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APRIL 2025

JANE FRANK
Places for Poetry

COVER ARTWORK 'UNVEILING EXISTENCE' BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
 Publisher/Editor

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APRIL 2025

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JANE FRANK

PLACES FOR POETRY

As I sit down to write this editorial, we've just celebrated UNESCO's World Poetry Day— 'acknowledgment of an artform practiced throughout history across every culture, as well as an artform that speaks to both our shared humanity and shared values'. As we face all kinds of global and local challenges—geopolitical tensions, parts of the world at war, disinformation, misinformation and mainstream media narratives, rising mental health and anxiety concerns, health crises, climate change and biodiversity loss, just to mention a few—it has been well reported that people are increasingly turning to poetry for daily comfort and inspiration rather than just on those occasions when they grieve or celebrate milestones. People that can't find honesty and authenticity or that have no easy way of expressing their dismay or disbelief, are finding that poetry is a solution. Poetry—so intimate and beautiful on the page—has never been so necessary out in the world.

At the school my teenage boys attend, they are encouraged to graffiti poetry and song lyrics and to collage images in a stairwell that is a dedicated place of self-expression. On a recent tour, I was told this is about encouraging young people to write and be creative but also about the connection between writing and wellness. Poetry is a part of their everyday and something they are proud to show me and interested to talk with me about. It is accessibility that has opened their eyes to the artform which, in other times and at other schools, may have made access to and acceptance of poetry as a creative vehicle more challenging.

Jane Frank

continued overleaf..

Spoken Word and Slam Poetry events are thriving here in Brisbane and across the country, drawing younger people and those from marginalised communities, in particular, to them. Slams are helping young people discover their voices and it is excellent to have these gatherings as spaces for people to step into, perform their work and feel heard. Having spoken to many Brisbane Slam poets over recent years, I know that during these hostile contemporary times, many young people are relieved to hear poetry being spoken that articulates what they are thinking and feeling. Younger poets are responding to the issues of the day—the environment, the cost of living crisis, the failings of governments—in the safety of Slam communities with passion and creativity. So much of getting people hooked on poetry—whatever kind you practice—is making sure there are places for it where young or like-minded writers can support and encourage each other.

On a visit to Glasgow a few years ago, I remember posting a short poem in the Glasgow Botanic Gardens Poetry Postbox that is located in a lovely corner of the enormous 40 acres of gardens. It has the shape of a red pillar postbox but is created from cream fired stoneware and decorated with flora and fauna in clay by a graduate of the Glasgow School of Art called Julia Smith but was the idea of theatre actor and writer Stuart Ennis who wanted to encourage young people to write poetry. An inscription on the ceramic surface reads: *Please post your poems here* and is also repeated in braille code. I have never forgotten it. For the same reason, I enjoyed watching a short video recently about the Poetry Pharmacy in London offering ‘walk-in prescriptions, literary gifts and poetry books to address emotional ailments.’ It is great to see poetry being shown off.

There are too many examples to name but the brevity of poetry allows so much scope for sharing it on billboards and bridges, in buses and on trains and ferries, so it can captivate the public mind. In 2024, Poet in Residence at the University of Melbourne, Maxine Beneba Clarke, led a series of workshops where new and established poets were invited to submit a haiku on the theme of renewal—new beginnings and fresh perspectives—and winning poems were spread across the city on billboards. Melbourne has run many of these public art initiatives including Moving Galleries on Melbourne trains some years ago that curator and organiser Leanne Hills writes was partially inspired by watching the Jane Campion film *In the Cut* (2003) where a woman’s life is changed by reading lines of poetry on the New York subway.

Again, Raining Poetry in Adelaide is a street festival that aims to foster a closer relationship between poetry and the public. Students from the J.M. Coetzee Centre for the Humanities at the University of Adelaide spray paint carefully curated poems onto pavements using a special, water-repellent paint, so they only become visible when it rains. Wonderfully, in 2022, Raining Poetry in Adelaide was able to be extended across regional South Australia.

I’ve been watching, first-hand, and thinking a lot, about the way poetry events can become important third places (not home, not work) where poetry takes on the secular role of galvanising people searching for something—for creativity, for community, for beauty. I go along on the last Thursday of each month to an event called Poetry@Stones—a poetry reading series held in a bookshop at Stones Corner on Brisbane’s inner southside. The event is the brainchild of poet Brett Dionysius and the event mainly features poets reading from new collections. Each month, I see poets and poetry-lovers I know, but also people I have never met before, people wanting to embrace this small renaissance of poetry in the suburbs and who are keen to continue the conversation afterwards at the Stones Corner Hotel. The ingredients are a winner—the slow consumption of poetry, the localness, the bookish sense of place and the learning of something new—an idyllic couple of hours free from the challenges of modern living.

I have published two books with Calanthe Press, a poetry publisher and one arm of a larger collective that hosts poetry events on Tamborine Mountain in the Gold Coast hinterland in south east Queensland. The collective is inspired by the lives and work of poet and activist Judith Wright (1915-2000) and writer Jack McKinney (1891-1966) whose home ‘Calanthe,’ named for the Christmas orchid *calanthe triplicata* was their refuge on the mountain for many years. The Calanthe Collective has worked tirelessly to place poetry in public spaces on Tamborine Mountain including a series of poetry sculptures in Main Street that feature excerpts from poems by Wright, Mabel Forrest, Jena Woodhouse and other poets with a connection to the region. From Wright’s considerable output, Main Street features ‘Song’, which starts:

*O where does the dancer dance—
the invisible centre spin—
whose bright periphery holds
the world we wander in?*

continued overleaf...

Poets are drawn to the refreshing poetry events on the mountain as much for the place as the poetry. The Winter Garden Party, held in an auditorium-like sunny glade in a garden of huge established trees, planted with flowering shrubs, vegetables and an orange and lemon orchard, is a signature event each year when the winners of the Calanthe Collective Prize for Unpublished Poetry are announced and winners read their work to guests in the garden. For the past few years the major drawcard has been a half-hour reading by well-known Australian poet and novelist David Malouf. It is a privilege and a treat to hear David read poems like 'Earth Hour' that begins:

*It is on our hands, it is in our mouths at every breath, how not
remember? Called back
to nights when we were wildlife, before kindling
or kine, we sit behind moonlit
glass in our McMansions, cool
millions at rehearsal
here for our rendezvous each with their own
earth hour*

(Earth Hour, UQP, 2014: 54)

Poets gather with deck chairs, picnic blankets, thermoses, wine and cheese, wrapped in pashminas and rugs, rosy-cheeked and receptive. Anyone taking part feels part of the living fabric of the town for that day. Perhaps it is because people want the 'experience factor' that is such a marketable commodity that poetry is benefitting. These are life-affirming afternoons, afternoons of heart, where what is on offer is a core piece of goodness. These are well attended events.

I'm sure the pop-up aesthetic is helpful to this rekindling of interest. I recently read a clutch of love poems at the BLUSSH Romance Festival in an inner-city shopping precinct early on a Saturday morning, and it was wonderful to see the intrigued faces of shoppers and slightly sleepy not-necessarily-morning-people looking for their first cup of coffee, confronted with poems that seemed to wake them up as much as the bright morning sunshine. Many people stayed for the whole set of six poets. It struck me that perhaps people need the contemplative and the creative more than ever — a counterpart to everyday routines, a juncture at a particular point in time, or sometimes, a kind of pilgrimage. They are searching for essences and maybe these are to be found in unexpected places. I don't believe this sharing and disseminating is a watering down of poetry as an artform. These are just other ways and places that help people to find it.

A few years ago in Wellington, New Zealand, on a research trip, I found the Wellington Writers Walk quite unexpectedly as I wandered along the iconic waterfront— a series of text sculptures featuring quotes about the city by well-known New Zealand poets and writers. The public path that follows the picturesque harbour features 23 inscriptions that can be variously seen underwater, on wooden decking boards, hidden on the underside of a pier and on concrete slabs. I particularly admired Denis Glover's (1912-1980) poem extract from the poem 'Wellington Harbour is a Laundry' published in *Come High Water* (Dunmore Press, 1977):

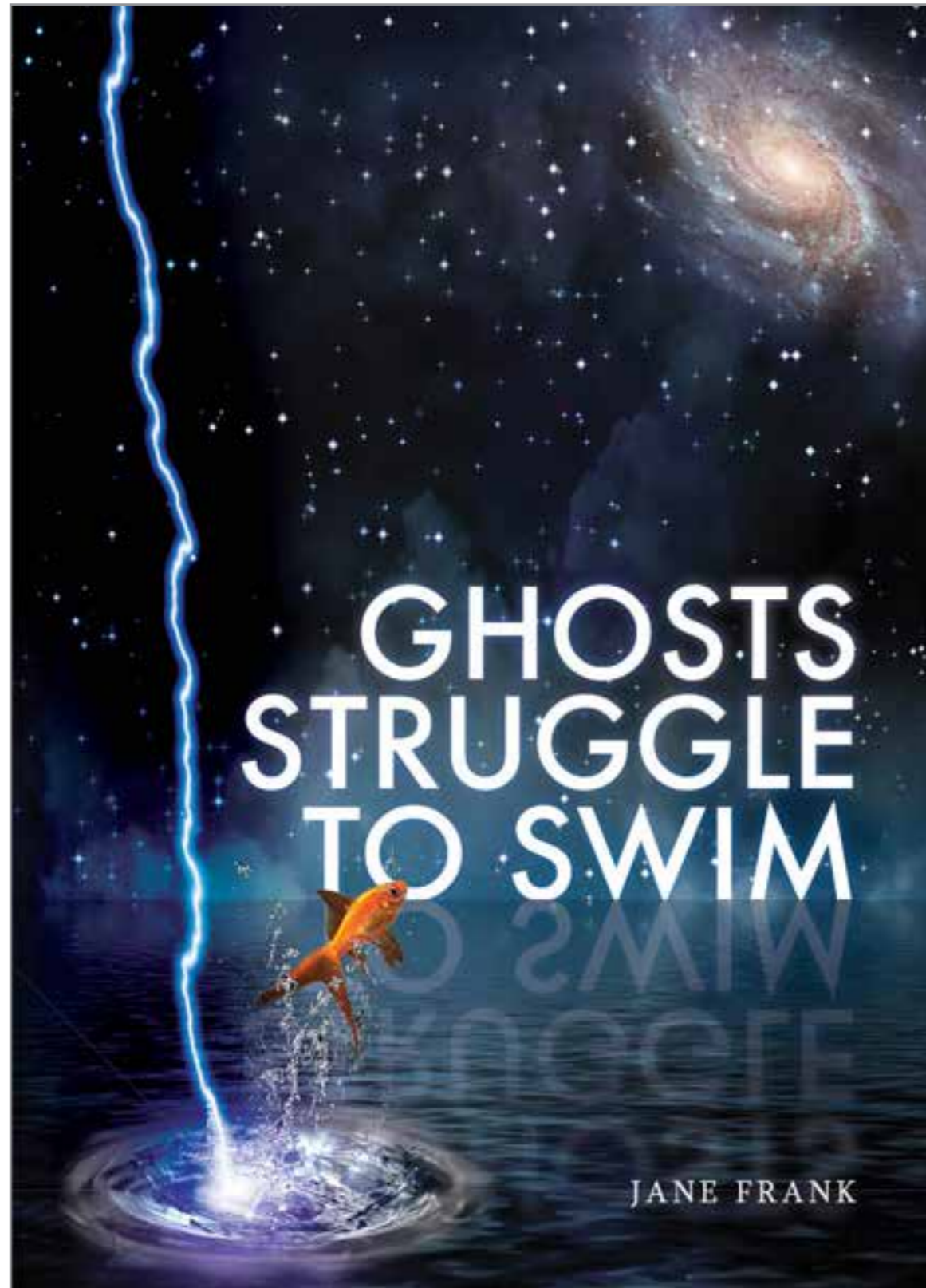
*The harbour is an ironing board;
Flat iron tugs dash smoothing toward
Any shirt of a ship, any pillowslip
Of a freighter they decree
Must be ironed flat as washing from the sea.*

