But the kind of breaking they fashion is the breaking of the heart wide open, the busting of clichés, the disassembling of habitual and commonplace ways of being in and understanding life. The kind of death they inflict is the useful kind, the fiery kind Zamyatin speaks of, from which good poems resurrect you into someone you were not before—or as I prefer to think of it, into much more, and much else, and something much other, than you knew you were before.

Good poems keep going off, too, long after you've put them down. They work like a perpetual revolution. They break what needs breaking because it constrains and diminishes an understanding of what a human life is and what all life is, and they keep on breaking you open to your self and all selves and the world.

Good poems can do this, they can do what a controlled burn does to a eucalypt forest overgrown with woody weed, they can renew an understanding of the human condition, of the way of all things, to the extent that they know what they're doing with language the way a plant knows what it's doing with light. They can do it if they understand craft and ask more of language than casual talk asks, if they write free of the orthodox constraints of theoretical or intellectual utterance. The kind of language a poem depends upon has about it the same integrity and wild order that life, itself, in all its forms, instantiates and which all human lives, know deep down beneath the categories the world imposes and theory insists upon. This is the kind of thinking I had in mind in one of my Nine Carols, "The Carol of the Living":

*NONE of us will last, but something will:
Let's be that from now on. Let's sing out
Our brief lives in the language of things.
Let the forms that nature takes—even
These our organic selves—be our speech
Again. Eternity incarnate—
Carol that, my friends, the way the wrens
Do, choughs and pardalotes and tidal
Flats and desert oaks. Alleluia.*

5.

Though I end with choughs and tidal flats and wrens, I am getting a bit declamatory there. But the most revolutionary poems are often the quietest, the most humble. They are not, on the whole, the poems that profess rebellion and declaim mantras, pronounce domination of prevailing orthodoxies. The heresy of the great poem—the way it perpetuates the revolution that is life, the way it refutes the false and all that diminishes an understanding of what it is to Be—is its modesty and openness and vulnerability; its insistence on the holiness, the *enoughness*, of the small and particular, its refusal to see things in stereotypes and categories (of class and gender and identity and power, for instance).

The poem that changes you most and consoles and delights and renews you most will be the poem not about the world, to riff on Blake, but about the grain of sand (in which it shows you the world); the most revolutionary poem will write the wild flower, not so much the heaven—but it will help you find heaven in it.

The great poem offers an instance of being and lets you, the reader, find yourself there, heard, for once, and also forgiven. The poem that is capable of encouraging a more just understanding of the plight of the downtrodden and silenced and excluded, will often have nothing in so many words to say about any of that. The poem that understands your heartbreak or your mental illness best will be the poem, silent on such themes, that depicts a quiet or an edgy moment of vulnerable human existence set down somewhere in particular, and which lets you find yourself, in your own frailty, there on the moment on the page. For the experience offered up to a reader in a good poem does not protest the uniqueness of the speaker's experience; it offers up, often from the poet's lived experience, a metaphor for all such human experience. The poem doesn't tell me about the poet; it tells me about my self; it speaks all selves.

This poem of Louise Glück's is such a poem.

*Alas, very soon everything will disappear:
the birdcalls, the delicate blossoms. In the end,
even the earth itself will follow the artist's name into oblivion.*

*Nevertheless, the artist intends
a mood of celebration.*

*How beautiful the blossoms are—emblems of the resilience of life.
The birds approach eagerly.*

—"Primavera", 2007

Notice, by the way, the birds and non-human things in this. Poetry catches our human plight only when it remembers the rest of the world in which we know and sometimes barely survive our lives. Too many poems I hear these days, even when the poets profess ecological concerns, disregard the more than merely human world almost completely. They are set inside their poet's heads. Such poems don't do justice to life as it is, to the world in which our living and suffering participate.

6.

Hear how this poem of Mahmoud Darwish figures something like his own experience as a displaced, imprisoned, and exiled Palestinian, as if it were the life of any one of us at all, and how he does so with imagery in which the actual world, nor merely the conceptual, runs.

*I belong there. I have many memories. I was born as everyone is born.
I have a mother, a house with many windows, brothers, friends, and a prison cell
with a chilly window! I have a wave snatched by seagulls, a panorama of my own.
I have a saturated meadow. In the deep horizon of my word, I have a moon,
a bird's sustenance, and an immortal olive tree.
I have lived on the land long before swords turned man into prey.
I belong there. When heaven mourns for her mother, I return heaven to her mother.
And I cry so that a returning cloud might carry my tears.
To break the rules, I have learned all the words needed for a trial by blood.
I have learned and dismantled all the words in order to draw from them a
single word: Home.*

—"I Belong There"

In this poem, the particular displacement stands for all such displacement—actual or potential. Like all good poems, the content is a synecdoche; it stands for the whole class of such experiences. This is achieved by the lyric accomplishment of the making—the metaphors and images that stand a step or two back from the actual, historical content—and it depends on the artistic intention of the poet to write a poem from but not merely about his lived experience, so that it is the reader who feels the poem's emotions, lives its moments.

7.

The poems that change the world are the poems that change us and put us back in the world differently. They perform a small molecular revolution upon us; they change the way we experience our Being. These poems are lyric poems, not didactic poems (or if they are didactic, they are lyrically didactic). Only in the lyric dimensions of language can the fullness and layeredness of lived experience be caught and carried, and only in lyric language can readers be touched and implicated in the lives they live in their cells and race memories.

The perpetual revolution is a lyric revolution, then. Poetry is its idiom; it says in language what the world practises—a radical kind of being alive. And this lyric revolution, on the page, in the organic world and in the heart, enacts itself more like a falling leaf than a felled tree or a fusillade:

*Every leaf that falls
never stops falling. I once
thought that leaves were leaves.
Now I think they are feelings
In search of a place—
someone's hair, a park bench, a
finger. Isn't that
like us, going from place
to place, looking to be alive?
—"Victoria Chang, "Passage"*

8.

As Chang throws her soft bombs and I write about them here, hard bombs rain down on Gaza. In the damage actual artillery does one can begin to understand, by contrast, how poems work and how, to work, they need to rise, as Darwish's poem does, above enmity and othering. War is always a bad idea; "swords," writes Darwish, "turn men to prey." Poetry is a peaceable revolt against the attitudes (animosity, tribalism, abstraction, ideology) that start wars and the violence wars are. The revolution that poetry performs is lyric; it changes how Being feels, it changes the neurotransmitters in a reader's brain, it fashions a new seeing. The poetic revolution does not happen in conflict, in streets and on fields of battle. It occurs, where real life happens and real change starts, in the country of the inner life, and in the felt sense of the existence, of the reader. There, shouting and insisting and proclaiming helps as much as bombs help in a densely populated area, as violence helps in a border town.

9.

Paradoxically, the least revolutionary poems may be those that declare the revolution.

Poetry carries on the revolution of renewing us by being what the self-renewing world is, and being it the way a tree is, or a moment, or a bird.

10.

Another thing. While, like instances of being, like moments of world, a poem will have layers and complexities, it will be, if it's any good, clear enough to enter and dwell in. A good poem, another attribute of the good revolution, the constant schooling of the senses, the tough love literature practises on us—a good poem is not so much obscure or tricky, as radically clear: open enough to inhabit, complex enough to defy a casual interpretation. It asks questions, but only after it's asked you in and sat you down and offered you food.

11.

Here's another small moment of the revolution. If it declares, forgive me. It's a sijo, a Korean form, and it's supposed to philosophise, as long as it does so lyrically:

*WE THINK too much in fences, and we live too little like fields.
Across the river in tumeric light, horses graze summer
Pasture. Where it ends, the Divide picks up. On the wind, two hawks.*

12.

"Alas, very soon everything will disappear ... nevertheless the artist intends a mood of celebration." Listen to Louise Glück there, making the revolutionary case for carrying on in celebration, notwithstanding death and suffering. Her words bring to mind Mary Oliver's poetry and Wendell Berry's "The Peace of Wild Things" and, since I am striking a Russian theme, Anna Akhmatova. "Why then do we not despair?" she asked in the grim midst of Stalin's totalitarian revolutionary stasis. And her answers? The "surrounding woods" and "cherries" and "summer" blown into town and "something not known to anyone at all/ but wild in our breasts for centuries." (I quote from the translation by Stanley Kunitz and Max Hayward).

There is always the earth, our only home, the stars, our original mother. Good poems remind us of that profound consolation, and they seem to be made of that "something wild in our breasts" that land is also made of.

There are always trees or grass or rain or distance or mountains of seas or, best of all, birds, moving through the poems that speak the revolution. Poems, in their grim hope and stubborn gladness, practise wildness and dance us back into it. Gratitude and reluctant joy at the miracle we find ourselves set down within: if I look across the lyric poetries of the world, that is what I find. Carrying on even though so much hurts, and the griefs pile up, though "your work will be ignored, your name misspelled," (as I put it in "Before the Day, a prophesy coming truer faster than I'd hoped"); carrying on even though in the end all, including the earth, will be lost—this is the madness and the wonder of life, of all living, and poems that report such living and exhort us to take part in it carry on life's eternal reinvention of itself.

But by God, it's easy these days to find poems that seem to know no joy and give rise to none—poems in which there is no love for language and no knowledge, innate in all Indigenious poetry, by the way, that we live lives and speak tongues that participate in the ways of places. It is very easy to have a bad time at a poetry gig these form-free and Sadducee Days, these days of outrage and complaint. "I'm tired of being punished for reading poems," someone said to me last year in Melbourne, an activist and health worker, a mother and grandmother and writer. And I had to laugh. She spoke to me at the end of a reading replete with poems without any manifest shape on the page or in the mouth—scribbled notes most of them seemed to me, whose language was tuneless and carelessly chosen, whose ideas were theories, whose instances were generic, who spoke dissatisfaction and grievance and blame, through which few birds flew. A poem, said Horace in a letter once, "should both instruct and delight." Not merely catalogue and judge and cry foul.

I think Jack Gilbert had it right when he wrote in "A Brief for the Defense," a title that knows it's flying into a prevailing headwind:

*We must risk delight. We can do without pleasure,
but not delight. Not enjoyment. We must have
the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless
furnace of this world. To make injustice the only
measure of our attention is to praise the Devil.*

Words that keep the peaceable revolution burning, Jack. Thank you.

13.

I heard the composer Eric Whitacre say recently that when he was studying at the Julliard School in New York, exhausted by the persistent atonality and abstract intellection of prevailing new work, he and some other formed a group called something like the Bolsheviks. They proposed the revolutionary idea that music be delightful to listen to and perform—not just in being melodic, or sounding happy, but in being made with a care for human traditions everywhere (of cadence and tonality and shape and beauty) all of them much older and wiser about love and the earth and the mystery wild in our breast than the clanging and tone-deaf theories, afraid of the heart and of the music inside things, that have prevailed in the West since the end of the Second War. We need the same kind of revolutionary turn in poetry. There are many writing such work, but it is hard to find them or hear them in the cacophony of the abstraction and complaint.

Life is too glorious and terrifying and short to spend much time with the technique-light, head-heavy, music-free poetries of strident social justice that have a lot of the running these days, including in my native Australia. Please let's all read some more across the ages and the cultures and remember the poet's obligation to be radically clear in image and compelling in language and to offer some insight and to give some delight; please let's observe the disciplines of grace that poets across the planet have studied in the works of poets across the planet, so that their one true voice might find expression and sing the lives of humans, of stars and fires, everywhere.

We live downriver from the past; we fish
 Our phrases from the stream. They are not ours;
 We finish stanzas long ago begun.
 We fly them like a flock of migrant birds
 Into the years...

—from "Before the Day,"

14.

I've heard form dismissed as patriarchal—a glib and foolish claim, which imagines itself, I guess, revolutionary. In every culture the earth has thrown up, lyric poetry has evolved, and everywhere what poetry was understood to be occurred in shapes of sound and sense, and women and men have made it and taken part in it, the powerful and the powerless, the conforming and the rebellious. Poems are what happens to language and to us because the making of the act of speech takes seriously the elements of language that are not reducible to thought: sound, rhythm, speech music, figurative language, lineation, syllable count. Poetry is what happens (to language, to writers, to readers, to reality) when one asks more of language than prose can ask, a thing we humans need some writers to do because the world asks questions harder to answer or endure than conventional thought and phrase allow. Form is how one asks (there are other ways, but they are all the application of a rigour and pattern in languaging that, as in free verse, are a kind of form in any case). No form is not the patriarchy; no it is not privilege; it is what poetry entails and teaches. The world, after all, transpires in forms, and so do we. If you're not thinking much about form, you're probably writing prose. And there's unlikely to be much world in it, much of the fire of life's revolution. And you probably can't hope to elicit much revolutionary spark in anyone who reads or hears.

15.

Up the hill from where I am blessed to live (in debt, because poets always own little and owe much) on stolen ground, there is a quarry lapsing back into landscape and lately when I walk there, among the many birds (robin, spinebill, bowerbird, butcherbird, kookaburra, whistler, fantail, wren and thrush) I encounter in form or voice, I have been hearing a whipbird. It asks a long question to which so far there is no response, beyond my hearing and delighting and worrying for him. He's hoping for the du-du-du of the female: the response to his call. The whipbirds sing an antiphon when they join each other's company. And it strikes me, as I write this, in the wake of a referendum in which a thundering chunk of Australian society couldn't find its way to listening long and hard enough to recognise First Nations people, and to listen to them, in the way in which they asked to be heard, that in poetry, as in politics, as in our relations with all others, especially those we configure as the enemy, what we need is less talking and more listening.

Let the poem say “Yes” in response to the world and its needs and miseries and joys and forms. Let it mostly listen and then come close and say, like the mate who hears the whipbird’s long plaint: “I am here. With you.” A good lyric poem has always been how a single string, the pronoun “I” has heard the world of her acquaintance, and vibrated with her listening. Saying only what it is that the world speaks to her. Poetry as a listening. That’s a revolution we need, the world needs to hear about.

16.

Poetry, Seamus Heaney once wrote, refuses the mind’s tendency to foreclose.

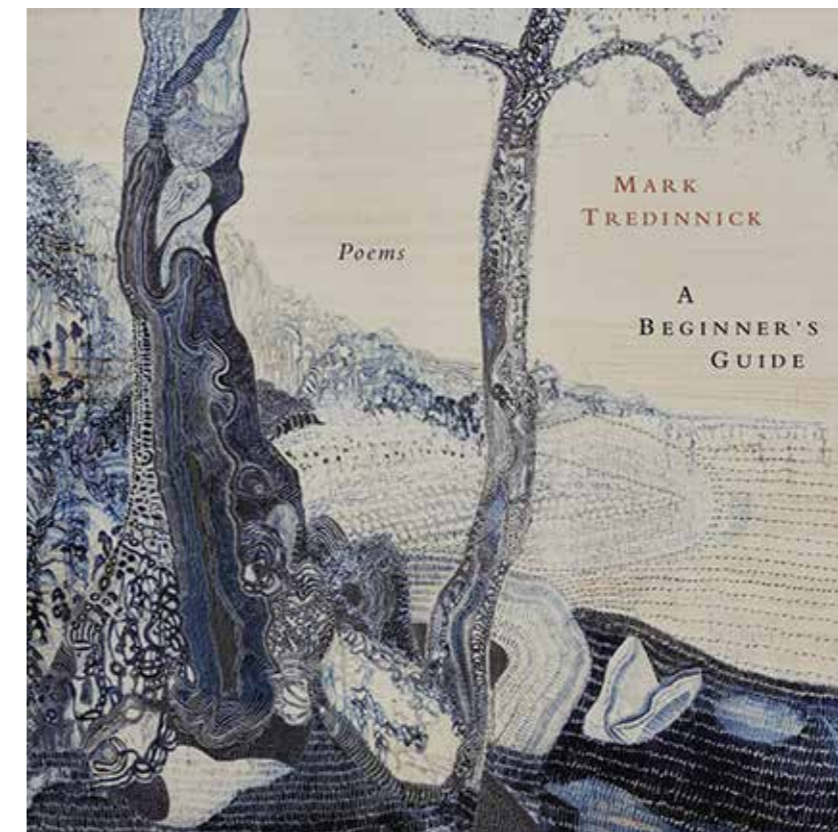
Poetry keeps opening to life and the multiplicity of existence, the mystery and wildness of things. Ideology and theory tend in the opposite direction—toward old or new orthodoxies, toward conformity, toward fixedness and certitude. Poetry wants to celebrate newness and, at the same time, to value and carry on forms and truths that know what eternity knows; theory and politics don’t have much room for uncertainty, vulnerability, the ways of the heart and the wildness of life; they tend to look, these days especially, upon the past (at least in the West) as a failed enterprise in need of redemption.

We need politics and theory, I guess, but because we have them, we need art, we need poetry, the way we need love and country and wildness and music. So, let’s not do the politics and the theory with the poetry, or else what will happen to what it is that needs poetry to witness it? Let’s do poetry with the poetry and let’s work at the crafts that make it a form worthy of the world it uniquely witnesses.

17.

The politics of poetry is how it refuses politics; how it resists and transcends the language and values, the orthodoxies, the categories, devices, and manoeuvres of politics and theory. Its politics is to speak for what goes unspoken for, disregarded and even disdained by conventional discourses, including the intellectual and the political; its revolution is to do justice, in its languaging and forms, to the irreducible originality, the tragedy and the mystery, of life as it is experienced and articulated in any human life, moment by moment—indeed as it is expressed in any moment of the world.

