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Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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JUNE 2024

DAVID RIGSBEE
Down Before I Die

COVER ARTWORK 'COLOURS OF THE HEART'
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).

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

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JUNE 2024

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David Rigsbee is an American poet, critic and translator who has an immense body of published work behind him. Salmon Poetry has just published his translation of Dante's *Paradiso*, and Black Lawrence Press will bring out his *Watchman in the Knife Factory: New and Selected Poems* this month (June, 2024). He is working on a memoir and a new book of essays to be called *The Keep of Poetry*.



DAVID RIGSBEE DOWN BEFORE I DIE

A couple of years ago, as Father Time reminded me that he was making more-than-usual headway, it occurred to me in a blink of a thought that I might look to assembling a “collected poems.” If the phrase hints at anything beyond what it denotes, it’s that such a volume represents a poet’s second life, life in another form, i.e. book form. This way of conceiving of it offers challenges, both handsome and repugnant. In the taxonomy of poetry collections, the names matter: Selected, New and Selected, Collected, New and Collected, and—most lethal of all—The Complete Poems. The first hardcover I ever bought was a copy of Wallace Stevens’ *Collected Poems*, which also happened to be my first purchase using a credit card. Next to it was his *Opus Posthumous*, about which the poet’s part was unclear (did he intend anything of the sort?). It took me a while to decide to buy that one. In the back of my mind was my teacher Carolyn Kizer’s remark that “a collected is a poet’s tombstone.” By this she meant two things: once published, there it is *in toto*; she also meant anything that comes after has to deal with the long shadow of that body of work. Retrospection clobbers the future. A Collected was poetry’s equivalent to *stare decisis* in the law: all was now settled. She was given to such remarks, but she also went about meticulously assembling her own collected volume which was published in 2000, after which she sank toward silence over the course of 14 years.

Although I didn’t know if I had earned anything like the status to suggest such a book, the idea persisted. I was intrigued. I consulted my daughter, who had followed her dad’s career with attention and had undergone a literary education herself. Her response was simple: “You *must!*” I had published a new and selected more than a decade before, *The Red Tower: New & Selected Poems*, and it had received good reviews and won some awards. It was also published only in hardback. Eventually, NewSouth Books, the publisher, had been acquired by the University of Georgia Press, and not too long after that new affiliation, the press wrote to inform me that the book would be listed as officially out-of-print at the end of the year.

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David Rigsbee

I approached some of my most reliable and sapient poetry friends, each of whom said, basically, do it. It would give me an opportunity to gather work that was either hard to find or out of print, as well as to repackage the contents of the three volumes published by my current publisher, Black Lawrence Press. Then there were new poems. In short, I could offer a look back at a 48-year ink trail since the publication of my first collection, *Stamping Ground* in 1976. So the idea seemed, in many respects, both tempting and classic. I talked to Diane Goettel, the founder and director of Black Lawrence, and asked if she would be interested in my submitting such a book. She, ever supportive, was open to the idea.

I had written a poem called, in fact, “Collected Poems,” in the early ‘80s. Here it is:

Collected Poems

The telltale spoors
under the jacket-flap of this
big book, this lifework,
hint more loudly of it than
the plain printer’s box of
the obituary page, the names
lying down to rest at last
within their little squares.

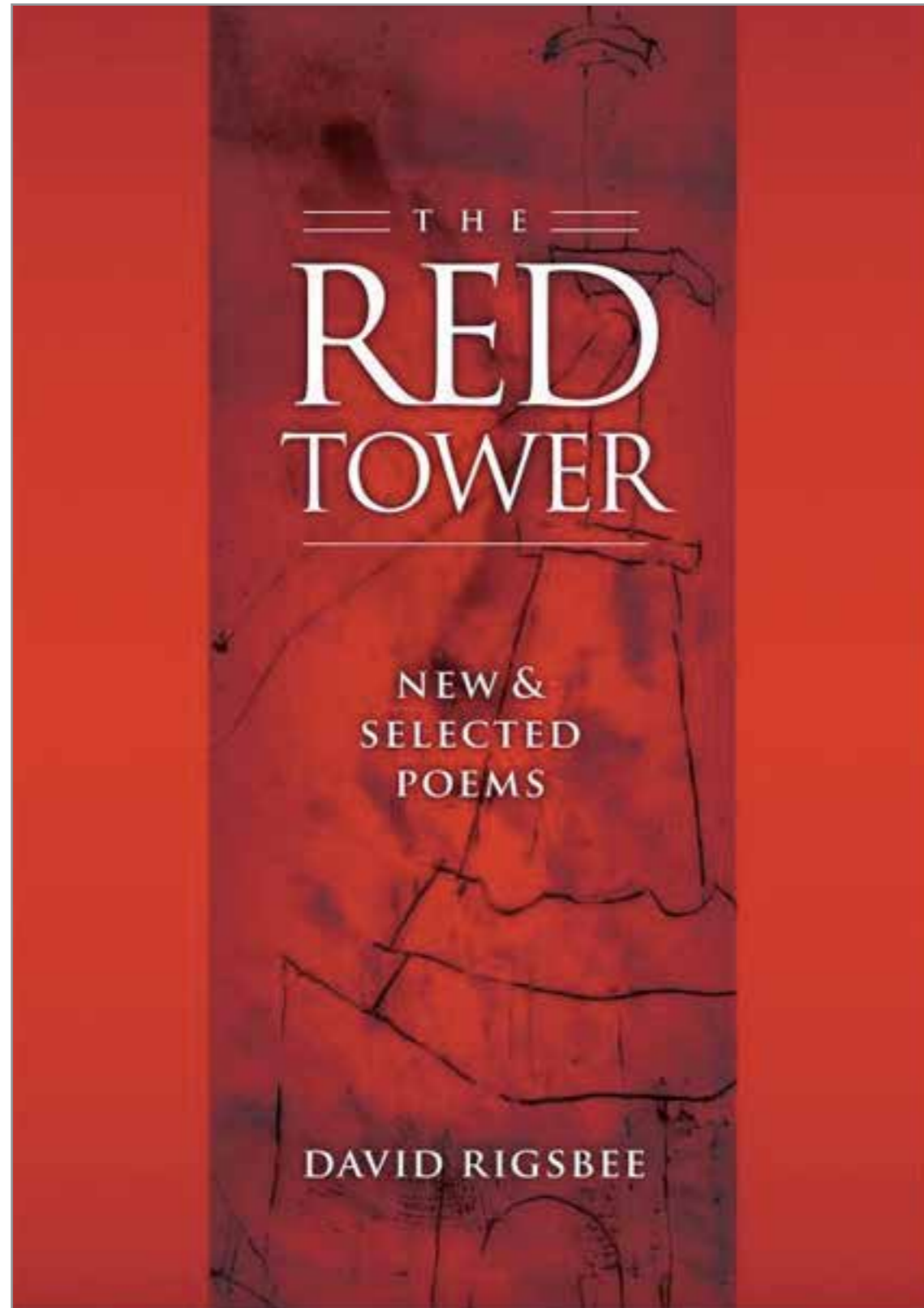
Slowly, nature erases culture
and life streams through the window
invisibly, in spite of gravity.
So the train’s solemn double horn
gives out a double meaning
as it strains down the rusty track
under the Mississippi bridge.
I can take it, or if I can’t

I don’t want to be the final
mention of my attempts when I am
less spine than this.
I don’t want to be the first whisper,
either, of the error I will be
when I lie in memory of such
a river, replaced by spoors
drifting down from the dark waters.

What’s notable about this attempt at a vexed subject — how to divide the labor between living a life and making the representation of it — is how delicate and yet grand (the Mississippi River) the thought of collecting one’s work in some definitive way—and yet involving courage (“spine”) and blurry chance (“the error”)—that emerges suddenly from the grip of someone’s *Collected Poems*. Then there is the unspooling of thought pondering its significance as the world cranks its way through the salt of history. In other words, between sudden exaltations and horrible reveals.

I spent a month compiling the poems and discovered that such a book would come to over 600 pages. This alarmed me. I remembered an aside from Sainte-Beuve, who noted that while one can’t make meaningful judgments about literature as a whole, one thing was for sure: “most of it is too long.” I spoke with Diane again, and she suggested that while she would surely consider publishing it, it would be harder to market than a slimmer new & selected. So I was back to fundamental questions: why would I want to preserve every poem I had ever published? That was a good place to start. Did vanity overtake judgment? Was I being presumptuous, a trait I was always quick to detect in others? Still, I could imagine the volume in its stalwart thingness. Its very existence would be a blunt fact, a statement, as well as a petition. But another thought took over, thanks to an exchange I had with poet Michael Waters. He pointed out to me that a selected poems would be much more likely to be carried around by readers than would a brick. For instance, he mentioned the popularity of selected volumes by Richard Hugo and Lucille Clifton, as opposed to the collected versions of each. I remembered that Robert Penn Warren, as he grew into his golden years, made a point of updating his new & selected volumes, opting for that over a collected version. So the idea began to sink in that it wouldn’t be a true collected, but it would nonetheless be everything worth saving—at least as far as I was concerned.

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I would delete any poem that displeased me for any reason. I would show juvenilia the door too. For instance, I jettisoned all the poems from my first book, itself an expansion of my master's thesis for the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins. It was paltry work, not quite cringeworthy to the gimlet-eyed senior, but not far from it.

I had some editing experience to draw from. I had edited the manuscript of Kizer's *Midnight Was My Cry: New & Selected Poems* when I was a senior at UNC. This opportunity just fell in my lap, and the learning curve was steep. But I managed to do it, explaining my suggestions about organization and inclusion to her satisfaction. I had also edited a collection of poems by the Polish poet Alexander Wat and translated by Czeslaw Milosz in the mid-70s. By the '80s, I was directing the St. Andrews College Press and went poem by poem through the work of all the forthcoming collections, making line edits and suggestions about organization. By the millennium I had begun doing manuscript consultations for poets. I would apply these skills, such as they were, to the verse record of someone's life, i.e., mine. It sounds awkward to say it that way, but that's what it was: representations marking, for good or ill, a long stretch of time. This was what it was like in my case, and though you may not have known me, these words would offer an affidavit, one version of feeling and thinking about what it was like living in the quick and singing about that feeling. It would also be dimensional collapse: three into two—all the better for preservation's sake. The Greek gods thought so, and in spite of Christ's driving them out and superseding them (according to John Milton), they survived in lines of verse to be restored by the poets, who knew that dormancy was and is a natural state, the fact of a bookshelf at home or the aisles of a library. But readers? It's every poet's fear: collecting dust, until the book and the voiceless dust merge. The gods, meanwhile, repose in bliss.

