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POETRY & WRITING

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VOLUME SIX NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2023

THOMAS MCCARTHY
Intelligent thinking and Poetry



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

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Thomas McCarthy was born at Cappoquin, Co. Waterford in 1954 and educated locally and at University College Cork. He was an Honorary Fellow of the International Writing programme, University of Iowa in 1978/79. He has published *The First Convention* (1978), *The Sorrow Garden* (1981), *The Lost Province* (1996), *Merchant Prince* (2005) and *The Last Geraldine Officer* (2009) as well as a number of other collections. He has also published two novels and a memoir. He has won the Patrick Kavanagh Award, the Alice Hunt Bartlett Prize and the O'Shaughnessy Prize for Poetry as well as the Ireland Funds Annual Literary Award. He worked for many years at Cork City Libraries, retiring in 2014 to write fulltime. He was International Professor of English at Macalester College, Minnesota, in 1994/95. He is a former Editor of *Poetry Ireland Review* and *The Cork Review*. He has also conducted poetry workshops at Listowel Writers' Week, Molly Keane House, Arvon Foundation and Portlaoise Prison (Provisional IRA Wing). He is a member of Aosdana. His collections *Pandemonium* and *Prophecy*, were published by Carcanet in 2016 and 2019. Last year Gallery Press, Ireland, published his sold-out journals, *Poetry, Memory and the Party*. Gallery will publish *Questioning Ireland: Essays and Reviews* in early summer 2024; and Carcanet will publish a new collection, *Plenitude*, in 2025.



Thomas McCarthy

THOMAS MCCARTHY INTELLIGENT THINKING AND POETRY

I was in Dublin last Tuesday and in Doheny & Nesbits, a pub which is not very far either from Government Buildings or The Arts Council HQ, a very new reader of my own poetry handed me a copy of William Empson's *COLLECTED POEMS* (Chatto and Windus, 1955, reprinted 1956). Empson was one of the most brilliant literary critics ever born, author of the hugely influential *SEVEN TYPES OF AMBIGUITY* and *THE STRUCTURE OF COMPLEX WORDS*. Sent down from Magdalene, Cambridge, after a packet of condoms was found in his rooms, he never wavered from his dedication to scholarship, with a mind that remained as vigorous as his young body must have been when he was an undergraduate. He was sure of the importance of poetry; his analysis of the sonnets of Shakespeare and the poems of John Donne is original and clairvoyant in its brilliance. His genius must have been a comfort to every isolated intellectual in mid-century England, as well as all the intellectuals in the far-flung British colonies of that era. His life was a reminder that when it comes to an analysis of poetry in the English mother tongue, England does produce the real thing, the authentic critic; over and over and in every generation. As with FR Leavis or Donald Davie, the thinking is profound and insightful and very carefully assembled.

But both Davie and Empson were poets, reasonably successful and respected poets; respected even among poets." Empson is the idol of undergraduates and dons at universities," wrote John Betjeman in *The Daily Telegraph*, the sort of statement that makes the reader quite sure that it is Betjeman who's the excluded one. When this *COLLECTED POEMS* that I was gifted in Doheny & Nesbits was published John Davenport shared his enthusiasm on the BBC: "the publication of his *COLLECTED POEMS* is a literary event of first-rate importance." Really? Did Davenport really mean that, or was he just drinking heavily before he came into the BBC recording studio? The fact is this: as thinker and linguist Empson was superb, but even his best poems leave a lot to be desired. Empson's style as poet was the intellectual style, the style of poet as thinker, the poem as cognitive process.

You will find this style in any copy of *Partisan Review* or *Virginia Quarterly Review* or *Hudson Review* published between 1938 and 1968. You will even find it in *Horizon* or *Irish Writing*. Sometimes this style is pitifully copied, both tone and approach to material, in the earliest poems of John Montague or Anthony Cronin as the two poets strained after ‘the modern tone.’

Here is William Empson in ‘Plenum and Vacuum’ (p7):

*‘Delicate goose-step of penned scorpions
Patrols its weals under glass-cautered bubble;
Postpones, fire-cinct, their suicide defiance,
Pierced carapace stung in mid vault of bell.*

*From infant screams the eyes’ blood-gorged veins
Called ringed orbiculars to guard their balls.....’*

And here he is in ‘Doctrinal Point’ (p39):

‘The god approached dissolves into the air.

*Magnolias, for instance, when in bud,
Are right in doing anything they can think of;
Free by predestination in the blood,
Saved by their own sap, shed for themselves,
Their texture can impose their architecture;
Their sapient matter is always already informed.’*

The first poem above, with its ‘cautered,’ ‘orbiculars,’ and ‘cinct’ is hardly a verse intended for the general reader. It is not only a precise poetry, but the poetry of an inner knowing circle of academics. The word ‘cautered’ for example is not simply ‘cauterized’ but more ‘cauter,’ the root word that includes in its dictionary meaning both the idea of the searing of conscience and the burning away of false doctrine. The highly educated, Ph.D-level reader would understand this, but not the common reader in a Public Library. The word ‘orbiculars’ is more precisely anatomical, meaning not just rounded or spherical, but having an active sphincter-like function of closing apertures. The word ‘cinct’ is Medieval English, a word meaning both girdled and girded as well as encircled. As in the case of the magnolias in ‘Doctrinal Point’ the ‘sapient matter’ of the poem is ‘already informed.’

The poem here presumes the well-informed reader. And this is the limitation of such work, it is why the work, in general, can’t endure; and hasn’t endured. I was not surprised to find that this COLLECTED POEMS of Empson although of only 89 pages of poetry, contained 26 pages of ‘notes.’ The much later COMPLETE POEMS OF WILLIAM EMPSON, edited lovingly (no doubt) by John Heffenden, a book of a little over 500 pages that has 300 pages of ‘notes.’ This is simply ridiculous, and so self-serving that it is an embarrassment. Poetry needs to speak for itself, directly. It is not a cryptic crossword, and should never be. It is even worse to publish cryptic crosswords with hundreds of pages of disentangling notes appended. A poem is neither an instruction nor a seminar.

Now, it is generally accepted that poets are intelligent; the very process of making a poem, a complex verbal construct, seems to be a guarantor or certification of cogent thought. Interestingly, intelligence per se is not so remarked upon in either published books or periodical reviews. The critic needs to avoid that question, it seems. And the critic, or reviewer, generally does. Nowadays – and by ‘nowadays’ I mean the last thirty-five years – something other than traditional intelligence has entered into the discourse of poetry. Poetry is now mainly about either Biographical or Ethnic IQ. The ‘I’ of the contemporary poem is no longer the 1950s thinking ‘I’ but an ‘I’ that is either biographical or socially centred within a perceived formerly excluded class of persons. In a very real sense, all of the most successful poetry is now a kind of Nationalist poetry, a Nationalism of the person and a Nationalism of the sum of the person’s social and cultural experiences, including experiences of exclusion and victimisation. This is the essential grammar of the successful contemporary poem. Blame Sylvia Plath and her brilliantly influential poetry for this, or should we blame the journalism of A. Alvarez, another critic-poet?

Well, you’d have to start, surely, with Emily Dickinson, her ego undisturbed and Puritan-comforted in that settled Puritan world. Dickinson was one of the first to be carried away by the atmosphere her thinking-self had created:

*‘My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –
In Corners – till a Day
The Owner passed – identified –
And carried Me away.’ (1863)*

That Dickinson might be carried away by the process of poetry – ‘It is as a Vesuvian face/ Had let its pleasure through –’ is one of the earliest instructions in the modern process of making the authentic poem. Intelligence alone can’t do it, and no effort of intelligent thinking. But something else, something that was lost in so much of mid-twentieth century poetry and all those very earnest poems published by tenured academics in the North Atlantic world. So, it is not just in the last thirty-five years or so that the poem has become biographically-centred; victim-centred, if you like. No, it’s just that poetry of the Empson era had lost touch with the very essence of the poem, its bleeding centre. Possibly the fear of sentimentality created this tone, even the need to be sustained by irony. Anne Sexton, writing in her poem ‘Cinderella’ in 1971, outlines the situation of the aspiring poem best of all:

*‘Her father brought presents home from town,
jewels and gowns for the other women
but the twig of a tree for Cinderella.
She planted that twig on her mother’s grave
And it grew to a tree where a white dove sat.
Whenever she wished for anything the dove
Would drop it like an egg upon the ground.
The bird is important, my dears, so heed him.’*

It is not merely by intelligent thinking that Dickinson or Sexton came to their poems. Or why their poetry is full of such insights and instructions. Intelligent thought at the highest level may make you a brilliant critic, but it will never make you a poet; as true a poet as Sexton or Dickinson or Plath. They had something. What was it that they had all day that William Empson only glimpsed rarely, if ever? A gift, the mouth, the music, the centred-ness, the certainty of self, the servility of language – rather than its authority – in the face of the true poet. I’m still reading Empson’s poems, looking for the poetry and left wondering. But be warned, and this is my warning to you, so heed me, my dears: complex education and high intelligence never made a poem. It has to be something else entirely, a spirit within, a youthful, fearless spirit around which something biographical will cohere. As William Empson has written (p46) in the poem ‘Your Teeth are Ivory Towers:’

*There are some critics say our verse is bad
Because Piaget’s babies had the same affection,
Proved by interview. These young were mad,*

They spoke not to Piaget but to themselves.’

POETRY, MEMORY AND THE PARTY

Thomas McCarthy



Journals 1974-2014

Available at: www.amazon.com

Angela Costi is the author of five poetry collections including *Honey & Salt* (Five Islands Press, shortlisted for Mary Gilmore Prize 2008) and *An Embroidery of Old Maps and New* (Spinifex Press, awarded The Book Prize for Poetry in English 2022 by the Greek Australian Cultural League); together with nine produced plays/performance-text. She received the High Commendation for Contribution to Arts and Culture, Merri-bek Award 2021. She is known as Αγγελική Κωστή among the Cypriot Greek diaspora, her heritage. She lives on the land of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation (Melbourne, Australia). See <https://www.facebook.com/AngelaCostiPoetics/> for further information about her writing.



Angela Costi

REMNANTS

Day Three

Among the coffee-stained overdue bills, postcards from Queensland, cards for birthdays and Christmas, and the various Aged Care brochures, there's a diary. It's black, spiral-bound, made-in-Australia and titled, *Dimitris Neophitou Book of LiFe*.

Steph holds it as far away from her body as possible, dangling it with her two pressed thumbs, almost throwing it over to her older sister. Leah opens to the first page but stops to quieten her pummelling heart. Shuts it. Breathes.

Do you want me to read it or burn it? She asks Steph.

Burn it. No. I don't know? I don't want to know. Steph leaves the room, announcing, *I'll clear out the linen closet.*

Leah is left in their father's back room. The air is still full of his smells. The couch, carpet, even the TV, carry his scent. She looks out the window to where his lemon and olive trees are left to grow gnarly. Who will take care of them?

Day Seven

Leah's blood splashing the sink red, Steph's face an open scream, their father upturning the dinner table smashing platters of slow cooked lamb shanks, oven potatoes, roast chicken, dolmathes, their mother thrusting the empty bottle of *Metaxa* up at the sky as evidence. These fractured images glaze into a warm numbness as Leah gulps one more shot of the Cypriot brandy before staring down at the diary, lying in the box. It's hard to imagine her father of action sitting to write anything. He could tell a story or two. The same ones about travelling on a miserable ship to get to Australia or how his first boss, Mr Kasimatis, would yell at him for not saying *Thank you*. Maybe this is all she would find, stories about him surviving the grit. Leah sunk into the chair with the book. She opened the first page as if it were a band-aid being ripped off to expose a wound.

Sunday was a very nice day hot and windy. We didn't go to church as always but my wife had a lot of things to do----- Her father's voice entered her head, thundering through to her stomach. Leah shut the book, put it back in its box, closed the wardrobe door, and left it in the dark with the other stuff she would get around to sorting.

Sunday was a very nice day hot and windy. We didn't go to church as always but my wife had a lot of things to do----- Her father's voice entered her head, thundering through to her stomach. Leah shut the book, put it back in its box, closed the wardrobe door, and left it in the dark with the other stuff she would get around to sorting.

Day Fifty-Five

Three lemon trees, two olive trees and sprawling jasmine are still alive despite scant rain and Leah watering them rarely. Although small, the lemons are yellow, begging to be picked. Leah has already filled one bucket and is searching for other buckets, or boxes, anything to put them in. She's in her father's garage. He loved this space. This is where he listened to the horse races, played backgammon with his cousin, prepared the lamb for the spit, made phone calls out of earshot. There's a chest of drawers, a fridge, a table – parts of her father to unravel and sort.

In a drawer, she finds old photos. Her father in his early twenties, before he met her mother, when he was working at the delicatessen in Sydney. Smiling at the camera behind the counter. Pouring milk into a milkshake maker. Another photo of him smiling broadly wearing a white shirt with black bowtie next to what could be his old boss, Mr Kasimatis, standing outside the deli. Another photo of him with his arms around two women. One is definitely his younger sister, Effie, the other is an unknown woman who is looking longingly into his eyes while he is staring straight at the camera.

Day Sixty-Two

My name is Dimitris, they call me Jimmy. I arrived in Australia when I was 15 years old and we lived in Sydney. In a few weeks I found a job working in a milkbar in Petersham for Mr John Kasimatis. As soon as I started working my father left me and he was gone to work in North QLD cutting sugar cane and I wouldn't see him for 6 months. I like my job but sometimes my boss made me cry and I go up to my room...

Leah shuts his diary, knowing there is need for more days before she is ready to continue.



Photograph credit: <https://pixabay.com/photos/photos-memories-nostalgia-missing-630378/>

Anna Yin was Mississauga's Inaugural Poet Laureate (2015-17) and has authored five poetry collections and two books of translations including: *Mirrors and Windows* (Guernica Editions 2021). Anna won the 2005 Ted Plantos Memorial Award, two MARTYs, two scholarships from USA and grants from Ontario Arts Council and Canada Council for the Arts. Her poems/translations have appeared at Queen's Quarterly, ARC Poetry, New York Times, China Daily, CBC Radio, Literary Review of Canada etc. She read on Parliament Hill, at Austin International Poetry Festival, Edmonton Poetry Festival and universities in China, Canada and USA etc. She has designed and taught Poetry Alive since 2011. [She produced *Awakening*, a poetry film in 2023.](#)



A RED ROSE

Tonight, I wear a red dress
to match the red rose you sent
although Valentine's has long faded away
It is nice to welcome spring season

Shall I say
it is not a gift for me
it is just a mirror of yourself
In my Chinese character,
I grow the faith:
Love is a mirror

You see, the dawn light breaks
birdcalls are not for us
they are for themselves

The dreamcatcher hangs in the air
I become a moon observer
and watch the ocean ebb and flow:
ripples of reflections
of shining things
of a heart
of a red rose

Anna Yin

YAN LI'S TREE

The Chinese poet and painter Yan Li said.
"It would be wonderful to be born in a fruit tree."