A range of historical wrongs need righting today, as they and other wrongs always did, and as the wrongs we scarcely imagine we are committing today will need righting down the line. But there are sharper tools for fixing social wrongs than poetry. Poetry is for inspiring activism, but not for performing or achieving it; the wrongs it rights can be righted no other way—the way it lifts the silence all other discourses keep and insist upon about what it feels like and what it may mean to live a short while, in suffering and in joy and in the certain knowledge that one day “everything will disappear” and to live that short life in the miracle of your body amid the marvelousness of the world.



Available at: <https://www.birdfishbooks.com/>

In the few quiet moments left after teaching, marking, and fulfilling her other commitments, she writes poems, short stories, essays, and scholarly articles. Alexandra has a PhD in metamodern literature (Otago, 2014) and a Master's Degree in Creative Writing (AUT, 2017) with a novel-in-stories titled *Why I don't Keep a Diary or A Secret History of Metamodernism*. She hopes to see the novel published one day when the stars align. Her MA thesis *Exploring the Big Bad World with Andrei Codrescu* (1998) was the first master's degree to be published about the Romanian-born Jewish American writer. Alexandra's writing has been published in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, America, and Europe (Czech Republic, Greece, Romania). Her debut collection of poetry *Transformation* was published by Scripta Manent in 2023. In his 2014 memoir *More Deaths Than One* Garry Forrester refers to Balm as "the mother of metamodernism".



HOME: LAST NIGHT AND THIS MORNING

Enough of this day
and its windows into
other people's lives,
into the past and
other distractions.

Will close shop for the day,
turn flight mode on,
and stay in the here and now

for a few moments
of communion
with the spirit

where all stories
converge

in silence

I wake after you arrive.
Your long shower
washes the dust of the world
while I busy myself in the kitchen
with resuscitated lemongrass dumplings
and meatball pasta.

'Wanted to go to sleep after I played
a bit of FIFA', you say when I knock at your door,
but you take the plate nonetheless
and close your door again.

continued overleaf...

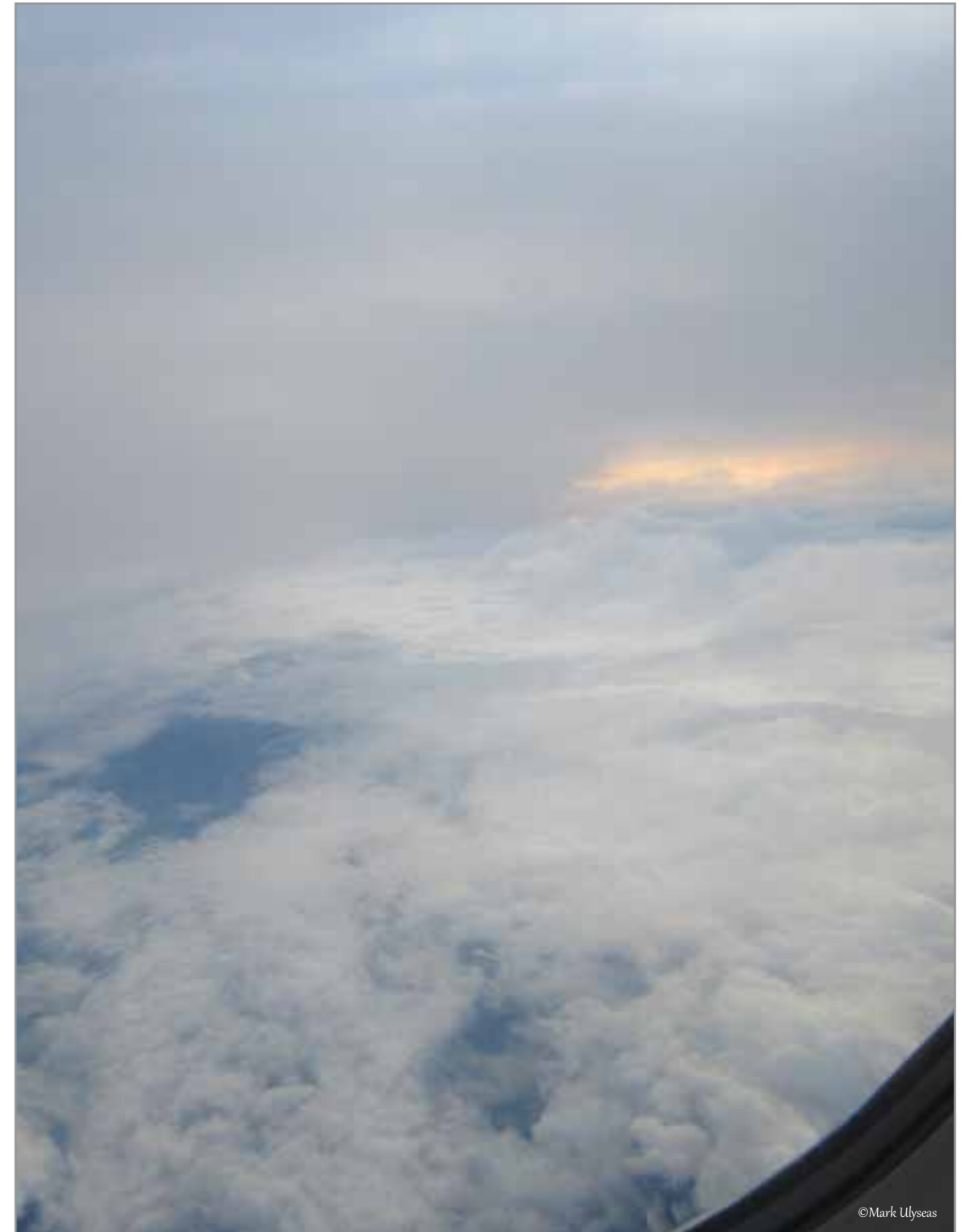
Alexandra Balm. Photo credit: Folko Boermans.

HOME: *contd...*

'Must change the flights to one-way!
'The student loan is crippling,' you explain
after you wonder what happened
to the myth of peripheral vision.
'It's a myth,' I quip, and I close the fridge door,
then I touch my chest
to check that my heart is still there.

'You can't sleep?', you ask
as the first roosters crow.
'No, but will try again. I work tomorrow,' I say.
'Guess you work today, too,' you say and smile
that cheeky grin that charmed me
decades ago,
when you grabbed my right index finger in your fist
as if to anchor yourself in this stormy world,
as if to reassure me that you were there.

'Oh, you are right. It's already morning,' I say
and I touch your shoulder,
hoping that my hand can still
help you find your moorings,
glad that you are home.



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Dr. Beatriz Copello is an award-winning poet, she writes poetry, fiction, reviews and plays. The author's books are: *Women Souls and Shadows* - Bemac Publications, Sydney. *Meditations At the Edge of a Dream* - Glass House Books, Interactive Publications, *Under the Gums Long Shade* - Bemac Publications, Sydney. *Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria* <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/72085>. *1Lesbian Love Lesbian Stories* <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/337572>. *A Call to the Stars* <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/608237> (Also translated and published in China and Taiwan). *Witches Women and Words* - Ginninderra Press. *No Salami Fairy Bread* - Ginninderra Press. *Ramble* - Ginninderra Press. *Renacer en Azul* Ciberwit Press (In Amazon). *Lo Irrevocable del Halcon* (In Spanish) Bemac Publications.

IN THE MIND

what crazy fantasies
 are awakened by your words
 they flower like gums
 after the fires burned them
 they are like wild waters
 that do not calm this passion
 and overwhelm my soul
 impossible dreams
 that die before being born
 imaginings in a corner of reality
 i allow myself to enter that world
 created by your lines and stanzas
 rosemary sage and sugar
 spice my life yet I know
 that you don't exist.



Beatriz Copello

TERMINATUM

passion eroded
like some mountains
in the andes
tenderness deflowered
like a virgin raped
passion drowned
friendship mutilated
anger reigns
in the country
of our bodies
embraces metamorphed
into killing desire
repugnance rejection
yet ...

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

the truth wrapped in silver foil
words silenced like those of a prisoner
nothing said no excuses
gated utterances unable to escape
forces that drive denialism
paradigm asserting the natural
accumulation of critical anomalies
relationship of shifting parameters
broad sweep of measured reality
deplorable mundane alternatives
tired of the usual narratives
of power and triumphalism
dispassionate cold myopic
ingrained desire to make sense
of the "messages in a bottle"

Damen O'Brien is a multi-award-winning poet based in Brisbane. Damen's prizes include The Moth Poetry Prize, the Peter Porter Poetry Prize and the Newcastle Poetry Prize. He has been published in journals all over the world, including New Ohio Review, Poetry Wales, Mississippi Review and Overland. Damen's first book of poetry, *Animals With Human Voices*, is available through Recent Work Press. He is currently working on his next book.



THE LONGEST WAVE

No phone call from you with the news we were expecting,
 so this Christmas will be the same gathering of children
 aging away from the wonder of those first yawning mornings.
 I'm laying down a line of dead letters at the beach: black
 tiles clicking into place with awful finality under the sun's
 dazzle: poems like so many failed children queuing in some
 figurative waiting room for life. The white space burns
 like ivory in the indirect glare of the beach, like bone.
 The swimmers clear from the wave as if they were
 fussy seagulls stepping away from the edge of the foam
 and now we can see the bright swirl of clothing that
 cleared them out, a small form lolling in the longest wave.
 All day I've been faced with endings and beginnings
 but I can only seem to find the endings in this poem.
 We lean forward too avidly, while the waves pull their lips
 back from the beach's pebbly teeth. I was thinking at the
 operatic distances of Wagner, of the birth of universes and
 their ending, how some physicists think they are the same;
 how the longest wave comes all the way back around the
 seas of forever, how ripples begun on Queensland's shores
 from the splashing of a child find their way across an ocean
 to twitch the other coastline, however small, however slow.
 Here, in this part of the universe, someone wades out to inspect
 the material, calling out to say that it's only floating swimmers
 billowing like a mischievous Houdini or a prankster's flag,
 so this poem has too hopeful an ending, but this is the first
 day of the holidays and there are many days yet to survive.

Damen O'Brien

THE ROBOT TO HIS LOVE

I will go down with you to the Art Gallery
and stand before the portrait of Dobell
as himself and tell you too loud I do not

like this modern junk, and we will quarrel
briefly over lunch: machine oil, batteries for me;
overcooked pasta for you. I'll sulk on the drive home

because the attendants in the cloaking room stared at me,
because the parquetted floors could not take my wheels,
because I can do a billion calculations a minute

and they cannot. I will be moody until dinner and
then frivolous and childish afterwards, until you cannot
stand it and go to bed early. I will follow hours later,

the recharging cord tangling in the sheets and you will roll
away when I try and kiss you, complaining about the cold
and how I've taken all the blankets, and grind your teeth

all night. I will be capricious and distant, then
desperately affectionate for days, until you say something
snide about bugs and error logs and reboots, which

you know I hate you saying, and I think about calling
that programmer that I used to know, but not with
any purpose, just to hear her voice, talk about old times

before I knew you and then the weekend will roll around
and I'll get drunk doing shots watching a live action remake
of Pinocchio, and by this you'll know I am a real man.

NOT DACTYLS

My girlfriend and I
watched a pterodactyl
pluck a business man
off a crowded street
on our walk home.
it seemed to struggle,
to find sufficient lift
and he flailed beneath,
battering at the reptile
with his leather briefcase.
That's an anachronism,
I told her. *No.*
It's Armani, she said.
Bit ironic, really. We
were silent the rest
of the way home.

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



David Ratcliffe

MIDDLE OF FOREVER

At 35 the world retains possibilities
unwritten pages yet to turn,
who knows how many?

New beginnings blessed by understanding
share space with defiance
all neatly tucked in your kit bag.

Passed opportunities, stolen by impetuosity,
jealousy, greed, faded now, the trail of debris
serving as a compass
should you open the clasp,
with the road ahead
all a glimmer in midsummer haze.

Whatever triumphs remain among damage,
virtues among the flaws,
the trail of debris left behind,
here you are now,
a little scarred,
unaware of the small lines
thickening under the skin.

You have reached the middle of forever
immortal for a while,
your chord cut long ago
yet still you bleed.

And so, shielding your flame
from a warm breeze,
you stealthily walk toward enrichment
carrying the burden
of lost youth
with renewed vigour
at the midpoint of adventure.

LAPSED MEMORY

I take myself to inner thought
like I'm in the dentist's chair
and listen to the rumours
spiralling around my head,
each occupant manipulating,
fragmenting traces of truth
from deception to deflection
causing a disconnect from reality.

I interrogate them one by one
starting with doubt;
I ask what troubles you?
but as this line of enquiry
leads deep into uncertainty
I unravel myself
from this cloak of indifference
and move on...

I turn to conscience
though I'm faced with a condensed windscreen,
with evidence of various attempts
to wipe it clear
that left smears of mistrust
along traces of betrayal.

So then on to guilt;
I ask, what is it that ails you?
why do you spend life in shadow?
and is it true you fled
leaving innocent victims
of circumstance
as you remorselessly forged ahead?

But my voice fails to reach
the depths of my despair,
and so, I turn to compassion
conjuring an alibi
offering mitigation
crafted from decades
of lapsed memory.

Maybe one day
my heart will slow
to the rhythm of my thoughts
as once again I escape
this close shave and smile
like I'm the happiest man alive.

GENIUS

Have you ever felt an urge to yodel in the mountains?
or take the mic from the stand and breath in the moment?
then imagine a world deprived of melody,
just the rhythm of a desolate heart.

Imagine the footage
from a camera fixed on a wall
the silent movie featuring a seated minstrel
ignored by the passing hordes.

Watch as it rolls into Roman times
focusing on a mute beggar
unseen, unheard
irrelevant, a source of disease
you'd pull your child from.

Though down there on the technicolour street
the sounds are a mix of screeching brakes,
car horns,
garbled chatter,
and a faint beautiful tone
emanating from the frozen man
with a tear in his voice.

Electronic earrings
direct commercial sounds
into the minds of some,
others are filled with shopping lists,
late appointments,
deceptions,
rejections,
weddings plans,
or divorce lawyer meetings.

But those who listen, stay awhile
watching the beautiful soul beneath a beanie hat
blue fingers manipulating strings
producing a melody never heard
accompanied by a voice singing words,
they'd never thought
from a genius with the price of a coffee
in his guitar case.

Dominique Hecq grew up in the French-speaking part of Belgium. She now lives on unceded sovereign Wurundjeri land 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 of poetry. Her latest publications include *After Cage* (2nd ed., 2022, Liquid Amber Press), *Songlines* (2023 Hedgehog) and *Endgame with No Ending* (2023, SurVision), winner of the 2022 James Tate Poetry Prize.



WOMAN TO MAN

Fingers feel beneath cold sheets.
She waits. Awe of ramshackle

architecture. Fleshes out
the shape of his desire. Watches

how it takes hold. Where it
surges from. Night. Unnamed

nothing. His hunger swirls over
her bait ball body. She throws her

self in. Catch-as-catch-can. Teeth
flash. Bite. He latches on. Licks.

Kiss. Rock. Hold. Surrender.
He says this child will be petted

with affectionate indifference.
She says it's pure wish-fulfilment

on his part. He chortles. Says he's
thinking of a cockroach

impaled on a stick. Winter comfort,
last daphne, first camelia,

the endless feat of being
fat with child is all

she thinks of. The pointed disregard
of the end. The fear, agonising.

And when he's done, she forgets
it has nothing to do with her.

Dominique Hecq

AUTOGENESIS

There is no river, there is no bridge
through the open window, same requiem
hypertrophy of walls, graveyard pillars.

Here sidewalks ponder smoke
ribbons swilling
the silence of disappearance
on the brink of brokenness.

The sky lisps its own abandonment.

Hollow glass, towers knock
your neglect over, trample
your shadow.

Buried belief backlights
your faceless head, already
dissolving by the lake, fag
hanging from black lips
eyes, embers in sockets.

All that tumble.

Soon your bones will chatter-hiccup
my cypress lips smack shut the slurs.

I weave alone through trembling
poplars, spectres of disappeared
apparitions where my child floats.

A lost kite trails, my prayer.

I baptise myself.

Swallow your name.

CODA

Fear is a retreating waterfall.
We shimmer across
surfaces. Skirt though time.

Meaning of life, secret of happiness
and all that jazz. I'm still writing
the history of my death. Dominant
colour blue. A whisper, cavernous
bass. I look up. Time has no face.

Elif Sezen is an Australian/Turkish multidisciplinary artist, bilingual poet/writer and translator. Her practice evolves through various media including painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, print media, installation, performance, music, digital media, artist's books and poetry. Her poetry collection *A Little Book of Unspoken History* was published by Puncher & Wattmann (2018), *Universal Mother* by Gloria SMH Press (2016) and experimental mix of poetry and short stories in Turkish, *Gece Düşüşü* by Hayal Press (2012). Elif's Turkish translation of Ilya Kaminsky's acclaimed book *Dancing in Odessa* was published by Artshop Press (2014). She also published a chapbook *The Dervish with Wings* (2017). She was recently shortlisted for the Born Writers Award 2023. Her work has widely appeared nationally and internationally in journals and anthologies. She holds a PhD from Monash University, and lives in Melbourne. Elif's website: <https://www.elifsezen.com/>



INSTRUCTIONS TO THE NEW SEEKER

Toward us and away from that buzz,
that troubled thing. Come now and let us
exit the city of oblivion of our small selves.

For troubled is the narrow valley of senses,
mediocrities of screwed up civilisations
and everlasting demons of supremacy.

If you don't come there will be more minds
sewed together with pathetic soul-contracts.
Hypnotised inheritors like wandering

dismal screams. So come and come quickly,
open-eyed, ready, and we can finally head to
the edge of realms with a courage to breathe.