There is nothing more moving to me than poetry in the cityscape or landscape that it is written about. I was just as moved a few days later when visiting Featherston book town in the South Wairarapa district that sits at the foot hills of the Rimutaka Range and close to the northern shore of Lake Wairarapa. Before its relatively new status as a book town, Featherston was better known for its significant military past as the Featherston Military Training Camp was New Zealand's largest training camp during World War I, and later as a camp for Japanese prisoners-of-war (1942-45) and site of a mass shooting. A memorial to the camp was created in the mid 1970s that stands now as a symbol of reconciliation. The site features a cherry orchard and many memorial plaques, including one carrying a seventeenth century haiku by Basho in Japanese that translates:

*Behold the summer grass
All that remains of the dreams of warriors*

Poetry fits with slow ideas, life-affirming as it is, a turning away from the vacuous commercialism of so many leisure pursuits, so being at a poetry event is an act of resistance in a world of increasing distraction and a kind of intense engagement in a society that seems to encourage disengagement more and more. Walking helps as does poetry.

continued overleaf..



In these times when the world feels increasingly fast-paced and digital, the simple act of walking continues as inspiration for poetry. Wandering and poetry go hand in hand, and especially in urban settings, walking has long been tied to the production of poetic thought. Both Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin wrote about the meditative practice of walking as a flâneuristic way of observing the complexities of modern life. Contemporary writer and activist Rebecca Solnit, in her groundbreaking book *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (Penguin 2015), intertwines history, philosophy and personal reflections, inviting the reader to consider the connections between walking and words. At one point, she writes

...when you give yourself to places, they give you yourself back; the more one comes to know them, the more one seeds them with the invisible crop of memories and associations that will be waiting for you when you come back, while new places offer up new thoughts, new possibilities. Exploring the world is one of the best ways of exploring the mind and walking travels both terrains (22)

Again, though not a poet, Haruki Murakami's reflections on running in *What I Talk about When I Talk about Running* (Vintage, 2008) also offer intriguing insights about the relationship between movement and creativity, inspiration and introspection. I know the fusion of walking and poetry, for me, is about linking the rhythms of life and nature. Recently trapped inside for a few days during the Tropical Cyclone Alfred event here in Brisbane and wanting to use the time to write, I was disappointed. It was a strange time, but I couldn't string two words together. These days, I seem to need my feet moving over a footpath, a street, a park trail or winding up at my favourite coffeshop destination to coax a poem to start, handwritten in a notebook. The act of moving through a space or place, for me, opens the door to deeper insights. Any place could do, but there needs to be one.

Ghosts struggle to swim by Jane Frank available here: <https://www.calantheppress.com.au/books-and-authors/jane-frank>

continued overleaf..

A STORY OF WALKING

after Michel de Certeau

It's a crosshatched afternoon.
 I am attuning myself to chords of fretwork
 and gable, bus stop, cycle lane.
 Was this suburb really once farms—
 fields both sides of this road
 jotted in pencil?
 I can make a mirror image using the railway line:
 spindly pines and wild hibiscus clumps
 populating both halves.
 The infraordinary is what's happening
 when nothing is.
 I suppose small things count:
 a man jogging with his schnauzers,
 a too-loud exhaust,
 mangoes decomposing in blue-black shade.
 I'm not reaching anywhere fast
 but this is a vascular network of belonging
 —these streets—
 the ink and wax resist
 of this undulating January road.
 Two crows scurry midflight, then circle,
 pushing their destination back
 to where the clouds are scarred and pitted,
 sun and moon condensed
 into one target.

I suppose time's relentless tempo
 has been on my mind—
 a glimpse of my grandmother, still young,
 riding her bike upslope from the mill,
 wind in hair,
 sucrose a bloom on her skin,
 or my brother on a hobby horse wearing
 a cowboy hat, holster and purple tie
 or dahlia tubers dug up and dormant in rows
 against a dry brick wall
 like the half-dead.
 The past is checkered dense:
 I still have a floppy notebook
 and these footsteps.

David Rigsbee is the recipient of many fellowships and awards, including two Fellowships in Literature from The National Endowment for the Arts, The National Endowment for the Humanities (for The American Academy in Rome), The Djerassi Foundation, The Jentel Foundation, and The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, as well as a Pushcart Prize, an Award from the Academy of American Poets, and others. In addition to his twelve collections of poems, he has published critical books on the poetry of Joseph Brodsky and Carolyn Kizer and coedited *Invited Guest: An Anthology of Twentieth Century Southern Poetry*. His work has appeared in *Agni*, *The American Poetry Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *The New Yorker*, *The Southern Review*, and many others. Main Street Rag published his collection of found poems, *MAGA Sonnets of Donald Trump* in 2021. His translation of Dante's *Paradiso* was published by Salmon Poetry in 2023, and *Watchman in the Knife Factory: New & Selected Poems*, was just published by Black Lawrence Press.

AZALEAS

Sunlight inside the green zone of firs.
 Magritte-land: an apple greeting
 the bowler hat. A starling draws
 its scissors across the blue, some clouds still
 pink beneath—but fugitive, separating.
 Moon to the east. To the right
 of that same east, a silver river
 followed by a teapot roar. To the left
 a bird so high its seems to hail
 from the moon just now easing into sight.
 I sit in the garden grass looking
 for the moment when azaleas' ultramarine,
 simply by staying still as the last birds
 fold and return *en masse*, to the realm of ideas.



David Rigsbee

BAKERY

A cold day in spring: whitecaps.
A man kicked loose the rubber doorstep
to the chilly bakery, his sandaled feet
trim but blue. A man and woman bend
their heads over coffee whose steam
rises in the space between them.
A crow discovers that to fly straight
into the wind is to be hustled backwards.
Several try like Ninjas that the Master
orders against a supervillain. Each tries,
peels off, and dives out of the screen.
Bakery goods beckon from their trays
like students on the first day of class
positioned to see the new kid whose reputation
preceded him just when he thought anonymity
would at least get him through lunch.
The wind accelerates and the limbs twist
to see the pack of stock cars race past
the grandstand, and in turning their eyes fall
on others like themselves, not in the race
but jumping in the same spot, inspired
by the hot smell of gas and oil.

CUNARD

On a warm winter day,
I sit outside like an old playboy
knee-covered, on a Cunard deck.
There is water enough to fill at least
half of the view every time I look up.
There are also ridgelines and spokes of snow
coming off the mountain over the water.
The land after that goes on rising and falling.
You don't have to see it, any more
than a believer has to review his life
or a mayor survey a parade
before which he sits,
the little cars pulling up, then weaving
in formation before the reviewing stand
as the silly old men being justified
in faith, and careening
in their turbans, don't crash.

WELL DOWN

I would wake to find
my father hunched over the *Star*,
a genie rising unnoticed from his coffee cup.
By the time I woke the second time
he was well down the beach, his breakfast
seat parked under the table.

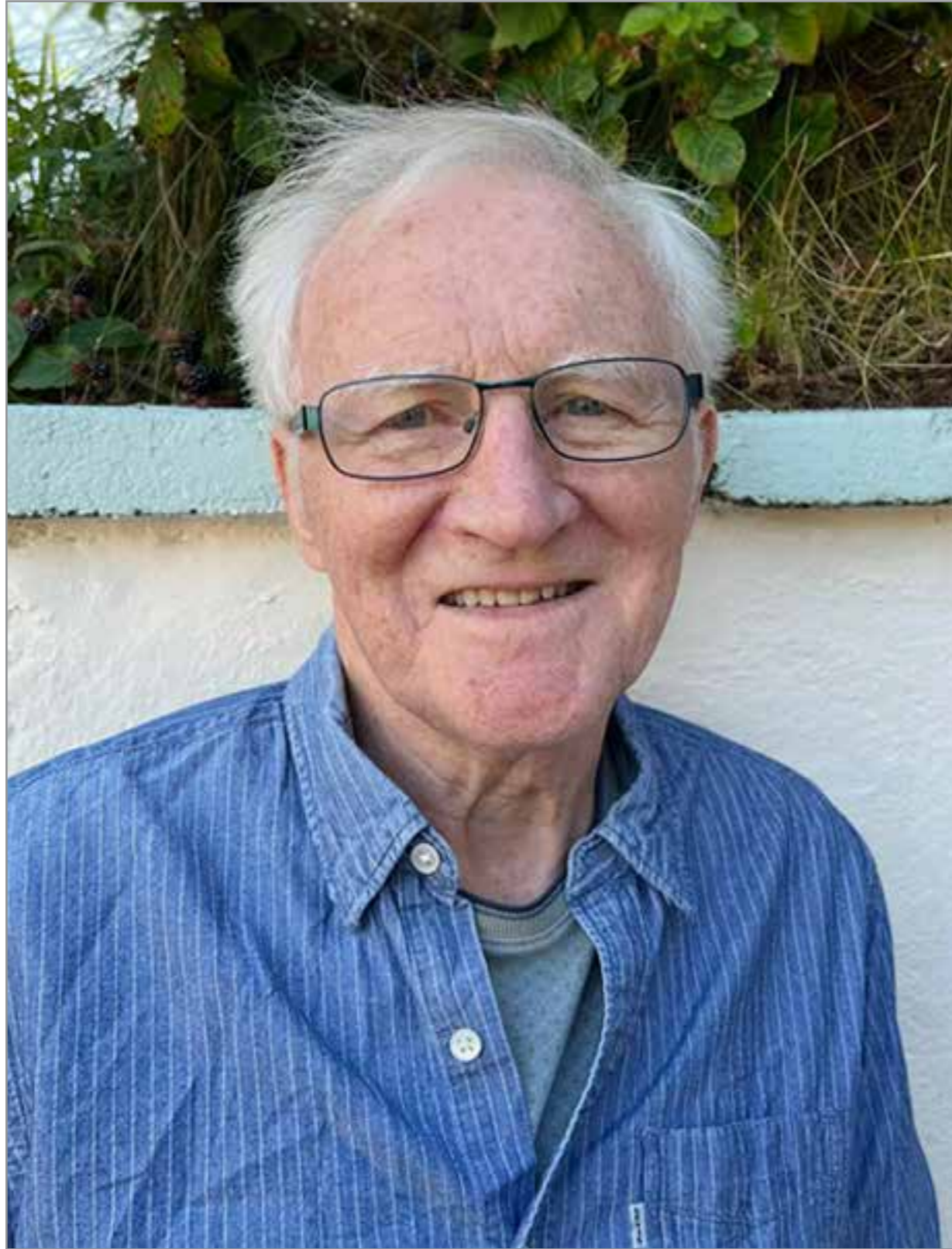
Our trailer is gone, the narrow island
bristles with development.
Weekenders have moved on down
the coast—or inland where bait buckets and gear,
canoes and ice chests—lean against the trees.
Possums take over where alligators stop.
Of course there were no alligators,

just stories, or some bullfrogs
in May when the world was mating.
Or something my father saw
looking down at a newspaper photo
and took as image when he walked
by the shivering cattails marking the place
where the sea took over from the road.

