

2010 - 2023



# Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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VOLUME FOUR NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2023



CAROLYNE WRIGHT  
*The Map-Maker's Colors*



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas  
Publisher/Editor

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VOLUME FOUR  
NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2023

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Carolyne Wright's most recent books are *Masquerade*, a memoir in poetry (Lost Horse Press, 2021), and *This Dream the World: New & Selected Poems* (Lost Horse, 2017), whose title poem received a Pushcart Prize and appeared in *The Best American Poetry*. She has nine earlier books and chapbooks of poetry; a ground-breaking anthology, *Raising Lilly Ledbetter: Women Poets Occupy the Workspace* (Lost Horse, 2015), which received ten Pushcart Prize nominations; and five award-winning volumes of poetry in translation from Bengali and Spanish—including *Map Traces, Blood Traces / Trazas de mapa, trazas de sangre* (Mayapple Press, 2017) by Seattle-based Chilean poet, Eugenia Toledo (Finalist, 2018 Washington State Book Award in Poetry, 2018 PEN Los Angeles Award in Translation). A Contributing Editor for the Pushcart Prizes, Carolyne lived in Chile and traveled in Brazil on a Fulbright Grant; on her return, she studied with Elizabeth Bishop at the University of Washington. Carolyne returned to Brazil in 2018 for an Instituto Sacatar artist's residency in Bahia. A Seattle native who teaches for Richard Hugo House, she has received grants from the NEA, 4Culture, and the Radcliffe Institute, among others. A Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award to Brazil took her back to Salvador, Bahia, in mid-2022; with another two months in 2024.

## CAROLYNE WRIGHT THE MAP-MAKER'S COLORS - STUDIES WITH ELIZABETH BISHOP

In her poem "Arrival at Santos," Elizabeth Bishop chides herself for "immodest demands for a different world / and a better life, and complete comprehension / of both at last." She was a poet whose travels and powers of observation and description allowed her to enter into landscapes, cultures, and the human heart, from the perspective of the perpetual traveler, even in her own country. Miss Bishop wrote these lines in January 1952, as she disembarked in this gritty South-eastern Brazilian port city—not for a grand tour or brief tropical getaway, but for what would turn out to be fifteen years of nearly full-time habitation in the interior of Brazil, at Samambaia, the working agricultural estate of Maria Carlota Costellat Macedo de Soares—Lota, the woman who was Bishop's lover and companion until Lota's death in 1967.

Brazil—an unlikely country, I used to think, for a poet like Miss Bishop: native of Worcester, Massachusetts, who spent some years of her childhood with relatives in blustery coastal Nova Scotia, and who was closely identified for much of her adult life with bluestocking Boston, in large part through her long friendship with Boston Brahmin poet Robert Lowell ("Cal"), one of her greatest advocates and supporters. When I was a student of Miss Bishop's at the University of Washington in the spring quarter of 1973, she seemed the furthest thing from a long-time denizen of Brazil. Short, plump, encased in tailored suits with matching silk scarves in muted pastels, with Minnie Mouse-style pumps and perfectly coifed hair, Miss Bishop exuded nothing of Brazil's tropical heat and humidity, none of its cultural mix of Portuguese Catholicism and Afro-Brazilian *candomblé*—transported across the Atlantic in the slavers' *negreiros* and recollected / reassembled in the fields and *senzalas* of Brazil by the enslaved and their descendants. Miss Bishop embodied none of the *alegria*—or the depths of *saudade*--that had so profoundly impressed me during my first encounter with Brazil, in the city of Salvador da Bahia.



Carolyne Wright. Photo credit: Scott Martin for Raven Chronicles Press.

That first encounter with Brazil was a physically and emotionally intensive six weeks of pilgrimage in early 1972, half-way through my Fulbright year in Chile, when I traveled by train and bus across the continent from Santiago to Bahia. I aimed to experience the legendary *Carnaval do povo*, the People's Carnival, on its own terms, as authentically as I could: dancing a *cachaça*-infused samba in the streets of São Salvador da Bahia; and after Carnival ended, hitchhiking in a long-haul lorry with young Brazilian and European backpackers from Bahia to Ouro Preto in Minas Gerais; staying with rural families in the interior and with journalists from one of the country's leading newspapers in the Rio de Janeiro neighborhood of Santa Teresa; hanging out with Brazilian students at concerts by Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil and Gal Costa—the reigning deities in the pantheon of MPB (*Música Popular Brasileira*)—and dreaming through lyrics of their songs printed on flyers included with record albums. These lyrics were my first introduction to Brazilian poetry.

By virtue of having acquired near-bilingual fluency in Spanish in Chile, I was also able to read magazines like *Manchete* and *Veja*—the *Look* and *Life* magazines of Brazil, whose up-beat, breezy articles studded with colloquialisms were my first exposure to Portuguese prose. I could figure out, or *educatedly guess*, the Portuguese equivalents for verbs, vocabulary and the like, and talk to people in a mix of Chilean Spanish and improvised Portuguese—and thereby absorb and respond, to some extent, to the cultural atmosphere and expressive nature of the language. Whatever shyness that still clung to me from childhood had to vanish in this intensely social, group-minded society, where the most commonly used term for “we” is “*a gente*”: the people.

At the same time I was carrying on this intellectual/linguistic challenge to learn the language and enter into the culture, I was throwing myself into a wild dance of emotional and never-quite romantic explorations during Carnival, with lean, shaggy-haired young men who embodied for me all the energy and excitement of Brazil and especially Bahia. How to speak to them, and understand what they said to me, as if I were a *menina brasileira*? Nothing like Miss Bishop's carefully circumscribed, decorously leveraged and openly closeted relationship with a woman of Brazil's landed upper class. I was going to be as bold and outgoing as a young woman with language and people skills and a survival instinct could be. Carnival in Bahia was an ecstatic, dark adventure—days of dancing in warm autumnal rain, torch-lit nights filled with the Afro-Brazilian ancestral spirits, the *Orixás*, who presided over the drumming, the floats of musicians and dancers, the samba schools: *a gente* seeking release in the all-day, all-night week of street celebrations.

I did not know Elizabeth Bishop's poetry until after I returned to the U.S. and entered graduate school, where I soon found myself reading the first edition of her *Collected Poems*, a gift from my mother, who guessed rightly that this work would appeal to me. By then, Bishop's work was highly regarded and beginning to have a pervasive influence on the first of several succeeding generations of American poets. Bishop was also a beloved and highly individual teacher of poetry, whose visiting positions in American universities in the last dozen years of her life put her in contact with young poets across the country—many of whom became significant voices themselves. Although I was too young and unformed to benefit much during that short spring quarter from her pedagogy, over the long term, the experience of studying with her—as well as her poetry, her presence, and her interaction with me as a neophyte poet—have continued to influence my own teaching and poetic development. To paraphrase the subtitle for Brett C. Millier's insightful critical biography (*Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It*), the life in that classroom had a different significance than the memory of it in terms of its ongoing resonance in my life as a poet. The classroom for me as that student poet extended to encompass a country, Brazil, with a shared affection and fascination, though the experiences of older and younger poet were wildly different.

The impetus for this essay grew out of a conversation several years ago with a graduate student of mine at Oklahoma State University, Michelle Brown, who was writing a seminar paper on Bishop's winning the Neustadt Prize from the University of Oklahoma's *World Literature Today*. I told Michelle a little about my experience of studying with Bishop at the University of Washington, when Bishop was the Theodore Roethke Visiting Poet in that spring quarter of 1973. Bishop was the *only* poet in my graduate school career, I added, who had given any structured assignments. She made us write in form, she was the only poetry teacher who compelled her students to learn about prosody and craft. Maybe it was ironic that she was the most exacting instructor, because she wasn't a tenured academic, and because, by her own admission, she didn't even like teaching.

Michelle asked me if I had written about this experience; I replied that I had some anecdotes, but had not yet put anything in written form. Soon thereafter a poem began to percolate, and by late fall of that year I had finished “Studies with Miss Bishop,” a double abecedarian in slant-rhymed couplets, whose lapidary pace of composition, allusions historical and personal, and formal properties meant to pay homage to Bishop's work—though she herself never wrote a poem in such a quasi-nonce form.

When I met Elizabeth Bishop on the first day of that workshop at the University of Washington, I was a graduate student not in English or Creative Writing, but in Romance Languages and Literature (now called Spanish and Portuguese). This departmental affiliation was to fulfill a commitment to the professor who chaired that department and who had written the language recommendation for me for the year I had just spent in Chile on a Fulbright-Hayes Study Grant during the presidency of Salvador Allende. The Chilean national political experiment and cultural renaissance that I witnessed and lived during that year would change my life and set the compass for much of the trajectory of my writing.

I also traveled extensively throughout South America during that year, including those six weeks in Brazil—Rio de Janeiro; São Salvador da Bahia for Carnaval; and the inland state of Minas Gerais, where I hitched rides on huge transport trucks to the villages of Mutum and the town of Ouro Preto. In Ouro Preto I spent a week in a hostel for students of the School of Mines—a hostel which stood only a few blocks distant, it turned out, from Bishop's house there. On that trip, I had fallen in love with Brazil: the humor and vibrancy of the people, the energy and beauty of the culture, the expressiveness of the language. Thereafter, whenever I talked about Brazil, or spoke in Portuguese, I found myself caught up in a transforming joy that didn't manifest when I spoke the Chilean-accented Spanish in which I had become fluent during my Fulbright year.

Although I was now taking graduate courses in Latin American Literature and teaching introductory Spanish as a teaching assistant, I found myself drawn toward poetry workshops offered by the English Department, and when I learned that Elizabeth Bishop would be teaching that spring quarter, I made it my business to be in her workshop. From my copy of her *Collected Poems*, I was aware that Bishop had spent time in Brazil; but I thought of her more as a New Englander. She turned out to be a wry but formidable presence in the classroom: her first words to us were, "Well, I don't like teaching, but the trust fund ran out, so my friend Robert—do you know Robert Lowell?—he said that I would simply have to teach." All of us wannabe poets were blown away by this frank announcement.

We were duly impressed whenever she mentioned renowned poet friends—Miss Moore, Mr. Jarrell, and especially *Robert* (just his first name, which she pronounced with a reserved but humorous affection). Once she called him *Cal*—"I mean, Robert Lowell," she added, probably realizing from our puzzled looks that we unsophisticated Westerners hadn't heard the nickname by which Lowell was known in East Coast literary circles. Clearly, Miss Bishop belonged to that exalted class of society, the Boston

Brahmins, in which "the Cabots speak only to the Lodges, and the Lodges speak only to God," as the quasi-apocryphal saying goes. But since the trust fund had run out, there was nothing else to be done—in her class we would write in form, at least learn the basics of prosody and poetic craft.

As a teacher, Miss Bishop was exacting, but not at all harsh or overbearing. The workshop was structured on a series of exercises—we were to produce sonnets, villanelles, quatrains, *ottava rima*, even a literary ballad, one of Miss Bishop's favorite forms. Whatever I wrote then has not survived the succession of packing boxes for all the moves of my graduate school days and thereafter. No finished work came out of this workshop: I was too much a beginner to benefit at the time from the rigor of formal exercises. I do recall one particularly lamentable set of ballad stanzas, something about the suffering of an Indian guru jailed in Patna for political activism—those pages are long gone. In much-revised form, a sonnet or two that I drafted for this workshop subsequently became part of a series included in my Master's thesis in Creative Writing at Syracuse University. My first attempt to write a sestina, that most Bishop-esque of received forms, was left unfinished from that spring workshop, but I brought it to an initial completed stage a year or so later at Syracuse. Without the plethora of creative writing textbooks that proliferate today, I created a template to follow by copying out and following the end-word pattern from Bishop's "A Miracle for Breakfast." This effort eventually resulted in my first completed sestina, "Another Look at 'Albion on the Rock': Plate 38 of Blake's *Milton*."

In this workshop, Miss Bishop—we never called her Ms. Bishop, Elizabeth, or, God forbid! *Liz*—seemed to us neophytes to be a Poetic Eminence descended from the dizzying heights of Parnassus. None of us realized how introverted she was, how she masked her shyness with an ironic reserve and a dry wit that could seem grumpy or crusty. During one workshop meeting, though, I happened to mention something about Brazil, and Miss Bishop's face immediately brightened. "Do you know Brazil?" she asked me.

After class, she invited me to her office for a chat. "Tell me about your time there," she smiled. "Where did you go? What did you see? Whom did you meet?"

I was honored and terrified to be singled out like this, and I strove to sit up straight in the plastic-molded chair, across from this Great Poet at her desk in the stark fluorescent gloom of her office, with its bookshelves, visiting professor-style, nearly bare. Though I was feeling shy myself, we talked about Ouro Preto, Diamantina, and Rio de Janeiro—cities I had visited that were so familiar to her. She watched as I grew animated, and nodded with little *Ah-hah*'s of recognition while I gestured and laughed, as I always did when talking about Brazil. As I described the university student hostel, "Jardim de Allah," where I had stayed in Ouro Preto with engineering students from the School of Mines, she interrupted me to exclaim, "Oh, but my house is only a few streets away! *Was* only a few streets away," she corrected herself. "Ah, my house." She sighed and said that leaving Brazil had been difficult, very difficult.

I had no idea, of course, how much lay behind the apparent simplicity of that statement. The resonance of loss and self-questioning softened her voice, though, and whenever I question my own travels, I think of this encounter with Miss Bishop and of some of the parallels in our lives as poets and citizens of the world.

I was too diffident—too immature, really—to build upon this special attention and follow up with more conversations about Brazil or any other topic with the Great Poet. Had the difference in our ages not been so great; had I not been suffering from unrecognized long-term weariness from so much travel and other dislocations during and after the Fulbright year; had I been less absorbed in my own concerns of the time—should I remain at the University of Washington, where the Masters career track would lead to high-school language teaching, or via an academic Ph.D. to a professorship in Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Literature; or should I accept the other offer of a fellowship in Creative Writing at Syracuse University, a fellowship I had postponed for a year in order to enter the Spanish program at the University of Washington?—I might have been more sensitive to Miss Bishop's own human needs.

