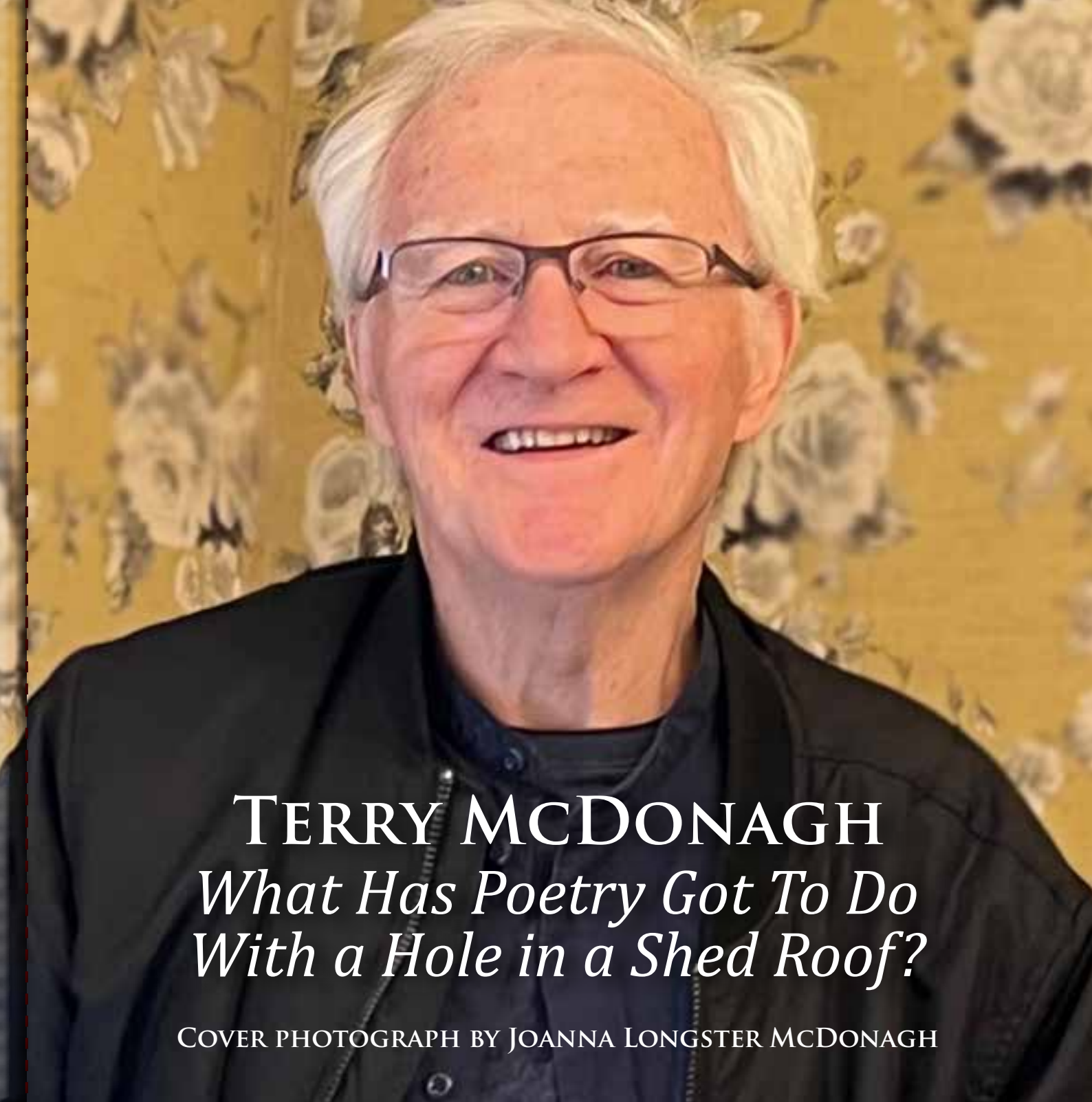


2010 - 2025 - 16TH ANNIVERSARY



POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
VOLUME ONE NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2025



TERRY MCDONAGH
*What Has Poetry Got To Do
With a Hole in a Shed Roof?*

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY JOANNA LONGSTER MCDONAGH



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

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

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

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

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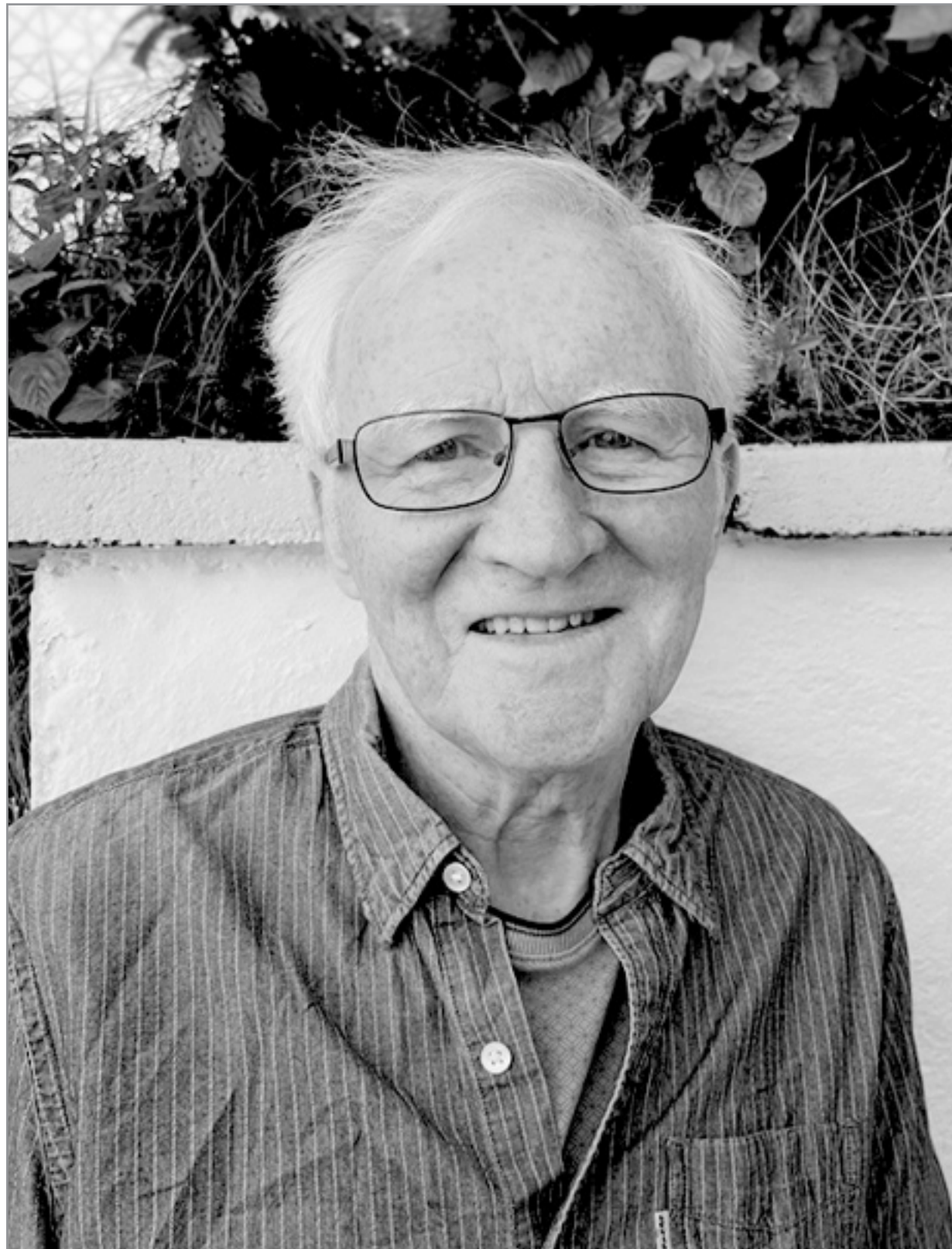


VOLUME ONE
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Terry McDonagh, Irish poet and dramatist has worked in Europe, Asia and Australia. He's taught creative writing at Hamburg University and was Drama Director at Hamburg International School. Published eleven poetry collections, letters, drama, 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 and Indonesian. His poem, 'UGG by Degrees' is included in the Galway Poetry Trail on Galway University campus. 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 collection, 'Two Notes for Home' – published by Arlen House – September 2022. He returned to live in County Mayo in 2019. www.terry-mcdonagh.com



TERRY MCDONAGH

WHAT HAS POETRY GOT TO DO WITH A HOLE IN A SHED ROOF?

When half the roof of our shed was tossed off in a wild wind, stuff had to be rescued. The matter was urgent, but, as ours wasn't the only damaged roof in the area, it became difficult to find a competent tradesman. *They're all in Australia*, I was told. Poetry was of little consolation, and my neighbour's wry comment didn't do much to lift my ailing mood either: *Any builder who's available can't be much good*.

You'd be right to question the relevance of a roofless shed in the refined world of poetry. I buried myself in pen and paper duties inside a window and made phone calls. No luck. We got used to the fractured roof and more-or-less abandoned hope of finding the right roofer. It even became a talking point in the pub at one stage. Poetry was rarely mentioned. The quest continued to no avail and to make matters worse, little colourful plants began to stir and trust themselves. Birds drifted in and out, without fear, as if they had earned squatters' rights. It began to feel like an eerie aviary. And I was learning a thing or two about myself.

Terry McDonagh. Photo credit: Joanna Longster McDonagh

I'd cycle the back roads to clear my head – thought of doing Yoga even drank green tea and turned to my inner self for comfort – to pondering on an afterlife with cremation, or otherwise, as an in-between option. October was on its way.

In a moment of light, my eye fell on Paul Durcan's '80 at 80' poetry collection. I needed comfort and got flavours of it on page 57. In his poem, Raymond of the Rooftops, Durcan's wife, Nessa, bemoans the fact that she is up to her knees in rainwater fixing a hole in their roof, while her husband sits indoors writing an Irish fairytale for a women's magazine in London.

Raymond of the Rooftops

This morning after the night
 The roof flew off the house
 And our sleeping children narrowly missed
 Being decapitated by falling slates,
 I asked my husband if he would
 Help put back the roof:
 But no – he was too busy at his work
 Writing for a women's magazine in London
 An Irish fairytale called Raymond of the Rooftops.
 Will you have a heart woman – he bellowed –
 Can't you see I am up to my eyes and ears in work,
 Breaking my neck to finish Raymond of the Rooftops,
 Putting everything I have got into Raymond of the Rooftops?
 Isn't it well for him? Everything he's got!