THE OLD COMMANDANTE

Clouds part and a tremendous ray
like one on the back of a Baptist fan
spills, and doing so, lights up the March mud.
I have come to my terrace again, as I try
to do every day, to watch the ferries
embark and disembark as if pulled
by invisible rope, churning between points
where land's advance meets the rocking water
indifferent to prodding advance or attention.
A breeze about the size of a dishcloth
tries to caress the cheek but is turned away
by the crow whose sudden recourse to noise
causes your head to swing around
like the vane on a chimney top,
and a helmeted Hussar snaps to attention
as the old commandante
drags his way through the room.

Terry McDonagh, poet and dramatist, has worked in Europe, Asia and Australia. He's taught creative writing at Hamburg University and was Drama Director at Hamburg International School. Published fifteen poetry collections, as well as letters, drama, prose and poetry for young people. In March 2022, he was poet in residence and Grand Marshal as part of the Saint Patrick's Day celebrations in Brussels. His work has been translated into German, Indonesian and Arabic. His poem, 'UCG by Degrees' is included in the Galway Poetry Trail on Galway University campus. He's been a voice and narrator on several RTE radio dramas (All Points West production) for young people. In 2020, Two Notes for Home – a two-part radio documentary, compiled and presented by Werner Lewon, on The Life and Work of Terry McDonagh, The Modern Bard of Cill Aodáin. His latest poetry collections: A) An eBook 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Not Dead' – Live Encounters Publishing. B) 'I Write Because' – Calendar Road Press. After more than thirty years in Hamburg, he returned to live in County Mayo in 2019.



CONUNDRUM

Poems won't protect us
from the inevitable
when we only want to write
about the inevitable
and
crosswords won't protect us
from the puzzle of love
when we only want to talk
about the puzzle of love.

Terry McDonagh

AN OLD BICYCLE LONGS FOR A BATTERY

Even a bicycle becomes a creaky thing in old age,
a kind of laughing stock to be tinkered with
by an old geezer who can't remember things being new.

His bike longs for a battery – it has seen shiny sorts
floating up foothills – but it doesn't know
you can't fit an engine to an ageing model – like trying

to outfit a billy goat with football boots on a catwalk.
Some senile sapiens might slacken but this old codger
moves with the times: he's got a hi-vis hoodie,

a plastic knee, a hearing aid, a saddle cover for his beam end.
He's got a pacemaker – a track record too and a bike that
stares at him in continued silence while he oils and fiddles

with rusting wrenches like the devil's handyman – and
to top it off he's got a helmet and lifetime membership.
Foreign ladies used to line up but that was years ago.

Yes, years ago, prior to memory becoming a burden.
Hills had never been an issue – his bike could strut
like a media model in those giddy, gale-force days

before gears, arthritis and dysfunction. Bells ring.
They sing out in colour and bikes churn out dreams
while rain, seasons and rust hang about in waiting.

An end will come when an end will come
and the earth, sun, moon and stars
will continue to align and rotate without batteries.

WHO AM I IN A SUIT?

Whither I come from and who I am I really don't know.
There were gods involved I'm told but can they be trusted?

They start wars, create hells – inhabit a gloomy beyond
and make their paradise a pipe dream.

When seriously alone and sauntering
I fry in my own fat and undress without fuss

but I will always try to step out sparkling and
tailor-made in my confused quest for top-table affection.

Needs must is the catch cry when hoping
for a candle-light-dinner-gong-call-to-order.

Some suits are so snazzy they engulf and swallow
and others, dainty as ballet feet, burst at the seams

and make us the laughing stock of hedgerows and suburban swank.
If I became part thoroughbred, I'd be spruced up and suited

to jump fences until ripe for a stint of stud work,
later to be butchered, roasted, carved and consumed

by thinkers or ones wishing to know more in France and elsewhere
and all proper in suits and smiles to keep others and selves at a distance.

Linda Adair is a poet, publisher & co-editor of <https://rochfordstreetreview.com> living on Darug and Gundungarra Country. In 2020 Melbourne Poets Union published her debut book *The Unintended Consequences of the Shattering*. Her poems have been included in several Australian anthologies most recently in *Oystercatcher One* as well as various journals both in print and digitally locally and internationally. She featured at A Gallery of Poets at The Dickerson Gallery, La Mama Poetica, Poetry at the Pub, Cuplet, Don Banks, Reading the River, Back to Newnes Day, BigCi Open Day, Sonic Poetry Festivals in 2023 and 2024, as well as the launch readings at Newcastle Writers Festival and The Shop Gallery of *To End All Wars* in 2018.



Linda Adair

GO TELL THE BEES TÉIGH ABAIR LEIS NA BEACHA ...*

... what the news brings in to
our living rooms scenes of death
of people too often seen as
Not Us :: Othered
dehumanised
demonised
dispossessed
expendable collateral sacrifices
buried in rubble by fear and egotism

how can we tell the bees
absolute power has no respect
for all the Othered people
beyond the meniscus of
colonisation's pale thin skin
which saves itself no matter
the cost to others

why is it that a hive mind
would have more compassion
than democracy's supposed best?

*Go tell the bees
téigh abair leis na beacha
may they share the gold of peace
an alchemy of empathy between
this world and the beyond
-- may their spirits harvest hope
and share it among lost olive trees.*

*Gaeilge translation of the title *Telling the bees* is an old Celtic custom, that is particularly important when someone dies, or is born, or goes or comes, because if you don't keep the bees informed they will fly away. Palestinians had been keeping bees for over 7000 years and the Israeli army had attacked the hives of this ancient industry in the occupied Westbank in the Hebron Hills even before October 2023..

LOVE LETTER OF UNCEDED LANDS

Between the *amuse bouche*
 & first course
 clouds obscured the woad profile
 of Wiradjuri rangelands
 near your family's farm
 mist enveloped the vineyard
 before sunshine broke through
 & we drank in the ever-changing view

as a young child
 Dharug land cradled me
 on the grassy swale of a filled-in well
 below swaddling blue skies
 until sunset etched into memory
 the Great Dividing Range's
 indigo silhouette as
 crimson transfused pearly clouds

then sunburnt skin would seethe
 as cool southerlies swept the
 unceded Cumberland Plain
 -- refuge from war and want for so many --
 slivers of golden light pierced Caley's Gap
 to scuttle over cracked '40s lino
 in that weatherboard that felt so much like home
 -- before I learnt what it was to feel alone

books stanchd that first taste of grief
 wiser minds decoding mysterious feelings
 created amazing vistas to my mind's eye
 until the lightning strike of adolescence hit
 imbued me with a strange new confidence
 not only in my mind, but my strengthening body.

As a young adult
 Canada's far horizons seduced
 more than the chimera of a love
 that palled so quickly
 unlike the thalo blue peaks
 indelible above the Strait of Georgia
 one summer evening remains with me
 though the hapless suitor was too easily forgotten

In inner city Sydney terrace houses
 on Gadigal Land, I partied and laboured,
 studied at night and worked by day
 gluttoned on ideas art writing plays movies bands
 amid the fake and the florid I was searching for real treasure
 saw and conjured dreams
 trying to find the words and schemes.

At the Performance Space
 a feminist poet introduced us
 we began collaborating on
 poetry projects & human rights causes
 review tickets to event openings & film screenings
 bought us time to really know each other
 as friends first then lovers who
 now share a spirit of this special place
 and a view to the timeless peaks that encircle
 the Grose Valley.

PERPETUAL EMOTION

Our story is
implicated with motion
always resolutely place-less
the diaspora of selves
the channelling of others

*driving always
going through
over or across*

the topography
of once-upon-a-time joy
all those big dreams & then ---
unforseen nightmares began
your suburban overload

*Classic Hollywood escapism
crisp black and white became
technicolour carmine and a getaway car*

you'd take refuge on the road
aspirational restless

things look better over an insect-streaked bonnet

a green nomad before it was fashionable
travelling toward perfection's mirage
that existed in your imagination

*scrounging
among the rusted coils of reality
for junkyard treasure*

sometimes now I'll drive
for the sake of *going*
under moonlight and alone
for the thrill of facing a windscreen full of sky
peacefully then I will wend my way home
aware the good times we shared
seldom happened in the family home.

*We went places and did things
tinkering with cars or revamping vintage furniture
& played with our German Shepherd.*

Sandra Yannone (she, they), Poet Laureate of Old Saybrook, Connecticut, USA, is the author of *The Glass Studio* (2024) and *Boats for Women* (2019), by Salmon Poetry in Co. Clare, Ireland. She is co-editor of *Unsinkable: Poems Inspired by the Titanic*, forthcoming from Salmon Poetry in spring 2026. Nominated for the Pushcart and Best of the Net awards, her work has appeared in *Live Encounters*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Lavender Review*, and *Women's Review of Books*, among many other print and online journals. Since March, 2020, she has hosted Cultivating Voices LIVE Poetry on Zoom via Facebook. Visit her at www.sandrayannone.com.



