

2010 - 2024



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
MAY 2024

RICHARD W HALPERIN
Mother's Day, More or Less

COVER ARTWORK 'ALIGNMENT' BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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Live Encounters is a not-for-profit free online magazine that was founded in 2009 in Bali, Indonesia. It showcases some of the best writing from around the world. Poets, writers, academics, civil & human/animal rights activists, academics, environmentalists, social workers, photographers and more have contributed their time and knowledge for the benefit of the readers of:

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

We are appealing for donations to pay for the administrative and technical aspects of the publication. **Please help by donating any amount for this just cause as events are threatening the very future of Live Encounters.**

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

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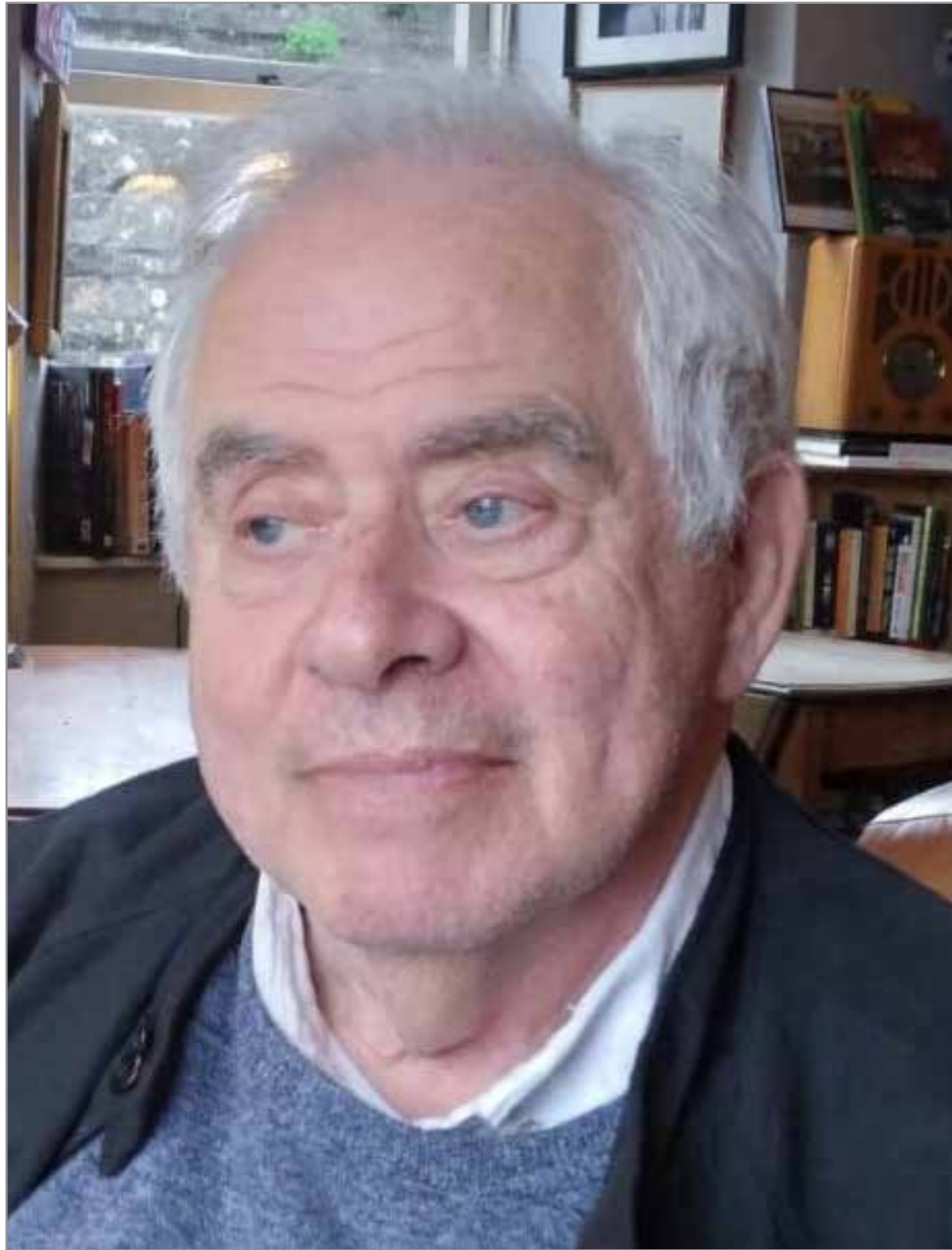


MAY 2024

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Richard W. Halperin holds U.S.-Irish dual nationality and lives in Paris. Since 2010, he has seen four poetry collections published by Salmon/Cliffs of Moher, and sixteen shorter collections published by Lapwing/Belfast. His work is part of University College Dublin's Irish Poetry Reading Archive. Mr. Halperin's next reading will be on 4 May, Achill Island, as part of the Heinrich Böll Memorial Weekend. The launch of his *Selected and New Poems*, Introduction by Joseph Woods, is anticipated by Salmon for early June, Dublin.



BLUE SKY, BREEZE OFF LAKE MICHIGAN

I've been thinking of my mother lately,
how before she started putting on a little weight
she loved wearing her friend Frank's
from-the-war pea jacket and sailor trousers
which he, no longer in the navy, could
no longer wear. She loved dresses and in fact
designed them, but nothing gave her the freedom
that those garments did, for a walk in Lincoln Park
with tiny me. The way she could move, I think.

Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Joseph Woods.

THE BAMBOO CUTTER

I am not he. He is in a prose tale
of old Japan. Illustrated scrolls
of his story are at the Chester Beatty.

Like him, I also cut stories.
Some are luminous on the inside.
I have nothing to do with that.

Once when the bamboo cutter
cut a shoot, a tiny luminous being
was within. She grew into
a quiet good-humoured beauty
whom many wished to marry.
She was not interested.

Eventually, she wanted to go
back home and did; back home
was the moon. Any poem is that.

Also at the Chester Beatty,
are papyrus fragments, third century,
on which are written parts
of Luke and of Revelation.

One sneeze, and they would fall apart.
I think they hold the world together.

ON MY ISLAND

What happened. I am on my island,
the one my friend was to show me before
he died. I, for the moment, am, which is
different from thinking or doing; which is
very like love. Clouds, sea, birds, rocks.
When seen for one second, or less than
one second, they, too, are. There should be
a word – there isn't – for what is the opposite
of ruins. When light hits ruins, and light
does, the ruins are there, but will not always
be there. Light will always be there. I remember
that today is my friend's birthday. April. I had
forgot. I am glad to remember it,
on my island.

INTERVAL

The interval is over for Jack.
 It is not yet over for me.
 And after it, what? Some books,
 some words people have spoken,
 ignite a thought, a certitude,
 which I guard preciously.
 In this my privacy, science
 distracts me, although science
 rests entirely on the invisible –
 mathematics, proportions.
 In this, also, philosophy
 distracts me. It paws at reality
 which, like China, knows
 how to wait.

PENTIMENTO 2

I wrote a poem a few years ago
 about my friend Dennis which related him
 to Haworth Parsonage. Shortly after his death,
 I wrote another, which related him to
 St. James Infirmary. The same Dennis.
 It was I who had changed. With time,

I see better; or poorer; or as I wish things
 had been; or as I wish I had been.
 This is why I live with all three memoirs
 of Lillian Hellman. She entitles one of them
Pentimento, but the title applies to all three.
 Pentimento means repentance:

the phenomenon by which the outer layers
 of a painting begin, with age, to fade
 and become transparent, revealing
 an earlier version or an entirely different painting
 of which the artist has subsequently repented.
 She repents each of the portraits she paints

in her private gallery – Sophronia, Helen,
 Willy, Bethe, Julia, Arthur W.A. Cowan,
 Dashiell Hammett, Hellman herself.
 At the outset and throughout she says
 she will do her best, but that the medium
 through which she writes is her unreliable self.

Other writers whom I live with say the same thing,
 Berkeley, Henry James, T.E. Lawrence,
 among them. Would that more historians
 said it. Rembrandt doesn't say it, he paints it.
 His 'Christ at Emmaus' begins to disappear
 as soon as one begins to look at it.

Ma Yongbo was born in 1964, PhD, translator, editor, and leading scholar of postmodern poetry. He has authored or translated more than 80 published books. Ma is a professor in the Faculty of Arts and Literature at Nanjing University of Science and Technology. His translations from English include works by Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, W.C. Williams, John Ashbery, Henry James, Moby Dick, Rosanna Warren and others.