Poetry has always been a way of tuning into the essence of the human struggle – of telling the important stories – and, as my the hole in my roof was an aspect of the human struggle and a proper story, I couldn't resist putting pen to paper:

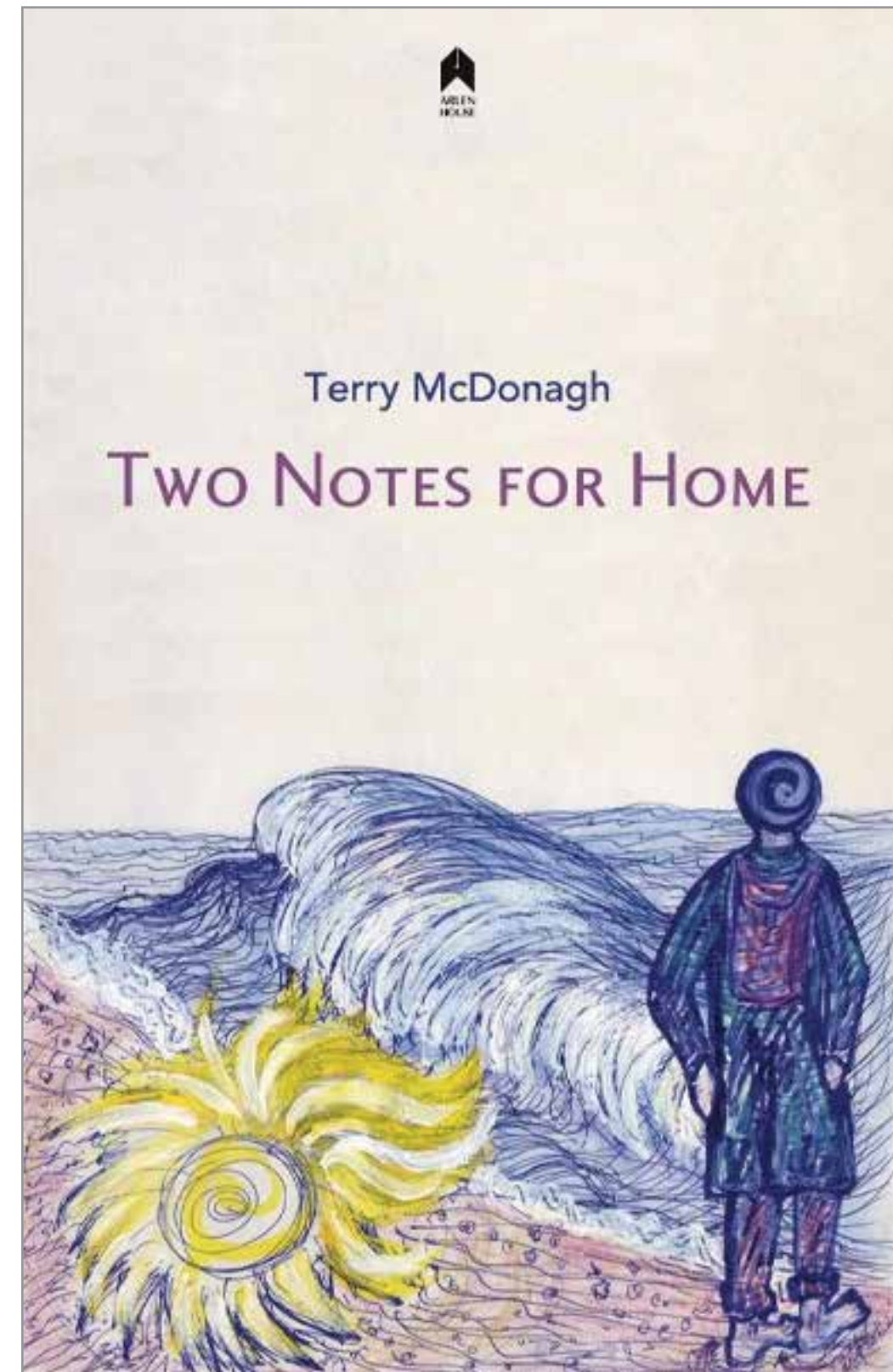
A Dark Hole in Our Shed Roof

Cycling home along the wood road
 late at night – not a light anywhere –
 outer space all around – beyond me
 and families all snuggled out of sight,
 I dug deep into the day-dreamer in me
 as I pedalled and pushed – with
 gentle rain falling on me in big tears
 and on all of East Mayo – and softly
 into a hole that used to be a shed roof,
 a receptacle without a hee-haw of hope
 and sniggering October round the corner.

But some say, *hope springs eternal* and when it springs, it feels like a cosy evening with a good book by a turf fire. This time, hope came in the form of a phone call. My friend, Declan, a romantic spirit and caring soul, called into my mobile phone: *McDonagh, I think I've got a roofer for you – and a good one at that!* This was poetry. Not the kind of stuff you'd get in a schoolroom or an anthology but the real thing that enters the soul and nourishes those dark corners where drear holds too much sway.

Jimmy arrived with measuring tapes and a practiced eye. He knew what he was on about and to add to the occasion, he had a big smile. *See you on Monday*, came at me like the opening line of an epic poem. He arrived with kit and tools and went to work with the grace and elegance of a man used to smiling. He was one-in-a-lifetime – an artist, masterful in what he was doing and what we needed. I was watching an artist at work in his studio – a poet, tapping nails and twisting screws. Things were happening in a whirl: That blue and grey panorama above – visible through the gaping hole – was fading into a memory. The tap, tap and drill sounds were like beats, quavers and rhythmic lines. The voice of a violin, rich and melodic filtered across the space between shed and back door and invaded our kitchen. These were rich, calming rhythmic sounds. Bit by bit, the work became clarity itself. It would endure.

Job complete and Jimmy paid, there was little left for me to do except to admire. This roof would outlive me. It could stand alone smiling skywards at great colourful – even stormy autumn days and a few sunny ones. It might cry out: *Do your best elements – you got me when I was weak and defenceless. You tore me apart but Jimmy came and healed me. On some days, a poet comes and stands there to admire and I just know he will sneak into his writing corner and give me my place in the greater scheme of things. I am another cog in the great wheel of life. I, once, was a gaping hole in a shed roof and, now, I am put right and pleased. Let the wily winds blow.*



Available at: www.amazon.com

Alex Skovron was born in Poland, lived briefly in Israel, and emigrated to Australia as a boy. His family settled in Sydney, where he grew up and completed his studies. From the early 1970s he worked as an editor for book publishers in Sydney and (after 1980) Melbourne. His poetry has appeared widely in Australia and overseas, and he has received a number of major awards for his work. His most recent collection is *Letters from the Periphery* (2021); his previous book, *Towards the Equator: New & Selected Poems* (2014), was shortlisted in the Prime Minister's Literary Awards. Skovron's collection of short stories *The Man who Took to his Bed* (2017), and his novella *The Poet* (2005), have been published in Czech translations; *The Attic*, a selection of his poetry translated into French, was published in 2013, and a bilingual volume of Chinese translations, *Water Music*, in 2017. His work has also appeared in Dutch, Macedonian, Polish and Spanish. The numerous public readings he has given have included appearances in China, Serbia, India, Ireland and Portugal. In 2023 Alex Skovron was honoured with the Patrick White Literary Award for his contribution to Australian literature.

<https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/towards-the-equator-alex-skovron/>
<https://compulsivereader.com/2022/03/12/a-review-of-letters-from-the-periphery-by-alex-skovron/>
<https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/abr-online/archive/2018/>

PAPERCUTS

Give me a quirky keyboard
for this heartwork,
the slow burn of Bruckner
at the back, the mute
swirl of circumstance
sniffing out the old velleities.
Later, a wakefulness
the night subdues
with dry dreams you can't
recall recedes,
all the lesions' ferment
in safe mode. Recurrence
the eternal cure, till
regrets taper to clerical, to
papercuts, and you walk about
like an achievement.



Alex Skovron. Photo credit: Anne M Carson

TRIPLE SHOT

Why do we all miss the point
of everything? Even that iron gate
squeaking in the rain
understands its true predicament.
As for you, ill-starred as a scribe

observing himself grow
pointless, how can you not know
art is the sublimation of desire?

How much sadder to drown
one's nightmares in a foaming pot.
Put down that triple shot
of double malt, oil the iron gate.
You're older than you drink.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Anna Yin was born in China and immigrated to Canada in 1999. She served as Mississauga's Inaugural Poet Laureate (2015–17) and as the Ontario representative for the League of Canadian Poets (2013–16). Anna is the author of seven poetry collections, including *Breaking Into Blossom* (Frontenac Press, 2025), and four books of translations, most notably *Mirrors and Windows* (Guernica Editions, 2021). Anna has received numerous honours, including the 2005 Ted Plantos Memorial Award, the MARTY Awards (2011, 2014, 2025), two U.S. scholarships, and grants from both the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts. Her works have appeared in *Queen's Quarterly*, *ARC Poetry*, *The New York Times*, *China Daily*, *CBC Radio*, *Literary Review of Canada*, and elsewhere. She has performed on Parliament Hill, at the Austin International Poetry Festival, the Edmonton Poetry Festival, and at universities across China, Canada, and the United States. Since 2011, Anna has designed and led her Poetry Alive educational programs while also working in IT. In 2021, she founded *SureWay Press* to promote cultural exchange through translation, editing, and publishing services. <https://www.surewaypress.com/en/>

TO HAIZI

Along Anqing's ancient, gracious promenade,
I wander beneath high lanterns, flower-lit lights.
Unbidden, your verses echo on a whitewashed wall—
*Am I, too, a sister, a kin,
seated by the river, endlessly remembered, asked about?*

Decades on, the same river still flows—
toward the sea, with spring's warmth, and blossoms in bloom.
But why did you leave your belongings on the tracks?
Your mother wept until no tears remained;
your brothers walked diverging paths.
And still, unbidden, we meet this.
I clutch my sole belonging tight,
drifting toward a farther ocean.