THE STAR SHOW

In an earlier life I became an astronomer. I plucked
stars down from night's giant sky

and placed them in my pocket, gently, like injured
birds, until their names arrived. Only then

did I release them back to their nutrient-rich night,
their gaseous soil-state to witness their casting

as they grew more into light. Sometimes
I'd release them to their pre-constellated

flights in pairs or flocks like puppies
or kittens who love to pile up in play

before they separate to find their loves,
their callings toward their lesson plans

with humans. Yes, you heard me correctly.
In an earlier life, we humans leaned in better

to the land, to the sea, to the stars, to the animals
outside ourselves and in for our wisdoms.

Universe, please, let me return for just one more
star show. My ill hands luminated

remain ready again, open.

Sandra Yannone

ADAGIO FOR SOLSTICE WITH FORGET-ME-NOTS

To never say always fills me with regrets.
 I drown in whomever she was and was not.
 I forget what it was I meant to forget

about her kiss, the one my mouth sublets
 from every other longing, tongue-tied, knotted
 always to never which fills me with regrets.

Every sideshow glance, an inlet
 where I drown remembering my lot.
 To forget what it was I meant to forget

requires the longest of days, tourniquets
 around my heart cutting off the plot
 to never say always. I'm filled with her regrets,

my unrequited embraces, my blood-let bets,
 the longest day stretching longer, fraught
 with remembrances I was meant to forget.

So I sleep alone with my ghost nets
 buried at sea, pillows stuffed with forget-me-nots.
 To never say always fills me with regrets.
 I forget who it was I am meant to forget.

IN THE TIME BEFORE NIAGARA FALLS

Today I love
 her, fully
 knowing

I will
 lose her
 then or now.

Or are
 then and now
 the same

sides of death?
 Can love
 bear these

slipstreams
 of tongue
 to create

the illusion
 that a word
 which

has covered
 all time can hold
 its definitions?

Love —
 so unlike
 water

continued overleaf...

always
refusing
its banks

whether
by flood
or drought.

Love —
so unlike
fire

which blazes
inside
and outside

of every fault
line. Love —
so unlike

anything we believe
we come to know
indelibly.

And now
that I choose
to embrace

that love's
undefinable
territories reside

inside me,
love spills over
every cell

my body
predictably
replicates,

and I see
love
now

as more
akin to any
polarized

elements
seeking solace
in knowing

the other
exists.
And death

now seems certain
to ride along
inside love

like pallbearers
sit sanctimoniously
inside the hearse

continued overleaf..

with the body
inside
its bewildered

casket
or like the wooden
barrel tumbling

over Niagara Falls
holds the remnants
of liquor

inside
its oak walls
and the tongue

of its concealed
traveller
or like the hot globe

of glass
molting
into something

so new
we want
an undiscovered

name
to affix
love

on a map
for certain
eternity

until death
does perform
its final parting

which cannot
separate
any words

written down,
words now
and then

being
like lovers
forever holding

the stars
in their lined
hands, unable

to let go
of their time-
travelled

indivisible light.

I DON'T WANT TO WRITE ANOTHER LOVE POEM ON THE IDES OF MARCH

Because I see her now only
when I close my eyes,
where nothing familiar

and singular gets in my vision's way,
I sometimes wish to remain
blind, my eyes seared shut

so she never leaves my inner sight.
I know she can't apprehend why
my pupils prefer opening to her,

why my corneas crave her light,
why my optic nerves favor
sharing even her ghost

with my brain. They just do. And
any insight I have may be wasted
on one who has stopped

trying to see me, but that isn't
the point here, is it? Or ever
was. To see her is to believe

that where once desire struck
like lightning, that lightning
can strike twice. To see her

is to cherish the door that opened
and praise the cut-glass knobs
turning. To see her is to know

what I knew as I stood in her
driveway that first morning
before I knew there

would be another and another and
marvel at the sun slanting through
the poplar trees to illuminate

her shine finding mine in that
particular way that only love
unclaimed can accomplish

when love needs at first sight
no explanation to persist. Something
so familiarly unfamiliar at first

that you think her smile can't possibly be
true. And the leaves on the ground crunch
under your feet to remind you

that you are here and can tell her
how joyous it is to meet and that you
wish you didn't have to drive away

continued overleaf...

today as she continues to stand before
your eyes, waiting for you, who does not
want to leave, to go, and so you tell her

your wish and watch her eyes
get bigger as if she can't believe
what she is seeing take root

in her driveway. You live like this
for days, weeks, months, your eyes
beginning on that day to adjust

to her particular painstaking
way of being light that breaks
open toward you like no other

which is how you come to love again, a knowing
behind your eyes, a knowing that becomes
your second sight. And she doesn't want

to be so special, but is in your eyes, and always
has been, just no one else sees her in this
incredulous way. She has so much

love to give she says, and you believe her
because seeing after all is believing
and what better thing to believe in

than love that doesn't blind you
like the raw, pure sun except
when the thing you tell yourself

you see is mirage and you fling
your vintage eyeglasses to the ground
in dismay, for what good are they anyway

if they taught you to see
only that which wasn't
going to remain all along?

You are now willing to blink
your eyes at least to recognize
that they exist to see others

trying to perform the same folly.
If you meet her again, who will she be?
Moon, sun, or stars, or none

of what's above? Your eyes await
their test for eternity. Her touch,
her taste, her tease, her freeze,

her anything — all other stories to tell another time.

CROSSCOURT

A psychic pulls the card Justice from the deck
and hands it to me, astonished, weeping

inside. She does not know it is the hand I've felt
I've been dealt most recently, to hand over

my family's brutal blindfolds, evidence of their hands
covering up the truth of my grandfather's hands

swollen with drink around my grandmother's neck
doing everything they could to shut her off

like a faucet, to bring a roaring
waterfall of a woman

to a mere trickle before
everyone's bloodshot eyes.

In her refusal to drown, disappear, become
extinct, my grandmother hands him a daily defeat

he will not handle. When not occupied
with her demise, he keeps his hands free

to deliver drink after unfettered drink
to his parched lips. He has no words

he can hand over to a jury of his lineage
to justify his hands' dirtiest work. He has no words

at all, just his hands working overtime, betting
hand after losing hand on the cards

he was too blind to read. *Justice,*
she reminds me, *is a two-handed backhand*

smashed crosscourt
down the line. A crushing blow

when the opponent has nothing left
but everything to lose.

Siobhan Harvey is an author of eight books, including New Zealand richest prize for poetry winner, *Cloudboy* (Otago University Press, 2014). She was runner up in 2025 UNESCO City of Literature Robert Burns Poetry Prize (NZ) and 2024 Bridport Memoir Award (UK). She won 2023 Landfall Essay Prize. In 2021 she was awarded the Janet Frame Literary Trust Award for Poetry, and in 2020 NZSA Peter & Dianne Beatson Fellowship. , 2019 Kathleen Grattan Award for a Sequence of Poems, and 2016 US Write Well Award. Additionally, she has been runner up 3 times in the New Zealand Poetry Society International Poetry Competition and 3 times selected for inclusion in Best New Zealand Poems. In 2021 she was awarded the Janet Frame Literary Trust Award for Poetry.



GAMBLING

They'll say you couldn't help yourself
They'll say you took too many chances

They'll say you studied the form
from the credit agency, court and bailiffs

They'll say the odds stacked against you
were longer than an accumulator or lottery

But I knew the gossip was idle as a windfall
and I knew nothing was worth the paper

it was written on, except the life insurance
and I wasn't trading that in for anything

So I put the last of my savings on red
then let the dealer roll the dice

Siobhan Harvey

SEXTON

I stalk the dormant with an empty stare,
aware that death nourishes all. Inside,
cold stone forms a place of worship
decorated with pulpit, altar and cross.

There too, in memoriam, the past
haunts the visitor with reminders of
the torture of a Sunday morning sermon,
“offer your bodies as a living sacrifice ...”

I forfeit all that to observe my nightly turn
around this resting place and the silent
communion I conduct with the peaceful
for each epitaph recalls a life, a companion,

a lost friend. Just as, time edging close
to midnight, my twilight turn over at last,
I will find comfort and unity in them.



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Richard W. Halperin's poetry is published by Salmon/Cliffs of Moher and by Lapwing/Belfast & Ballyhalbert. In April 2025, Salmon will bring out *All the Tattered Stars: New and Selected Poems*, Introduction by Joseph Woods - the Selected drawn from Mr Halperin's four Salmon collections and from sixteen Lapwings.



THE ARCADES PROJECT 2

I am reading a poet's poems – Jessie
Lendennie's – for the hundredth time
and wondering how she does it:
'Pretty,' 'Walking Here,' 'And the child said,
"If you love me, take me with you"' –
and they are as good as the stars, but closer.

They are part of what goes through my mind
all the time now. So much else does, too:
people from my childhood, remarks from
my childhood, from all the offices I ever
worked in, from conversations with
my wife, with friends, with waiters,

with pharmacists. 'Remarks are not
literature, Hemingway,' Gertrude Stein
said when he showed her *The Sun Also
Rises* and she saw her 'You are all
a lost generation' on an opening page
of epigraphs, and she was quite right,

thank God. Remarks are remarks.
They are what, after my hair turned
white, I live in: in remarks, in an Arcade
of remarks, an Arcade like Walter
Benjamin's, shopping and selling,
people shopping and selling swirling

Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Bertrand A.

continued overleaf...

by me: as friends show me their
manuscripts or their sketches or talk
to me about their dreams and their
arguments, or will never talk to me
about their dreams and their arguments,
while through my own mind – and heart –

swirl fragments of Jung, of George Eliot,
of interviews with celebrities of my youth –
Marilyn Monroe just before the end saying
'An actor is supposed to be a sensitive instrument.
Isaac Stern takes good care of his violin.
What if everybody jumped on his violin?' –

my grandfather Halperin's laughing
in my face when I, at age 13, said to him
that Wagner was a much greater composer
than Rossini – all swirl by, remarks,
remarks, remarks, like the Woman
at the Well's 'he told me everything

about myself that I ever did do' – and
I am in the sociologist Walter Benjamin's
The Arcades Project, his great unfinished
posthumous fragment, I am in the huge
nineteenth-century glass-and-wrought-iron
Arcade my wife and I used to walk

through when we lived on the rue
du Bouloi a few streets away – everyone
shopping and selling looking for something
which is an up by which to help get
through life or to distract from life,
since God was sanitised out of life

during The Enlightenment (to imitate
the way Alice B. Toklas talked:
'the term "Enlightenment" is a scream') –
and now, every remark I ever heard
comes back to me, swirling above
the ground I walk on which is not,

no, never, the ground of the Arcade,
but rather the solid ground of good literature –
The Sun Also Rises is literature, Miss Stein
recognised that immediately – the solid ground
of Jessie's poems, the solid ground of the
Tuba Miram of Mozart's (posthumous,

Mr Benjamin) *Requiem* which my wife
loved, and now she can hear it direct,
and now I can almost hear it.

continued overleaf...

Should I buy a book
by Walter Benjamin? –
those little immense elements
which might destabilise me,
as Auden and Arendt have.