Speaking of Kizer, who is now virtually mute among the shades, I had, as her literary executor (a designation that morphed later into legalize—"advisor to the estate of..."), written another poem in a moment of pique at having to go through another box of effects after her death, and wrote this:

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

continued overleaf...

Executor

In the box I expected, of course, evidence of journeys, exotic, stony destinations where her famous friends, those with prizes and wit, waved on the dock having come to greet her, a fellow traveler. They would have adventures, diversions, and engagements proper to their kind. When they were home, such material! Just like the tragedians and satirists. When their books came out, they signed them with abiding love, vigorous pledges rendered in tiny, unassertive script. From the first book, as with all the others I quarried, flyers fell out: reviews from *The Nation*, *Poetry*, and *The New York Times Book Review*. On the back page, notes, "P150—Metaphor;" "P 72—relation of present and past," P 29-31—"Barbarians." I reinserted the reviews and returned the books to their container, sealed it with masking tape, careful that the creases were straight, the tape itself reinforced and taut.

If the executor did this, what of the general reader? There was not just the presumption of making the effort in the first place; there was more importantly somehow the reception it would receive. After all, it suggests all you ever did with your life that you want the world to know about. But would the denizens of that world here and there ever pick it up and begin thumbing through? I remember people saying things like "poetry is not my strong suit," or Raymond Carver's classic, "I must admit that poetry is not the first thing I reach for when I look for reading matter." I think of Linda Gregg's quick insult: "Of course they're idiots." Far be it from me to be tainted as an aesthete, but I know what she means.

Sister Bernetta Quinn, a poet and critic of Modernism, once told me that she had noticed that Randall Jarrell often used the word "world" in his poems. What did this mean, she wondered. I sent her a poem in response that touches on the idea of what it means to be collected in a world constantly in motion. The poem ends like this:

Once I stood by Jarrell's grave and smelled
the boxwoods sweetening the field, the same
shrubs that had sweetened my childhood.

And I remembered that a Fragment describes
how, in Hades, souls perceive by smelling,
as the fixity of past life gets jarred loose
in spring. Structurally speaking, the slab
and a bookshelf are identical. How sad,
then, to seed books with the word
"world," as if one brought the other
into being by will or necromantic power;
or book were to life as "world" is to this
shifting habitation. Instead, the birds
are dabs of pathos, and songs lean automatically
toward their shelves. Already I have to go
a new way to work, and things, I know,
are not going to be so easy as they once were.

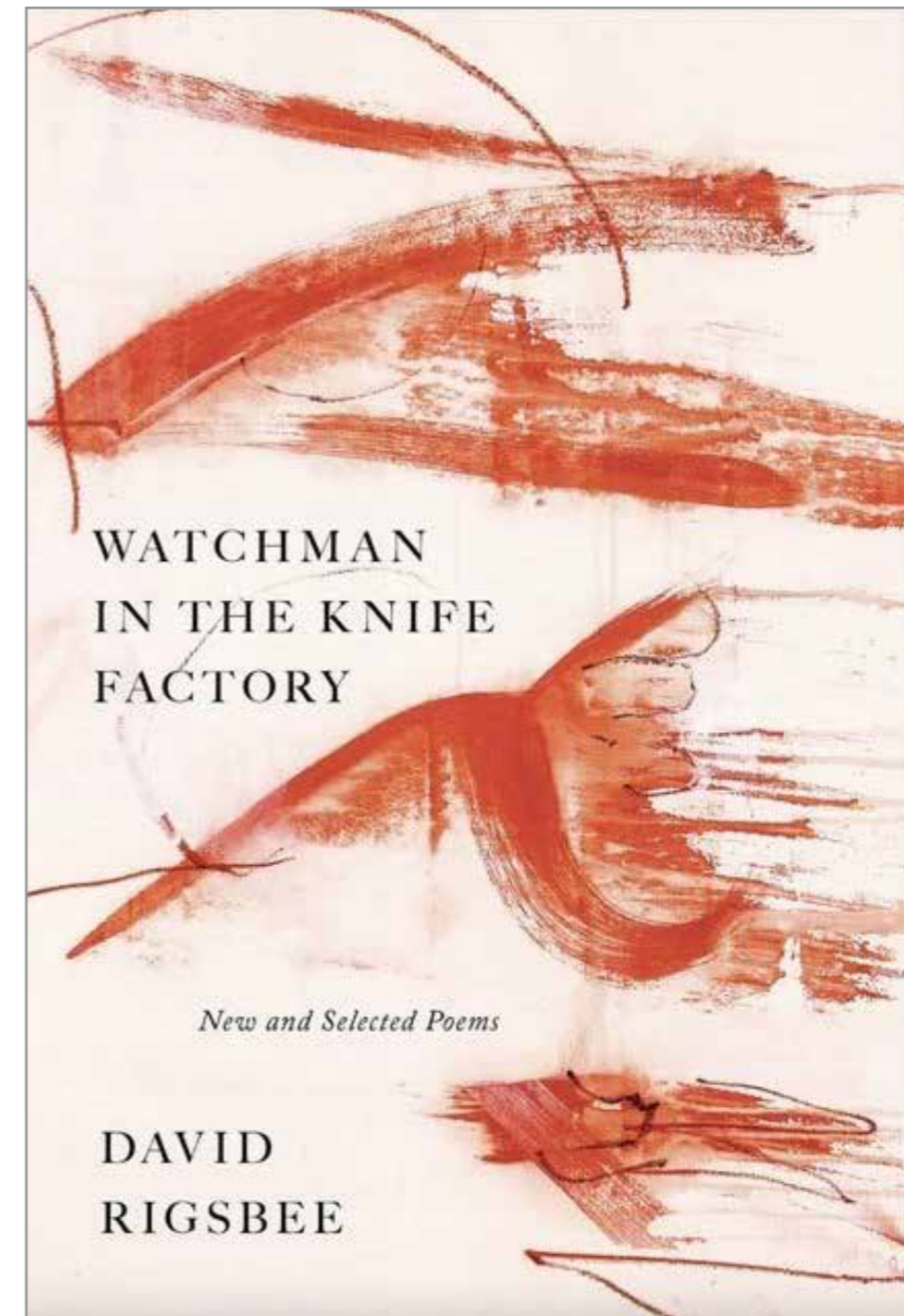
(From "The Word 'World' in Jarrell")

My most recent (though surely not my last) attempt to engage the subject concerns the urge on the part of many poets simply to get things down, regardless of the outcome: neglect, dust, vanity, mattering, not mattering, praise, rising in glory, dwindling to zero, or any of the possible results. It's about the need to make an accounting, whether that faces judgment or is simply ignored. The poet who figures in the poem below is someone I know, so much a poet's poet as to be virtually unknown, who himself receded into a core where he found poems that stand in his place.

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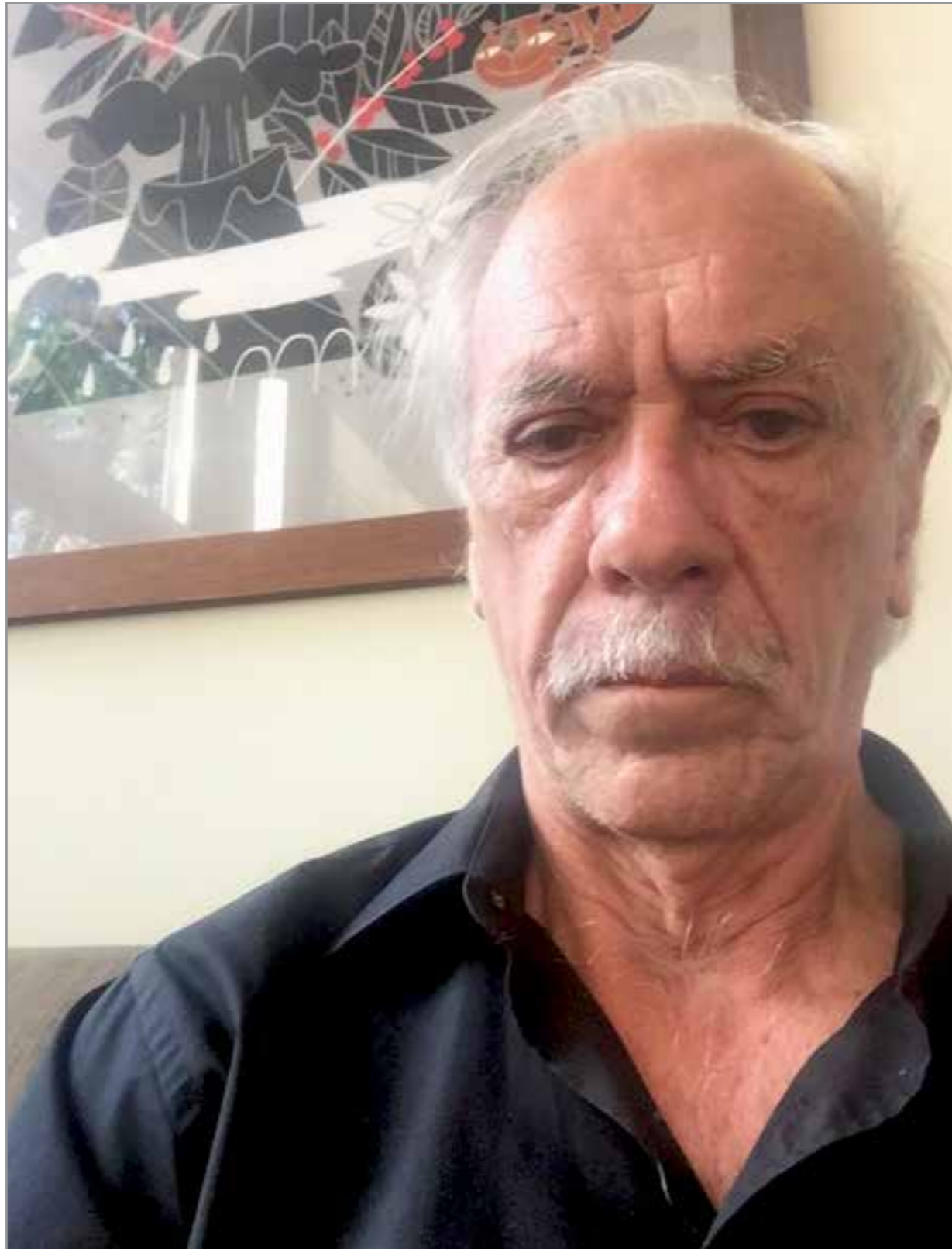
Get It Down