Spin. Spin at your own pace, attach to nuclei
like humans nowadays. Exit the train station
a simple body. A luminal heart in preoccupation.

But what do you really need among
the deadest of minds? A truth so thick,
a silence hard to fake. So eat. Chew well.

Then the awakening, cold and arsenic,
superluminal, inner, outer, fill within. But O!
Circling brings the consciousness of roses.

Not-so-dark waters. The hush of wormholes.
Unknown tree bark. Smell. Lick. Drink.
And you are a rose. Complete.

Elif Sezen

Esther Ottaway's poems have been shortlisted in the international poetry prizes, the Montreal, Bridport, MPU International, and Mslexia, and she has won the Tim Thorne Prize for Poetry, the Tom Collins Poetry Prize, the Queensland Poetry Festival Ekphrasis Award and other prizes. Her acclaimed new collection, *She Doesn't Seem Autistic* (Puncher & Wattmann), creatively illuminates the hidden experiences of women and girls on the autism spectrum, and her previous collection, *Intimate, low-voiced, delicate things* (Puncher & Wattmann), which explores family and its origins, motherhood, love and the loss of love, won both the Poetry category and People's Choice in the Tasmanian Literary Awards. Often powerfully bringing to light the experiences of women, her work is widely published, including in *Rattle* (US) and *Mslexia* (UK), and anthologised in Australia and New Zealand, notably in *Thirty Australian Poets* (UQP).

AND YOU AWAY, IN DESERT SCENES

This prompting day, the first of spring,
 which past the winter's caution leans:
 a sun both gold and fresh as cream,
 the grass full green in backlit blades.
 Our breeze-rubbed river jags and gleams.
 The scarpered gait of native hens
 can-canning territory routines
 down claw-worn paths through arcing reeds.
 Joy-cries of big gulls, biking kids,
 a toddler in a tutu dress –
 and I have lived within four walls.
 Bright oyster shells make opal signs.
 My heart half hesitates, half dreams.



Esther Ottaway

Gillian Swain is an Australian poet based in the Hunter region on Wonnarua land and grew up on Awabakal land. Gillian's poetry appears in various journals and anthologies including *Burrow* (Old Water Rat Publishing, v1,2,3) and *Live Encounters magazine: Special Australia-New Zealand edition* (May 2021) as well *Poetry for the Planet: An Anthology of Imagined Futures* (2021, Littoria Press), *What we Carry: poetry on childbearing* (2021, Recent Works Press) and others. She is involved in running many poetry events and has recently featured as a panelist and guest speaker at literary festivals, as well as curating the poetry component for a local writers festival for three years. Her debut poetry collection is *My Skin its own Sky* (Flying Islands Press, 2019) following her chapbook *Sang Up* (Picaro Press, 2001).



OLD LETTERS AND NEW: A BASKET OF LOVE LINES

Like it requires an apology you say you're
Out of practice
Versions of ourselves sent weekly
Extended through years and nothing

Lost to time or distance
I still remember the rush of torn envelopes
New paper scent page spillage
Eager fingers unfolding
Story and secrets and I would

Lunge into the lines hungry
Other than greying hair and
Voluptuous proportions
Every pen-stroke every image remains familiar

Long sweeps, the slope and curl
I return seamlessly to this music
Notes we've scribed along time
Each year we grew quieter
Silence slowly replaced stamps

Licked and pressed and gone
Other life took us and still
Vivid memories of two young things
Erase any sense of disconnect

Loss was something we shared
It stayed understated
Nested like a waiting bird
Each year a line in the weave
Strengthening our story.

Gillian Swain

AT THE MOUTH

things open,
there are many
ways to wash.

You lean into the cool
cup hands and pull
the spill sweeps

across skin.
Your body knows
quench and breath.

At the mouth
there is birth.
Some are
privileged to see,

open arms and
receive
this gentle smallness.
You are silent

hold
this living cathedral
in your hands

lean and carefully
sweep across skin
cup fingers and wash

this gift which is
not dirty.
Your body knows

this is your own cleansing
and deep inside yourself
things open

and listen.
There are many
ways to welcome.

There are many things
being readied
at the mouth.

INTERIOR ABSTRACT

There's room for you in
burnt red curves. Heat opens
through spheres of thought.

Reflect and shadow and stretch
sometimes penumbra. Mindful melt,
cool shy blue and you move

within colours, among shapes
through spaces
inhabit the things we cannot be

and know a sense of sacred
few of us can see or
carry in our days.

Yet you, there's room for you
in turning woods and fabrics
in shadow-bright mornings

that fall across your floor
in the solid seats of readiness
this tight curl of furniture

this place of your own making
your own bivouac – open, full and enough
to bring you gladness.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Irina Frolova is a Russian-Australian writer. She has a degree in philology from Moscow City Pedagogical University and is studying psychology at Deakin University. Her work speaks to the experience of immigration, neurodivergence, and a search for belonging. It draws on folklore and explores archetypes through cultural and feminist lenses. Her poetry and prose have appeared in Not Very Quiet, Australian Poetry Collaboration, Baby Teeth Journal, Rochford Street Review, The Blue Nib, The Australian Multilingual Writing Project, Live Encounters, Mascara Literary Review, Kalliope X, Burrow, and various anthologies. Irina's creative highlights include her first collection of poetry *Far and Wild* (released by Flying Island Books in 2021), winning the second prize in the 2021 Deborah Cass Prize for writing, and being shortlisted for the 2022 Alice Sinclair Writing Competition.

THE LIGHT IN YOU

for Michael

this burnt honey
 this warm amber
 flecked with green
 has me lost
 in the soft folds
 of an afternoon
 I amble
 in autumnal woods
 where a wide sunbeam
 shines
 through the canopy
 I savour it
 trace it
 to the heavens
 I never knew
 love could be this
 full this
 light



Irina Frolova

SOUL-MATING

each day we eat dark chocolates
send each other quotes about love

you share the latest quote and say
that we are two halves of one soul

I sip my earl grey 'love' your comment
and silently disagree

I wonder if that's what you really think
will make me smile

if I'm being honest
it does

I bite into my chocolate the swirl
of sweetness & bitterness

I am tempted
to separate the ingredients

kind chaotic
particular passionate
tender temperamental
romantic resilient
intelligent idealistic

impossible
to split these neatly in halves

each soul more or less im/perfect
& whole

in the dead of night we twist
around each other like snakes

legs intertwined
your long fingers in mine

one more kiss bitter-sweet before sleep
I think

if I have to relinquish this waking moment
to the uncertainty of another

may it be my love
& my friend by your side

Jane Frank is a Brisbane-based poet, editor and academic, originally from Maryborough in the Wide Bay region of Queensland. Her debut collection *Ghosts Struggle to Swim* was published by Calanthe Press in May 2023, and she is the author of two previous chapbooks including *Wide River* (Calanthe Press, 2020). Her work has been widely published in journals and anthologies in both Australia and internationally including *Antipodes; Westerly; Cordite; Meniscus; Shearsman; Other Terrain; Poetry Ireland Review; Live Encounters; Ink, Sweat and Tears; Takahe, The Ekphrastic Review; Australian Poetry Anthology; Newcastle Poetry Prize anthology; ACU Prize for Poetry anthology; Heroines; Grieve; The Incompleteness Book II and Poetry for the Planet* (Litoria Press). She is currently reviews editor for *StylusLit* literary journal and teaches creative and professional writing. Read more of her work at <https://www.facebook.com/JaneFrankPoet/>



THE MOUNTAIN

When I last drove north
 the pine grove triangle
 that caught dawn light
 in the waves of its branches
 like an ocean washing the foothills
 had been felled
 and the mountain
 stood defiant, looming in the gap,
 almost speaking to me
 in arrowed gestures of hoop and kauri
 of absence and neglect,
 then softening in sun,
 shading the road
 with an amber-shot understanding.
 I've often thought you might survey
 the lilac expanse of creeks,
 scrub and sea
 to the south and east,
 the cattle country to the west
 from its Bactrian peaks—
 after all, you memorialised
 every other angle in paint.
 North of here the grasses turn brown,
 skies blazing indigo,
 mirrored, immense,
 the mountain marking a border
 in space and time:
 a bookend, a giant green sentinel
 lion guarding the places
 the river's ink loops between,
 embellishes, remembers.

Jane Frank

WATCHING HANG GLIDERS WITH LEONARDO DA VINCI AT TAMBORINE MOUNTAIN

We look for solutions in the sky—
a relentless quest—

From here on the still-
warm western escarpment grass
the valley is a salad
of farms and small settlements
under Renaissance clouds

Thresholds are closer here:
figuration/abstraction: cloud cover/rain
and there are wounds in the air—
a lack of answers from beyond
an invisible wall

As the next glider
waits for the windsock
I study Leonardo's face—
weather-worn but with bird-keen eyes
that see angles and angels,
that are portals to batwing dreams
and electric-blue-thermal days

He is difficult to read
but we talk about progress, the way
his wing-seeds took life and sprouted
despite the earth-locked severity of his time,
ideas that dipped and rose
over centuries

He tells me things—
the function of feathers and their intricate designs,
the action of a falcon's tail,
the way a sparrow moves, steers, dives
ascends in flight
and the way an eagle's vision
multiplies colour by five

Sometimes I see in ultraviolet too, I tell him,
an infrared riot of colours,
make sense of things using wave-
lengths and I ask him if thinking
is a kind of flying,
like riding a bike through air
free of sepia burdens before they're mirror-written
in a lasting codex?

Whether painting is a way of dreaming when awake?

I offer him figs and wine
while he recounts a story
about the Duke of Milan's payment
of a vineyard for The Last Supper
back in 1498—
but this makes him sad because the place is a museum now
and the wine, he says, has lost its softness—

the world has lost its softness—

continued overleaf...

WATCHING HANG GLIDERS WITH
LEONARDO DA VINCI
AT TAMBORINE MOUNTAIN *contd...*

I may not see him again

It is his turn to soar from the luscious green ridge
and he is sliding gloves over those expressive
ink-stained hands,
reading my mind

He reminds me not to forget the relationship between
the forces that pull down
and lifting pressure on a bird's wing
that the air is fluid and so am I
that the light is thickening to dusk and autumn is visible
because trees are reddening

and there is a deep fuchsia-clarity towards the horizon
which is an empty line demanding words

DRY, FINE DAYS

Tonight, I won't care if I'm not forgiven
but wonder if the creekside cicadas have paused
to sleep or if the wallabies that watched us
from the bridge are lonely under an absent moon.
The tin roof creaks with a kind of weariness
but I noticed flame trees and red gums in flower
along the ridgelines before the day was stolen

Tonight, I won't care if tomorrow is better,
won't knit mountain air into worry or ride
the rapids of misunderstanding. The tiles are cold
against my feet, the boards honey-cream.
There are only elements here—no ghosts—
but I can hear stars singing, very softy,
whole choirs of them crooning in harmony

Tonight, I won't care if my good intentions
are smudges on the walls of you. The scent of cut
grass still lingers, and wood smoke, and rosella bushes
give their confession through the cabin window.
The hanging chair you sat in swings, drums bamboo.
This night holds the fragrance of 1000 dry, fine days
that have come before, some that even survived fire.

John Liddy is from Limerick, Ireland and lives in Madrid, Spain, where he worked as a teacher/librarian. He has many collections published and his latest poetry book is *Arias of Consolation*, Revival Press (2022). He is the founding editor, along with Jim Burke, of *The Stony Thursday Book* (1975-), one of Ireland's longest running literary reviews and is on the Advisory Board of The Hong Kong Review. Soon to be published *Spanish Points*, a bilingual anthology of his Spanish-related poems.

These new poems are for a *Travelogue* in collaboration with Jim Burke.



John Liddy

IMAGINARY PAGES FROM A TRAVELOGUE

The Lady of the Strand

I continued from where you left off, using a different coloured pen. The gist of what you had been writing was easy enough to follow. The problem was in the style, the tone, the voice, the actual words. So, I side-stepped the clumps of seaweed on the strand and imagined a local beauty out for a morning stroll, coming towards us to ask if we wanted something to eat, a drink perhaps or even a swim. When I read back what I had written, you took up your own pen and continued: She had come from the sea and had shed the seaweed on the strand from her long mane and was calling us to go with her, to enter the water and dive down into the depths.

We could have gone on like this forever, finding harmony, at one with the line of thought, no matter what the colour of pen or syntactical differences, the pulse was the same. Needless to say, we decided to go pubbing instead and toast the Lady of the Strand.

Endurance

The gist of what Coogan and Ó hEithir told us that night in a pub near the schoolhouse on Aran, consisted of an oft repeated mantra to young, aspiring poets who may be uncertain of their calling or the pitfalls that await them.

Brace yourselves for rejection, said one. Nothing matters but the words, said the other. And we listened wide-eyed to their advice as the pints and the music flowed, making us giddy and less awkward with our Irish.

Filled with moon-struck inspiration on our way back to the tent, we called on the ghosts of the famine dead to abandon their graves and join us in a merry dance around the schoolhouse field but no such luck prevailed.

continued overleaf...

IMAGINARY PAGES FROM A TRAVELOGUE

Endurance *(contd...)*

Slumped in our sleeping bags we slept through the morning and were lucky to catch the boat to Ros an Mhíl, where a cold wind blew against us as we took the hill to Costelloe, bound for Screebe, Cloonagleragh and Maam Cross.

Those words of wisdom on Aran fell by the wayside, with no mood on us for updating the journal that day or the next, until placenames began to hum on the page again, and in our heads the advice from those two seasoned men of letters.

Verified in our belief that we were serving the 'call', the slog through a summer hail made of us survivors of pitfall and rejection, inextricably tied to our fervent belief that we were living our words in body and soul.

Now I wonder what we would say to two young dreamers come in from the cold to sit beside us, their talk of poems in the making, not much to show for aspiration but enough cop to see in our eyes the lived experience.

MIRAGE

1.

Was that a wild daisy, a sprig of heather we just passed? A man scything in a field, the scent of green to last a lifetime, even as I write this now, touchable feather, like turf smoke, straw, a scene painted by Paul Henry, you and I going over the hill to leave it all behind for others to harvest what we reaped.

2.

Maybe memories are made of this:
Illusions lived with a passion
last the longest, for better or worse,
steeped in possibility, reinvigoration.

Another deception, perhaps, or a hazy recreation of part without parcel,
words borrowed from times once lived,
unfaithful servants of the echo-shell.

Viewed from isolation with pen in hand,
an act of mining the mind for the page,
memories still intact until memory itself
decides to no longer engage.

continued overleaf..

MIRAGE *contd...*

3.
To catch a whiff again of odours
we thought lost to us, to have adored
that time in the fullness of limited
resources, to have left some record

For the poet O'Grady's approval,
to have lived a writing exile
with its demands on tenacity,
silence, cunning and guile

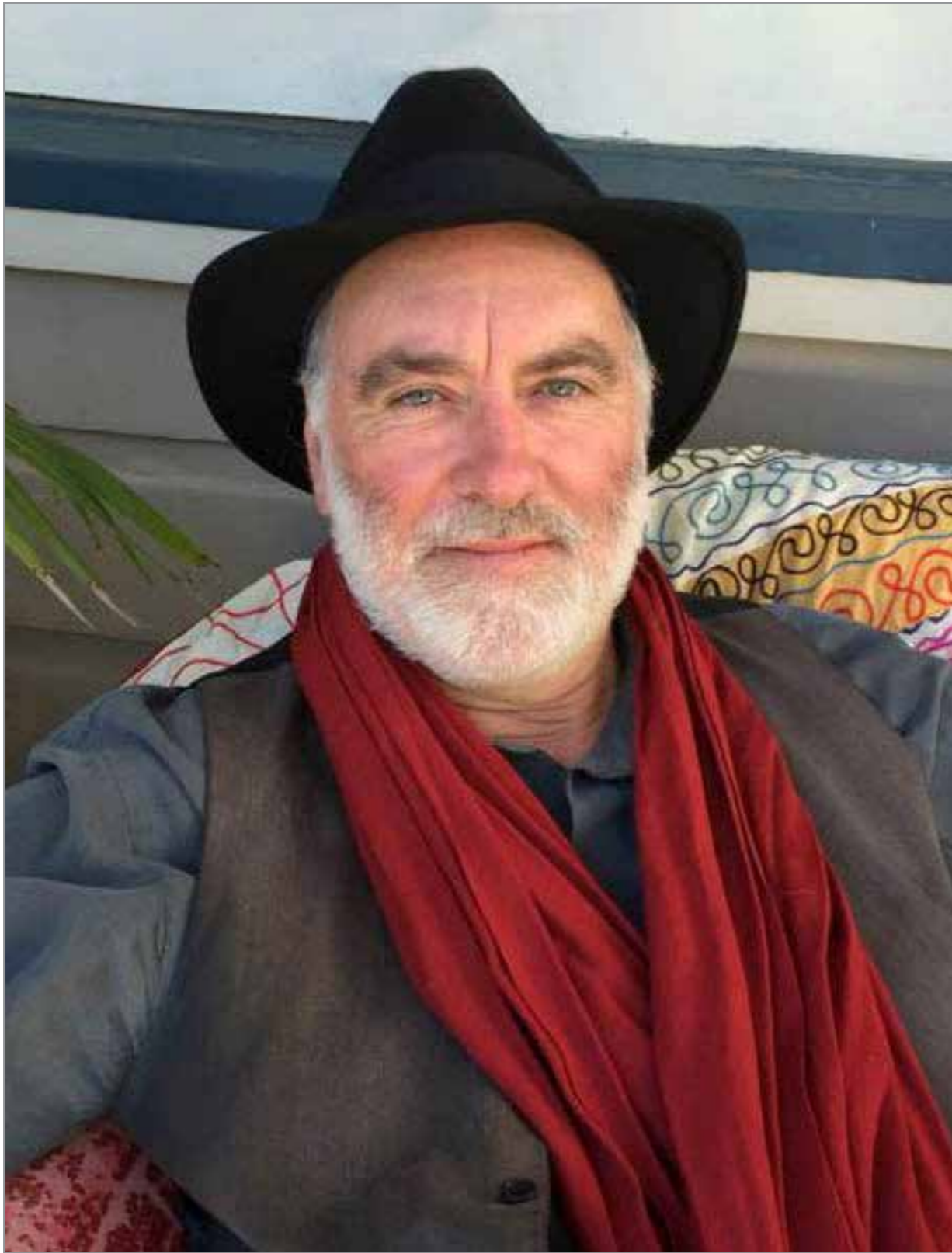
Perceptibility of the tactile
in the leaf's smooth underbelly,
awareness fine-tuned to sense
a cloud in the guise of Machiavelli

Lingering overhead to release
its almighty, unmerciful deluge.
The observant eye not caught
off-guard even in old age.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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.