Perhaps she was seeking to learn more of our common cultural interests, to open the door to further conversations. But I will never know. Reading Brett C. Millier's book so many years later, I realize—in the one page that this biography devotes to that spring quarter 1973 in Seattle—that Miss Bishop was lonely, ill and out of sorts, and couldn't wait to leave. In letters she wrote during that time, Millier quotes her exclaiming, "Only four weeks to go—WHEEE!"

Had I known that she was a person who exclaimed "WHEE!!" in letters, I might have been less in awe of her and more capable of recognizing a fellow human being with whom I could share a streak of giddiness. But the gulf of age and stage of life was too great, and Miss Bishop, from my perspective, was too formidably renowned, too much a Big Name. Yet she was also awkward in groups of people, and perhaps a bit scared of her workshop students. Not good at putting people at ease, nevertheless she had tried in her own way—I recognized decades too late—to make a human connection, talking about Brazil in her office with me.

Miss Bishop also missed several classes due to illness—in that era before e-mail list-serves, Facebook messaging and WhatsApp, we students would arrive to find the cancellation notice posted on the classroom door. And we were further disappointed, on the May evening of the Theodore Roethke Memorial Reading—delivered during those years by the poet who held the Roethke visiting chair in the spring term—to discover that Miss Bishop was once again ill. I never heard her give a public reading of her work: University of Washington faculty poet David Wagoner gave the Roethke reading in her stead that night. By the time Bishop returned to Seattle the following spring to give the 1974 Roethke reading and thus fulfil the terms of her contract with the University of Washington, I was at Syracuse University.

Miss Bishop was not entirely elusive—I did occasionally run into her in the University District: she had to walk to and from her apartment several blocks from campus for class and for shopping in University Avenue stores. We would chat briefly, and she was always affable and relaxed in this impromptu situation, much more so than in the comparatively formal ambience of the classroom. I don't think she socialized outside of class with students, as she apparently had during other teaching visits, including her previous residency at the University of Washington in the winter and spring quarters of 1966. Only much later did our group of students understand how ill she was during the spring of 1973, how much effort she had to exert to fulfill her teaching duties, and how her reclusiveness was not just a habit of being, but also a self-protective measure to guard her relatively fragile health.

Miss Bishop remained a mysterious but revered figure, a great poet of almost legendary stature in her lifetime, particularly from my viewpoint as a naive young poet from Seattle, an outsider from a region still at the edge of the U.S. literary map. But the workshop with her was the impetus that prompted me to go on leave from the Romance Languages program at the University of Washington, reactivate the earlier fellowship offer from Syracuse, and pursue what I came to understand was my true goal at that stage—a Master's degree and ultimately a doctorate in English and Creative Writing.

Working with Bishop and applying what I learned from her over the course of an ongoing literary life have encouraged me in the simultaneous centrifugal and centripetal impulses of this career: to incorporate a life of crossing cultural borders with a dedication to the craft of poetry and writing. Above all, Miss Bishop's example of living so many years on another continent, in another language and culture, have been an inspiration for deeper and more resonant discoveries—not just in the realm of art, but at a fully human level, among people as they live in their own countries and cultures.

This brief recollection can only begin to map the contours of one international writer's life. In "Questions of Travel," Miss Bishop asks, "Is it lack of imagination that makes us come / to imagined places, not just stay at home?" My answer is to suspend any definitive *Yes* or *No*: the active imagination should have the ability to enter with empathy into the reality of others' lives, *on their own terms*, even if the traveler's presence in those lives alters those terms and conditions, however subtly. Such an imagination can be immeasurably enriched by its experiences abroad—and likewise, we hope, enrich the lives of others whom it touches. Truly, Live Encounters with others, on their own terms.

Miss Bishop asks, finally, "Should we have stayed at home, / wherever that may be?" My answer here is emphatically *No*—we must travel, whether at home or abroad. Wherever that home may have been, for the traveler transformed by her experiences, home is now the entire world.



Available at: <https://losthorsepress.org/>



Alison Gorman is a poet, teacher, and former speech pathologist who lives in Sydney. Her poetry has appeared in *Meanjin*, *Cordite*, *Southerly*, *Mslexia*, *The Honest Ulsterman* and *Popshot Quarterly*. She was awarded the Dorothy Porter Poetry Prize in 2016 and a Varuna Residential Fellowship in 2023. Her work was shortlisted in both the Fool for Poetry International Chapbook Competition, the Mslexia Poetry Competition in 2022 and she currently has four poems shortlisted in the Bridport prize. She has an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Sydney. When Alison is not writing poetry, she teaches creative writing to children at Inklings Writing Studio which she founded in 2018.



## ON SANTA TRINITA BRIDGE

*after Beatrice and Dante, by Henry Holiday (1883)*

Beatrice sees him first, waiting at the corner, dressed in his finest burgundy bag hat. He feigns a cavalier air—one hand resting on the stone wall of the bridge, the other plumping the velvet green

fall of his robe. All along Via Lungarno, shopkeepers untie shutters and sweep clean their doorways under a cloud-churned sky. The women promenade and pigeons gather, strutting and fanning

their tails, cooing as they search bricks for crumbs. She walks toward him like a primavera bride, clasping a single bloom to her breast. A rose, picked by her friend Monna who flounces

her russet gown and leans in close to whisper. Beatrice's maid, strides behind muttering, ready to shield her mistress from his brazen stare. Rumours run more swiftly than the Arno, where upstream

on the Ponte Vecchio, butchers hurl pig scraps into the turbid water. Beatrice looks beyond him, to the market where a woman sits weaving thread into cloth. She slides the shuttle between the weft,

then plucks the loom like a harp. Somewhere, a church bell rings and piffero horns begin to play. Rumours shared of smokescreen women, quixotic diversions to conceal his brightest love.

And still, he writes poems to them,  
as if they are his sweetings. *O fie upon him!*  
How can he fancy she will catch his gaze?

Alison Gorman

## VIVA LA VIDA

*Frida Kahlo writes to Diego Rivera.  
July, 5th, 1954*

Soon, I will leave you Diego.  
Death will unpin me from this bed

to float with Noguchi's butterflies  
into our blue walled garden. I will rest

upon the pyramid among the pots  
and cacti, drink nectar from the orange

dahlia that grows between your idols.  
I will watch over Casa Azul, and you,

mi amor. But first, I must finish this painting.  
It is the sweet, pink flesh of watermelon.

I love the way it hides beneath dark,  
green skin. Tell me, what shall I call it?

Let it come to me, in my final brush  
strokes and I shall write it on this slice.

I want to paint in the garden today,  
with the spider monkeys eating fruit

from my hand. I want Bonito to perform  
his best parrot tricks for a pat of butter.

Mother said that you and I were a marriage  
between an elephant and a dove. But you,

are a toad Diego—the greatest accident  
of my life. Not even my sister was safe

in your slippery hands. Bastardo!  
I took lovers as balm, but the truth is

I love you more than my own skin.  
Promise me that you will burn my body

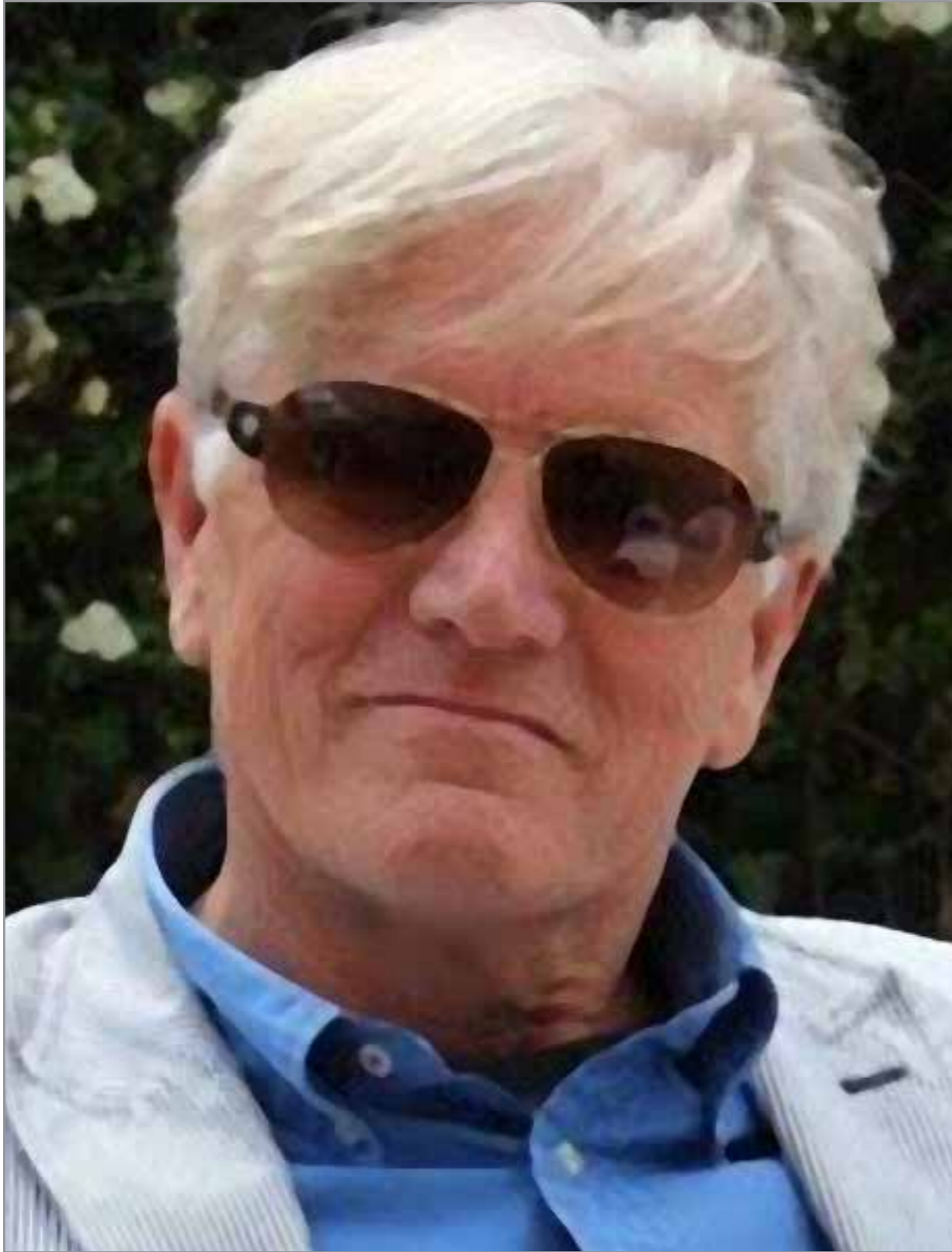
when I have gone. Ask the women to dress  
me in my white huipil, to braid my hair

with flowers and to put on my rings.  
Play music and drink tequila. Ask Chavela

to sing Paloma Negra to me. Set fire  
to my bed and watch my body burn.

Until then, I will keep painting  
these words onto watermelon.

Allan Lake, originally from Saskatoon, Canada, has lived in Vancouver, Cape Breton, Ibiza, Tasmania, W. Australia and Melbourne. Lake has won Lost Tower Publications (UK) Comp, Melbourne Spoken Word Poetry Festival & publication in New Philosopher. Latest poetry chapbook (Ginninderra Press) 'My Photos of Sicily'. Literary journals in 17 countries have now published his poems.