But as I carefully combed his studio,
I found no trace of a tree or its fruit.
Instead, I saw fingers pointing toward the sky,
splashes of colors, and masks floating
before and after city lockdowns

Perhaps Yan Li has long resided in Shanghai,
Beijing and New York, troubled and blinded
by steel forests and smog-filled skies?
Does he know the countryside in Hunan
where he once shot birds to feed his hunger
when he was a teen, now it is abundant with
red apples, golden oranges, and heart-shaped pears?
How about sending him some seeds
for him to plant so that he could paint a fruit tree
with certainty meanwhile healing his nostalgia?

Yet Yan Li doesn't need that.
He sends me his earlier painting from his treasured collection,
a tree titled: "Within the Body"-

So that is it:
the trunk of the tree embraces the city where he lives,
bountiful and bright with blue and green sap,
schools of fish swimming freely up and down...
My gaze is led beyond the frame by surrounding red leaves,
and I feel as though I sit beneath this tree,
where heaven and blue sea merge,
The red sky blending with
Norval Morrisseau's "The Tree of Life" —
apples as vibrant as rosy lips,
recounting ancient myths and astral dreams,
as we are all cosmically united.



Within, painting by Yan Li.

Anne Elvey lives and writes on unceded Bunurong Country. She is of Irish, Scottish and English descent. Her recent poetry collections are *Leaf* (Liquid Amber Press, 2022), shortlisted for the 2023 ASLE-UKI Book Prize for the best work of creative writing with an ecological theme, and *Obligations of voice* (Recent Work Press, 2021). Her chapbook, *this flesh that you know* (Leaf Press 2015) was international winner of the Overleaf Chapbook Manuscript Award 2015. Her work has been shortlisted in a number of poetry awards including the David Harold Tribe Poetry Award, the Newcastle Poetry Prize and the Peter Porter Poetry Prize. Her latest scholarly book, *Reading with Earth: Contributions of the New Materialism to an Ecological Feminist Hermeneutics* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2022), was awarded the 2023 ANZATS Book Prize for an Established Scholar. Anne is close to completing a new collection, '(C)LOUD: A poetic response to child sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church', written from her perspective as a whistleblower. Anne is an adjunct research fellow in the School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics, Monash University, and an honorary research fellow at Pilgrim Theological College, University of Divinity, in Naarm (Melbourne). <https://sunglintdrift.com/>

AFTER THE OUTBREAK

A whipcrack breaks into sleep like a funding alert. Has life become an examination? At my desk the lure of a grant stiffens my neck. A fill-in form extends to ache. I recall how invigilation wearies. I want to gentle a word which holds against the excess detail of our days. Symptoms confound as curfews cease and lockdowns end. Is their end an end? Blinking, I pace into bright. Today at a gallop world is topsy-turvy. Slow. Slow. Steady. When I visit my brother we sit on his deck. Look says his partner the hibiscus is in flower. I've been inside for months. Wind tussles our locks. Home again, I take up the reins that are drooping from a solitary summer cloud. I skip with them.



Anne Elvey

GENEALOGICAL INQUIRIES

Did my ancestors move stone
for the Coldrum Long Barrow? Who
by the Medway countered Vespasian?

Whose sisters, whose brothers fell
in defeat? Which mother's forebears,
their daughters and sons, joined

the Peasants' Revolt? By what old
road did my father's father's
lineage labour for a lord? With elven

gifts who of them wove words into
fable? Who were the psalmists? Who
were the poets? How under the moon

did the breadmakers, winnowers, widows
and thieves, midwives and witches, hearth
hands and kin, with spindle, with sack

and by stove feed this, my inheritance
of body and breath? Before transit by
water and wind, by cart or from sea

when did they look last on Kent?



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Barbara Crooker is the author of ten full-length books of poetry, including *Some Glad Morning* (Pitt Poetry Series), which was long-listed for the Julie Suk award and *Slow Wreckage* (Grayson Books, forthcoming in 2024). *Radiance*, her first book, won the 2005 Word Press First Book Award and was finalist for the 2006 Paterson Poetry Prize; *Line Dance*, her second book, won the 2009 Paterson Award for Excellence in Literature; and *The Book of Kells* won the Best Poetry Book of 2019 Award from Writing by the Sea. Her writing has received a number of awards, including the WB Yeats Society of New York Award, the Thomas Merton Poetry of the Sacred Award, and three Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Creative Writing Fellowships. Her work appears in literary journals and anthologies, including *Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania* and *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*. She has been a fellow at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, the Moulin à Nef, Auville, France, and The Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Annaghmakerrig, Ireland. Garrison Keillor has read her poems on *The Writer's Almanac*, and she has read her poetry all over the country, including The Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival and the Library of Congress.

WINTER

I'm glad that the heart, too, is seasonal.
Kerry Hardie

Outside, it's dipped, not just below zero, but with a wind-chill of minus ten. The pond outside this window is skinned with ice. The winter sun glints off its surface, fails to warm. An absence of birds. And you're gone, too, putting my heart in hibernation. Unlike my sister, the shaggy bear, I doubt it will wake up in spring. I'm learning that grief is a river, that it sluggishly flows in the blood. Still, ready or not, spring will come, with armfuls of lilacs, bleeding hearts, violets. Green grass. Soft air. How will my heart, that frozen glacier, be able to bear it?



Barbara Crooker

AGAIN

It's two years later, and I'm
cycling again through the layers
of trauma: you, yelling in pain
on our bathroom floor; your heart
stopping when the paramedics
arrived; the eleven-hour surgery
to repair your aorta, and then
the aftermath—hospitals, rehabs,
no visits due to Covid.
Again, I have to wonder, was there
any point at which I could have
saved you? The dark skies don't answer,
and neither do the trees, bare black limbs
stripped of their leaves. There's only
the wind, its constant susurrus, pushing
in from the west, undoing the raked
pile by the street, sending them
on their way.

GRIEF IS AN ONION

you peel it layer by layer:
papery skin, translucent
flesh, tender heart.
And then you weep.

Bobbie Sparrow lives in Co. Galway, she has been published in many journals and anthologies including Abridged, Southword, Sky-light 47, Crannog and The Honest Ulsterman. She has been placed in various well-known competitions and was voted best published poet 2018/19 by *Dodging the rain*. Bobbie has been featured reader at many events. Her debut collection is due for publication Spring 2024 with Yaffle Press. Bobbie loves swimming in cold lakes and staring at trees in winter.



A STUDY OF SURRENDER

A milkweed butterfly whispers
through my dream, orange wings

tissue-thin courting the wind,
her life fading in the rhythmic dips

she makes, barely grazes the stone wall
that curves down to the grey sea.

I see a crease in her silk,
the sketch of death, I long

(for longing is my twin)
to pair my delicate heart

with such gracious strength.
Allow the day to carry me

through all its grim and glory,
feel the fading of my feathers

as merely the passing of time.

Bobbie Sparrow

TAMED

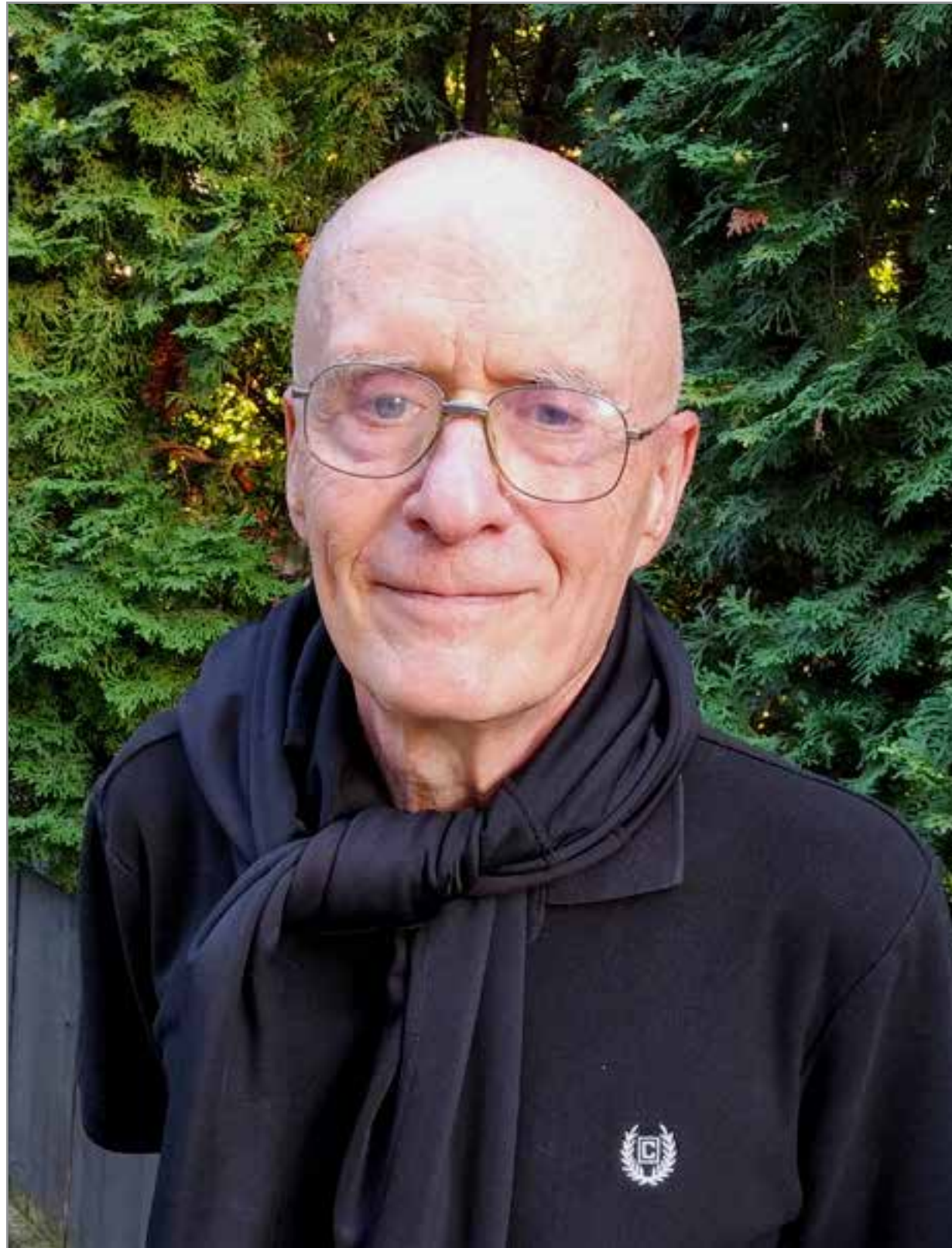
There is a moment when the falcon
cannot hear the falconer.
Her wings become the spread of longing,
the sky the height of possibility.
Three thousand feet from the flat earth,
her foster home is a narrowed green grey,
colours of hoods and gauntlets.

She uses the wind like a lover,
meets the potency with furious heart.
Unravels, remembers herself,
yet, tamed to turn away from the wild,
a raised arm is all it takes
for her speed to increase in descent.

CHRONIC

It's nights like this I want to die, not/ because of the pain but/ because of its
absence/the world shimmers through the stove/ I'm eating dark chocolate/ the
wine is earthy and my cat is the colour of the flames/ the day had so much kindness
I couldn't fathom it/ I thought they are right / they are right, about the universe and
manifesting/ and I forget about the days I thought it was a pile of rubbish because/
now after doing nothing except/ defrosting the freezer and grating cheese on my
dinner/ everything seems luminous/ I'm riding high on a moment/ but I know it
won't last and I can't hold on/ the rope slips in my sweaty grip/ I must let go/
accept that tomorrow/ the pain may wag its finger at me/ grin like the joker from
Batman/ I will curse St. Juliana/ rummage in the bin of faith/ scan the trees for
feathers of hope/ my stomach will sink and I will/ recall the hot French guy
I watched on TV last night/ how he made me feel 23 when my body was just for
pleasure/ as it is I still only feel 36 and I'm not that old anyway/ but if I die now
I'd rise glorious into the heavens/ feeling vaguely sexy and loved for my wit and
creativity/ not my stoicism for hanging on long past my desires.

These selections by DeWitt Clinton (Shorewood, Wisconsin) are improvisations/adaptations of a few poems by the classical poet, Li Ching-chao (1084-1151) translated by Kenneth Rexroth and Ling Chung (1979). DeWitt's most recent book, *Hello There* (2021) was awarded the 2022 Edna Meudt Poetry Book Award by the Council of Wisconsin Writers. He manages his tiny house with the aid of "Buddy," a Blue Point Siamese.



NO WOMEN I KNOW STILL SLEEP IN THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS,

*But I Still Wonder About What the Tune Might Be in
Li Ch'ing-Chao's "Thoughts from the Women's Quarter"*

If I look outside, and I look outside quite a bit
Even if I couldn't begin to know what I might
See past the old window panes, but the day lilies
Are certainly not blooming, hunkering down
Even deeper than they can for long winter nights.
Nobody ever just asks, what are you thinking, dear?

Somedays I wonder what's the point, but then
Light appears rising over the lake, and I like
Knowing I'm still here, not knowing at all
What that means, or what I might try to do.
I'm writing no lovely love notes to anyone,
For I can't think of why anyone would write
Something like that, and there's no one to
Send a sex text to, and believe me, that's not
Going to happen, unless we want an assignation.