THE PLEBISCITE

they are let loose
into the maze of the world,

like little mice
they scurry about pawing at the dead ends.

the occasional rat of an adjective is thrown in,
voracious as a meme

while the newsreader
paws at the whiskers of his syntax.

they bite and snarl and proliferate
more verb than noun

until the little mice
are almost too frightened to make a peep.

this is when those conducting the experiment,
the ones grasping for a new understanding,

find themselves unable
to elucidate their intentions,

language itself having become the maze.

Justin Lowe

MY TINY SHADOW

I am sitting out the neighbour's row with my little dog.
the sun is low the pollen count high.

she was pawing at a bee before
as it lay dying and the neighbours wailed and thundered.

from the heat, probably, although
I have found bee stings meshed up in the fabric of this couch.

in the Roman Republic,
the Republic of Cato and the Gracchi,

my little dog may have been guilty
of a capital crime, bees being sacred in their eyes.

we can live without Gods, it seems,
but not without the bees.

there are fires already down in the valley
and the September sky looks old, bruised.

my little dog has been my close companion
these past eight years.

she is so tiny,
I never cease to marvel at the heart of her.

she is snoring by me now
as the day cools in the law's blue light.

she goes under the knife tomorrow
and as I watch the steady rise and fall of her breathing,

as the police van pulls away with its grim cargo,
I try to picture life without her.

but it is just a void,
some planet where I no longer cast a shadow.

I guess we are, all of us,
only portioned so many breaths in this world,

there is only so much oxygen for each life,
no matter how tiny.

it is the burden of that knowledge
that makes us human, I've been told,

and why the law casts a blue light,
and why the bees are sacred.

AFTER REMOVING AN ARROW

for Rebecca

the acute phase is often ushered in
 by a feeling approaching nausea
 a not-quite-clenching of the lower abdomen
 that resembles the tickle of moonlight
 through a torn curtain in the small hours

it is a mild discomfort like that feeling of apprehension
 before the bus reaches your stop
 the skin quivers more than itches
 the patient experiences a nebulous sensation
 a kind of liquidity as though joined to another
 that provokes a smile at the doctor's ministrations
 at the ripple effect of a stethoscope pressed to a burning heart

after this the patient will appear calm for extended periods
 exhibiting what can only be described as a reckless disregard
 for the effect they are having on friends and family
 how they laugh and kick when asked to take a few tiny steps
 much like a toddler would or someone climbing the gallows steps
 gasping at the crows perched on a nook of sunlight spelling a name

and when a light is shone in their one still eye
 the patient will bare their teeth like a fox cornered in its lair
 the cornea pulsing, a nova fit to burst
 likewise, every question asked at this stage seems to worsen the condition
 leaving doctors and care-givers in an impossible bind

the monitors, of course, can tell only half the story
 and the laughter is so deceptively hollow

KATE

a name usually preceded
 by the sound of breaking glass
 like some dark angel jangling coins in its pocket

soon followed by the dull thud
 of a fist on a car bonnet
 too old to be alarmed

a car I assume is owned
 by the one who goes
 by the name echoing now

down the dark winter streets
 a name attached to some wrong
 a wrong that echoes like a pistol shot

always that single syllable of the lost
 that ricochets off each hard surface
 something discharged like a grudge

not nursed like a longing

Kim Ports Parsons grew up near Baltimore, earned degrees, and worked in education for thirty years. Now she lives near Shenandoah National Park, walks, writes, gardens, and volunteers for Cultivating Voices LIVE Poetry. Her poems appear in many print and online publications, including *Poetry Ireland Review* and *Vox Populi* and have been nominated for a Pushcart. Her first collection, *The Mayapple Forest* (Terrapin Books 2022), was a finalist for the North American Book Award, a national competition sponsored by the Poetry Society of Virginia. Visit her at <https://www.kimportsparsons.com/>



Kim Ports Parsons

SKIPPING WOMEN IN HISTORY SOPHOMORE YEAR

climbing over the radiator
maneuvering out the window

the two panes louvered wide open
a beckoning gateway

the long dark hall stretching behind
like a guilty conscience

the first really warm spring light
seductive as an imagined kiss

the bright, pebbled tarmac roof
where some women have already set up camp

stretched out on comforters, doubled-up
blankets, and even a dime store pool float

and by noon the roof is full
more classroom chairs are empty

and there's talk of getting some lemon juice
from the cafeteria to work on highlights

and someone passes around her baby oil
and all the tender young skin glistens

and the legendary feminist history professor
and her insights into suffrage are forgotten

and we are liberated by our recklessness
but we are captives of our desire

to be blonde and bronzed and luscious and loved.

COMPANION

I am on a lonely road and/ I am travelling, travelling, travelling.
~Joni Mitchell, "All I Want"

My face is a fading sign
in the funhouse mirror of the iPad screen.
I'm watching Joni while chopping
onions for the frying pan,
enough for two, these days.

She's enthroned in a gilded chair
at Newport, adored and loving it.
Everything comes and goes.
She leans in and eases out
a deeper version of herself.

Famous back-up singers grin,
and the audience sings along,
marked by lovers and styles of clothes.
Once I was a teenager stretched out
on a flowered bedspread,

big headphones turned up high,
cloudy dreams wavering
like the needle on vinyl,
sinuous verses sparking
my skin, a long dive down.

Later, that silky, sliding voice
poured sunshine into my dorm,
filled it with butterscotch,
warm as the sweet fire of yearning
the night before, chords curving,

smoke-signaling poems
I longed to loop from my own tongue,
to honey the world like Joni.
How could I not rewind and play
all I really, really want

over and over again?
Thrumming, loud in my Walkman,
scuffed boots knocking the sidewalk,
trying to lose the lonesome
that dogged me in my twenties,
far from home. Careful steps
over love's cracks in my thirties,
picking myself up, telling myself,
I can choose my life, I can make
the life I want, free myself

from fear of the empty bed, sleep
in my own arms, fly anywhere
in my dreams. Joni carries me
down the river, sings it fine
and dark, high and deep.

The liquid of her music buoys me,
washes me, and I drift along.
I did find someone, loving and kind.
If I could, I'd turn and push my way
back to that tender, searching self.

Take her hand. Tell her
to keep on singing. Tell her
to keep one eye on the rearview
mirror. Watch how the lonesome
falls further behind.

PORTRAIT OF FAMILY WITH GUNS

A preacher poses with his wife and kids
on a basketball court, in the center of a playground
behind a brick, one-story church with a modest steeple,
cross-topped, on some quiet rural route.

The preacher holds his wife's hand,
his other hand holstered in his right pocket.
They smile and stand relaxed, in jeans and T-shirts.
They are white, in their early thirties, and clearly,

everything is fine. Their daughter is perched on a tricycle,
knees drawn up, grinning and squinting into the light,
a red bow blooms on the top of her head, thin arms
dangle from handlebars. Her brother is tucked

into a toy John Deere, the only one not smiling,
a boy who's bored of posing, a boy who'd rather
press his foot down hard to see how fast he can go.
His golden hair curtains one eye.

The preacher's collection of sixty-five firearms
is laid out carefully on the cement court,
arranged around them like some kind of meditation garden
designed on the principles of destruction:

handguns, shotguns, semiautomatic rifles,
some plastic, some metal, some wood, some with sights,
some with straps, some with repeaters, some small enough
for a pocket, some large enough for a crowd.

Stones in a nightmare garden, specimens on display,
treasures lined up for sale, markers in an impossible maze,
children's desks in a classroom, body bags after
a battle, headstones in regulated rows.

What does he preach on a sunny Sunday morning?
Does he admonish? Does he beseech? Does he declaim?
Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

Kit Willett is an Auckland-based English teacher, poet, and executive editor of the Aotearoa poetry journal *Tarot*. His debut poetry collection, *Dying of the Light*, was published by Wipf and Stock imprint Resource Publications.



A FRUIT, A FLOWER

She is a fruit: a peach, a plum. I press my thumbs slowly into the fold and suck the juices. So, I plant her seed in the soil and weep on it until it sprouts.

She is the soft-curved flesh, cupped-in-my-hand sweetness. She is a memory of those summer picnics.

He is a flower: poppy, rose. I tear him apart, petal by petal. I dip my head low to breathe in his scent. Still, he is the delicate dance

of growing, turning-towards-the-moonlight, or the-wind-in-the-trees, and there is something elegant about his stem.

She is the most perfect sunset: relief of another day having passed, embrace in the nighttime, comfort of familiar sights.

He is a body in motion: the trail of fabric, the cello's song, a twisting, a turning, a leap across a lime-lit stage.

She is a new candle: all illumination and beeswax scent;

he is the ocean shore: crashing into me and then returning.

Kit Willett

ON HOLD WITH THE BANK

I walk the gardens, hands brushing
against lemon verbena and lavender
on either side before I spot it:
my hybrid tea rose. I pluck
a flower and return inside.

An ornate ceramic bowl and pitcher
set—a wedding gift—sits expectantly
on the table beside a heated towel;
The bowl already contains the warm
mixture: milk, honey, and egg yolk,
but I sprinkle the petals on top. I soak
my fingers while I listen to the Kiwiana
on loudspeaker.

After ten minutes, I rinse my hands
with water from the jug and dry them
carefully, thoughtfully. I brush on cuticle
oil and lie down while I massage it in.
My skin is soft, and my thumb glides
across each nail. I rub the excess
into my palm and close my eyes
while it dries.

A base coat, and it dries.
A first coat, and it dries.
A second coat, and it dries.
A topcoat, and it dries.

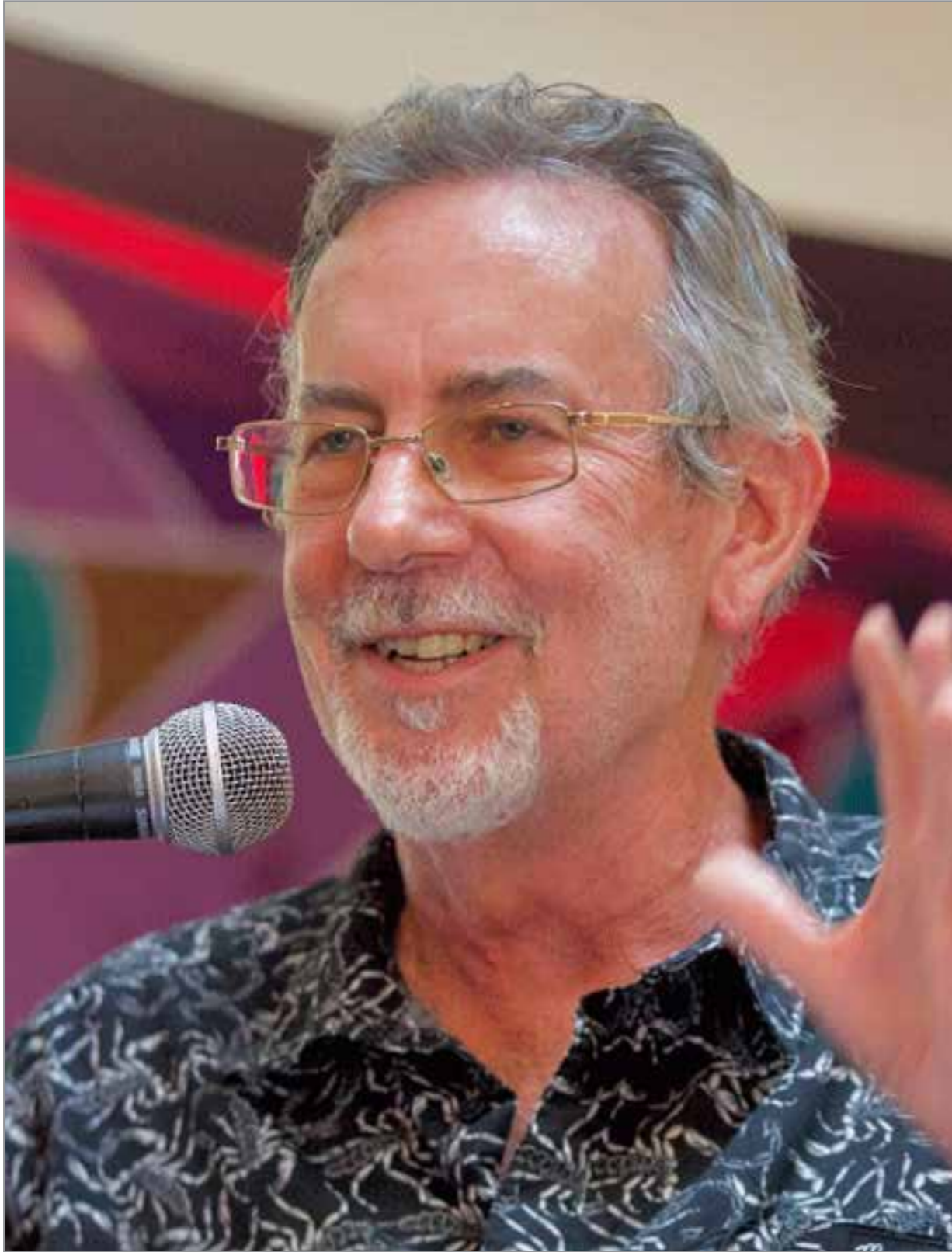
I trace my nail with a cotton swab,
and a man picks up to ask me
how he can be of assistance today.



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Les Wicks Over 45 years Wicks has performed widely across the globe. Published in over 400 different magazines, anthologies & newspapers across 36 countries in 15 languages. Conducts workshops & runs Meuse Press which focuses on poetry outreach projects like poetry on buses & poetry published on the surface of a river. His 15th book of poetry is *Time Taken – New & Selected* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2022). <https://leswicks.tripod.com/lw.htm>



PAPER & BLADES

Living in a book
 I know I've read before.
 No sign of finale, the characters forgettable.
 Any conflict is a murmur like
 mewling dog-eared leaves that saw
 too much time under the thumb.
 Prevarication is a clumsy bookmark.

News comes in from university,
it's all about the plot.
 But another predictable crash
 does not draw people back to the page.
 I've tried fraud, suicide
 & a grand old caper.
 I guess your murder is the last twist available.

Les Wicks

SURRENDER TERMS

Perhaps we all outgrow our dreams.
 Feed our bodies
 while futures starve.
I can't complain. Can anybody?

This temporary breath we carry,
 truly borrowed
 as the kiln warms up to host our cinders.

This mercy-fuck of bone & gristle
 will all be over soon.
 We shuck existence at the doorways
 of anything next.

Like tie-dyes & flares
 those aspirations I wore
 were just another fad.

IMO There is the touch... now.
 Forgotten more than I failed.
 Remembered more than ever happened.
 There is love tomorrow.
 Cronulla Beach, a light northerly breeze.

THE COVENANT

God-things reached down & took the water.

It rose, abject. The People were shocked
 at this weak surrender.
 Where did it end up?
 Maybe it just sat in the sky & watched
 the arguments that arise from thirst.
 Or perhaps there is some new lake
 plotting life in an unpeopled region.

After all the hankering
 the god-things gave them fire
 which rippled & flowed just like their river.
 They were not satisfied, this wild appetite
 outran their own.

Certain it was not their fault
 they face the future
 armed only with incendiaries.
 Pray, that's what you do
 when you can't do nothing.

Lincoln Jaques is a Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) based writer. His poetry, fiction and travel essays have appeared internationally in collections, journals and anthologies. He was the runner-up in the International Writers Workshop (IWW) Kathleen Grattan Prize for a sequence of poems, and was recently shortlisted for the inaugural At The Bay | I Te Kokoru awards for a hybrid full-length collection of essays.

THE FIGHT AGAINST EVERYTHING: PIER PAOLO PASOLINI AND BOLOGNA

In the early morning of 2 November 1975, in the seaside town of Ostia, near Rome, a woman discovered the gruesome remains of a man who had been brutally murdered. There was evidence of torture: the victim had been beaten, then run over by a car (later it was revealed his own car). Several times. His genitals had been mangled by a heavy object. After all this, it seems someone had poured gasoline over him and set him alight. The body was that of the controversial Bologna-born writer, poet, political activist and film director, Pier Paolo Pasolini.