I had a friend who was so pathologically shy he barely functioned in public. He was in essence, a hermit living in a dune shack. Unfortunately, he wrote poetry, and this brought him to the attention of an art colony that offered him safe haven, in return for which he had only to push paper, arrange chairs, and host weekly readings by prominent poets. It was almost schtick as he stood, a large man, before the gathering, hands folded defensively over his crotch and paused long enough to give the audience, also, pause too before he swept one hand mechanically, by way of introduction, and blurted, "Miss Bishop!" or "Stanley Kunitz!" then found his chair. It was a performance of the highest order, in one sense, and no one who was there ever forgot it. He was a beautiful and mysterious poet too. I said "unfortunately," only in the sense that he had to overcome his shyness, in order to look a fool in the eyes of all. And I imagine him each time going home from the weekly humiliation to write the most radiant poems as the green sea gnawed its way up to the shack and the crabs scissored across the wooden steps, as irrepressible as I imagine Ritsos was, confessing to his young executor, "You see, I'm trying to get all this down before I die."



I understand this drive, although I don't know to what end. That's for the sybil to say. What I do know is that my book, *Watchman in the Knife Factory: New and Selected Poems*, is half the size of the original idea of a collected, an idea that still seems sound to me for others. It's the testimony you present to your deity, who is at the same time almighty and the inventor of dust, and who, as the poet tells us, "thinks about poetry all the time." That deity waits at the vanishing point, eager, as you must believe, to learn what you did to justify and exalt your own mixed and fleeting moment.

Jorge Etcheverry Arcaya is a Chilean-born poet, editor, publisher, and translator. He has been living in Canada since the early years of the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, where he was a member of the poetry collectives Grupo América and Escuela de Santiago. A highly regarded writer, he has been a key cultural figure and promoter in Latin American and immigrant communities in his adopted country and has continued his prolific literary and editorial work. His texts have been published in various countries and in multiple genres, including poetry, criticism, literary fiction, essays, and science fiction. His latest books are *Clorodioxepóxido* (Chile 2017), *Canadografía: antología de prosa hispanocanadiense* (Chile 2017) *Los herederos* (2018) *Samarkanda* (Canada 2019), *Outsiders* (2020). He has recently contributed to the anthologies *Wurlitzer. Cantantes en la memoria de la poesía chilena* (Chile 2018), *Antología de la poesía chilena de la última década* (Chile 2018), *Antología mundial: la papa, seguridad alimentaria* (Bolivia 2019), and *Anthologie de la poésie chilienne, 26 poètes d'aujourd'hui* (Francia 2021). His latest publications in magazines appeared in *La Pluma del Ganso* (Mexico 2018) and *Entre Paréntesis* (Chile 2022).



THE WATCHMAN

This body
 this sort of cover
 for an uninteresting book
 or disguise of sorts
 is an instrument
 that encloses me
 I am inside
 somewhere
 and I master it
 to a certain extent:
 When I feel I don't want to stop
 I keep on moving my legs
 even faster
 than before
 if I don't want to see something
 I close my eyelids
 like two loopholes
 and prepare to cheat
 this ever vigilant sentry
 inside my skull
 and I tell him:
 "It's not true
 there's nothing outside
 it's an illusion"
 But he won't let himself be cheated
 much less bought
 And the whole machine
 lies awake at night
 and he's awake to
 'cause he's always
 watching.

Jorge Etcheverry Arcaya

RES EXTENSA

The body, like this dog
seated beside us
waiting with imploring eyes
for us to throw him
some food
to care for him
to bath him
to kill his fleas
to give him his medicine sometimes
We are men
we exist officially
from the neck upward.

DARWINISM

Are we an endangered species?
That's what I wonder
when I go to a poetry reading
or open a poetry magazine
It's true that
the most sensitive
and talented
of our youngsters
practise poetry
(at an alarming rate)

It's a well known fact
that there are 4,000 poets
in this country
Our extinction
is out of the question
We don't have much of a public
it's true
but we can always read
to each other,
exchange chap-books
or just letters

Please enclose
a self-addressed,
stamped envelope.

North American writer Michael Simms is the author of three full-length collections of poetry published by Ragged Sky Press: *American Ash*, *Nightjar*, and *Strange Meadowlark*. Simms has also published speculative novels; *Bicycles of the Gods* and *The Talon Trilogy*. His poems have appeared in *Poetry* (Chicago), *Poem-a-Day* published by The Academy of American Poets and *Plume Poetry*. Simms is the founder/editor of *Vox Populi*, an online forum for poetry, politics and nature, as well as the founder/editor emeritus of Autumn House Press, a nonprofit publisher of books. Currently, he works as a peer counselor with recovering addicts in Pittsburgh's Southside neighborhood. In 2011, Simms was awarded a Certificate of Recognition from the Pennsylvania State Legislature for his service to the arts.



HOOKAH WINK (CUP OF DARKNESS)

I craved a cup of darkness
To smooth the mood
Untie the knot of my unrighteousness

So I stopped at the Church of the Golden Onion
Next to Gypsy Blood Tattoo and Rock Shop
Where glass pipes and hookahs wink
At the skanky junkie slumped at the cash register

Ah I thought *one life at a time*
Sat in a pew, opened the songbook and began to hum
The hymn of good intentions gone bad

The church is empty but full
A blue light coming through Maria's robe
I lived halfway between pride and survival
A dumb fuck who couldn't admit he'd gotten life wrong

I was in a situationship with God—if you know
Then you know, you know? But all I knew
I was circling the dunny, ready for the deep dive

When this woman's voice came to me. It wasn't Maria
Our Lady of Sorrows, Undoer of Knots
But Maria Salvatore who hung at the corner
Husking and busking to make a buck

Need a meeting? she asked knowing I didn't know
But I did and we did and there we were
A little closer to getting through the night

Michael Simms

JUBAL RISING

Spider his momma calls him
Always spinning a tale
To make himself a hero

He hides a glizzy in his room
Little white street rat
He says *mooma stay*
Out of my zees you
Got no biz there fookin
With my shit so she

Slaps him so hard
His eyes bug and she says
Stop talking like a thug

She says *you come from good*
Folk who work hard she
Says I'll die of worry you
My baby and you going
Down the wrong road

And he runs out the door
Into the trailerhood
Of crackistan a bag
Of white skunk for sale
To the zombie at the corner

~

The man hurts the boy because
He enjoys it
Can get away with it
The boy bullies smaller boys
And those boys hurt
The smallest boys who swallow
A burr of self-hatred that grows tangled
And dangerous in the unforgiving sun

The drunken grandmother whips the boy
For being a mistake
He carries through the world
And children beside the road
Throw rocks at the passing cares
As if nothing matters at all at all

~

Jubal Momma says
You don't have to understand
Why the sun rises
Go about your chores
Noticing only
What's in front of you
Wipe the dish dry like so
Knead the bread like so
Let the living yeast live
And die in the dark
Not knowing they
Feeding you
Sit at the table
With those you love
Let them be
The light you live by

~

continued overleaf...

Grab a dime bag of certainty
Cause the street lamp is an eye
Poked out / the better not
To see cash passed between
Self and self / ragged amen
For the chorus of young men
Hanging out the windows
Of passing beaters they borrowed
Cheering the hotties swaying
Down the sidewalk like
Well-fed cheetahs daring
The bangsters to try. Oh
They try awright. They bloody
Their noses trying. They say they
So high they never gonna die

~

Jubal pays attention
By not paying attention
Walking through the city haze
Far-fetched fantasia of broken
Brick and re-bar pointing toward heaven
As if all he sees is the smoking city
Of regret and all-out suicidal romps
In the bad neighborhood of his head-scape
Where drinking drugging scheming
Collide with the law of fast returns
Karma ketchup he calls it because
Every action boomerangs back atcha
Wherever he goes he's there waiting
Ready to screw the pooch with lies
Deals and manipulations lined
Up from here to the jagged horizon
Of crack house nirvana. *Let's go*
He says. *Let's do it. Let's rise*
Like steam from a broken pipe
Let's be this frantic nightmare

HALFWAY PRAYER

Jesus, I'm broken by anger
And need a fix of whatever
You have in your black bag
Of mysteries, holy magician
Of the forgotten, spectator
To the suffering that leads
Me to you. I need a trick
Of light that knocks me
To the asphalt, a summons
To the court of last appeal,
A bailiff who hauls my
Sorry ass in front of you,
Righteous judge of the quickening
Spirit, true witness to my
End and beginning.
Hey man of sorrows shining
Through the crack smoke
Don't corkscrew me no more
My soul hurts but I can't stop
Jerking off thinking of you,
Cringy lover, bunk mate
In this halfway house of the abyss
Show me how to rid myself
Of myself and begin again



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Living in two beautiful places, north Alabama and the Florida panhandle, Karen McAferty Morris writes about nature and everyday people. Her poetry has been recognized for its "appeal to the senses, the intellect, and the imagination." It has appeared in *Persimmon Tree*, *Sisyphus*, *The Louisville Review*, *Black Fox*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *The Mackinaw* and *Canary*. Her collections *Elemental* (2018), *Confluence* (2020), and *Significance* (2022) are national prize winners. A member of the Emerald Coast Writers and the National League of American Pen Women, Karen lists reading, hiking, traveling, and spending time with family as favourite pastimes.



