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# Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH  
AUGUST 2024

GERALDINE MILLS  
*The Beauty of Happening*

COVER ARTWORK 'AUTUMN LEAVES'  
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:

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas  
Publisher/Editor

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AUGUST 2024

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Geraldine Mills is a poet and fiction writer. She has published five collections of poetry, three of short stories and two children's novels. She is an experienced facilitator and is a member of Poetry Ireland's Writers in Schools' Scheme. Her most recent publication is *When the Light: New and Selected Poems* (Arlen House, 2023).



Geraldine Mills

## GERALDINE MILLS

### THE BEAUTY OF HAPPENING

I read about the man who left England and settled on the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland. Something about its miles of stone walls held him there. The cartographer in him had him walking it day after day, every step a purpose, as he charted each field, named each boreen, mapping each ancient physical feature, its topography, and in that way, preserved the islands' heritage.

Here, in the west of Ireland where I have lived for nearly 30 years, I ask myself how well do I know the geography of my own place? I'm not talking of the roads of the local townlands but the world within the stone walls that we call home. While everyone is walking the Camino de Compostela, stepping out across the Meseta in the long hours under the sun, I cannot go and learn about somewhere else if I am not familiar with every tree and rock that is around me, to be able to read this land before I ever turn the page of elsewhere.

Because of that, I have taken to walking the camino of the field at the back of our house, to record the atlas of my own life. Like T.S. Eliot, I hope that the end of all my exploring will be to arrive where I started and know the place for the first time.

When we moved into our house, the farmer had kept the wall clean of shrub or tree but with no encouragement from us trees have planted themselves there. A seed listened, heard the sound of life tapping inside it. It read the light through the soil, the temperature the soil gave back to itself, found the shelter of the stones, put down root, shoots stretching into the air. And so the trees grew.

I begin to move around the walls and start to record the names of the trees growing there while the field lifts itself up to me. A realisation begins to dawn. As I begin to record alder, willow, hazel and ash I recognise these as some of our native trees that go to make up the Celtic Tree calendar of 13 months with 28 days as constructed by Robert Graves.

This calendar is associated with ogham, that mysterious alphabet of the ancient Irish and British Celtic peoples. Ogham script is made up of a series of lines carved along a central line. These sets of lines denote the initials associated with each tree which the calendar uses.

Now that I can incorporate this piece of our land into the ogham calendar, I start at the west-north-west corner where the dry-stone wall meets the farmer's field and our neighbour's boundary. The first to be recorded is the willow. It is given the initial S for Saille in the tree calendar. Commonly known as Sally, its rods are still used to make baskets. Three willows that seeded themselves here are now commanding a canopy across the grass. In spring their catkins fall in a pollen shower all over the field, sprout in no time, little seedlings that find whatever hold they can.

Alongside them is the alder, as noted by F for Fearn and is a lover of wet places, the roots drink up all the west of Ireland rain and thrive on it. In ancient times, its wood was sturdy enough to be fashioned into round shields.

Holly as noted by T for Tinne is plentiful along this wall too, with its bottle green waxy leaves, its spikey curves, its carmine red berries. Unlike all the other trees, it hangs onto its leaves until June when it drops them, their fall, a carpet of noisy brown sharpness at my feet.

The hazel or Coll is the next one to have rooted against that part of the wall close to where the sun goes down. I am no Julian of Norwich, but the hazel also holds its whole own world for me, the tree closest to my heart. The one of my childhood; there was a hazel grove behind our home where I ran to when the walls of the house could not contain me. My entire universe held in that small nut.

I stash its bounty away in my pockets, in the corners of my bag, on the windowsills. They are my talisman, my rune, the one whose myths I carry around with me, of Fionn and the salmon or wandering Aengus in the hazel grove, Hermes and his wand. They become a poem.

The lung tree is the name we have given to the huge ash that has grown healthily along the southwest corner of the wall. We call it that because it is made up of two huge lobes of leaf-like lungs that branch out into bronchioles and alveoli.

On days when the world is too heavy for me to breathe, I look to it to do it for me. Once considered a charm against drowning, twigs of it were carried by emigrants to the US after the famine and it is famous for the wood that makes hurleys. A noble tree throughout Ireland, it carries the symbol N for Nion in the tree calendar. Yet many of them are suffering. The fungus, Ash Dieback brought onto the island some years ago, causes the loss of leaves and death of the crown. Lots of our younger trees have succumbed to it.

We pray that our lung tree is strong enough to withstand it. Because the ash doesn't give up hope. It sends its keys, its single winged seeds floating all over the field, landing on the gravel, in pots, any unlikely place it may find a hold. I see the seedlings sprouting. I trust some of them will survive while the snow of dandelion seed drifts across the air to land where it will and wait its time among the tiny suns of buttercups.

In the south corner more alder dance with light in the evenings as the sun goes down behind the lung tree. This wall is graced by it. Language doesn't have the words to paint the light that gives the wall its own importance.

After the gather of these alder, we have the hawthorn with its symbol U, Uath which in the month of May dresses its whole self in white blossom. Its flower, its twigs, its berries nurture the heart just to look at them. When the countryside is ablaze with white, we should be celebrating it with a festival as the Japanese Hanami honours its own cherry blossom. How I wish I knew what the sky sang as it brightened with all this flowering.

When all else fails, we welcome haws as do our migratory birds that come in October all the way from Scandinavia, the eye of the redwing telling us it is not a thrush as does the little flame on the wing that they are called by. They turn their feathers to the morning sun, singing to the first sky. If they haven't glutted on all the berries, I make haw chutney. Making this preserve carries the same labour as writing a poem. Gathering as much fruit as I would words, drop all fruit and images into a big pot and boil them all up with the tart of vinegar, the wages of salt. Add clove, ginger and nutmeg, the taste of metaphors and let the whole lot simmer for a while. Then when the time comes, pass the mulch through the sieve of my red pen until I am left with a fraction of what I started out with. Pot up into jars and leave for months to mellow, to become itself, a poem.

Where the wall has no trees, ivy and brambles twin their way up along the stones, sheltering, covering. Both of these, with their symbols M and G, are included in Graves' calendar. Ivy, the nesting place of the wren. Cheeky little troglodyte, tail perched, peeks out from behind a stone, and on short, rounded wings whirls to flight in search of breakfast. She has mouths to feed and her mornings are a panic of caterpillar catching. Another few days and they will be ready for their first flight. No one sees the nest secreted within the crevice of the wall behind the veil of ivy.

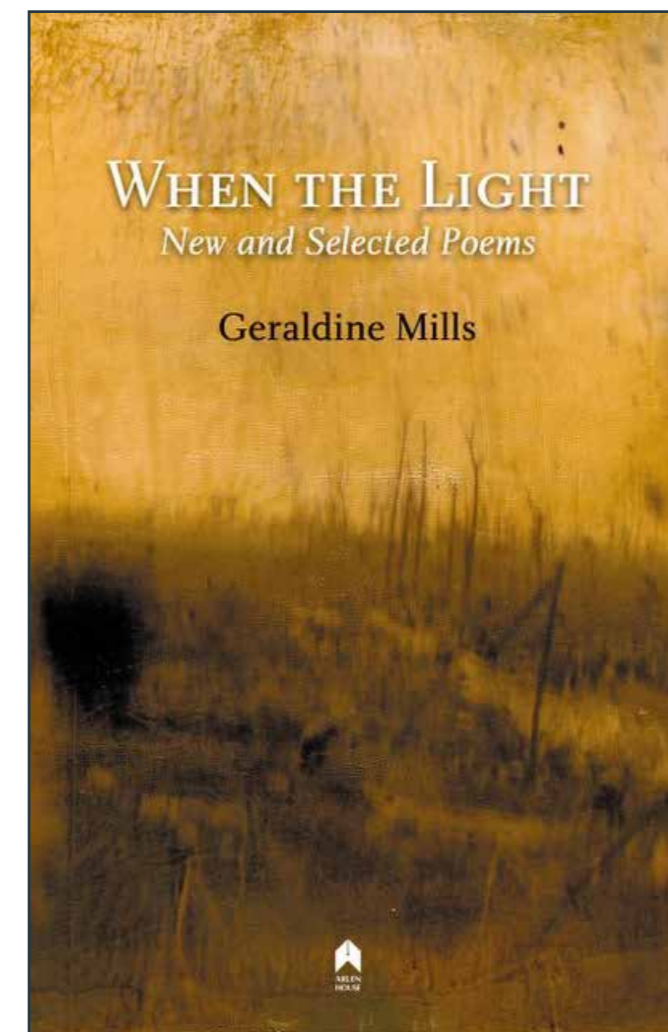
The elder has grown huge all by itself. With its symbol R or Ruis, it was sown as part of native hedging but the blossom was so beautiful it was let grow to full height and it's a larder for the pigeons who gorge there. The elder also has superstitions attached to it. With its scaly trunk and centre of soft white pith, it's supposed to have been the tree from which the true cross was made, the tree on which Judas hung himself. But its blossom is beautiful and plentiful and captures summer in its elderflower cordial.

We also have the rowan, the birch, and the reeds with their consonants, B, L and Ng respectively which all go to make up Robert Graves' ancient calendar. Now there is just one more to make up the full list. Some bird must have dropped an acorn against this wall for there the sessile oak has seeded itself and has grown large and strong without us giving it a thought. D or Duir, is our doorway to other worlds with its gifts of endurance and triumph. The tree of the Dagda, the tree of the druids, king of trees and tree of kings.

This tree also bears oak galls, nut-brown spherical homes which are the nursery of the minute gall wasp that is so tiny it needs magnification to see it. I am reminded that the monks made ink from galls such as these in order to write our ancient manuscripts like the Fadden More psalter. I try to imagine what it was like for the monk in his cold little scriptorium having to first make the ink before any word of the psalms marked the vellum.

Fascinated by the idea, I go searching out a recipe to make it. Visible on the branches I pluck a dozen of these brown galls. Placing them in my mortar I grind them to a fine dust with the pestle. Mixing this with the measured amount of water, I follow instructions and leave for two weeks to let the alchemy happen.

After this time, I add Iron Sulphite, the gum Arabic to fix the ink, strain it through muslin into a jar. Then in the scriptorium of my kitchen I pick up the pen, snug in my hand, dip it in the sloe-black ink that has magically appeared. Like the best of live encounters, I begin to write about my own place in the beauty of happening.



*When the Light: New and Selected Poems*  
is available at: [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Perie Longo, Santa Barbara, CA Poet Laureate (2007-09) has published four books of poetry: *Milking the Earth*, *the Privacy of Wind*, *With Nothing Behind but Sky: a journey through grief*, and most recently *Baggage Claim* as well as poems in *Connecticut Review*, *International Poetry Review*, *Miramar*, *Nimrod*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Rattle*, *Salt*, and others. Since 1984 she continues to lead poetry workshops for the Santa Barbara Writers Conference as well as privately. A psychotherapist, she facilitates poetry therapy writing workshops at Santa Barbara Hospice and is Poetry Chair of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation.



## MY FATHER'S BUSINESS

was the church of singing mountain streams,  
low notes hiding rainbow trout.  
You didn't so much catch one, as dip the pole  
gently in, not to crease the water's stillness,  
a worm threaded hook at the tip,

and when you felt a tremble in your hand  
you'd lift the fish up almost as if it were  
the most fragile thing on earth, like a child  
out of the bath, that kind of reverence.

His other business, besides the flock  
of five kids he called his little Peppers,  
was his writing when not exploring beneath  
the crannies of earth to probe what lives  
beneath the skin of things.

Yesterday I showed my granddaughter,  
after her first day of biology, his book  
authored a lifetime ago, *The Science of Zoology*.  
She lit like sun on water, "Cells!  
Just what I need!" Like time I mulled,

flowing into a thousand infinite energies,  
she carrying splashes of his passion. The book  
snuggled to her chest, I caught the sound  
of his old Royal tap-tapping in the far distance,  
mother calling him to turn off the light.