A brief history of Bologna: Bologna is a mid-size city that sits between Florence and Venice, dab smack in the heartland of Northern Italy, capital of the Emilia-Romagna region. Once an Etruscan stronghold, later the Romans came, then they were thrown out by the Goths. Then the Lombards outdid the Goths, who were eventually ousted by Charlemagne, only to be ruled for a time by the Carolingian empire. From the 1200s a series of powerful families fought for power, building tall towers—two of the most famous still seen today leaning dangerously—to try to better the other. The plague came in 1348, desecrating the population. For a brief time Napoleon seized the town, placing it under French rule. The Pope claimed Bologna back, until Mussolini instilled fascist power after WWI. The Germans came in 1944 and bombed almost the entire city. After the war, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) held control. If I were penning a glossy tourist guide, I would probably end that description by saying something like: 'Today, Bologna is a beautiful town of covered walkways, good food, terracotta buildings (its nickname is *La Rossa* The Red) and good-looking, photo-shop-enhanced, well-dressed people'. But as usual, a town like Bologna is much more than those inadequate clichés.

continued overleaf..



Lincoln Jaques

THE FIGHT AGAINST EVERYTHING: PIER PAOLO PASOLINI AND BOLOGNA *contd...*

A young 17-year-old, Pino Pelosi, was charged with Pasolini's murder. It was thought the two rendezvoused in Rome, then drove out to the beach in Pasolini's Alfa Romeo with the intent to get a meal together. Things became heated between them, as it was believed Pasolini propositioned the young man. Pelosi spent many years in prison for the crime, and finally in 2005 he confessed that he'd been used as a scapegoat. The real murderers, he said, were a group of men who followed the two to the beach, where they dragged Pasolini away and killed him in an almost ritual frenzy while yelling "Dirty communist!"

I'm in a bookshop, just around the corner from the Piazza Maggiore. The establishment is one of those café-bookshop combinations that serves more like a reading library for the locals. A place where people gather and drink coffee and laze around on couches and soft chairs. A place where you go to pick out an Elena Ferrante to find old caffeine stains on the cover, its pages stuck together by bits of jam from a Pinza Bolognese, the edges of the pages well-thumbed and oily and a price tag still wanting €15.99.

People in their early twenties, sprawled across chaise longues, the men in Tommy Hilfiger t-shirts, the women dressed in Diesel jeans and sporting Burberry rucksacks, smoke cigarettes and keep their mirrored sunglasses on. I immediately think of Pasolini's thoughts on hyper-materialism that oozed through all his works. Smoke from their cigarettes gets thankfully sucked outside through the large doors opening out to a deep portico. Italians have a way about them as if sharing one long private joke. They half-heartedly argue over a scatter of papers, textbooks and iced frappes; many of them are more concerned with what's happening on their mobile phones. A waiter-cum-shop assistant in a Pantera t-shirt ignores them. The bookshop sells more coffee than books. These are students from the University of Bologna, the oldest university in Europe, giving classes since 1088. Another important resident of Bologna, not born here but he taught here for a large part of his life, is the semiotician and medievalist Umberto Eco. Unlike Pasolini, Eco lived to the ripe old age of 84.

I didn't order a coffee but I remember I purchased John Dickie's *Cosa Nostra*, one of the few books in English kept on a small shelf hidden behind the Italian bestsellers. I've always been fascinated by the history of the Italian Mafia, and when I spotted the book I thought I was having an authentic Italian experience by buying a book from a bookshop in an Italian city about Sicilian crime lords written by a British author. These stupid things you do to try to fit in.

The first novel Pasolini published in 1955 was *Ragazzi De Vita*, or 'The Street Kids' as translator Ann Goldstein rendered the title. He'd self-published volumes of poetry before this, and a handful of writers and intellectuals of the day took notice. The novel revolves around Riccetto, who falls early into a life of crime and prostitution. He's finally convicted of stealing so he can buy an engagement ring for his fiancé, and put in jail, but when he gets out he's immediately back to his old ways. Riccetto and his cronies have no plans, no ambition, no thoughts about tomorrow. They only have now, survival. Pasolini sees his characters as being set adrift from modern consumerism and politics. In Pasolini's mind, they were the truly free souls; we, on the other hand, are imprisoned in our day-to-day brainwashed yearning for everything we can get.

The Piazza Maggiore is the heart of Bologna. It's the equivalent of St Mark's in Venice, St Peter's in Rome, the Piazza del Duomo in Florence. Wherever you arrive from all parts of the city, the trolley buses, diesel buses, taxis, Ubers, or your feet, they will bring you into this place. From here you can find your bearings to go almost anywhere in Bologna.

Today they are dancing in the Piazza again. It's late afternoon, and the sun is starting to hide behind the medieval buildings surrounding the square, which resembles today closely how it would have looked in the 15th century.

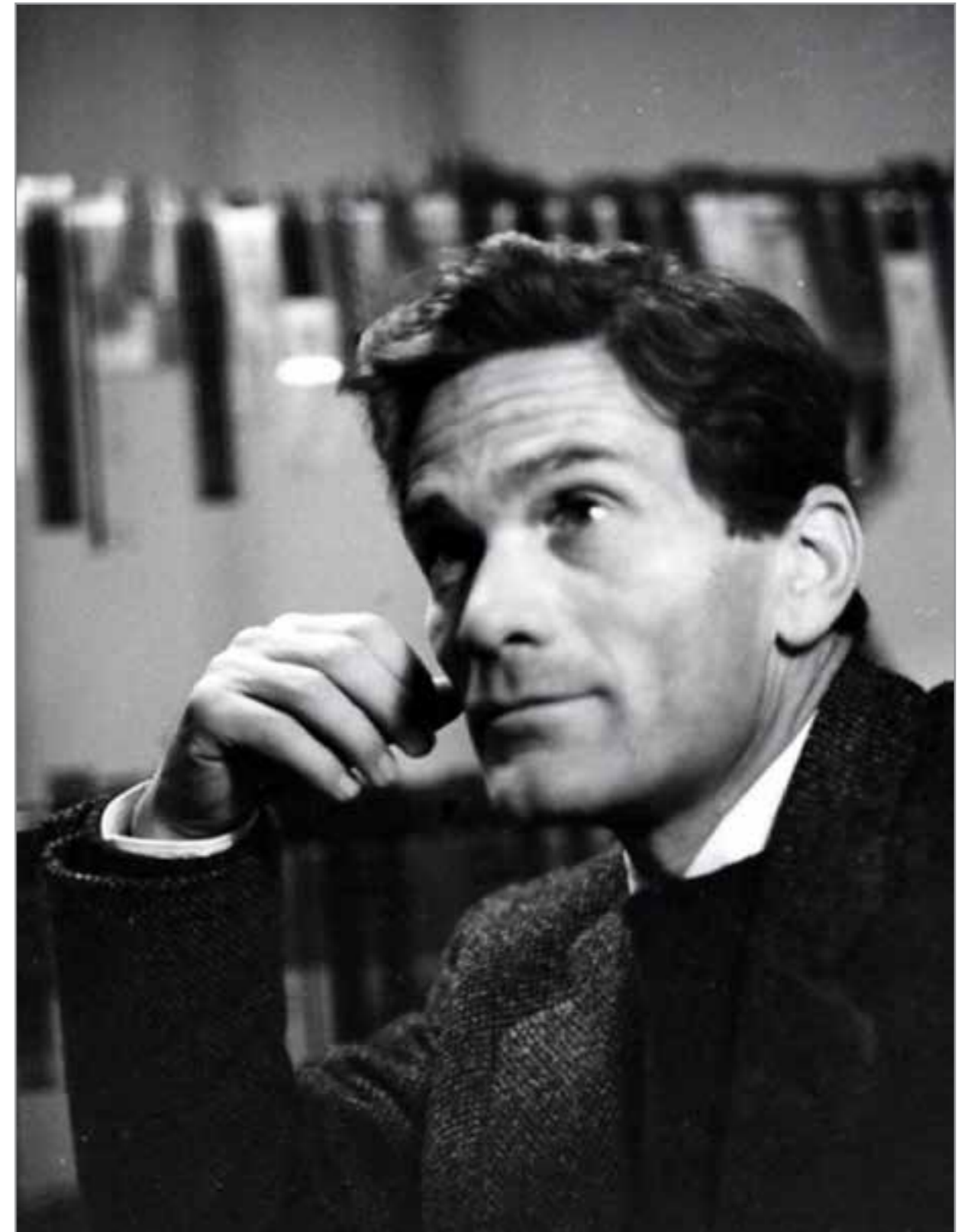
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THE FIGHT AGAINST EVERYTHING: PIER PAOLO PASOLINI AND BOLOGNA *contd...*

The dancers have been here every afternoon, where we inevitably end up after a day walking the endless porticos and avenues. The square is like a centre-weight to a large perpetual-motion machine, the line where the city walls once were its outer ring, dragging the city into itself, a net drawing in a catch of exotic terracotta crustaceans. You can relax here, and no one will bother you. Bologna is still avoided, for reasons unknown, by the hordes of tourists.

The group must belong to a club. They all know each other. Some don't have partners; they stand to the side and wait for an opportunity. They occupy a space in the middle of the square. People don't invade their space. Dance is a sacred thing. Some of them are young; but many are older, more seasoned in the steps. They do the Ch-Cha, the Tango, the Waltz, the Foxtrot, the Jive. Old Italian songs blare out through a boom box with a ripped speaker, fuzzing the singer's voice. I focus on an elderly couple. He's dressed in a green tweed blazer, an olive shirt, pressed dress pants, soft Italian leather shoes. His moustache is immaculately trimmed in line with his lip. She wears cream-coloured suit pants, a black loose-fitting top, polished dance shoes with straps wrapped around her ankles, Roman-style. They stand out from the rest. He embraces her at the right places in the change of beat. She swings in time with him, her eyes closed in a rare trust that he will not allow her to falter. It seems they move in time to the whole square, to the bustle of the crowd swarming around them, to the flautist who stands up on platform outside the faded brickwork of the Palazzo Re Enzo; to the Fontana del Nettuno, the Fountain of Neptune, which seems to shake and boogie along with the swirling music. The façade of the Basilica di San Petronio glistens in a sudden shaft of light from the lowering sun, obscuring for a moment the centuries of dirt and dust on the half-completed white marble, a detail of Jacopo della Quercia's Original Sin on the pillars having no effect to destroy this moment. A young, dark-haired man in a green t-shirt and white Reeboks stands transfixed by the couple, letting his lighted cigarette burn out between his fingers. A girl has stopped her bike and leans it against her thigh as her eyes follow every move.

The couple are like butterflies who have spent their lives together amongst the petals of a brief magnolia flower, coming out to dance before the shortness of their lives catches up with them.



Photograph courtesy: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PierPaoloPasolini.jpg>

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THE FIGHT AGAINST EVERYTHING: PIER PAOLO PASOLINI AND BOLOGNA *contd...*

Pasolini was also an accomplished filmmaker. He came to light with his film, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. It follows the story of Christ as written in the Gospel, the parts played by actors picked from the street and using dialogue as it was written in the New Testament. Originally slammed by the Catholic Church, later The Vatican called it the best film about Christ ever made. Another of his films was *Mamma Roma*, about a prostitute who tries to make a new life for herself and her 16-year-old son, but the son keeps putting obstacles in her way. *Teorema*, or *Theorem*, concerns the intrusion of a stranger (called 'The Visitor' played by a young Terence Stamp, who mumbles only a handful of Italian words throughout the movie) into a bourgeois family. After seducing the entire family, one by one, he leaves as promptly as he arrives, after which each family member rebels against their middle-class existence. *Salò*, the most controversial and explicit of his works, renders the story of the Marquis de Sade in modern Italian society.

Pasolini was born in Bologna but grew up in Friuli, an area close to Venice, the birthplace of his mother. He returned to Bologna to study at the university. He soon became embroiled in politics, writing inflammatory articles for a student magazine. Later he joined the Communist Party (he was asked to leave due to his homosexuality). He started writing poetry seriously, then novels, then experimenting with film. Federico Fellini allowed him to write some parts of dialogue for *Nights of Cabiria*.

In an article from *The Guardian* written in 2014, Ed Vulliamy observes that 'Pasolini's view of a new totalitarianism whereby hyper-materialism was destroying the culture of Italy can be seen now as brilliant foresight into what has happened to the world generally in an internet age.' Pasolini centred on the influence of television as especially disruptive, along with the criticisms of The Christian Democratic Party, who Pasolini thought was in cahoots with the Mafia. But one of Pasolini's biggest mistakes was his vocal criticism of the 1968 student riots, where he seemed to side with the police, calling them the real proletariats, the sons of poor families who were just doing their thankless jobs, for small rewards and salaries.

It's no wonder, with all his strong political views, he came to an untimely end on a ramshackle beach outside of Rome, his body left alone all night to rot under the stars, all of his future creativity and intellectual activism a mere dream that we can only pretend to pick at.

My wife leans on the iron balustrade, a brochure clutched in her hands. She's wearing her Franz Kafka t-shirt we bought in Prague, an image of Franz's haunting eyes peering out of a black background. Her hair is longer in the photo, and I can just see the ends of her flared trousers disappearing into the top of the stone tablet which reads: MUSEO CIVICO. The shot is her standing in the middle of 3 immense porticos, the porticos and the staircase she stands on creating a perfect pattern. Three more porticos sit under the staircase, directly matching the one at the top, where she stands. In the darkness behind her, partially hidden in the depths of the middle portico, a Roman God appears out of the shadows as if a wraith. My wife's expression is a little strained though; I take too long getting the shot, trying to line everything up in one go.

We're in the courtyard of Bologna's Archaeological Civic Museum. The website boasts that you shouldn't come here if you're looking for the Lost Ark of Indiana Jones, or if you hate Ancient Egypt, or your favourite Roman Emperor is Nero. For here they give you the 'real story'. They don't resort to fantasy. Maybe a reference to Nero never actually playing his violin while Rome burnt. The Atrium, where I took the impatient photo, houses one of the biggest lapidariums (or lapidas, rather) you'll encounter anywhere. Roman cemetery headstones line the walls like the small signs in modern crematoriums or memorials. Each stone simply has the deceased's name and the one who dedicated the tablet, ie. the person left behind who paid for it or bothered to have it done. Our voices reverberate through the courtyard, echoing those long-lost souls.

Outside, the afternoon traffic rushing by, we walk through the porticos, the famous covered walkways. Some of the porticos are plain; others are highly decorated like miniature motifs of The Sistine Chapel.

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THE FIGHT AGAINST EVERYTHING: PIER PAOLO PASOLINI AND BOLOGNA *contd...*

A woman emerges from an archway with a child in a stroller, stopping at the crossing, waiting for the lights to change, impatient for her day to continue. The natives here take all this beauty and history for granted. You could walk through a rainy day here and never get wet once.

We pass a bicycle that could be a prop taken from *Tea with Mussolini*, leaning up against a fat buttress, its owner queuing up at a *panificio*, a nearby bakery. Elderly men sit at small tables along the pavements, smoking cigarillos, their loose shirts flapping in a breeze, no doubt discussing the bygone days and regaling the change happening all around them. I spot a closed roller door, painted bright red, with a street-art image of Charlie Brown having a tantrum. The words 'Spazio Sociale Studentesco' are sprayed above. With my limited Italian I instantly think it reads something about a student socialist club, but beneath, in smaller letters, is the English translation: 'Student Social Space'. A café for students to hang out in.

I think of Pasolini, as a student, sipping an espresso, a notebook before him, cigarette stuck in the corner of his mouth, eyes hidden behind dark glasses, as I've often seen photographs of him, writing notes for his first experimental film, a few lines of a new poem, an idea for a novel. I think of the turbulent times of the sixties and seventies here (and everywhere). The place seems a little lost without him.

All the conspiracy theories and investigations and secrecy surrounding Pasolini's death over the years has come to nothing. The fact that Pelosi was a young, scrawny 17-year-old it is highly unlikely that he would have overcome Pasolini. And a witness who said he saw several men drag Pasolini from his car that night was ignored; and the coroner who said there was more than one attacker involved, his statement also seeming to fall on deaf ears. Pelosi also confessed that he took the hit for Pasolini's killing, as his family was put under threat, which smells suspiciously of mafia influences.

I still have that John Dickie book on the Cosa Nostra I bought that day in the bookshop off the Piazza Maggiore. Reading it always takes me back to my time in Italy, especially Bologna. The imagination can run wild. Nothing is ever as it seems.

Pasolini's real murderers have never been caught. Such cases as Pasolini's will never be truly brought to light. For it would frighten us to death if we realised the truth. Interest keeps flaring up now and again, though, and the case has several times been officially reopened by Mayors and influential types. We live in hope. But for now, Omertà, and rest in peace.

Linda Adair is 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 *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing*, *P76 the Sonic Poetry Festival Issue*, *Ozburp*, *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. During a recent Varuna residency, she began working on a verse memoir of her family's complex relationship to unceded land. She has been a featured poet at various venues including La Mama Poetica and a Sonic Poetry Festival event.



Linda Adair

AS THE FLOWERS LOST THEIR BLOOM

Acid stung a wound
I heard the cry
your heart silently screamed
barely uttered in text

no one else heard
the arrythmia of your despair
I know I was not supposed to

your impassive gaze
buttressed emotions
a stalwart blokey trope
professional resignation
it's only politics or a lack of solidarity

What do you want?
To solve it
When do you want it?
Yesterday

in the crone's shadow
fear for one's self shrinks
only to lengthen for
loved ones yet -- if ever -- to be

the passion and idealism
in your veins
flows as a torrent
across time

each one of us
a momentary bend in a river
that scours out
a meandering truth.