I LOST THAT CHILD

I've lost so much, yet I haven't found myself.
 I lost the sweetness of the child's fingers in my mouth,
 lost the clear astonishment in those curious black-and-white eyes.
 The laughter in those eyes, now tinged with mockery,
 even that mockery has dissipated, perhaps turned into cataracts.
 I even lost the vast continent that gently rolled in those eyes,
 and the bowed head of the white horse returning from afar, flames on its back.
 I lost the multitude of bodies once present,
 only the purity of lips kissed by mother remains.
 The steadfast love stirred behind frosted glass by the sound of water,
 the freshness of corn being husked, untouched by the old sun's yellowed teeth.
 I lost both the ruins and temples within those bodies.
 I lost the couple standing by my side,
 and at some point, I lost the hand holding mine,
 the tobacco scent lingering on the hand and warmth in the palm lines.
 I lost them, speaking from dwindling ashes,
 speaking of my inherent fatigue, the grey above my head,
 speaking of my fate, as if the neighbour next door hangs on by a thread.
 I lost the fields in the autumn rain
 and the silent black sheep at every graveside.
 I cover my face with the darkness, returning to the uninhabited home,
 the landless country, back to the womb without a mother.
 Embracing what little remains of me, holding my breath, living until death.

Ma Yongbo

COMFORTER

Out of mercy, God let a dead man dream himself
still living, everything just as it was
daylight, family, city, reliable lamplight
His job tires him as it used to do
the difficulty of translating sentences from a giant blue book
whose bound threads fall loose
Sometimes he understands the sentences
sometimes they seem mysterious, distant like stars
Yet, the land, sky, seasons, house remain the same as before
his few friends still truthful
They sometimes bend over, burying themselves in a book
studying the shades of words, sometimes walk
out of the city to a drying field, in blustery spring wind
drink till late night at a cold, desolate bar

Life is peaceful though changes occur
Some people leave, some die, die of grief
some new faces shine with hopeful glory
In his tearful eyes, the city has expanded
He has a different job in a city far south
Recalling the person he used to be
he realizes ten years have flashed past
He wants no more change, used to failure

God has duplicated the whole universe for his soul
but his enemies increase
Sometimes he senses something has been moved
but doesn't know what or where it went
He keeps writing poems, tucking them carelessly
into tree holes or between pages of books
Sometimes he finds whole sentences go missing
or inexplicably changed as if written by someone else

Around him, things secretly decrease
First the hilltop is bulldozed flat
several lakes dry up, exposing fearful caves
with huge footsteps at their bottom
Then his friends are replaced by strangers
who wink at each other
Revolution and love still happen
seem so real yet he feels
they never actually existed
as if telling him, *nothing can hurt you*
You are already dead

MIDWAY STOP

It was an autumn long ago
I was still young then, still in love with something
There are few passengers on the huffing local train.
I'm curled up alone on a long seat,
the vibration of the wheels rocked my head,
suddenly stopped; woke me up

it is late at night and the northern plain is dark,
only the river shimmers and no one speaks,
no-one moves around, only the joint between the two carriages
sighs in frustration like an accordion
like the silence after a dispute between lovers

I stand up and listen. What's happening?
Where are we? The darkness outside is also listening,
no signal lights are flaring,
no train suddenly burst out from the opposite side
waving ghostly white vapour.

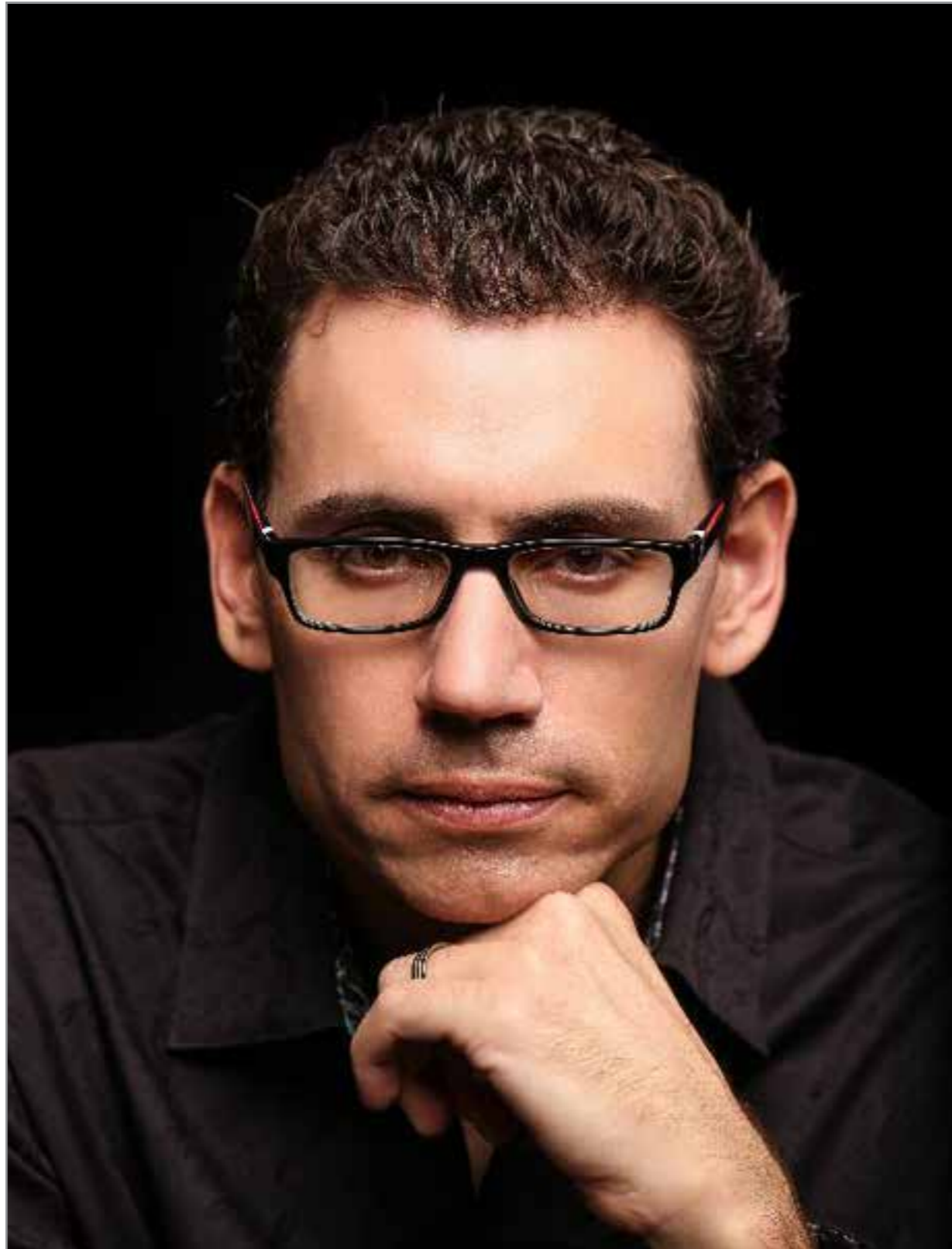
Nothing happened. Suddenly,
in the dark, a bumblebee swoops into the car window,
leaving scratch marks and a clear buzz in the dust;
its whole head looks like a dazed
and painted eye, staring at me blankly.

Many years have passed, the purpose of that trip
I have long forgotten. The only thing that I miss
is the silent gathering of the entire wilderness during the midnight parking
and the uneasiness of the young man who never got off the car.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Louis Efron is a Pushcart nominated and award-winning writer and poet who has been featured in *Forbes*, *Huffington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Ginosko*, *Jasper's Folly*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *A New Ulster*, *Flapper Press Poetry Café*, *PentaCat Press*, *Words and Whispers*, *Bourgeon*, *The Deronda Review*, *Young Ravens Literary Review*, *The Ravens Perch*, *POETiCA REViEW*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Academy of the Heart and Mind*, *Literary Yard*, *New Reader Magazine* and over 100 other national and global publications. He is also the author of five books, including *The Unempty Spaces Between* (winner of the 2023 NYC Big Book Award for poetry), *How to Find a Job, Career and Life You Love*; *Purpose Meets Execution*; *Beyond the Ink*; as well as the children's book *What Kind of Bee Can I Be?*