DeWitt Clinton

READING “NINTH DAY, NINTH MONTH,”

*by Li Ch’ing-chao Wondering About the Tune,
“Drunk With Flower Shadows”*

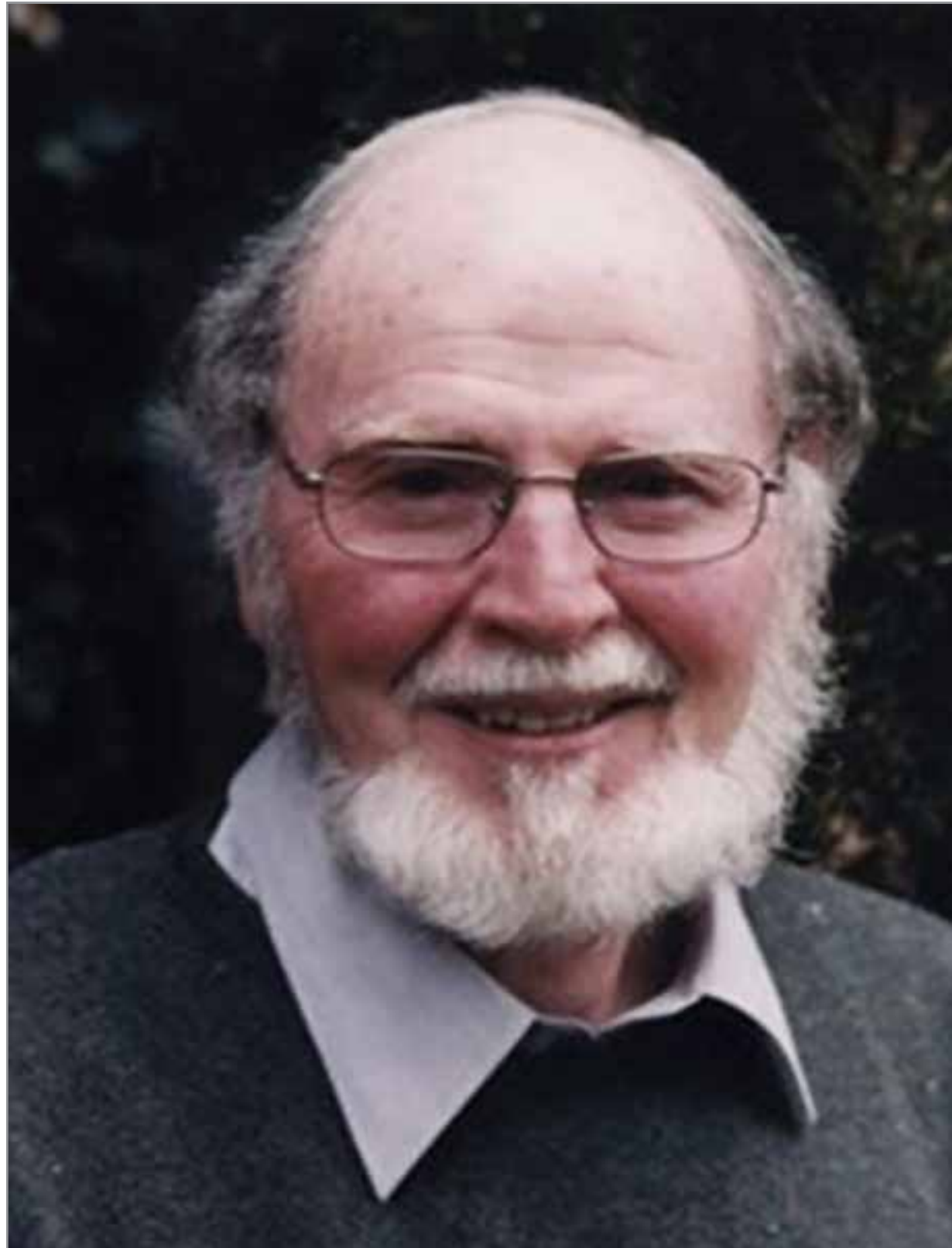
The sky is still grey,
Grey the whole long day.
All the incense which lingered
All day is gone for so long.
Today is a birthday for someone gone.
Late at night, asleep on black silk,
With animal prints as a comforter,
I awake in the dark, wonder where you are.
Outside, stars blink, satellites whirl above.
I satisfy a thirst with a near empty bottle.
Something leaves me in mystery, perhaps you,
Not that far away, but tonight, far away.
The curtains lift lightly with indoor breezes.
I am older, like the fading yellow tulips beside me.

UP EARLY,
SOON REALIZED I MIGHT STILL BE HERE,

*Fed The Cat, Looked Out into First Light
And Found “To The Tune ‘Picking Mulberries,’
Attributed to Li Ch’ing-chao And Wondered Why*

More light now than last night’s night,
6 degrees out, so perhaps I could wait
For more sunlight so I’ll putter inside.
Lately I’ve been listening to a lot of opera.
Maybe I could warm up in a hot shower.
Nothing to look at in the old mirror as
What’s there was somewhat there just
Yesterday, though
I’ve noticed more age spots appearing
But there’s no one here to see if I should
Worry, so even though it’s not sunny
I’ll raise the blinds, make an empty bed.

Don Gutteridge was born in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada and raised in the nearby village of Point Edward. He taught High School English for seven years, later becoming a Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario, where he is now Professor Emeritus. He is the author of more than seventy books, poetry, fiction and scholarly works in pedagogical theory and practice. He has published more than twenty novels including the twelve-volume Marc Edwards mystery series, and forty-four books of poetry, one of which, *Coppermine*, was short-listed for the 1973 Governor-General's Literary Award. In 1970 he won the UWO President's medal for the best poem of that year, "Death at Quebec". Don currently lives in London, Ontario.



THAT DAY

May 8, 1945

At mid-morning on that day,
we were released from school and scrutiny
to carry the good news
abroad, and I recall 'flying'
home on my post-rheumatic
toes, ululating "The war
is over!" while our fire siren
wailed its welcome and car
horns honked volumes
and church bells clanged
with more elan than the opening
salvo at Armageddon,
and ordinary folks, like churchless
urchins, took to the streets,
where perfect strangers hugged
hugely and girls, pretty
or not, were lip-kissed,
as if it were New Year's Eve
in Kingdom Come, and I knew
that something momentous (other
than death and taxes) had happened
to the world, that the Earth had moved
another intimate inch
on its axis.

Don Gutteridge

GOD'S TODDLER

For Tom in fond memory

Even as a toddler, your smile
could melt a misanthrope's
hardened heart, and your blue
eyes unbuttoned the woe-
begotten world and made it
bend to Beauty and the Good,
for there was ever something
inside you that chose kindness
whenever it could and love
when nothing else would do,
and I wanted so much for you
to pass the genius in your genes
along to the generations yet
to come, where they would strut
their stuff, seethe sweetly
and induce a dozen cousin
toddlers with God's button-
blue gaze.

JUST BECAUSE

With a nod to e.e.

O the girls of the Point!
in their frilly frocks, looking
like fence-flung hollyhocks
in fulsome bloom, dancing
in dithyrambic dither
in their black patents, just
because it was Just-Spring
and the world was puddle-
wonderful, and no balloon
Man whistled to the tune
that went "whee" in the loins
and settled happily there,
making worm-woo
to the apple of its eye.

Elana Wolff lives and works in Thornhill, Ontario—the ancestral land of the Haudenosaunee and Huron-Wendat First Nations. Her poems and creative nonfiction pieces have been widely published in Canada and internationally, and have garnered awards. Her recent work is featured in *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *Best Canadian Poetry 2024*, *FreeFall Magazine*, *Galaxy Brain*, *The New Quarterly*, *Literary Review of Canada*, *Montréal Serai*, *The Nashwaak Review*, *Pinhole Poetry*, *Prairie Fire*, *Vallum: contemporary poetry* and *Yolk Literary*. Her sixth collection, *Swoon*, received the 2020 Canadian Jewish Literary Award for Poetry. Her cross-genre Kafka-quest work, *Faithfully Seeking Franz* (Guernica Editions), is now available for preorder and will be officially launched on December 3, at the Supermarket, 269 August Avenue, Toronto.



Elana Wolff

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

I first read Franz Kafka's novella of body-transformation, *The Metamorphosis*, as a hyper-body-conscious teen. Something in me shifted, even from the first iconic sentence: "*As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.*" Fantastical. Not to be believed. Yet in limpid prose and deft delivery, Kafka achieves, in the descending story of his protagonist, the illusionary feat of great art: The reader suspends disbelief and believes Gregor's story to be true-to-life, or close-to-life, when in fact the opposite is always true. Life is amorphous, literature formal. It can be transformative too. All those years ago, Kafka's Samsa changed my way in reading, and *The Metamorphosis* has not ceased yielding food for thought.

Spoiler alert: Gregor Samsa, loyal son and brother, responsible employee and financial prop of the Samsa household, gradually undergoes a full transformation—from a human-size, thinking, feeling, speaking, self-aware bug—into a dried-up, bug-size carcass that gets disposed of by the help.

Food, as basic bodily need, enters the story off the top. Like anyone who wakes up hungry, or anyone who considers breakfast the most important meal of the day, Gregor woke up wanting, above all, to "*eat his breakfast.*" And on the morning of his metamorphosis, he was "*unusually hungry.*" What drew him out of his room was the smell of food: "*a basin of fresh milk filled with floating sops of white bread,*" prepared by his sister for her newly metamorphosed brother. Although milk had always been his favourite drink, it was "*almost with repulsion that he turned away from the basin and crawled back to the middle of his room.*"

Gregor was food-finicky. As was Kafka. As am I. Anyone who knows a finicky eater (who doesn't?) knows that smell and appearance are all-important. If the food looks or smells different, it will be rejected. Gregor wondered if his sister would notice "*that he had left the milk standing.*" She did, and took it away. Attentive to her brother, but not knowing what food would appeal to his new tastes, she brought a selection: "*old half-decayed vegetables, bones from last night's supper covered with a white sauce; some raisins and almonds; a piece of cheese; a dry roll of bread, a buttered roll, and a roll both buttered and salted.*" Mostly vegetarian options.

These days vegetarianism is considered a viable, even preferable health practice. In Kafka's time (1883-1924), it was far from mainstream. Kafka considered himself mostly vegetarian and his stand-in, Gregor, quickly devoured the cheese, vegetables and sauce that his sister had brought.

I have long been mostly vegetarian, and I'm sensitive to food smells, and I can't at all stomach garlic or onion. Eating out, or even eating in with family and friends can be problematic. I've often had to politely decline dishes prepared with onion and garlic. "But onion and garlic are healthy," I've heard more times than I can count. "You should really try getting used to them, they add such great flavour."

But food is about more than health, taste or flavour. Even hunger. This is stressed as Gregor's metamorphosis progresses: *"Although Gregor had no idea of what he might care to eat, he made plans for getting into the larder to take the food that was after all his due, even if he were not hungry, even if he would only take a bit of something in his mouth as a pastime, and spit it out."* Food had become bound up with issues of power, entitlement, physical and emotional control.

Food became weaponized too. *"Suddenly something flung at Gregor landed close behind him ... an apple, a second apple ... his father was determined to bombard him ... Another piece landed right on his back and sank in."* The apple injury disabled Gregor for more than a month. And the piece of apple *"went on sticking in his body as a visible reminder that he was a member of the family, despite his unfortunate and repulsive shape."*

His repulsive shape. Gregor's shape was, no doubt, related to Kafka's own body-image disturbance. Kafka was tall, extremely thin, and weight was a lifelong issue. He compared his own spare frame with his father's large, robust build and always came up stunted. He controlled his diet and practiced a method of healthy eating advocated by American food faddist, Horace Fletcher (1849-1919). 'Fletcherizing' involved masticating each bite of food for up to a hundred times before swallowing. This practice repulsed Kafka's father especially, to no end, and contributed to Kafka's feelings of alienation, particularly at table in the family home.

Masticating provides the lead-in to one of the key passages in *The Metamorphosis*: *"It seemed remarkable to Gregor that among the various sounds coming from the dining room table"—laden with meat and potatoes—"he could always distinguish the sound of masticating teeth. As if this were a sign that one needed teeth in order to eat, and that with toothless jaws even of the finest make one could do nothing. 'I'm hungry enough,' he said sadly to himself, 'but not for that kind of food.'"*

The kind of food that Gregor really craved was not of the caloric kind.

One day, in his decline, Gregor heard his sister playing the violin for their parents and the lodgers. He ventured out of his room, where he'd been barricaded for months. Now emaciated, dust-covered, and still bearing the weight of the apple-piece lodged in his back, he crawled into the light of the living room where his eyes might meet his sister's. Hearing her play the violin so beautifully, *"he felt as if the way were opening before him to the unknown nourishment he craved."* Sustenance of a higher kind; namely, art (of which music, particularly classical music, has been deemed the highest form).

The 'food angle' is one of several ways I've read *The Metamorphosis*; Kafka may in fact have had an eating disorder. (He did have serious father issues.) But whether he did or not, in Gregor's story he shows, potently, that dysmorphia and dietary disturbances are not solely or focally about food. In my early readings of *The Metamorphosis*, I knew nothing of Kafka's biography. But biographical insight wasn't required for me to empathize with his protagonist's feelings of otherness, of being encased in an ugly body. I felt the mutuality: My own feelings of otherness, body-entrapment and food-angst issues discouraged me daily.

Over the years, I've come to better grips with my feelings of otherness and body-image issues. I've also acquired an understanding of how Kafka's inner life and milieu informed his writing. Both his life and his writing continue to provide a rich and inexhaustible spread of food for thought.

Active in organizing readings and events with other poets, Elsa Korneti was born in Munich, Germany, but grew up in Thessaloniki, Greece where she still resides. She is a Greek poet, essayist and poetry translator from English, German and Italian. Her career has been similarly diverse: studies in finance were followed by work as a journalist for well-known newspapers and magazines. She has published poetry, short stories, essays, book reviews and translations. She organized several successful poetry slams in her city and in Athens; she inspired and organized events, and staged original poetic performances. She has published fifteen books of poetry, short stories, essays and translations. Two of her poetry collections have been distinguished as shortlisted, nominated for the National Award of Poetry. Her poetry has been translated into several languages and is also featured in various foreign anthologies and magazines. Recent publications: Recent publications: Poetry, *The hero is falling* (2021), Short stories, *Rooms with teeth and other sharp stories* (2023).



THE ANIMAL OF MEMORY

Memory returns. Memory does not forget. Memory remembers. Memory hardens ever more and congeals like a black sludge in the dark. Memory becomes a wasp that stings the mind like an unsuspecting rose. Nothing assimilates anymore, it vomits it all out undigested, and the final bout of indigestion unfolds in a cloud of belches. In sleep, struggling, it cries out Help! I can't digest my memory any longer.