Note: Haizi (海子), a renowned Chinese poet from Anqing, ended his life on March 26, 1989, at the age of twenty-five. He lay down on the railway tracks in Shanhaiguan, bringing to a close a brief but blazing existence.



Anna Yin

ABOUT AFTERLIFE

Reading Lynn Tait's "Thoughts on the Afterlife"

Scatter my ashes beneath a cedar
or across the ocean—
let raw roots drink me down,
let white waves carry me away,
becoming leaves,
or clouds...

Once, beyond this body,
I flew with verses,
walked among stars,
danced my own Milky Way,
believing I could travel
anywhere
with only a thought.

There is no end—
life drifts forward,
woven into stories...
until some small moment in me
settles, like raindrops,
on someone's shoulder.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Anne Elvey is a poet, editor and researcher, of Irish, Scottish and English descent, currently living on unceded Bunurong Country. Her most recent poetry collections are *(C)loud: A poetic response to child sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic church* (Palaver, 2025), *Intents* (Liquid Amber Press, 2025), *Leaf* (Liquid Amber Press, 2022) and *Obligations of voice* (Recent Work Press, 2021). Her work spans ecological poetry and poetics, environmental and social justice, and unsettling settlerdom. Her most recent academic book is *Reading with Earth: Contributions of the New Materialism to an Ecological Feminist Hermeneutics* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2023). Anne was inaugural managing editor of *Plumwood Mountain* journal until 2020. <https://sunglintdrift.com/>



BRUSHTAILS

if broken on
a lost coin's
toss the air
fetid alive

the limb age
folds round
a new hollow
possumgift

to run swift
wireglance
in evening's
eyeglimmer

body dodges
hands' touch

Anne Elvey

BRAIDED

*Visiting Te Wāhipounamu/Westland, Aotearoa/New Zealand, October 2024
for Jen*

*I miss the rivers she tells me
the sound of their voices*

So I look for them
water interwoven with shingle

building from snowmelt
towards sea

Under rain’s persistence
their resonance noisy as static

is scored with that temper of bass
almost sweet

in the dynamic clarity of its claim
Skies transluce

Voices soften
to threaded murmur

Beneath another one-laned bridge
this one flows from a glacier

I resist vertigo
to take a photo from the pedestrian path

Stone against stone against stone —
building channels

where ribboning water
plaits through gravelled bed

From the slow-hastening of glacial recession
across rock

rapids resound
singing (are they singing) *we’ll be lost*

As I lean on the rail
I can see

why the stream’s shade of mineral-rich blue
is called ice

LAST DAYS

- 1
On the centre white line a magpie stands carolling while I attend
- 2
Sun glistens on camellia leaf amid the lift and curve of branch
- 3
The nurse calls with news of a pressure sore in ninety-nine-year-old skin
- 4
This season there is barely a blossom on the red flowering gum
- 5
The pink hibiscus opens under bloomless limbs heavy with gumnuts
- 6
Heat radiates through overcast sky and sand burns after sea's relief
- 7
Ninety-nine is enough she repeats to ensure that I understand



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Anne Walsh Donnelly writes prose, poetry and plays and is the author of the novel *He Used To Be Me*, (New Island Books, 2024.) Her poetry collections include *Odd as F*ck*, (Fly on the Wall Poetry Press, 2021) and *The Woman With An Owl Tattoo* (Fly on the Wall Poetry Press, 2019). She was appointed Poet Laureate of Belmullet by Poetry Ireland and the Mayo Arts Office in 2021.



ON A SEPTEMBER AFTERNOON

yellow-tits flit
from branch to bird house
in a garden.

Three writers sit in a kitchen,
appetites teased by scents
of garlic frying in a pan

and cinnamon crumble caressing
foraged blackberries in the oven.
These world-weary women

feast on falafel, olives
and stuffed vine leaves.
They share stories of children

as mad as meerkats,
clients as tight
as a duck's arse

and woodpecker landladies
who just won't stop tapping.
After, there's laughter

as they utter rude words
(in the nicest possible way).
Grace flows through

their in-breaths, their out-breaths,
love resides
in the space between them.

Anne Walsh Donnelly

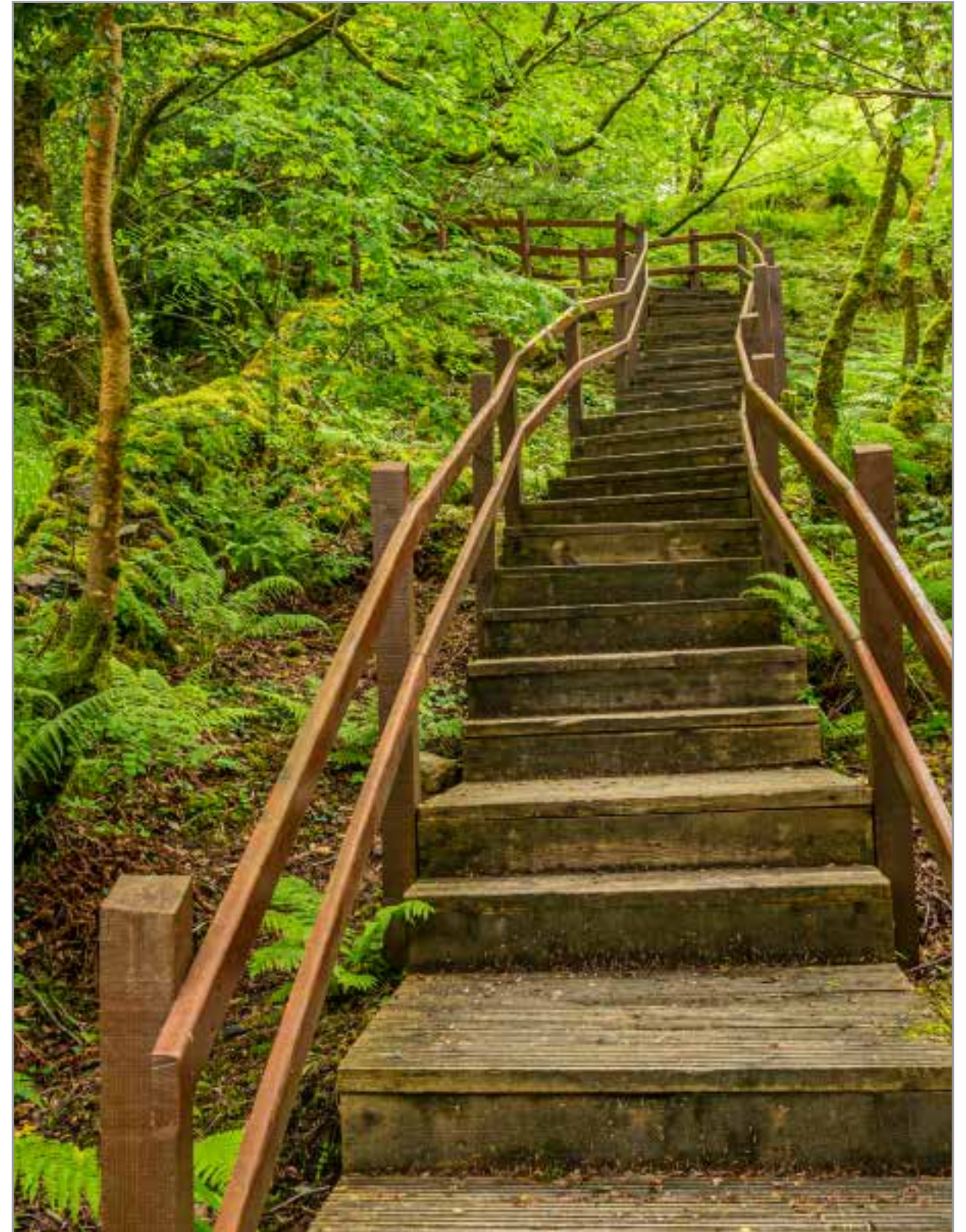
AFTER THE STORM

I sit, sipping a chai latte in Connemara National Park,
beside a trio of Sitka spruce. Cream-green lichen

acres their wrinkled bark, their moss-covered fingers
sink into soft earth. Scattered on the ground

their cigar-shaped cones. Fierce winds have taken
limbs but not the bird houses strapped to their trunks.

Sparrow hawks, chaffinches and wrens still sing
oblivious to the relentless rush of the nearby stream.



Photograph courtesy <https://www.nationalparks.ie/connemara/>

Dr Beatriz Copello is a well-known reviewer, writer and poet, she is also known for her sense humour. "Her poems are sensuous, evocative and imaginative. Beatriz Copello is one of Australia's foremost poets," wrote Julia Hancock, Ex-Editor of Allan an Unwin and Freelance editor and journalist. Copello's poetry books are *Women Souls and Shadows*, *Meditations at the Edge of a Dream*, *Flowering Roots*, *Under the Gums Long Shade*, *Witches Women and Words*, *Rambles*, *No Salami Fairy Bread* and *The Book of Jeremiah* and in Spanish *Lo Irrevocable del Halcon* and *Renacer en Azul*. Her poetry has been published in literary journals such as *Southerly* and *Australian Women's Book Review* and in many other print and Electronic Publications. Fiction books by author are: *A Call to the Stars*, *Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria* and *Beyond the Moons of August* (Her Doctoral Thesis).

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

the truth wrapped in silver foil
 words silenced like those of a prisoner
 nothing said no excuses
 gated utterances unable to escape
 forces that drive denialism
 paradigm asserting the natural
 accumulation of critical anomalies
 relationship of shifting parameters
 broad sweep of measured reality
 deplorable mundane alternatives
 tired of the usual narratives
 of power and triumphalism
 dispassionate cold myopic
 ingrained desire to make sense
 of the "messages in a bottle"



Dr Beatriz Copello

LSD

there is a war within himself and he escapes
and hides in the solitude of the deserted streets
dark thoughts create an abyss - him versus the world
he searches but cannot find love it runs away
like a gazelle persecuted by an implacable lion
there are no kisses to appease his desires
nor water to turn off his passion
the south wind sweeps his thoughts
like dry leaves fly searching for freedom
freedom that only exists in his imagination
where coloured dolphins dance dressed up as angels
the mind hesitates and waits patiently
happy are those who believe in gods and fairies
he walks alone ... his abode earth, his roof
the sky, grieving he falls sleeps and dreams
of a devil painted green and with the taste of salt

TERMINATUM

passion eroded
like some mountains
in the Andes
tenderness deflowered
like a virgin raped
passion drowned
friendship mutilated
anger reigns
in the country
of our bodies
embraces meta-morphed
into killing desire
repugnance rejection
yet ...