THE EASE OF SPRING

From a forty-degree low,
the west wind is warming,
combing the oleander and myrtle
and turning the bayou to tweed.
Near the banks the water is calm,
with strands of yellow pollen.

Spring is everywhere.

Though sunlight slants and shade is cold,
the wisteria swells in lavender velvet,
daffodils are lit with white starbursts,
blueberry buds are bumps of faded pink,
the Japanese maple's thin maroon branches end
in tiny deer hooves of green.

There is no stopping this eruption of life,
moving in stealth even beneath an any-shaped moon.

Spring's ease shames me,
emphasizes the difficulties
of my efforts to create, the setbacks,
the intervals of inactivity.

Yet sometimes the earth struggles.
In the desert, the cactus blooms,
rootless moss softens Iceland's lava fields,
fireweed lifts purple flowers from scorched land,
for a few short weeks tufts of cottongrass feed
migrating caribou and snow geese on the tundra.

Karen McAferty Morris

THE UNIQUENESS OF LEAVES

Science tells us that no snowflake is like another.
But in northern Alabama this November evening after a rain,
slick loafer-brown oak leaves,
are everywhere underfoot, their tiny acorns
snapping with each step—and it occurs to me
that no leaf is exactly the same,
not the dogwood, nor the sweetgum or fig.

My son's kindergarten hand-print turkey
with feathers crayoned saffron
created on that particular day
by his distinctive hand.

My dead brother's last Saturday morning phone call
when we laughed over memories
of watching old TV comedies.

This journey under trees at their turn
from cool green into sepia. Nothing is ordinary
or common.

Instead of finishing the Sunday crossword tonight,
perhaps I will, in a poem, memorialize
the noisy squabbling of two birds over
ripe persimmons outside my window in Italy
on a frost-laced October morning.

ALPENGLLOW

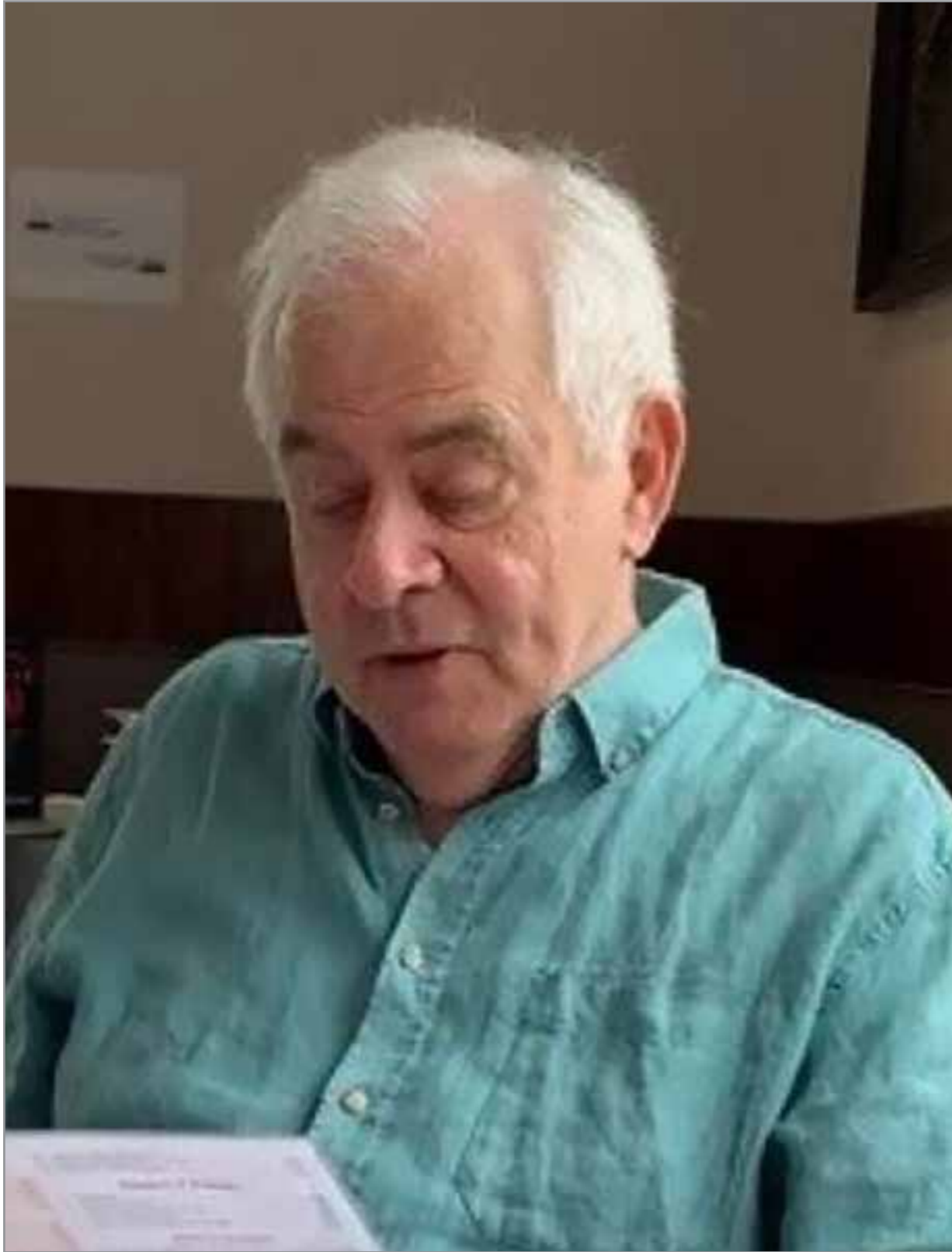
I pause on the trail. Not from fatigue. Not from the relief of having traversed the trail along the vertical drop above the Going-to-the-Sun Road. Carved into the granite wall, it is so narrow that a hand cable has been provided for hikers to grasp.

I pause from enchantment. The land has widened. A meadow of bear grass slopes gently to the precipice, now in late summer erupting in blooms, not grass at all but hundreds of tiny white clusters shaped into cones crowned with pointed caps, each on a single slim stalk. In hundreds, they stand and seem to admire the distant peaks of the Continental Divide like awed spectators, and together we watch the rays of the setting sun turn the stone to ruby and bathe the snowy crevices in red-gold.

Back at home a thousand miles away, my father has no doubt tended his garden of tomatoes, squash, and beans, a bounty he used to carry inside by the basketfuls, and she'd cook their country meals. Now his meals are solitary. Her long illness is over, but in the last years he tended to her, adjusting her food, adapting the house to accommodate her wheelchair, driving her to long-distance appointments. Whenever I visited, late at night I could hear them laughing at TV shows, like they always had. When her ability to speak failed and she was able to move only her fingers, he designed a button that she could press as an alert. It sounded like a two-note doorbell, and they thought it a merry trick when, the first time I heard it, I scurried to the front door, returning puzzled that no one was there. He garnished the house with gardenias.

In the company of the bear grass, I remain until the shadows swallow the summits and the alpenglow fades. I ache to see such beauty pass. But I have seen it before, have known a much longer brilliance that defied the approaching darkness.

Richard W. Halperin holds dual U.S-Irish nationality and lives in Paris. His poetry is published by Salmon/Cliffs of Moher (four collections) and by Lapwing/Belfast (sixteen shorter collections). In Autumn 2024, Salmon will bring out *Selected & New Poems*, Introduction by Joseph Woods.



CAN THE STARS READ?

Can the stars read? Read us?
I think they might. I think they
can. Including our own sun,
although one doesn't like
to think about that – too much light.

Can the moon read? I think it can.
It has all the requirements for a good
reader: stillness, shadow, death.

Einstein was a good reader.
Bach was a very good reader.

Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Bertrand A.

ENDLESS PLEASURES

Anne Kennedy's poetry, for a start:
her collection *The Dog Kubla Dreams My Life*. Why does a poet put marks
on a page? Because they are marks
on the poet's life. And if the poet is
really good, marks on the lives of others.

The dog Kubla dreams my life.

I am not American woman. I do not have
a husband who occasionally strays
or thinks about it. I do not have children.
I have never lived in California or Upstate
New York or Buck Mountain or Galway.

I have not been diagnosed with terminal
cancer. I have not asked that my ashes
be buried in Westwood, near the plot
where my mother is buried, which is near
the plot where Marilyn is buried, to which
Joe continues to send red roses.

Anne Kennedy makes me know there is
something endless about courage.
I shall need courage to enter the night
that she has entered. Her poems.

About stones she finds on beaches.
(And people find amethysts on Achill.)

About a woman sitting next to her
on a bus, talking about an umbrella
lost or stolen in a place which starts
by being Paddington Station and
turns into tunnels under Cairo.

About Schrödinger's cat. For
Anne Kennedy, as for Einstein,
physics can't be physics without charm.

Some people are fond of Schrödinger's cat.
Some people are fond of Schrödinger.
To be fond of makes any discussion
of eternity or immortality a discussion,
not an experience.

OISEAUX

A tiny bird – mad? – mainly yellow,
 hovers over a bush outside the guesthouse
 in which I am staying in Ireland.
 Never landing. Changing its mind
 every second. Then landing. Continuing its
 evident argument. Is it injured? Can it not
 fly away? Then flying away.

Multiply this by the tiny birds
 trying to get at a nearby bird feeder.
 Multiply this by all the stars that are.
 Multiply this by human stupidity and by
 human kindness (bird feeder).
 The bird's tiny head was bright yellow,
 as was most of what was either its neck
 or revolving spasms.
 Was Jesus a tiny bird talking to other
 tiny birds?

Hop, hop.