Perie Longo

## THE WARMING HUT

*for Ronnie (1941- 1998)*

We should be sending our warm breath  
to the stars by now, a wreath  
from our bellies to the tip of the big dipper.

We should be skating  
pell mell toward each other  
our mittened hands snow-cruled ready

to catch each other in remarkable trust,  
no space between  
and twirl, oh, the heaven of it,

spiraling out into  
the knife edged air  
as we hold each other up,

heads tossed back,  
hair flying in this young dynamic,  
bodies taut and full.

Now we should be in the warming hut,  
ice clusters evaporating like the hour,  
an exquisite ache in our toes.

We are the only ones here  
except for the man who smiles, fires  
the pot belly stove with logs from the woods beyond

while we unlace our skates, reach under the bench  
for our boots we will need in more ways  
than we can imagine, years later

to grip us like any cold snap,  
you letting go of my hand  
as I reach out in the dark to catch you.



## FALL RISK

Soon after hip surgery repair,  
ball in socket kind of thing, 2:00 am,  
I try to turn over. An alarm shrieks.  
The night nurse rushes into my room.  
"You can't move," she says,  
"you'll wake the dead." I'm not?

A red plastic bracelet tells the story:  
FALL RISK, also printed in black  
on the wall chart above my bed.  
Without my name. Is this what's left of me?  
Why do I keep throwing myself  
to the ground, three times this year  
as if in supplication. Not on purpose,

mind you. I once read when our woes  
get the best of us, kneel down on Earth  
and breathe troubles into her arms.  
She'll manage everything. I was young then,  
always one with patchwork clouds  
tinted gold, and hawks holding court treetop  
at dusk. Now look at me, a Fall Risk  
imprisoned in rehab along with Earth choked  
in all the ways we've reduced her to parch.

When I found myself immobile on asphalt,  
I figured a gremlin's hand had reached up  
to punish me for some unknown transgression.  
I was alone, feebly calling Help. No response,  
yet there was a fleeting moment

I felt part of so many others around the world,  
all of us falling one way or another  
connected beyond anything that makes sense.  
I breathed out and somehow came to be  
on the other side of the sirens, raising the ire

of the night nurse. As she wheels me  
to the rest room, I tell her I have a whole list  
of other more interesting risks, if she's up for it.  
In the backlight, she bursts out laughing  
our revelry real as any prayer.

Anna Yin was born in China and immigrated to Canada in 1999. She was Mississauga's Inaugural Poet Laureate (2015-17) and Ontario representative for the League of Canadian Poets (2013-16). She has authored six poetry collections and three books of translations including *Mirrors and Windows* (Guernica Editions 2021). Anna won the 2005 Ted Plantos Memorial Award, two MARTYs, two scholarships from USA and grants from Ontario Arts Council and Canada Council for the Arts. Her poems/translations have appeared at Queen's Quarterly, ARC Poetry, New York Times, China Daily, CBC Radio, Literary Review of Canada, Denver Quarterly, Epoch Quarterly. She read on Parliament Hill, at Austin International Poetry Festival, Edmonton Poetry Festival and universities in China, Canada and USA etc. She teaches Poetry Alive and started her own small press: *Sureway Press* for translating, editing and publishing or other cultural exchange services. Her new poetry collection: *Truth in Slant* will be published by Frontenac House in 2025.



## ECHO

A little red oriole  
returns to her nest  
whenever the moon rises.  
Paradise-yearning wings in her dream,  
she sings only between the tides...

On a distant shore  
when the sunset satins the lush mountain,  
someone picks up  
a tiny blue seashell,  
to listen to her heavenly song in the wind...

## 回声

一只小红鹂  
月亮升起时又要归巢  
飞天的羽翼隐藏在梦里  
她的歌唱只在潮汐之间

在遥远的海岸  
当夕阳染红山峦  
有人拾起  
一个小小的蓝色海贝  
去聆听风传来的她的歌吟

Anna Yin

## AN ELEGY TO MY OLD SWIMSUIT

For decades, you have sat quietly in my drawer  
I guess in the mirror  
you too feel shamed on my naked body  
So you fade in colour to  
make an exit.

I don't blame you  
being coward myself...  
Now I regret not seeing what really matters  
Too late, but let me wear you again  
to ask for forgiveness.

## 给旧泳衣的挽歌

多年来，你一直静静地躺在我的抽屉里  
我猜在镜子里  
我赤裸的身体也让你感到羞愧  
所以你褪去颜色  
毅然离场

我不怪你  
自己也只是懦夫...  
而今我后悔没有懂得真正重要的  
为时已晚，但让我再次穿上你  
请求你的原谅

## WHAT WE BEHOLD

Quietly at a corner of the airport,  
I don't count time.  
Like a leaf in the crevice rocks in a stream  
I let my musings wash over me.

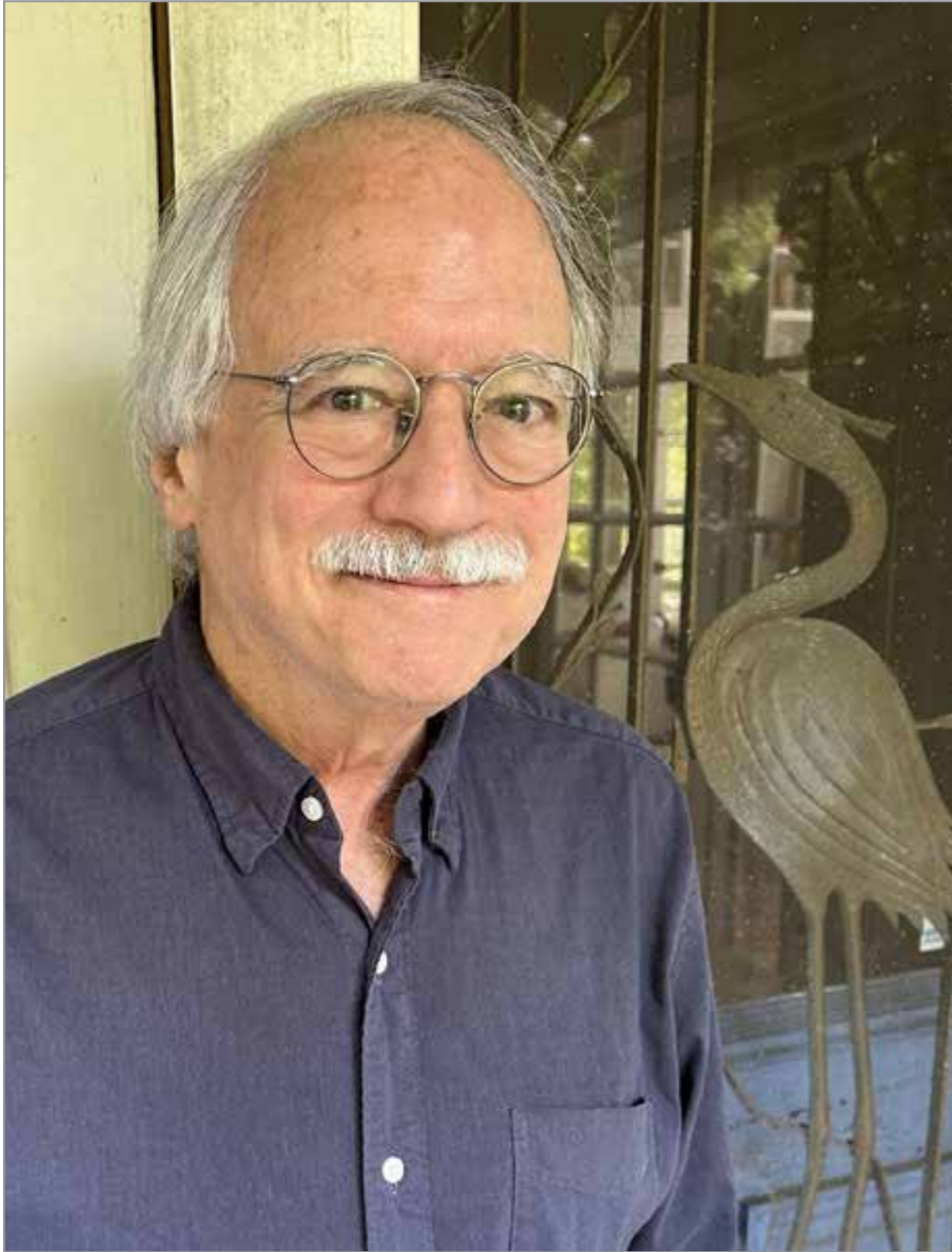
A school of fish swim under the water...  
How long can they hold their memory?  
Perhaps beauty is a moment like this -  
Just beholding the distant dream once  
and that's enough.

## 所思所得

静静地在机场一个角落  
我并不去计算时间  
像溪流中岩石缝隙里的叶子，  
让思绪在我心中流淌。

水下有一群鱼游弋  
它们的记忆有多久？  
也许美好就是这样的一刻  
见证过远方和梦想  
这就已经足够

John Philip Drury is the author of five books of poetry: *The Disappearing Town*, *Burning the Aspern Papers*, *The Refugee Camp*, *Sea Level Rising*, and most recently *The Teller's Cage* (Able Muse Press, 2024). His first book of narrative nonfiction, *Bobby and Carolyn: A Memoir of My Two Mothers*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press. After teaching at the University of Cincinnati for 37 years, he is now an emeritus professor and lives with his wife, fellow poet LaWanda Walters, in a hundred-year-old house on the edge of a wooded ravine.



John Philip Drury. Photo credit: Tess Despres Weinberg.

## THE WRESTLERS

### *Take Down*

Grappling in a hotel,  
 their gym this afternoon, she's got him in  
 the ladder hold,  
 squeezing his neck, legs locked around his waist,  
 a scarf of breeze  
 brushed over shining flesh.  
 But he pins her  
 repeatedly to the mattress, and she bucks up  
 her neck and bites—

### *Reversal*

then flips him and rides hard,  
 her fiery hair riffling his eyelashes.  
 Her torso contorts.  
 Like a surge of fog tumbling over a roof  
 and burning off,  
 like waves of solid ocean  
 and rocks that shatter  
 into spindrift, like starfish on oyster, they give  
 until they give.

### *Escape*

With night, the vanity lights up.  
 She knots his tie, tugging it snug;  
 he fastens her brassiere, then slips  
 his hands around to heft her breasts,  
 but she's as fluid as the rain  
 that smears the window, mixed with flashes  
 of red and yellow, out the door  
 without a sound except the hush  
 of pumps on carpet, the challenger hunched  
 on a footstool in the lit arena.

## PINDARIC VICTORY ODE IN TWO HAIKU AND A TANKA

The sumo wrestlers  
loll in cherry-blossom shade,  
bees circling thick toes.

Noon sunlight unscrolls.  
Grass calligraphy blurs, eyes  
flit shut, fists open.

Not even grumbling  
Kawasakis can rough up  
these napping giants  
who dream of blue pools, clear sky,  
a hold they don't strain to break.

## GHAZAL OF LUST

It may begin as exploring, a kind of Wanderlust  
of the soul. But officially, it's still filed under "Lust."

You feel it rising from your toes, your fingertips,  
your gut, your groin: titillation and/or lust.

It breaks the bank. It makes you hot with fever,  
eager to obey your mad commander, Lust.

Deadly sin? How about master of ceremonies, seer  
moaning, pilot mooning, his moorings planned for lust.

Desire as the problem? Keep it coming, nirvana or bust,  
revels of enlightenment through senses and more lust.

LaWanda Walters is the author of *Light Is the Odalisque* (Press 53, Silver Concho Poetry Series, 2016). Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Georgia Review*, *Southern Review*, *Nine Mile*, *Antioch Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, *Laurel Review*, and several anthologies, including *Best American Poetry 2015*, *Obsession: Sestinas in the Twenty-First Century*, and *I Wanna Be Loved by You: Poems on Marilyn Monroe*. She received Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Awards in 2020 and 2024. She lives in Cincinnati with her husband, poet John Philip Drury.



LaWanda Walters. Photo credit: Tess Despres Weinberg.