ASTERISK

a missed respite from ugliness

the feathered asterisk
blows from a trampled thistle
over smoldering stained battlefields
dodging metal perfected to blur
our spineless skin

twisting

jerking

and gliding

shepherded on a carriage
cradled in God's tender breath

to preserve even petite stars
muted by lit space
she was *always* worthy of being noticed
cherished

catching the sun
she glows
one last time
for our blinded weary eyes

then her beauty slips from our *page forever**

**a perpetual footnote
in our metaphorical world*

Louis Efron

EXPRESS TRAIN

as if breaching a sealed plastic bag
 filled with scorched marijuana
 and sour urine
 bullet-polished subway doors separate
 with a *shhhhhhhhhhhht*
 bringing us together
 down below
 where we are all invisible

clanking
 metal on metal
 like the pounding of empty soup cans
 in unison
 with flickering
 fluorescent light
 a distraction
 to ignore
 what makes us squirm

fixed forward
 jerking side to side
 with every imperfection
 each in our own obscure tunnel
 until together again
 illuminated by what we are
 forced to notice

tightly pressed against
 graffitied scratched glass
 a pregnant woman
 with a green knit hat
 and glistening amber eyes
 unable to cup her unborn child's ears
 when stamped a *whore*
 by a barking fatigued soldier
 freshly soiled
 and forgotten
 in urban trenches

tucked behind our backs
 like a trembling child
 in our protective shadow
 we exit our stop
 together ascending
 cold black gum-encrusted gray stairs
 towards heaven
 as sunken stares
 dart and bob
 attempting to meet ours
 desperate for connection

TECHTOPIA

artificial grey matter spills
from large-headed missionaries

beckoning us to join them
in a world without sacred ground

where chattering disembodied heads
afloat with others

forge lasting bonds held together by
petite yellow-gloved hands

below fixed smiles where
nimble fingertips pinch charged pencils

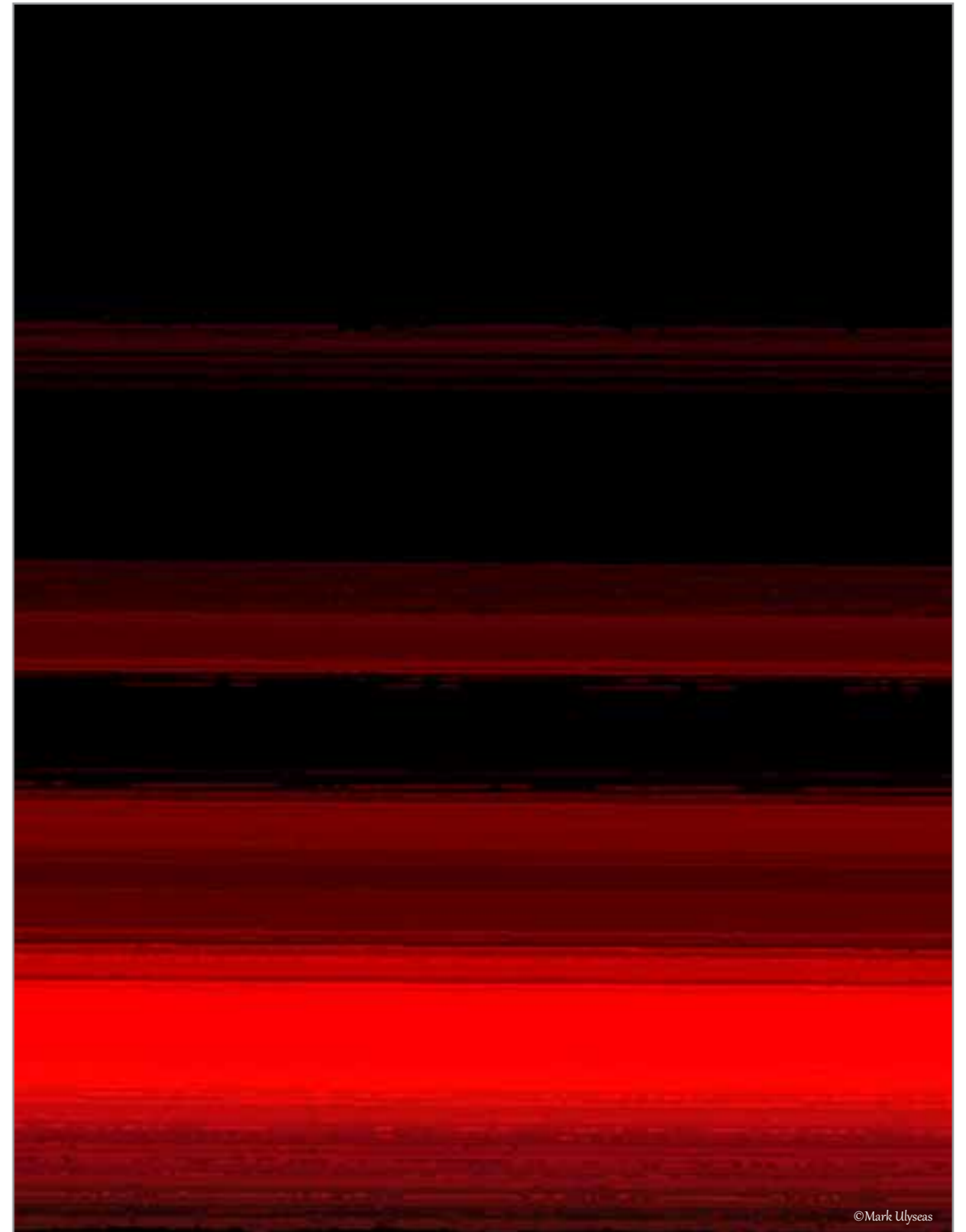
etching teal-hued faces
on polished glass canvases

meant to represent us all
equally

permanent installations within
museums without walls

a place where dusty paper trays
are no longer needed

but still here for our children
to discard after we are gone



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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 and psychiatric treatments in the US and Mexico. 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. His work has appeared in: ACE Anthology III: Arresting, Contemporary stories by Emerging writers, ACE Anthology IV: Arresting, Contemporary stories by Emerging writers and in several editions of Live Encounters Magazine. His work has been taught at NYU. <https://rafaelfajer.com/>



RICARDO'S MALLEUS MALEFICARUM

Ricardo and I are in the counselor's office. I'm online, reading the posts for The New York Writers' Workshop. Ricardo is sitting on the desk, writing on the computer, hammering away at the keyboard. I look up from the screen on my laptop, to his screen.

Click... click... Enter shift dear shift mrs fullstop shift ramirez comma enter enter enter shift i take this opportunity to let you know that comma no... comma you apostrophe re son is doing well dot...

I'm trying hard to concentrate while Ricardo is concentrating hard on enunciating his every keystroke.

Click... click... click... shift notwithstanding delete ding his short time at the clinic comma he apostrophe s progress.

Rick, why are you writing emails to the family reporting their progress? Don't we do it over the phone?

Usually yes but she wrote to me to see what's going on with Jorge, he replies.

I insist, Could you write without describing what keys you're pressing please? I'm trying to read. It's distracting.

Of course, big man. No problem, he says.

click. click. click.

Rafael E. Fajer Camus

Two minutes later he starts wording his keystrokes once again, softer voice, still very audible. I'm able tune out his words but the clicking continues.

click... click... click...

He doesn't write quickly. It takes a few instants from one click to another: more than for most.

click
click
click

This is torturing me. But I want to read the entries online. The other rooms and common areas are even more populated.

click
click
click

Words words words out of Ricardo's mouth.

Click *full stop* click *comma* click *apostrophe* click.

Punctuation has never been this difficult.

If only he wrote like Saramago. Genius! I'm going to gift him Saramago's The Gospel According to Jesus Christ. Double whammy! He'll get an alternative perspective on the life of Jesus, and he'll see how punctuation is overrated. How many painful clicks will that save me in the future?

Click..
click..
click..

Bad idea. He'll probably report me to his church's inquisition, and I know I can't float to the surface of a body of water if I'm weighed down by a stone. Hell, I almost didn't resurface without a stone once... or twice. I'll give him The Stone Raft. Maybe he'll drift off to another continent.

Click... click... click

Punctuation can be tough but never had I experienced it as pain. I read some posts online and find that punctuation takes space.

Is it necessary Maybe not Saramago certainly uses it sparingly Punctuation is overrated Fuck I have a few birthmarks and meth-marks that could be construed as devil engendered Tread carefully Will the inquisitors believe me if I explain that the markings on my skin are remnants of my drugged-up days Scars of when I would accidentally burn off parts of my skin with a lighter a torch and liquified meth Or will they insist I've been marked by the devil

click click
click

Ok have him read Saramago It ll definitely help This torture could become shorter What books would be good for him I think about The Double Yes an evil double takes over the protagonist s life No not the double maybe Ricardo will multiply

Click click click

How else can I economize his language yes no capital letter s that s perfect a few lesser clicks per paragraph this is genius for real this time should i give him death with interruptions no no that would definitely clash with his scatological stance he would undoubtedly report me to the authorities in charge of decommissioning the existence blasphemers

click click click
 click click
 fucking clickyti
 click
 afucking

CLICK

my heads not feeling right still i need more ways to save pages from his inter-
 ventions paragraphs we dont need paragraphs were saving now adding all of
 these economies up will definitely save space and clicks)

click click click click click click

ill give him the wait a minute theres no need for italics either all the names perfect
 book for him thatll keep him busy and away from the keyboard were definitely
 getting places now my head is starting feel weird

click click click click click click... click... click

(silence)

CLICK

CLICK CLICK

i think hes stopped writing no need for adjectives or adverbs just straight facts
 wait there are useless words in this last ok no need for last there are useless ok no
 adjectives i said there are words in sentence its starting to look like daylight
 savings time over here what about spacesbetweenwordsaretheynecessarythisis-
 thewaytosavemefromtheincessantclickingfuckfuckmymindisigniting I need
 capital letters and spaces. I need fullstops commas, and punctuation!