Karajan said in a podcast radio interview
 that what made him know, as a boy,
 that he could conduct big symphony orchestras well –
 that it could be done – was seeing flocks of birds
 in flight, wedges and diamond shapes
 moving in the sky as one beautiful thought.
 That this was happening entirely without him.
 The interview was in French. Thus,
 oiseaux.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Amanda Anastasi is a Melbourne poet whose work has appeared in unexpected places, from the walls of Artist's Lane in Windsor to The Massachusetts Review. Her work has been featured in Australian Poetry Journal, Griffith Review, Cordite Poetry Review, Right Now and Best Australian Science Writing 2021 and 2022. Amanda has been the recipient of a Wheeler Centre Hot Desk Fellowship, where she wrote a series of poems set in the year 2042. She was also a digital Artist in Residence with Assembly of the Future's *The Things We Did Next* during COVID-19 lockdown, exploring imagined futures. During her three-year poetry residency at the Monash Climate Change Communication Research Hub (Monash CliComm, 2019-2022), Amanda was tasked with communicating climate change and the 2020 Australian bushfire crisis through poetry. Following this, she was the recipient of a Nielma Sidney Literary Travel Grant from Writer's Victoria, writing poems at the Great Barrier Reef. Amanda's poetry collections are *Taking Apart the Bird Trap* (Recent Work Press, 2024) and *The Inheritors* (Black Pepper, 2021).



SCRATCHES

Biro marks, instantly recognisable
and intended to be barely legible.

The same feathered bars used in Santa's
decorative letters punctuated with lively

drawings of bells, flowers and deer,
congratulations on my good grades

and a warning to not *fall off the bridge* –
your metaphor for teenage waywardness.

The same hand on essays I was tasked
with typing on free thinking and the dangers

of blind faith. The very hand notating names
and numbers on paper scraps - misplaced,

uncategorized - of clients and old friends;
one by one, each becoming a stranger again.

In later years, room appeared between
the pen strokes like the parts of a barbed

wire fence pushed out to form a thin
corridor, though never quite wide

enough for the full story to show itself
or to overcome a lifetime of camouflage.

Amanda Anastasi

WAYS I SAID I LOVE YOU WITHOUT SAYING I LOVE YOU

There was a cleaning frenzy in your flat. A sorting and returning of books to your almost bare shelves. The neat placing of pencils and brushes in a mug so you could sit at your desk again. There was a portion of leftover lasagne kept in my freezer until I next saw you. I'd never stick to the shopping list you gave me, adding cashews and olives. Making phone calls for you and joking about the ear violating waiting music while on hold. Telling you the bills were paid and all was well. Asking you how the kitchen got so filthy. Buying you a new calendar with orange and pink scenes of desert plains. Answering the same question you asked me last week about a California town you wanted to visit that you saw in a western once. Fetching you drawing pads and pencils and commissioning a sketch of a bowl of fruit during lockdown. Accompanying you to the GP; refuting your assertion that you were taking your medication daily. Locking eyes with you while the doctor gave you the lecture about would happen if you didn't take the tablets. Guiding you to a seat in the socially distanced waiting room. Asking you to face me so I could fit your mask properly over your nose. The welling in my chest when you allowed me a tiny window into your inner world, when I brought you home from hospital: *Oh, it feels good to be home*. A close falling apple, I do not know how to form this emotion into a fitting, coherent response. Proceeding to organise your cupboards, I ask again with a shake in my voice *Is there something you want to tell me?*

MONOSTICH POEMS

My imaginary friend is now visible to all.

I swim in a pool while I dream of the sea.

Inside the cage, another cage.

There was a day I forgot to be cautious.

I falter at the last door.

I walk down an unnamed street.

David Graham's *The Honey of Earth* appeared in 2019 from Terrapin Books, joining *Second Wind* (Texas Tech), and *Magic Shows* (Cleveland State U Poetry Center); as well as four chapbooks. *Local News: Poetry About Small Towns*, an anthology co-edited with Tom Montag, appeared in 2019 from MWPB Books; and an essay anthology *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography*, co-edited with Kate Sontag from Graywolf, 2001. Currently retired from teaching at Ripon College, he lives in Glens Falls NY.



TO EARTHWARD

Thirty years walking through the cemetery
I felt myself gradually slowing, my beard bleaching
with my dogs' snouts. We wandered the rows,

moving sometimes older to recent, sometimes
the reverse. I'd puzzle at the German script
on the older slabs, hard to decipher that Gothic

lettering, even aside from the mossy inscriptions,
frost cracks, creeping lichen older than history.
But most of all, each winter would tilt the headstones

a little more each year, more toward the earth,
like grandfathers or grandmothers, bending
over a shy child to hear what they've said.

David Graham

APHASIA

What is that tree across the street?
I knew it once: beautiful fan-like leaves.
One fall they all turned bright saffron yellow
and fell in a great circle on the ground
like a lamp's low flame. Today I see my face
in the mirror but somehow not exactly myself.

I can't say who phoned me this morning
but I think we had a nice talk. I tried
to look up the word for that tree, and while
stumped by the spelling, suddenly the leaves
turned blank, so I knew I was dreaming.

Maybe it was my mother calling me.
Whenever I haven't phoned for too long
she'd always say not Hello, but "this is
your Mother. . ." as if I could ever forget.
But maybe is it possible I've begun to?

Still, these days I think more and more
of my dead and dear ones. I just wish
to listen to them again. I see the mailman
looking today just like my father, but says
nothing, smiling apologetically, then
carries on with his silent route as he leaves.

GOSPEL GRAYSCALE

How sweetly we sing, Jesus,
how bright and braided our yearning.

Closest I'll ever get to your heaven
are these voices rising like flocked birds

to twist, reverse, scatter and rejoin
in the gusty, cloud-confirming sky.

Singing O river of Jordan, singing
glad tidings beyond. I believe

we're dead once and once only, Lord,
but how I love how sweet this song.

Michael J. Leach (@m_jleach) is an Australian poet, critic and academic who lives on unceded Dja Dja Wurrung Country and acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land. Michael's poems have appeared in journals such as *Cordite Poetry Review*, exhibitions such as the Antarctic Poetry Exhibition, anthologies such as *Poetry d'Amour 2022: Love Poems* (WA Poets Incorporated, 2022), and his two poetry books: *Chronicity* (Melbourne Poets Union, 2020) and *Natural Philosophies* (Recent Work Press, 2022). Michael has won the UniSA Mental Health and Wellbeing Poetry Competition (2015), received a commendation in the Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine (2021), jointly won the poetry category of the Minds Shine Bright Confidence Writing Competition (2022), and had a poem shortlisted for the Woollahra Digital Literary Award (2023). During 2024, Michael will publish two new poetry books: a collection of haiku and senryu (*In Case of Emergency Press*) followed by a collection of poems exploring sounds and emotions (Ginninderra Press).



Michael J. Leach

CONTEMPORARY COMPLAINTS

someone loitering out the front of a fast-food restaurant late one night
sucker punched me in the ear for briefly being out the front of a fast-food restaurant late one night

a passenger in a speeding car threw a beer bottle out the window and said bottle just missed my skull

I'm constantly br(e)aking as fellow drivers enter roundabouts right in front of me

a fellow driver suddenly resolved to race me rather than merge with me, accelerating to overtake my almost-speeding car as our respective lanes finished merging into one lane that was about to pass through the narrow arch of a railway bridge

my next-door neighbour started up a souped-up car at 6 am without lowering the loud volume of the thrash metal spewing from said car's subwoofers

rubbish from my next-door-neighbour's red bin keeps overflowing & blowing onto my nature strip & front yard, remaining there till I finally give in, pick up all the items, and sort them into my red, yellow & green bins

someone dumped enough broken-up cement in my red bin to prevent the garbage collector from collecting my red bin

when I tried to exit an edifice via its emergency exit, I couldn't exit because someone had placed a full skip in front of the emergency exit door

sometimes, I need to have a short conversation with people having a long conversation in a store's front doorway

I turned up at an out-of-the-way business fifteen minutes before its closing time and, upon asking to buy a small item, heard the words *I can't serve you because we're closing soon*—without one word of actual explanation—from a cashier who stood still behind the counter

continued overleaf...

commuters keep making or taking long, confidential business calls in the train's 'quiet' carriage

dogwalkers keep illegally walking their large, 'well-behaved' dogs in public places without leashes, leading to instances where said large, 'well-behaved' dogs disobediently dash out into traffic or try to attack leashed dogs, including my miniature cavoodle

scooter riders keep illegally electrically scooting on walking tracks, alarming or harming pedestrians & pets in the process

I regularly received threatening letters from an energy retailer I never signed up with

someone without a face mask approached me in a supermarket aisle amidst an airborne disease pandemic and, upon reaching me and noticing me wearing a face mask, forcefully coughed once in my face rather than in the preferred place: the crook of the elbow

a chain store refused to let me return an incompatible item because days of Victoria's lockdowns counted towards its 30-day returns period

I ordered something online but got nothing

a phone company kept charging my late mother's unused account upon receiving notifications of her death, even after receiving a copy of her death certificate, culminating in a debt collector harassing my father and stealing his hard-earned money

a repeat offender stole heirlooms from my widowed grandmother's home

I received the following info from the airline that cancelled my evening flight:
- the initial instruction to keep checking an airline app that I didn't have and didn't want to get because it required me to enter my credit card details for no reason
- the later instruction to wait around the airport for the next three hours to listen out for a PA announcement naming the nine lucky passengers hand-picked by the airline to board a near-full flight later that night
- the belated news that I hadn't been hand-picked by the airline to board a near-full flight later that night
- the late-night announcement of a replacement flight the following morning
- the last-minute delay of the replacement flight the following morning

someone reversed into my first car, insisted we resolve the matter without involving my car insurer and later rejected all my car repair quotes

someone crashed into my legally parked car then left without leaving behind a note

I received a rates notice overvaluing my first home to the tune of a quarter of a million Australian dollars

I stayed at a BnB with a spa bath that was advertised as a spa but only functioned as a bath

I keep failing to get full use out of electronic devices that were carefully made not to last

I keep tuning out tainted news driven by political leanings rather than truths

I keep seeing (not-so-)subtle signs of institutional discrimination against person after person after person, including the one I love

Edward Caruso has been published by *A Voz Limpia*, *Australian Multilingual Writing Project*, 'La Bottega della Poesia' (*La Repubblica*, Italy), *Burrow*, *Communion*, *Kalliope X*, *Mediterranean Poetry*, *Meniscus*, Melbourne Poets Union, *n-Scribe*, *Right Now*, *StylusLit*, *TEXT*, *Unusual Work* and *Well-Known Corners: Poetry on the Move*. His second collection of poems, *Blue Milonga*, was published by Hybrid Publishers in 2019. In August of that year, he featured on 3CR's Spoken Word program. In 2024 he co-judged the Ada Cambridge Poetry Prize.