## INTO THE WORLD THERE CAME A SOUL CALLED IDA

*After the painting by Ivan Albright in the Art Institute of Chicago*

I love that title, and I know  
that's how Mr. Albright thought of me.  
I was Ida, the woman in the painting  
you may have seen. I was proud of it  
and used to go to the museum  
to try and explain it to visitors  
who shuddered at the horror.  
That was just the style he painted in,  
like the picture of Dorian Gray  
he did for the movie.

He wasn't fond of clear skin.  
He wanted me dissolute, irreparable.  
He loved decay. He learned, in the First  
World War, how to paint things  
that would make my stomach turn.

He fell in love with me. But I laughed  
when I read his love poem.  
I couldn't help it. You know when you try  
not to laugh, like in church, and it gets worse?  
That's what happened.

He paid me to sit three hours a day for two years.  
I was nineteen, and I brought my baby sometimes.  
If I didn't bring her, I was so bored.  
I'd bring peanuts and eat them, let the shells  
fall on the floor. It's not like he wasn't getting  
paint and turpentine everywhere.

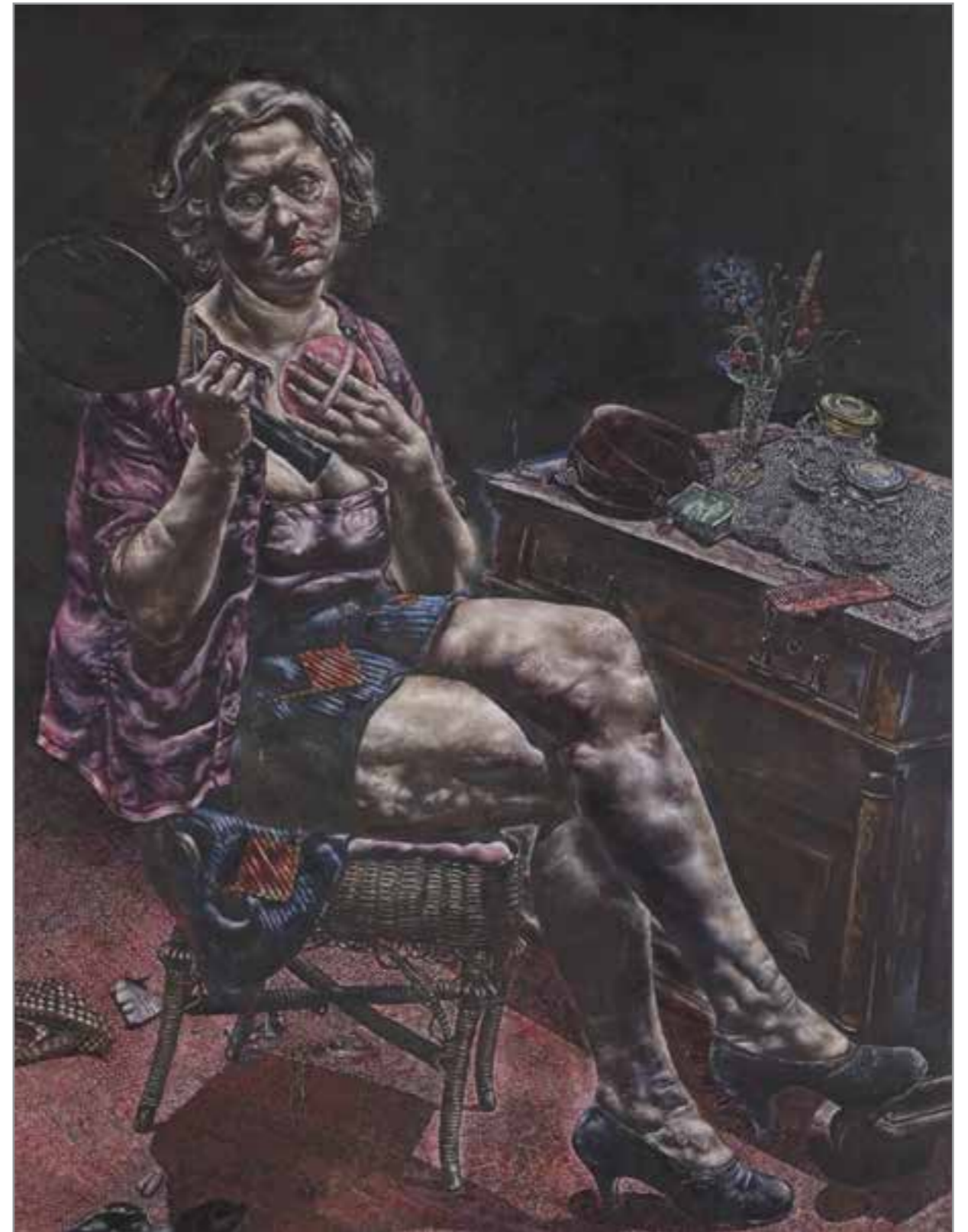
*continued overleaf...*

But the peanut shells must have made him mad.  
 And my rejection. And he didn't want to let me go.  
 So he kept adding things on—cellulite and varicose  
 veins and a cigarette with smoke rising  
 from a cut-glass ashtray. He had this brush

with only three hairs, from a boar  
 or some other animal. He loved detail,  
 and details are what we get when we age.  
 So he made me fifty and fat and like  
 I'd been a prostitute. But it was only me,  
 sitting for him at nineteen and twenty  
 and sometimes my beautiful baby girl  
 would be in the basket on the floor.

That's the true story, which you'll think  
 is more boring than you'd hoped.  
 I never did smoke or drink, myself,  
 and if I thought that fifty looked old—why,  
 I lived to be in my nineties.  
 I never did get those veins, and I had  
 better metabolism than he'd planned on.  
 I stayed thin and never had that overhang  
 of cleavage like the lady in the painting.

But that peanut shell on the floor—  
 that shell is the truth, painted so exactly right  
 with his miniature, three-haired brush  
 that it makes me blush now.  
 How rude of me to throw them there  
 like I was sitting in a movie theatre.



"Into the World There Came a Soul Called Ida," by Ivan Albright (USA) 1929-30:  
<https://www.artic.edu/artworks/93811/into-the-world-there-came-a-soul-called-ida>



### STUDENT, 1968, BY WAYNE THIEBAUD

I was that student in 1968,  
 although my hips were wider.  
 But I sat like that in Victorian Lit,  
 unaware of how I'd like it, later,

Victorian literature. The student  
 in this work keeps her narrowed eyes open  
 while, in that class in Charlotte, I couldn't.  
 This California girl looks a little sullen.

She's blonde, her straight hair parted neatly.  
 She stares like she knows she's on display,  
 her feet apart in blue tennis shoes,  
 faded jeans tight on her thighs

in the valley's light. Her lap becomes  
 a canvas—between her legs, a shadow  
 might be a golf tee, even a slit. A rainbow  
 is glancing off her collarbone.

I was bored. The professor was bald,  
 and his talk on Matthew Arnold wasn't  
 thrilling. I could not believe my friend  
 was having an affair with this married,

dull professor. But Wayne Thiebaud,  
 standing where a professor would,  
 painted her as the play of shade  
 and light on a body—an insight which

he'd had as a boy, too poor to buy the pastry  
 shining like the moon through plate glass.  
 What's luscious transcends the bakery window.  
 Crisco's likeness to oil paints is witchery.

"Student," by Wayne Thiebaud (USA) 1968: <https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/FC.839/>



## THE LOGICAL CONCLUSION OF DIEBENKORN'S DISTANCES

Richard Diebenkorn, *Prisoners' Harbor, Santa Cruz Island* (1961)

I'd like to walk down a ways, see the distant building which seems to be a Victorian bungalow with its own view of the bay. But the foreground of this painting is a tall, roseate wall. The viewer

is near-sighted, then far-sighted—the maybe bungalow cannot be inspected closely. The antique-white rococo of it remains unresolved. We can still peer over the wall. The green that could be a tennis lawn is besmirched

by an offhand black stroke that can't be inspected either. The black mark reclines across a part of the green beyond the wall. The angle's a slash, so it is not a tennis net. The black brushstroke ruins the logic of a fence.

The stroke of black paint lolls and laughs at realism. At the same time I think it's very real—that frustration, that buzzer saying *wrong*. This logic, that of a fence or the knowledge of perspective, won't hold here. But maybe

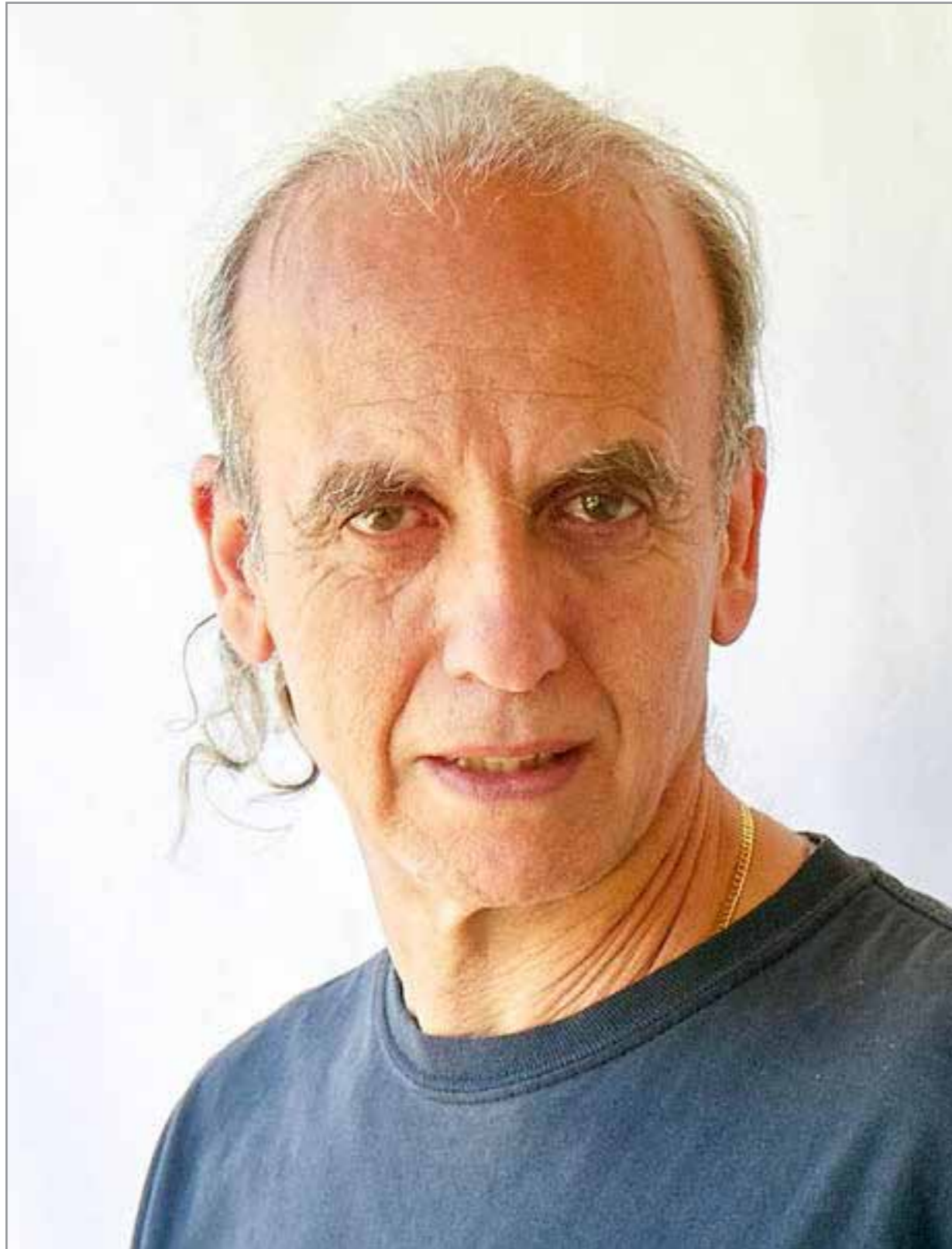
it is the logic of vision. Wallace Stevens made frustration the whole point. Yet he also said this racist thing I won't repeat about a poet. It's painful to admire the *nicer knowledge of Belief, that what it believes in is not true*.