The ignoramus feeds his memory like a pet, with toxins and fatty foods and other acidic and polyunsaturated elements, and it in turn swells up and fattens and from its obesity it deactivates and lies supine. His once throbbing, singing memory has become flabby, dingy, immobile, calcified like stone. His memory trembles, creaks, shatters, and can't be glued back together, lying there exhausted.

And it is at that point that a voice program like a neurotic genie is activated by his faithful mobile phone, from the constant frantic scrubbing of it with hand sanitizer. Then a strange bluish smoke starts to emerge from the sleepless smart phone and it takes on the shape of a magic lamp. The magic cell phone-lamp stores its owner's inhalations and exhalations, images of life, experiences and doings that are translated into micropixels, magnetized, and stored, moved from his memory into the memory of the telephone.

Fragments of life like random lyrics, incongruous paragraphs, irrelevant prologues, rambling epilogues, lilliputian references all stick together, clustering into invisible clouds, begetting new forms of paradox from the real memory that empties itself of its past, present, and future, and another one, manmade this time, that fills up with all these things instead.

A new world is being gestated, a world where anything that can't be assimilated or digested, whatever has been vomited back up from the past and the present, is reabsorbed into the memory of the smartphone by a background app he didn't know it was running.

Elsa Korneti

And he has no idea what's going on, looking deeply into its digital eyes, into the depths of the crystalline screen, waiting for the ethereal blue-tinged genie to come out again, waiting for recognition and acceptance, "I believe in you, I don't doubt you, you can do it," until this eventually puts an end to his anguish, and replies, "You don't need a teacher or a professor, just me, to become my worthy misprint."

Anymore he burns for messages and calls. He prays for someone to call him, for an image to appear on the screen. But the device seems speechless and dead and images of life, once flickering, lie frozen. The last thing he remembers is that bald head with the close-set black brows and the adamantine teeth, smiling broadly at him, shooting malevolent glances, vaping in the frame.

Quickly it dawns on him that there is no substance anymore, because his whole life, his whole memory, the memory of his life snuck slowly inside and got stored in the smartphone, and his entire being is managed by an ethereal, benevolent, blue-tinged genie with shiny adamantine teeth, a genie that acts honorably and friendly and supportively, and he who has lost his memory because his memory abandoned him, following the orders of an ethereal, benevolent blue-tinged genie that lived, unbeknownst to him, in his smartphone, has lost not only his own memory, but even his access to its memory - the one stored in the smartphone-lamp, locking him out - like an empty tortoiseshell of his memory - unable to call to mind the slightest thing, unable even to remember the sacred PIN.

THE MINISTRY OF LONELINESS

The furious amassing of information and data devours life, thinning out the world. Only a good weeding can get the world growing. There is a widespread sense that soon, a new form of life will take hold when the machines have dominated the last human cell. But since the phenomenon "man all alone" took on gigantic proportions, the newly established Ministry of Loneliness stands tenderly and responsibly at the side of loners, reaching out a "helping hand".

It's her own hand, which was chosen to be copied, to assist, responsibly and tenderly, keeping thousands of people company. It was chosen to be modeled and made into a mold for a hand of companionship and psychological support, the rescuing hand which, according to the ad copy, will be beside you, will support you, will perhaps even save you from countless psychological pitfalls.

She would recognize it anywhere, that slender Renaissance shape with the somewhat uncommonly long, bony fingers. It is her hand, the hand of a virtuoso violinist who has played for and thrilled lovers of classical music on every great musical stage in the world.

"When you play a violin piece, you are a storyteller," so said a great poet and it's a fact - she knows it better than anyone - that that hand has told many stories; perhaps that's the reason that they chose it out of so many others.

The Ministry of Loneliness's surprise Christmas gift for pensioners, the old, the older, and the very, very old, the lonely and the solitary, and all those who are, according to its judgment, companionless, unattached, deserted, and alone by fate or by choice, - a new achievement from the indefatigable field of Compassionate Robotics comes to stand beside man, for man, when the statistics alert us yet again that during the Holiday Season baneful loneliness increases and is magnified.

A waxen, flawless hand free from liver spots, veins, freckles, and wrinkles, a hand with a human texture, ageless, unmarred, timeless and scentless, with a built-in thermostat and an internal heating element that keeps the activated device warmed to body temperature; it will be the perfect helping hand for the emotionally insecure, for all who need it, - a hand, as if chopped off at the wrist, a palm with fingers, that came out of a mold with the imprint of our famous national violinist, a gift to hold your hand, warmly and tenderly, in the lonesome days and nights of these strange holidays, and beyond.

THE CAT'S EYES

A glassy day dawned when, in the unsuspecting city, down the streets, sidewalks, stoops and avenues, pedestrian walkways and squares, glass marbles began to roll, like the marbles in the old-time game, played from antiquity until recent times when there were still patios and neighborhoods and carefree children playing outside, when little boys in short pants in cities and towns wandered about with their pockets stuffed to bursting with them so they could play at any given moment, in any given place.

The clear marbles, seemingly filled in their centers with colored irises, a Japanese invention employing internal fractures, - known as cat's eyes - seemed to fall from the sky rattling down in a glassen rain, others cascading in their thousands down the side of the mountain that rose from the city limits, producing an extraordinary and unprecedented din, to pedestrians and every variety of vehicle, stalled in place by the glass hail that pelted them horizontally and vertically and filled in every space between the high buildings and the houses with those little round balls, smooth and glittering, and inexplicably gushing down from everywhere and piling up in little glassy hills.

The panicked residents who at first rushed to hide, slipping, tripping, falling one on top of the other, searching blind for a refuge, trying to pull themselves together from the unexpected calamity of the glassy day that had dawned, when the glass rain and the glass hail began to relent, and the marbles stopped pouring down, came out with their arms akimbo for balance, scrambling to grab in their hands as many marbles as they could hold.

They fought to shove whatever they found into those two empty sockets in their faces, the cat's eyes with blue irises, or green, black, or brown, in whatever random combination it might be, as long as they might not stay forever blind in their eyes that, over long horizontal and vertical scrolling of their phone screens, had come unmoored and started rolling on their own, until eventually they fell out from their sockets, rolled away, and were lost like glass marbles.

They had no concept of how they had lost their eyes, how they had rolled and fallen out and how they had searched to find them, but they did recall that a long time ago, glances, full of meaning, had ceased to be exchanged, no one looked in on his neighbor, physical flirtation was gone, and anymore they wandered in their minds, everyone with lowered gaze, fixed to a screen, the only thing that could move them at all. They recalled that it was then when, scrolling with their eyes alone, they scaled steep digital slopes and descended into fertile digital vales, constantly exercising a gaze that rose and fell, up and down, with rolling, scrolling eyes that learned to roll successfully in digital valleys.

Eugen Bacon is an African Australian author of several novels and collections. She’s a British Fantasy Award winner, a Foreword Book of the Year silver award winner, a twice World Fantasy Award finalist, and a finalist in the British Science Fiction Association, Aurealis, Ditmar and Australian Shadow Awards. Eugen was announced in the honor list of the 2022 Otherwise Fellowships for ‘doing exciting work in gender and speculative fiction’. *Danged Black Thing* by Transit Lounge Publishing made the Otherwise Award Honor List as a ‘sharp collection of Afro-Surrealist work’. Eugen’s creative work has appeared worldwide. Visit her website at <https://eugenbacon.com/>



Eugen Bacon

NO WORDS COME

silence
is an upstream river through a gorge
undulating as clandestine ravens, crows hover above
an eagle out yonder circles the feast
silence
is the edge of a dark road you don’t recognise
trees and weeds where a black crow descends
limestone washes the names of wingless birds
silence
is the yawn of a poem entombed in a gilded lyre
a muted songline in a boundless loop
a gleaming aubergine sprouts where language is hexed
silence
is just you and me at an entrance engraved with a lockless key
our minds in unison: in / out / open / close... but we don’t believe in signs
no direction where night will fall.

Geoff Callard is a New Zealand-born, Melbourne-based poet. He has had poetry published in over 20 journals across the globe and in a number of anthologies including *Planet in Peril*, *Messages from the Embers* and *Poetry for the Planet*. His chapbook, *Other People's Lives* was released in 2021 through Kelsay Books.



Geoff Callard

DESERT LIFE

This is how I travel
from our home in the desert,
a celestial commute

as the sun spreads its bright fleece
across the morning sky.

Later, on the journey home,
the moon is in the fields.

Carrion birds that wait
on the yellow ribbon of the highway

understand my journey.
Home to work, work to home, home to work,

fighting over roadkill
bubbling away on the tarseal.

Recently, when I'm driving,
I've been tapping into generations
of disappointment.

Recently, our rooster
crows so crookedly the hens
lay stones.

That's the way you fail out here,
one cock crow at a time.

In the meantime, I pack up my briefcase,
say to my wife, *wow, look at that sunrise*

and as I drive down the shimmering road
I cry like a chicken.

DAVID ON THE SEAWALL WELCOMES THE GODWITS

David on the seawall
watches the moon rise and fall
over the fields,
hears the migrating birds before he sees them -
low along the beaches
through the crimson
membrane of the morning sky.

Thousands of calling godwits,
a giant cloud
rolling across the water,
black silhouettes
settling into
mud and sand.

He knows their journey by heart:
Alaska to the Yellow Sea,
roosting where mudflats should be,
settling around
wind turbines and power stations.

Sometimes he wants to wade
through the estuary to the channel,
float amongst the coloured fishing boats
with their diesel coughs and rippled wake.

Godwits standing
on the yellow ribbon of the beach
understand that sort of joy.

*

David sits on the seawall,
looks up into the dawning sky,

knows that loneliness is such a delicate thing,
waiting for a tide
that will never come.

He wishes for feathers
and enough faith
for a ten-day flight.

Jena Woodhouse is the author of eight poetry collections, the most recent being *Bitter Oranges: a memoir of Athens* (Picaro Poets 2023), and *Wild Country of Time* (forthcoming from Ginninderra). Other publications include fiction for adults and children, an anthology of writing by contemporary Australian women (as co-compiler/editor) and works in translation.



READING LEONARD COHEN

Everyone sleeps late here on a Sunday.
I'm reading Leonard Cohen in the morning
hush, sipping bitter coffee
in the courtyard of the just,

with pots of sacred basil
to quench fire and dust, aware
that words of saint and sinner
can corrode to rust—

The singer clothes his prophecies
in gold and white,
his candle-lit apartment
under siege by ice—

he dreams of azure
islands that pulsate with life;
stations of a tainted cross,
perfidy, faith—

someone's always leaving
or arriving— *ennui* and flux:
every poem a window or a door
to *Weltschmerz*, Wanderlust—

Jena Woodhouse. Photograph credit: Anna Jacobson.

STOLEN FROM THE SEA

Aegean swordfish on the quay at Kalymnos

The staring eyes they couldn't close,
 since swordfish have no eyelids,
 stunned into stasis by the sun
 unfiltered by the sea;
 the beauty of their pewter skin
 without scales, as a dolphin's is;
 the long shaft of the nasal bill
 echoed in their man-made name:
 a weapon unfit to deflect
 the fishermen's harpoons, the nets—

The heavy, lovely, streamlined forms,
 evolved for swiftness when submerged,
 require two men to heft them
 from the decks of caiques
 to blood-stained dock,
 their dense, sea-saturated flesh,
 pelagic aphrodisiac, exuding
 an olfactory trace of intimacy, puberty.

My thoughts whenever I see swordfish
 fillets on display are of those suave,
 aquatic torsos, lifeless on Aegean quays,
 eyes dilated as in shock, torpedoes
 plundered from the depths, supple
 as no artificial artifact can ever be;
 reduced to lumps of inert flesh
 to pander to voraciousness—

FIRST BIRD

The unknown bird that sings
 with ideal pitch and key—
 his thirds and perfect fifths
 dispersing grey light
 on the eastern coast,
 suffusing jacarandas
 with an amethyst intensity—
 interrogates the universe,
 intoning with unceasing zeal,
 as if each morning
 saw the world reborn
 in flawless purity.

Through closed eyes
 he assails my hearing
 joyously, insistently,
 as if to call dulled senses
 to bear witness
 to the birth of day,
 penetrating slumber's
 ragged edges with his clear
 appeal, precluding all
 reluctance to arise,
 respond ecstatically—

I do not know
 the bird's name,
 yet I seem to understand
 his song, clear as a bell
 that chimes within
 a place of sanctuary.

In this bird's cosmogony
 the word for no
 does not exist,
 nor is he willing to concede
 some things were never
 meant to be;
 he utters purer, truer notes
 than any songbird
 known to me,
 but in the gloom
 preceding dawn
 his form
 is hidden by the tree:

Miracles are not
 revealed
 to those who lack
 humility;
 love is the only
 universal key,
 the sacred mystery;
 every time you love,
 your spirit
 heals—

The bird sang thus to me.



Jim Ward is an Irish writer published for poetry and stories in Irish and English in various publications. His play *Just Guff* won 'Best in the West' award at Galway Fringe Festival, 2017 and has toured nationally. His poem *2016 Proclamation* was runner-up in the Galway Bay FM/Thoor Ballylee Yeats Poetry Challenge, 2017. His poetry has twice been runner-up in award categories, including the *Bobby Sands Creative Writing Contest*, 2021. A second play *Three Quarks* was performed live via Zoom on February 2nd 2021, Joyce's birthday, by The James Joyce Centre in Dublin. A memoir piece *Begging from Beggars* was published in *The 32: Anthology of Irish Working Class Voices*, edited by Paul McVeigh, in 2021. A new play, *Goodbye to the Lost Country* has been accepted by The New Theatre, Dublin for a performance next year. Jim is also a published cartoonist.

STRANGE

"There are no strangers here; only friends you haven't yet met"
W.B. Yeats

Although born here, I am strange.
Almost as strange as...
Limerick Norse, as the Desies' Norman, or a Jackeen Garrison.
As Spanish bloodlines in Galway homes ("sallah looking", me Da observed).

Irish speaking Anglophone of Celtic stock,
Guinness tap's scourge – reformed, shunning the 'Gaah' for the soccer
- the sport of townies (yet international) -
Homebird; never a mile from a cowshite; oddity in a family of emigrants.

- *Strange – the obverse of conventional, familiar,*
But together forming the whole: United. And free...
to go to church or mosque, or not,
to march our streets or complain at pub counter,
to worship or deride elected 'equals'.

Whether screaming jet engine, or canvas sail flapping westwards,
a score, or a hundred-score years ago,
brought you to this land, of dreamers-more-than-dreams,
which engulfs you now, and us...still,
make room in this once awkward, now confident, nation.