Click.. Click.. Click..

I need structured paragraphs adequately spaced, with adjectives and adverbs to
 complete the ideas therein.

My mind. It's going insane, but is it me? Wait, I'm I bearing witness to my mind
 without falling into its machinations? Thank you Ricardoooh shit. Truthfully, no.
 I'm immersed in my mind play.

It's too late.

A chain reaction has been catalyzed. I feel a stake impale me. I can't move. I'm
 burning. BURNING!

Ricardo! You bastard. I will come back and haunt you. Revenge will be mine
 (exclamation point) I curse.... you and your...

All I can see is white.

Blindness

Paris Rosemont, author of debut poetry collection *Banana Girl* (published by WestWords, 2023) writes poetry that traverses liminal spaces between the light and dark. Her writing has won a swathe of awards both locally and internationally. Paris takes delight in bringing her poetry to life through multi-disciplinary modes of expression, including theatrical performance. She may be found at <https://www.parisrosemont.com/>



THE LOVERS OF DÚN LAOGHAIRE

'Tis said that by the knotted whorl where river meets the sea
 a bonny lass with raven locks and glacial eyes of blue
 slips out on full-mooned nights to wait for him at Dún Laoghaire.
 A travelling minstrel stole her heart and swore a promise true:
 my darling, if you wait for me, I shall return some day
 to free you from that brute to whom you're wed;

when I've the means.

But first, I must my fortune build so we may sail away
 out to the Ring of Kerry, where I'll worship you, my Queen.
 You'll want for naught and there we'll live—I'll take you as my wife.
 How happy we shall be, my love!

Alas, 'twas not to be.

The lass's husband found them out and plunged her with a knife.
 Far up the coast the lad caught wind of this great tragedy.
 'Tis said each time a new moon rises 'tween this world and hers
 you'll see the lovers' shadows dancing 'midst the conifers.

*Written whilst in County Kerry, Ireland, as an Atelier Artist in Residence (April, 2024)
 This poem is in the form of a Sonnet in iambic heptameter, otherwise known as a 'Fourteener'*

Paris Rosemont

Ahmad Al-Shahawy is an Egyptian poet and the author of more than 20 books and poetry collections. His poems have been translated into many languages, including French, Italian, English, Turkish and Spanish. He participated in many international poetry festivals organized in many countries of the world. Al-Shahawy was also the recipient of the UNESCO Literature Award in 1995 and the Cavafy Poetry Award in 1998. Four of his literary works are nominated in the long list of the Sheikh Zayed Book Award in the branch of literature, including his novel *The Magician's Hijab* 2022. Also, recently, *Lavender Ink / Diálogos* published Al-Shahawy's poetry anthology entitled *Alone by the Nile*, 2023.

Translated from Arabic by Dr. Salwa Gouda. She is an Egyptian literary translator, critic, and academic at the English Language and Literature Department at Ain-Shams University. She holds a PhD in English literature and criticism. She received her education at Ain-Shams University and California State University in San Bernardino. She has published several academic books, including "Lectures in English Poetry, and "Introduction to Modern Literary Criticism" and others. She has also contributed to the translation of "The Arab Encyclopedia for Pioneers," which includes poets and their poetry, philosophers, historians, and men of letters, under the supervision of UNESCO. Additionally, her poetry translations have been published in various international magazines.

THE MAGICIAN'S HIJAB

To Nawal Issa

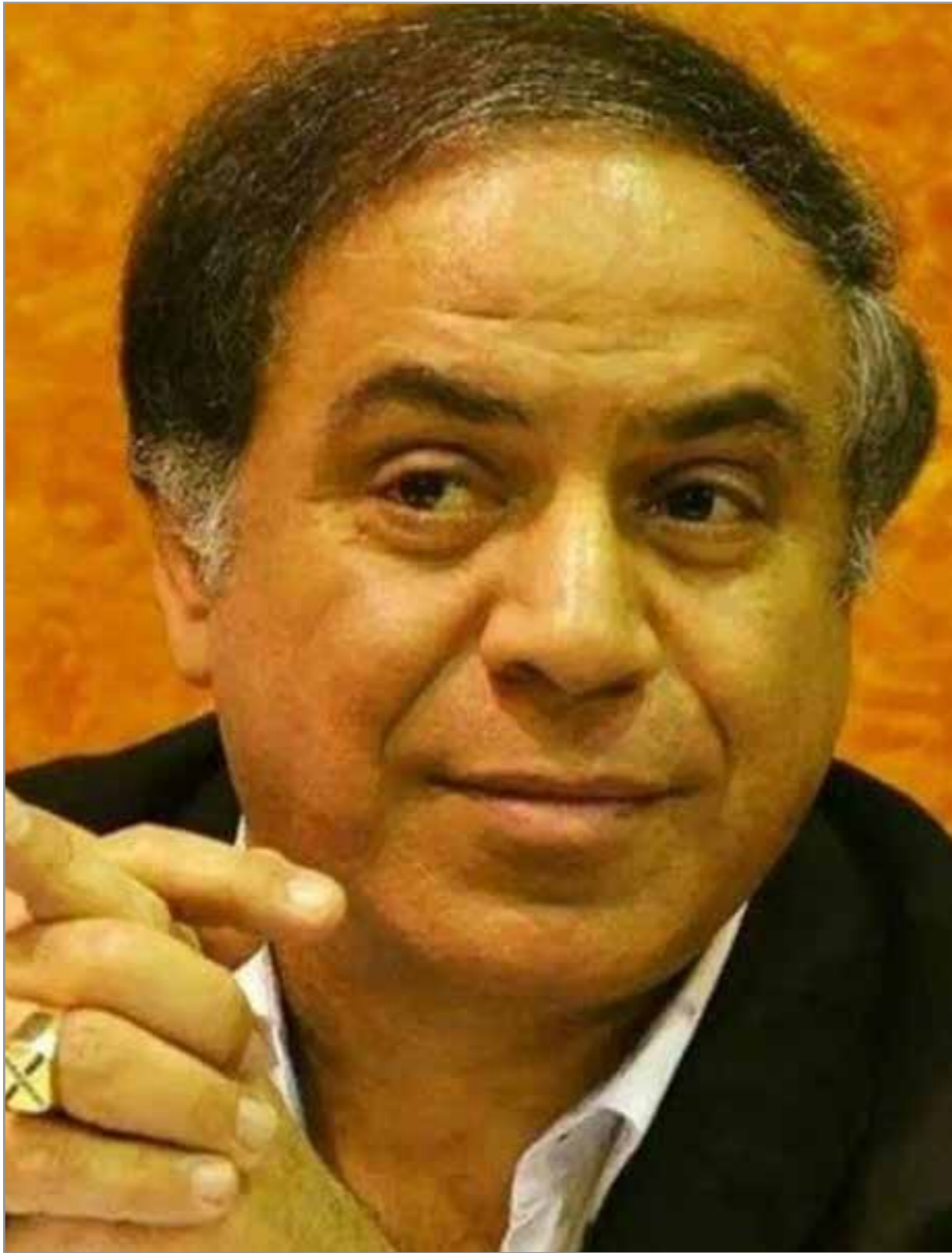
Because of your departure, I go to bed afraid of my tomorrow.

To my son Ahmad

Put a violet on my grave every time the sun rises,
And the sun will come to you as usual.

To Shams Hamdi

I know that the earth no longer rejoices for me
It's as if my heart is sleeping in your hands
Your water is running, flowing between my sides, and it is the treasure of my life.
The world will stand for a long time before your eyes, which taught me to strive
to change the alphabet.



Ahmad Al-Shahawy

I will not go to some theory to write it or tell its story, as the written form is loose and broad, and I prefer not to be boring, or make my readers turn away from me due to excessive boredom, digression, and immersion in the minutes and tempting small margins of any writer or reader, as the details are many and the secrets are more. I did not go to writing except to bring joy to myself first, to fill my heart with joy and happiness, as I delight in contemplation and deep observation towards what others do not see, seeking to record or create a parallel world to the life of Shams Hamdi, who is one of the best women, and no woman has been more charming and beautiful since Eve, preserving her history from disappearance and oblivion, so that her memory does not fade, as she always tells me: "Everything has a flaw, and the flaw of knowledge is forgetfulness"; and for you to read her story in her life, before she goes to her secret and mysterious world, where she lives the rest of her life in the embrace of ancient mistresses who revive in her room. Sekhmet, the lioness Goddess, known as the Avenger of the Wronged, rides her new car that her wealthy father contributed to buying.