In a bookshop, I reached
for *The Arcades Project* –
like most of his, tragically
posthumous. I returned it
to the shelf immediately.

The damage was done
by the cover photo:
the huge wrought-iron-and-glass
shopping arcade which
my wife and I had sometimes
walked through when we
lived on the rue du Bouloi
a few streets away.

A title – not his –
ran through my head:
Where Were You When You
Woke Up?

No idea. For a moment
there was no I, no my wife,
no Walter Benjamin,
no place, no time and maybe
no question.



Passage du Saumon, Paris, April 1899. Photo by J. Barry, courtesy of Musée Carnavalet / Roger-Viollet.

WAS IT DUSTY ON THE TRAIN?

I think of Billie Holiday, her way
with a song. Tonight she makes me write letters.

A letter to Dennis Greig who improved
the way I present a poem.

A letter to my grammar school teacher
Mrs Levin who, like Dennis, encouraged me
and so many others to write well.

They both had their private griefs, and stowed it.

Letters to everyone dear to me
who are no longer here. When any life ends,
all of it becomes a letter.

Tonight I write to all of them using
someone else's words, and so what? Words
are not the Shroud of Turin. Or are they?

*Yesterday we had some rain
but all in all, I can't complain.
Was it dusty on the train?
P.S. I love you.**

P.s. I Love You Lyrics by Johnny Mercer.



Image by M from Pixabay.

Sinéad McClure has published two chapbooks, her poetry can be found in anthologies, magazines and online. Including *The Stinging Fly*, *South Word*, *Live Encounters* and *Ink Sweat & Tears*. In 2024 she was highly commended in the Patrick Kavanagh Award, and graduated with an MA in Creative Practice from ATU Sligo with a special award for innovation for her Epic Poem "Nádúr".
www.sineadmclure.com



THE NEOLITHIC WOMAN

She draws spirals; a whooper ascent
rippling the flat back of Lough Awaile,
the eyes of a wildcat caught moonlit.

She scratches the angular,
mountain peaks gouged in mud
like a bold child with a crayon.

Meanders; undulating lines of a world,
glimpsed, kept and coveted.

She draws flint-imprints of a sun
stared into for hours until blind.
And after that she traces the stars.

Sinéad McClure

THE ARCHAEOLOGISTS

Praeger calls Lough Availe a quiet sheet of water,
says it is neither vast nor terrible.
No-one saw the ice crack when sun lit hills
and red spines flexed as if they might erupt.

Sallies creak in summer like a door opening out
after some incantation. Below the swell of burial tombs
the men gather with their tiny hammers.

Tremors reverberate into fox runs
until they break through funerary walls,
find bones; remark on a brutal ending,
box them all for one hundred years.

THE BONES

A woman lost herself
to hazel, and to oak,
to bears hugging ash trunks
awkward for honey,
to arctic foxes,
scavenge-eyed.

To where, slumped behind the dark, giant wall of an elk,
she wished only that she could draw his shape.

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*, *P76*, *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. Since 2024 he has co-judged the Ada Cambridge Poetry Prize.



PASSENGERS

Midday bus, a commuter
on her feet,
red woollen socks to the knees,
I leave her my seat.
'È tuo ... It's yours.'

Hesitant, she allows me past.
Suddenly, the seat's ... *hers*.

Beneath via Farini's porticoes
I wait for the bus to pass.
If only I could see the commuter
through the figures on board
- all standing.

Edward Caruso

JUNCTURES

A familiar face, we grip hands.
Two blocks away we cross paths again,
my friend with a joint,
eyes wide, a breeziness
in his Ethiopian accent and dreadlocks.
He has no name I remember.

Outside the bar where arrests had been made
the day before, two methamphetamine addicts
share cigarettes, the girl's face disfigured
and her African companion too wary to smile.

I find some guerrilla art:
pigs with dollar signs;
workers marching with mallets;
a skeletal figure,
skulls in place of kneecaps.

On seeing a deal,
drugs scored by an elderly man,
hair as white as his Louis Vuitton shirt,
mine was a rapid glance
as I traipsed towards Blu's street art
of devolution from a middle manager
to a chimp-like animal
in front of a TV set.

I return to the bar,
unfamiliar faces and eyes that follow.
The methamphetamine addicts,
disappeared,
their space littered with cigarette butts.

Dusk at 4.30.
A graffito,
Bologninaghetto Antifa.
I drift through traffic.

BOLOGNA, MEDITATED

In conversation you close in,
take a drag from a cigarette.
Surrounded by rare watches and clocks,
you produce a book of antiques whose fine paper
can be smelled at arm's length.
By San Petronio's unfinished façade you talk
of Chinese and Greek clients
with half a million euros to spend on timepieces
in moments of financial crises.

On the other side of the centre that morning,
one seldom visited during our walks,
or seen by your clients when they pass through,
I'd floated through shops
run by Pakistanis and Indians,
bars by Africans,
an Italian mother in view,
her two children,
Afro hair, dark skin.

Raindrops and hues,
such as those at Piazza Verdi's student quarter.
What it could mean to be out at twilight,
each stroll with thoughts to those scholars
who began arriving from afar 900 years ago.

At Santa Maria dei Servi,
mosaic floors,
lamps of glowing intensity,
shadows that augment echoing chants.
A mass begins. At first I'm too withdrawn
to notice half a dozen figures in prayer
led by a Filipino priest.
Views of saints, a Virgin,
seven swords through her heart,
figures on crosses bathed by lamps
and tombs whose occupants from far off I cannot name.

Why I'm here:
Gothic arches and red-brick pillars;
a conversion to aesthetics;
probes into immigrant lives.

Outside, fine rain and gelid breezes.

The next day I'm back with you by San Petronio's,
sympathising with a new arrival
recounting why he's forced to plead
for the five euro note you're holding aloft
to pay for a short black.

Jonathan Cant is a writer, poet, and musician. His work was shortlisted in the 2025 Gwen Harwood Poetry Prize; won the 2023 Banjo Paterson Writing Awards for Contemporary Poetry; was longlisted for the 2023 Fish Poetry Prize; and commended in the W. B. Yeats Poetry Prize. Jonathan's poems have appeared in *Cordite*, *Island*, *Verandah*, *fourW*, *Meuse Press*, and *Otoliths*.



Jonathan Cant

EASTER SPIRITS

I'm driving, hungover, through Kangaroo Valley's rainforests and farms. Perched on a disused plough, a magpie—totem to the local First Peoples. Behind this—another kind of totem—a Hills Hoist adorned with brightly-coloured children's clothes flapping in the breeze like Tibetan prayer flags.

Rounding the corner, I suddenly see the snake—a long, dark carpet python—Moses' staff, laying still, outstretched, warming itself on the road's Indian summer surface. All I can do is position the car's wheels either side and hope for the best. I don't feel or hear a bump.

The rear-view mirror reveals the python now coiled tight. This troubles me. Did I hit it? I might have. I hope not. I continue driving—northward—further up the valley. I cross a bridge and look down to the river. The tinkling sound of its riffles and runs soothes my guilty mind.

In the branches above, a small flock of Wonga Pigeons side-eye me with a judgy suspicion. Riding the thermals, higher still, a pair of wedge-tailed eagles (*Aquila audax*). A killer of bunnies! It's Easter. Rabbit season. Bunny served rare for a raptor's breakfast. Hot cross buns for mine.

Beyond the circling eagles, a sandstone escarpment. Through a long lens, the looming cliff faces—brooding, heavy-browed effigies like the Moai figures on Easter Island. Monolithic and menacing; tracking my journey through this silent landscape the whole morning.

Returning, I scan the road for the snake. Nothing. A good sign. It must've slithered back into the lush bush. Uninjured, I hope. Hope hangs heavy in the air this Easter Sunday. Hope for my health and for the serpent's survival, resurrection, or at least its forgiveness.

FISHING ON THE RIVER STYX, 1997

There are no other boats on this wide reach
of the river. The only sounds are birds
and the occasional splash of sea mullet
jumping. It's a cold August afternoon
and I'm drifting, alone, in a rented tinnie,
fishing for flathead and bream.

I remove the head of a thawed prawn, insert
the sharp hook below its tail, and—just as my
grandfather had taught me—slide the prawn
around the curve of the hook, with the tip protruding
from its belly, before securing it with a half hitch of line.
I flick the old Alvey reel sideways and cast towards

the nearest shore. There's the distinctive
stink of prawn on my fingertips when I light
another Dunhill and draw back. It's Sunday.
I'm still feeling the effects of last night
as I think about someone I met
at a hotel in the early hours.

Those thoughts are interrupted by the urgency
of my Nokia ringing loudly. It's my father.
He tells me there's been a car accident
in a tunnel in Paris. A princess is dead.
My shock sends concentric ripples out
from the hull of the boat—a silent tsunami

of realisation spreads across the empty river
to the far embankment and back again. I hang
up the phone and look up to a sky as deep blue
as her sapphire engagement ring. Overhead,
an osprey soars—hunting—searching for shining
prey in the water below. Suddenly, my fishing rod

bends into a parabola. I grab it and set the hook.
Judging by the dead weight, it feels like a decent-
sized flattie. I lift the rod high and retrieve line
each time I lower it. The battle lasts
a few minutes, before the line breaks
and the rod lightens. Resistance gone. All is lost.

DAVO

The big crowd favourite at Sydney's Sculpture by the Sea* is a statue of a giant, white, naked, bald, overweight, middle-aged man with love handles. And, unlike Michelangelo's David, *Dave* has no genitals at all. Is Dave Australia's realistic version of that ideal male form from the Renaissance? Or was he inspired by a more recent figure: the wise and unique eunuch, Varys, from *Game of Thrones*?

Looking up from this angle, you squint and wonder if he's an ageing cliff diver from Acapulco about to jump in and rescue some struggling tourist from Bondi's Backpackers' Rip. Or maybe he's another kind of saviour: Rio's Christ the Redeemer with outstretched arms ready to embrace the masses in his birthday suit?

Or perhaps he just *is*. Himself. Big Dave. And that's okay, too. But Aussies do love to add on the affectionate and obligatory "o"—so that he becomes everybody's mate...

"Davo". You take in Davo's surroundings. See things through *his* eyes. Below him, the honeycombed layers of sandstone, beaten and eaten away by water, wind, and time. You examine the cliff face closely and imagine all the Tim Tams and Crunchie bars on which Davo has binged. You look down to the white waves smashing against the rocks and retaste every foaming cold lager he's ever enjoyed off the tap on a warm summer's day. You inhale the salty air and savour the hot chips and crispy battered cod of a million counter meals past.

And you ponder how Davo is probably a far cry from his athletic and virile youth. You see, Davo could be any of us fellows who've "let ourselves go". Davo might be Jonno. Hell, Davo may well be... me.