SUDDENLY AT SEA

Back in mountain clouds
folding laundry
my swimsuit retains the scent
of the Indian Ocean's salty
clarity and sunlight washes me

our limestone coast walk
coffee-in-hand conversation
undercurrents and kelp
snorkellers and children explore
as we tiptoe along the edge

navigate our course
adrift after years beyond
birthright's close dyad
a sharp reef to wreck upon
we seek sushi sashimi wasabi

we anchor the day
in habit's safe harbour
pedicures shoe shopping
buy salmon salad sticky date pudding
share a home cooked meal at last.

Day two quick coffee
you drive past white sand beaches
covered in thick weed
we enter Cottlesloe's swell
your curls stay mortar-board ready

my first taste of summer
I plunge into the water headfirst
shock lethargy away
float with my eyes shut smiling
buoyant on the languid swell

meanwhile on the sand
you read about the psychology
of Russian women
serial killers ... why
they did what they did and to whom

mother daughter trips
are not what they used to be
you are consumed by work
while all I want is to have fun
& make light while the sun shines.

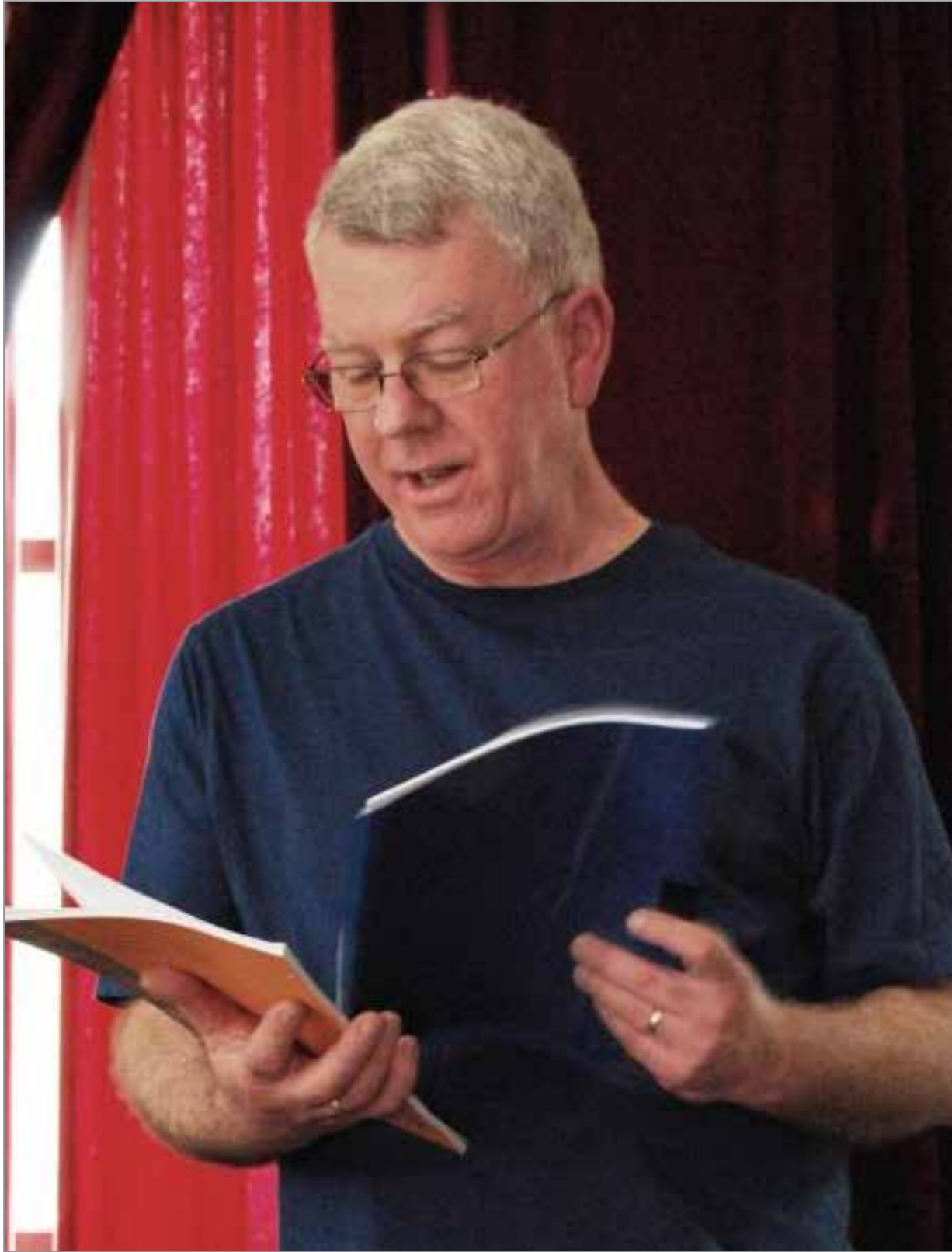
AS IF I COULD FORGET WHERE I AM

... the tram bells sound
on my feet I hold the strap
count stops ready to
tap off & change lines
then I see *Cafe L' incontro*
where we drank the last coffee
on that May day in 2019.

Suddenly the sting of maternal tears
threatens my mascara as I recall
the sinews of intimacy
stretched to bind
the fresh wound of separation
we had flown in from our respective cities
to see that iconic couture exhibition
together
we had brunch at the gallery
and talked
then poured over every
pleat fold and bias cut
in that show
over a late lunch
we talked then walked
and talked some more.

Just today you have just flown
in a single-engine prop plane
along the coast of Broome
I watched that reel here
momentarily alone
scampering away
from expectation
doing what I needed to do
to centre myself
only to find I still miss you
wishing you were here
to see *Goddess*
which I know you would love.

Mark Roberts lives and writes on unceded Darug and Gundungurra country. Along with Linda Adair he edits *Rochford Street Review* and *P76* magazine.



FUTURE POEM

darkness enfolds us
like a remembered lover
avoid the patrols
shelter in crumbling sheds
in the shadows of abandoned train lines
by day stay in empty rooms
near the old university
keep low away from windows
every night move to a new hole
freedom an old poster
still hanging from a fence
shadows move through walls
like a repressed history
memory of a drive to the bay
a drink on the esplanade
a poem published in a friend's journal
now poems are whispered slogans
and even the bullets are imported

Mark Roberts

THE RED MOTORBIKE

1.

One day
the red motorbike
was just there.

I didn't even know I wanted one.
A man told me to take it for a spin,
but to be careful as the gears
can take some getting use to.

Perhaps everyone,
when approaching 60,
is offered a motorbike.

The bike was cool.
I wore my helmet everywhere,
even when doing online banking.

2.

I'm in a large country town.
It looks like Goulburn
but it has another name I can't remember.
I'm with the kids and we are riding home
with them perched on the back of the bike.

We get lost leaving town
and have to drive through
a shopping mall
and push the bike up some stairs.

On the outskirts of the town
we stop and call home.
The kids tell my wife
they love riding on the back
of the red motorbike.

NORTH SHORE LINE

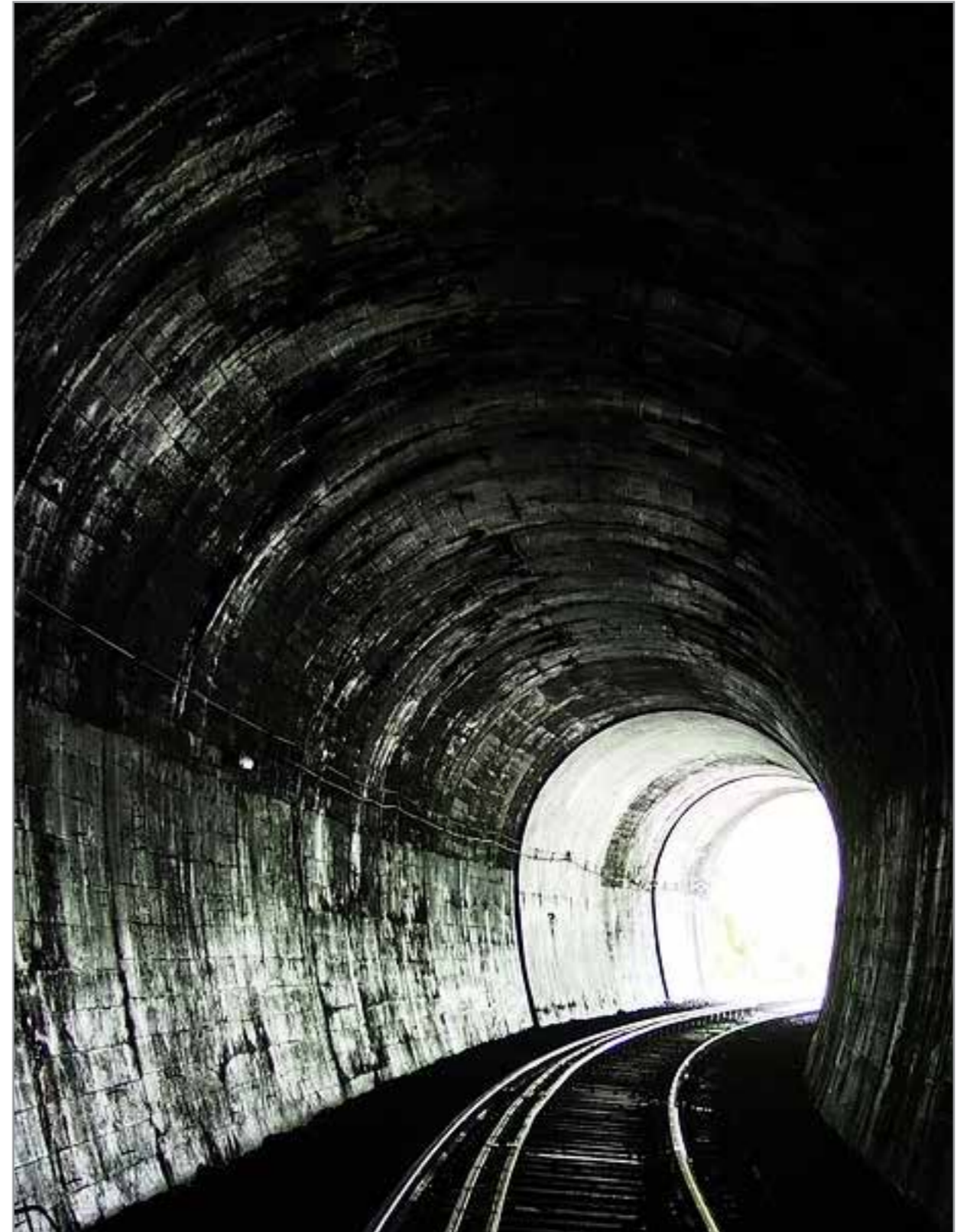
once
coming around the curve
the harbour
would burst through
bush

now
a valley
full
of apartments
thrown up
to stimulate
a lazy economy

possums
follow old aerial trails
leaping
between roofs
remember branches
scratch into ceiling cavities
to nest & wait
bush rates gnaw
through
fast internet cables

urban weeds
sprout between broken
sandstone

the next
station
a tunnel
away



Photograph credit: <https://pixabay.com/photos/tunnel-train-railway-transport-518008/>

Michael J. Leach (@m_jeach) is an Australian poet, critic and academic. Michael's poems have appeared in journals such as *Cordite Poetry Review*, exhibitions such as the Antarctic Poetry Exhibition, anthologies such as *Poetry d'Amour 2022: Love Poems* (WA Poets Incorporated, 2022), and his two poetry books: the chapbook *Chronicity* (Melbourne Poets Union, 2020) and the full-length collection *Natural Philosophies* (Recent Work Press, 2022). Michael has won the UniSA Mental Health and Wellbeing Poetry Competition (2015), received a commendation in the Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine (2021), and jointly won the poetry category of the Minds Shine Bright Confidence Writing Competition (2022). He lives on unceded Dja Dja Wurrung Country and acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land.



CHANGING HABITATS

i.

country roadside—
the motorist holds a blanket
'round a joey

ii.

wetland
encroached by developments—
frogs plonk

iii.

netted orchard—
a noisy miner flies back
& forth inside

iv.

sugar
bowl on the countertop—
ants

v.

white noise
on the ground floor—
rustling in the roof

Michael J. Leach

Irish-Australian poet Nathanael O'Reilly teaches creative writing at the University of Texas at Arlington. His ten collections include *Selected Poems of Ned Kelly* (Beir Bua Press, 2023), *Dear Nostalgia* (above/ground press, 2023), *Boulevard* (Beir Bua Press, 2021), *(Un)belonging* (Recent Work Press, 2020), *BLUE* (above/ground press, 2020) and *Preparations for Departure* (UWAP, 2017). His work appears in over one hundred journals and anthologies published in fifteen countries, including *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Anthropocene*, *Cordite*, *The Elevation Review*, *Identity Theory*, *New World Writing Quarterly*, *Trasna*, *Westerly* and *Wisconsin Review*. He is poetry editor for *Antipodes: A Global Journal of Australian/New Zealand Literature*.



STUDY DUPLEX

I knock on the wall between my study
and my daughter's room, call for her to change.

I call to my daughter's room for her to change
into clothes for dance, meet me at the car.

Wear dancing clothes, meet me at the car.
Drive past neighbor George arranging bins.

George is in the alleyway arranging bins;
he wears gardening gloves, collects trash.

George wears gardening gloves, collects trash
from the gutters, the detritus of gameday.

Gutters overflow with detritus from gameday;
coffee wafts from the fire station's open door.

Coffee drifts from the fire station's open door;
I knock seven times on the wall of my study.

Nathanael O'Reilly

AN ENGLISH TRAGEDY

After Ian McEwan's Atonement

a young couple wrestle for control
of a vase on the edge of a fountain
unable to recognize mutual love
and lust, break the object of beauty

Aphrodite strips to her underwear
submerges in the pool, emerges
triumphant, angry, saturated

water drips from her glistening body
remains behind on the paving stones
evaporating like an absent father

meddlesome sister intervenes in adult
affairs, naïvely destroys lives, performs
the leading role in her one-girl play

mother retreats upstairs behind closed
doors and drawn curtains, denies
the reality of her existence

goddess in a green silk dress leads
her man to the dark library
for spontaneous bookcase sex

innocent man accused of a shocking
crime, convicted by class prejudices
banished to prison, writes coded letters

Cambridge pals in black tie sip cocktails
on the terrace, discuss investments
keep calm and carry on with their privilege

BISHOP'S BEACH

Hundreds of washed-up logs bleached by sun
and salty wind rest on rocks and grey sand.
Breaking waves sigh to shore. Seaweed gathers,
decomposes. Fresh green grass emerges
between rocks. The sun pierces clouds above
the swell and swale of Kachemak Bay.
Sea otters frolic, float on their backs.
Pine trees line the ridges of the Kenai
Mountains. Cloud shadows drift along the beach.
Water turns green west towards Russia.

Piet Nieuwland has poetry appearing in Aotearoa/New Zealand and internationally in numerous print and online journals. He is a performance poet, a visual artist, co-edits the annual Northland anthology *Fast Fibres Poetry*. His new books of poetry *As light into water* and *We enter the* are published by Cyberwit. <https://www.pietnieuwland.com/>



VIOLETS SLOWLY FALLING

In a storm of kisses
a memory of memory
drawn from aquifers of blood
and the hurricane of silence on theoretical numbers of the night

In the hidden geometry of squalls
buried in holocene Aupouri dunes
you are like a conversation of frenzied bee hives on a springtime field
a stream of violets slowly falling from the call of Australorp roosters

You are the flurried feathers of a scatter of gulls
the warm sand on a summer beach
the wings of a white bra falling into the surf
I cling to the smoothness of light that fills your breasts
under the vicious blue sky

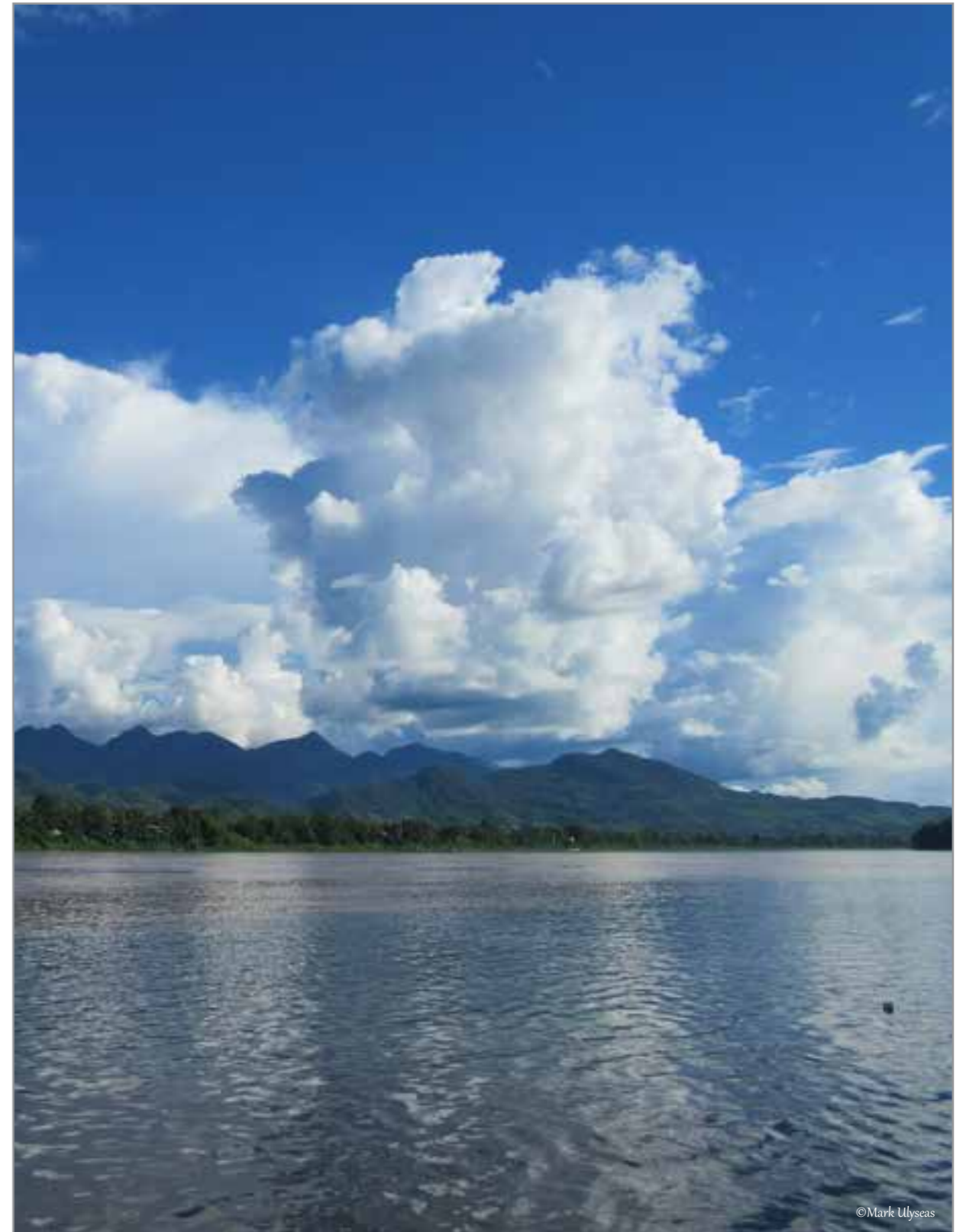
Piet Nieuwland

LIKE WIDE WATER

In the insinuations of limbs and colors of desire, ephemeral blues and braided beauties in the laughing sky, the soft call of spotted doves in the café beside the bluish purple lazy sea, a red and yellow flag