"I will not forget the unforgettable in my life, as humans do not forget their pains and sorrows, the signs of damage in their souls, and the death marks that crowded their hearts. I wished for the oblivion of possessions, what fell and was left of it for its worthlessness, but unfortunately, my bag is full of what I hate. I never loved fighting, and I do not want the lamp of my mind to remain lit all the time; I want to rest. I, who have doubled and multiplied, haunted by ghosts about myself every night, and that will not be achieved for me with a memory composed of layers, where incidents are repeated, and it is written in its map that it is resistant to forgetting. I need to cross my limits so as not to fall into the abyss, and to lose more than I am in it of confusion and disappointment, and to distance myself from the one my heart chose as a lover. I feel every night - as a day is subtracted from my life - that I am a woman devoured by a huge snake, and sometimes I see myself being sacrificed, near an unknown temple whose name I did not ascertain, and that I live in no place, time, or logic, between wakefulness and dream, where my past merges with my present, and I often see the unseen sleeping on my pillow, lurking, as if I A defeated queen or mistress, compelled to the altar despite her status and history, tries to escape with the coming of night, but the door does not open despite repeated attempts," said Shams.

I can intervene a little in weaving and braiding, not in the way everyone expected; because her world is richer and more flowing with imagination. Of course, I must mention that she inspired me with some light to write, and she was frank with me to the extent that I did not find in any other women I knew or encountered.

She enjoys a great deal of honesty and intelligence, and in many cases, I find her poor and lacking in resourcefulness. Sometimes I see her skillful in managing her affairs, and getting out of difficulties easily and smoothly, and sometimes I see her powerless, unable to do what is necessary, as if she had no trick left in her hand, and she exhausted all means and possibilities, and tired of the available tricks, but she is unable to see, as if she is among "those who cannot find a way out, nor are guided on a path," and I always say to her, my sun: "If you have no trick for the matter, and you find nothing but patience, then be patient."

I will not tidy up anything, nor will I shield from myself or from her what I envision in the realm of my imagination or my mind. I will not delve into explanations or interpretations because I belong to those who seek revelations, ponder meanings, and contemplate the hidden truths. I prefer to let events unfold naturally without imposing my influence. Writing about Shams Hamdi carry profound significance, offering lessons and insights rather than mere storytelling for amusement.

Shams Hamdi's life is a tapestry of richness and diversity. She is a woman who presents herself differently each night and day, embodying multiple personas instead of repeating herself. She captivates everyone's attention, teaching us that with unwavering faith, one can move mountains. Her name is Shams, but she is a multitude of suns due to her exceptional individuality. By day, she immerses herself in ancient texts like "The Book of the Dead" and "The Then followed by another hour or more of reading in the book "Metun Al-Ahram or the Texts of the Pyramids," you no longer know if she is Shams Hamdi, or Isis, or Sekhmet, or are they all one woman, living inside her a goddess who came to save people from evil and sins?

"My goal is to help myself in the afterlife with this consecutive daily reading, since I understood what the book is, and what reading is? Which I see as rituals, ceremonies, invocations, hymns, incantations, and religious prayers, as its presence in the pyramids, always attracts me to read and embody it, as through it I realize my mind, and I try to know who I am, and I unravel my intense mystery and turmoil with it, which accompany me as I cross worlds and strange doors, and caves of secrets, perhaps I find the happiness that I have not tasted in my life with people who misunderstand me and do not know who I am?

Although every time I read it, I found around me hundreds of snakes and serpents, which I could find in my grave one day, but they look at me with sorrow, leaving me without harm, danger, or risk, as I see myself remaining alive in the afterlife, and only my enemies whom I specified in my life will die, and I wrote their names on a paper and folded it many folds so as not to attract attention, putting his name at the top of the list, followed by two, one of them from my family, and the other from the filth of the leftist movement in Egypt, and I placed it in a secret place known only to me, and perhaps someone will find it one day after I go to my world, and they are not many, because I naturally hate having enemies, so I traveled to the afterlife alive without death; so I can live forever, and if I die, I will live again in the kingdom of heaven; because I usually flee from death, I am against darkness and stillness, seeing myself in a distant kingdom in the form of a star that never sets or disappears, and of course never perishes, as if I am in a stellar afterlife, and I also see myself as a goddess of the sun as if I am in a solar afterlife, soaring above the enemies of The air, I traverse the countries of the sky as an eternal goddess, ascending on a ladder made for me by the rays of the sun that hangs from the sky, I carry my prestige on my head, and I also carry my disappointment that no one knows except you, and on my neck are the charms that you made for me; To protect me wherever I am I hope you are not surprised, and do not accuse me of nonsense and madness, for you are the only one on this earth who trusts me, loves me sincerely, and has given me so much, to the point that I always told you: You deserve a better woman than me, but you stuck to me, despite the confusion that struck my soul, and you tolerated my inconsistency. And I am not consistent, and you wore ignorance with me, and you tried to drain the waters of evil from my land that the enemies gave me to drink, and you are still trying, and in your hand is a silver inkwell that your grandmother had left for you, and two old pens that your father left for you before his early death, one of them for the black ink that you prefer and write with, The second is for red ink so that you can correct my mistakes, your mistakes, and the mistakes of others."

At night Shams sleeps with her friends from the mistresses, where they gather and hover around her, giving her a lot of advice. She does not miss a night without one of the mistresses gifting her one of their jewels, especially the rings adorned with pieces of precious gems or engraved inscriptions, which give her the ability to control demons or genies, communicate with animals and birds, particularly with the hoopoes, can open doors, enter caves, uncover treasures, and enter paradise.

Nothing on land or at sea is withheld from Shams Hamdi because the rings are linked to the rotation of the planets, the movements of the planets and the constellations, and they are "subtle wonders of the Creator's craftsmanship and a sign of His system and wisdom." They possess spiritual virtues indicating power, reverence, and greatness. Every movement or gesture that comes from the hand adorned with its rings predicts a specific spiritual stance, and the more the rings increase, the more the situations increase, as if they were dances conversing with the lords in their heavens. The ring, in general, is the stamp, the mark, and the symbol, indicating authority, fame, and wealth. The right hand signifies spiritual authority and the path to the heavens that those on earth strive for. If Shams Hamdi has been chosen and selected as a goddess among humans.

The mood rings, each containing a thermochromic colored element like liquid crystal, so that the color changes based on the finger's temperature. The ring is accompanied by a colored graphical drawing, indicating the presumed mood of the wearer based on the ring's color. The ancient Egyptians were the first to use rings as a link between two hearts that joined and mingled.

Gold was more widespread than silver, as the Egyptians could easily access the sunny metal, while silver was more expensive than gold adorned with carnelian and turquoise. Shams Hamdi prefers the emerald stone because of its magical abilities, especially in making talismans, spells, and amulets. Whoever wears it will be rewarded and will not see misfortune, "wild animals will be humbled before him," and God does not reject a hand sealed with it in vain, granting emerald safety, confidence, and the ability to focus. It is linked to the planet Mercury, eliminates negative energy, disturbing nightmares, and bad dreams, provides protection against the "evil eye," makes the person who wears it relaxed and calm, takes away stress and anxiety, improves memory and the ability to think, and also protects the wearer from snake and scorpion bites. It is considered a stone. The divine one of the goddess Isis; Because it is a symbol of eternal life and is known as the "healing stone." Because it achieves emotional, physical, and spiritual balance for whoever wears it, and strengthens insight and faith, it is believed that it helps with inspiration, gives calm to the soul, helps relax, and has therapeutic benefits for those who suffer from insomnia, asthma, ulcers, and problems that affect the heart.

Since Shams Hamdi read the teachings of Ptah-Hotep, who was interested in emeralds, and she does not forget his wisdom that says: "Beautiful speech is more illuminating than the emerald we find among the pebbles." These teachings are a collection of judgments and advice directed from Ptah-Hotep to his son, known as the "Words of the Gods." Shams used to repeat these words whenever she was alone in her room, car, or at her desk in the popular neighborhood of Cairo, as if reminding herself of her situation.

Those who always desire women will not succeed in anything they plan. And at this wisdom, she shouts loudly: "Listen to me, O conqueror, the time is near, and it's your turn now, you dog."