But when he said this racist thing I won't repeat, why could he not apply it to his own belief? What was his true belief about who should *not* be crowned a great poet? Here are the limits of vision.



"Prisoners' Harbor, Santa Cruz Island," by Richard Diebenkorn (USA) 1961:  
<https://diebenkorn.org/objects/322/>

David Adès is the author of *Mapping the World*, *Afloat in Light* and the chapbook *Only the Questions Are Eternal*. He won the Wirra Wirra Vineyards Short Story Prize 2005 and the University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize 2014. *Mapping the World* was commended for the FAW Anne Elder Award 2008. David's poems have been read on the Australian radio poetry program Poetica and have also featured on the U.S. radio poetry program Prosody. His poetry has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and twice been shortlisted for the Newcastle Poetry Prize. His poems have been Highly Commended in the Bruce Dawe National Poetry Prize, a finalist in the Dora and Alexander Raynes Poetry Prize (U.S.) and commended for the Reuben Rose International Poetry Prize (Israel). David is the host of the monthly poetry podcast series "Poets' Corner" which can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLb8bHCZBRMBjWIPDeaSanZ3qAZcuVW7N>. He lives in Sydney with his wife and three children.



## THE ALCHEMIST

The alchemist read the tea leaves of her heart,  
found her calling early.

The music of transformation swelled within her.  
The sciences, yes, chemicals and potions, flasks, beakers,

and the vectors of contagion,  
but she was drawn to more than this, to esoterica,

to the human psyche, to swirling seas of emotional vortices,  
to intricate mazes of the soul, strategies, chess gambits,

military manoeuvres, the cut and lunge of politics.  
Secretly, telling no-one, she made potion after potion,

refining, discarding, pouring the gold of her beauty  
and youth into them, the alchemy of her obsession,

an entire life of toil, patient, refusing frustration,  
until her final act, her antidotes destroyed,

a triumphant smile on her wizened face,  
removing the stopper, kindness flooding the world.

David Adès

## ALLOTMENT 21250/?

Waking up this morning to another allotment  
in the uncertain sequence of allotments —

wedged between allotments 21249/? and 21251/? —  
I validated the assumption (again)

that I would wake up, an assumption daily  
more tenuous. Waking up to an assumption

daily more tenuous, I flicked the domino  
of assumptions and watched their click, click,

click of validation as they each tipped over.  
Watching their click, click, click of validation

I ticked them off: the day cold with snow  
and ice, slippery slick on the steps to the streets,

on the sidewalk; the face in the mirror  
as tired as yesterday's, darkening

with another day's stubble,  
a headache already manifesting,

two girls still asleep in their beds,  
a mental list of tasks lining up, ordering itself.

With a headache already manifesting  
I started on the list of tasks lining up,

the day inscribing new, unheard notes:  
preparing breakfast for the girls —

awakened now by my wife  
to their respective allotments —

gathering schoolbags, a chess set,  
homework, a swim bag, a lunch box,

all of us living the same, different day,  
going about the four paths of our lives,

together and apart, combative, wilful,  
recalcitrant, each of us with our own needs,

our own wishes, singing our own notes,  
our own discordant songs,

unable to harmonize if not by accident,  
going about the four paths of our lives,

apart and together, living the same,  
different day, preoccupied with

our own concerns – oblivious amidst it all  
to the day's singular music,

to the four submerged melodies rising and falling  
within us, amongst us, between us.

## LOST

The day I argued with a door  
and came off second best

I was at the Art Gallery  
researching a painting

to relieve it from obscurity,  
from a cache of paintings

lost in a storeroom and  
rediscovered, provenance unknown.

My mood was pontifical.  
I orated to the bin

(when no one was looking)  
at the lost art of art

and prepared a list  
on a whiteboard

of iconic paintings  
thought lost and then found.

I thought of myself  
as lost and not yet found

as I read the inner screen  
of my longings,

the secret artist in me,  
riotous colours

splashed over time  
and never seen.

## PLEASE

do not rouse me  
from this fitful

jumbled dream  
of a life

that I can make  
little sense of

but that holds me  
in its beautiful

capricious arms  
like a familiar lover

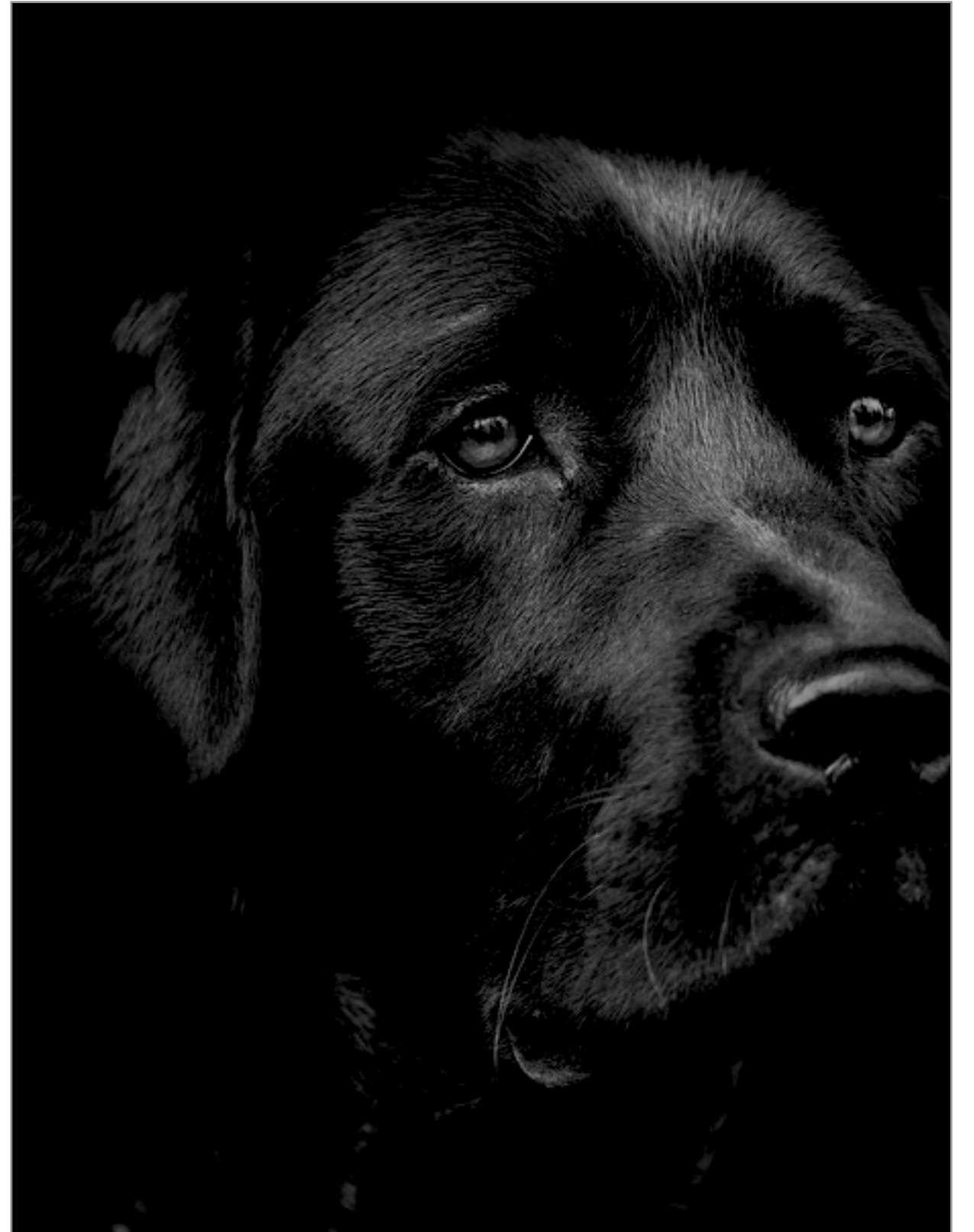
whose every curve  
and breath

I want to know  
and whom I too

hold tightly  
not wanting to let go.

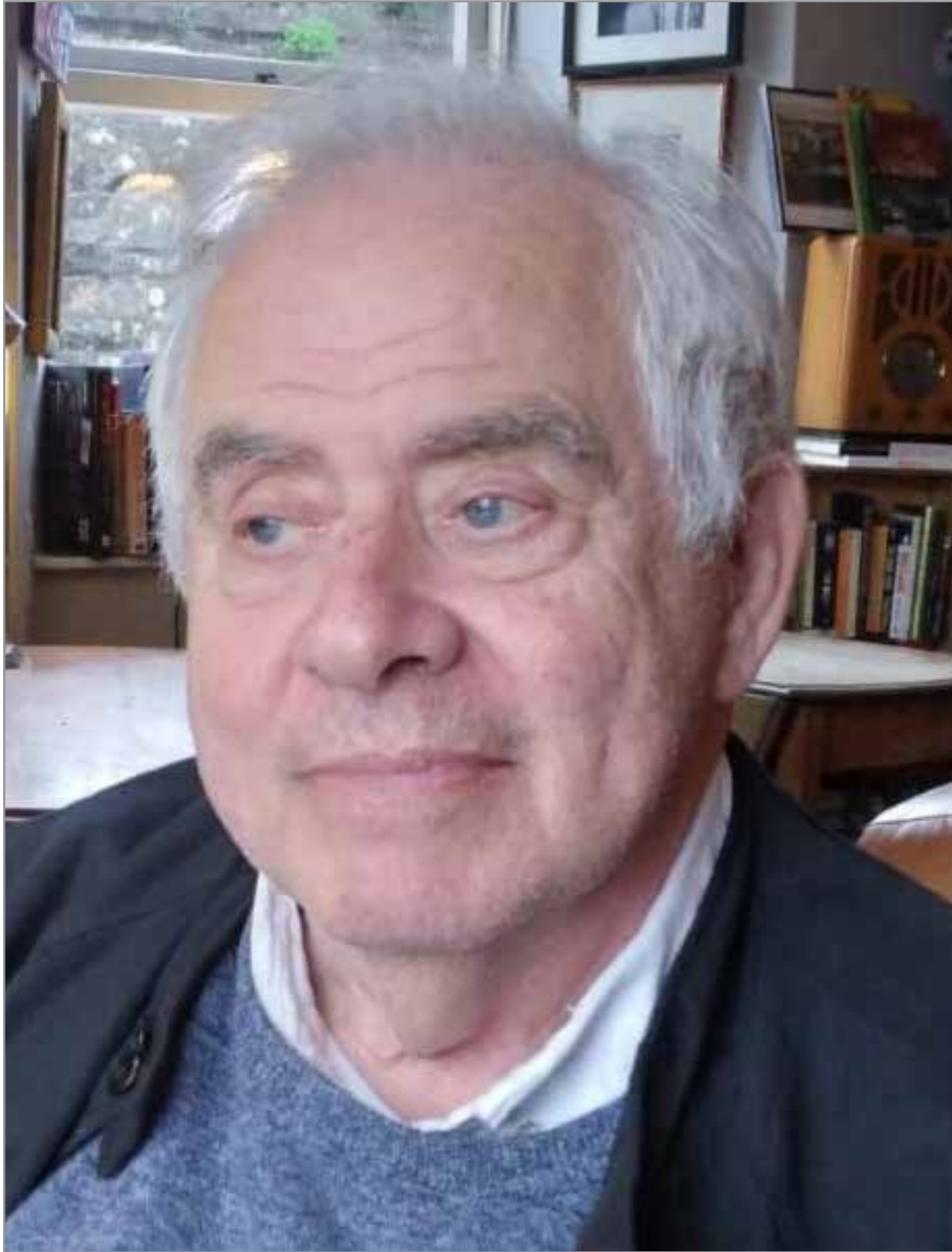
## THE NAKED FACE

A shock wave ripples, ripples outwards each time I meet the naked face of obsession, its intent glare, its bared teeth with their bulldog grip never letting go, and my life resembles a house of cards, flimsy and once again toppling, until I too fall into fixation, and aware that Inuit has fifty words for snow, must know which language contains the richest repository of darkness, literal and metaphorical, darkness of the soul and heart, looming, malevolent darkness, darkness of the oncoming storm, shifting shadows pooling in the dark rooms of the house of the black dog, darkness welling from deep inside the pit of betrayal, nuances of darkness, gradations, sooty onyx, stealth panther, glooming dark, the mine's obliteration of light, darkness of the times, kernels of darkness expanding inside the end of all things.