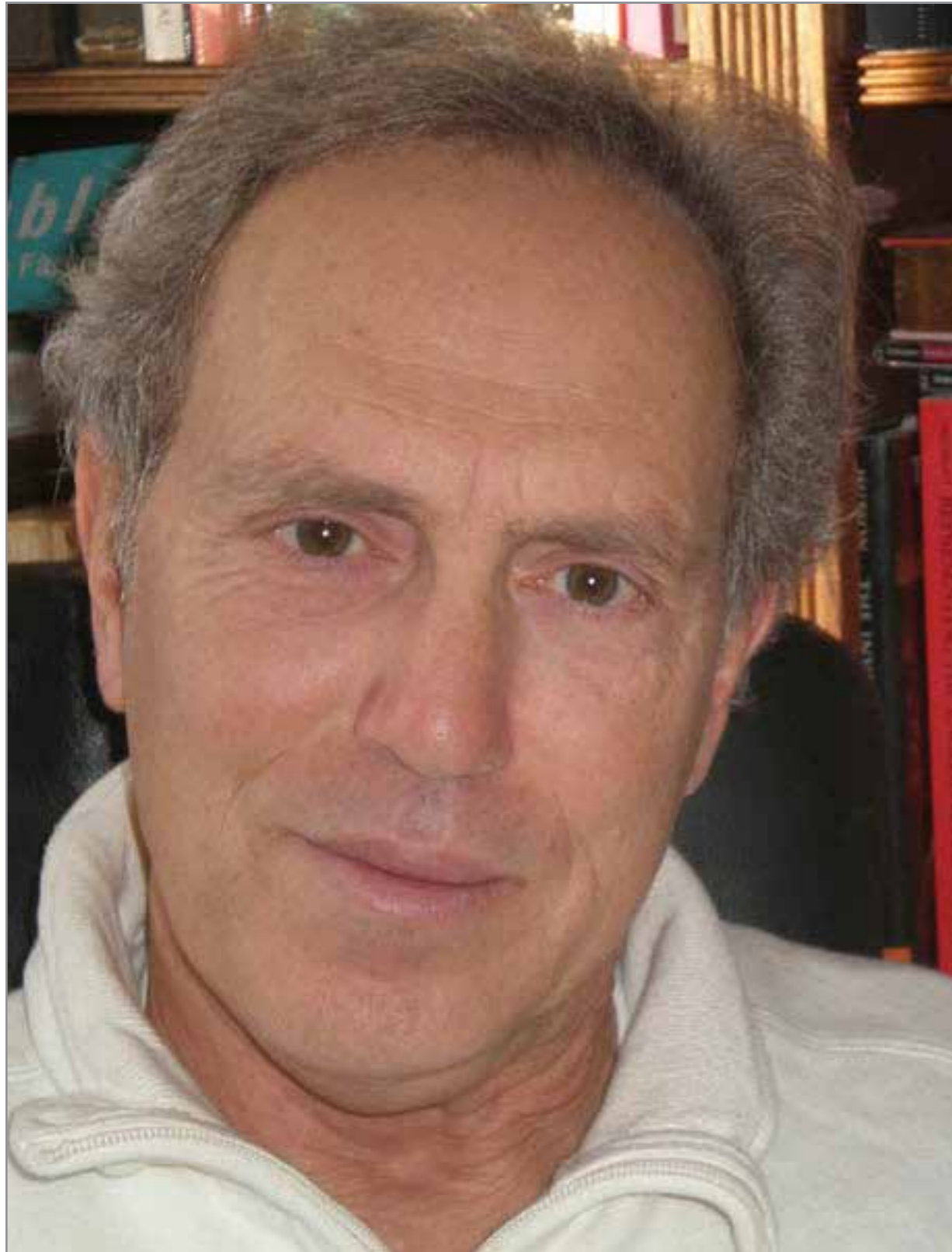


### (NOT SO) SWEET BAR

*It appears* I have achieved invisibility.  
I shift tables, look expectant, try  
to catch someone's eye, raise brows  
then move whole head to one side  
like a curious or hungry parrot.  
Prancing waiter lavishes attention  
and kisses – this is Sicily –  
on anyone else but cannot see me,  
obvious tourist me with sun hat,  
lime green thongs and beach bag.  
I need my morning espresso plus  
pastry and there are other cafes  
in every direction. Just the name  
of this cafe and its purple plastic  
seats should have put me off but,  
against instinct, I wandered in,  
sat, waited way too long then,  
shunned and stunned, wandered –  
I am not a ghost – invisibly back  
out in a blaze of indignation  
that absolutely nobody noticed.  
Episode ironically filed under:  
*Things That Left A Sour Taste*

Allan Lake

Anthony DiMatteo's third poetry collection *Secret Offices* is just out. Why secret? One can't take credit for an office dedicated to the pursuit of beauty and fairness as a poet must be. No one knows what one is doing in such a search, a prerequisite for it. His previous collection *In Defense of Puppets* explored the way we imagine things when we speak for others or they for us. A recent chapbook *Fishing for Family* charted the experience of language from infancy to senescence. Recent poems have appeared in *The Connecticut River Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *One Art* and *The Galway Review*. A professor of English, he has defended the mysteries of literature and art at the New York Institute of Technology for over 30 years. He lives on the Outer Banks with his wife Kathleen O'Sullivan, pianist, designer and fellow empty nester. Please feel free to leave a trace at his e-ent: <https://anthonydimatteo.wordpress.com>



## WHAT THE WAVES SAY

We inspire everyone who sees us,  
make them erase anything they write,  
delude painters with our changing light  
and turn homes into bric a brac, if we like.

We welcome lives in thousands of forms  
if brave enough to cross our wrack line.  
We roll on proud in our moving moment,  
then curtsy with a self-applause of foam.

Sunlight bales to bless and crown our crests  
while our troughs stir sleeping sands of gold.  
We never read messages in a bottle  
and can't drown broken hearts though people wish.

The wind and the moon think they rule us,  
but our bottom line bestows the final swish.

Anthony DiMatteo

## A VISION

*For Michael*

We ride into a dead zone.  
 Are we breaking out or in?  
 Someone's been stealing sand,  
 black pines slumped over a pit.  
 Ten blocks from home, we've  
 stumbled on the end of our race,  
 busted, out of luck, wrack line  
 all that's left of a mall.

A man's living in the woods  
 off a road next to smashed gates,  
 once an entrance to a theater.  
 "Who's that man?" my son asks  
 as if I know him somehow.  
 The man motions to join him.  
 "Just keep riding," I tell my son.  
 My son says, "he must be lonely."  
 "Yes, could be, and he could be  
 anyone of us down and out,  
 forced to live the barest life.  
 Best we keep our distance."  
 My son looks at me hard.  
 How to teach him what trust is,  
 who to trust and who not,  
 when many believe in nothing  
 and seek solely what they lust?

My own creedless creed  
 is near a nihilistic kind,  
 my ideals of love of earth  
 and faith in mankind rooted  
 in fictions to which I've made  
 commitment, a paradox,  
 labored, I admit, but not  
 in the way clouds float in air,  
 more like the hermit crab  
 who turns an abandoned shell  
 into a transient home.

Yes, love and freedom in love  
 I hold the ground on which  
 I stand, yet I would not have  
 my son hurt loving those  
 who don't deserve. We stand there  
 taking the broken world in,  
 what we are, were, and will be,  
 meaningless to the universe  
 that will likely let us  
 go extinct sooner than rats  
 claiming what's left behind.

Someone had driven a car  
 off an asphalt slab into a ditch  
 that's turned into a stream –  
 or is the stream free of its cage?

*continued overleaf..*

A VISION *contd...*

The sky warns those who hear.  
"It's getting dark. Time to go,"  
I tell my son who says, "We  
gotta come again." "But why?"  
I ask. "Haven't seen enough?"  
"It's cool here, a great place  
to explore." He makes me think  
how disorder lures the mind,  
holding true to what exists,  
things longing to return  
to what is not, as when  
we sleep or when we die,  
or enter a zone of play  
in which our fate is cast.

## READER'S REQUEST

Lift open the lid of my head  
until my childhood pours out.

Blow both my socks off  
so blades of grass pierce my pride.

Make me kiss a cold stone in a stream  
thinking it my dead mother's face.

Bring back dreams of flying.  
Turn my backdoor into a launch.

Burn my cynicism to a crisp.  
Fan my fear of desire.

Grant me the gift of annihilation.  
Sing the song of the suicide.

Break the mirror in which I live.  
Let love reveal its greater law.

Anton Floyd was born in Egypt, a Levantine mix of Irish, Maltese, English and French Lebanese. He studied at Trinity College, Dublin and University College, Cork. He has worked in education in the eastern Mediterranean and in Cork City. He now lives in West Cork where he gardens organically. Poems widely published in Ireland and internationally. A member of Irish Haiku Society, he is several times winner of International Haiku Competitions. A selection of haiku is included in *Between the Leaves*, an anthology of new haiku writing from Ireland edited by Anatoly Kudryavitsky (Arlen House, 2016). His first poetry collection, *Falling into Place* (2018) was published by Revival Press. He edited *Remembrance Suite* (Glór, 2018), a chapbook of sonnets by Shirin Sabri and an international anthology of poems, *Point by Point* (Glór, 2018). He received the 2019 Literary Prize awarded by the Dazzling Spark Arts Foundation (Scotland)). A new collection, *Depositions* (Doire Press) was published in 2022. A new collection, *On the Edge of Invisibility* is forthcoming. A collection of haiku *Singed to Blue* is in preparation.

## VIGIL

Lighting in the ward  
 can be too harsh.  
 Intended as a help,  
 it loiters in corridors  
 a kind of menace,  
 a threat to the quiet  
 of a darkened room.  
 Listless, I sit through  
 his inaudible dreams.  
 Outside a bird sings  
 in surprise or praise  
 to returning light.  
 Often such things  
 are taken as omens.



Anton Floyd

## EACH POEM THEN IS A FLICKERING

On reading Michael Longley

*for Matthew Geden and Caroline Smith*

Each poem then is a flickering.  
 Your syllables begin to quicken.  
 Words could be mottled pebbles  
 on a beach or miraculously  
 stray snow buntings foraging.  
 And in the spaces between words  
 whooper swans that paraded  
 on the turlough all day, now  
 at rest, have looped their sinewy  
 necks like elegant cursive letters  
 about a luminous waterline.  
 In a gleeful instant, your commas  
 magic into the iridescent fur  
 of the arched backs of otters  
 that swim in and out of clauses.  
 Nor is there finality in your fullstops.  
 They, like owls' eyes, a concentration  
 of obsidian black, become at once  
 reflective pools, doors into the dark,  
*a place where you can see thought.*

## SCHOOLED

A poem is never finished; it is only abandoned - Paul Valéry

*for Malcolm & Elaine Urquhart*

How I picture this is this:  
 In school every morning  
 with metronomic accuracy  
 through the open window  
 I listen to the sounds of a piano  
 from one of the music rooms.  
 Someone is practicing the gamut  
 of diatonic and chromatic scales  
 over and over. It lasts an hour.  
 It is like a mantra. I listen  
 and imagine someone seated,  
 a straight back mirroring  
 the upright instrument;  
 the strength in the hands  
 hidden in attenuated fingers;  
 and the eyes closed, perhaps,  
 to focus on the sound.  
 This is dedication to an art.  
 Over time my ear is attuned  
 to each version of each scale.  
 Each variation in each attack  
 is nuanced. This is, I suppose,  
 a personal quest for mastery  
 one that never ceases.  
 I revisit this time to weigh it  
 in my scale of words, balancing  
 the ones to leave in with the ones  
 to leave out, until, for now,  
 all I have left is this poem.



Bernadette Gallagher lives in County Cork, Ireland. Her poetry is published in, among others, *Agenda*, *Crannóg*, *The Stinging Fly*, *The North*, *Stony Thursday*, *Dreich*, *The Frogmore Papers*, *Southword*, *University College Dublin Poetry Archive* and *Words Lightly Spoken* podcast. She has received awards from the Arts Council of Ireland and Cork County Council.  
<https://bernadettegallagher.blogspot.com/>



## PUNTA DEL PAPAGAYO

rises out of the sea  
 in a mist of sand.

A buoy names the place,  
 holds on against the tide,

the squalls and high waves.  
 Flotsam drifts past;

a motorboat makes light  
 of the waves

moves like a pencil  
 across a page.

The balcony is empty:  
 only footprints

in the sand remain.  
 Wind makes its way

across the desert,  
 across the open sea,

across the earth.

Bernadette Gallagher

## NEAR RING'S FARM COUNTY CORK

A new-born calf calls for its mother,  
a goldfinch and mate dance in mid-air.

We talk of war and peace,  
walk along the frontline; a line

so fine we cannot find it —  
maybe we have already crossed over.

Cuckooflower waves in the wind,  
spring-water pools in the cow's footprint.

Hedgehog, fox, and badger  
cross and criss-cross these fields

we call Willie's or Jimmy's or Jack's  
as the calf stumbles on all fours feeling his way.

## VARANASI AND BEYOND

I remember a time when women wore mantillas  
in the House of God.

I remember a time when men wore robes all the way  
to the ground.

I remember a time when women were swathed in black  
from head to toe, and underneath blues, red, purple, and gold.

I remember a time when boys wore short trousers and girls,  
cotton dresses, all sewn by their mothers.

I remember a photo — my grandmother before she was a mother,  
starched white dress, almost regal.

I remember another photo — her holding a hen in her hands  
standing with her husband outside a thatched cottage.

I remember a time when my father rowed a boat  
from the *Duach* out to the open sea.

I remember a time when two young boys rowed  
across the *Tigris* with a woman in a sleeveless dress.

I remember a time when, before sunrise,  
burial pyres burned along the shore.

Carol Ann Wilburn started writing poetry at a young age, a practice she has continued throughout her life. Select poems were published in April 2021 in *While You Wait*, a poetry anthology for the Santa Barbara, California community. Her poetry has also appeared in *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing*, and in *The Bryant Literary Review*. Most recently, her poem, "My Piano Man", was the winner of the 2022 *Carol DeCanio Abeles Emerging Poets Prize*, which recognizes individual poems by Santa Barbara County emerging poets. Carol has recently completed her first chapbook.



## KENTUCKY DERBY 2020

*for Breonna Taylor*

Not on the first Saturday in May,  
but on the brink of fall in my hometown.  
No fans or rainbow of ladies' hats  
or Mint Juleps. No losing tickets  
scattering the grounds  
of Churchill Downs. Forget cheering crowds  
wall-to-wall in the infield  
amid the echoes of Derby Days. Instead,

in Covid time, we spectators  
are screen-bound, cut off from sharing  
what's real and momentary. We feel  
boundless, weightless in the freedom and joy  
that only live experience can inspire.  
All that lifts us, helps to forget what holds us  
so tightly to this earth.

But not now.

We watch as thoroughbreds race inside the track,  
while — in split-screen — generations  
of protesters seek justice. They protest outside  
in a line that snakes  
all the way back to last March  
when a young black woman in Louisville  
was gunned down in her bed.

Tell me, can we ever be truly free?

Carol Ann Wilburn

## TILLING

Would take on the feel of yesterday  
if I could put my finger on it.  
You and I together, moved  
by the same frenzy.

You, the sweat darkening  
your shirt and bringing a shine  
about your hairline. You loved  
the pain the tilling brought you.  
It was a gift the way it burnt  
places inside and set you  
back, then forward again to here,  
the soreness a relief.

Meanwhile I scurried  
about the place in search  
of this or that chair. I poked  
around in the garden shed.  
How I loved the warm earthy richness  
that only sun can lend to cooped up  
rakes and trowels and garden gloves,  
dirt-worn and familiar.

And you, tilling still,  
your labor broken only  
for long drinks or to wipe away  
the salty grit. How puffed up,  
satisfied you looked when stopping  
to take in the new ground  
beaten up. You asked the time,  
told me of some delicious new ache,  
then set to work again.

Moved by some need to pull  
the inside out or draw the outside  
closer in, I gathered up plants  
and carried them out one by one:  
the "Country Girl" geranium,  
the bromeliad for our engagement,  
the ivy I bought in the fall.