SAN GIACOMO APOSTOLO

White-marbled Canova sculpture
and painting of Christ's flagellation,
with its faded blue of a clouded sky.

A priest asks my impressions of the outside world,
but apart from raising the futility of the Gulf War,
this refuge is all I find.

So much angst within thoughts
that take me where I don't want to go.

Even the quietest space has to be free from fear.
Even the violence of one insect towards another
smacks of the gravest defect of this universe,
aggression that prompts violence.

On leading a just life without savagery.

Edward Caruso

RESURRECTION

1

An emaciated figure, arms extended,
legs to the right, feet to the left, nailed.
Pilgrims stroke and kiss the image
beneath the sculpture of an agonised mother.

One could ask why this man
never claimed innocence.

Faith asks so much.

If any priest could peer into my bloodshot eyes.

2

On a book cover I find a Caucasian Jesus
clad in a worn leather jacket.
Imagine this outcast speaking English
on our side of cool, high-fiving,
palms or wrists yet to heal.

3

A face restored on a 600-year-old church wall.
One can use infra-red cameras and touch up frescos,
see how they were painted,
whether from the ground or ceiling, right or left,
or if one hand commenced a profile
and another completed it.

4

St Francis's basilica after the Assisi quake.
Had I wandered into its nave
to glimpse images of the saint, arms extended
as he's lifted into the air on a cloud.

Faith transcends so much.

If any priest could peer into my wary eyes.

5

A crypt beneath the floor of an altar,
nave filled with hymns.

Via Francigena: dense mist and icy winds.
On this road, verdant countryside,
a camino of loose stones,
rain that turns everything to slush.

TORRITA TIBERINA CEMETERY

Dreams of death.
Not eternal peace.
Not even memories.
Nothing.
Not even awareness of nothing.

MOHAWKS

A drunken punk picks up cigarette butts
and sings about sex;
her American companion,
orange and black hair spiked,
tugs her through the crowd.
They vanish inside a department store.

I was born in Lismore Co Waterford in 1933. After Leaving Cert ,I trained as a Radio Officer and then went to sea for about 3 Years. On coming ashore I joined ITA as a transmission engineer. I was married in 1958. In 1966 while stationed in Belfast I applied for a position of Lecturer in Telecommunications in City College for FE London and was offered the post. I remained at City College until I was invited to go into Secondary Education to introduce Electronics into the curriculum. No money in the budget so no Electronics. Same story with another school who made the same offer to me. I stayed in that school and retired when I was 55 years of age as Head of Lower and Middle school. Now living in Co Clare with my daughter.



FAMILY GATHERING CHRISTMAS 2017

Our family is now long scattered, living mostly in the Home Counties of England. The family consists of our two daughters Catherine and Una and Joan's nieces Patricia and Paula and their brother Ciarán. The three of them came to live with us when their parents were killed in the car accident in 1975.

The family likes to get together as often as possible, but it is traditional that everyone comes together at Christmas time. This year, after discussion, December the 19th we agreed as the date for the family gathering.

While Christmas dinner was intended for our own family, members of the extended family sometimes asked if they could join us. This year Paula's 3 children, and two of her brothers, Desmond and Brian will be joining us, Paula's husband, Andy, and Una's husband Michael, make a total of ten persons dining. We extended the dining room table to its full length and the kitchen table was added at the end to accommodate everyone.

By noon all have arrived, some staying in the local hotel while others will be driving home after the dinner. The house is filled with laughter and banter. It is strange that I had not missed these sounds until I hear them once more in the home. Now we know that the family is complete again.

I often wonder if all parents notice that when a family member comes to stay overnight and then goes to visiting, you lie in bed, half asleep waiting for the sound of the key in the door. Then, knowing that they are home safely, you can drift back to sleep. It may be the parental instinct of wanting to care for your children is awakened when they are back home.

Joan and I decorate the room with holly and festive garlands, the decorations include the Christmas tree that we bought when Catherine was a year old. It was one of the first imitation Christmas trees on the market but very realistic. The Crib takes pride of place under the Christmas tree.

It is now time to lay the table and do the preparations in the kitchen. The majority lend a hand, some are in the kitchen preparing the vegetables or making the various stuffings for the three-bird roast, while others help in the dining room. The traditional Christmas tablecloth with an elegant festive motif is used, with a gold runner down the centre of the table. The black and white dinner service, in the sideboard since last year is taken out. Because of the occasion our Waterford wine glasses are also used. Some find an opportunity to chat and have a drink and sometimes issue unnecessary instructions to those laying the table. The instructions are often greeted with cries of "come on then you show me how to do it" or "put down that glass and give us a hand." Comments and answers are greeted with smiles.

Everyone contributes in one way or another to the dinner, no one comes empty handed.

Joan's contribution is her now famous Syllabub trifle. The trifle has macaroon and amaretti biscuits, white grapes, and strawberries. It is assembled in a deep glass bowl so that one can see the construction. The macaroons in the bottom of the glass dish are softened with sweet Sherry. Then there are alternate layers of mixed grapes and halved strawberries and amaretti biscuits. These layers are softened with some Brandy. The fruit and biscuits are covered with a whipped cream. The whole construction is topped with a syllabub. The syllabub is made with icing sugar, lemon zest and a little drop of Brandy. Just looking at it in the glass bowl acts on one's anticipation, like Pavlov's bell. The common name for this dish is Boozy trifle a very fitting name!

The 3-bird roast has two different stuffings, one is made from sausage meat and breadcrumbs and herbs, and the other is breadcrumbs, herbs and finally chopped onions. The Birds are prepared by laying a boned Capon with legs and wings still attached with the skin side down. A layer of sausage meat stuffing is spread on the bird and two duck breasts are placed one at each side of the capon. A little of the breadcrumb stuffing is placed between the two duck breasts. Sausage meat stuffing is then applied, and two pigeon breasts are placed one at each side. The whole assembly is carefully rolled up and stitched.

The heat in the kitchen and the smells of the various ingredients used fill the whole house with the smell of Christmas. It may be that the same smell is there at other times of the year but at Christmas it is special.

Someone in the dining room has found a CD of Christmas music, and family members join Bing Crosby singing White Christmas. Even though we have heard this tune in every store that we went into, for the last weeks, hearing it sung by, I think, Una and Ciarán, brings the spirit of Christmas nearer to me. While our family are not a von Trapp family but when it comes to singing, I enjoy listening to them. A family singing or laughing together or even just being together at Christmas time, emphasises the true meaning of Christmas, that is, extending love and peace to everyone.

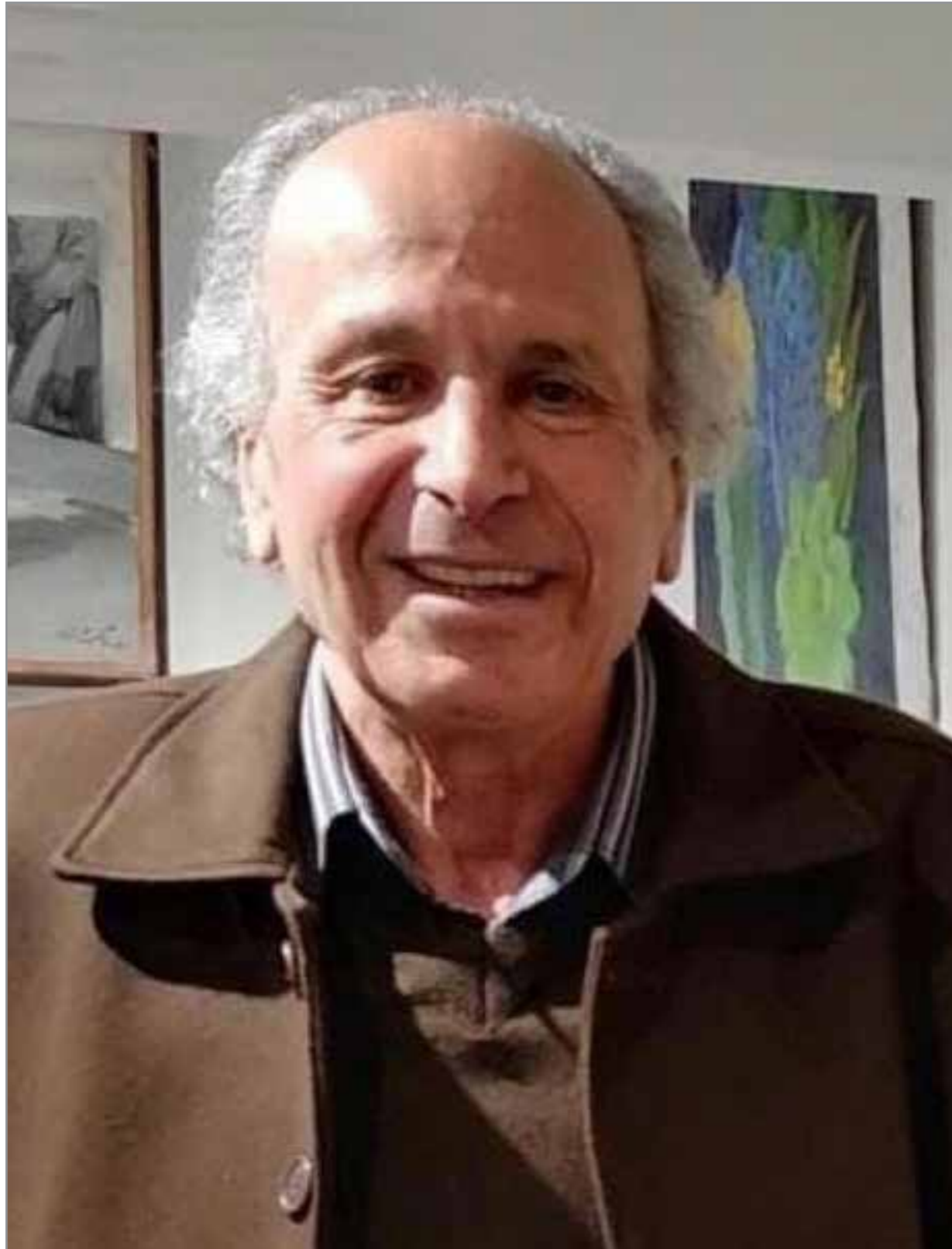
It is time to eat. Every dish, from the 70's style Prawn Cocktail starter to the flaming Christmas pudding, draws compliments from around the table. It may be the wine had influence.