Brian Kirk has published two collections with Salmon Poetry, *After The Fall* (2017) and *Hare's Breath* (2023). His poem "Birthday" won Irish Poem of the Year at the Irish Book Awards 2018. His chapbook *It's Not Me, It's You* won the Southword Fiction Chapbook Competition, published by Southword Editions in 2019. His novel *Riverrun* was chosen as a winner of the IWC Novel Fair 2022.



MAY BLESSING

May winter die and summer bloom,
green branches shade us from the sun,
wildflowers dapple meadow sward
guiding us toward the light.

May bonfires show the way at dusk
to those who wander in the dark,
let each one take their part as due
allowing all to share the light.

May days stretch out to welcome all,
the poorest given all they need,
the weakest soar above the strong,
the heavy burden growing light.

May sunshine bless your ageing bones
and bring the spark back to your eyes,
the smile to those unhappy lips,
you've waited so long for the light.

May seasons always be discrete
just as they were in your dim youth,
may summer alter everything,
defeating darkness, bearing light.

Brian Kirk

NO PEACE

with apologies to Yeats

I will recline and rest now, turn on the TV,
and a small burrow make here, of throws and cushions made;
two remotes will I have there, Doritos open on my knee,
and mute the sound to bluebottle grade.

And I shall have no peace there, for peace is not a show
airing on terrestrial TV or pay per view, no satellite pings
serenity; empty faces and jarring images glow,
and I'm drawn to them like moths' wings.

I will recline and rest now, for always night and day
I hear devices buzz, vibrate, whisper and roar;
while I lie in a heap with last night's takeaway,
I hear only what is uncalled for.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Colin Dardis is a neurodivergent writer, editor and sound artist, his work has been published widely throughout Ireland, the UK and the US. He co-hosts the long-running open mic poetry night, *Purely Poetry*, in Belfast, and is editor of the *Poem Alone* blog.



PERMEATED LANDSCAPES

Thesis:

To make a spade
of your own head
and dig within,
a hibernation
for all seasons.

Antithesis:

To be the torch-lit
flood onto nations,
however small,
building constellations
one star at a time.

Synthesis:

To welcome sun
and shade, infused;
flash of and dark amid
the lighthouse turn,
finding all weather fair.

Colin Dardis

THE COST OF POETRY

Due to circumstances beyond our control
the cost of poetry will rise this year.

The ongoing Brexit situation has meant that metaphors
are now as a premium, and similes are in danger
of running out unless ministerial forces urgently intervene.

Blank verse will continue to rise in line with inflation,
but the use of form will be strictly controlled
by a government task force to help reduce spiralling prices.

Having long imported the finest Ukrainian semi-colons,
the current conflict means than we are left with little option
put to past on the increased cost to the reader
in order to continue to meet punctuation demands.

As Russia threatens to cut off our supply of rhyme,
rhetoric and refrain, we need to manage national reserves.
Erroneous use of these devices will be punished.

Meter will be restricted to a maximum of three feet.
Dactyls and anapests in poetry are forbidden.
All caesura will now be stopped.

Thank you for your understanding.

THE MORNING NEWS

Often, when it is already daylight
and the night has disappeared
around an hour which we rarely see,
I find you awake, with your phone
lit up like a church candle:
you are still in your reading,
the typewriter rock of your eyes
silent upon our mattress.
Perhaps you fear of waking me,
but often, wait until my first
moonless exhalations, signalling
the gear shift out from sleep,
until you tell me your reports,
what your morning forage
has gathered from the electric forest.

Diarmuid Fitzgerald was born in 1977. He lives in Dublin. Diarmuid supports other writers in getting their work published. He has published three books with Alba Publishing (<http://www.albapublishing.com>). *Thames Way*, a collection of haiku poems, was his first book, released in 2015. A second haiku collection, *A Thousand Sparks*, came out in 2018. In 2021, *The Singing Hollow*, his first collection of poetry, was published, which covers themes of personal development. A poem was longlisted in the Bridport Prize in 2025. He has received recognition through awards, such as winning an Individual Artist Bursary from South Dublin County Council in 2018. He came in second place in the South Dublin Library Poetry Award in 2020. In 2021, he won a mentoring experience through the National Mentoring Panel. A professional member of the Irish Writers Centre, he also writes nonfiction and works on spirituality. <https://www.diarmuidfitzgerald.com/>



THE CORKSCREW

I twist the metal worm
through the cork. Pulling
and tugging, I feel resistance
from the levers. The cork pops.

The aroma breathes out from the wine,
suffusing the room. I pour
this heavy red, making a gulping noise.

The worm glistens as I turn it
reminds me of waves undulating,
moving in the same direction,
going to where I don't know.

I run my fingers down the corkscrew,
feel its hardness and purpose,
wonder if there is a pattern?

Diarmuid Fitzgerald

TERMINUS

The metal wheels squeal along the tracks
as the bell of the Luas tram rings out.
You wear short pants and a T-shirt,
swear your smile brings out the sun.
I like your deep American twang
but not the over-the-top optimism.
You forgot about the Irish weather
and pelting rain smashes onto the road.
Sweat trickles down your brown skin
and you run, leaving me without
a kiss. You don't turn around or wave.
The tram trundles over a can in its way.

THE CONSOLATION OF THE SKIES

The clouds are floating east
hovering until they billow
beyond sight

the dome of the sky turns
from egg blue to red
dousing the sky

I carry this disappointment,
this burst of hand ringing
a way of holding on

the sky offers its consolation
to me turning from red
to deep black

the light pours through the sky
fills up every particle of the air
wave after wave

moonlight glimmers
into unexplored corners
where I see my street in a new light

Fotoula Reynolds is a poet, born in Australia of Greek heritage. She is the author of four poetry collections and is published widely in journals, reviews and magazines. She has been anthologised multiple times in Australia and internationally. Fotoula was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2019. She is the first prize winner of the 2024 Greek-Australian Cultural League Book Award for her collection titled *Kairos*.



HEAVEN ISN'T LIKE LYNNE STREET

A strong current flows
like a river in a hurry
carries me to the place
where you end and I begin

My mind is a rolling boulder
please wait so I may fall with you
take my heart, take my eyes
in dreams we are whole again

Today the sun refuses to shine
i think of impossible things
how do I warm your cold hand?
we haven't finished our walk

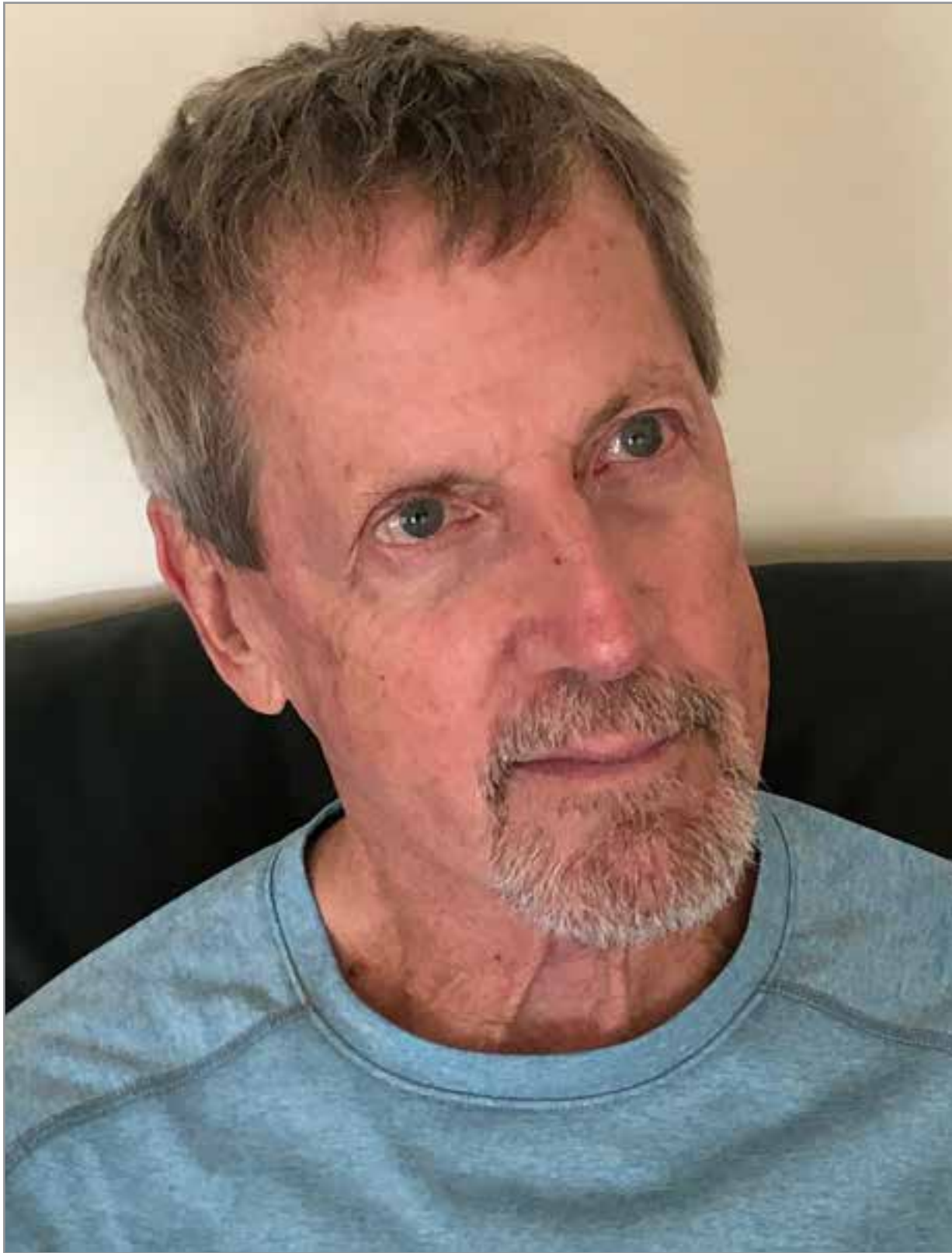
I'm late to catch your last breath
the one that gives and takes
chance dims in the quiet light
words die, no time to exchange

Heaven isn't like Lynne Street
but I bet all colours mix together
and waterfalls are on every corner
maybe god lives nearby

People advance in every direction
I know love lives at the kitchen table
I'll make Turkish coffee and meet you
there, where time never changes

Fotoula Reynolds

Gary Fincke's latest poetry collection is *The Necessary Going On: Selected Poems* (Press 53, May, 2025). His most recent book is *After Arson: New and Selected Essays* (Madville Press, Oct. 25).