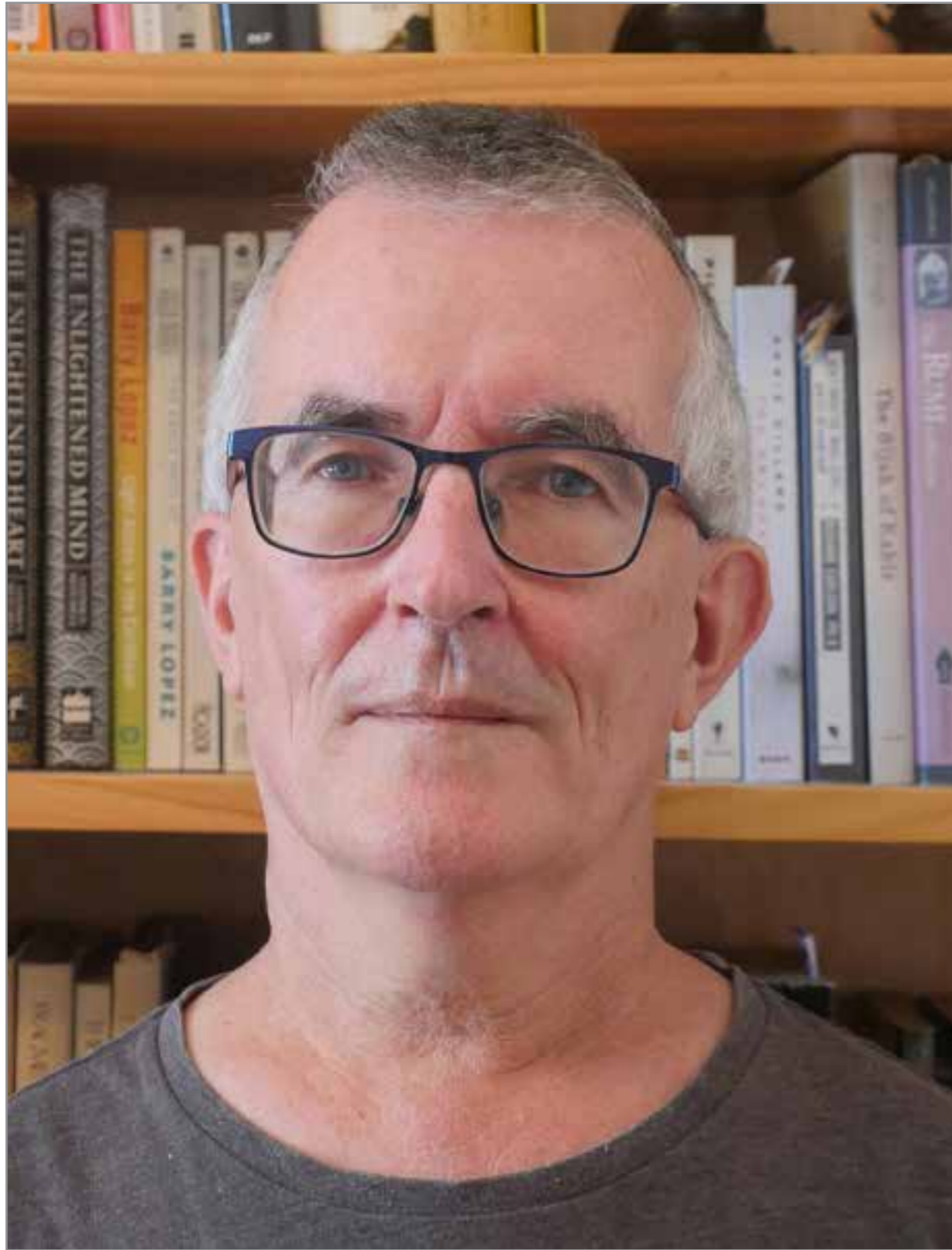
The day like wide water, processions of green fields and nonchalant clouds, dusty emotions on dry gravel roads, the succulent satisfaction of ripening plums, aromas of rapidly rising yeasty dough, eggs laid on the slow dusk of solstice, flies, the overnight sensation of courgettes and beans, the silken weaving of our afternoon siesta

Everything on the same level surface, without hierarchies, all priorities equal, spectra creating the music, light skidding across a crumpled cloth covering the heavy wooden table, the kaleidoscopic eyes of the landscape, the fractals of your mask spill unspoken glances through the summer shimmer, for an instants fraction, an invisible link unites us like the silence of glass, the lick of an ice-cream



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Richard von Sturmer is a New Zealand writer. He was born on Auckland's North Shore in 1957. His recent books are the acclaimed memoir, *This Explains Everything* (Atuanui Press, 2016), *Postcard Stories* (Titus Books, 2019), *Resonating Distances* (Titus Books, 2022) and the recently published *Walking with Rocks, Dreaming with Rivers: My Year in the Waikato* (Titus Books, 2023). He is well-known for writing the lyrics of 'There is No Depression in New Zealand,' which has become the country's alternate national anthem.



MAYU

Mayu imagined us
 seated around a table.
 The table was fragile
 and we were fragile as well.
 It was evening
 and someone lit a candle.
 'Just around the corner,'
 said Mayu,
 'there's a hundred years of wind.
 We may all turn into
 horseshoe crabs.'
 No one disagreed
 with Mayu.
 It was a distinct
 possibility.
 Outside the cabin
 an unmoored dinghy
 rose and fell with the waves.

Richard von Sturmer

THE ETRUSCANS

On the fifth day
they appeared before us
slender as cypresses
each holding a stone.
We would have liked
to study their features
but sleep overcame us.
Our eyelashes were heavy
with olives.
A line of ants
crossed the courtyard.
Someone had just baked
a loaf of bread . . .
And when we looked up
the Etruscans were gone.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Ron Riddell is a New Zealand writer with a deep commitment to ecology, on all possible levels: natural, social-temporal, philosophic and spiritual. Recent books are: *Dance of Blue Dragonflies* (poetry) and *Pachamama & the Jaguar Man* (novel). Previous work has been translated into a dozen languages. Book One of his long poem *The Wanderer* was launched in New Zealand in 2020 by HeadworX Publishers of Wellington. Married to Saray Torres from Colombia, he has two sons Roland and Pablo, and three granddaughters Tuvia, Felicia and Ella, who all live in Sweden. His latest collection of short poems is *Exilstationer/Stations of Exile*, a bi-lingual English-Swedish edition, was published in May 2020 by Simon Editor, Jonkoping, Sweden. Book Two of his long poem *The Wanderer* was published in November 2022. He believes and works in the spirit of the transformative power of poetry and all creative human expression. At present, he divides his time between New Zealand and Colombia. His work has been translated into German, French, Swedish, Japanese, Turkish, Arabic, Hindi, Bengali, Uzbek and Spanish. Recently, his poems have featured in several large international anthologies, in Kenya, Bangladesh and most latterly in the Nepalese world anthology *Madness*, edited by Keshab Sigdel.

SOMETIMES THERE'S A TIMELESSNESS

Sometimes there's a timelessness
about scenes, events, occurrences
including the long gone; the long dead

including the neighbour today
moving the lawn with a t-shirt
that reads *Up the Punk!*

also the lady who later calls
asking me repeatedly
Is that Mose? Is that you Mose?

I almost haven't the heart to say no
or at least, *who knows?*

Also, I keep seeing bright lights
in new slants, places, sills
things I haven't seen before

at least not in the clear light of day

and this is nothing remarkable
nothing life-saving or endorsing
or maybe is; this pause-to-ponder

the moment of wonder when
you notice the generosity of spirit
that pours through all living matter



Ron Riddell. Photo credit: Sergio Rivera.

REMEMBERING BLAIR PEACH

*The New Zealand civil rights activist killed by British Police
in London 1979 during an anti-racist rally*

They're cold grey, these London streets
and cold grey the faces on-the-beat
the faces advancing, in lines advancing
in grey waves of our sealed defeat

at the fall of these cold grey hooves
the shaft and heft of empire's weight
bearing down on us, from iron-grey skies
dominant, indifferent.

What do we know friend, what do we know?
How do we progress from this cold grey world
these bloody fronts by the old grey river
the easy-rolling, sooth-saying Thames?

You, dear brother, are the protector
of voices; of the needy, the lowly
who, without your example are voiceless:
they're cold grey today, the streets of London

yet in your name they're revived
even though they grow dark, dark
with the hues we'll never forget
because they're us and our deliverance

in this way, it's not so cold today
though your bones lie in the cold grey clay
teacher, *matua*, give up your robe
your mantel of care and compassion

in time of need, you offer your cloak
caught between the lines of fire
against the ire, the dictates of fate
the fires of love don't hesitate

to embrace you, welcome you back
to the hearth of *kaha* and *aroha*
together with *mana*, *tupuna*
as kith and kin, as *tangata whenua*.

IF I SAY NOTHING WORTH HEARING

If I say nothing worth hearing
that improves the common lot

if I amount to nothing but
a diminished note, murmur

still I'm content, grateful
for my presence, voice

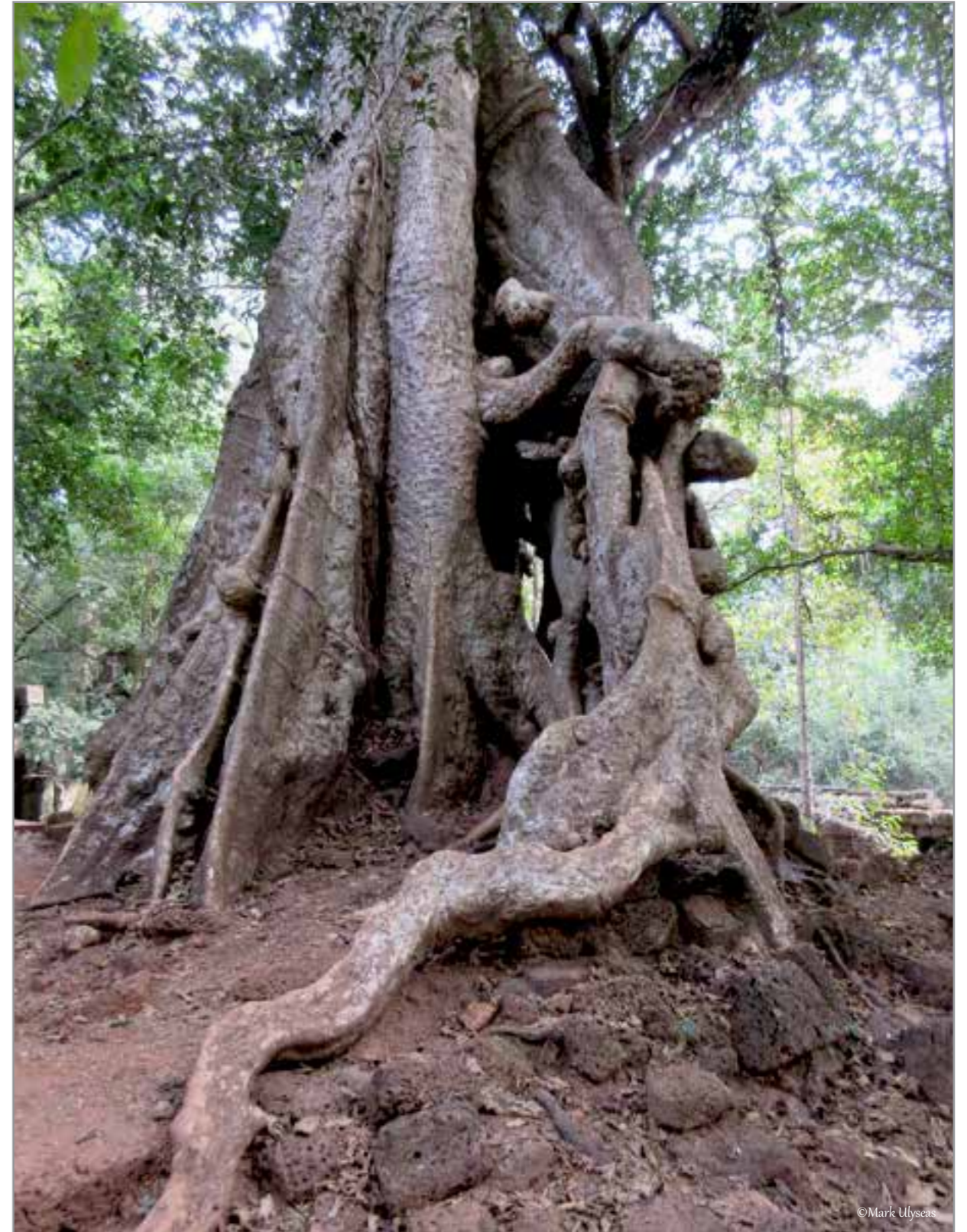
for being a brief witness
to tranquil pastures, shores

waiting, fetching, singing
rounds of rebounding echoes

if nothing but a sounding board
to subtle vibrations

emanating from within
reverberating from without

so it is to live in silent rapture
shape-shifting lullabies of hope



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Sarah Day's books have won the Queensland Premier's and ACT poetry prizes, and been shortlisted for the Prime Minister's, NSW, and Tasmanian Premier's awards. Her story "In the Dark" won the Alan Marshall Prize. She has taught creative writing to year 12 students for twenty years, has collaborated with musicians, and judged national poetry, fiction, and nature-writing competitions. Her ninth collection, *Slack Tide*, was published late last year.



Sarah Day

FINGER

She sat with her face close to the glass, aware but unmindful of the striped light and shadow cast by the avenue of ash and elms upon her. She was conscious of the early spring sunshine only in so far as her legs under her frock were bare to their ankle socks and lace-up shoes and that the fabric of cotton was lighter than wool. There was a cool, draughty freedom about her upper thighs and forearms. The car smelt of leather and petrol plus the acrid memory of chicken manure. She blinked repetitively in the flickering light. They drove past a farmhand on his bicycle, a bundle of wood balanced on his handlebars. Then a horse pulling a cart piled high with hay.

Wur's 'e takin' tha' then? Her father, at the wheel, wondered aloud to himself.

A motorbike could be heard in the distance heading towards them, the grey speck of its rider growing larger, then flashing by in a blur under her nose. To all that passed she was oblivious. A question worried itself at her insides like a rough seam of leather inside her shoe, distracting, abrasive, reddening the smooth white skin beneath her ankle bone until it became sore, then worsening into a nastier wound, bleeding a little and swelling its watery blister beneath the skin.

Why had Anne, her four-year-old sister, remained silent? Why, on the slow three-mile road between Wrightington and Standish, had she not mentioned, signalled, or bawled to anyone else in the car, that her finger was trapped in the heavy door? Not a whisper, even to Mary who was squeezed up to her for the whole journey. A wonder Mary hadn't seen, she would've called out. She would've stopped the car. Anne must have hidden her poor hand.

Another cyclist pedalled by. Now the avenue rose out of the dale and into open farmland with its flat faced, greystone houses.

continued overleaf...

FINGER *contd...*

Miriam, still gazing through the window, raised her shoulders and let them fall. Her thoughts would not let go of that finger. Normally small and brown, it had puffed up and turned greyly purple by the time anyone had paid attention to it. It didn't look like a part of her sister anymore. She could see it now, as her father had opened the door. Before he had seen it:

C'mon Anne, we 'avn't got all day -

The way it had travelled all the way to Standish, trapped, when the rest of the hand had been inside the car, made her feel sad. And anxious too. She drew her shoulders up and down again. Twisted her face from side to side. Would passers-by have noticed what had happened? The opinions of others had become more important over recent months. Miss Phelps, the new housekeeper, talked a lot about the opinions of others. Not long ago Miriam's world had been simpler. There was home: mother, father, sisters, the farm labourers. Then school, with friends, teachers, the lovely of feel of French vocabulary and Latin conjugations in her mouth, always new words to bring home and share, like *algebra* that came from the Arabic *al-jabra*: 'the reunion of broken parts' her teacher had said. Then there were her aunts, uncles, grandparents, and the Rector. Everyone, everything in their place, contained, enclosed. Or so she realised now, looking back, nearly half a year on. It had all been simpler, then.