The noblewomen who believe in the power of gems and magical symbols to influence their lives had gifted Shams Hamdi with round, flat, and wide necklaces that extend from the end of the neck to the shoulders and chest, woven around the neck, or in the middle of it a pendant in the shape of a human, bird, or fish. Earrings, which are one of the oldest known customs throughout history for body adornment, and bracelets dedicated to the upper arm, known as the "armlet," embellished with lapis lazuli, red agate, adorned with shapes of gold inlaid for the female falcon to ward off evil, and others adorned with the goose, with engravings on their inner surface of cartridges and epithets belonging to the lady Isis.

Chains for the abdomen and waist, belts made of rare gemstones, necklaces, and splendidly designed anklets engraved with amulets and royal titles, are among the ornaments and jewelry tools of the ancient Egyptians. Crowned with gemstones, they emit a sense of comfort and tranquility, adorned with genital parts in the lotus flower, symbolizing purity and clarity. This flower blooms at dawn and closes at dusk for five days, shedding its petals on Thursday to reveal a green seed pod, bending towards the water to scatter its seeds, initiating a new cycle of life. It is the symbol of creation among the ancient Egyptians, one of the holiest flowers, and the most magnificent in beauty. It is the queen of perfumes, offered as sacrifices during funerary rituals.

The noblewomen presented Sun of the valuable necklaces that adorn the neck, bracelets, necklaces, and collars that fill her chest carried on the most beautiful of shoulders, in them lies the collection of her desires, they can be a leader, a guide, and a signpost for a woman, as even noblewomen do not have breasts that resemble her breasts, except perhaps for Sakham.

Sun's neck is like a vessel nearing fullness, where it rises and stands proudly, overlooking the sky challenging limits and constraints, as if it is noble heading towards high matters, for the neck is the most prominent feature - and I will not forget her eyes and waist in the body of Sun Hamdi - because it signifies her fertility and femininity, "breasts like ivory's right, cheaply," and whenever I saw her, I repeated to her a verse from Ibn al-Rumi: (Women who have no flaw, except preventing the lover from embracing).

The sun celebrates its beauty in its daily rituals, to the extent that she distanced herself from her lover, no longer seeing him or even speaking to him, contenting herself with writing to him from time to time, affirming to him - whenever he complains and reproaches - that love is a spiritual connection, not just a physical one, although he realizes that she is a woman inflamed with intense desire and passion, with a strong sexual urge to make love, she is agitated, with turbulent waves, and this intensity of desire is not found in other women on earth, it is a divine gift, a sacred grant from heaven.

She does not be satisfied with a little pleasure, because it is a sea of desire, and the mythical rebellion that distinguishes it from women. She brings things and actions that her lover does not expect, and did not anticipate, but he undoubtedly started to love her and eagerly awaits her. Whenever she gives him an appointment, she breaks it, without apologizing, even though he waits for her mentally, emotionally, and physically prepared, to the point where he doubts that love has gone from her heart to another direction, or that she may have known another, and he, in such a situation, as much as he loves, his detachment is as much, and he forgets what happened, even if he experiences pain and suffering, and she deprived him of her, until he became a barren wasteland.} s it within the realm of possibility for me to say that the sun is the key of its time, and through it, I can uncover many mysterious phenomena, in which there is ambiguity, concealment, obscurity, and confusion, and a lot of lack of clarity, and that it helps me as much as I help it to return to the sun that I first knew.

Shams Hamdi is a museum that I used to go to fill my soul with joyful beauty that inspires living. She is a vast, multi-faceted, and diverse world or miniature universe. She is a woman who does not know how to compromise or barter. I see her as a living model for anyone who wants to understand the theory of art or the philosophy of beauty. You will find in her what is not... According to Hegel, Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and other philosophers of aesthetics who followed in their footsteps.

Luis Cuauhtémoc Berriozábal, born in Mexico, lives in California and works in Los Angeles in the mental health field. He is the author of *Raw Materials* (Pygmy Forest Press), *Before and Well After Midnight* (Deadbeat Press), *Peering into the Sun* (Poet's Democracy), *Songs for Oblivion* (Alternating Current Press/Propaganda Press), and *Make the Water Laugh* (Rogue Wolf Press). Kendra Steiner Editions has published 8 of his chapbooks, the latest one, *Make the Light Mine*. Luis graduated from Cal Poly Pomona, earning a degree in Finance, Real Estate, and Law. He earned his Master's degree in Public Administration from Cal State Northridge University.



I HEAR HER VOICE

On freshly mopped floors,
barefoot, she enters
early in the morning.
I hear her voice from my room.

She likes to play with my mind.
If she had claws, I am sure
she would skewer me like a bear.
In the wind
I hear her voice. No medicine can stop her.

Luis Cuauhtémoc Berriozábal

SHRINKING

I feel my eye shrinking,
weeping without tears.
A sea is raging in its iris.
It whimpers and vanishes.

I feel my teeth shrinking.
They bite my tongue in cheek.

I turn the other cheek
and my teeth disappear.

I lie naked on a slab.
Maybe it's just a dream.
The years have come and gone.
I am being cut into pieces.

I cry inside.
My face is hollow.
I set myself on fire.
The smell is less than glorious.
I swim with the fishes,
a formless corpse.
An angel draws near,
two thousand angels follow.
My spirit surrenders.
It flees the scene.

I am carried away by the wind.
A fallen angel follows.

I push the devil away.
It smells of sulfur.
I do not let it condemn me.

I fly with the crows.
In a frenzied tone, I sing.

What would you do?

My hands are shrinking.
I cannot tie my shoes.

Margaret Kiernan is a prolific writer known for her captivating poetry and compelling short stories. With a remarkable literary career, she boasts publications in esteemed journals and magazines such as *The Blue Nib*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and *The Galway Review*, among others. Margaret's talent has garnered her nominations for The Best of The Net Award on three occasions and earned her the title of Runner-up in The Hannah Greely International Competition. Her work is not only celebrated in the literary world but also recognized in *The Index of Contemporary Women Poets in Ireland, 2020*. Beyond her literary pursuits, Margaret brings a wealth of experience from her background in professional advocacy. In her leisure time, she finds solace in the company of her faithful companion, Molly the dog, and channels her creative energy into painting landscapes and still-life scenes. Margaret G. Kiernan's dedication to her craft and her diverse range of talents make her a prominent figure in the contemporary literary scene.

IN NEW YORKS TIMES NEWSPAPER

It all started with a report in the Times newspaper, about future water rising and coastal living. Connie watched askance at the paper on its stand, she didn't want to read or even believe, what the print was suggesting.

Connie was dubious about most news, she preferred to let things pan out for itself. The end of things rarely interested her. She was a live in -the -moment lady. It served her well enough; she cruised her beat each day.

Her eyes were keen, and she could spot amazing detail without effort. Now, she read on, one third of the land to be below sea-level in ten years. The year twenty fifty to feature the city living in pods, or floating pontoons. She ought to choose another city now she sighs, to no-one in particular.

She will mention this to the McGuigan neighbours. They might choose to move too. Not that she wanted their kids around, but she figured that would be part of the deal. At least they no longer had the mangy dog that barked all night, she had seen to that by a call to the city. Animal welfare came and removed the dog.

Connie decided she would make a trip, a recce, scouting for a good place to move to.

Later at home, she drew diagrams and numbers. The McGuigan's were only one family, she'd need more for safety. There would be gangs to consider and displaced people and crimes, all of this foremost in her mind now, she was a police officer.

She considers what she and others will be doing in their future daily lives, living in the new place, she wrote about that in the margins too. To start, rafts would be tethered together for safe living. Night watches while people slept, and day watches too. The children would need protecting.

continued overleaf..



Margaret Kiernan

See through living in pods with neighbours, will be invasive she figured. She would need some cover. Connie remembered that she had studied colour in art workshops. She would swot about opaque colours. It could be blue. Deep in her heart she knew it would be necessary. It would remind her of when skies had been blue.

By nightfall, Connie has compiled extensive lists, plans, and diagrams. Carefully placing them into a folder, she feels more in control, she relaxes her shoulders.

Stretching and yawning, she decides to pull on a jacket and head out for a stroll through Brooklyn. A sense of nostalgia is overtaking her.

She walks through the night, blue-black sky above. Lights blink in empty office spaces. She avoids walking on the metal vents, looking down into those submerged spaces now leaves her feeling anxious.