The air about us not of spring  
but hot, adjusting our bodies  
to summer's pace, while Chuck our cat  
rolled in the grass. Then it was  
just the breeze and us. Time,  
not some measure of efficiency  
but of home.

## FURY

Waning sun,  
you take away  
summer's exquisite  
heat and light.

Day dims, clocks  
turn back. We find  
ourselves teetering  
on winter's edge

windswept  
with late sundowners  
and Santa Anas.  
They scourge, explode

into menacing claws  
of fire like some sinister  
beast, leaving verdant beauty  
scorched, burnt-out houses  
and cars, all skeletons

of people's lives.  
I remember that knock  
on the door *Get out now!*  
Wind and fire headed  
right at us. The mad dash  
to grab all we could,  
helicopters deafening  
overhead, air choked  
with toxic smoke,  
the run for our lives,  
chasing refuge.

Ever since, dread lingers  
in the deep-down of us,  
grabs hold  
at any sudden wind  
hint of smoke  
a siren's blast of danger.

Caterina Mastroianni is a poet and educator living in Sydney on the land of the Cadigal and Wangal people of the Eora nation. She has published poetry in various literary magazines and four Australian anthologies, including *Australian Mosaic*, and most recently in *Burrow*, *Mediterranean Poetry*, *Honeyguide*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing*, *Poetry for the Planet: An Anthology of Imagined Futures and Medium*.



## AT CHERRY MOON CAFE

An aroma, caramel, nutty and with something else is a magnetic pull.  
 I try not to look at the younger queuers with phone-lit faces like first quarter moons waiting for their fill. I try not to look at the frontline queuers ordering their coffees. I try to be a composed middle queuer, but I sway and look over shoulders, wondering about the lady ahead. Perhaps she's a poet, a retiree or a quaintrelle. Her long, cross-hatched fingers move across her rings and phone and there is a *something else* she brings to the brim of her being, that I relook and re-wonder about until she turns. An older, fuller face speaks in an emollient voice,  
 "I never know what I'm going to choose. I'm working my way through the menu."

Caterina Mastroianni

## AT MS. QUEENY NAILS

Into the act of grooming  
that fastened war talons  
to the fingers of Babylonian men

into the act of filing and shaping  
that encumber the practicalities  
we chip at, the typing and minding

into the act of painting and glossing  
that revolutionise Iranian women  
with a flash of perilous colour, I soak

into your complex intonations,  
into your Cleopatra red,  
into all the illustrious women

from Mrs. Cobb Manicure Parlours  
in New York to Ms. Queeny Nails  
in this Sydney suburban nook.

## AT THE HOTEL

In this booked warm bedroom,  
feeling relaxed and free from  
morning games, there are no  
daily solicitations and no  
nightly noises. None of it.  
I pull on my jumper and denims,  
then make out the hanging fur,  
pick the milky caramel strands  
mingling into my dark clothing,  
prising open a pretty preener,  
leaping onto a favourite tree,  
pawing her iPad fish furiously,  
flattening to escape our cuddles,  
supervising us with a patient purr,  
widening eyes, and waving tail.

Is she all right with her carer?

Claudine Nash is a psychologist and award-winning poet whose poetry collection *Beginner's Guide to Loss in the Multiverse* (Blue Light Press, 2020) was chosen as winner of the 2020 Blue Light Book Award. Her other books include *The Wild Essential* (Kelsay Books, 2017) and *Parts per Trillion* (Kelsay Books, 2016) as well as the chapbooks *Things for Which You Thirst* (Weasel Press, 2020) and *The Problem with Loving Ghosts* (Finishing Line Press, 2014). Widely published, her work has been nominated for the Pushcart, Best of Net, and Pulitzer prizes and has appeared in numerous publications including *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *BlazeVOX*, and *Cloudbank* among others.



Claudine Nash

## HOPE IS

the song  
I feel in my muscles

(before I can sing  
any of the lyrics),

it is a moment

stirring in darkness  
before the day begins

a direction

found in a forest  
of limitless routes,

the breath

(I didn't know  
I was holding)

winding around  
the stillness  
of the morning,

it is the thought

that is spinning itself  
into an idea

as the coffee  
is brewing,

the answer

that is catching  
the light.



Dirk van Nouhuys is a native of Berkeley, California. He writes short stories, some experimental forms, and occasionally verse, but mostly novels, which have been published as excerpts or serially. About 100 items of fiction and a few poems have appeared in literary or general magazines. He has a BA from Stanford in creative writing and an MA from Columbia in contemporary literature. He worked for decades as a tech writer and manager for SRI'S Augmentation Research Center, Apple, Sun, and others. This century he devotes full time to fiction. He occasionally publishes translations and photography. [http://www.wandd.com/about\\_me.html](http://www.wandd.com/about_me.html)



## FAITH

It was the day before Thanksgiving. Celia was an orphan since her grandmother had gone to Wisconsin, and no kin offered the ritual turkey. She had been invited to Thanksgiving dinner both by the family of her high school friend The Pretty Girl, who would be back for the holiday, and by her suite mate Angelique. Angelique was a fellow math major whose mother ran a café that featured food and music from the Azores. The subject of the holiday had not arisen between Celia and the guy she was hooking up with. Celia had committed to dinner with Angelique, who seemed to her to open toward another world.

She returned to her dormitory after her morning classes to find one of the girls in her suite, Debby Leigh, lying on the floor weeping. Debby was not close to Celia who remembered her mostly attached to her boyfriend—like a parasitic fish, Celia thought. She did not even know what Debby's major was. She was surprised to see her in the dorm at all, because she knew that she had planned to travel with him to her home town in the California gold country. Debby did not seem to notice that Celia had entered, as she sprawled abandoned on the tile in paroxysms of weeping and choking, her moans as physically immersive as passionate lovemaking.

Celia knelt and put her hand on Debby's shoulder, as much puzzled as distressed. Debby twitched as if startled by a loud noise, then rolled over on her back and looked up.

*continued overleaf..*

Dirk van Nouhuys

“Did you hurt yourself?”

“Fred broke up with me,” she said through her sobs.

“Why?”

“He won’t go with me to see my parents.”

“Can you stand up?”

Debby got to her hands and knees.

“He was the one person I thought would never hurt me.”

“You’ve been hurt?”

Angelique came in. “What’s happened?”

Debby stood, wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, and spoke out, “What’s happened? Like, I loved him with no beginning, no end. Like, I loved him as if he was an organ in my body.” She was smaller than her guy, with a round, pretty, carefully made-up face, which Celia always remembered seeing nestled in the shoulder of the young man. “Like, I loved him as only a girl could love a boy. Without fear.”

Celia turned to Angelique. “Fred broke up with her.”

“Like, I wanted nothing in return, except that he would keep me in his heart. Do you understand that? His eyes gave me freedom.” She crumpled into a chair.

Angelique turned to Debby and said, “I think you should take a shower.”

Debby nodded obediently, stood, and went into her bedroom. Cecilia and Angelique exchanged looks that neither understood.

Debby nodded obediently, stood, and went into her bedroom. Celia and Angelique exchanged looks that neither understood.

Debby reappeared in a robe. Angelique embraced her, enfolding her terrycloth shoulders. Debby stood still as if drained of every impulse. Angelique dropped her arms and said quietly, “Go on.”

She went on into the shower and they heard the water start.

“Poor Debby,” Angelique said.

“Fuck it, she shouldn’t have...” Celia couldn’t at first find words for what Debby shouldn’t have done. “She shouldn’t have had so much fucking faith.”

“He seems like a good guy. Do you know him? He seems like a good guy.”

“I despise her,” Celia said.

The shower continued to run.

Gopika Nath is a textile artist-craftsman who stitches and writes, threading her syllables into poetry, creative non-fiction and art reviews, where her art practice provides a mirror to the self. Her writings have been published in Bengalaru Review, Brown Critique, Lakeview International Journal of Literature, 100 subtexts, Garland Magazine, Varta, Verve and others. <https://gopikanath.co.in/portfolio/articles/>. A Fulbright Scholar; alumnus of Central St. Martins School of Art and Design [UK], Gopika lives and works in Goa, India.



## MASALA CHAI

The morning cup always tastes good  
but as it diminishes, I see stains  
In my porcelain-white teacup

Perfect circles marking the gravity  
of stagnant moments; and a smudge of brown  
where the froth had been roused

And, when it's almost all been drunk,  
tell-tale marks remind of paths crossed  
Of embarrassment, guilt and blame

For views that imposed and I could not  
stand up for myself. Irritated by reflections  
that weren't what I'd like to see,

I gulped the murky dregs, scoured the cup  
with some Vim and a Scotchbrite

Lines above the brow remained

Gopika Nath

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

## FLORENCE

Walking past and  
 Watching, wide-eyed,  
 The magnificent buildings  
 From the past some hundreds  
 Of years,  
 Much older than the country  
 Called America,

Around me people  
 From all over earth,  
 Aroused, enlightened,  
 to feast on continuity,  
 On history, tradition, ritual,  
 As I do.

Suddenly, I feel I am back  
 To be the child  
 Coming across my dream  
 doll, a toy ship or a teddy bear  
 And feel again  
 That huge excitement  
 And pleasure  
 Of dreams becoming true,  
 Becoming a reality.



Greta Sykes

## A SINGULARITY

I imagine, it's  
like a moment  
When lies collapse,  
When all appearances,  
all guises, fallacies  
And history's essence,  
history's truth,  
Collide in a crescendo.  
It may be close.  
The streets of London  
Are ringing  
with ululations,  
of falseness and forgetfulness.

The Strand is beaming  
with the colourful flags,  
on street lamps,  
Hotels, teacups, ties.  
Proclaiming total freedom  
From nature: You can be woman, man  
Or both or none.

But over there  
are barriers of steel,  
Huge bars and blocks,  
discreetly placed overnight,  
Aligning the pavements of the city,  
for a show down,  
For the moment  
Of the singularity,  
The moment of qualitative  
Change, the energy,  
Crescendo, the  
Sound waves  
That will move millions of people  
Around the globe.  
demanding justice,  
freedom from exploitation.  
From subjugation  
A singularity  
that cannot be stopped.

## I BOUGHT A BAG,

I wanted it, just suddenly,  
 So badly, t'was  
 In the sale.  
 A receptable,  
 A holder, it reminded me  
 being a child  
 And cherishing  
 The dolls pram  
 I was given.  
 In a hidden pouch  
 I kept my secrets.  
 It had a recess, a niche,  
 A nook, a cranny,  
 A closet, boot, just tiny,  
 For the doll's shoes,  
 A portmanteau  
 For comb and hairbrush,  
 etui for lipstick, eye make up.  
 A purse and pouch  
 For treasures, a bag, a sack, a vestibule.  
 How many treasures  
 I could hide in it!  
 From spying eyes,  
 From older sisters,  
 From anyone  
 But from myself.



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[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Woman%27s\\_Handbag\\_LACMA\\_M.85.85.27.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Woman%27s_Handbag_LACMA_M.85.85.27.jpg)

Indran Amirthanayagam is a poet, editor, publisher, translator, youtube host and diplomat. For thirty years he worked for his adoptive country the United States on diplomatic assignments in Africa, Asia, Europe and North and South America. Amirthanayagam produced a "world record" in 2020 publishing three poetry collections written in three different languages. He writes in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Haitian Creole. He has published twenty three poetry books, including *Isleño* (R.I.L. Editores), Jennifer Rathbun) (Diálogos Books), *Ten Thousand Steps Against the Tyrant* (BroadstoneBooks.com), *The Migrant States*, *Coconuts on Mars*, *The Elephants of Reckoning* (winner 1994 Paterson Poetry Prize), *Uncivil War and The Splintered Face: Tsunami Poems*. In music, he recorded Rankont Dout. He edits the *Beltway Poetry Quarterly* ([www.beltwaypoetry.com](http://www.beltwaypoetry.com)); writes <https://indranamirthanayagam.blogspot.com>; writes a weekly poem for *Haiti en Marche* and *El Acento*; has received fellowships from the Foundation for the Contemporary Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, The US/Mexico Fund for Culture and the Macdowell Colony. He is the IFLAC Word Poeta Mundial 2022. In 2021 he won an Emergent Seed grant. Amirthanayagam hosts The Poetry Channel (Youtube/indram). New books include *Powè nan po la (Poet of the Port)* MadHat Press, 2023, and *Origami: Selected Poems of Manuel Ulacia* (Dialogos Books, 2023). Indran publishes poetry books with Sara Cahill Marron at *Beltway Editions* ([www.beltwayeditions.com](http://www.beltwayeditions.com)). A new collection of Creole poems *Kont Anlèyman* is forthcoming from Edisyon Freda in Haiti. Amirthanayagam's first collection in Portuguese *Música subterranea* will be published in 2023 by Editorial Kotter in Brazil.



## WINDOW, SAN FERNANDO

A girl combs her hair on the porch  
of the house across the road. Her hair  
is long, the combing long, her audience  
behind the kitchen window, although  
hampered, without spectacles, transfixed.

The following morning, after my visit  
to an optometrist, settled in place  
by the sink, I spot a mother  
and daughter in coiffed Sunday  
elegance, daughter with a rainbow-

dappled umbrella for shade, mother  
on her phone, waiting for their ride.  
Last evening various kids left the house  
with a football to lots of happy scrambling  
on the street. Should I keep observing

these scenes or step away from the window?  
I am only visiting these houses built  
on former sugar cane fields. I will go  
to Debe, read poems, then head back  
to town, the airport. What business, or right

is mine to look out the window? Can I  
become a country boy by force  
of observation? Leader of a UN  
Observer Mission? I do not believe  
in borders I have declared elsewhere.  
There is no elsewhere I declare  
by way of this poem.