Gary Fincke

WHILE OUR NEWSPAPERS STARVED

During the endless war, the civil one
when we raised hate like hybrid tomatoes
our children could swallow like caplets,
our devices hummed like lovers' demands.

They glowed with memes. Their slogans walked
with us while our newspapers starved until
they became a few paragraphs, then less,
then merely a provocative headline with photos.

We open-carried at the grocery store.
We flew flags and sanctimony, trained
our dogs to be fences along the borders
of our small, carefully surveyed lots.

News kept breaking while we posted
the recipes of neighbors. Each update
sentence about the war drew thousands
of comments, punditry spreading

like highly contagious airborne flu.
Subtlety was shed like unwanted fat.
The world we knew was thinner now,
relying upon the app for true or false.

Each night arrived despite the debate
on darkness, whether or not it was
deepening, threatening to become
perpetual, expanding like a universe

that will never cease to widen, or,
according to others, collapsing back
into the tiny, pulsing, dot that contains
everything all of us supposed was true.

DROUGHT-STRUCK PLANTS SQUEAL IN DISTRESS

The afternoons are worst, even
the succulents in the shade
beginning to whine like our dog
during its throes of dreams.
Those in full sun—the hardy,
decorative grasses, the iris,
and the prolific yucca--
drive us indoors with their
wailed cantatas of sorrow.
Months now, since anxiety
swelled to anger, how tired
they were of us explaining
that our surreptitious
dawn and dusk sprinklings
were the best we could do.
Look, we say, somebody
has cut our garden hoses.
Green is taboo, your leaves
a loud, public confession.
A short walk from here, fields
of corn cry in unison,
inconsolable as infants
in the expanding famine zone,
the ones whose mouths we used
to cover with monthly checks.

The house plants, though locked
inside their gated community,
are frightened by conservation.
For weeks, they have asked
for increased security.
Among themselves, they discuss
who would be easiest for us
to sacrifice, their squeals,
like yours, no longer coded.
Despite our care, even the cacti
loathe us enough to wish us
dead. Suicidal, they agree,
but the world, in time,
would flourish without us,
that assurance no more flimsy
than your cautious talk of souls.

A HOMILY

Just now, I've learned the vocabulary for grapefruit, how it is the endocarp that is savored and swallowed while the albedo is the bitter mistake caused by careless sectioning, what, each morning, in the kitchen before breakfast, my mother never made with her curved, pliable, serrated knife, already dressed as if she needed to be prepared for emergencies that drew assistance into the house-- police, EMTs, the doctor who lived in a house walking distance from us.

Always, I ate those sections before cereal, even the somber bran flakes that end-stopped her morning routine, a synonym, then, for comforting. But not necessarily, not, this week, when my urologist announced, "This routine procedure is performed without sedation," reaffirming that standard for stent removal a week after my surgery, extracting it through the one and only orifice option in what he called "a bit of tidy-up." Not something that felt like the soul leaving my body before my brain's run was canceled, how I described the sensation to him, not receiving as much as a wry smile, nothing, as well from his beautiful nurse, her expression fixed somewhere between bemused and indifference.

All week, I've told this post-surgery story as if it needed an afterword, ending with "It was really something," so ecstatic in conclusion that I've relied upon my mother's expression for unaccountable sensation as a synonym for inevitable instead of including the details of exposure—the soft penis on display, the nerves broadcasting an exclamatory sentence of helplessness--satisfied to be survivor of nothing more than surgical routine, my body's flaw repaired like a slow, persistent drip from a seldom-used downstairs bathroom. Not shouldering the silence my mother carried with her when her dread of the procedures that might, for years, have prolonged her life as someone other than herself, counseled her to dress as carefully as a bride, closed her bedroom door, laid her down, and extinguished her.

Joe Kidd: Author of 'The Invisible Waterhole', and 'Digging Underground/Portrait of a Beat Poet Laureate'. Beat Poet Laureate Emeritus 2022-2024. Cultural Director, Ambassador of Peace, Official Poet of Government of Birlant (North Africa). Honorary Doctorate. 2025 Pushcart Prize Nominee. Member: National & International Beat Poet Foundation, 100K Poets For Change, International Singer/Songwriter Assoc, Michigan Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Toured 10 European countries, Mexico, Jamaica, 36 states in USA



IF THE PROPHETS HAD CELL PHONES

I deeply slept upon the desert rocks where entities transparent roamed
high above the farthest star, there sounded the trumpet from the plateau
and I, then shaken, gazed upon the staircase as it rose beyond

a vertical horizon, the axis of my heart and mind
countless works to mold the landscape into that which would support a measure
reaching out to help, my hand was frozen unable to touch what was once divine

"away to Babylon," cried the prophet as he disappeared into the mist
clutching his garment it was then recalled a sweet and loving voice gone
"literature is the memory's tool to prove that something is now no more"

shall I die for what I have done, pay for redemption as if a merchant
stand at the gate begging for mercy, the sacred seat beside the throne
or raise my fist in true defiance, become human as a last resort

a mother's breast, a father's breath, delinquent not in the hour of need
but temporary is nature's realm, the door that opens and closes behind
locked in love to serve our master and ourselves together born

barefoot I have walked the trail, tamed the tiger, accepted the fate
I now cast it all into the fire, the light of souls returning home
the days are short and years are shorter, a revolution dwells within

may this campaign be documented, the outcome and victorious march
all questions answered, all faith resolved, beliefs forgotten one by one
I take it with me, nothing here to visit, sitting still in silence and the spirit's peace

we saw it coming, we heard the warning, dropped to our knees and wept out loud
removed our clothes defying history, naked except for the haloed crown
I took God's picture as he walked away shaking his head, my name in vain

Joe Kidd

Les Wicks — His “career” in poetry has seen him strolling through a minefield, performing at a festival financed by a mob boss & to a one person audience in remote country town. He’s read in a gold mine, a Roman Empire cistern & a madrasah. 15th book of poetry is *Time Taken – New & Selected* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2022).



SOME TOTAL

Justice occasionally prevails. Once I was counting the votes
until I forgot the names of the candidates. Everyone won.

Dropped so many hates
that my friends thought me clumsy.

Music is food for the soul?
Last week it was just noisy.

Travelled to the glares of a red light district
then flicked the switches. Come Dark.

Marched against a war
discovered it was the wrong one.

Patience is rewarded
as even Satan becomes a shoelace.

Theft isn't redistribution
but maybe...

Roll with the punches
better yet avoid them altogether.

The best exercise is touch
trivial as a hope.

We are all in the river
wish it was cleaner.

Les Wicks

THE FLIGHT FROM PERMANENCE

Before I fall
close my eyes.

As the dead pile up around me
I *only* think I've chosen a side.

Even falling needs a peak.

Close my eyes.
We have artificial intelligence
but still not got intelligence right.
Means so much to me
shadow (though my car runs on colour-wheels)
& breeze is breath.
There's mortality touch.

Count to three then run...
pointless, but we'll be together.
This planet is inexplicably both depressed & hyper
but there's still another song.

Common cause. Economy class.
There will be fires tomorrow.

Juggle mice long enough
then your whiskers will twitch but
cabarets are tired of the act.
They misspelt my tattoo
but no one reads anymore. This hazmat suit
is both practical & a liberation from fashion.

Summer was a habit — like all habits
it had more fun than we did.

Would anyone die for these principles?

HAVE YOU HEARD?

Everyone's talking infiltrators.
There's arson in factories
& truths leaking out about aliens...
they've got paperwork. & vote!

If infiltrators are like imposters
regularly thought I was one.
My poems were no passkeys
maybe a few people thought me clever
if some days the tricks worked to plan.

Having previously edged my way inside love
I knew the plot would be uncovered

because everything is uncovered.

Across a life I've snuck past the barriers,
done some damage.

The cause is hopeless
but alternatives were never offered.

A cough insinuates
& I am accused.
Spies like me receive no medals,
a discreet death
garland of dirt.
Deniability grows like an errant vine by the grave
three mourners dance among fallen leaves.

Lynda Tavakoli lives in County Down, Northern Ireland, where she facilitates adult creative writing classes and has worked as a tutor for the Seamus Heaney Award for schools. She is a professional member of The Irish Writers Centre and has been nominated for *Best of the Net* and *The Pushcart Prize*. A poet and novelist, Lynda's work has been published worldwide with Farsi and Spanish translations. She has been winner of a number of international poetry and short story awards and been published in numerous journals and anthologies including Live Encounters Poetry & Writing, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, , The Galway Review, Skylight47, Abridged, CAP Seamus Heaney Anthologies, Eat the Storms, Drawn to the Light Press, amongst many others. Lynda's debut poetry collection, *The Boiling Point for Jam* received wide acclaim for its raw honesty and authenticity while her second collection *A Unison of Breaths* has been recently published by Arlen House.

HAVE YOU THE TIME?

When you first came to the door
I offered you the time,
for that is what you asked me for.
I was ten, and you a skinny not much more,
with cheeks sucked in by some mysterious force
no ten-year-old might choose to understand.
The collar of your blouse had scarfed
a greying rainbow round your neck
to merge in seamless union with the pallor of your skin.

Later, when my mother heard you'd been,
she asked me what I'd given you.
The time, of course, I said,
for that is what you'd asked me for, or so I thought.

When you next showed up, I was at school,
but later on my favourite sweets were absent from the jar
and when I asked, my mother simply
pointed at the clock to mutter
something underneath her breath
about how time is never always what it seems.
And now I often wonder what became of you,
the worker's girl whose name I can't recall
because I never even took the time to ask.



Lynda Tavakoli

GHOST SHIP

Out of a Tsunami breath you came,
proud for the winds to take you,
not with sail but only bulk to carry you along.

A year of days, a thousand miles of ocean
paint their terracotta wash upon your silent bow,
while Hokkaido mourns its errant child.