The air is chilly, a brisk breeze is blowing up from the river, she pulls her collar up. Her hand feels a tear land. Connie swishes it away, furious with herself. She grabs the doorway of a bakery and heads inside, to wait for freshly cooked donuts.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Alicia Viguer-Espert, born and raised in the Mediterranean city of Valencia, Spain, lives in Los Angeles. A three times Pushcart nominee, she has been published in LummoX Anthologies, Altadena Poetry Review, ZZyZx, Panoply, Rhyvers, River Paw Press, Amethyst Review, Odyseeey.pm, and Live Encounters among others. Her chapbooks *To Hold a Hummingbird*, *Out of the Blue Womb of the Sea* and *4 in 1*, focus on language, identity, home, nature, and soul. In addition to national and international publications, she is included in "Top 39 L.A. Poets of 2017," "Ten Poets to Watch in 2018," and "Bards of Southern California: Top 30 poets," by Spectrum.



TO THE OLD CAROB TREE

we used to climb as children

Like then,
enter my eyes, oh light!
illuminate the path to return home,
point at the old carob tree with your luminous fingers,

the vast universe of its foliage,
the shades of its ancient leaves drunk with chlorophyl
and the darken veteran ones already harden.
Show me the road embroidered
with violent reds from poppies, nightingales' songs,
like then.
To find you, carob tree
I'll focus my melancholic gaze
on the mystic milieu of these abandoned fields.

I know that tomorrow
when the ancient guitar player of the wind strings
the musical instrument of your branches,
I will inhale your spicy fragrance, the sweet lullaby of my childhood mountains.

Light, return to my eyes from distance and time,
join me, undress the shadows,
let the aroma from my old carob tree guide me to my home's center,
like then.

Alicia Viguer-Espert

A DOVE AND A CANARY

To Renee Amitai's art

Today in LA a French artist promised
to reveal the tale behind her canvass:
beginning, middle, and end.

I yearn to ask how she charms blank surfaces
to speak, determines brush itineraries, creates
color families, and at the mystical moment
a genie whispers the work's completion,
in what language does she hear,
"the task is accomplished."

She tells me about *la liberté des idées*,
the practiced dance of hand and vision,
inner concerns shaped by social issues,
assures me the work is never finished,
hears no magic words in her inner ear, only
the arrival of a new child weans the older one.

I notice a dove floating in luminous attire,
a white tuxedo preened in pink mother-of-pearl,
refusing to look back toward the speckled flock
behind darkening sand as the eve approaches.
Mellow golden tulips entice yellows of hope
to hover at the center of its vision.

Above green water, light from a fiery sun
turns its embers into a tangerine glow,
before it swallows rainbow shades
as it travels to the other side of the earth.
A white triangle protects a nascent tree
struggling to emerge after the flood.

A canary holds a twig given by Noah,
the dove retains the olive branch, searches
for receding waters, but only the canary
warbles, happy songs illuminating
Renée's foliage garden where hidden
melodious birds nest already.

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



ORDINARY DAYS

*'even an hour of this
would be too long'*

- Diane di Prima: *War Haiku: Lebanon*. July 2006

This is what we mean by ordinary days
Ordinary slaughters in foreign parts
Safely tucked in the frame of a TV screen
And faces full of opinions and the bills more or less up-to-date
And nothing treacherous through the letterbox
Or dangling in the Inbox; no GP appointments, if it is winter
There is an icing of snow on far hills
The dogs have been given their worming pills
That ache in the lower intestine seems to have receded
You have a vague, weird notion of being needed
You will not see out another decade, but that's fine too
The Big Amazement came for others, it'll come for you.

You have lived snug inoffensive days
At least the police have stayed away
No midnight knocks, no gulag apprehensions
You read the novels, that was quite enough, how terrible
The lives some people endure, fortunate you
To be where you are, with your milk and honey
Pasteurised and plentiful and the weather fair to mild
Nothing rattling in the closet, no traumas defiled
A more-or-less ordinary soul, though that one incident
Forty-odd years back, if you dwell on it, turns you penitent
Even that can be classed as ordinary, (she's over seventy too)
It's what happened in those days, and it happened to you.

Fred Johnston

A POEM OF NO CONSEQUENCE

My grandfather's moustache
Had the warm smell of pipe tobacco
And even now I settle
When I smell pipe smoke in any unfamiliar room,
He's left me that comfort
When he died they said he possessed at eighty-five
The heart and lungs of a man of forty -
There was no physical reason he should lie
In a hospital bed and fade out
We said his wife of sixty years had just died
He'd switched off, the rooms he inhabited
Had no further use for light -

He was the best man I've known
He was quiet and sturdy like an old wall
Or deliberate and absolute as an old wall
But when she went she pulled him after her
And that can happen
Two wars and a revolution couldn't do it
Her gasp for breath was the storm and fury
Her midnight chest pain
Was the bullet passing through him

It was uncomplicated, all of it
Simple, and we all should be so lucky
No lingering, no peevish hanging about
Just a sweet lightness in the head
Be the only one to know exactly what's happening
Feel the room darken in the middle of the day
It's not personal. Not unique. There's nothing to say.

DRONE FOOTAGE OF AN EXPLODING MAN

My strange brother
Putting more weight on one leg than the other
As I often do

On a flat surface
Of sand and stones, you become empty space
As I often do

Dark suit
A human image in a sandscape. figurative, mute
In a blaze of sand

Editor's blur
As if a drone's remote indifferent eye sees more
Than mind can stand.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in New World Writing, North Dakota Quarterly and Lost Pilots. Latest books, "Between Two Fires", "Covert" and "Memory Outside The Head" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in California Quarterly, Seventh Quarry, La Presa and Doubly Mad.



John Grey

IF ONLY I WERE ELSEWHERE

Sky's wide and blue,
but I'm trembling all over.
It's a Summer sky
but it may as well be January.
I'm lost in the woods,
thick foliage,
but not as thick
as the jacket my body needs.
A jacket of courage.
A jacket of sanctuary.

And then the sun slips away.
With lengthening shadows.
the trees no longer disguise
their true nature.
These are not oaks and elms,
but lookouts, wind whisperers.
Branches rustle,
"He's here and he's alone."

I stumble on,
down a trail
that feels more like
it's leading me farther in
than to the way out.

The ground beneath
is soft and pliable.
Like a tongue.
I fear it is a tongue.
I can hear teeth grinding,
stomach rumbling,
somewhere up ahead.

HARD TIMES

I was a month late
leaving the Christmas tree
out for pickup.
And I never did get around
to writing to my elected official.
So the bad times are all on me.
Like when I confused the X-factor
for its Z opposite.
And I played down the scar
when I could have flashed it brazenly.
But that's the way I am.
I'm always somewhere in the process
of establishing myself
as my own worst enemy.
I extended the finger
when it wasn't warranted.
My remote control went missing
for the better part of a week.
I feel as if I have a world record
in me somewhere
but only for doing something bad.
Like the number of times
I've killed my own weekend plans.
Or wasted hours perusing
on-line dating tips.

Yes these are hard times.
Hard times for the
strip-mall computer repair shop
where I work.
But also hard times
for that nagging feeling
that I've forgotten something important.
And hard times for knowing
I'll never be a self-made man.
There are good times of course.
Like when I look in the mirror,
and tell myself,
"Not bad for a guy your age."
But that's always moments before
I take back what I said.

Kate Mahony is a long-time writer of short stories and flash fiction with an MA in Creative Writing from the International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University of Wellington – Te Herenga Waka. Her work has been published in anthologies and literary journals internationally and in New Zealand. Her debut novel, *Secrets of the Land*, was published by Cloud Ink Press in 2023. She lives in Wellington. www.katemahonyauthor.com ; <https://www.instagram.com/katemahonywriter>; <https://www.facebook.com/KateMahonyAuthor>



Kate Mahony

PIECES OF BREAD

I came out of the station, my feet sore from trudging the central London streets. Dusk was settling in. Across the road, the market sellers were dismantling the last of the stalls and there were few people around. The Airbnb I had left from that morning was still some distance away and I was also hungry. If Andrew were here with me he would have thought to buy provisions when we arrived. He was organised like that.

He also always knew the best places to eat. I merely followed, as always.

I saw an Italian restaurant and went in. I ordered antipasto as Andrew would have done. A platter of cherry peppers, goat cheese, roasted peppers, salami, meat cuts, ricotta, olives and more. My mouth salivated just remembering.

The glass of rosé and the antipasto arrived quickly. But this antipasto was nothing like those in Italy. This was merely torn slices of thick bread arranged around some kind of dipping sauce.

The bread was dry. Even so, I ate as much of it as I could. I drank the rest of the glass of wine. There was nothing to keep me occupied other than checking Andrew's Instagram but I knew that would be a bad idea. I no longer posted on Instagram. It had taken the most of three weeks for the black eye to go away. After that, I had lost the urge to exhibit myself to strangers.

When I had last looked, Andrew was still in Italy but further south. He was still posting photos of food and restaurants. I would sometimes study them to see if there were any traces of anyone else with him, a second glass on a table, a phone. I knew how carefully he edited his photos.