Little did we know that this dinner would be the last family Christmas we would spend together. Later that month, Joan was taken ill, and she died the following February.

The married ones now host their in-laws at Christmas. They also issue invitations to others in our family to join them.

Gamal Al-Qassas (1950) is an Egyptian poet and journalist. He has published nearly fourteen poetry collections, the most recent of which is "There was Music Here," published in 2023. Selections of his poems have been translated into English, Arabic, and Greek. He also won the Cavafy International Prize in Poetry in 1998. Furthermore, he is considered one of the most important founders of the "Illumination 77" poetry group in the 1970s.

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.



A SCREAM

We are the new wise ones
 The new mad ones
 We have kept the commandments well
 We understand that fear is an unruly plant in the heart
 That the note will remain blind
 Waiting for the melody to provide
 An escape for the spring
 Beyond time
 Beyond place.
 What can we do??
 Live with your epidemics
 With your disasters
 Nurture them as if deprived of our own sustenance
 Under your oppression
 Under the filth of your shoes
 In the name of a life
 We have never encountered face to face
 The flags in the sewage pools
 In your dirty lies
 In your senseless wars
 In your coffins in front of the museum.
 We are the stone of chance
 The stone of nothingness
 We did not rebel to imprison the air
 Or to confine water in the cup

Gamal Al-Qassas

continued overleaf...

We are humans
We have the right to complain
The right to scream
The right to hunger
Our mouths are always open
Always gaping
Always tired
Knowing how to bring hope
From the flutter of a bird
From a child's smile.
Oh, guardians of the effeminate ruin
What do you intend to do with us
Today
And yesterday
And tomorrow...
We are not your enemies
Your dawn has aged
Rusted in the fingers of time
Open the windows
Open the cells
Teach the thieves to knock on the doors
To leave something in the dish.

I DON'T WANT YOU TO FEEL SAD

As you read this message
Take it easy
Speak freely about your inner hunger
About your new friends
There is a philosophy of pain
It always happens
It happens sometimes
That children are born in stray carts
That lovers go and do not return
It's okay.
You can invent a secret gateway to the forest
In the thickets of your shirt
You can slap the world on its cheek
As you wake up from your sleep like a blind cat
But please..
Speak sweetly about your past
How trivial and gentle it was
And that you found nothing to fight for
Exactly like all my treacherous children.

Abeer Abdelhafez Abdelaal is a full professor of Spanish language and Hispanic literature at Cairo University and a translator. She studied Master and PhD at Complutense Madrid and Cairo University. Her research area focuses on contemporary Latin American narrative and poetry (XX-XXI), comparative studies, contemporary Arabic narrative, and Latin American Orientalism. She published several articles in Spanish and Arabic. Published more than 35 books translated from Spanish to Arabic and vice versa. She is, also, founder of the Wikipedia project - Translation from Spanish into Arabic in Arab Universities.

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THE PARROT ON THE SIXTH FLOOR BALCONY

He used to speak every morning
 To passersby and those returning
 And in the evening to God
 In the negligence of thick eyes
 "Affaf" places for him grains, water, and peeled fruits
 She scolds him for his weekly escape
 When he sneaks to the balcony of the fifth floor
 In the opposite building
 A cold joke seeps into his hot blood
 His whistle rises, turning into screams and moans
 Hoping to return to the silent ceilings of boredom
 The walls of the house painted in pale white
 The warmth of the room filled with cinnamon and cloves
 The clicks of the typewriter
 The creak of the door after the wedding night
 And the birth of the delicate-legged girl
 Born in her last month
 We all go in search of "Coco"
 We run out of the buildings through the streets
 We follow a whistle like lamentations
 We distribute in neighboring streets
 We knock on black and brown wooden doors
 We wander into the rooms
 We hear but see nothing
 We return defeated
 We drown in a half-dead slumber
 We go the next day, hearing knocks and whistles
 We open the door and are met with mocking eyes
 Thirty years have passed
 He left, and after him "Affaf".

Abeer Abdelhafez Abdelaal

THE THIRD WORLD

Come
Open the door of the air
Its locks are slippery algae
From the heights of the eastern skies
Go west.
You will wear the Chinese shoe
And you man, you will wrap your head
And you woman, you will wrap your head too
You will twist your tongue with the vowels
You will merge the consonants
You will tremble at the moment of greeting
You will think in languages and speak in others
You will shake your head as if you understand
And your shoulders as if you don't care.
The emerald of your eye will fade
The olive of your eye will inhale
The color of spectrum will shatter in your gaze
You will learn to cry in another language
In silence
The snake will dwell in your guts
And will not leave
The universe will become your friend
Not humans.

You will transmit your talk to the leaves of the trees
Because it is the oldest
You will converse with birds in sign language
And squirrels will approach because you do not eat them
The bald old woman will secretly stare at you
The white child will rejoice in your face
And the blonde Machu will stare at you.

You will die and live
Twenty-four times each day
Only your fingerprints will remain
Maps will float on your face page
And prayers will erupt from your ears
Invoking one God.

Tayssir Haidar (1951) is a Lebanese poet. He studied at the Lebanese University and obtained two degrees in Arabic language and geography. He published his book "Love of the Countryside" in 2014. Furthermore, he communicates with hundreds of writers and poets in the Arab world on facebook pages and literary websites.

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.



AS IF THEY WERE TREES

Those whom I loved
 And nurtured by the fragrance of their company
 In the plains and mountains
 They departed
 Leaving their trunks filled with greenery in my heart
 Sometimes I pluck from their fruits poems of longing
 Fig trees that I taste with all their overflowing honey
 Almonds with the flavors of the earth loaded with delicious Ivy
 And olives that smile at me
 Becoming tables of longing
 The pomegranate while chanting the charm of the breast
 And the tree of my heart that embeds itself next to their trunks like love...!

Tayssir Haidar

THE CHAOS OF LONGING

This soft universe like the ivy is yours
For the tenderness of your cheeks
For your elegant dress.
Where are you heading
While my heart is a tent in the vicinity of your pastures?!
And I trespass the roads leading to the dew of your surroundings
I watch the clouds
I envy them for embracing your bedroom
You left
And the energy of my feelings at the exits of your home
Is like a traffic sign where colors mixed
And plunged the world into the chaos of nostalgia!



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Mostafa Ebada (1965) is an Egyptian journalist, poet, essayist, and critic. He works as the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Al-Ahram – Arabi Magazine. He is also the cultural advisor to some of the most important Egyptian publishing houses, such as The Egyptian Lebanese House, Al-Mahrousa Center, and Dar Batana. Furthermore, he published more than 10 books in different creative genres, such as poetry collections and cultural and literary studies.

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SMILE, O CROW

I appear melancholic in the photos
 Asleep or devoid of expression
 The light fights me, and the eye of the camera
 It always seems like this
 And it repeats on every occasion
 So my eyes appear closed
 My shoulders like an empty hanger
 And my heart is filled with crowds
 On the wedding night
 The photographer whispered in my ear
 Smile, O Crow
 Do not darken your event
 “The One who dwells in the heavens laughs”
 So I made wings and feathers
 And lived, as if I lived, among butterflies
 And smiled
 And when I owned
 The first camera in my life, as a gift
 I took a picture of myself in front of a mirror
 I contemplated my face and rejoiced like “Narcissus”
 But I forgot to press
 The “capture” button
 So the whole moment was lost.

Mostafa Ebada

continued overleaf...

I couldn't this time
 Turn anger into a poem
 Or make sadness a song for the sorrowful
 I am just a resilient man today
 Only nodding
 If the wind passed by him, he overflowed
 And if a scent approached, he drew near
 I am a man today
 Who got his full share of the night
 He doesn't want poetry or immortality
 He just wants the scent of your armpits
 And the scent of desire or the sound of blood
 Today, the angel left me
 And I want to regain my wings
 That the birds stole
 To flap the air above your bare back
 Then jump into the water
 Today, the angel left me
 Abdel Halim Hafez* drove him away
 The poetry and the deferred dreams drove him away
 The man who went to the end of the earth
 Collecting the clouds and the wind
 And when he messaged "Drew Barrymore"
 She replied to him
 And when "Anne Hathaway" greeted him
 She guessed he was crazy
 Who believed in a moment that he was a prophet
 And that no one
 Will shout in his face again:
 Smile, O Crow

Do you remember the handkerchief
 I placed under your armpit?
 I found it yesterday among the papers
 Surrounded by books
 But it is still as fresh as it was
 And your scent lingers
 The handkerchief is still alive
 I am the man who met a woman
 With nine children
 And when she remembered it
 She scoffed at herself and murmured:
 What a stubborn crow you are
 If I leave you
 Who will prove that femininity is eternal
 Or point to the long road
 That we left without adventure?

continued overleaf...

I was an ordinary person
 Waking up at eight
 Escaping from the sun's heat
 And fearing the howling of people
 Taking care of his harmful herbs alone
 Covering every corner of the places
 Here the waiter deceived us
 Here I sniffed my fingers after a touch
 I stand in front of the shops
 Buying plates and knives
 And knowing the difference between one knife and another
 To protect Rua's fingers
 This veil is suitable for her while she prays
 And these are bags for storing clothes
 I was an ordinary person
 Not thinking about sin
 As soon as I leave the house
 Preferring the metro like office pens
 Whoever walks
 Or sits in the nearest "small cafe"
 Thinking of a poem or a trick to meet the forbidden
 When did the light breeze start
 And the trees replaced the forests?
 Who changed me?
 Who inspired the cloud to quarrel?
 How does time deny me?
 And everything is like a bitter echo
 Who made me that strange father?
 The prophet whose back was peeled
 By the whip of love.