The *Oshawa Seamount*
oceaning your longevity on the waves
while the waters of Alaska drown your long escape
and feed upon the flotsam of your shrapnelled wounds,
thwarting the passage home.

*In March 2011 a rusted, uncrewed squid boat, named Oshawa Seamount,
based out of Hokkaido, Japan, was cast adrift by a tsunami. It was eventually
tracked floating off the British Columbia coast, heading for Alaska.*



© Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Ma Yongbo was born in 1964, Ph.D, representative of Chinese avant-garde poetry, and a leading scholar in Anglo-American poetry. He is the founder of polyphonic writing and objectified poetics. He is also the first translator to introduce British and American postmodern poetry into Chinese. He has published over eighty original works and translations since 1986 included 9 poetry collections. He focused on translating and teaching Anglo-American poetry and prose including the work of Dickinson, Whitman, Stevens, Pound, Amy Lowell, Williams, Ashbery. His translation of *Moby Dick* has sold over 600,000 copies. *The Collected Poems of Ma Yongbo* (four volumes, Eastern Publishing Centre, 2024) comprising 1178 poems, celebrate 40 years of writing poetry



Ma Yongbo

ODE TO MEANINGLESSNESS

The cataract growing in the dead horse's eye, children chase
their own screams that hover between deep-sea creatures and plants,
running back and forth. This is the land you lived in,
the alley where golden twilight slowly retreats,
only the mother of fear can save you,
while the mother of truth's call to come home lingers unheard.

How to return to simplicity: the simplicity of flame,
the layered simplicity of a rose—not love,
not rungs of esoteric knowledge,
not the cosmic wheel of sacrifice,
but merely a flower being itself.

A human too, just human—not a vessel, not a function,
only a simple body and simple joy,
ah, to return to that meaningless wilderness,
that wilderness which is paradise.

Necessary abstractions, words in masquerade
pilgrimages through endless vegetarian buffets
from the shed elytra of countless past lives,
you come here to prove
this place does not exist, you do not exist,
if you find land turned to fish,
a school of memories with transparent brains—
what will you do with them?

Yet here remain flickering surfaces,
smooth, impenetrable, drawn-out pranks,
like mirrors that both reveal and block,
a point spinning infinitely back into itself—
dust forever mimicking the cold reverse.

You must rise from the depths to the surface; you must forget
the silent language of forking flames,
green blood, hay, and the lightning of pitchforks.

EMPTY MOUNTAIN

The emptiness of this empty mountain hinges on your loneliness
 on those who once lived here before you,
 on which slope of the valley the white breath of spring ascends,
 which slope the golden exhalation of autumn descends,
 more depends on where you observe the qi in this moment
 even the time it takes for a moss-cloaked stone
 to plunge to the valley's bottom.

Then time's echo will split the valley wide,
 revealing mountains behind or beyond this mountain:
 the slow transparency of raindrops falling before or after this mountain,
 the heavy slowness of a great bird rising from a broad and smooth water surface,
 and your gaze lifting from depth to height.

As for the mist of dawn and dusk, the incense curling over your incense table,
 as for the half-painted screen, a letter that only has the beginning part,
 the flatlands beyond the mountains, crisscrossing paths, and distant winds—
 all can temporarily give way to a mood of missing a friend, yet not longing to meet.

THOUGHTS ON PORTRAIT OF JOHN ASHBERRY

You split the darkness open from its very core
 you split the fragmented crimson darkness—
 those are red window panes you've painted black with words,
 or a door on the verge of falling away,
 two geometric fruits plucked too soon.

You turn to the right, gaze fixed in astonishment,
 the ice in your mouth nearly slips away,
 what did you see? or what saw you?
 the salt flats of your forehead glow with a pale, blank light.

What feeble caution, yet how weightless—
 your hand, a small single-pole double-throw switch,
 do you mean to turn the universe on, or shut it off?
 let the electrified darkness shriek in curls,
 let yourself become a bloodless piece of chalk.

Come out, old brother, from your flattened utopia,
 come to the loneliness of my thirty-year-old birches
 I'm stuck between two young, rounded bodies,
 you never became my father either,
 I hesitate like you, stare to the right like you,
 as lost as you—wondering what I saw,
 or what saw me.

Maybe we could gather white plants together,
 arrange them before a wiped-clean blackboard,
 until it all ends,
 and trust again the certainty of the weather.

Mandy Beattie is a feminist, former social worker and academic. Her poetry's published in, *The Waxed Lemon*, *Poets Republic*, *Drawn to The Light*, *WordPeace*, *Orphic Review*, *Crowstep*, *Abridged*, *The Banyan Review*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Full House Literary*, *Verse-Virtual*, *Abridged* and many more. Prizewinner and shortlisted poet and Best of Net nominee 2024, 2025.



FRUITLESS: KISS OF LIFE

*If I can ease one life.... or help one fainting Robin
unto his nest again I shall not live in vain — Emily Dickinson*

Skinny as a wishbone a fledgling ousted
from nesting, quavered, quivered on concrete. Janie
scooped her up like ladling broth; couried her to galloping
breastbone: Rapped on the vet's brass knocker — The slash
of his guillotine-hand said, *Put it back, nothing can be done*
Janie stepped off his polished parquet into furious sun
Unearthed a budgie cage; carpeted its steel-nest with
trimmings, furnishings, resistance. Fed her milk-mashed
Weetabix from a straw-teat, pharynx gobbling like turkey
giblets. In the wee hours she wormed her way out
of a walkabout seed drawer, took her maiden flight into
an ebony stereo speaker: Janie earthed her under
a peace rose as hollow epithets hovered
on her tongue like sycamore seeds
waiting to float to earth

Mandy Beattie

GO LADY DIVA:
A NARRATIVE GHAZAL FOR LADY GODIVA

Ride you naked thro’ the town, and I repeal it
— Leofric, Earl of Mercia

At market she heard serf rumours of rising taxes
it haunted Lady Godiva
The fault lay with the King and Lord Mercia
discovered Lady Godiva

Returning to lichen walls of their castle
she waylaid Leofric, Lord Mercia
His vaunted penury: plates empty, bellies gaunt
revolted Lady Godiva

Lord Mercia’s taunting dare if she rode out bare
he would cede tithes
Her mettlesome mien flummoxed Lord Mercia
beseeched him did Lady Godiva

Jaunted to Coventry she spoke to the people
of Leofric’s scheme. Commanded
them home the morrow; keep from windows and doors
demanded Lady Godiva

Lamented riding unclad, to *Banbury Cross*
with rings on her fingers and bells
on her toes: Silk spun tresses hid modesty’s blushes
it daunted Lady Godiva

Peeping Tom truant, flaunted disregard for her order
his lust struck blind by some unseen hand
Lord Mercia did not raise levies
kept his oath to Lady Godiva

A cathedral erected and her comely cameo
stained-glass cast — A monk scribed:
Lady Mercia did plead, *avidly goad* Leofric
for love of townsfolk, The Lady Godiva

*Anagrams of Lady Godiva:
Go Lady Diva
Avidly goad

Michael Durack lives in Co. Tipperary, Ireland. He is the author of a memoir in prose and poems, *Saved to Memory: Lost to View* (2016) and three poetry collections, *Where It Began* (2017), *Flip Sides* (2020) and *This Deluge of Words* (2023) published by Revival Press.



STOWAWAY AND MUTINEER

Every great voyage requires a stowaway
and a whiff of mutiny, *Endurance* no exception.
Blackborow, the young Welshman failed the audition
so Bakewell, his American mate, stowed him in his locker.
Discovered by Holness and signed on as a steward.
First man to set frostbitten foot on Elephant Island.
Last man to return to England having been hospitalised
in Punta Arenas for treatment of his amputated toes.
Elevated from stowaway to Polar Medal Bronze.

"The only man I'm not dead certain of,"
so said Shackleton of McNish, shipwright and carpenter,
curmudgeon and owner of Mrs Chippy, a male cat
sacrificed with the dogs on the altar of necessity
after the ship had been abandoned to its fate.
Mutual mistrust, and mutinous mutterings.
"Everyone works well except the carpenter,"
Shackleton wrote, and yet the doomed vessel bore his handiwork
and he too braved the Southern Ocean waves
aboard *The James Caird*, having made it seaworthy.
Finally shipped from South Georgia back to England,
no kudos, no Elephant Island reunion, no Polar Gong.

Michael Durack

FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS

Skating on thin ice is a metaphor for danger
and camping on an ice floe carries its own risks.
Shackleton taking the night air and pondering the future
hears the warning crack and sees Holness, the stoker,
still wrapped in his sleeping bag, sink into a chasm.
Shackleton luffs him out, Holness blase,
lamenting only the fate of his sodden tobacco.
Eight years on, a fisherman out of his native Hull,
but having once fallen through the cracks and survived,
no second rescue awaits, no gripping wrist
on a trawler near the Faroes, lost at sea.

A MISSING STRING

In Greenwich, London look out for
Leonard Hussey's banjo bereft of a fifth string
like a frostbitten foot missing an amputated toe.

Who knows what became of it?
Did it snap like the timbers of the ice-locked ship?
Was it flung on the ice with all the jetsam

of Ocean Camp and Camp Patience?
Perhaps it reached its limit of endurance
during a Saturday concert on Elephant Island.

No likely replacement south of Punta Arenas or The Falklands,
and slim chance of Shackleton picking up a spare string
amid the whaling stations of South Georgia.

The banjo served its purpose, medicine for troubled souls.
Now in retirement, taking a well-earned rest,
an autographed curio in a maritime museum.

Michael J Leach lives and works on unceded Dja Dja Wurrung Country. Michael’s poems have appeared in journals such as *Cordite Poetry Review*, anthologies such as *under the same moon: Fourth Australian Haiku Anthology* (Forty South Publishing Pty Ltd, 2023), and his four poetry books: *Chronicity* (Melbourne Poets Union, 2020), *Natural Philosophies* (Recent Work Press, 2022), *Rural Ecologies* (In Case of Emergency Press, 2024), and *Chords in the Soundscapes* (Ginninderra Press, 2025). Michael’s poems have been recognised in various competitions, most recently first place in the Philippa Holland Award for Poetry (Eastwood/Hills Fellowship of Australian Writers Literary Competition 2025).