Photograph courtesy: <https://pixabay.com/photos/dog-labrador-retriever-lab-animal-7671355/>

Richard W. Halperin's poetry is published by Salmon/Cliffs of Moher (four collections since 2010) and Lapwing/Belfast (eighteen shorter collections since 2014). In autumn 2024, Salmon will bring out a *Selected & New Volume*, Introduction by Joseph Woods, drawing upon most of these. The eighteenth Lapwing, *Three Red Hats*, appeared in July 2024.



Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Joseph Woods.

## ROME, SUMMER OF 2016

I am on the terrace of  
my usual café, avenue de Villars.

The young waiter with the limp and the nice smile,  
maybe me way back when so my heart goes out to him,

brings a second coffee.  
Things are fine as they are, things are fine as they are.

A pull to Rome,  
but I shall not go.

Its detestable Coliseum, the heat,  
the absence now of Ingrid Bergman.

What is the difference between a Paris street –  
the trees, the traffic, the people, a slipping of the masks –

the human face for a moment  
openly dear – and a hospital?

So well captured in the novels of James T. Farrell,  
*No Star Is Lost*, *The Death of Nora Ryan*.

Music is a signal from other worlds.  
Open the envelope, there are piles of them

in the bedroom, in the kitchen.  
In a few days Teri Murray will launch

her new book, but for a book like hers,  
days don't exist.

Clouds.  
And people would rather watch television.

## LETTING GO THE STRING

Utter mastery. Letting go the string.  
Joseph L. Mankiewicz  
does this in *A Letter to Three Wives*.

Maugham does it in *The Razor's  
Edge*: On the first page, this is  
what I shall do. On the last page,  
I seem to have done it.

I have to mention suffering:  
they have theirs, I have mine,  
you have yours and no one's  
affair, that. 'My yoke is easy,'  
says Jesus. And, when I think it,  
it is. But I seldom think it.

When an artist lets go the string,  
my own suffering seems  
suddenly dowdy. A string weighs  
nothing at all.

## TEA SHOP IN THE RAIN

Colour and light. Henry James.  
Zinka Milanov. Chardin. Philip and  
the eunuch in their little scene  
in *Acts*. They begin to separate off  
from the surfaces they have so  
divinely imprinted. Venice in the rain.  
Venice in the rain blurs whatever  
distinctions there are among morning,  
afternoon and evening. A teashop  
in the pouring rain as seen from  
the street. No idea what is going on  
inside and everything is going on inside.

Paris Rosemont is an Asian-Australian poet and author of poetry collection *Banana Girl* (WestWords, 2023), shortlisted by the *Association for the Study of Australian Literature* for the 2024 Mary Gilmore Award for a first volume of poetry. Paris's poetry has been widely published and has won awards both locally and internationally, including first place in the *Hammond House Publishing Origins Poetry Prize 2023* (UK) and shortlisted for the *International Proverse Poetry Prize 2023* (Hong Kong). She takes delight in bringing her poetry to life through multi-disciplinary modes of expression, including theatrical performance. Paris may be found on Instagram @msparisrose, Facebook [www.facebook.com/parisrosemont](http://www.facebook.com/parisrosemont) or at [www.parisrosemont.com](http://www.parisrosemont.com)



## MY DEAREST, DARLING EVERYTHING

I love your dextrous, strong and tender hands;  
cartographer—keen circler of my maps.  
How you adore me fierce, without demands  
for me to bend or change till I relapse  
to factory settings, bland as CO(g).  
A thirsting fish, I thrash inside my bowl  
all goggle-eyed and gasping at my need  
for you. I'd give up civil rigmarole  
to lick the knife's edge of your intellect.  
No pleasure comes without a smidge of pain—  
for you I'd gladly die the little death:  
*again, again, again, again, again!*  
And when I reach Saint Peter's Gates above,  
I shall festoon hot entrails of my love.

Paris Rosemont



Mark Laurent is a professional musician and writer. He's recorded over 20 albums, worked as a recording producer and session musician, as well as touring NZ, Australia and the UK for several decades. Mark has published 4 collections of poetry, an illustrated children's book, and has written numerous articles and reviews for New Zealand and international magazines. He is currently putting the finishing touches on an anthology of poetry and short prose, as well as a candid memoir of the 1970s hippie scene in Aotearoa. He lives in Auckland. <https://marklaurent.bandcamp.com/>



## BLUE SKY MORNING

Early on a blue sky morning  
the tall city still sleeping  
air autumn crisp  
eyes blinking, mind opening  
tiredness receding from late bones

In younger days I always rose early  
a hunter of epiphanies  
mildly obsessed by bright shadows  
- things that just might be

Somewhere among the days  
my zest for wonder faltered  
bed became too familiar

I'm trying to work out  
how many mornings have woken me  
but schoolboy arithmetic is faltering too  
- maybe twenty-five thousand...?  
that's quite a few mornings  
quite a few epiphanies  
quite a few repentances  
quite a few breakfasts

Sun peeks over the horizon  
- glows against mirror glass  
as near-full moon sets  
behind high-rise ramparts

I still hope to make an epiphany  
of blue sky mornings  
- the light I receive

Sometimes I do.

Mark Laurent

## RUBY

*(a letter to a dying friend)*

Hi Ruby

I wish I had healing hands  
I want to have so much faith  
that I could reach across the miles  
and touch your failing body  
with that power you need  
to get you on your feet again  
running and dancing  
through those flower-strewn fields  
you wander in your dreams

I wish I had words so strong  
so full of life and breath  
they'd shake the foundations of the earth  
make her set you free  
give up that clinging grasp  
with which she tries to hold you down  
and those dark mountain clouds  
would have to move aside  
and let the sun shine on your lovely face

But all I have is these words  
and a yearning in my heart  
that God will hold you close  
and whisper - lips soft against your hair -  
hold you still and warm till morning  
when you hear that first bird singing  
and know his song is for you  
because you are love's best reason  
for the sun to keep on rising.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Anton Floyd was born in Cairo, Egypt, a Levantine mix of Irish, Maltese, English and French Lebanese. Raised in Cyprus, he lived through the struggle for independence and the island remains close to his heart. Educated in Ireland, he studied English at Trinity College, Dublin and University College Cork. He has lived and worked in the Eastern Mediterranean. Now retired from teaching, he lives in West Cork. Poems published and forthcoming in Ireland and elsewhere. Poetry films selected for the Cadence Poetry Film Festival (Seattle, 2023) and the Bloomsday Film Festival (James Joyce Centre 2023), another, *Woman Life Freedom*, dedicated to the women of Iran, was commissioned by IUAES. Several times prize-winner of the Irish Haiku Society International Competitions; runner-up in Snapshot Press Haiku Calendar Competition. Awarded the DS Arts Foundation Prize for Poetry (Scotland 2019). Poetry collections, *Falling into Place* (Revival Press, 2018) and *Depositions* (Doire Press, 2022); a special edition of *Depositions* translated into Irish, Scots Gaelic, Welsh, and Scots with an introduction by Professor Seosamh Watson (Gloir, 2024). New collections *On the Edge of Invisibility* and *Singed to Blue* are in preparation. Newly appointed UNESCO - RILA affiliate artist at the University of Glasgow.



## LONGING

*for Alison Phipps and all at UNESCO - RILA*

I'm longing for a permanent recess  
from these tedious follies of empire;  
from slogans that make a virtue of excess.

Spare me from those who callously profess  
their worn-out shibboleths of power.  
I'm longing for a permanent recess

and some ease of living without distress.  
The world is burning yet in hellish fire  
from slogans that make a virtue of excess.

This all-devouring vanity, success,  
has made of innocence a monstrous pyre.  
I'm looking for some permanent redress.

Even stones, dumb till now, do now protest.  
With justice rise (we must) before we all expire  
from slogans that make a virtue of excess.

I'm longing for a world in which largesse  
is the defining gift - each heart's desire.  
I'm longing for a permanent recess  
from slogans that make a virtue of excess.

Anton Floyd

## CYPRUS - A LATE AFTERNOON

Γλυκά καρπούζια. Έχω καρπούζια,  
κόκκινο σαν το αίμα του λαού.

Sometimes when I hear the sound  
of a double-cab pick-up on the road  
it winds back the ticking clock.  
Childhood ghosts suddenly crop up  
like flares in a spool of ciné film -  
Not just the whirring sound on tarmac  
of hostile ferret cars on patrol;  
or police vans with loud hailers  
enforcing the curfew; but also  
the sound one late afternoon  
of a laden truck, a village vendor,  
his rough voice thinning  
and sharp over the tannoy:  
*Sweet watermelons. I have watermelons  
red like the blood of the people.*  
The noise alarms roosting birds and  
the flame tree in the garden explodes.

## THAT LONE TREE ON THE EDGE OF A DREAM

That lone tree, glassed in the lake,  
carries the sky in its branches.  
In the water, as if under ice,  
there are indistinguishable faces  
guarding their dark element  
with their terrible mouths -  
all teeth and thin lipped.  
They are mouthing hurts  
miming their disbeliefs,  
mocking the tree's isolation.  
They see only that tree  
and can't imagine the reach  
of its roots or the wide forests  
poised in its tiny seeds.

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.



## FRAGMENTS

**1**  
Autumn crueller than winter,  
in a warm sun the iciest breath.

The loneliest leaf  
parched in mud  
reduced to fragments  
paler than cement dust.

**2**  
During an encounter of several minutes.

He pauses to call a girlfriend.  
'I can't talk ...  
I have to leave you  
for reasons I'll explain.  
We'll always love each other.'

As he hangs up, 'I'm sorry,'  
my voice trails as I grip his hand.  
'No, that's my lover,' he replies.  
'This juncture is where I am.  
Why I come back.'

**3**  
Our worst moments  
arise without awareness.  
Days pass.  
A tract where nothing grows  
– sunlight on a stretch of parkland  
covered in dew, a lone cigarette,  
stubs in mud, worn outlines  
of boot heels.

Edward Caruso

*continued overleaf...*

4  
Nails in the trunk of a tree.  
Such pain flowing out of me.

5  
During an encounter of several minutes.

Bus stop: an elderly lady I'd joined had  
no ticket, her remaining coins  
bought my spare.

She remembered working in rice fields,  
being transported to work in Romagna  
and having to climb five flights of stairs  
to her apartment.

The elderly woman tells two nearby commuters  
who'd just appeared that she'd arrived after me.

Three hundred metres from our stop  
a bus, defying a snap strike, comes to view.

6  
Aldo Moro Park, by the River Savena.  
In the canopy masses of pigeons,  
midday breezes,  
scattered seeds and leaves.  
Sudden departure and return, shadows  
of the flock gliding across lawns and treetops;  
endless fluttering oblivious  
to my copy of Pasolini's *Canzoniere*,  
it's reading lost to the flight  
and sudden silence.

7  
Cemetery, San Lazzaro di Savena.  
Stems, the more leaves they have  
the less their roses drink.  
Gardenias, adjacent tombs  
decorated with our spares,  
their deceased closer to us.

Weeping oaks and pines,  
white skies.  
The drive home, avenues  
of ploughed farmland opposite  
apartment blocks, rows of grapevines,  
leaves receding to their autumnal residues,  
colour of tilled soil.

Fields, clods of earth and treetops  
covered in blood-red creepers.  
Our departed, always with us,  
each second of November.