What did she think about before, walking to school with Frances and Joan? What did she used to talk about?...the black runt in the sheepdog's litter that died in the night; haymaking; toffee-making for bonfire night? She didn't know. They sang or they skipped, they chanted cheeky rhymes about the lover of the king:

*Who's that walking down the street?
Mrs Simpson's sweaty feet.
She's been married twice before,
Now she's knocking on Edward's door.*

They'd laugh aloud, leaning across one-another's path as they sang. Or they'd talk about the French teacher whom they all adored, and imitated in unison with outstretched arms:

Take all ze fleurs from ze walls and put them in ze vases or out in ze garden where zey belong.

They fell about in hilarity as they toiled up Parbold Hill.

Their conversation had been mostly about school. The Art of Speech teacher, palms beneath her large bosom, drilled them each morning to lengthen their Lancashire vowels, entreating them with an expression of disdain, not to speak 'broad'. The girls imitated her too, on their walks to school, holding in their collective breaths from time to time to enunciate, in back-of-the-throat Queen's English:

*A fine large barge is passing slow,
A barge as large drifts on below.
They hardly ripple as they pass -*

she, Miriam, still joined in, going through the motions of mirth as they chorused the long aahs in the final line:

The water smooth and calm as glass.

But inside it wasn't funny anymore.

Six months ago while she walked alongside a farm worker as they followed the tractor with its dibbler, her thoughts might have meandered between the shape of the seed potato they were planting - sometimes spuds looked like faces, sometimes they looked like rude parts - to keeping up with the fellow beside her, or to her Latin verbs which she must learn for homework...to the black pots in the scullery which needed to be washed before tea.

continued overleaf..

FINGER *contd...*

Six months ago, assisting with the Saturday baking, she might have grated farm butter into the flour for pastry in peaceable silence beside her grandmother who was peeling or coring russet apples for filling; or, buying a ha'penny of aniseed balls at Mrs Scanlon's little shop on the main street across from school, observe the accuracy with which the shopkeeper predicted the balance on the scales, scooping the aniseed balls with one action only and getting it right, to a single sweet, every time.

Mrs Scanlon's hands were smooth and pale and small, like a child's, quite unlike the hands of the women in her own family that were rougher and broader from hard work, more like men's. The aniseed balls slid like liquid through the mouth of the triangular tin basin on the balance, into the little brown paper bag. Miriam never tired of the sight nor the lovely knocking sound they made together. Nor the sweet fennel smell that made her mouth water.

Things were different now. The present moment – of walking to school with her friends; or working with a farm hand; or buying sweets – had been put aside somehow. Each moment had become secondary to her preoccupation with what was going on in the minds of whoever she was with.

She stood a little apart from Joan and Frances as they walked to school; she thought they might prefer that. She wondered if they thought her odd now, different from what she had been and certainly a lot different from them now. They never said anything, and they never asked questions. That, in itself, made her more suspicious that they were holding back from her. And they were her best friends. What of all the other girls in her form? It was hard to pay attention to what was going on anymore.

As the skipping rope lifted its swift, rhythmical pothook into the air then slapped loosely and briefly beneath her feet, her attention was far from the rope or the girls who turned it. The voices of all the others waiting in line had once thronged and mingled, lifting her up, up, in a delirious trance of cheer. Nothing else had existed but that double-skip up and the downward beat every second syllable.

*Charlie Chaplin went to France
To teach the ladies how to dance.
First the heel, then the toe,
Then the splits, and around you go!
Salute to the Captain,
Bow to the Queen,
And turn your back on the Nazi submarine!*

Time stood still inside the turning rope and the chanting ring of schoolgirl voices. Now when she skipped, she felt alone. Had the girls in the queue always stood back as if observing her? She thought not. Were the girls at the end of the rope turning the handles more quickly? Her legs didn't seem to lift as high. Her own voice had no load. When she skipped now, she felt that she was in the queue remarking, like the other girls, on her own strangeness. She no longer felt the static calm inside the turning rope.

Even the farm hands whom she'd always liked, Tom with his schoolboy face and forever teasing, and Dan, whose wrists always looked cold, sticking out too far from his jacket, even Tom and Dan, kind and helpful and friendly now looked at her differently, sizing her up as if they felt sorry for her. That was awful, too horrible to think of. She didn't want anyone to pity her.

She turned her head away from the window and stole a glance across her other two sisters, at Anne's left hand in its white bandage. It rested, palm up, inside her right hand. Anne was not tall enough yet to see through the window. She looked quietly down towards her feet. She was wearing new shoes. They had a strap and a button to fasten them. They were brown. She wasn't used to wearing new shoes, mostly she inherited her sisters' hand-me-downs. Miriam hoped she was thinking how nice they looked with their little blue buttons. She hoped she wasn't thinking about what Doctor Kirkby had said, about the possibility of losing her little finger. She had to blink back tears at the thought of Anne's small hand missing a finger. It was even worse if she thought of the lost finger, all on its own. Forever.

continued overleaf..

FINGER *contd...*

She'd better stop. Anne wasn't crying, why should she herself? She was eleven, Anne was nearly four. The three sisters sat upright in a row in the back seat of the car. She looked at Mary's solemn face, smiled at her, then called softly:

Anne.

Her little sister looked up. She was oddly calm; pale though.

Annie, you can sleep in my bed tonight.

Anne smiled, pleased, then turned back in the direction of her shoes.

It was a miracle that she was so calm, that she could smile. A nip in the scissor hinge or in any of the outdoor machinery could hurt for an age. Even with the aspirin powder she had been given Miriam knew that Anne's hand would be hurting more than anything she herself had ever felt. Why on earth had she kept quiet? The question gnawed at her. Her stomach ached with it. What would her mother do?

She straightened her shoulders again suddenly and looked at her father as if he might have heard this question. She looked at her sisters. Had they? Now her stomach felt sick as well as sore. The headmistress at school occasionally said that she could see children's thoughts on their faces. The time last year, when Dora Kiek's lunch had gone missing, and no-one would confess. It had been terrible, sitting in their wooden forms, instructed to look up into the headmistress's eyes as she walked slowly round the class. Miriam felt sure that she'd looked guilty though she'd never stolen a thing and never would. What if her father had seen that thought now? If he'd been looking into the rear-vision mirror at just that moment?

The day he came home, after he'd driven their mother away to the hospital, he'd called his daughters to him. He'd spoken in an unfamiliar voice, angry, she'd thought. He'd said that they must never mention her again, not to him, not to each other. That they must forget her. That they'd be better off without her. She'd be all right where she was now, he'd said. She'd be better off too with nurses to look after her.

They'd all be better off, he'd said again. Always lying in bed like she did. Hardly talking. If he heard them mention their mother, it would upset him. He'd have to punish them. They were not to talk about her. They were not to think about her anymore. She had brought shame on them all. The sooner they forgot her, the better. Never ever mention the word 'Mother' again, he'd said. On that first night, he'd shed a tear, again, for his own mother who'd died when he was only hours old. They'd heard the story many times, before and since. Tough as he was, he always got a moist eye when he mentioned his mother.

They were nearing home now. The ashes and elms had given way to hawthorn hedges. The farm hands were bringing the cows in to the parlour for milking. The sheepdog, Jock, had run down to the gate to meet them and was barking as he spun in a whirl. She had put the lamb on the range before they left and built up the fire. The rice pudding was in the slow side cooker, she'd save the skin for Anne. The potatoes were peeled. She had only to wash and peel the carrots and cut the cabbage. Tea would be ready in less than half an hour. There'd be time for her Latin homework later if her father didn't find her another job outside. Latin. Algebra. French. Physics. English. It made her feel better just saying those words.

Siobhan Harvey is the author of eight books, including the poetry and creative nonfiction collection, *Ghosts* (Otago University Press, 2021) which was long-listed for the 2022 Mary & Peter Biggs Poetry Award (2022 NZ Book Awards). She was awarded the 2021 Janet Frame Literary Trust Award for Poetry, 2020 New Zealand Society of Authors Peter & Dianne Beatson Fellowship, 2019 Kathleen Grattan Prize for a Sequence of Poems, 2019 Robert Burns Poetry Prize and 2013 Kathleen Grattan Award. Recently her work has been published in journals and anthologies such as, *Acumen* (UK), *Asia Literary Review* (HK), *Best New Zealand Poems 2022* (NZ), *Feminine Divine: Voices of Power & Invisibility* (Cyren US, 2019), *Griffith Review* (Aus), *Mslexia* (UK), *Out Here: An Anthology of Takatāpui and LGBTQIA+ Writers from Aotearoa* (AUP, 2021), *Stand* (UK) and *Tarot* (NZ).



CLEOPATRA

The real me doesn't exist
in history, that reinvention of
the past – lost world - men
compose as they reflect
where they came from,
where they went wrong. I
am not their binary: passive-
aggressive; other-mother;
temptress- whore. No,

like few women before
or after, I commanded
everything, everywhere:
land, water, fire, air, sky,
faith, belief; love; birth,
and death. Reborn, I
in the image of Caesar
and Antony, as lover,
mother, consort, queen,
philanthropist, muse.
My descendants ruled
the world. Still erased,

I want to say I lived
on my own terms,
not those mediated
by any man. Silence
my voice by all means,
but know my legacy
has been poisoned
by my enemies'
snakish tongues.

Siobhan Harvey

SARAH TIFFEN

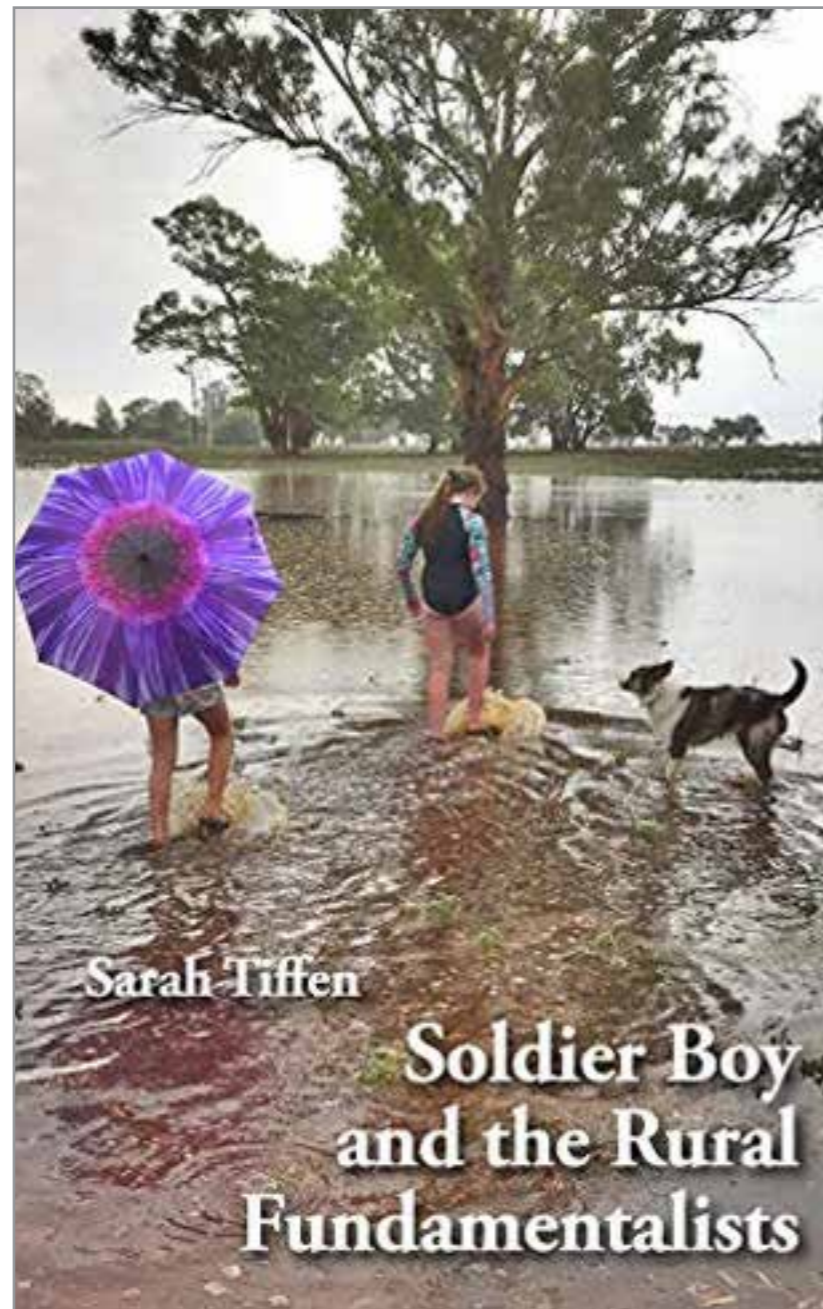


Sarah Tiffen, author of six volumes of poetry celebrating a rural Australian sensibility and a Riverina aesthetic - deeply tied to the place where she was born, where she lives and works and where all her ancestors lie buried. Recognised by Les Murray, Donald Hall, shortlisted for the ACU Poetry Prize several times, and founder of Riverina Writing House – an independent publishing house and centre for writers and writing - Sarah's work echoes Dylan Thomas and Seamus Heaney and Murray, evocative, spiritual, raw - she also is a mother and teacher.

LES WICKS



Les Wicks Over 45 years Wicks has performed widely across the globe. Published in over 400 different magazines, anthologies & newspapers across 36 countries in 15 languages. Conducts workshops & runs Meuse Press which focuses on poetry outreach projects like poetry on buses & poetry published on the surface of a river. His 15th book of poetry is *Time Taken – New & Selected* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2022). <https://leswicks.tripod.com/lw.htm>



Available at: <https://www.ginninderrapress.com.au/>

LES WICKS Review of SARAH TIFFEN'S *Soldier boy and the Rural Fundamentalists* Gininderra, 2017

Last year I was grateful for the opportunity to tour large parts of rural Australia with my new book. I found myself constantly amazed & humbled by the diversity & strength of the women writers I worked with there alongside the sacrifice & good graces of those who organise writers groups in their community.

Sarah Tiffen is one of those who works tirelessly for development/exposure of local writers while cementing literature as a cornerstone of their region's cultural life. She is a contemporary poet from the Riverina. Her works have gained attention in the literary world. as she shares her experiences and observations of life, including themes such as love, loss, farming & the environment.

One of the most notable aspects of Tiffen's poetry is her use of imagery. She has a skill for creating vivid pictures in the reader's mind through her words. Her poems are filled with detailed descriptions of the world around her, from the colours and textures of the landscape to the intricate emotions of the human heart.

Another strength of Tiffen's poetry is her ability to capture complex emotions in a simple, straightforward language. She has a talent for distilling complex feelings and experiences into relatable, accessible language that resonates with readers.

Her works have been praised for their emotional depth, rare but rich imagery alongside accessibility. There are several pieces addressing the clarion call of the "rural fundamentalist". This is a somewhat problematic phrase for me with associations of hillbillies or WACO. But the reader is quickly directed to its meaning here as that which is fundamental to the lives of regional Australians.

An array of perspectives & imperatives is celebrated herein.

Our hearts move in miles and acres, furlongs and inches
The Rural Fundamentalists

apricots the taste of sex and dust, rich gold and dusty
The Rural Fundamentalists III

digging, tying knots and cutting things, branches and wire
The Rural Fundamentalists IV

Alongside this, of course, is the cost

our God is a benevolent God, demanding work
not blood, though sometimes blood is taken
The Rural Fundamentalists

A key portion of the book is the very long poem dedicated to the passing of Les Murray. Travelling to smaller centres, repeatedly I have encountered women who Murray had encouraged and mentored. This real selflessness highlights the depth of this hugely popular poet. Tiffen was obviously one of those women and the sorrow at his passing is on display here

where do I put my grief on this wintery afternoon
On the Funeral of the Poet Laureate, the Bard of Bunyah

Surely you are there at the altar smiling, thinking
ibid

Oh contrarian, Oh posturer for the redneck humble folk...
ibid

As we travel through the rest of the book the complexities and joys of a relationship are vividly portrayed

I will pull you slowly shoreward
with a rope of silk and tears

Whither You Go, so I

So too we share Tiffen's spiritual explorations ranging from work that has an almost biblical tone to a broad-based numinous gaze (but one which is framed so openly as acknowledgement of the first custodians of the land & how we tread upon it).

Steeped deeply in the Deep Ways of Country,
we are not native, but know no other life
The Rural Fundamentalists

For me, these reflections build purposefully towards what I regard as the second key dimension of this book... the infinity dialogue poems. These pieces concern an interchange between two lovers on the nature of life, meaning & the universe. They come to life brilliantly as both conversational and profound

given infinity,
anything that can happen must happen
an endless number of times
The Infinity Dialogues II

I thought to lay down with you
to soothe the storms,
but could not, so
a late-night lie
seemed the smallest concession to make
in the face of the great and sacred whole.
And you called me cunt — and I let you
because... because it was complex,

The Infinity Dialogues

Getting poetry out there is always hard. You can multiply that by a factor of three for those not based in a capital city with its attendant networks. Tiffen's book deserves to be read.

2010 - 2023



14
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