WINDOWS

- i.

office window—
a wattlebird
views the whiteboard
- ii.

car window—
a grey roo waits
on the footpath
- iii.

neighbour’s window—
a black cat
looks
out
- iv.

window shopping
bare
floor space
- v.

my bedroom
window—
wallabies
- vi.

Windows update...
the window
darkens
- vii.

Melbourne hotel
my window looks out
on windows
- viii.

window seat
Sydney Harbour
Bridge

Michael J Leach

Moya Pacey's third poetry collection, *Doggerland* (Recent Work Press 2020) was highly commended in 2021 ACT Book of the Year Awards. She is a founding editor of the women's on-line journal *Not Very Quiet* and in 2019, received a Canberra Critics Circle Award, with Sandra Renew, for her influential work on women's poetry. Her poetry has featured on buses and radio, in galleries and has appeared in print and online journals and anthologies here and overseas and has won prizes. In October 2018, she was the Poet in Residence at the Elizabeth Bishop House in Great Village, Nova Scotia, Canada. She has an MA in Creative and Life Writing from Goldsmiths College, University of London. Listen to Moya read and talk about her poetry <https://artsound.fm/poetry-on-the-radio/>.



STARLING HOPE

I hadn't seen a starling for a long time until one morning, two slender birds arrive intent on building a nest. Their plumage— iridescent purple, and green shimmers in the light. He is all backwards and forwards flight selecting and carrying each supple twig to fashion the outer layer of their nest.

When he's done, she flits to-and-fro, choosing every blade of grass, each leaf, and tiny feather, to line the interior of the nest where she'll sit and brood upon their eggs until they hatch within.

They have built in a place where it will fall—a space where the garage door meets the brick wall—mistaken it for an eave. I can't leave it there, so before they fasten it with mud and clay, I intervene and take it down. Block off the gap with cardboard and hope they'll find a safer spot.

I know the nest will fall but how can they?

Just as I will never know
the why of why some days
begin with that same starling
hope that all will be well until

a long arm stretches
a steady hand reaches
five fingers feel
and find
my nest.

Moya Pacey

BIRDSONG

When the wonga
Whoops,

The currawong swoops—
Whoosh!

Black feather, black beak,
Eight toes, each digit

An evolution of malice.
Clack!

The currawong sounds
Its long, long lament.

PELICAN

Ludicrous on land.
The god of pelican designed her
to partner with water and air.

To rise and lift in graceful
pas de deux.
How does she

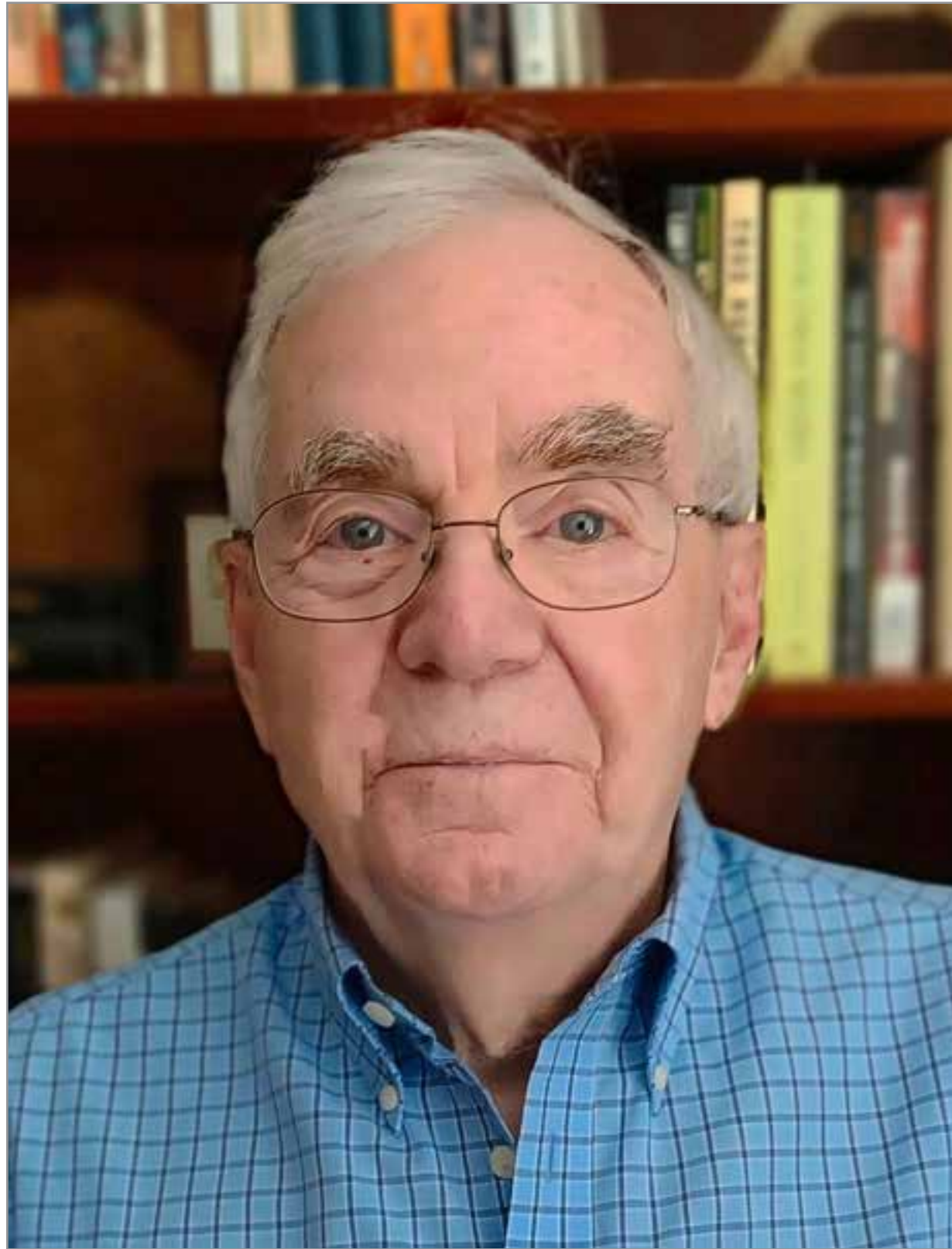
get her weight to soar,
stay steady and fly wondrous?
Setting down on water,

we wait for—
a belly-flop.
It never happens.

She descends
like a lover
after a long absence.

One slow caress—
a perfect embrace
of bird and water.

Peter A Witt is a Texas poet and a retired university professor. Peter's poetry deals with personal experiences, both real and imagined. He is a twice published Best of the Net nominee. His poetry has been published on various sites including Inspired, Open Skies Quarterly, Medusa's Kitchen, Active Muse, New Verse News, and Blue Bird Word. When not writing poetry, Peter is an avid birder and wildlife photographer.



AMARILLO BY EVENING

Driving a vacant highway through overheated west Texas
populated with its miles and miles of nothingness,
Patsy Cline plays on a lonely AM station,
black vultures circle above their shadows thinking I might be prey.

Pass through a town people have left behind,
with wounded windblown signs, and a scrawny stray dog hoping
a kind stranger discards a half-eaten Dairy Queen
sandwich from their takeout lunch from a previous town.

And windmills, some long stationary, pumping life
into concrete troughs, no cattle in sight, only mile after mile
of cactus blooming like fireworks, and new growth
green mesquite trees begging for a squirrel.

Radio switches to another town,
Hank Williams sings a sad song,
the highway sign says 85 miles to Amarillo,
as a jack rabbit avoids my 85 mph tires.

Peter A Witt

ACROSS THE TRACKS

He lived north of town,
in a zip code forgotten unknown to most,
where wildflowers bloomed in the unkempt yards,
and dogs ran freely in search of someone
with a kind hand and a morning bowl of food.

Life was solitary, since his Sarah passed,
days now filled with coffee at a neighbor's table,
nights sustained by a beer at a run down bar.

Saturdays he played cribbage with the guys at a table
set on a concrete slab that once hosted a house,
destitute mother, two ill-clothed kids,
now a community gathering point,
too often taken over by dealers in nefarious drugs.

His days ran into each other, until one Friday
he let one of the dogs stay, a companion,
to while away the hours in a corner
of town abandoned by uber drivers,

THE DAY OLD JOHN WENT TO EARTH

In the shallows of early morning
light thoughts turn to yesterday
and the fading shadow of sunset,
as eyes shut the stars refuse
to shine, the moon melts
to nothing against the blackened sky.

Tomorrow we'll sing about
the hims and hers
who loved and cared for you,

then cover your remains
with soft spring earth.
as eagles soar and
trumpets blare a final taps
and sad eyes weep
as gentle hugs are exchanged

Over shortbread and strawberries,
your favorites,
stories will be told about this day
and that, each emboldening smiles,

as a soft rain of remembrance
dampens the garden with hope.

Peter Boyle has published eleven books of poetry, including *Ghostspeaking* (Vagabond, 2016) and *Enfolded in the Wings of a Great Darkness* (Vagabond, 2019). His most recent collection is *Companions, Ancestors, Inscriptions* (Vagabond, 2024). His awards include the New South Wales Premier's Prize, the Queensland Premier's Prize and the South Australian Festival Award. He is a translator of poetry from French and Spanish with nine books of translation published, including poetry by José Kozér, Marosa Di Giorgio, Olga Orozco and Eugenio Montejó. He has published two collaborative books with Queensland poet MTC Cronin, most recently *Who Was* (Puncher and Wattmann, 2023). After many years working as a teacher with TAFE, he completed a Doctorate of Creative Arts at Western Sydney University. Peter lives and works on Dharug land.

From *The Wide Starless Silence*, a sequence of 65 poems.