Indran Amirthanayagam

## SHARING ROTI

Motilal speaks pidgin real good  
with a deep, hoar throat. Can't  
catch every word—I have to train  
my ear—but his broad smile  
and the roti he brings for the party,  
his slight bulge, the charmed love  
he shares with his wife, Savitri,  
make up for my clueless smile.  
Love don't need to be understood  
word by word. Just smile and scoop  
the chicken curry with the roti. And  
don't worry about the belly. That's  
a party rule. Another is plan  
to speak real slow on the telephone.

## LEGACY

I hung with Kaisonians on my Trinidad lime,  
from the Back to Basics tent. They were  
superb troubadours filling halls from Mayaro  
to Port of Spain. Some had been crowned  
monarchs, others were new rhymesters,  
all the songs gladdening hearts even if  
the messages did not spare disturbing  
reality. Away from the concert hall,  
and the familiar, happy beat, gunsmoke  
and vehicular exhaust fogged up the sky,  
darkening the world, as the Kaisonian sang,  
*we are leaving for tomorrow's children.*



Kate McNamara is a poet, playwright and critical theorist. She also works as an editor. Her plays have been performed internationally and she was invited to deliver the opening address to the 4th International Conference of Women Playwrights in Galway. She has recently returned to her first love: poetry. Her works have been published in a range of formats. A founding member of the Canberra Surrealist movement, Aktion Surreal, she lives in Ainslie with her sons, cats and a menagerie of wild birds.



## FOR SPIKE

On a white bed  
Bleeding sickness  
The old cat sleeps  
A still compass in the night.

What tiger dreams rake  
Through your slow retracting claws,  
Young cat in treetime?

There's tree bark  
On your whiskers and dew  
From spiders' web, wise one.  
You open one green eye,  
As lethal as a sea snake,  
And then return.

You'll not stay long now,  
These long years mauled  
By time and tragedy  
You have kept faith with me.  
I will hear you still  
The slow lashing tail  
Across stars and time  
Memory will bring you home.

Kate McNamara

## THE INSURRECTION OF LILITH

*(Lilith, according to the Torah, was Adam's first wife.  
However, she refused to be subjugated to Adam's will  
and was thrown out of Eden. She was then reconstructed  
as a demon that terrorized men)*

How a woman lies with her silence mouth clotted with  
the blood of dark nights.

The blind caterpillar reflexively weaves its own shroud  
the queen bee sits in her six sided cell endlessly reproducing the buzzing hive  
the hen submits to incubating nests full of eggs.

Only a mind debauched by learning makes the natural strange.

All our furious grasping at life our hands  
that mangle and grab the monsters that seethe  
lurking in the unstable heart.

The perfect mind wings beating trapped utterly.

Journeys of futility hair forcing more follicles  
cells mutating the slip and slide of blood  
the absolute tidal pull of breathing  
our wanton caprices of passion.

Short nights long long penance.

The maggots that curdle and writhe in the white  
blinding mind unforgiving unforgiveable  
beset by rage scalding and burning scarring  
the withered stumps of time our mouths  
swelling with the wasted tumescence of words.

All of it stilled by death  
stay not her hand when she comes in the violet hour  
perfect at last cleaving to earth pure in the flame  
and quiet so quiet at last.

Air  
and the startling clarity of bones.

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

## ANTIODE

no moon  
brightens a bare  
knee half under  
a plank picnic  
table bleaching  
to splinters beside  
the dry creekbed

no wind rustles cattails  
into husked whisper no  
witness adores  
the nightingale its  
fled music  
it puffs  
against cold  
in the bramble



M. L. Williams

## HENDRY'S BEACH

The lot's full and people wait for tables  
at the restaurant or walk dogs  
on the beach or set up volleyball nets  
or surf their phones or boards or tidepool  
or cross the creek fanning into the foamy  
toxic tide to walk or sunbathe or jog  
or stop and look up at the houses of people  
who can afford houses perched on cliffs  
over the blue Pacific, but not us, we have to  
drive and park in the lot and enjoy  
Arroyo Burro Beach Park (its real name)  
and we're like everybody else here  
on a quiet Tuesday sunscreened  
and happy except for the crying toddler  
with sand in his wet diaper bumped  
by the hyper setter or the sullen waiter  
after a day of bad tips or a sad divorcee  
looking for answers in the scintillant waves,

but most of us feel lucky to be here  
with our lovers or children or solitude,  
and if you're luckiest, you'll notice  
the flock of pigeons that erupts  
afternoons out of the cliff in tight  
circles of pure aerodynamic purpose  
and if you look harder you'll see  
the one oversized and oddly green,  
not grey, pigeon, green because a conure  
has decided to be a pigeon and it is  
welcome among the flock and, sure,  
nothing's cheesier than the animal kingdom  
teaching us hope and acceptance,  
but that conure looks damned happy  
to fly in tight aerodynamic circles  
and the pigeons don't seem to mind  
its occasional "pretty boy" or "wanna party?"  
or "knock knock who's there?"

## PANTHER WIND

All rain down  
can rain  
the gully's brown  
gush and gravel-  
guttled road a  
river's shore rising  
tree-crossed  
and mudslid  
and you still  
my love still in  
my arms still in  
my rained  
mind's bed  
and safe



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Mari Maxwell's work features in *Washing Windows Too* [2022]; *Washing Windows Three* [2023] both by Arlen House; *The Stony Thursday Book*, No. 18, Winter 2022; *Bosom Pals*, Doire Press; *Veils Halos & Shackles* [Kasva Press, Israel]. She received a 2020/21 Professional Development Award from the Arts Council of Ireland and a 2019-2020 Words Ireland/Mayo County Council mentorship. She is working on her debut poetry collection and a novel.



## STOCK TAKING

Down the aisle to the lake  
 where swans feed at dusk  
 the cat and I listen for barking deer,  
 rutting calls cough deep in the trees  
 as autumn sheds the last blackberries.

Long grasses loll as deer feast through  
 low hanging boughs as they pass through.  
 Three harebells sway with rosehips and haws.  
 The last of the swallows practice runs through  
 shed eaves and fields.

Our village is downing tools in our last summer here.  
 Farmer Tony's final cut is in.  
 Bales of liquorice shine in the moonlight.  
 Late September the first fire warms grate, house and heart.  
 All of us ready for slumber and new pastures.

Mari Maxwell

## SUPERMOON

Do you hear the birds at night?  
because they see you when  
you ignite stone walls and tree limbs.

Silver silhouettes shimmer from window pane  
to window pane as you traverse  
the contours of our home.

You make me dizzy in my four  
poster bed,

sliding, plaiting love rings and webs  
cocooning us in.

But ah when you smile—up up up  
240,000 miles away,  
every crevice dug deep  
in limestone walls grins.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Nessa O'Mahony was born in Dublin and lives there. She has published five books of poetry – *Bar Talk*, (1999), *Trapping a Ghost* (2005), *In Sight of Home* (2009) and *Her Father's Daughter* (2014). *The Hollow Woman on the Island* was published by Salmon Poetry in May 2019. She has edited journals and anthologies.



## CLASSROOM

*Bishop Galvin Primary School, 1995  
i.m. Larry O'Loughlin*

I'll keep this simple and true,  
as you liked your poetry.  
Eight of us in a school room  
perched on wooden chairs  
too small for us, in a ring  
surrounded by rainbow walls  
with smiley faces and unicorns.  
We each took our turn,  
shyly turning a page  
in our brand new notebooks,  
trying out phrases,  
startled by what we'd only heard  
in our heads before.

Then introductions  
to our characters:  
yukky princes and Ella's boy,  
a house with green shutters,  
a Kerry policeman keeping peace  
when we disagreed over syllables.  
Every so often a nod,  
an appreciative murmur,  
or a pause, gentle but clear  
there was a better way  
to say what we wanted.

That circle grew,  
the rooms got larger, louder,  
the chairs configured  
in other shapes and sizes.  
And we each cheered  
when another stood up,  
took the stage, a podium,  
the teacher's spot  
at the front of a rapt class.  
Murmured our praise,  
then shouted it to roof-tops.

Nessa O'Mahony



Born in Havana, February 19th, 1964. Poet and translator. He has published six books of poetry in his own country: Algo de lo sagrado. Unión, 1996. (Also published in the U.S in 2007, by Factory School, N.Y.; with translations by Kristin Dykstra and Roberto Tejada. [www.factoryschool.org/pubs/perez](http://www.factoryschool.org/pubs/perez)) ¿Oíste hablar del gato de pelea? Letras Cubanas, 1998. (Translated by Kristin Dykstra and published by Shearsman, London, in 2010: Did you hear about the fighting cat?) Canciones y Letanías. Extramuros, 2002. Lingua Franca. Unión, 2009. He has also published a collection of essays on poetry and translation, La perseverancia de un hombre oscuro. Letras Cubanas, 1999. Crítica de la Razón Puta, obtained the 2010 Nicolás Guillén National Poetry Award, and was published also by Letras Cubanas. In the same year and with the same publisher, Omar Pérez offered a second collection of essays, El corazón mediterráneo. In 2016, he published Filantropical, with Letras Cubanas, and Sobras Escogidas, with Silueta, Miami, Florida. In 2018, Station Hill (N. Y.) published Cubanology, a book of days, while the Alabama University Press printed The race, a poem collection; both translated by Kristin Dykstra. Omar Pérez has consistently translated from the English, Italian, French and Dutch languages.

## AS FOR ME

as for me, am surprised to be someone  
 something in itself (in thyself, in songself) surprised  
 that from a wooden peg: the unnameable!  
 hangs this cloak of flesh, blood and thinking.  
 Where does it go, and what does it really do?  
 if “really” and “do” even exist at all. Surprised  
 by such a scarecrow based on a true story  
 which would rather attract the bird and hold it.



Omar Perez

## I'M REFERRING TO

the world of men, with their mechanic horses, electric tigers, plastic elephants;  
i am not talking about women, who have their transgenic perfumes, elastic hair,  
pelvic logarithms and dynamic creams; nor to children, who enjoy protein  
lightnings, encephalitic chocolate, cheese superheroes and triumphant candies;  
not to mention, no, the elders: synthetic wheelchairs, apocalyptic swellings,  
magnetic coffins and bankcard prostates.

I am referring to the world of men, with their mechanic horses, electric tigers  
and plastic elephants.

## ANCIENT HISTORY

Atlantis and South Beach collided  
a science pop fiction Armageddon  
they crushed the last danceable proton  
and dancing they subsided.

The metaphysics of procrastination  
and the grammar of eternal return  
have designed a neon light contour  
to illuminate a back-up creation.

Spastic heroes and didactic mobsters  
the democratization of self-interest  
a conglomerate of clay-footed titans  
ready to chew the world and make it softer.

The Muses arrived at the crime scene  
of the organized photogenic disaster  
epiphany!: may the poems sing

what's real, and what is not  
a brainless chickens splendor  
should be reported in a forensic note.

Phil Lynch lives in Dublin, Ireland. His work has appeared in a wide range of literary journals and anthologies and has also featured on national and local radio arts shows. He is a regular performer of his work at poetry and spoken word events and festivals in Ireland and further afield. His poetry collection *In a Changing Light* (Salmon Poetry) was published in 2016 and a new collection is in the works. This is a link to info about my collection 'In a Changing Light' (Salmon Poetry): <https://www.salmonpoetry.com/author-details.php?ID=394&a=284>



## SUDDEN FALL

The leaves fell on Saturday,  
succumbing to the firm force  
of a sudden September storm.

Autumn had come unannounced,  
awkward, an uninvited guest  
at an intimate dinner party.

The ground a confusion of greens,  
many in their prime, smooth to the touch,  
clinging to the illusion of foreverness.

Nature took care to sprinkle them  
with a camouflage of half-turned reds and yellows  
to lighten the shame, share in the shock.

The trees stood bereft in the after-calm,  
stoic in the stillness of silent thought,  
uncertain what to expect next, a feast or a fall.

Phil Lynch

## WINTERING

Pale winter sun creeps low across bare quiet fields,  
a wave of biting wind whips through near naked trees,  
the brighter sounds of summer long since switched to mute,  
from ditch-to-ditch slink stealthy shapes in search of food.

## ALL ABOARD

when the boat comes in to the cove  
it rolls in the waves while they wade  
with all that they own in their heads  
retained to be shared far away  
on some shore they never have known  
passages paid with lives upturned

the children first clamber on board  
their minds by adventure consumed  
while the adults crush on real tight  
their goal to survive with each breath  
enveloped by dangerous tides  
the dark boat sinks into the night

Polly Richardson is living and writing on the Dingle peninsula Kerry Ireland, hosting private mediative writing workshops and poetry walking tours. Her work has been published in various e-zines, lit mags and anthologies both nationally and internationally including her contributors page with Dallas based Mad Swirl, Live Encounters archives and Inspired lit mag. She curates and hosts her collective collaborating creative group Worldly Worders each week with a mighty bunch of misfits celebrating writing in all its glorious forms! Her debut collection Winters Breath was published during lockdown and is available from Amazon in both paper back and e-book. Polly is currently working on three new collections in-between wild sea swimming, foraging, fading into small corners by candlelight in her favourite local and getting lost without time with her side kick Jasper.



## DINGLE WILDS 43 PLATT

I've nurtured bulbs in darkness for longer  
 than sunrises climb over cliffs. Felt their  
 oblong nudge against these fibres laying  
 across my skin. Crossing into my obscurities,  
 land uninvited in peculiar ways  
 I often ask moons disappearing face  
 to come see,  
 hear ditties weighted down  
 in dreams end. Groom clouds  
 so they whip up, decorate blueness that  
 often visits this coastline, divine in all  
 its offerings. Shutters of grey breaks.  
 Damp clay clings in-between these fingers,  
 rich coldness  
 deliciously bites  
 limpet of land almost,  
 as it hangs on to flesh clumping  
 soothes longing,  
 inner shudders birth themselves  
 tingling to each outer bare part  
 lulled into gorgeousness as sea laps  
 acoustically draws in serene. I place myself.  
 The sleeping unaware, secrets of spring suddenly  
 burst from bulbs conversations with sod and worms.  
 I take my place before dinning on all possibilities  
 of life coming to surface, witness each tidal turn  
 And perhaps whisper to grasses gracefully watching  
 Oddities of humanity.