I went up to the counter to pay. On my return, I passed my table with its platter and empty wineglass still there. I paused and without even thinking about it, picked up the remaining pieces of bread to take with me. My breakfast if nothing else. Sensible, I could almost hear Andrew saying. Not wonderful, but better than nothing.

continued overleaf...

Outside, the packed up trucks were leaving. It was darker than before and what lighting there was barely lit the street. As I walked further down the road, a small slim man darted out from behind a big truck startling me.

'Miss,' he said, his hand out. 'I'm hungry. Can you spare some money?'

My credit card was still in my left hand. Stupid of me. I felt my fingers tighten around the card's hard edges.

I realised then my right hand was holding the pieces of bread. 'Here,' I said. I thrust them into his palm. I wasn't sure which of us was the more surprised. Both of us stopped in the street for a moment as if frozen. He was the first to fall back. I continued walking, this time striding in an effort to portray a confident air, through the rest of the rubbish-strewn street where the market stalls had been.

Then I saw the Airbnb up ahead. I had made it there on my own. All this time, Andrew had been lingering like a bad spirit, occupying a place in my mind, giving me instructions. But now as I breathed out I felt an overwhelming sense of something lifting. I took out my phone and tapped an icon. I tapped again. The next time I tapped, his profile had disappeared. Ciao, Andrew, I said aloud.



Photograph courtesy <https://pixabay.com/photos/graffiti-building-nyc-usa-brooklyn-7432657/>

Ray Whitaker was a Delegate to the Writer's International 2024 Panorama Festival this past January. He participates regularly with several zoom poetic events worldwide. Among them, He has been spotlighted on a US National Poetry broadcast from Quintessential Listening Poetry Online Radio earlier this month of April '24; and also this April has an upcoming International Poetry Recital hosted by The Fertile Minds out of India. Ray has four books and two chapbooks published. Some of his work has been published in American, Irish, English, India, Belgium, Pakistani, Italy, Greece, Spain, and Bali Literary Journals.



A TURKISH COFFEE CUP

so many things rest in my working place
each having a special place
belied by the existence of mere shape
when the sense of switching on the Egyptian marble lamp

a sudden light. Illuminating what might be there
hidden in the darkness under the monitor
where these words appear chasing each other
down the white page finding a nested grouping in verses.

Behind me is a quilt on the wall
made by my departed wife
in careful stitching, radiating a rare talent
in color choices on a beige background

fingering a Distinguished Flying Cross laying there
earned in a war far away long ago
it's presence sourcing courage despite dangers
the red white and blue stripes pushing determination.

All are strong stories now
a history fond, green memories of times gone by
cherished pinks and purples now yellowing in age
a wistful smile championed.

even as the sun rises each new day
those things there always have their say
as the keys modulate in the daily songs , nay
in these things mine, I do sway.

Ray Whitaker

WORDS OF THE WOLF

I run up the dry
red arroyo, moving up
towards the sky above,
with its scattered white clouds amongst the blue

the howls of my distant brothers
invade my ears like a amplified electric bass
yet it is a tenor and soprano voice all at once
the range of expression seeks occurrence to land

the howl-song seeks to celebrate
with an affectionate nosing from the wolf
pushing a difference in Love.
Pushing the chance, the happy incidence

of those that have opened their hearts
no matter whether too old for the younger
or little issue for those that are too young for the older
that their heart, throbbing with that particular joy

that having met and felt that someone,
that new somebody that has reached inside
to the wet arterial redness flowing
towards the gift, pushed from God

colliding, those humans press into a mesh
that knows no aged too old or younger too young
smoothing, a knowing from those too bound
by adult experience that perchance became an altercation

to that seventh sense of wonder
that of enrichments each having their own colors
spanning the rainbows after a gentle rain
when bare feet do not mind the wet.

WATER MUSIC

Clear Creek flows cold
even in the summer sun
this, on a high bank beside
where my meditation is complete

and the connection is made
with the water's energy
the sun warms as the music from the creek
jingles in eardrums, calling, inviting.

The water calls in inaudible words
notes, in harmonies, to immerse in it this July morning

stripping down, to wade in and bathe
a first few careful steps into fast moving rivulets
then, in deeper, and deeper still
until, at the waist, a noticeable connection
into a new appreciation of the cold
it's unmistakable

total immersion now, head and hair wet
up now with water dripping off, then dipping head in again
nostrils flared with shock-cold,
those drips from the nose
that are never needing antihistamines
a flick of the wrist sends small, clear drops outwards

up on the bank in the sun now, a refuge into only air
sitting on a t-shirt, drying cross-legged in Father Sun,

reflecting that George Handel's Water Music
had no context here on this sunny day in Colorado
where his composition for King George in 1717
played on the banks of the Thames didn't include a bath.



Eileen Casey writes poetry, prose, short fiction and journalism. Her work is widely published. She received many awards, including The Oliver Goldsmith International Poetry Prize, A Hennessy Award (Emerging Fiction) and a Katherine and Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Fellowship.

River Songs is available directly from Fiery Arrow at numberninebirr@gmail.com (€12, incl. p.&p.).



Eamonn Lynskey's work is published extensively in leading literary magazines and journals at home and abroad. His fourth collection *Material Support* was published by Salmon, 2023.



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EAMONN LYSKEY
Reviews
EILEEN CASEY'S
River Songs,
published by Fiery Arrow Press

River Songs is a truly elegant production. The illustrations – in full colour – are quite simply stunning. As well as deepening the reader's experience of the poems, they often bring new life back to the illustrations themselves.

Millais' painting *Ophelia* for instance, depicts a moving, distressing subject, which is further underscored in its pathos by the accompanying eponymous poem. Details one might not have noticed before now claim attention and also, the echo form proves striking.

'Millais paints her shrouded in green. Seen as rebirth. Healing. Fertility. Spring. Brings envy (and) Greed, (not of her making). Guiding her under a bridge, a fallen tree. You see willow means 'false love'. Like hand in glove.

The poem charts Ophelia's tragedies and in a line such as 'Elegant hands cup empty air,' indicates how much she has lost in life – her former lover, her sanity. Monet's famous paintings of lilies feature too. Monet never grew tired of lilies and depicted several versions of their form/colour. In 'Water Lilies at Birr Gardens', the poet might have thieved a canvas from the gallery walls and brought it to the location where Monet's favourite subject matter comes into her mind with each visit; 'Under a bridge, by weeping willow shaded/June to September, water lilies bloom'. Monet's work is the inspiration for two poems, both poems serving as an example how two forms, the visual and the written, complement and contrast. The illustrations don't just 'add' to the meaning of the poems, and the poems don't just 'fill out' the subject of the illustration. They work together to strengthen experience: fine examples of ekphrastic writing.

However, most of the poems in this book stand on their own. It is difficult to see where a painting might be found to mirror the power of a poem like *Mannán Mac Lír's Curse* with its thunderous, sinewy lines that will send a reader scurrying to a dictionary of Celtic Myth, in order to pin down this sea god who 'spreads the mist of invisibility / (féth Fíada) to cloak the croneen.' As mentioned above, the illustrations in *River Songs* are truly beautiful, thanks to accomplished artists and photographers (Annabel Langrish, Tina Claffey, Emma Barone, Jackie Lynch among others). *Camcor on Ice* imagines a winter, iced-over world where the Camcor 'Creates a universe in shards. Splinters/glimmer ice-gold droplets/reflected in eye, felt in fragmented/heart-lands. A polar bear might emerge/beyond cavern's iced over layers.'

River Songs is a fine collection of fine poems from an accomplished poet, mostly of a touching, observant and reflective nature – Kingfisher, Alder (Tree of Offaly), Heron (grey) – serve nature themed poems with dramatic energy (the aforementioned *Mannán*, and the powerful poem *River Gods*) for example. Overall, such is the wealth of striking phrases/lines, images, that's it's difficult to single each one for comment, but a mention must be made of poems like *Villanelle for a Kingfisher*.

This is a fitting tribute to a wonderful bird so rare that, if one is lucky to catch a glimpse of it; its image, and the location of sighting, stays in the mind forever. And for those who like delicate, structured writing, this poem is also an object lesson in how to write a successful villanelle, one of several in this book. *Kingfisher Sighting* is also concerned with this rare and beautiful avian; 'We crave kingfisher's glossy flits,/rustling leaves. Red legs and feet bright./Long black bill striped crimson darts/deep down river waters,/fat minnow speared sunlight glistened.

This collection is 'a series of river poems, based on the rivers of County Offaly' (Eileen's home county). It is this, but more than this. It is a worthy collection of poems, celebrating not just the rivers of County Offaly, but rivers everywhere.

2010-2024



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