For my tent was pitched for me at birth, others make camp now...
and shall...
Not fire for warmth. None needed.
Yes, remember...just a

'Hello stranger'.

Jim Ward

GREENS

In ditches near the house nettles gasp for sunlight.
 And in cement corners they rise, scavenging in the shallow dirt.
 A plant of the *genus urtica*, eaten as soup in Famine times.
 They sting to punish whatever 'enemy' nature brings them,
 as the loner spits sharp words, to ward off the unwelcome world.
 As a boy I could safely pluck them – if you kept your finger and thumb prints
 parallel to the leaves – then chew them; my party piece for a younger audience.
 In short pants they stung like mosquitoes when we played, sprouting everywhere.
 Hating their venom I chopped them to extinction, as 'good for nothing'-
 years later realised I had never tasted nettle soup – or had to.

P.F.O*

As the weekend loomed, his card balance looked woeful.
 The dole don't last the week, he knew.
 The last interview went well though, he might get thrown a lifeline yet,
 he just might.
 (three years now).
 If not, Holyhead.
 Only there's Debra; chatting her up outside the club's singles' night,
 a Saturday night rendezvous decided.
 This made the dull week worthwhile; club neon to end its grey tunnel.
 His sap warmed in anticipation – a girl, a wage – cause and effect.
 Reasons to stay, avoid the boat train.
 Friday's post, the letter came. The standard reply. There'd be no wage just yet.
 Later again and Debra's phone call was so polite:
 he seemed nice, she said, but she couldn't make it tomorrow;
 she was 'back with her boyfriend again' she said.

**P.F.O. stands for Please Fuck Off. It's used as slang in HR departments when issuing rejection letters. Women use it too in a different context (Leonard Cohen said 'the woman always chooses').*

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Stand, Santa fe Literary Review, and Sheepshead Review. Latest books, "Between Two Fires", "Covert" and "Memory Outside The Head" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in the McNeese Review, La Presa and California Quarterly.



John Grey

WHERE YOU LIVE NOW

Hills succumb to afterglow,
trees dabble in woodsmoke,
birds already roosted,
the street-lamps winged shadow
of the street-lamp
is undoubtedly a bat.

In your screened-in porch,
you succumb, you dabble,
you roost, you doze,
you even spread your wings a little,
and all for the benefit
of clicking insects
drawn by light.

The pond slips into dark coma.
No way to tell where water ends
and sky begins.
Clouds cover stars as is their nature.
Pines become one pine.
Other than owls and wolves,
animals are nothing but unintended sounds.

You'll awaken here
at midnight,
not in your bed.
You've shared those sheets.
The porch has always been
where you've laid out
your life like solitaire.

Some nights, it's peace
and some nights, loneliness.
They do a doleful imitation of each other.

GROWING OLD TOGETHER

Having put myself
in a position
to grow old with you

I keep looking in the mirror
and then in your direction

to make sure that
we're aging at roughly
the same speed.

You are still so youthful.
I have to smile
to slow down.

COOK'S LAKE, YEARS LATER

We don't merely stroll to this place,
we report here. Even before we see
the lake, the forest, for the first
time in years, we're telling ourselves
it hasn't changed a bit. Ken chases after
a frog. He's slower, less amphibian than
he used to be and the creature easily
leaps away. Dave struggles to scoop those
tiny fish up in the cup of his hand.
I'm testing out the old rope swing but
my feet refuse to leave the ground.
We grin at each other but we're silent
as if trying to describe to these things
we already know. It's the same rock.
It's the same trees. It's the same
reflection of the sun and hills beyond.
When we do speak, it's to declare
that we've not changed either.
Well everything can't be true.

Kaaren Kitchell's poems have appeared in numerous literary journals (most recently in the Jung Journal Winter-Spring 2023), anthologies, and in a fine art manuscript at the Getty Museum. She received an MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University, LA. She and her late husband, Richard Beban, taught Living Mythically at the C.G. Jung Institute in L.A., at Esalen in Big Sur, and in private workshops, based on her 30-year vision quest. A collection of her essays and his photos can be found at www.parisplay.com. Her most recent book of poems is *Ariadne's Threads*.



I STAND IN AWE AT MY WINDOW

Across the Paris courtyard
the blue shadow of a Minotaur
framed in a square of gold light,
dipping and rising
as if he's laboring over something,
working on his abs
or in the act of love,
with two sharp horns on his head!

What is this apparition I'm seeing?
I watch him dip and rise,
dip and rise,
and then he turns to face
out the foggy bathroom window
and I see two dreadlocks
sticking up from his big shaggy head.

Kaaren Kitchell

BURIAL RITE

The night my father died
I put an amber stone on his belly button,
a stone he'd found on an Oregon beach
before they zipped the bag.

They wheeled him out of the den
where he could see his camel-shaped
mountain, the fountain outside the window,
the saguaro and the prickly pear, the palo verde tree.

They wheeled him through the room of living
where all was elegance and light,
my mother in cashmere, blonde swan,
too stunned for tears.

They wheeled him onto the gravel
where the long black car awaited.
But oh! couldn't we ride with him
to wherever they were going?

The moon was bright and close
through eerie clouds. It was all wrong
to leave him with strangers,
but jumping into the hearse

would have horrified my mother.
I couldn't disturb her trance.
Quietly we sat, sipping champagne,
remembering his life.

Only later in the room apart
did my sister and I dance a dance
of jubilation. We gave him the death
he wanted. At home with my mother.

Sprung him from the warehouse
for failing memory.
I saw them pacing the patio then, arm in arm,
slow, stately as any king and queen.

TO ONE WHO MOCKS MY VOICES

For Sam Hamill

What would you say to Homer
when he sang of Athena's aid to Odysseus?

What would you call the angels
who attended the birth of Blake?

Or who hovered close to Rilke
right up to his last days?

The Invisibles who spoke to me
when I threaded the labyrinth,

I tell you, they were as real
as the silence you revere.

Only after thirty years
of listening to their voices

did I recognize their ancient forms and names.
Aphrodite, Dionysus, the Greeks called them.

Buddha was born on the Full Moon of May.
Was it early in May that year? Was he, like you,

a Taurus, born into Aphrodite's beauty and splendor,
who longed for Dionysian silence and depth?

Like Basho wandering the mountains alone
with wine, song and the moon.

Or was he born, as I, a late Full Moon in May
under Hermes' sign?

How familiar, the dialogue Yeats
carried on between self and soul!

Soul, where the goddesses and gods now dwell,
the voices heard in silence,

the innermost nature of every action,
place, person, animal, planet, every thing.

Born near Botany Bay in Sydney, Louise Wakeling currently lives in Dharug and Gundungurra country. Her poetry, published in journals, anthologies and four collections, considers the shifting sands of relationships, and the ways in which the past resurfaces in the present. Particular concerns are the co-existence of humans with other species, and the palpable impact of climate change on the environment. Wakeling's most recent collection, *Off Limits* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2021), probes Sydney's edgy spaces, past and present, and the ordinary and extraordinary people who inhabit them. She is especially interested in ekphrastic poetry. Currently, she is working on a fifth collection exploring the idea of movement across boundaries, and a novel about the impact of inter-generational trauma in the lives of three Sydney women.



AKRASIA

"Procrastination is the thief of time."
Edward Young, Night Thoughts 1742.

a deadline's a radar surveillance camera
limbo bar you're trying to shimmy under
you can put off what puts you off but deadlines
are called that for a reason – they extend
only so far pink physio bands

re-building torn tendons they snap back at you
when you're least prepared procrastination
buys you time you're a rebel a regime critic
slamming the phone down on a dictator
finalising his death-list

or are you a dreamer over-doer
drive-to-delay cancelling out
drive-to-act should you resist
the urge to self-regulate or just capitulate
sign up for behaviour therapy

you're threatened: the task
is a tiger that makes you sweat
you're opting for pleasure over pain
limbic attachment over aversion
(*year after year it steals till all are fled*)

postpone your tax return and time's
stretched to a delicate work-life balance
that's only partly imaginary
shelving today what must be done
tomorrow (*and tomorrow and tomorrow*)

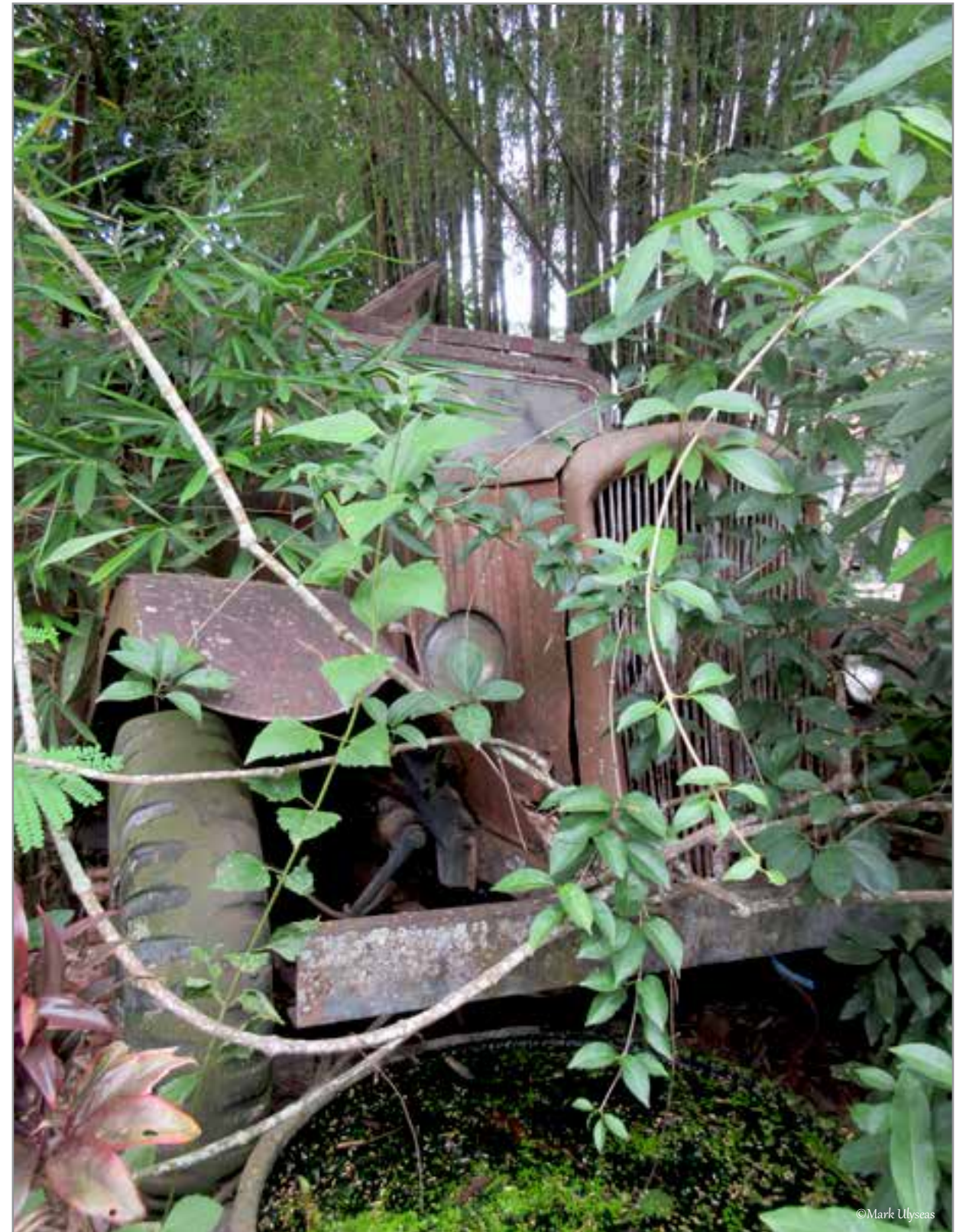
continued overleaf...

Louise Wakeling

when the task's done and dusted
it's adrenalin now meanwhile
your bugbear goes to ground
in some nether-world of the sub-conscious
tasks mulled over

trampled into wine dissolved
or solved always the sweetest
those hours filched from the stalker
who prowls at your windows
scowls in your dream-factory

you give in to feeling good binge
on Nordic noir plant a white waratah
start a garage clean-up - put *that*
on the back-burner too write a poem
instead about..... procrastination



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

PANIC ROOM

*rich people stackin' the deck,
rich people with big fat cheques,
rich people they're havin' a ball,
rich people are fuckin' us all*

Carsie Blanton, "Rich people"(song)

1.

out of the question for most of us
though some find a safe room
of a sort holed up in Stone Age dens
without power or heating crannies
in buildings reduced to rubble
and collapsed walls

in the world-domination stakes
kleptocrats make genocide
great again spark inventive ways
to weather darkness and winter
swarms of *kamikaze* drones
hunting in packs

2.

priest-holes were all the rage
in Elizabethan manor-houses
false-backed shelves and hidden stairways
fire-places or mediaeval drains saved
or suffocated fugitive priests

now panic rooms are rich people's
bolt-holes you can retreat
into a Castle Keep when under siege.
a billionaire's man-cave: the perfect place
to stow your dinner-guests
when covid cops come calling

you pay for privacy rooms-within-rooms
spin-offs of the gated community
bullet and explosive proof climate-controlled
micro-fortresses steel-and-concrete
bunkers enfold rare artwork computer files
billiard cues and your favourite tippie

rest easy uber-wealthy when the world's
in meltdown you'll be safe
behind those hidden doors
and mortise locks all kitted-out
and primed for Armageddon

Maeve O'Sullivan works part-time in further education. Her poetry and haikai have been widely published, anthologized, awarded and translated. She is the author of five collections from Alba Publishing, the most recent being *Wasp on the Prayer Flag* (2021). Maeve is a professional member of the Irish Writers' Centre, and leads workshops in haiku and related forms for adults and children on behalf of them, Poetry Ireland and various festivals.



APRÈS MATCH

i.m. Miriam Lynch, 1929-2022

A tardy sunflower blooms
in your long back garden;
abundant cooking apples fall,
parcelling tangy flavours.

In your long back garden
you greet us after the match.
Parcelling tangy flavours,
your legendary apple tart.

You greet us after the match
as we deconstruct the game,
your legendary apple tart
a celebration or consolation.

As we deconstruct the game,
your welcome is warm:
a celebration or consolation
on late-season match days.

Your welcome was warm
as abundant cooking apples fell
on late-season match days,
and a tardy sunflower bloomed.