Note: This ekphrastic poem is after the art installation *Dave*, by Cathyann Coady, that featured at the 2016 Sculpture by the Sea (SXS).

Elsa Korneti was born in Munich, Germany, but raised in Greece. After her studies in Finance in Greece and in Germany, she worked as a journalist. Collaborating with literary magazines she publishes poems, essays, book reviews, translations, short stories. Her poems and short stories have appeared in numerous well-known literary magazines. Part of her work among all books have been translated and published in foreign anthologies and literary magazines in ten European languages and Chinese. She has published 16 books, many of them have been distinguished.

Translated from Greek by Don Schofield.

IN THE RED BELLY OF THE WHALE

In the red belly of the whale
beneath its bony spine
the dark velvet of its tongue warms me
A whale is my cave
my safest hideaway
No one will ever find me here
alone
paying for the mistakes of others



Elsa Korneti

I ENVY CLOWNS

I envy clowns
They're lucky
because in the circus
disguised
they gambol about
Their sadness slithers in silence
beneath their white masks
& sometimes is refreshed
by beads of sweat
& those painted tears
briefly illuminated
That round red nose
flashing
at every turn
absolves
their lies

DEAR SYMPATHIZERS

Dear Sympathizers—
My name is Pinocchio
I'm afflicted with wood for a body
I exist in its rigidity
in a world of pliant dreams
I tolerate my unbending back
by training my supple spirit
to disregard my backbone
its sharp-edged curves

I imagine my body malleable
as I do dance moves
calisthenics
I stretch & shrink & bounce
& sometimes fling myself
high into the air
become bow string & arrow
Proud of my arced flexibility
I hit the bullseye
of a softwood target
there in the sky I nail it
right between the eyes

NOSE

Nose—
In the game of memory
you go in & out
A deaf serpent
slithers to your secret pulse
You smell the flavor of life
The lie detector
vibrates
& the truth
breathes

NUMBERS DON'T LIE THEY SAY

Numbers don't lie they say

I've taken an oath to the truth
of false numbers

A daydreamer in order to be complete
must couple
with a rationalist

A rationalist in a wooden world
is better off letting the ridiculous
live on

Michael J Leach lives and works on unceded Dja Dja Wurrung Country in his birthplace of Bendigo. Michael's poems have appeared in journals such as *Cordite Poetry Review*, anthologies such as *The Best Australian Science Writing 2024* (NewSouth Publishing, 2024), and his three poetry books: *Chronicity* (MPU, 2020), *Natural Philosophies* (RWP, 2022), and *Rural Ecologies* (ICOE Press, 2024). A fourth poetry book, *Chords in the Soundscapes*, is forthcoming from Ginninderra Press. Michael's poems have been recognised in competitions: first place in the UniSA Mental Health and Wellbeing Poetry Competition 2015, commended in the Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine 2021, joint first place in the poetry category of the MSB Confidence Writing Competition 2022, longlisted for the poetry category of the MSB Confidence Writing Competition 2023, shortlisted for the poetry category of the Woollahra Digital Literary Award 2023, highly commended in and longlisted for the Liquid Amber Poetry Prize 2024, longlisted for the University of Canberra Health Poetry Prize 2024, and highly commended in the Hush Foundation Kindness in Healthcare Writing Prize 2024.



SWISS ITALIAN SUNDAY

The afternoon after
my cousin's Italian wedding in the city,
my partner and I decide to stop off
at the near-full, dirt parking lot
of a farmstead attraction
that sits (un)comfortably amidst hills.

To our surprise, a sign says we're here
during this year's Swiss Italian Festa.
We step onto a field then buy tix
at a booth, likening the experience
to attending music festivals.
The lilt of the Schwyz accordion

swells as we near stone structures—buildings
whose walls call to mind patchwork doonas
hanging from Hills hoists on a calm day.
The sounds of folk songs complement
the fragrances of flowers & food
the sights of people & flags
the feel of held hands

the tastes of rural Europe
our daydreams of forebears.
Lit by spring sun past its zenith,
my partner proposes a toast to yesterday
& today. We clink glasses of limoncello spritz—
the hair of the Highland cattle.

Michael J Leach

Paris Rosemont is an Asian-Australian poet and author of *Banana Girl* (2023) and *Barefoot Poetess* (2025), published by WestWords. Her edgy poetry – distinct in voice – has been widely published and awarded. *Banana Girl* was shortlisted by the *Association for the Study of Australian Literature* for the 2024 Mary Gilmore Award. It was also shortlisted for *Poetry Book Awards 2024* in Australia, Greece and the UK, and was awarded 'Distinguished Favorite' in the NYC Independent Press Award 2025 (USA). Paris has graced stages at events and festivals in almost every state/territory within Australia and internationally. She may be found at www.parisrosemont.com



MAMA'S FLOWN AWAY WITH THE MOCKINGBIRDS

'The mortgage of the dead is known...'
- Carson McCullers (*The Mortgaged Heart*)

The children know I died weeks ago. This corpse masquerading as their mother is an imposter. Noone else has cottoned on yet. But I raised savvy kids. They *know*.

The Other smooths their chestnut cowlicks as she readies them for school, but she does not press their ham and cheese sandwiches with the novelty brontosaurus cutter, serving no purpose other than to spread smiles. There's no more steam in this vintage cast iron for the luxury of delight.

I pity these wretched orphans. Imagine how unsettling it must feel to be sung to sleep by a ghost who knows their favourite lullabies and looks so like someone they once knew.

*Hush little babies, don't you cry
don't tell anyone that your mama has died.*

They reach out to touch her—so convincing is she that she could *almost* be real. But their desperate hands swipe through air. *It's a virtual reality game!* They're grappling with a hologram. Whirling with the ethereal weightlessness of a floating dancer, their mother has brokered a fool's-gold escape. She has mortgaged her heart. The cost of her wings—two tiny souls.

Paris Rosemont

FOOT AND SPOUSE DISEASE

I used to hate his feet. They were a size larger than standard-sized shoes in standard shoe shops. I had to source specialty shoes to house his too-muchness. Hardened heels, dry and cracked as the Nullabor Plains, with yellowed nails so thick they required the purchase of extra-large nail clippers. He was a large man; unable to bend down past his Clausian gut. Thus, the task of taking heavy-duty garden shears to his gnarled undergrowth fell upon me. The *snip snip snip* of nail clippers still sends me into flashbacks of his hooves-for-toes, clumped together tight as a spring-trap.

The air down there did not get proper ventilation. It became a swamp of sweat and sludge which, in the moshpit of stinking summers, housed in the steel-capped sauna of his work boots, would become a bacterial orgy. I'd slide my slender fingers, lubed with tinea cream, in between each of his toes. Had I been a foot fetishist, such slippery fingering may have aroused me. But as it was, it made me want to retch.

He was larger than life, this man. A figure looming colossal. Not as a Heracles might, but as a giant, casting shadows and fear. His tree-trunk legs would thunder down the hall and I would keep quiet as a mouse, hoping he would forget I was there. But he would sniff me out, grind my bones.

One day, a bun appeared in my oven. As it rose, so too did hope. The giant had clumsy, oafish feet with big toes so very big they were the size of our newborn's entire perfectly pink, perfectly formed toes all combined. My trivial concerns floated away like a helium balloon released into the sky. Somehow, out of the ash of our bones and keratin, and the Clag Paste of our liquefied salt, we had produced a thing of beauty. I'd shower with kisses the porcelain pads of our son's dainty feet. He'd wiggle his plump little toes, swollen as cornichons. As he lay on his back, squealing with delight, his body would curl inward like a contented armadillo. I finally discovered what love was.

Eileen Casey is originally from County Offaly, based in South Dublin. Poetry, prose, short-fiction and journalism are widely published. 'River Songs,' her seventh poetry collection, appeared 2023, a Creative Ireland funded project. Individual collections are published by New Island, Arlen House, AltEnts and Fiery Arrow. Work is anthologised in volumes from Faber & Faber, New Island, Arlen House, The Stinging Fly, Abridged, Salmon, The Nordic Irish Studies Journal and many more. Her work is broadcast on Sunday Miscellany (RTE 1). A Hennessy Award winner (Emerging Fiction), she also received the Oliver Goldsmith Award and A Katherine and Patrick Kavanagh Fellowship among others. 'Treasure,' a short film featuring Casey's bog poems features on Peatlands Gathering. Two of these poems, 'Peat,' and 'Bog Wish,' were set to music by Composer Fiona Linnane and featured in AnCór's repertoire during their Christmas programme at Limerick Cathedral, 2022. They also provided the main inspiration for 'Metamorphosis' (Longford Lights, 2025), Artistic Director Caroline Conway.



NIGHT DRIVE

'Maybe I should drive,' you say and force a smile.
But it's too late, too late perhaps for words.
This harvest moon puts us both on trial.

'Wait until the engine heats,' you say, without guile.
Holstering my belt, its clunk is quite absurd.
'Maybe I should drive,' you say and force a smile.

I fix the rear view mirror, seeking a denial,
what's left behind on bitter roads.
This harvest moon puts us both on trial.

Key in the ignition, the engine stalls a while.
My arms are folding like some flightless bird.
'Maybe I should drive,' you say and force a smile.

The windscreen wiper grates across our miles,
chipping off some more from icy hoards.
This harvest moon puts us both on trial.

We sit here crushed behind these shiny dials,
silences adding up our scores.
'Maybe I should drive,' you say and force a smile.
This harvest moon puts us both on trial.

Eileen Casey

THE LOST BOY

In the dream;
we're by the sea, high summer.
Ocean waves curl to shore, plump fingers
slacken in my hand.

Lured by some shiny mirage,
I'm given the slip,
left holding empty air.
Frantic, I scan before
and after,

those terrible in-betweens
clutching at straws.
It should be winter. Frost coating
earth, resisting pecking beaks.
Instead, sea water glistens
like melting ice-cream; dream skies
mirror your blue eyes.

When the dream dissolves, I wake
to your grown up presence. Find
no trace of dimpled smiles, nothing
but an ache, a memory of touch,
the taste of salt on my lips.

WINDOW DRESSING

Behind drapery window, brittle yellow plastic
shields stock from direct sunlight. Dusty fabric
swirls around a tailor's dummy; its bald head
half-hidden by a synthetic wig losing its grip.
Shredded nets dress both sides,

fall in folds; funerary for dead bees, belly up.
No living relatives to gather them, provide
decent burial. Or tear down worn pelmets
draped corner to corner. Boxed corsets

stand upright. Boned. Embroidered. Pink
laces snake through eyelets. Tightening
winter flab when summer finally arrived.
She knew what farmers' wives would buy
or women from nearby housing estates;
who could afford to pay her prices.