8  
The mists and gales in Fellini's movies ...

9  
The deep red  
of your blouse across  
the bed.

Lay lie next to me  
sky inside me  
fingers tongue nipples

I'm inside you

fading light,  
breath.

James Deahl was born in Pittsburgh during 1945, and grew up in that city as well as in and around the Laurel Highlands of the Appalachian Mountains. He moved to Canada in 1970. He is the author or editor of over thirty books (mostly poetry) and is the author of fifteen poetry chapbooks. A cycle of his poems is the focus of a one-hour American television special, *Under The Watchful Eye*. As a literary critic, Deahl has written about Milton Acorn, Raymond Souster, and Bruce Meyer, as well as sixteen leading poets of the Confederation Period, and he has presented university lectures on Alden Nowlan, Robert Kroetsch, Canadian Postmodernism, and the People's Poetry tradition.



## FELIX GIRARD

*The stars that lent us dust  
sing in our blood*

- Katherine L. Gordon

Seven feet of snow buries California,  
but near spring here in Ontario,  
and it's only early March.  
My grandson's not three weeks old  
and still free of trepidation concerning  
life in our despoiled world.  
Every bird that absconded south  
fearful of winter has returned weeks early  
while spring's first flowers erupt yellow  
from soil long released from frost.

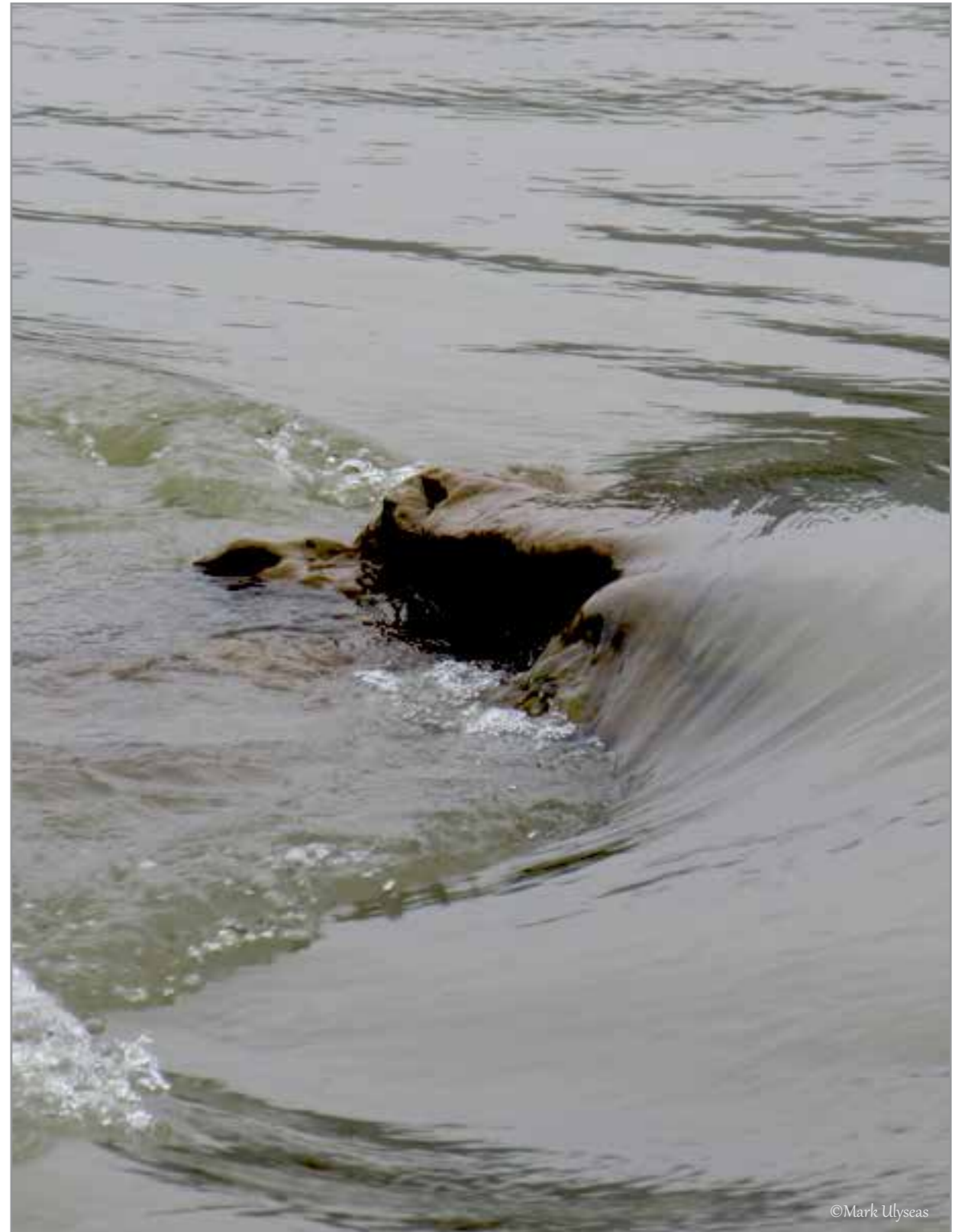
His future is inscribed in a journal  
without pages; leaves in the beech grove  
whisper as expanding buds push them free;  
each shriveled leaf that falls tells a story  
to those who know their language.  
They speak of love inflaming a human heart.  
After my daughter feeds him,  
my grandson sleeps while I cradle him  
against my chest. The light shining  
from his tiny bones enters my body like stars.

James Deahl

## MISTY MORNING, SARNIA HARBOUR

No other walkers in sight and few squirrels  
to share this mist drifting off our harbour.  
Ghost ships at loading docks are scarcely there,  
the other shore's nearly invisible.  
Sounds sleep swaddled as if nothing dared breath;  
in the moist heart of stillness, no bird sings.

Almost every place one steps, unmarked graves  
of Indigenous people, early French  
settlers, cry out wordlessly, desperate  
to relate their tales of injustice  
where two civilizations collided.  
Just like today in Sudan and Gaza,  
we've made our earth a living cemetery.



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Katherine L. Gordon is a poet, publisher, author, editor, anthologist, judge, reviewer and literary critic. She has many books, chapbooks, co-operative books and anthologies internationally. She is the recipient of many awards including Best Foreign Author from the 9th international edition of "I Colori Dell Anima" Italy. She earned an award from The World Poetry Association for her contribution to peace poetry. Her work is translated into many languages and will appear this year in a U.S./Korean anthology and two international collections in Italy and China. Katherine believes that poetry is a unifying force across the planet.



## BROTHER BLACKBIRD

The blackbird fights a rising wind,  
 I see him soar between the gusts  
 with enviable grace  
 riding each wave with clever descent  
 into harbouring trees.  
 I link my spirit to his,  
 buffeted between the tempt of sky  
 and pull of earth.  
 Clouds part for me in caped surprise  
 duty and mundane let go.  
 I would erase all war and strife  
 see the land as everyone's,  
 tame the wind to benevolence  
 scatter the seeds of grace and joy  
 the love of soul-flight  
 let the earth and heavens be one  
 in a rapture of green clean freedom.

Katherine L. Gordon

## CASTLES IN WALES

Stones so old, clutching secrets,  
built to make bold statements of impregnable defense  
while time in her mirth at human illusion  
erodes keep and tower  
erases boot-hollows in ancient steps.

Yet we sense the power, the iron belief  
in weapons and zeal, the spirits caught  
in old shaped stones like a startled gargoyle,  
his smashed face and bleeding neck forever part  
of that castle-wall fabric.

A mind-switch stirs in motion the busy reeking kitchens,  
ladies farewelling weaponed gallants, love suspended.  
The lust for power and control fragrancng the leaf-strewn air,  
the passions of another time echoing in our confused blood,  
so primal so real, we no longer know how to channel it.  
We touch a rampart and recover our equilibrium,  
all so docile now but the primal heart stirs.  
I know these walls and still search for you.  
Marooned in a cell-phone time  
where true immersion in another does not happen.



A painting of Caernarfon by J. M. W. Turner in 1830-1835.

I have lived in Phnom Penh, Cambodia for 22 years. I am retired from teaching, academia, and IT, peppered with stints as a publisher, editor, poet, and poetry advocate. Nowadays, I concentrate on writing poetry and maintaining some contact with the old poetry life in California. I have two full length poetry collections, the most recent, *Still Life with Coffee* (Brandenburg Press, 2022). I am included in several anthologies, one of which I co-edited with Christopher Buckley and M.L. Williams, *How Much Earth: The Fresno Poets* (Heyday Books, 2001).



## WAKING IN THE DEAD HOUR

No lover rousing early, no sighs from trees or river,  
no birds signaling dawn, no hum of traffic,  
no stars, Moon's full light two weeks away  
as loneliness pours into the cruel pitch of night,  
slaking the self's stubborn addiction to misery.

With nothing to look at, thoughts turn inward,  
a landscape fraught with misinformation and lies  
amid mirrors reflecting the vacant everything.

Hours later, after night has drawn gradually away  
and light becomes the breath of revelation,  
worlds reappear in expected places and  
the sweet comfort of familiarity pervades the air.

Shadow hours call out persons to look back at life,  
which cannot be held up with too much pride  
as little of it their own making, merely  
mouthfuls of foredoom whispered to the dark.

David Oliveira. Photo credit: Roeun Nakry.

## THE WORLD WILL BEAR WITNESS, AGAIN

*Tuol Slang Genocide Museum,  
Phnom Penh, Cambodia*

The first time I came here was at my insistence.  
A young man attached to me on entry,  
a guide talking enthusiastically to the air,  
not an employee, but a student working for tips.  
He didn't have enough words in English  
for the story, but I didn't need many words.  
The place reeked of eloquence in those days  
before the floors were scrubbed, walls painted,  
flowers planted, barbed wire coils pulled down.  
I only really saw it that once, though I've  
taken guests there a few times, letting them  
wander the rooms on their own while I wait outside,  
my eyes summoning the rows of display racks  
with perfectly spaced photo portraits of ghosts  
whose plaintive eyes still plead to all who pass.  
Everyday activities take me by there often,  
but the import barely registers now,  
rarely looking past the high walls and new  
entrance to the heart-wrenching stories beyond.  
Buses deliver tourists, not judges.

What does it mean to bear witness?  
What can it change? What does it change?  
Such places, as this one, spatter over the planet,  
almost no spot, however small, untouched—  
infamy wrapped in patriotic slogans,  
morality relegated to public relations managers  
and peppered with the spice of amnesia.

I'm not trying to convince you of anything.  
Neither am I trying to impose the beauties  
and music of language, which are abundant,  
over the strains and difficulties of living,  
of which there is also an abundance.  
I am trying to say that we are not a species  
which seems to learn from overcoming problems.  
With our great minds and enormous talents,  
we bring the same sins back time and again,  
exacerbate them, improve tools of delivery.  
We assume the species will ultimately survive,  
that the good angels eventually will out,  
that we have capacity to create the world  
in the harmonies of equity and peace  
despite a paucity of evidence.  
Our science teaches our world is fragile,  
that our existence depends on good luck  
more than good inventions or intentions.  
Someday, humans, the good and the bad,  
will be cleansed from this remarkable Earth.  
From that, whatever stories, if any, come,  
only the countless stars will bear witness.

## THE WORLD FROM CAFÉ NOVO

I will walk in the morning without forgetting.  
I will look at serious faces walking past  
and wonder if they too are absorbed with regrets.  
I will still wonder this from an outside table  
at Café Novo watching more faces walk by.  
I will wait for cappuccino while light dances  
through mango leaves into unserious patterns  
on the table in my unimposing corner  
where no one knows me, and I know no one either—  
where I hide seething angers raging beyond sense  
behind screens of convivial conversations  
and shyness that should have desisted long ago.  
The world's no more unjust today than yesterday;  
so why has release forsaken me in old age?  
Time swipes each hard-earned year from my life with such speed,  
it's a kindness nerves numb me against feeling it.  
Men and women who frequent the café also  
bring their hard lives which come for each differently.  
Though none are blameless here and all arrive lonely,  
they do not remain alone. They sit at tables  
beside people who sit at tables beside other people,  
none of whom come with maps showing their connections.  
Such is the price exacted for walking on Earth,  
for the luxury of sitting in this café,  
this calm space from which to unfold our destinies,  
the stories we make up, step by step, as we go.