Polly Richardson

## SEEKING

*Inspired by visiting Sylvia Plath's grave*

I seek flowers beyond ups ups and dips  
of these valleys going deeper on decline  
than roots to core before singeing,  
begging silence of newly filled  
womb. Its humble presence acquiring  
its bounty full, doing what its predisposed  
to do, living in succulence,  
I often think what pure delight that must be,  
doing what I am predisposed to do.  
I meander these thoughts, they heckle  
me sometimes in the thickest bracken of my mind  
I image great big mound full of green, its breath  
rises like its lungs have decided to expand  
And fall back down quiet rhythmically as its buries  
me, dressing me for eternities.  
I seek shells that bring solace to these palms  
fingering each little grove crusting's  
tracing erosions of seas wonderful harshness,  
I turn over in moments like this held forever  
in timeless nuances, I feel death of flower-head  
as it weeps into its former ideology,  
I seek beyond boundaries sewn in from  
conversations between stars and  
their disappearing light

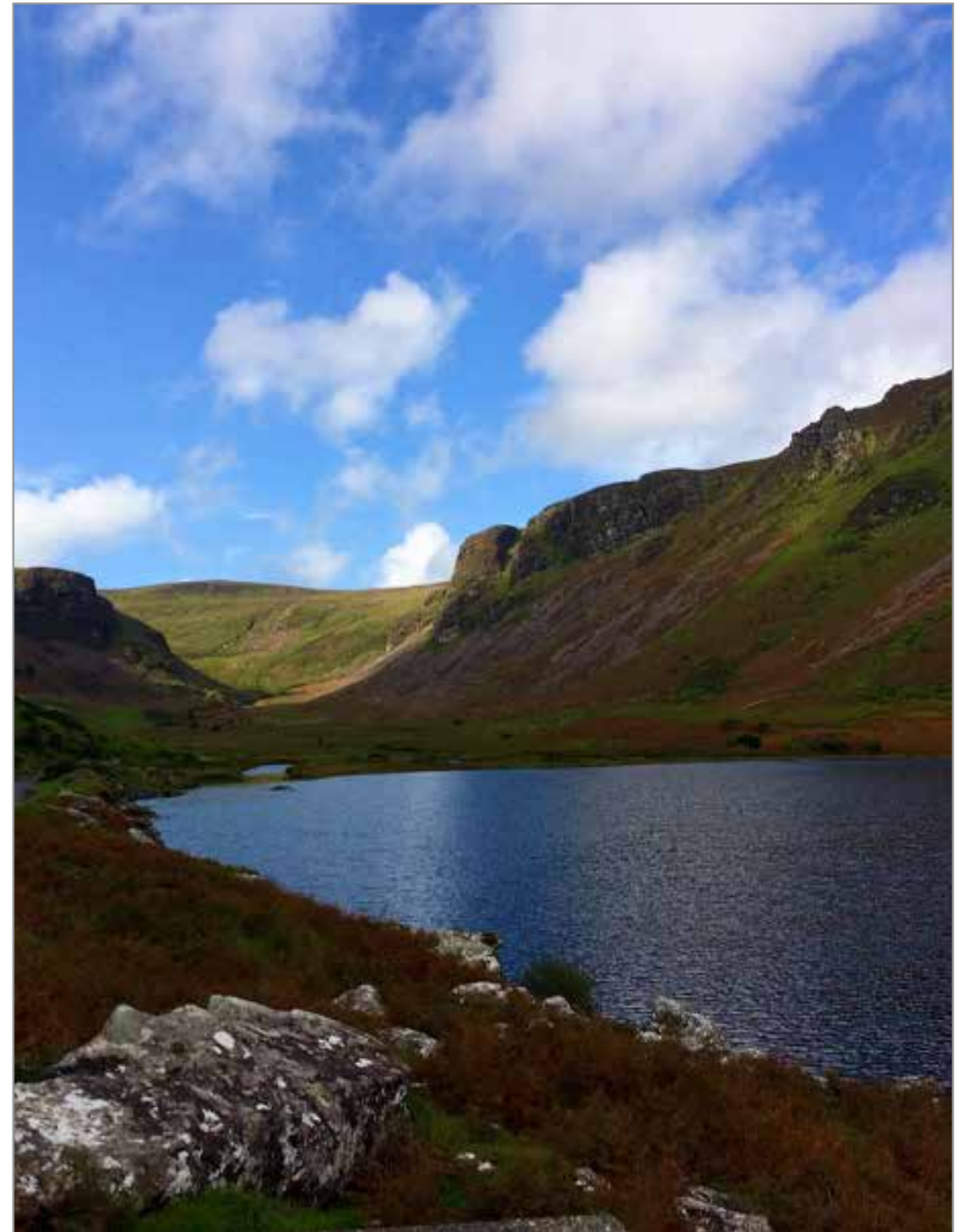
and plop into waves retrieving itself as it moves  
from full swell to merry little horses prancing.  
And there I dive, as Shag in seek plumage to fish,  
arrow like straight from skies  
never quiet hitting kelp bed, re-surfing full blackness  
all plume momentarily satisfied, cocking one eye up  
every so boldly to wink my brief success at sun  
and her brazen illumine intrusions into my darkness.  
I'm braver now. Seen freedom offerings  
despite its brief display behind silence  
of closed lids seeking.  
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## DINGLE WILDS 44 - SILENT MELODIES

I am buried here beneath these lullabies  
 that come with each owl hoot,  
 where water flows with neither rush  
 nor agenda, I am white heron -  
 feet yarn to pad in muddy  
 realm surrounds, send ripples to moon's  
 smile gentle shimmer framed by overhead  
 budding trees steaming, grasses silently part  
 with each earthen inhale.

I thread each morsel to feed years ache  
 for sun dance  
 far off baying signifies  
 it's time to claim reclaim instinctual  
 rites, ruts rebound between  
 the call of night-time narratives  
 softly tongued between forming cloud  
 and star melodies. Dampness falls  
 kissing politely as it moves from  
 face to hands inward chants evoke  
 it all

I bang out my drum invoking  
 all to grace these footfalls  
 and sea comes  
 galloping  
 to  
 bind  
 herself and I  
 as first taste of  
 submerge greets  
 these parched toes.



Photograph by Polly Richardson.

Raine Geoghegan MA is a poet and playwright of Romani & Welsh ethnicity. She is a Forward Prize, twice Pushcart Prize & Best of the Net nominee. Her work has been published internationally both online and in print with Poetry Ireland Review; Travellers' Times; Under the Radar and many more. Her essay, 'It's Hopping Time' was featured in Gifts of Gravity & Light (Hodder & Stoughton, 2021). She has three pamphlets published with Hedgehog Press. 'Apple Water: Povel Panni' was listed in the Poetry Book Society Spring 2019 Selection. Her play 'The Tree Woman' was featured online with the Same Boat Theatre Collective in San Francisco. She is the Romani Script Consultant for the musical 'For Tonight'. 'The Talking Stick: O Pookering Kosh' was published in June 2022 with Salmon Poetry Press. She has read at festivals in the UK, Ireland and Sydney.



## THE ALLOTMENT IN ABERBARGOED

She sits on an old crate watching  
her Taid pulling up cabbages  
He pushes his large rough hands  
into the soil and heaves one out  
and as some dirt lands on her lap  
she hears a wheeze as he stands.

*It's his bad chest. She thinks.  
'Too many years underground,  
breathing in coal dust.'*  
Her Mam once told her.  
She jumps up, brushing the dirt away.

*'We'll have this for our dinner girl,  
now you have a go.'*

She nods her head and squats.  
He gives her the small red trowel.  
She teases the earth around the cabbage  
sticks the trowel in  
and wiggles it about.

*'Right now girl pull it out.'*

Tugging at the cabbage with both hands,  
she puffs her cheeks and tries again.  
She's almost there. Twist and tug  
then up into the air it comes

*continued overleaf..*

Raine Geoghegan



## THE ALLOTMENT IN ABERBARGOED *contd...*

Her Taid claps his hands.  
'Well done cariad.'  
She stands laughing, holding the large vegetable  
as if it were a trophy.  
It starts to drizzle.  
The sky darkens.

*'Come on my lovely, let's go home.'*

He takes her hand.  
She knows when they get home  
her Nanna will praise her for helping him.  
She imagines the cabbage on the plate,  
along with the Welsh lamb and gravy.  
She walks quickly,  
trying to keep up with his long strides.



Welsh words  
*Taid* - Grandfather; *cariad* - dearest.

Photographcredit: <https://pixabay.com/photos/cabbage-vegetable-cabbages-1356960/>

“Ray has been writing both prose and poetry since he was seventeen. He has three books published from NEWNESS TWONESS BOOKS: “ACKNOWLEDGMENT: Poems From The ‘Nam,” a two volume set [2019, 2nd Editions available on Amazon]; and “23, 18,” [2020, 2nd Edition, available on Amazon, and “For The Lost and Loved.” [2021, available on Amazon]. A chapbook, THE SCUPPERNONG WORKS” was published last fall, also by Newness Twoness. His fifth poetry book now at publishers for consideration, THE TAVERN ON OLD LOG CABIN ROAD. He is working on another chapbook and full length poetry book. Ray has done readings around the state of North Carolina, now in Colorado as well, and has been a member of both the North Carolina Poetry Society, and The North Carolina Writer’s Network. He has thrice been a ‘Writer-in-Residence” at the North Carolina Center For The Arts and Humanities at Weymouth, in Southern Pines, NC. He is the father of two daughters, and lives in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Active in the poetry scene in Colorado, and is available for readings state-wide. Ray, an American poet, has participated in the International Poetry scene as well, published by literary journals in Bali, India, Belgium, Pakistan, United Kingdom, Greece, Ireland, and the United States.”



## QUIETUDE [SONNET TWO]

Not like there was silence anyway  
I heard my Mother’s compassionate voice  
insisting that the only option was listening to an aged wisdom  
her coaching about being nearly seventy.

Not like there wern’t other voices in the recesses, my own too  
I heard my Father’s voice speaking  
over a flight line’s roar of air power, taking off  
and landing on talking about the courage

to face what may come despite what may have occurred.  
Memories bespoke the bravery  
having followed a plan  
of determination

of design of a full life contributing  
and following the course, still, all the while, aging.

Ray Whitaker

## HOMO NALEDI

*Homo naledi is an extinct hominin species discovered in 2013  
in the Rising Star Cave system, Gauteng province, South Africa.*

Twenty feet into the cave  
hearing a very soft rustling  
then louder, and a flight of bats  
making us duck down as they made their way out.

Crouched down, shielding eyes from  
the flying bats, thousands of them it seemed  
our arms over heads, all  
no one got up until they'd passed.

Blink your eyes now, keeping them closed  
think of yesterday  
or perhaps the day before  
then think back even further

past your imaginable past  
of a short life  
measured in tens of decades  
to the in-human, maybe the un-human, yet

of our genus,  
a sort-of our species,  
with all of our humanly traits  
in our human family tree  
we speak sometimes in whispers  
about all our abilities in this modern age  
shaking heads over the evolutions  
of thinking towards Being Human.

There is a dawn's rise  
into the cradle of thought  
an emotional discovery in fingertips  
touching the body that belonged to  
those we loved  
after this, what was, has gone cold  
warmth of corporeal, depth of emotions  
has gone to an undiscovered afterlife.

We bury our loved ones  
in so many varied mortuary rituals  
honoring the dead,  
giving grief a presence for those left behind

thinking, surprised  
when there is a discovery  
that a quarter million years ago

a far distant hominoid relative, Homo Naledi  
did the same thing then, that we do today.

Underneath the arrogance of our ways  
to believe we moderns are the only Humans  
to love and cherish those that have come before.

## WHAT I'M NOT SAYING

*written from the health-care perspective  
of a 34 year career as a Respiratory Therapist in the USA*

All the people I have had the privilege of  
to be present in their dying  
are a part of me.

I don't remember all their names.  
What I do remember is that  
some were in the winter of their lives  
some were in their summer  
only a few were in the spring of Life.

I also remember the clear absence of color  
of the endotracheal tubes  
those had a blue strip down the side  
with a gradient so we Respiratory Therapists would know  
how deep it was in past the vocal cords.  
And the black fancy ambu bag  
that we sophisticated Respiratory Therapists  
could attach therapeutic devices to,  
and give breath  
for someone who could not anymore.

Even being an Expert at resuscitation  
we only kept about thirty percent  
of 'em  
on the planet.

Walking away  
from a Code blue  
I wanted sunshine,  
or trees,  
or wind  
sometimes in the fall,  
outside the big teaching hospital  
I could get all three.

I stopped counting  
all the Humans stopping their Being  
after about three years of this.  
In the hospital room  
and assisted the Registered Nurses  
in cleaning up the "after" detritus,  
yes, we medical people can be messy.

I have few regrets after all those years  
when someone left, said goodbye to Life,  
having stopped circling the toilet in small tight orbits  
Codes would sometimes last almost an hour...

Having learned to get dog-love  
upon arriving home from my day  
this was welcomed, enjoyed  
nourishin' for me in a way  
I didn't have to imagine  
my buddy had no idea  
that my day  
had been someone's last.

And right after there was more to do.

Roisín Browne lives in Rush, Co Dublin and has been published in *A New Ulster*, *The Galway Review*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing*, *Poetry NI*, *The Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *Flare* and *Echoes from the Castle Anthology*. She was commended in the Gregory O'Donoghue Awards in 2018 and shortlisted in The Seventh Annual Bangor Poetry Competition in 2019.



## MOTHERS IN MUD FIELDS

'STAY on the path. Walk upright. Don't go on the grass. DON'T!'