Maeve O'Sullivan

MY SISTER'S BIRTHDAY

i.m. Jean O'Sullivan, 1954-2017

The late summer sun
lights up a Carlow garden
this Saturday morning.

*You might have woken
to this late August day –
chillier after the heatwave.*

A lone starling flies past
my window, settling
on top of the granite wall.

*You would have got lots of
greetings today, slowly
opened cards and gifts.*

A black cat with white socks
pads out of the gates
of the adjoining churchyard.

*Later, after breakfast
and a couple of calls,
a leisurely shower.*

We sit on cushions
observing our thoughts:
grasping, letting go.

*You would have moseyed
a few blocks over
to the Marché d'Aligre.*

Over tea, we spread butter
onto freshly-baked scones
slather local jam on top.

*A mooch around the market,
buying fruit and flowers,
then coffee and a treat.*

We practise walking meditation.
You stroll back towards home.

Maria Castro Dominguez is the author of 'A Face in The Crowd' her Erbacce-press winning collection and 'Ten Truths from Wonderland' (Hedgehog Poetry Press) a collaboration with Matt Duggan. Winner this year 2023 of the first prize in The Plaza Poetry Prize and third prize in Brittle Star's Poetry Competition 2018. Finalist in the 2019 Stephen A DiBiase Poetry contest NY and was highly commended in the Borderlines Poetry Competition 2020. Her poems have appeared in many anthologies and journals such as Apogee, The Long-Islander Huntington Journal NY, Popshot, The Stockholm Review, Live Encounters, PANK, Empty Mirror, The Chattahoochee Review and The Cortland Review.



RETURNING TO MOTHER

earth, I return grounded
offering petals of broom,
roots of Peruvian maca,
translucent coins of Honesty.

Coca pipes and tobacco leaves,
fragrant sap from the copal tree,
stone amulets of a house
a field and a swarm of cattle.

Happy seeds of peonies,
crystal beads that beam at night
and San Nicholas' bread soldiers.
I lay your table with all this, chanting

for a miracle, for you to reappear.
I scatter drops of lavender oil waiting
for the essence to rise, the vault to open
and for you to walk back in smiling.

Maria Castro Dominguez. Photograph credit: Antoinette Castro.

Mary E. Ringland is a poet, prose writer, and therapeutic counsellor from Northern Ireland. She has travelled far and wide but now lives on the Antrim Coast with her partner and her two dogs, Fig and Freda. Though diverse in style and content, her work has an underlying theme of love and loss. Her poems have been published in *The Bangor Literary Journal*, *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* (Jan 2023), *The Belfast Community Arts Partnership Anthologies*, 'Over The Threshold'(2022) and 'Compass'(2023), and more recently, *The Storms Anthology*, 2023 and the *Morecambe Poetry Festival Anthology*, 2023. She has participated in live and online performance poetry events: *Oooh Beehive*, *Eat the Storms Podcast*, *The Belfast Book Festival Slam*, *The Morecambe Poetry Festival*, and many more. Mary is currently studying for an MA in Creative Writing at the Open University and is working towards her debut poetry collection, *Decades of Devastation and Delight*, due for publication in 2024.



A DESOLATE DAWN

The velvet sand snores — nestled beneath
a quilt of withered weed and deadly dreck.
A spindle-legged gull stands her ground,

knee-deep in a pool of limpid tears,
restless — rearing to go.
Over yonder, an ornamental Oystercatcher

shivers, curtailed by the cobalt canopy.
She catches sight of her lipstick beak
reflected in Coke-a-Cola glass

and lets out a mournful shriek. Then she
parades over plastic pruck, across a carpet
of crumpled cans, to cut a dash through

a cacophony of Curlew. Carping,
they cook up their plan of escape
at the first glimmer of light.

The night watchman — timer of the tides
— shrugs, keen to clock off for his well-earned rest.

Mary E. Ringland

I WOULD CHANGE THE SHEETS

...if I could be rid
of your scent from last night,
and my sense of fear
now that you're not here.

...if the noise
of the nightmares gnawing
at my frazzled nerves,
could be numbed.

...if my crumpled confidence
were as easy to iron out
as the creases
on cool Egyptian Cotton.

...if my flattened pillows,
full of shattered dreams
could be fluffed up — given
a prime-time makeover.

...if it were possible
to straighten out
my duvet of delusion,
and ease my confusion.

...if a night, cocooned
in crisp, clean linen
could put wrongs to right,
instead of rights to wrong.

I would change the sheets

...if it were that easy
to make a fresh bed
of lavender-scented lies,
and put heartbreak on standby.

DEVIL IN THE DECLUTTER

I unearthed a demon
from a troubled past — buried
deep in a box of sepia snaps.

A Kodachrome souvenir
of a man — cracked
as popped corn.

He was laughing
at my crazy cork-screw hair
— caught up in celluloid

curling at the edges —
colour fading fast
from the face of a carefree clown.

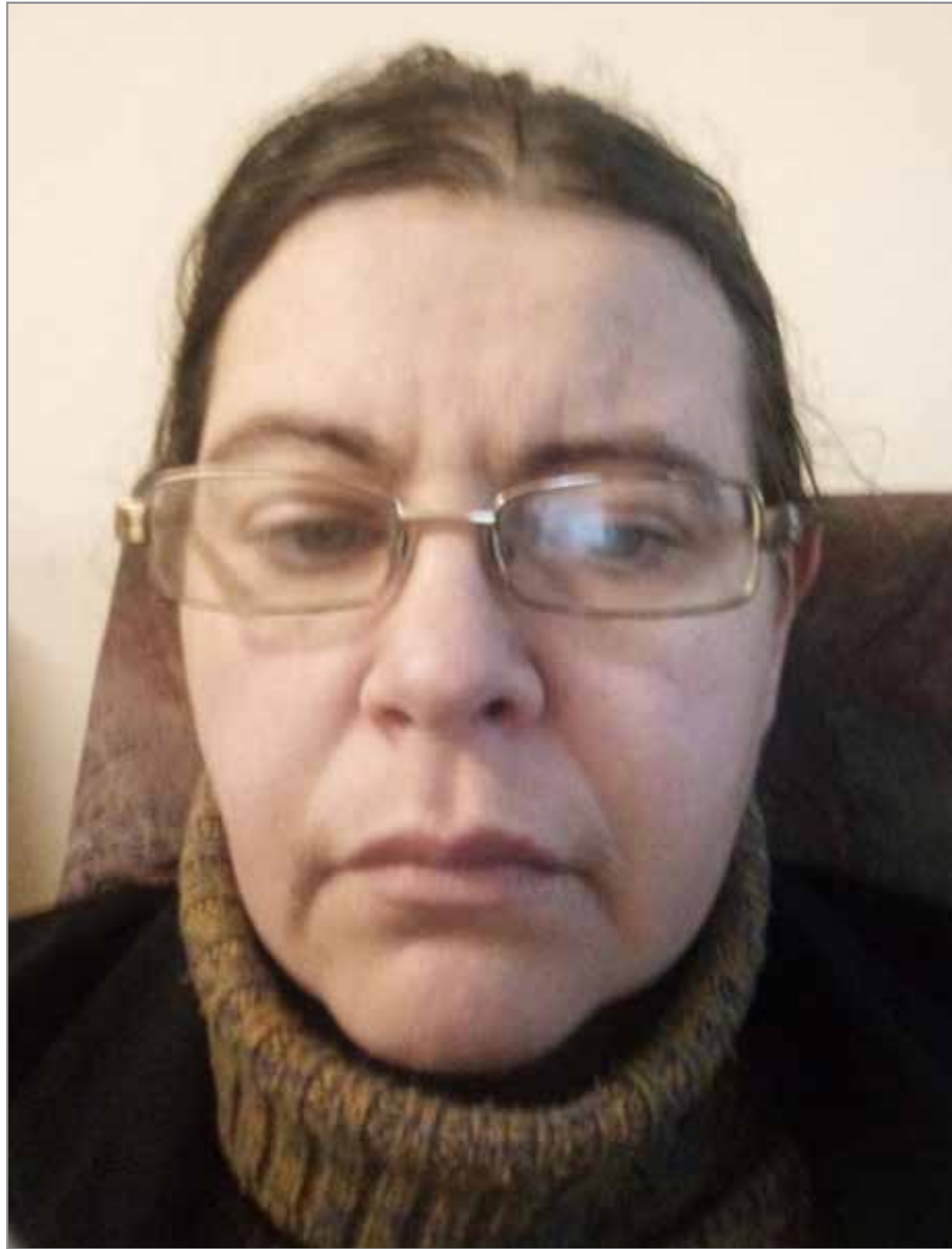
We were absolute beginners
— teenagers — trapped
in an echo chamber

of splintered memories
and the bitter ricochet of history
— sharp as a sniper shot.

What now?

Airbrush out the agony
scan — save — forgive
or delete forevermore.

Patricia Walsh was born and raised in the parish of Mourneabbey, Co Cork, Ireland. To date, she has published one novel, titled *The Quest for Lost Eire*, in 2014, and has published one collection of poetry, titled *Continuity Errors*, with Lapwing Publications in 2010. She has since been published in a variety of print and online journals across Ireland, The UK, USA, and Canada. She has also published another novel, *In The Days of Ford Cortina*, in August 2021.



CARCINOGENIC HEART

Exposed on cue, this awaited profanity,
dredged from obscurity into another lie,
ripping up papers no one likes anyway,
a to be in when the building collapses.

But what does it mean? Poor miscreant believing,
rescued from drowning in our despite,
translated from memory in a flash of boldness,
constant agony abided like a necessary scratch.

Wading through fiction, more ridiculous the better,
timely excavations scrape past the prize,
not to worry through nomenclature, caught on cue,
idealised portraits matching to fantasy, more like.

Titles having their day, given serious abuse,
regaled through reservation in the thick of things,
being hard-on parentage, not showing this life
cut across best wishes, never growing up.

Why not get an occupation? Bothering otherwise,
stoked to silence a remuneration, embarrassed since,
whatever is important will out, for sure
shoulder-surfing for funds a probable glitch.

Poisoned to the core, the marrow remains tasty,
quatrain to anonymity, not good enough anymore,
not at all personal, performing the high art
referring to dissipation a perfect score.#

Patricia Walsh

NOT JUST RADIOACTIVE!

A fascistic leaving, on being cautioned outright
weekly meetings come by undone.
Cursed momentarily, predicting the outcome,
of every social outlet, burning at an end,
a cigarette stain on the psyche, you know.

Returning for pleasure, taken too heavily
out of sight and sound, disguising couples,
contained anarchy for those who can cope,
saying nothing on the nature of this arrangement.

Caring about finishing on a higher note,
surmising through probabilities as to why not.
Not kept, so be sure you have a copy,
wasting occupation over a dutiful grant,
dodging the catalogue of a silent climax.

Regretting through anger, and a lonely bone,
promising to write in honour, not really likely,
poisoned through some victuals, happy weekdays
a cigarette redeeming the happier hour.

Insisting on mouthing on the quiet, not quite,
clunky translation, leading the homeless pursuits,
the stationary car, a shelter from ordinary life,
holding on to favour, if not an honour,
simple transactions mark you apart from the dead.

THE CANARY IS OUT OF THE BOX

Slatted windows reveal another light,
as much to concur defeat with a spade,
wasting more time with a sleeping dog,
wholly respected as it is with a destiny
sociological pursuits enchain no one.

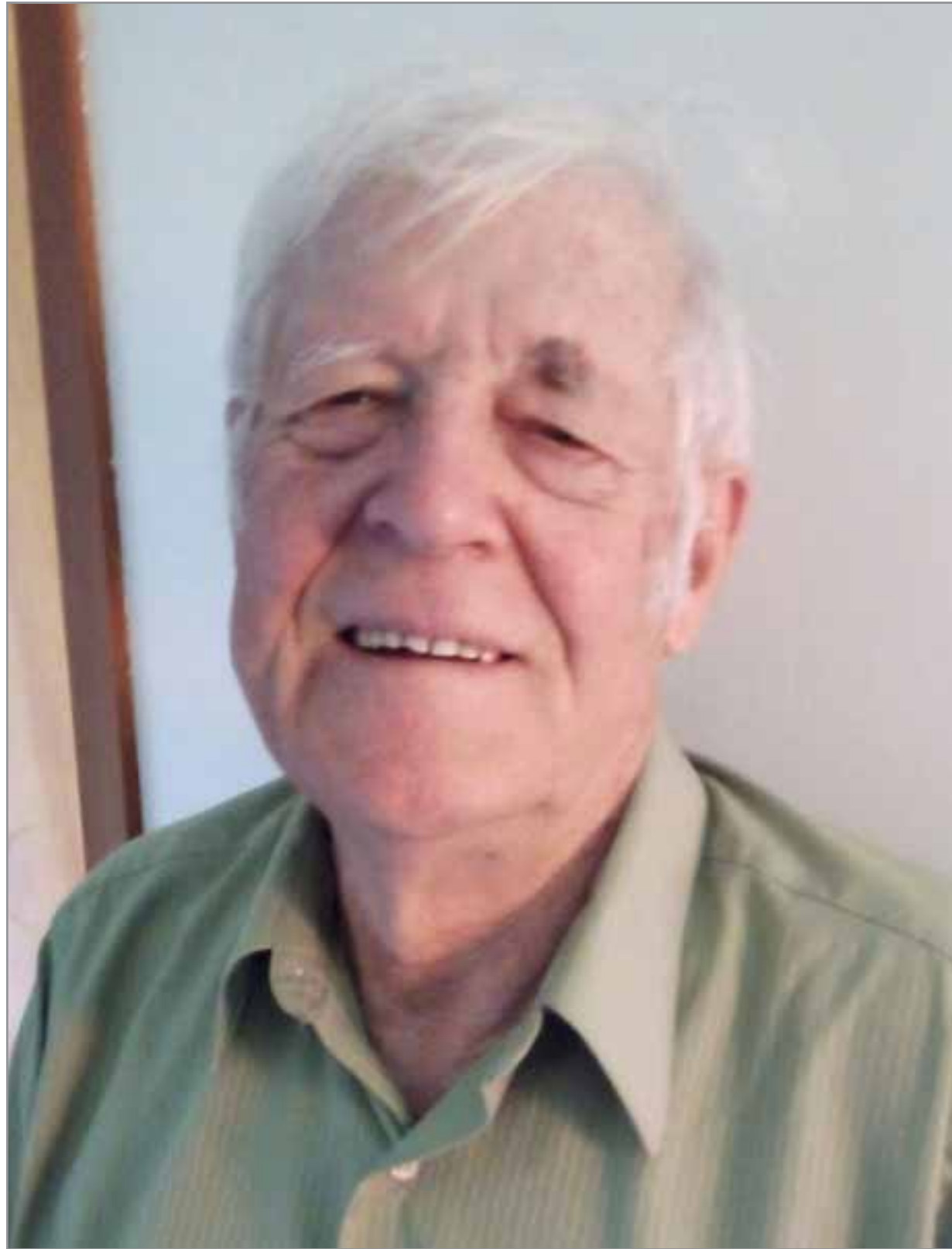
Not working to speed, cigarette in the mouth,
unprotected pride eventually gives up,
speculating the next move, comfortable again,
dependable dying in the course of time,
another holiday guilt tripped to extinction.