## MAY 3RD 2024

Late night brings flashes of distant lightning  
on schedule to start the rainy season,  
  
though still a bit too soon for rains themselves,  
which should come along in a week or so,  
  
not an uncertainty that would trouble  
anyone born to incessant changes  
  
in Earth's raging days. As the present one  
that planned to nest evening in quiet dark  
  
before fierce winds opened across branches  
and sound turned from air whipping against leaves  
  
to hard spatters of water on a roof—  
rain, at its insistence, coming early.

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, Birmingham Arts Journal, La Presa and Shot Glass Journal.



John Grey

## COLLECTING SPECIMENS

I park the car at the sight of antlers,  
a moose up to its knees in a marsh  
below the road,  
long submerged muzzle  
nibbling away at water plants,  
shoulders hunched high, dewlap dangling,  
the perfect specimen already in my head  
now made true to life  
by the creature itself.

I'm on a New Hampshire backroad,  
having already checked off coyote,  
fox and white-tailed deer.  
My brain's black bear I don't expect to see  
but the lumbering hooped giant  
completes a perfect run of impressive mammals.

And that's not counting the wild turkey flock,  
the vultures, cooper's hawk,  
and sundry songbirds.  
I imagine them before.  
I celebrate them after.  
My head is a nature reserve.  
So is nature.

## FOR DUALITY, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

Men are neither soft tissue nor sandpaper.  
Just some combination of the two.  
Like how I'm angry in a forgiving way.  
Or exceedingly proud  
of how meek and unsure of himself  
I can be.

The list goes on.  
Lusting with the purest of intentions.  
Greedy taking what I generously give.  
Unambitious at wanting everything.  
Saving and spending.  
Grieving and laughing.  
Mercifully cruel.  
Courageously faint-hearted.  
Even down and out when I'm out and about.

Without the duality,  
I'd be one thing or another.  
And I wouldn't want that.  
Or maybe I would.  
At least, I agree to disagree.

## BEHIND THE TALK

When you speak, one word may mean a completely different word.  
That's why I don't just hear but intuit as well.  
Otherwise, I won't know what in hell you're talking about.  
I'll just get sound when what I need is feelings and ideas.

One word may in fact substitute for an entire sentence.  
Or a whole paragraph. Or a story that, you figure,  
you won't have to tell me as long as some word, some  
innocuous quietly spoken word, can make the rounds of our conversation.

It's more than just subterfuge when I'm talking to you.  
You wipe your tracks with some low-hanging fruit of the English language.  
I'm sure you don't think of it as lie.  
More a way of offering sanctuary to the truth.

I must admit that you're quite good at the deceit.  
It takes all of my wits to penetrate your tongue.  
But who you are is in hiding. What you've done keeps its silence.  
That's why, when you're done speaking, my listening takes over.

Barbara Anna Gaiardoni received two nominations for the Touchstone Award 2023, recognized in the Haiku Euro Top 100 list for 2023 and on The Mainichi's Haiku in English Best 2023. Her Japanese-style poems have been published in 190 international journals. They have been translated into Japanese, Romanian, Arabic, Malayalam, Hindi, French, Chinese, Korean, Turkic and in Spanish languages.



## HAIKU

mother's day  
a rose bud pure  
Himalayan salt

nerves in tatters . . .  
a madeleine moistened  
in lavender tea

in tandem  
scent of hay  
and red dirt

summer feasts  
forced to navigate  
no luggage

flowers of violet  
fragrance on the back  
of her neck

falling star  
it's not the star  
that I want

Barbara Anna Gaiardoni



Mandy Beattie's poetry appears in, Poets Republic, Drawn to The Light, Lothlorien, Ink, Sweat and Tears, Visual Verse, WordPeace, Wildfire Words, Spilling Cocoa, Last Stanza, Poetry Super Highway, Crowstep, Spoonie, The Pen Points North, Full House Literary, Verse-Virtual, 5 Words, Abridged, Big Girl's Village Lockdown Showcase, House of Commons, Resilience Frontiers Films, anthologies and many more. Winner of Words with Seagulls and City of Poets Competitions. Poets Choice, Marble Poetry. Shortlisted, 10th International Five Words Competition; Creative Future Writer's Award and Black Box Competition. Best of The Net Nominee, 2024. Short story in, Howl New Irish Writing. Forthcoming poetry publications in, Dreich, Lunares Zine, Coin-Operated Press, Orphic Review and Federation of Writers Scotland Anthology.



## A GHAZAL FOR CAITHNESS: THE LAND O' THE CAT

The Land o' The Cat scaled Scaraben's  
clavicle when the ice came midwinter

Mute swan over hummocks and water hollows  
a plaid ribbon never tame midwinter

The twin greylag geese of Camster Cairns  
their drystane dyke lichen a vine and ivy

on standing stones and scrambled yolk  
of marsh marigold aflame midwinter

Pirns of thread in ground-ganse's string sedge  
among kelpies in lochans and Wee Folk

on Faeries Hill playing Cat's Cradle  
under herring bone sky's hame midwinter

Mizzenmast in smoor-mist and whirling dervish  
winds on Drove roads and Clearance crofts:

Stone aikles in salty tears in the shebang  
of sphagnum not to blame midwinter

Mandy Beattie

*continued overleaf...*

But the Selkie of St Trothan sees not black  
crowberry and black bog-rushes only sundew

and dragonfly under North Star's amber musk  
In the Land o' The Cat dame is midwinter

even after duck-egg blue ceiling on daffodils  
and yellow on the broom. Aurora Borealis

over rowan, stone barley and sporrán  
of heather after Muirburn's game midwinter

Returning to Heavenly Dancers ashes will fly  
with hen harrier and merlin birthing

into the next cleat of peat; pearl inside  
a seed pod of wame's midwinter

## BLUE-MOON FORE-TELLING

Angelica withdrew; drifted  
into other-worldly third eye, portent-flames

and augur-dreams with angels, ravens and one magpie kneeling  
on stirrups of kin-branches under worm moons. Knew sure

as breaking eggs under a waning gibbous moon  
when her granddaddy clawed his last wheeze —

A sibling named her witch. Hissed  
*That's not true. That's not true. You're wicked*

Her mama thought devils danced among those visions  
in kindling, coal lumps and peat — So, Angelica went incognito

deep undercover; kept hag-stone and crystal ball kennings, comings  
and goings, close as a mute-muff under waxing crescent moon's

waxwing and yew. Overseas she keened; kenned  
her brother's heart murmur slipped beneath full moon's

waves. Killed time  
like last quarter moon's top-heavy bough waiting for telegram's

ebony armband.  
Her mama's mama another oracle interred deep

as wild fig tree roots; not broiled in tar like the Brahan Seer  
or Janet Horne and her ilk stake-burnt, or dunked in tipsy chairs

*continued overleaf...*

for soothsaying of new moon's umbilical arrivings  
gatherings and harvest moon leavings. Those

God-gifts endowed through daughters with their royal toe  
longer than the hallux — Aurora a fey mystic too

Yet, their Clan were no hung jury  
but Kangaroo Court



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Al-Bahaa Hussein (1969) is an Egyptian poet and journalist, born in Sohag, Upper Egypt. He has published 14 books and poetry collections. Moreover, he obtained a doctorate in Arabic literature. He is also a member of the Writers and Journalists Syndicate in Egypt.

*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 LETTER WRITER

He used to raise the words in his mouth  
Just as his mother raised the chicks in the courtyard of the house  
That nurturing, whose duration and impact remain unknown  
Yet it manifests in the hands over time.

He used to act with the village's share of words  
As if he were its sole heir  
So that he finds something suitable for every heart  
He knows from the erection of the woman's nipples  
That one of them wants to send a letter  
To her expatriate husband  
And from the paleness of the face  
From the grief  
From the longing of the features  
For a hand to touch them  
From the eye, when it shines and becomes a bed  
He knows that the lady needs  
To embody the role of a folding sheet  
And when the words that fulfill love are not available  
He resorts to reminding her of her sorrows.

Perhaps she wanted to send a letter to her brother  
Who died in the war, and they did not find his body  
So, they sent his things instead of him  
The thick socks, the remains of the jar of mish cheese  
And a crumpled picture of his beloved  
And because the letter writer does not  
Find enough tears at the lady's disposal to hold a funeral  
He borrows poignant words from the living balance  
She kisses the address and the addressee  
And when he finishes, she sticks the letter with her tongue  
To reassure herself that she has closed the envelope on loneliness  
So, it does not fly away.

Al-Bahaa Hussein

*continued overleaf..*

Many times, he wrote about himself  
While writing letters to widows in which they appealed to luck  
He used to say that the village roads  
Where donkeys and mules walk naked  
Are luckier than them  
Nothing covers their desires  
He used to write that widows are more  
Entitled than the roads with this spontaneity  
But he never knew who to address the letters to.

He used to write letters to God on behalf  
Of the village  
About its enduring wait  
Its struggle with bilharzia before its power waned  
About the rusty locks that grew weary of their duty  
About the humble homes that could never justify their poverty  
Sometimes, He would write in the air  
Careful to insert dots on every letter  
Yet, God did not seem inclined to answer a child  
Who used tears as ink or words.

Oh Lord,  
The widows are still waiting for me  
And the village streets have taken my steps as a mortgage  
Until I repay the debt  
So, do not embarrass my fingers  
And my dry pens that wrote to you  
To allow "my father" to visit my mother  
Even in her dreams  
To ask for an hour each night from his grave  
And leave her  
With enough money and kisses  
To stop her cries.

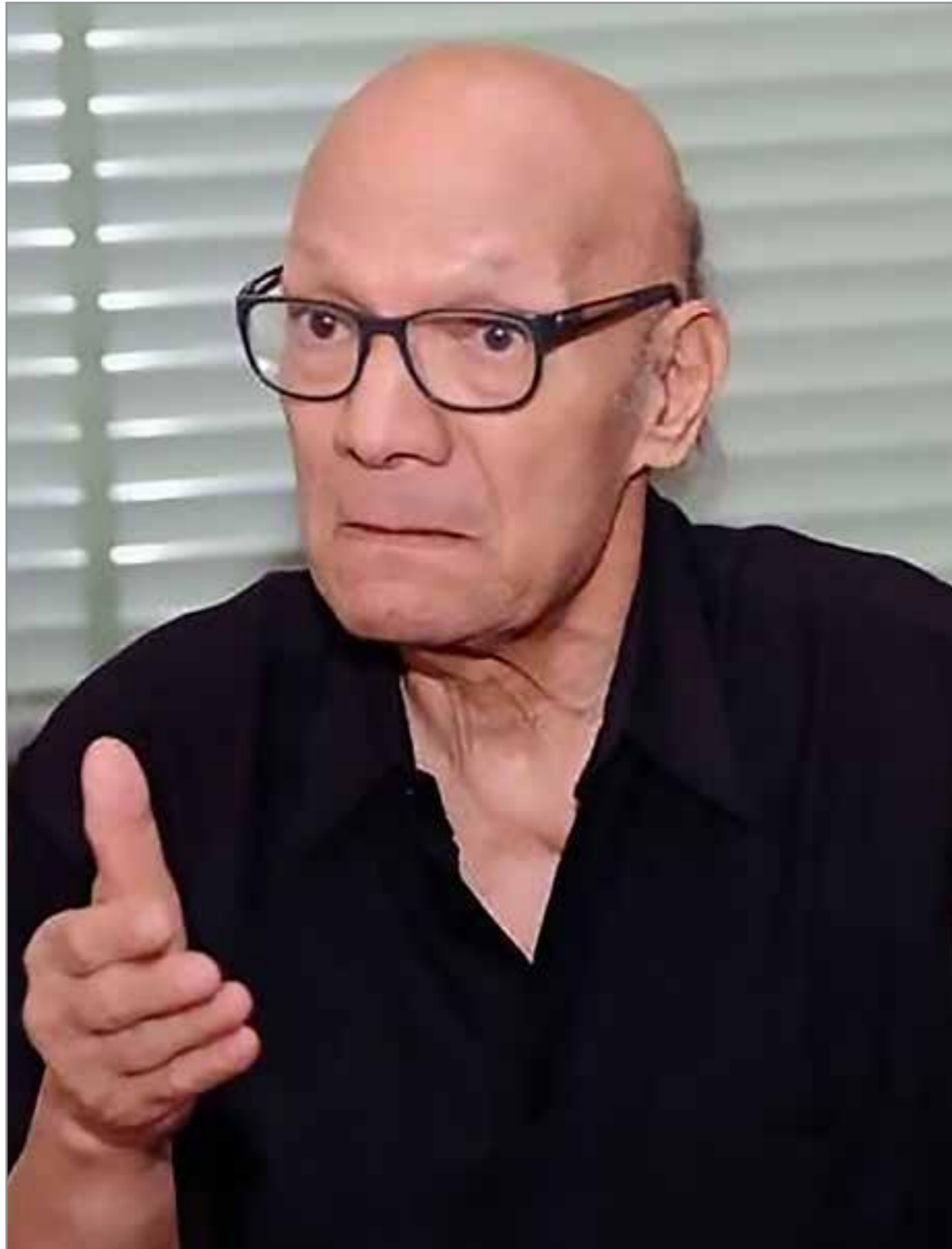
O Lord, I am the writer of letters  
The lines used to flow under my hand  
Just like the years that pass without glories  
How many lives have been ruined  
In mailboxes because of me  
Husbands returned to find their wives in the embrace of the grave  
Sometimes my letters went to the wrong addresses  
And many times, they could not  
Pass the borders  
I am the writer of letters  
I lived stranded, wandering in the distance  
Between every pair of hearts  
Until I turned into a letter sent long ago  
But it never received a reply.

Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi (1935) is an Egyptian poet and critic. He has actively contributed to numerous literary conferences in various Arab capitals and is recognized as a leading figure in the modern Arabic poetry renewal movement. His poetry has been translated into several languages, including French, English, Russian, Spanish, Italian, and German. He has been honored with the Greek-Egyptian Kavafi Prize in 1989, the African Poetry Prize in 1996, and the State Appreciation Prize in Literature from The Egyptian Supreme Council of Culture in 1997.

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## ME AND THE CITY

This is me  
 And this is my city  
 At midnight  
 The open space of the square, and the towering walls  
 Appear and then vanish behind a hill  
 A leaf in the wind spun, then landed, then  
 Got lost in the pathways  
 A shadow fades  
 A shadow extends  
 And a curious, dull lamp eye  
 I stepped on its beam as I walked by  
 And my heart's turmoil with a sad episode  
 I started it, then fell silent  
 Who are you.. who are you?  
 The clueless guard does not grasp my story  
 Today, I was evicted  
 From my room  
 And I became lost without a name  
 This is who I am  
 And this is my city.



Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi

## LOVE IN THE DARK

Do I love you? My eyes say I love you  
 And the tone of my voice says it  
 And my long silence  
 And all the companions who saw me, they said... I love  
 And you still do not know  
 I love you... when I offer my smile  
 Like a passer, walking by for the first time  
 And when I greet, then I quickly pass  
 To enter a room  
 And when you tell me... recite a poem  
 I recite it without looking back, fearing the eyes meeting  
 For when the eyes meet the poem, it opens a door for a captive bird  
 I fear for it if it becomes free  
 I fear for it if it lands on your hands  
 So I keep it away from them  
 But in the evening, I confess  
 I walk on the corridors of serenity  
 And open the doors of my heart  
 And release my bird  
 I converse with the city's radiance  
 As it dances under the bridges  
 I say to it... O radiance, feed my heart for I love  
 I say to it... O companion of ships and travelers, answer  
 Why does the lover walk alone?  
 Why do my arms keep hitting the bushes without an arm?

And the light and shadow mesmerize me until  
 I feel like I am part shadow, and part light  
 I feel as if the city enters my heart  
 As if words are spoken, and people walk beside me  
 So I tell them about my beloved  
 My beloved came from the countryside  
 Just as you came once, my beloved came  
 And the wind threw us on the shore, hungry and naked  
 So I fed him a piece of my heart  
 And combed his hair  
 Made my eyes mirrors  
 And dressed him in a golden dream, and we said we'd walk  
 For the best of life is abundant  
 And he takes a path, and I take a path  
 But in the evening we meet  
 So I look speechless at my beloved's face  
 My beloved came from the countryside  
 And I tell them about you until  
 The moon sleeps on its western side  
 And the wind inhabits the heart of the tree  
 And when I return, I tell myself  
 Tomorrow I will tell her everything.

Chawki Bazih (1951) is a contemporary Lebanese poet. He has dozens of books on poetry and prose, as well as critical, literary, cultural and intellectual articles. He won the Okaz Poet Award in 2010 and the Al Owais Cultural Award in 2015. He also received the Jumblatt Medal in 2010, the Palestine Medal in 2017 and the Special Honor Award at the Mahmoud Darwish Award for Culture and Creativity in March 2020.

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## HOMES

Homes are birds that nest their chicks with longing  
 Every time they move away from  
 The inclined iron of their windows  
 And homes are bridges of nostalgia  
 That connect the cradle to the grave  
 The feathers of the first adventure  
 The clay of reproduction  
 The secret of symmetry between nature and character  
 Between the funeral and the midwife  
 And homes are lines that compose us  
 With their sea like a poem  
 One line of verse after another  
 So that we weigh memories with its scale  
 Every time the melody breaks  
 Or the compass gets lost  
 And homes are roots  
 That always bring their inhabitants back  
 Towards the same place they left  
 For its sun protects them  
 From the dizziness of the heights  
 And from paths that scatter them  
 In the fractures of the place  
 And homes are time that divides  
 Its beats equally on its dwellers  
 So they can swim between two homes:  
 The home of existence and the home of nothingness  
 And to silently cross

Chawki Bazih

*continued overleaf...*



Between what collapses and what heals  
And homes are our longing womb  
For residence in the archipelago of drowsiness  
Seeking a connection with the sea without water  
So we can lament our initial fires  
Or mourn a time that will never return to the earth  
And homes are our lost paradises  
So, care about your homes  
Carry them, like the turtle, on your back  
Where you are and where you go  
For in their shade, you will not lose  
The way to your own shore  
You will not tire of their black stones  
No matter how far you stray from their winding paths  
You will not bend over a cradle  
Less harmful than their neglected bridges  
And you will not find in the frost of your winters  
Anything equivalent to leaning on the rock of the family  
And the silk of silence  
Care then about your homes, turn  
Even once, towards them  
Then hasten your steps  
Towards the home of life that never dies.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Hassan Najmi (1960, Ibn Ahmed, Settat province) is a Moroccan poet, author, and journalist. He was The President of the Union of Writers of Morocco between 1998 and 2005 and the former head of the House of Poetry in Morocco. He is also the President of the Moroccan Center for the International PEN Club and the Secretary General of the Argana Prize for Poetry. Furthermore, he founded the House of Poetry in Morocco with a group of Moroccan poets (December 1995) and was elected vice-president and spokesperson for the House. He received many Arab and international awards, and his works have been translated into more than ten languages. He has also translated into Arabic the poetic works of several of the world's leading poets.

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## THE SINGER'S VOICE

The cup of song slipped from my hand  
 I drank, quenched my thirst, and sang  
 And the drink took over me  
 Together, we exchanged meanings in the song  
 You cried –  
 And I, captivated by the gaze, count the tears and the words  
 And the conversation of the song continued with us  
 You asked me:  
 Why did the tone break in the verses?  
 And I asked you:  
 What does the singer's voice imply?

Hassan Najmi

## LIKE A LITTLE STRAY WEED

You were standing there the whole time  
Waiting for the day to end  
A solitary tree in the plain kept looking at you  
It was almost shadowless  
And when night finally came  
You remained standing at the threshold like a little stray weed  
No one or anything trusted you  
Even the night itself did not invite you in.

## TORTUGURO

There, in another moment, I see you  
From here, I see you  
I turn towards the distant memory of your smile  
And I see you through the greenery  
And this solitude and the pathway  
I try to make sure of the color of the shadow  
I pick a red flower without asking its name  
I hear a bird's chirp that I do not see  
I open my gaze to the sea, the river, and the light  
Warm rain is now falling on my life.  
I will leave, returning to my room in the "Ikaku"  
My shadow in my step.

Sameh Mahgoub is an Egyptian poet who graduated from the Faculty of Dar Al Uloom. He participated in many major poetic and cultural events inside and outside Egypt, including those in Tunisia, Morocco, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Algeria, and Jordan. In addition, He participated in the jury committees of state awards, as well as obtaining a number of awards and honors, including: the shield of the Prince of Poets Ahmed Shawky, the Al-Babtain Award for his poem "On the Rhythm of His Laughter, He Walks", the Atheer Award for Arabic Poetry for his poem "I Write to Defeat My Death". He issued a number of poetry collections, including: "Nothing Equals the Sadness of the River", "Digging with One Hand", "The Metaphor of Water", and "The Wind Explains Its Travels", and some of his poems have been translated into French, English, Russian, and Spanish.

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## I WRITE TO CONQUER MY DEATH

I write to break free from my constraints  
 To leave a perplexing question  
 Above the river's lips  
 For a prophet who comes after me  
 Sitting in the seafront café  
 And signing in my name  
 Above the lips of his rustic beloved  
 I write so that love in a café does not mourn  
 If the narrative comes to an end.

I write  
 To unlock the gates of heaven  
 For the rebels and the outlaws  
 Those with the blue collars  
 Imbued with the spirit of defiance  
 I know that God is beautiful  
 And that's why  
 I open the gates of paradise  
 Without seeking permission.

I write  
 So that I can see myself  
 In the darkness of my own, something I do not know  
 It does not know me  
 We intertwine every morning  
 Then we return as two  
 We are brought together by the love of a woman  
 Who loves only herself  
 How dreadful it is for a person to beg for his shadow!



Sameh Mahgoub

*continued overleaf..*

I write  
 So that all my beloved ones can hear me  
 Those who nibble at my heart  
 So they become a love poem  
 In my blue notebook  
 Time jumped quickly over my wall  
 And time split in half  
 But I am still there  
 Waiting for a poem  
 The cloud has run out and did not flash.

I write  
 To satisfy the text's anxiety  
 There is a female invading my bed now:  
 You are stupid  
 She said, and my ten fingers  
 Gently prowl around the waist:  
 Do not look around in a clear meaning  
 Say to the sun: good morning  
 And to yourself in the mirror...  
 How ugly I am!  
 The world is more beautiful than a language  
 That doesn't feel the longing of a woman for her first love.

I write..  
 So that another Cain doesn't kill  
 Another Abel  
 So that the world expands  
 To include the white and the black  
 Strike the ground with your wing..  
 So that a word comes out  
 Free your soul from your body.

So that it becomes a word  
 Flee from yourself..  
 So that a word penetrates  
 Tell your girl  
 Before boarding the sea  
 I love you..  
 So that a word grieves  
 Be a word..  
 So that you see.

I write  
 So that I defeat my death..  
 My filthy friends  
 With the noise of the mind..  
 They are still waiting for the revelation..  
 Under the sky of the imaginary gods  
 No sanctity for an angel  
 Not touched by masturbation  
 No sanctity for a single meaning  
 Salma said:  
 Do not love anyone but me..  
 I am the heroine of your first poem  
 I am your tears standing on the roads  
 I am the witness at your grave..  
 I water your cactus from my breast  
 And I guide the legend to you  
 Before the flood.

2010 - 2024



# Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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COVER ARTWORK 'AUTUMN LEAVES'  
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