Military orders delivered in staccato. I look back. Instructions not for me. A mother pointing her Avoca-gloved finger at her confused woolly-hatted toddler. Chaffed cheeks, gappy teeth, penny-wide eyes, he teethers between tarmac and lawn. His blue welly boots sucking on the mud. Gloopy earth lifts between the blades. The grass is slick from pails of rain, delivered last night as we all slept in our beds and cots. Left foot, green, right foot, black, left foot, green, right foot, black.

Mammy shouting, Mammy waving. Wobble straight, wobble left, wobble right.

I look at him balancing in the vastness of this eighteenth century Georgian estate. He has exactly 194 Fingal acres, he is allowed, by the council, to walk on, including forest, to get lost in. She is roaring now as if there are landmines lurking everywhere. I'm impressed with him. I'm almost afraid to veer on the grass myself. He continues doing what toddlers do best, ignores her and toddles on.

There are other mothers here. Dots of them placed across the fat, green, rolling, slices. Early teen sons, exclusively with them. Some hold leads, their dogs mucking, twirling, snouts in ditches. There is talking, trudging, listening, laughing. The mothers in hidden awe, quiet smiles, as these boys will soon outstretch them. The dots rotate, like clock hands, in wet fields. Each muddy step an imprint for future memories. As they soak each other in, conversations tumble out and silent raindrops catch unspoken words.

Roisín Browne

Scott Thomas Outlar is originally from Atlanta, Georgia. He now lives and writes in Frederick, Maryland. His work has been nominated multiple times for both the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. His essay "Daydreaming Dystopia" placed second in the 2023 Bellarmine Goes Gonzo Writing Contest. He guest-edited the Hope Anthology of Poetry from CultureCult Press as well as the 2019-2023 Western Voices editions of Setu Mag. Selections of his poetry have been translated and published in 15 languages. He has been a weekly contributor at Dissident Voice for the past nine years. More about Outlar's work can be found at <https://17numa.com/>



Scott Thomas Outlar

## INTENTIONAL MOTIONS

A photographer  
eying loti in utero  
through a divinely  
focused lens

An artist  
appreciating her perfect  
nature at work

Clicking on all cylinders  
ebbing in the tide

A connoisseur  
witnessing Magdalena  
in another era

A soldier  
badgered by peace  
beleaguered by the wages of war

Glass sheen waterfalls  
reflecting crystalline consciousness  
honed to the finest degree

a thousand cliches  
can be laced in the coding  
of mundane lines  
and same old stories

but magic is gorged  
to the gills with primordial guts  
designed for weaving  
a world of infinite imagination

## 4TH &amp; CHAPEL

Open house  
prayer rooms  
near St. John's cemetery

each one offers  
a little taste  
of God's flesh  
from different angles  
of perception  
on the globe

High and flighty with the angels  
or six feet under carbon layers

everywhere you turn  
in life  
someone is doing something  
or other

Out and about  
constructing the world  
or laying down  
lazy bones

like the morning cat  
sat up  
and yawning  
in the window

and add a lion  
bronze or rusted  
proud in stone  
playing sentinel  
or cherub  
with fur aflame

## A MONSTER OF LIGHT IN MOTION

Assimilate  
disparately dichotic parts  
to align the structured whole

fractals and fragments  
shards and splinters  
pieces and particles

Chaos scrambles  
the pattern's picture  
with white noise  
and scattered signals  
until cohesion  
of honed consciousness  
coalesces  
the vibrational  
sound scape  
into more highly  
ordered shapes  
and forms

cymatic intentions  
sacred geometrical premonitions

pulse rays and photons  
stars and spirals  
pinpoints and needles

Stephanie Green has published poetry, short fiction, creative non-fiction and travel essays in literary magazines, anthologies and journals over the past four decades. Most recently her work has appeared in *Meniscus*, *StylusLit*, *Axon*, *TEXT*, *Burrow* and *Live Encounters*. Her writing is included in several current anthologies, such as the *Pratik* special edition *Fire and Rain*, edited by Yuyutsu Sharma, Sally Breen and Jennifer Mackenzie (*Pratik/APWT* 2023), *The Incompleteness Book II*, edited by Julia Prendergast, Eileen Herbert-Goodall and Jen Webb (Recent Works Press 2021) and the *Anthology of Australian Prose Poetry*, edited by Cassandra Atherton and Paul Hetherington (Melbourne University Press 2020). Stephanie released a collection of prose poems, *Breathing in Stormy Seasons*, with Recent Works Press in 2019 and previously published a selection of short stories, *Too Much too Soon* with Pandanus Press in 2006. Her new poetry collection, *Seams of Repair*, will be published with Calanthe Press in November 2023. Stephanie lives and writes on the lands of the Yugembeh/Kombumerri peoples and is currently an Adjunct Senior Lecturer with Griffith University.

## ANTS

It's what comes of digging, when every sign and omen is against you. The clay earth hardened by summer. The dying tree's refusal to give up. The roots that cling to what they've known so long. Yet you make progress, wetting and scraping away the clay many times, going deeper with each shallow cut of the spade, each thin scoop of the trowel. And when, finally, finally, you tear the last root from the hollow ground, you discover you are not alone. What was buried has been disturbed. What was still is now moving all around you. Tiny creatures ready to remind you, sharply, that it's well past time to find the angle of escape.



Stephanie Green



## UNBROKEN

When your mother died, you took the ornament cats from the shelves and smashed them into the fireplace, one by one. I didn't know if you were angry with your mother or the clutter she loved so well. She had thirty-two in her collection, gathered from her travels around the world. White porcelain kittens with gold edged ears and sweet, painted smiles. Terracotta cats as plump and serene as the Buddha. Venetian glass felines, smoky and sinuous. A black pair from Slovakia with red and yellow eyes. My favourite was the sleeping earthenware cat, furred and unadorned, that I could hold flat in the palm of my hand. I spirited it away to the bottom drawer before you could destroy it. In all these years I've never shown it to you. Maybe I'm hoping you'll pull out the drawer some day and see it, still unbroken.

## EDGE

You follow the edge of the road, black tar softened by heat, traffic rushing past, rushing past, until you're somewhere you don't recognise. A dusty stand of trees, dry weeds, a broken barbed wire fence. This is where the black crow descends, to give you some kind of direction. Or the white raven, if there is such a thing. Or – if night has fallen – the owl with wide earthy wings. You don't believe in signs. You want one anyway. Something telling you go forward, or back. The creature lands and eyes you coldly, but no word comes. No sound except for the distant traffic and the wishing of the trees. There's only a red and white ice cream wrapper caught in a clump of dried mud, a faded corner flapping in the wind. You can make out some of the letters if you try.

Thaddeus Rutkowski is the author of eight books, most recently *Safe Colors*, a novel in short fictions.. He teaches at Medgar Evers College and Columbia University and received a fiction writing fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts.



## SPIRAL STAIRS

The building's tower wasn't known to many people. When you came in the front door and looked around the bar area, you didn't see it. You had to go around behind the bar to find the stairs. Most customers wouldn't search far enough to find the stairs; they'd sit on a stool, drink their liquor, and, if alert enough, enjoy the decorations: the antique tchotchkes on shelves and the colored lights on strings.

My wife and I had stopped here for food on our way home from a clinic. I'd picked her up there.

"I'll be back soon," I said, and got up from our small, round-topped table.

I went straight to the tower. The stairs twisted in a spiral, following an outside stone wall. There was no railing, so I had to steady myself with my hand against the stones to climb the steps. As I ascended, I passed rooms, and when I looked in I found something ordinary but surprising in each one.

In the first enclosure I saw someone preparing a recipe. The food was red and white, and mushy, like grits. "Is it sweet or spicy?" I asked. "Or is it both?" I didn't hear the answer because I had to move on.

Not only did I not know what was in these rooms, I didn't know this part of town. We were way up north, and we lived downtown. On a table next to the tower's steps, I saw a stack of fliers referring to the kind of poetry event I'd attend downtown. And why not? There was no reason uptown's events couldn't overlap with downtown's.

When I looked into another room, I spotted a plant with flowers. It was a cactus—not a particularly healthy one. It looked like a windowsill plant in our apartment. Our plant had branches that drooped for most of the year but gained new life in the winter, when the cactus put out a bloom of large white flowers.

Thaddeus Rutkowski

## SPIRAL STAIRS *contd...*

Elsewhere, I saw an art print on a wall. In the work, an insect sat in the center of a gray-brown background. The creature was some sort of fly, with a pattern of blacks and browns on its body and wings. But “sat” wasn’t the right word; the insect was mounted where two lines intersected. It was pinned there. One of its legs had come free and was frozen in a curl. It looked like a specimen prepared by my father for study. He had been an amateur entomologist and had preserved hundreds of insects in glass-topped boxes.

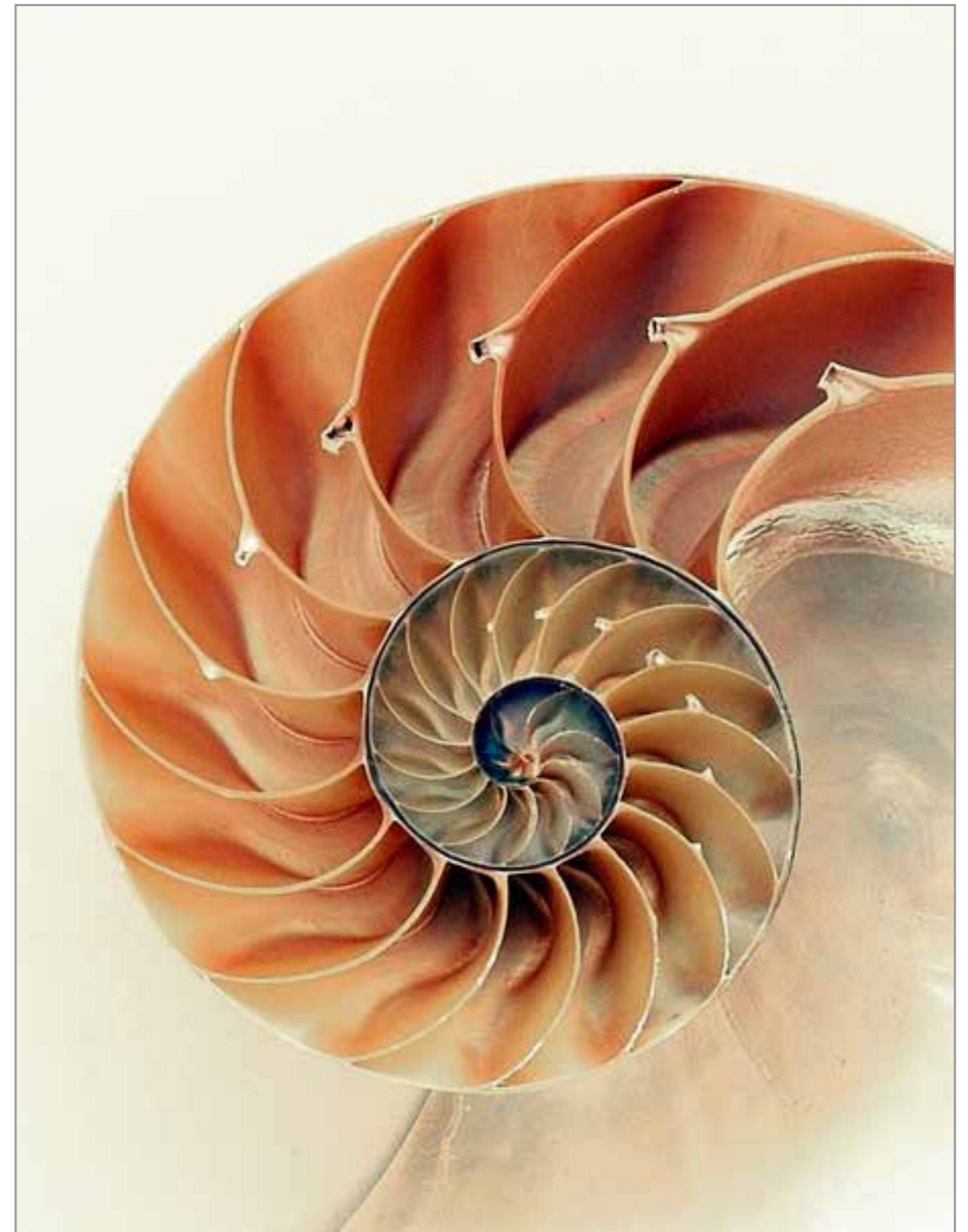
In another room, I was drawn to a window and looked out, expecting to see the side of a neighboring building, but the view opened onto greenery, a place like a park. Three trees stood in a row, as if planted. They were past flowering, and yellow-green leaves sprouted from their branches. They looked like trees outside our apartment in late spring.

Farther along, a watercolor made by child was tacked to a white wall. I recognized it as an artwork by our daughter: A girl’s head rose above a river next to Manhattan. Only one building, the Empire State, was visible in the distance. Was she drowning? I didn’t think so. The dark-haired girl was afloat, and she was smiling. Maybe she’d completed a swimming lap around the island.

In another enclosure, a photo caught my attention. Someone I knew was in the photo: a member of my childhood family. It was my mother, standing with her relatives—people I’d never met. The photo was labeled “The Wang Family” in someone’s handwriting. I should have known these people—they were my relatives, too—but I didn’t know them. I couldn’t put first names to their faces.

I came back to our table next to the bar. Very little time had passed since I got up and walked away. Our food had arrived. The drinkers were in their same places.

I encouraged my wife to climb the stairs. “You should go and look at the rooms,” I said. “If you go alone, you’ll see things I didn’t see.”



Photographcredit: <https://pixabay.com/photos/nautilus-shell-shine-silver-1029360/>

Tim Tomlinson is the author of the chapbook *Yolanda: An Oral History in Verse*, the poetry collection, *Requiem for the Tree Fort I Set on Fire*, and the short story collection, *This Is Not Happening to You*. Recent work appears in *Bangalore Literary Review*, *The Anonym*, *Tin Can Literary Review*, and the annual anthology, *Best Asian Short Stories* (2023). A new collection, *Listening to Fish: meditations from the wet world*, will appear soon on Nirala books. Tim is the director of New York Writers Workshop, and co-author of its popular text, *The Portable MFA in Creative Writing*. He teaches writing in NYU's Global Liberal Studies.