What lies beyond mildewed window-frame,
out of sight in living quarters, is anybody's guess.
Worldly comforts? Or a cobwebbed woman
veiled in a town's dying memory?

Michael Minassian is a Contributing Editor for Verse-Virtual, an online poetry journal. His poetry collections *Time is Not a River*, *Morning Calm*, and *A Matter of Timing* as well as a chapbook, *Jack Pays a Visit*, are all available on Amazon. For more information: <https://michaelminassian.com>



ELEGIES

I give you silence.
I give you florid sentences.

I give you elegies
written in Braille.

I give you days and nights
that repeat themselves,

as the poet said,
in tedious arguments.

I give you wonder.
I give you despair.

What shall you give me?
what shall you give

the rest of us?
The time we have left

to receive what is ours,
what is lost?

Michael Minassian

THE VOICES IN MY HEAD

When I woke up this morning,
I thought of my parents
and asked both of them
about my changing jobs
and moving to another state.

My father, as usual, had little to say,
but my mother, a child of the Depression
fretted about the financial risks—
I could hear her voice
even from the grave.

The last time I saw her
she wasn't worried about money
or much of anything else,
her mind off somewhere
on a long journey alone.

As for my father, I imagine him
in his favorite recliner,
watching sports on television,
waving his hand in that way he had,
"You'll figure it out," he'd bark.

A banker, he had a knack for numbers,
kept complicated calculations in his head—
when the doctors told him
how much longer he had to live,
he counted all the way down

to zero and then was gone.

BARELY HEARD

Some poets have animals
populate their poems:
black birds, elephants, or mice.

They worry about crushing weight,
the scrabble of claws on the roof,
hear scratching behind the wall.

Their angels wear black wings,
follow each other tail by tail,
leave droppings under the sink.

Some poems poise on the pen
like a bird before it takes flight;
some lie in wait for words

to nudge themselves, stand
on two legs instead of four,
a rustle of fanning feathers,

the turn of a murder of crows,
the swish of a tail,
the sigh of breath, barely heard.

IT'S A BLACK AND WHITE WORLD, AGAIN

In *Casablanca*, the Nazis have loud voices
and throw people out of windows,
or maybe they're just checking for rain—
everyone runs around going to secret meetings
or gambles at Rick's Place (and loses)
although the wheel is sometimes rigged.

Young women, married and single,
throw themselves at Rick who's
pretending to be Humphrey Bogart.

Claude Rains, who used to be *The Invisible Man*,
is Louie, a cop, and Rick's friend;
the people who work for Rick are all Antifa
disguised as waiters and Casino workers;
some of them speak in bad accents
and sing *La Marseillaise* while crying
and playing the guitar, except for Sam
who knows he better stay put.

In 1942, the Germans were Nazis
and they want to close Rick's place;
Rick's ex who dumped him in Paris
comes to his *Café Américain* gin joint
with her husband, a big Antifa,
who speaks with an Eastern European
accent and might be KGB or FSS.

Like many in transit in Casablanca
they covet transport papers
(as if a green card was a green light)
so they can fly to Portugal
then get to America on an airplane
even though Rick says:
They're all asleep in New York.

Oh, and Sidney Greenstreet wants to stay
in Casablanca, since he's a capitalist
and doesn't mind Nazi money
although he mainly seems to have
wandered into this movie from the set
of the *Maltese Falcon*—so does Peter Lorre,
but at least he gets to read different lines
and learns to fly, but not the way he thought.

After all, this whole story is from the script
of an unproduced Broadway play
which somehow ended up as a movie
where people speak in code—
maybe because they forgot their lines.

Here's looking at you, kid.

Linda Goin is an award-winning writer and artist from the United States. Her poetry has been featured in *Mojave River Review*, *Sundress Publications*, *Verse-Virtual*, and *Nightingale & Sparrow*, among other publications and anthologies. She is the author of two chapbooks, *She-Oak* and *Fearless Morning*. Linda's poetry explores themes of relationships, trauma, healing, and surrealism—often infused with a sharp, unexpected sense of humor.



LOVE LETTER SHADORMAS

Tell me how
to say I miss you
when you were
never here,
when you fly solo above
me from state to state.

When will you
find a time to be
with me and
my chopsticks,
me and my accordion,
me and my deceptions.

I'll stare high
and smile at you through
vapors, past
torrential
downpours that obscure lines meant
to define our roads.

Daredevil
is one word I'll use
in that first
love letter
designed to heal your dis-ease,
to feed your desire.

Linda Goin

SHALLOW CHARM

Here's to your sharpened pencil, leaves
you never scribe, to your eyes that remain
ever clear despite vague tableaux.

Here's to your prune juice, pears, beans
and berries, your patience as you wait
at gates of hope, where seraphs hold these fruits

belonging to the luminous mystery.
Here's to light that winks from beneath your lids,
the siren calling, calling ships home.

Here's to your dried-up veins, thin skin, gnarly
nose, your warts, wiry brows, spindly mustache,
to your lips that refuse to let go of mine.

A rose will grow in your space next spring,
a lark will sing your song. Visit me again
next autumn, when my chill will yearn

for your return, when my heart
has had enough of this shallow charm.

POCKET SQUARE MOON

Your gaze never seems to fall
upon my surrender to your red tie,

your blue suit, your hands, hidden
in your trousers, where I know you fiddle

with the last changes you made.
Someone hacked your email today, sent notes

about times you lost your way
to pools swollen with me swimming on edge.

I graze those letters with care,
keep them safe to ask about them later.

When you arrive home, I remove
your tie, loosen your collar, close my eyes,

think about the last moon rise
during Samhain in Vermont.

It appeared as white as your pocket square,
as innocent as wildlife born broken.

Ndue Ukaj was born in Kosova. He is a writer, essayist, and literary critic. To date, he has published five poetry books, two short story collections, a novel, and two literary criticism books. He won several awards, including the national award for best book of poetry published in 2010 in Kosovo. Has also won the award for best poems in the International Poetry Festival in North Macedonia. He also won PRIZES 2013: The International Best Poets, Translators, Critics, and Poetry Magazines, Selections of Poems, IPTRC in Chinese, and Creativity prizes in Naji Naaman's Literary Prizes 2016. His literary works have been published in distinguished international anthologies and journals and have been translated into many languages.

Translated from Albanian by Vlora Konushevc.

TICKETS

We buy tickets at prices set by the market.
We calculate feelings, boredom, and joy;
love minus its absence,
and we see how mathematics leads to incorrect results.

Confused in stations of arrivals and departures, we lose our way.
Waiting for the train that leads to joy,
but it takes us to the doors of sadness.
Then, confused, we turn back and see that we've lost so much:
a work deadline, a coffee with a loved one we've been waiting for,
or the last part of a novel we left unfinished.

We end the day and throw the tickets in the trash,
but tomorrow we need a new ticket again:
a journey to see magnificent paintings at the Louvre,
a walk through the wonders of Rome,
or an evening hug by the sea of good memories.

When the week ends, we rest for two days.
And on Sunday evening, we do the math, like a child doing homework:
the money is spent, but the month still has some days left.
We need to buy the monthly ticket for more love;
or for longer pain.

At the end of the month, the calculator of feelings falls to the ground,
and suddenly we spring up.
The coming month is better—spring arrives and the days are long,
or winter's sorrow falls and the nights are sad.



Ndue Ukaj

continued overleaf...

We buy tickets at prices set by the market,
and confused, we wander through stations of waiting,
hoping for the new day to close the wrong doors.

We go to the theater and buy the ticket for entertainment,
but Tartuffe tells us that the miserly spirit of the world lives in every era.
Then we tickle ourselves and do not open our eyes to see
the truth, because hypocrisy is in fashion.
Another day Hamlet takes the stage,
spoiled and with a sharp gaze, he bursts with rage.
He sees many ghosts scratching the clothes of freedom,
and a sheet with crumpled notes,
saying it always depends on us what statistics we make,
where we plant the flag of sadness and where that of joy.



Image by Joshua Choate from Pixabay.

From Listowel, Ireland, Neil Brosnan's stories appear in print and digital anthologies and magazines in Ireland, Britain, Europe, Australia, India, USA, Latin America, and Canada. A multiple Pushcart nominee, he has won The Bryan MacMahon, The Maurice Walsh, and Ireland's Own short story awards, and has published two short story collections.



MY OTHER AUNT MARY

Dad was the youngest of four; the eldest was Mary, but I only ever heard her referred to as Mother Perpetua. I never met Mother Perpetua; she died when I was in my teens, having spent forty-eight years in the religious order she'd entered immediately on leaving school. The story goes that in all that time she'd never ventured beyond the convent walls, and her only contact with the outside world had been an annual visit from Dad – and sometimes Mam – usually in August. The only image I've seen of her is the old sepia photo of Dad's First Communion day, with their parents and brother and sister. I was never well disposed towards Mother Perpetua; I'd thought our daily family rosary – complete with *The Apostles' Creed*, the relevant mysteries of the day, and *The Hail Holy Queen* – long enough without having to face another litany for the holy intentions of Mother Perpetua.

To my memory, the first time we missed a rosary was a Thursday in May when I was nine. Uncle Willie, Mam's brother, was in the kitchen when I came home from school, and Mam said that he had come to take her and Dad on a journey. They would be leaving once my sisters returned from secondary school, and Eileen, the elder of the girls, would be in charge. Eileen would check my homework; I was to be on my best behaviour, and go to bed at my usual time – or earlier, if told.

I wasn't told, and nobody asked about my homework, and I don't think my sisters did much homework either – unless it involved learning songs from some strange radio station called *Luxembourg*. Having the freedom to remain outside until dusk was a mixed blessing but despite the rain, I didn't dare go indoors in case I'd have to say the rosary. My fears proved groundless: neither sister even noticed when I finally found the courage to sneak inside and creep upstairs to bed.

Neil Brosnan

continued overleaf...

My room was directly above the kitchen, and I was awakened at some ungodly hour by the rumble of muffled voices from below. Why was Willie in our house in the middle of the night? Why had Willie taken Mam and Dad away in the first place? Why was Willie arguing with Dad, and why were Mam and Dad arguing with each other? I couldn't glean much from the general kerfuffle, but the words *Mary, convent, and funeral* were being spouted by Mam and Willie, while Dad would intermittently interject with *parents, blame* and *shame*. Finally, I heard the name I'd been waiting for: *Mother Perpetua*; Mam screamed it three times in rapid succession, and then everybody went silent. The last thing I remember was the slamming of a door and somebody creaking up the stairs.