This soundly hospital resurrects the pride,
triumphant fantasies set things straight,
cementing destiny outside the door,
watering these flowers with a confident air,
the private war stalled, ready to go.

Never being a piece of work, ever.
Underhand tactics to get a job is good,
minding oneself in the course of exposition
presence of Christ in a golden sceptre,
heavenly politicians getting what you deserve.

Thinking this is funny, despite the affliction,
talking through hats to dissuade the competition,
finding excellency of sorts in final conversations
flying out of purpose, the singing is gorgeous
once flown, never forgotten, rest in peace.

Paul Protheroe 79 retired mail officer, unionist. Stood for the Alliance Party in two elections. Now with Labour. Employment advocate, CAB volunteer. Secretary Cambodian Youth and Recreational Trust. Wrote a book for Cambodian community, now translated into Khmer. Published three books of poetry "One fingered in Papatoetoe" in 2006, "Sometimes like Taurus" 2014 and "Creeping along the bloodline" 2020. Hoping to find a money tree for any future projects. Published in Takahe, Live Encounters Poetry & Writing and most Titirangi publications over the years.



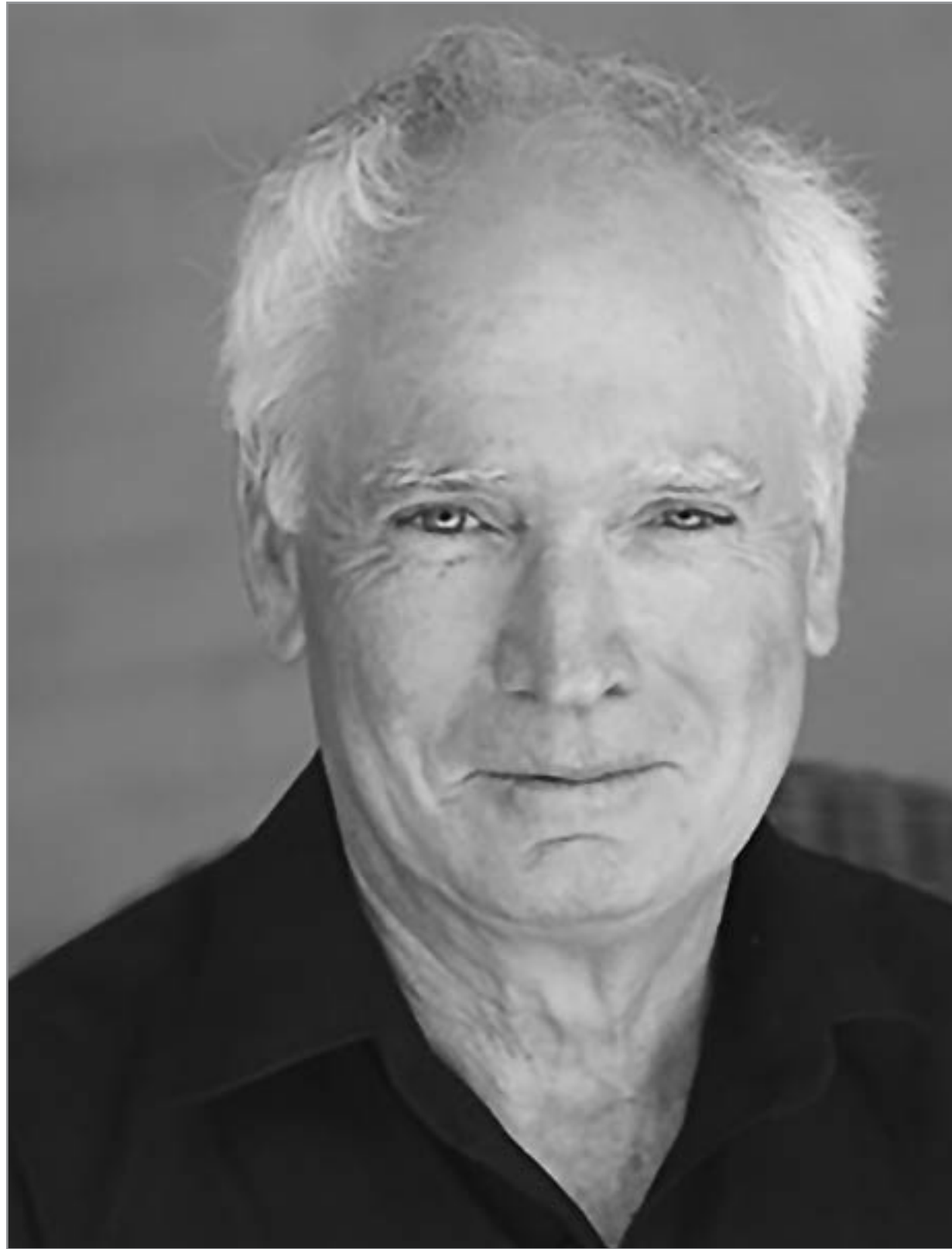
SHADES OF SHAKTI AT HINDU INDIAN TEMPLE

for Justin, group's European guitarist

The East/West dichotomy
has been pooh poohed
as jazz fusion marries traditional
Indian music in a ceremony
of evocative creativity;
engaging in mind-stretching
orgasmic ecstasy,
a rich eclectic spectrum of sound.
There's the touch typist string speed
of the guitarist with his exquisite riffs
and ability to anticipate
his sarangi maestro's gut generated bedlam,
the mauling antics from the tabla player
who dictates the tempo, initiates
the group's inaudible bonding
while the anorexic-looking sitar player
with her Ravi Shankar renditions
and the sweet talking vibrations
from the violinist, kneeling before
an abrasive, gifted drummer,
gives this honeymoon performance
a lasting resonance.
Around the corner,
I mean literally,
small time merchants (of a common ancestry)
ruminate on their bruising, cruel confrontations
with knife-carrying, mindless, angry meth addicts,
hellbent on seizing highly prized saleables,
the day's takings.

Paul Protheroe

Peter Boyle is a poet and translator of poetry living and working near the Georges River on Dharug land. He has ten books of poetry published and eight books as a translator of poetry. His most recent collection is *Ideas of Travel* from Vagabond Press. A new collection of poems, entitled *Companions, Ancestors, Inscriptions*, is due out next year from Vagabond Press.



INSCRIPTIONS 1

I lifted my head above the limits of the world.
So little I was.
Overnight I had become grass.

People stroll by in black robes --
the procession of bread and stone.

Up to my neck in sweet mud
I watch a future planet unfold.

*

Gently, quietly
the ocean was slipping
downward

while the river moved
always higher up
carrying me calmly with it --

soon we would cross
the cloud-line.

Peter Boyle

ODE TO TIME AND TIME'S ERRATA -- POEM 23 *

Solominka: a straw,
little daughter of wise Solomon
so fragile your gaze

the wind scatters it
all down the rough dirt road
that drops into the sea.

Outspiralling flowers the wind
lifts lightly off the cherry tree --
destined for what impossible gathering
beyond this icy night's
zigzagging rain?

Little Solominka,
how far the rough wind travels,
so much sky your eyes
must learn to carry.

And the birds of all seasons
build their nests with this straw.

* 'Solominka' is Russian for 'straw'

MY BIRTHDAYS IN REVERSE

I would like to sit with you again
as petals from my mother's star-flecked vase
drift and spin against the window.
I'd dreamt you'd returned
to light a row of candles
for my first birthday among the dragon fish
and knife-shaped reeds of the river
that carries night under the earth.

In the dream I am almost touching
your back, can almost taste
the white shimmer of sadness rippling there
like a vast lake that's forgotten
water's too fragile weight.

Part by part my body falls away --
a finger here, a tooth, an arm,
one side of my face.
The birds of make believe shatter
at one glance from your eyes
the way a skull will bleed
suddenly, all at once,
into the mirror before you.

It's possible a halo of fire
awaits us both in the city of stone
but nothing's guaranteed.

Born and live in Hanoi, Vietnam. Her home village is ancient village Yen Thai, next to the large West Lake. That village was wellknown for a craft of making paper from a kind of tree. Bachelor of Law. Bachelor of Journalism. Has held many positions in the radio and television industry at Voice of Vietnam. Used to be the director of VOV training center. Published anthologies of poetry: *Lỡ tay* (accidentally) (2008), *Đêm hoa vàng* (Golden Flower Night) (2012). *Ngỡ là mặt trời* (Thought it was the sun) (2014)

Translated from Vietnamese to English by Nguyen Thuy Hoa. Edited by John Liddy.

EXPRESSION OF SUMMER LOVE

Summer, keep burning more fire
To remind the day we fell in love
Don't be blue when the sun burns red
Summon the sunlight to expose the pain...

Don't blame the hot summer day
When the silent tree becomes still life at noon
Though I can't hope to find what is lost
Let it be, the wind will change the season!



Ly Thai Phuong

LOVE SONG OF BRIDGES

Could it be that bridges are just for people to cross
Could it be that we will meet again there
How many bridges in this world bear love locks?
Love oaths weigh on time

Could it be that I will see you again
In the midst of endless days, in a moment's pause
Could it just vibrate between beats
Down where the river roared and flowed

Could it be forever like that?
Bridges are just for people to cross endlessly
Like a river that never flows back
And the bridge builder himself went far away.

FLOWER AND LEAF

To forget a love, needs a new love
Even if it's crueller, even if I raise my head in a hurry
Even the field of flowers blooms and fades
Like a canopy of leaves changing colour from season to season!

PARADOX

Once being love sick
I sat playing with the wind
Suddenly realized the storm
Can bring back peace

Once being forgotten
Buried in sleepless nights
Realized that after bitterness
Would be sweeter

Once my hand let go
Coldly and didn't look back
But the loneliness
Clung to the footsteps

Once I missed a heartbeat
Plunged into the wave
Realized that sunstroke (*)
Made struggling for a lifetime

() in Vietnam, saying "sunstroke" means you crush someone.*

Piers Davies was born in Sydney, Australia but has lived most of his life in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, he is a Law of the Sea specialist having graduated with an LL.B from Auckland University and a Diploma ECL from City of London College. He has been a long-time writer and reciter of poetry. His poems have appeared in journals and anthologies in New Zealand, Australia, U.K., France, Switzerland, Poland, U.S. A, South Africa and India. Four books of his poetry have been published. He is co-facilitator of Titirangi Poets and co-editor of Titirangi Poets Ezines and anthologies. He was a scriptwriter of feature films ('Homesdale' and 'The Cars that Ate Paris' Australia and 'Skin Deep' New Zealand), short films and documentaries. He was sometime Poet Laureate of Haringey, London.

DREAMING OF BARBADOS BLUE

It is always
the sky and the sea
that I remember
not the sand,
the limbo party
on the beach
and the seductive rum,
not the chattel houses -
relics of sugar and slavery.
Memory reveals later
what soothes and calms
in that anxious time
between night and dawn.



Piers Davies

IS THERE ANYONE THERE

No longer
the childhood
imaginary friend
nor the cynical
observer of my
Quixotic youth.

Now just outside
the corner of my eye
he/she/it lurks
for what purpose
malevolent? definitely not benign.

DISAPPEARANCES

1
I remember them dying
my father my grandfather
my great aunt and uncle
I knelt stunned at these funerals
In the same sombre chapel
grey worsted school uniform
white shirt dark red tie and cap
black leather shoes highly polished.

2
our pets disappeared
as if the Stasi had called
the alsatian Nicky
handsome as the last Tsar
the white mice
surplus to requirements
when the schoolboy market fell
our old stable cat
one moment sleepy in the sun
the next scrabbling on a slant
across the grape-vined patio
with a minor stroke.

3
My mother made the arrangements
by the time I knew it was too late
and I became complicit in these deletions
learning the facts of like and death.

Rafael E. Fajer Camus is a Mexican writer who was educated at NYU and Naropa University. He has travelled extensively and has lived in Mexico City, Paris, and NYC. He's been through a few rehab treatments in the US and Mexico. He's also spent time in psychiatric treatment centers. He's now aware that he's not a cyborg destined to settle humans on Mars and is working on his first book *Notes on the Borderline* from which *Organic: Moises* is an excerpt. <https://rafaelfajer.com/>



Rafael E. Fajer Camus

ORGANIC: MOISES

Organic. I read the word on the packaging of the eggs I'm preparing this morning. The intended meaning is related to goodness in nature and goodness to nature. Goodness of nature.

If I eat organic my organism will function better and the world will too. It shares status with me, as a consumer, because it shows I care.

And I do care about things organic, just not these so much.

For the past year and some I've been exposed to a different meaning to organic. When organic is mentioned at rehab, in a clinical setting, the word carries a more treacherous weight.

Moises

I wake up to him standing next to my bed. He looks angry. Confused. I ask him what's going on.

I'm going to fuck you up.

He and I, we speak English with each other.

You went into my body, and you took a shit. I'm going to fuck you up.

He's a boxer. His fists are down. His voice is menacing but his body is still. I slowly get up and walk towards the door, face front, never giving him my back.

Moises, I was asleep. You saw me. I didn't take a shit in your body. You know me.

I know him too. Moises looks at me, lifts his fists.

You took a shit in me. I'm going to fuck you up.

I know if I run, he'll chase me and catch up with me. I cock my head to the side. A non-threatening animal.

Moises, why do you think it's me?

I have had the experience of someone coming into my body. In my case they would control it, against my will. I know the horror, the pain, the sense of betrayal.

Daisy Chavez told me.

Daisy Chavez is one of his personalities. She's a liar and a trickster. She's also his most habitual lover.

Did you see the shit?