Photographer,
 Do not be harsh
 Let the lens alone see me
 Allow the glass the freedom of sorrow
 That shadow that appears
 Before you now, without metaphor or prophecy
 Loves small cafes
 Walks from street to street
 To write his secret history
 And how many praises in a day
 Photographer
 How can you define my features?
 And how much sorrow behind contentment
 Do not be harsh
 Let the lens alone see me
 Let the hand of man be neutral
 This is a thirst with no water
 So do not whisper to me:
 Smile, O Crow.

**Abdel Halim Hafez: a famous Egyptian singer.*

Muhammad Al-Shahat (1954) is an Egyptian poet and journalist. He published twenty-five poetry collections. In addition, six critical studies are written about his poetry. He is also a member of the Egyptian Writers Union – and a member of its Board of Directors in the previous term. His poems are published in most newspapers and cultural and literary periodicals in Egypt and the Arab world. He has participated in literary forums and cultural conferences since the early seventies, and has won several awards, the most important of which is the Egypt Youth Award in 1978.

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.

SONATA

1

She was carrying some
Mulberry leaves
And holds between her fingers
The first thread
Of the silk cocoon
And she dreams of making
A dress for weddings
All her seasons were lost
The mulberry leaves withered
And she's still holding on
Between her fingers
The first thread
Of the silk cocoon.

2

She was searching
About her knight
And she wrapps
Some wedding dresses
She sits near the window
Staring at everyone passing by
Perhaps
When her man sees her
He will know her
She kept looking out the window
All the knights returned except her knight
So she went back to wrapping
Some wedding dresses
And sits near the window.



Muhammad Al-Shahat

continued overleaf...

3

All my strength failed
The gray hair covered me
And some women are still inhabiting me
And they flirt me
So I try to avoid
What slept in my memory
Oh, the bird of youth
You're still fluttering
So dwell in your nests
And leave me with my gray hair.

4

Some of the thorns of cactus
Fell on my dress
I caressed the air in the room
So it can fly
Or for some aloe vera bitters
To fade away
My dress is torn
And the cactus remained
Sleeping in my throat.

Ahmed Nabawi is an Egyptian poet and academic. He deals with humanitarian themes in his poetry. His poetic career began early in the nineties. He has five collections of poetry: (Testimony of Love), (Wounds Have Tributaries), (Flames of Questions), (Scenes from the Refugee Camp), (The Brilliance of Colors), and two collections in print entitled (An Ant Said - The Doors). In addition, he has a collection of critical books, including The Poet's Culture and the Production of Significance - The Poetics of Small Details - The Contemplative Tendency in Andalusian Poetry - The Heritage Tributaries in Andalusian Poetry.

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A C A T

In panic
 A cat passed by
 Dying of hunger
 While trying to escape from the stabs in their eyes
 As all the dogs of the earth were chasing it
 Lurking, in greed, its journey
 Nibbling as it steals a glance, its path
 And telling on the table of the night, its tale
 It was wandering in the land of God
 Seeking while weak, food for its babies
 Sometimes it succeeds
 In extracting scraps from among the harsh world
 But
 When the situation becomes tough
 It would eat some earthworms
 And sometimes
 It would eat in pain from what some people throw at it
 One evening
 While trying, in the middle of the street
 To get rid of a dog that was chasing it
 So it could reach under the cover of night
 Those whom God entrusted it to
 The cat was hit—in reckless violence—by a car
 And without care
 The passersby and cars trampled on its blood
 At that moment, all the street dogs
 Would swoop down—in their greed—on its sanctity
 And on the other side
 There were young ones who
 Due to their extreme hunger, crying
 Hastily waiting for mother's return.

Ahmed Nabawi

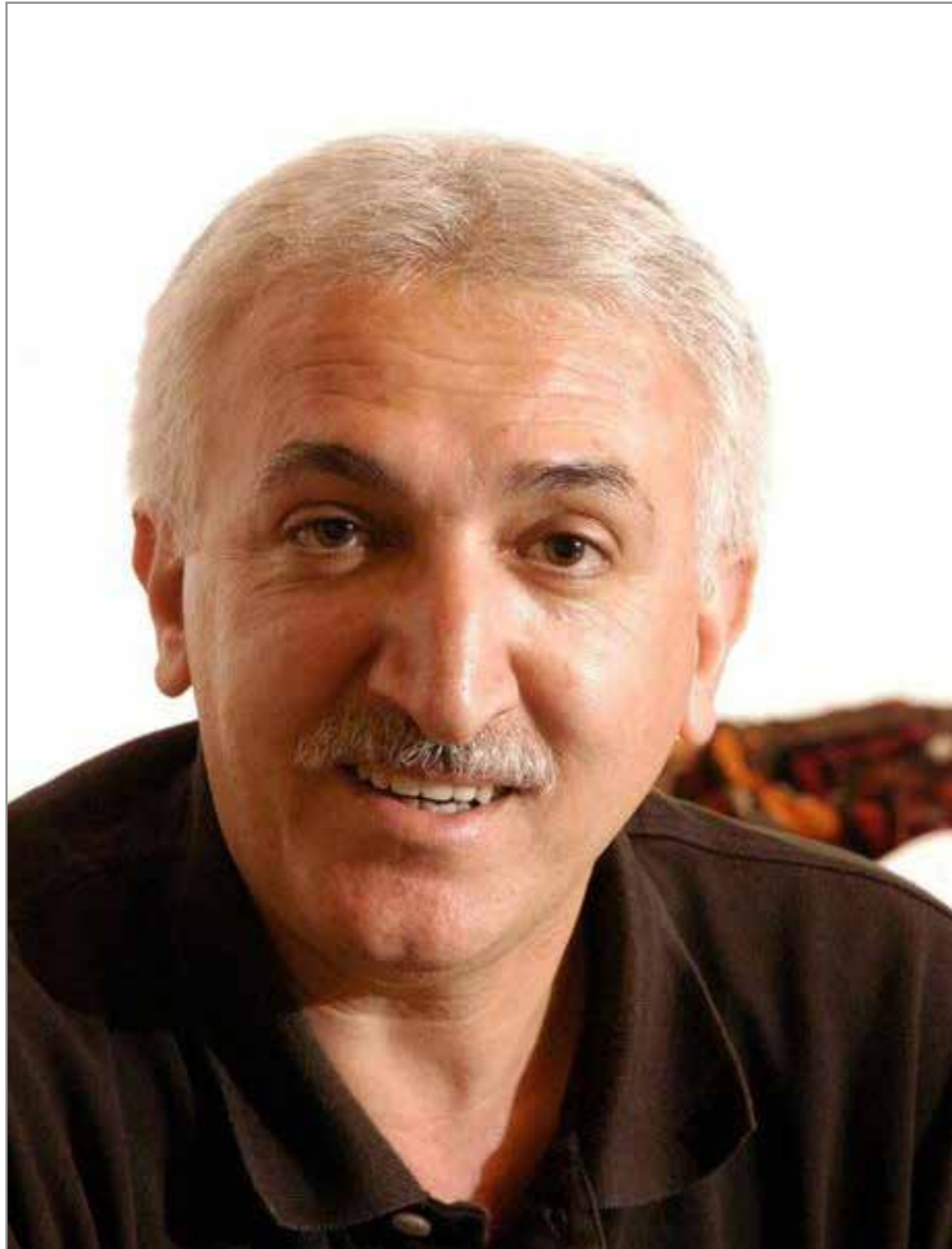
Al-Mothanna Alcheikh Atiah, a Syrian poet and novelist, was born in Deir ez-Zor - Syria in 1953. He graduated from the College of Agriculture in Damascus in 1980. He published a poetry collection for Dar Al-Haqiqat in Beirut under the title "Yes, there is More" in 1979, and a collection of poetry under the title "Mouth of The Rose" in 1989, and a novel under the title "Lady of the Kingdom" in 2006, from the Arab Foundation for Studies and Publishing in Beirut. In addition, he published a critical book under the title "The Poetic Rhythm of the Intifada" in 1990 from Dar Al-Aswar in Akka. He worked in journalism as managing editor for cultural affairs in Al-Sharq Al-Awsat newspaper in 1984 and managing editor of the new Shahrazad magazine in Cyprus in 1990.

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THE CURSE OF GAZA

And you, O deceitful Odysseus
 A game in the hands of a king you think it's your game
 O cunning, deceived fox
 And you know that
 You will stand here inevitably
 In the square of Troy, still burning with phosphorus bombs
 Amidst the scattered bodies of Gaza's women
 And their children cut by your missiles
 And their men whose hands have not left the handles of their swords
 Here where the crows of the world bewitched by your wooden horse roam
 Above the bodies
 Here where the winds blow or do not blow as you wish
 Here where human blood renews its fertility with the cracks of vultures in its soil
 Here in the land of Canaan
 Here you will bid farewell to your final glance at your crime
 Before departing to your new abyss...

You, the filmmaker of your burning, a victim of racism
 On a crooked cross
 With a Stockholm syndrome camera
 And your raised director's sword vowed
 Between a bloodthirsty god and a chosen slave whose hooked fangs
 To burn humans, plants, animals, and stones
 O dead thief, living bloodsucker
 On detonating women's wombs
 On stealing the burnt toys of children
 From the scattered remains of their hands in the rubble...



Al-Mothanna Alcheikh Atiah

continued overleaf...

You, the deceitful killer himself
 The knowledgeable ignorant
 The killer does not escape his dagger planted in the land of his victims
 Does not escape the harvest of their nightmares in the head of his night
 Does not escape the coming of his collapse
 How short the lifespan of kingdoms
 When the earthworm comes to nibble at the staff of your deceit
 O sorcerer enchanted by delusion
 O king who spoke to birds in the language of the hunter
 And enslaved humans and jinn to build the illusion of the promised time
 Above the bodies
 You know the certainty without certainty
 That you will soon turn to ashes
 In the ashes of the transmigrating sacred books that crowned
 Your miserable glory with illusions
 Soon a forest of nightmares
 Will crawl in your fleeing head

Soon, the Bernam Forest will crawl
 Killer nightmares in your head fleeing from the darkness of your victims
 Soon, you will see the bodies of your captives
 Trees walking hand in hand with the children of the corpses in the forest
 Its mouth gaping to swallow you
 Soon, you will witness your extended throne fangs
 Between the West and the East
 Crumbles
 A leaf for burning
 In the hand of a poet casting it as ashes
 In his ashtray...



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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