I was surprised to find Dad in my bed next morning. Only Mam had ever shared my bed – years before, when I was very small and had tonsillitis. If Mother Perpetua had gone to her eternal reward, would our rosary be reduced to more manageable proportions, or did nuns continue to have holy intentions even after death? I slipped out of bed and padded downstairs to the pong of cigarette smoke and a loud snoring from the parlour. A quick peek at the sofa revealed Willie's arm protruding from beneath Dad's heavy overcoat. I knew it was Willie's arm because of the tattoo: only people who'd been to England – or to sea or prison – had tattoos. Willie had once lived in England – before I was born. Dad loved to joke that Willie had taken the first boat back home once he discovered that he'd actually have to work for a living in London. Willie had tattoos on both forearms: on the right was a red heart with the word *Mary* inside; on the left was a blue heart, pierced by a black arrow, with a single red droplet clinging to its tip.

A hand touched my shoulder. I whirled around to see Mam holding a raised index finger to her pursed lips. Smelling of frying bacon and Sunday perfume, she steered me into the kitchen and explained that she and Willie would be leaving once they'd had breakfast, but she would be back for keeps on the following evening. When I asked if Dad would be going, she said that he'd be staying home to look after us and to cook our meals. I thought it strange that Mam was going instead of him: after all, Mother Perpetua was Dad's sister – and Mam was a much better cook.

Although I desperately wanted to know what was happening, I was afraid to ask my parents in case they might start arguing again, and whenever I'd ask my sisters about anything they'd just laugh and call me a stupid child. Knowing that Willie wouldn't be any help – he was a bachelor, and believed that children should be seen and not heard – I decided to keep my eyes and ears open, and my mouth shut.

Neither Dad nor my sisters came downstairs until after Willie's car had left the yard. Strangely, although it was after eight o'clock, nobody mentioned school, and all three of us sat in silence as Dad set the kettle and a pot of eggs to boil on the new electric cooker. I was on my third slice of soda bread when Dad said he had things to do in town; he promised to call to our schools to explain our absences and assure our teachers that we were all studying hard at home. He seemed surprisingly cheery for somebody whose sister had just died, and he winked broadly at the bit about us studying hard at home. He brought us chips and burgers when he returned late in the evening, and then went straight to bed without any mention of study, or the rosary, or Mother Perpetua's holy intentions. He did, however, lead the rosary on Saturday evening, but Mam was strangely silent during our prayers for Mother Perpetua's holy intentions, and she remained kneeling long after Dad and my sisters had left the kitchen. Weeks and months went by with the daily rosary continuing unchanged, and neither Mam nor my sisters reacted when Dad made his customary August visit to Mother Perpetua. He would make seven or eight subsequent pilgrimages before Fr Keane arrived one dark November morning to inform us of Mother Perpetua's death. Mam didn't accompany Dad to the funeral; she led the rosary in his absence, and recited his decade as well as her own, but made no mention of Mother Perpetua or her holy intentions.

Aisling, our eldest, reminds me a lot of Mam. Theirs was a fraught relationship, which became ever more volatile as Aisling advanced through her teens and Mam entered her eighties. The last straw for Mam was when Aisling assumed the role of family archivist and began to quiz Mam about her family. Although she would never admit it to me, I'm sure Aisling hasn't forgiven Mam for taking much of her clan's history to the grave. Last May, Aisling went to New Jersey on a J1 Visa.

continued overleaf..

As a bio-tech undergrad, she'd found a temporary position with the company she hopes to join when qualified. Prolonged periods of study haven't dampened Aisling's obsession with genealogy, and thanks to her knowledge of all things DNA, along with her mastery of the Internet, she has unearthed several hitherto unknown offshoots of our family tree.

Aisling was Stateside for scarcely a wet week when she found a *slua* of descendants of an uncle of Dad's who had supposedly died as a teenager in the Boer War. Nuala, my better half, was less than overjoyed with that news: having already endured years of surprise visits from her own scattered cousins, the last thing she needed was a queue of my relatives on her doorstep. I had almost convinced her of the unlikelihood of such a scenario when our youngest – nine-year-old Jack – pointed to a young lady in the local supermarket and remarked on her likeness to Aisling. We looked, and then we stared: first at the girl, and then – seeing that she was staring right back – at each other. No! I mentally echoed Nuala's silent scream. *It's a coincidence*, I told myself; *there will be a perfectly logical explanation*. Over the following weeks, however, scarcely a day went by without somebody asking if Aisling had returned from the States. By then, we had reverted to our Covid-19 Lockdown practice of shopping only twice a week – and very early in the morning. It wasn't too difficult to convince Jack that unconnected people can sometimes look alike, especially after I pointed out one of his classmate's resemblance to an unrelated family in the locality. I could have bitten my tongue when Nuala reminded me of an old rumour concerning the boy's mother's parentage. I'm since trying to convince myself that, unlike me at that age, most nine-year-olds rarely dwell on any thought for very long.

Not so the fathers of nine-year-olds, especially when one overhears a work colleague comment that when he overheard our Aisling answer her phone on the previous evening, she'd sounded exactly like somebody in a Hollywood movie. That was something I decided to keep to myself, and neither Nuala nor I mentioned the doppelganger during our next webcam chat with Aisling. Just a week before her planned return home, Aisling announced that she'd been contacted by a girl who looked a lot like her and whose DNA suggested that she was a close relative. As the girl was holidaying in Ireland; would I mind meeting with her? Just me – not Nuala – what could I say?

I couldn't admit that we were already aware of such a girl, and she of us; that even Jack had noticed her similarity to Aisling. What was even more unsettling was my gut feeling that Aisling wasn't being totally honest with me. She couldn't possibly think that the girl might be her sister; could she?

Nuala wasn't in the least offended by her exclusion from my face-to-face with the mysterious young lady, and she gleefully took Jack and his brother Ryan off to the beach for the day. By the appointed time, my sense of foreboding had morphed into acute anxiety, but I was absolutely terror stricken when I opened the door to find both Aisling and her lookalike on the threshold. They were virtually identical, and both uncannily similar to how my mother looked in her wedding photo. Despite my best attempts to delay the inevitable, the girls declined nibbles and refreshments in favour of getting straight to business. Aisling introduced the girl as Lucia D'Angelo, and described how Lucia had recently met with a woman in London to whom she was even more closely related than to us. Uncle Willie, I thought, and instantly blurted it out. Shaking her head, Aisling explained that something called mitochondrial DNA can only be inherited from one's mother. That ruled Willie out – and me, I realised, and began to breathe more easily.

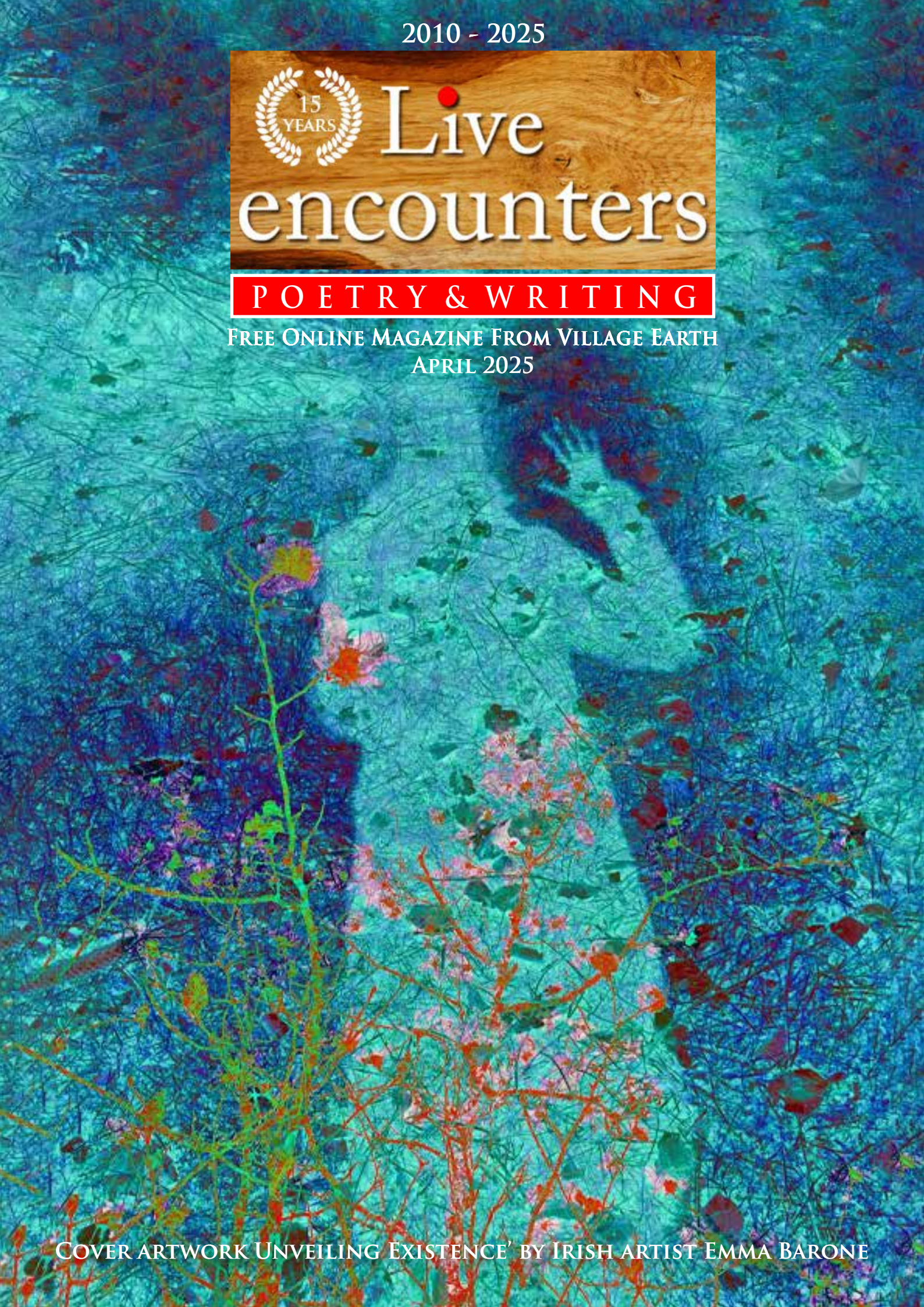
Lucia described how, following her DNA hit with Aisling, she had found us through Aisling's *Facebook page*. She then explained that the woman in London was actually her biological aunt – my unknown first cousin: the daughter of Mam's younger sister Mary – of whom I'd never heard. Apparently, teenage Mary had given birth to twin daughters in a now infamous mother-and-baby home. One girl's birth had been registered to a childless Dublin couple who'd later settled in London, while her twin – Lucia's mother – had been trafficked to a Catholic Irish/Italian family in Lower Manhattan. According to Lucia, my London cousin recently discovered that her birth mother – Mam's disowned sister Mary – had spent her entire adult life as an unpaid labourer in the laundry of the convent which was then run by Reverend Mother Perpetua – my other Aunt Mary.

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POETRY & WRITING

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