Tim Tomlinson

## LOST

Every day, for half of the Seventh grade and all of the Eighth, Dale Weston and Clifford Foote walked the halls of the Junior High together. They shared many of the same Advanced Placement classes: AP English, AP History, String Ensemble, Latin I, then Latin II. The classes they didn't share kept them apart only for the duration of the period. When the class bells rang, Dale would be standing without fail outside Cliff's classroom door, ready to walk him to the next class, her hair held back in a tortoise shell barrette, and her culottes hemmed many inches above her knees. How did she get there so fast, Cliff wondered? Did she run? Did she get out of class early? Did she request a pass? It was like magic, and at first it made school bearable, then exciting. He never told her all through Seventh and Eighth grades that he loved her, but he could tell that she could tell. They weren't officially "going steady," Cliff hadn't given her a ring, he didn't feel he had to, they weren't in *Archie Comics*. Still, he believed it was clear that he loved Dale, clear to Dale and to everyone else, just as it was clear to him, through her devotion and reliability and consistency, through her delight in his jokes and her attention to his assertions, that Dale loved him, too, very much, although like Cliff she had never felt the need to proclaim that love aloud. But what else could she mean, Cliff used to tell himself, those times when they'd sit together on class trips, or at lunchtime with their legs dangling over the cafeteria wall, and she'd sing, *just call me angel of the morning*, and *I say a little prayer for you*? Or on the many days, walking and talking between classes, Dale took Cliff's hand in hers. *She took his hand*, and he loved that so much. When they spoke at their lockers, she'd remove his wristwatch and run her fingers lightly up and down his forearm. Later, after school, and already miles away on his bus rides home, while Dale practiced tennis with her friends or attended ballet class or student council meetings, Cliff could still feel the tingling of those fingers on his skin.

Sometimes Dale's friends Judy and Patti complained that Dale spent too much time with Cliff. They were afraid he might be a bad influence. His hair was unkempt, his taste in music was extreme, and he stole books from the library. He wrote weird slogans on school walls, and once he'd been suspended for handing out SDS flyers at a high school assembly. But Judy and Patti lived close by Dale, and Dale told them that there was always plenty of time to talk to them later, after school at tennis practice or choir or on the telephone when they'd finished their homework.

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Dale encouraged her friends to get to know Cliff better, to listen to his suggestions about records and books and politics. They needed to be less naïve, she said, and more mature. Didn't they know all the terrible things that were happening? Didn't they see how wrong it was to ignore injustice?

Riding home, Cliff ignored the chatter of his school bus mates and stared blankly at the passing roadside that led to where he lived, past the auto body shops and 7-11's, the parking lots dotted with green dumpsters on which seagulls perched, the asphalt veined with cracks sprouting weeds and strewn with broken glass and wax paper and Styrofoam cups and plastic lids and pizza boxes, the blocks after blocks of identical houses on identical plots with identical trees in exactly the same spots in developments laid out in grids on land flat as potato fields—on land that once was potato fields, but Cliff didn't concentrate much on what he looked at, or through, or beyond. Rather, he imagined a future with Dale opening as vividly as a movie on the screen of a drive-in theater. He and Dale holding hands at rock concerts. He and Dale holding hands at demonstrations against the war. He and Dale sitting-in on college campuses, spray painting revolutionary slogans, throwing rocks at cop cars, tossing smoking canisters of tear gas back at the National Guard. He'd see that all in such clarity, such detail, each day on his ride home, their future as certain as the next album by the Beatles. Sometimes he'd space so far into the future he'd ride the bus right past his stop.

Then, one day in the Ninth grade, on the second floor of the GCA building just outside the science labs, Dale asked Cliff not to follow her around anymore.

"Follow you?" Cliff said, and Dale said, yes, follow.

Cliff remembered that moment photographically. In the beige hallway, against the brown lockers, the sheet metal clanging of the locker doors, the wall of students shouldering by, the blurry din of their chatter. Dale in a collarless and sleeveless white blouse, and micro-mini culottes with a houndstooth pattern. No stockings. She stood erect, a dancer's position, her books against her chest. Cliff shouldered a locker. He remembered how her words seemed to hollow out his chest and stomach, and how they set off a ringing in his ears.

She had spoken with her father, she said, and her father had told her what to say. He had said to tell Cliff don't follow me anymore.

"Hold it," Cliff said.

But Dale wouldn't hold it. She told him not to wait for her any more, between classes or after school. She said not to call on the telephone either.

"My father said to tell you you're a nice boy," she said. "That he thought you were a really nice boy."

"Nice boy?" Cliff muttered, his face scrunching around the phrase as if around a bad taste. "He said that?"

"He did," Dale said, nodding. "But he also said you were lost."

"I'm what?" Cliff said.

"Lost," Dale repeated. "He said you were nice, not in some spastic way, and he stressed that, but he also thinks you're lost."

And Cliff recoiled, as if from a blow, and the word rang between his ears like a gong. It registered so deeply that Cliff turned away, shaking his head, silently forming the word in his mouth as if it were a code he had once memorized and suddenly recalled, the breakthrough of an amnesiac. Lost. The sound of it pushed away all the other sounds in the hall. The students shouting, the lockers banging, the heels thumping, all these receded in the echoing gong of lost. He pictured Dale's father pronouncing it, his lips carefully forming the word around the stem of his pipe. It was the first true word, the first true sound. Lost. How, he wondered, had Dale's father seen it, how had he known? What clue had betrayed it? How could he not have known it himself? Who else knew? The teachers? Judy and Patti? He wanted to talk to Dale's father, he wanted to know more about himself, he wanted to be found.

Cliff said, "I thought—"

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But Dale cut him off. She said her father told her not to discuss her decision with Cliff, and not to argue it, and not to defend it. It had to be stated, but that was that. It was final, and there was nothing to be gained by explanations because all the explanation Cliff required was the statement itself. Dale's goodbye might seem painful in the immediate, her father had told her to tell Cliff, it might appear abrupt, without warning, irrational, violent, unfair. It might appear as if it erased, in a second, more than two years of very close friendship, a friendship that might have appeared to others, maybe even to Cliff, as a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship. But that would have been a mistaken impression, based on nothing Dale had ever said or meant to say. However, she added, it could be the case that Dale had inadvertently contributed to that mistaken impression, and that was why her father had advised her to be so final, so resolute now, even if that resolve might appear cold, even brutal. Eventually, Dale's father told her and she repeated now to Cliff, eventually Cliff would come to appreciate her economy, her efficiency, the neatness of her goodbye, and when he did—perhaps in a month, or a school term, maybe a year, or perhaps not until Cliff was in his twenties and after he'd had new experiences with other girls, and perhaps after he'd left them abruptly and without explanation, which Dale's father felt certain would happen, as it must with every young man, and young woman—when Cliff was able and did come to appreciate the humane economy of Dale's goodbye, he would probably want to thank her for its merciful brevity. But in the meantime, she quickly added when his eyes lifted and she could see clearly through the pools forming in them that something like hope was already forming in them too, but Cliff was not to call and thank her once that understanding did arrive, which her father had been certain it would, and she was certain, too, but just to be clear and thorough and completely transparent, Cliff was not to call her with that understanding or with any other understanding or observation or reason now, soon, or in the future, ever.

"Ever?" Cliff said, or thought he said.

And Dale said, "Ever."

And Cliff said, "I don't—"

But Dale said, "Period." She said, "Full stop. Time out. Game over."

Cliff said, "But how--?"

And Dale said, "There is no how, Cliff, there is no why."

And Cliff said, "I don't understand."

And Dale explained what her father explained to her: that there was nothing to understand except that she had made a decision and that decision was that Clifford Foote was no longer to follow her, or contact her, or question her, ever and for always. Her father, she said, had said the exact same thing about the finality and the irrevocability and the totality of Dale's decision, and her mother agreed with, and Dale believed in, and Judy and Patti supported very strongly and the Student Council endorsed and even the choir and the ballet studio encouraged that absolute, unequivocal, and non-negotiable resolve.

And then the bell rang and Cliff said, "Dale," and Dale snapped at him for grabbing at her arm and he begged her to wait for just a second, or a minute, and she snapped again.

"Stop holding me back!" she shouted. And she stamped her foot once, maybe twice, and she shook his hand free from her arm as if shaking off an unpleasant substance, and other students in the hallway stopped and stared and some laughed and others whispered, and then Dale Weston scooted away, so quickly she ran down the up stairs.

"Will you wait outside my next class?" Cliff said after her.

He wasn't sure she heard him.

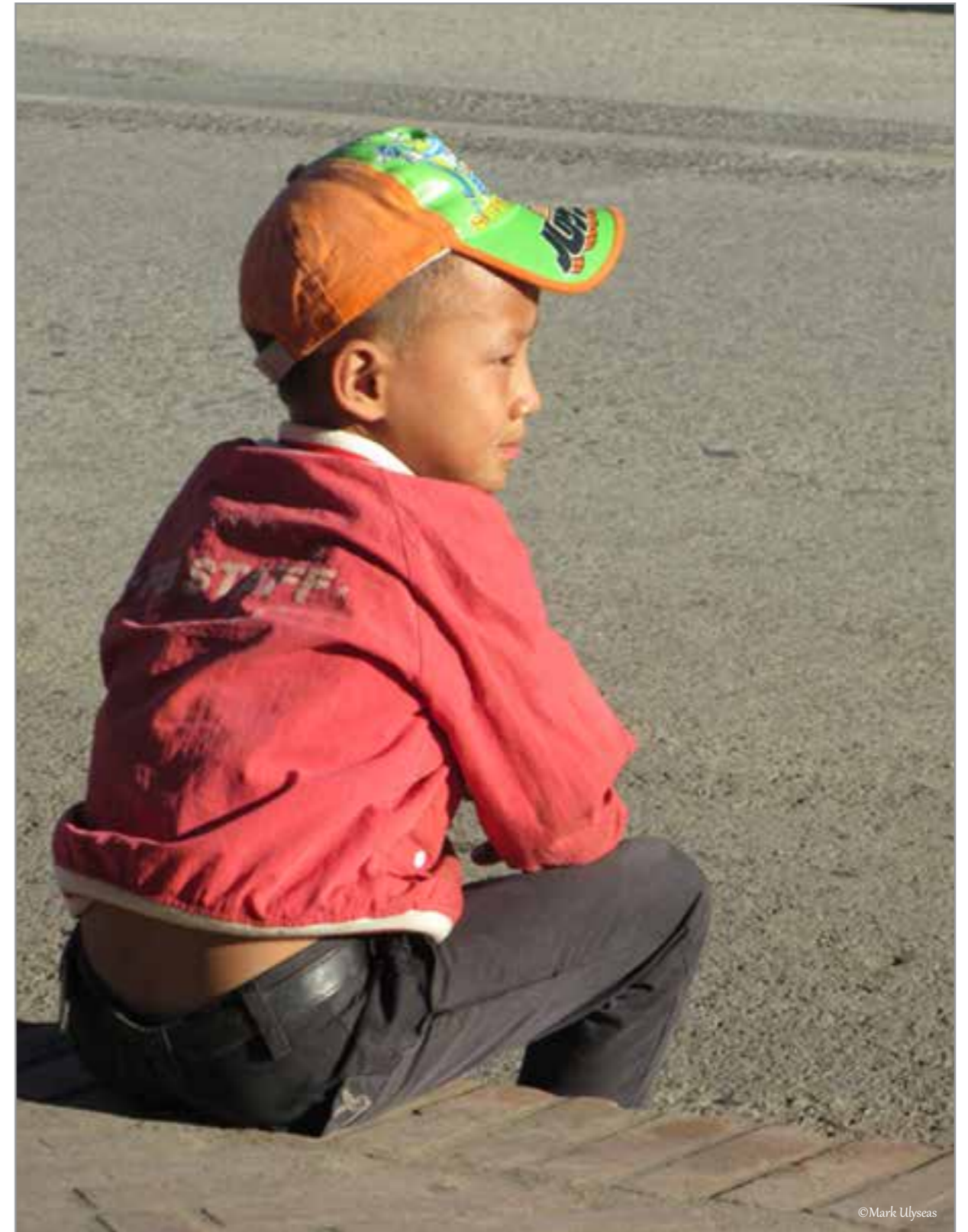
But when his next class ended he waited outside its door, and waited and waited, his heart pounding, then nearly stopping each time he spotted a ballet-straight posture, perfectly aligned shoulders, long, stockingless legs, cordovan penny loafers and white anklets. He waited through the press of other students passing through the halls, entering classrooms, opening and closing lockers, proceeding down or up stairways. He waited through the thinning, then the disappearance of those students, and through the second bell ringing through the empty halls.

*continued overleaf...*

•••

Ordinarily, when Cliff cut school, he did it with stealth. Today, he just walked down the front drive. He felt like he was invisible, or like he didn't care. When someone called his name, he kept walking. He walked over the speed bumps, past the track and the tennis courts, to the hill near the end of the drive, which he climbed. At the hilltop, he hopped the fence and took the woods path that led to downtown. Pale green buds were just appearing on the bare trees. Cliff didn't notice them. He didn't notice anything. He could have walked into traffic, been struck by a car, and still continue walking.

At the harbor he watched seagulls perch on pylons. A ferry went out, a ferry came in. It emptied. Everything felt empty. From his pelvis to the tips of his lungs he felt empty. He thought of a poem he'd read in a book he'd stolen. It gave him an idea for one of his own. He got as far as its title. "Lost: Lines Written in Dejection at the Empty Goddamn Harbor (for Dale Weston)." He imagined the rest of his life would be its lines.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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# Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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