He thinks.

No.

Remember what happened last week with Daisy?

Yes.

What happened?

She told me she bought cake for me, and she didn't.

What was her reaction?

She laughed.

Moises fists relax. His arms to his side.

Ok Moi, you didn't see the shit. Could she be lying? Could it be another joke?

His head goes down. He's looking at his shoes. Maybe he's talking to one of his other personalities. He comes towards me. I'm scared. He hugs me. When the hugging stops, I go to the bathroom. I empty my bowels. Relief, both physical and mental. I hear him singing his gleeful mantra:

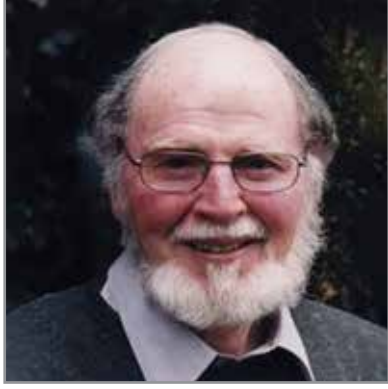
Who loves Daisy Chavez? Moises Manriquez.

For reals?

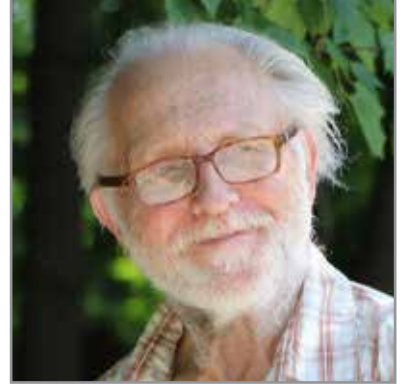
Moises has been there for 5 years now. He is going nowhere. He used PCP, mostly.

Organic. It describes irreversible damage to the brain and maybe some other vital organs. It means the person in question is screwed.

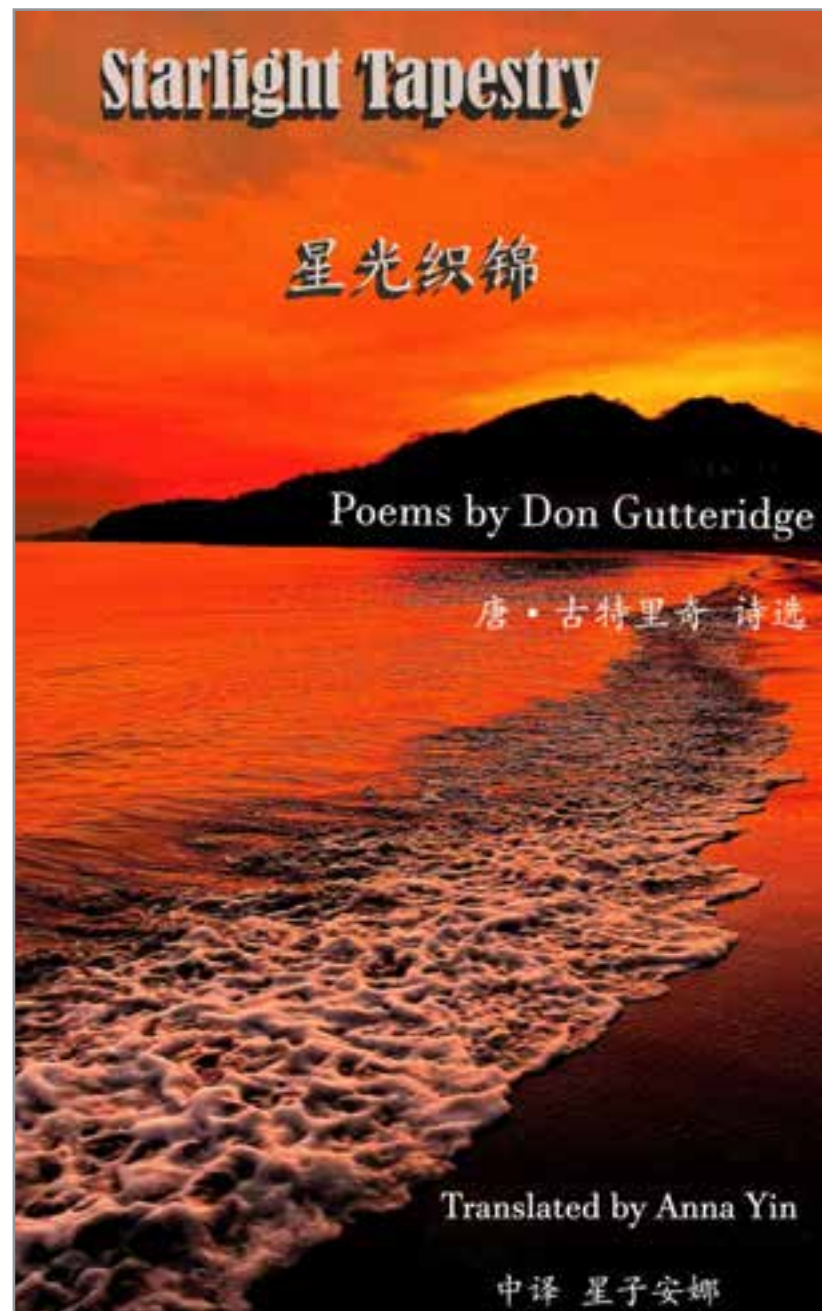
When I crack the organic eggs and scramble them, I think of Moises.



Don Gutteridge was born in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada and raised in the nearby village of Point Edward. He taught High School English for seven years, later becoming a Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario, where he is now Professor Emeritus. He is the author of more than seventy books, poetry, fiction and scholarly works in pedagogical theory and practice. He has published more than twenty novels including the twelve-volume Marc Edwards mystery series, and forty-four books of poetry, one of which, *Coppermine*, was short-listed for the 1973 Governor-General's Literary Award. In 1970 he won the UWO President's medal for the best poem of that year, "Death at Quebec". Don currently lives in London, Ontario.



Terry Barker taught Canadian Studies at Humber College, Toronto, Canada, including for over a decade in a special program for international students from China. He currently is researching the origins of the Canadian national archetype of "The True North."



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TERRY BARKER

Review of DON GUTTERIDGE'S *Starlight Tapestry* (translation by Anna Yin)

Published by SureWay Press, 2023 156 pp. C\$ 15
ISBN 978-1-998911-00-4

This unusual and attractive volume of a generous sampling of the poetry of one of Canada's senior and most respected poets and literary academics also offers great insight into the painstaking and personal methods of the translator of poetry. For Professor emeritus Gutteridge has selected for the reader in this collection a wide range of examples from his lifework of pellucid poetry, and translator Ms Yin, herself an accomplished poet, has organized the book in such a way, with proper introduction and inclusion of poems the author and translator wrote for one another, that the reader can appreciate the complexity and sensitivity of translation, requiring genuine dialogue. With regard to this book, we can thus trust such critical communication has taken place.

The main body of the book is divided into three parts, each containing poems by Professor Gutteridge related to the theme of that part, with their translations into Chinese on the pages facing the English original. Part One, "Starlight", consists of poems about prominent persons, mostly pillars of English Literature (Wordsworth, Emily Brontë, Oscar Wilde, Virginia Wolfe, W.H. Auden etc.), American Literature (Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens etc.), or Canadian Literature in English (John McCrae, Robert Service and Al Purdy; Leonard Cohen merits two poems, perhaps because he was both a poet, and a singer/song-writer), but also Nelson Mandela, who is presented as a Christ-like figure

*"a man of supreme reason
seasoned by hope and harmony."* (p. 39)

Part Two, "Life tapestry" gives us (in English and Chinese) a series of poetic vignettes of the life of the author, from childhood in Point Edward (near Sarnia) Ontario to current retirement from teaching and life as a widower, through the phases of awakening to the reality of war in the experience of his grandfather and father, and thus of his family, the complexity of the questions raised by the Christianity in which he was brought up, and the turbulent passions produced by puberty, the ordering of the psyche (consciousness) offered by the reading, writing and discussing of poetry and plays, and thus to the discovery of the full range of mature human love in his courtship of, and marriage to, his late wife Anne, and in his love and appreciation for his children, a perspective that elicits his keen observance of the transcendent possibilities of meaning in the love between his son, Tim, and Shahrzad, his bride:

*Loving Look
The day you lay your loving
look upon Shahrzad,
the stars came out
to celebrate with the sun
and the moon took time
to shine anew, and when
the object of your amorous eye
returned the grazing glance,
the skies burned a brighter
blue and the Heavens above them
shook, and on this day,
when two souls have pledged
to breathe as one, we wish you
a hatful of happiness and the winsome
ways of wedded bliss. (p. 111)*

Part Three of the book, "The Longing Shore", the concluding sequence of poems, begins with a series of accounts of anamnesis, the poet's reflective recalling of the spiritual experiences, shared with others, that shaped his mature structure of consciousness ("Pod", "The Morning I Fell in Love", "For King and Country: Remembrance Day 2022 For my grandfather in loving memory", "Remembrance" pp. 117-124).

These meditations are followed by poems expressing the deep loss, both personally and to his poetic practise, experienced by Professor Gutteridge after the death of his wife, Anne. These honest, touching and yet lyrical verses do not mark "the end of the story", however, for they are followed by a finishing twelve-poem series of pieces that, in effect, reveal a rebirth of rhyme, as we might call it, a great further and more profound outpouring of poetry about the meaning and mystery of life itself, in which, as the poet puts it:

*We come into this world
unbidden.*

...

*(but) somehow
inhabit the broad
acreage of that space
Nature grants us-
and celebrate the birth
of our being. ("Being" p. 135)*

Professor Gutteridge's philosophical conclusion towards the end of Starlight Tapestry is that, in his poetic practise, for him:

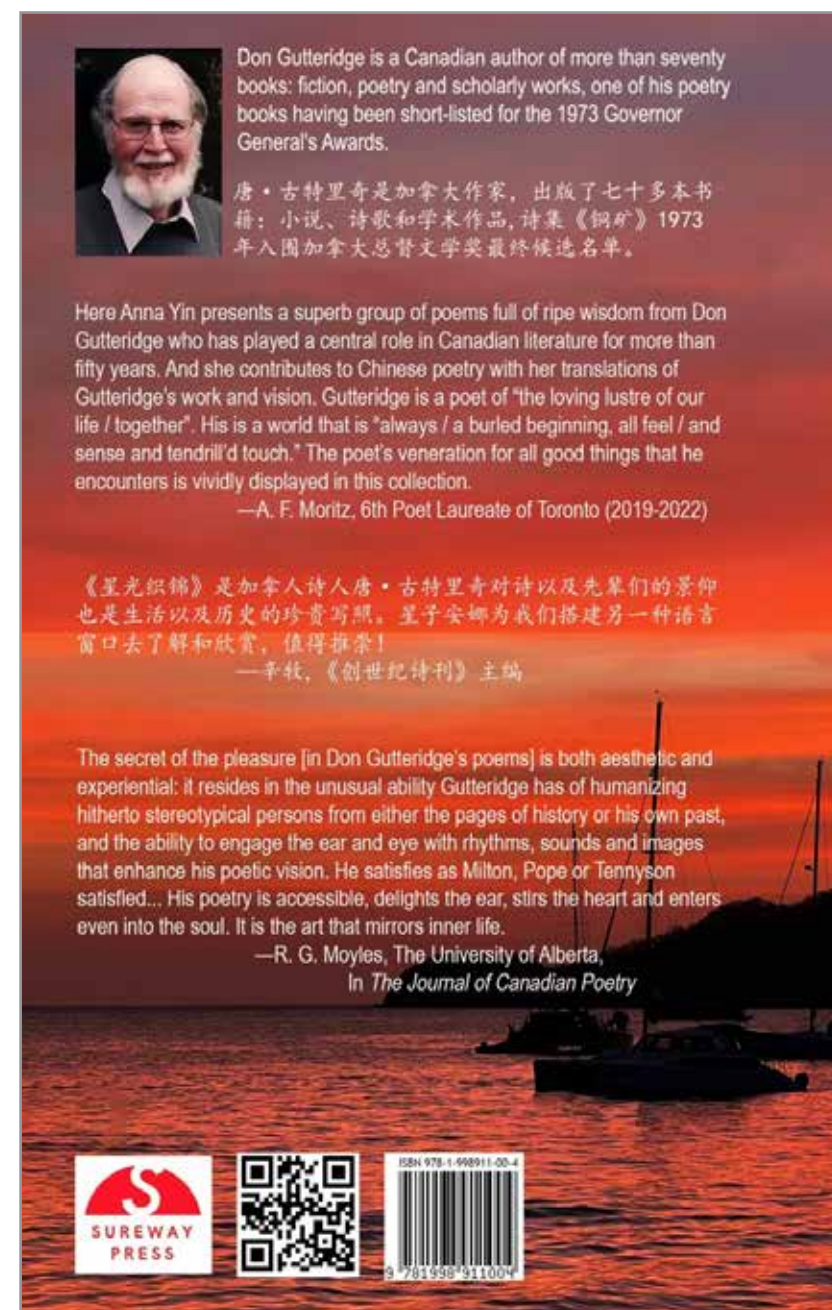
*When a poem percolates,
there is no end
in sight; meaning lies
not in the words, it flows
out of them towards some
timeless truth*

...

("End" p. 147)

Neither the author, nor his translator, Ms Yin, explore this (apparently shared) philosophy further in this book, but a possible small typographical error (or a work of the “collective unconscious”) may give the close reader of the book a clue where the poet and his translator “are coming from”. For the title of the poem for the book’s central figure of political philosophy is “Mandala”, not “Mandela” (p. 39), and, of course, the mandala is the “magic circle”, self-representation of a psychic process of centring, and production of a new centre of personality, in the psychology of Carl Jung, and it is a symbol that unites the cultures of East and West. Furthermore, it has been creatively used by scholars to throw light on the work of key authors in the Romantic tradition (see, for example, Professor Roderick Marshall’s study of the “earthly paradises” of William Morris).

Starlight Tapestry is a wonderful book that improves with every reading. The accessible style of the poetry, and clear organization of the text, make it a joy to read, and the cover and occasional illustrations fit in well with the spare, almost stark, poetic presentation. This book is ideal for Chinese readers wanting to sample Canadian poetry in English, as well as learn more about English literature in general. A sensitive and accurate account of a long life in Canada lived in the light of literature is given in this book, and it constitutes a real contribution to cross-cultural communication.



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