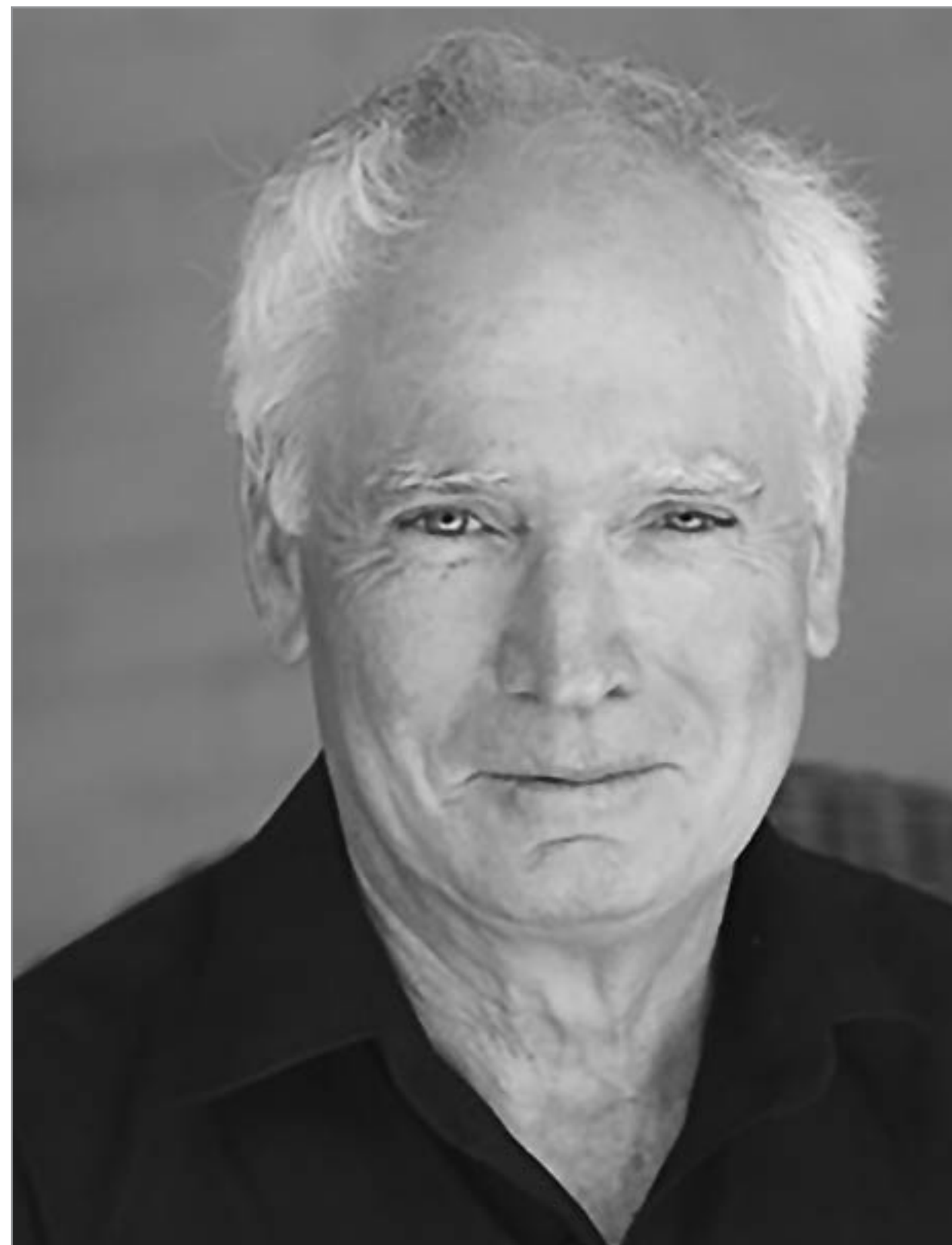
1

Because the sky does not always fall
evenly on the earth
I have made for you this shelter of words.
May it ward off destruction,
may it catch the filtered traces of joy
life sprinkles on your fingertips and eyelids.

Because trees and stones have never been
our only building blocks
and walking was once a poor cousin
to the focussed mind's
steady flight into the ether.

And yet and yet
a sincere stammer
may go further than all words

*loving is also a way to make poetry.*¹



Peter Boyle

7

I drive the double-decker bus
 up to the river of sadness.
 The streets are familiar but the line of wooden wharves
 has changed. And I don't know
 why so many people have climbed
 on board my private bus.
 And now I must search for the ticket
 to this streamlined car-ferry
 that by some strange operatic pun
 bears the name *Carmen*.
 Standing on the observation deck, keys in hand,
 I can just make out the river's far side --
 a trailing line of rooftops and city spires
 barely readable on the horizon's edge.
 Has it come to this: that I was always
 some sort of intergenerational
 transport driver, here only
 to ferry others across time?

And now the tasks and the horizon blur,
 postponed beyond postponement
water flows -- and no one asks it
'How do you flow?'²

62

Winter leans over the flattened scalp of the earth.
 A voice is crooning a circular song:

*'Spirit seeks the bride of the north,
 seeks the bride of the south.
 There's a heavy fig in the bag you carry --
 do not tarry.'*

My double, a bewildered giant, leans in;
 his face, a flesh-balloon on fire,
 fills the window of my micro-house.
 Light is pouring from my hands
 even as I hug myself small
 to squeeze through the final door.

The body is a circular story.
 It wants to be carried through,
 asleep but open-eyed, warmly wrapped
 in a carriage that glides, light
 glinting off roofs and lakes,
 familiar landscapes of trees and skies, the lips
 whispering 'One more time'.

Spirit knows only now, the extended
 single moment of leaving, precise but vague,
 a brief shining knife-point at the heart of the ice.
 Beyond, rose-fingered streaks
 ripple a corner in the sky's distant mirror --

and the spirit
 limitless in one go, *the illusion of breath*⁴
 unravelling. No need to be here twice.

33

The night inside the night has the colour of straw.
 Very gently it combs your face, enters your nostrils,
 trails its fingers over your eyelids.
 It's clear that much of what is here you bring yourself
 but there are others here as well and others' voices.
 You can sense them starting to speak
 in the numb soles of your feet,
 the emptiness of your hands.
 Or they come towards you as long-ago people
 seen once in childhood on a vanishing railway platform,
 snatched away by the miracle of a departure
 that instantly erases all that it leaves.
 They can be heard in the hammering of old pipes
 or the high-pitched monosyllables of birds
 and you follow them down tunnels
 of the straw-coloured night.

In the luminous blackness that settles on all sides,
 writing your name on the stones,
 writing your name on the sky,
 it was time to begin but you were still
 in transit, moving gracefully
 through waterlily ponds between sandstone escarpments,
 imagining you could run alongside yourself
 cheering encouragement over the brink of night.
 As if your one escape was to live always in fast-forward
 but the night inside the night
 takes a lifetime to understand
 and you wake so few times inside it,
 bereft of all light, all past or future,
 space and time sealed off,
 groping your way
 to a loneliness that is also
 its own kind of beauty,
*the opening of a dimension that can't
 ever be closed again.*³

1 Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*.

Translated by Carolyn Abbate, Princeton University Press, p. 99.

2 Gennady Aygi, poem 27 from "Thirty-six Variations on Themes
 from Chuvash and Tatar Folk-Songs".

3 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p196:

'ouverture d'une dimension qui ne pourra plus être refermée'. My translation.

4 Anna Akhmatova translated by Paul Magee "Three Autumns".

Stephen Haven's fourth book of poems, *The Flight from Meaning*, was published by Slant Books in February 2025. In earlier form, *The Flight from Meaning* was a finalist for England's International Beverly Prize for Literature. His earlier collections are *The Last Sacred Place in North America*, winner of the New American Poetry Prize; *Dust and Bread*, for which Haven was awarded the Ohio Poet of the Year prize; and *The Long Silence of the Mohawk Carpet Smokestacks*. His work has appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *The Southern Review*, *North American Review*, *Image*, *Salmagundi*, *Arts & Letters*, *The Common*, *The European Journal of International Law*, *World Literature Today*, *Blackbird*, and other journals. His book-length memoir, *The River Lock: One Boy's Life Along the Mohawk*, was published by Syracuse University Press. With Wang Shouyi, Li Yongyi, and Jin Zhong, in 2021 he published the 300-page (Mandarin and English) anthology of collaborative translations, *Trees Grow Lively on Snowy Fields: Poems from Contemporary China* (Twelve Winters Press). He has received grants and fellowships from the Fulbright Foundation, Yaddo, MacDowell, the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, the Djerassi Foundation, and five Individual Excellence Awards in Poetry from the Ohio Arts Council. <https://www.stephenhaven.com/>



Stephen Haven

VESTIBULE

We volleyed white against his pickup.
rushed him as he hawked Sassafras spring
in 5-gallon jugs. Fired a round against
the rag-tag shop he ran from his old trailer.
In blue coveralls, rubber, knee-high boots,
he'd King Billy Goat Gruff out the door.
Our quicksilver leapt its bed where those
wooded paths hit blacktop. He was always

game to chase us. Long elementary
chain-on-tire months, we'd Rambo also
hoods that rang in fishtails. Larger rigs
drummed the kettles of their empty beds.
Jake brakes hissed. Teamsters ditched
the warmth of their cabs: We nimbled the vigil
of all their candles but still they followed,
hunted me all the way through the idyll

of my first college inter-term. One last time
a shock of snow stunned a four-wheel drive.
I fired from a bridge straight down at him.
He morphed into a heat-seeking missile,
thundered beneath the railroad trestle.
Some long-gone trouble hopped the curb,
bit the track, two fat tires spitting gravel,

two thumping against the ties. *Crazy Fucker*,
I muttered as I looked over my left shoulder.
Yes, I ran. I was afraid of a man who played
chicken with the ghost of a late-night train.
Up the ladder of that 5-alarm fire, nestled
behind a rooftop railing, I peered down as he
swung his ride into the Sahara of that yard.

continued overleaf...

He eased a scarred silence from cab to ground.
When he looked up to the mute god in me
where he couldn't see, the dim-lit quad
squared a ring around him. Then he took
some steps with his arms only. Boots and jeans
trailed a groove in the ground behind him.
From his elbows in the one good light
the quiet never broke but it was breaking

Christ-like on the aluminum and the ice.
I had no slight to offer the haunt he suffered me.
In that refracted silence I was fairly sure
deep inside himself a boy cried out.
In the absence of a word, both boys heard.
I wondered where he'd been, if he ever
bludgeoned what bludgeoned him. Then snug

in my twin bed, just as it was always said,
the chancel of sown sin, faithful as the moon,
lumbered from the roof of that white vestibule,
lit a candle in the dorm room dark, hushed,
shushed, watched me as I watched him, and for
the longest time, hawked me from that height.

CERAMIC REPLICA, QUEEN ANNE'S CHAPEL, MOHAWK VALLEY, 1712

The wire cross thin as a syringe.
Seated at your desk you lean
across it, barely see it, touch
the blinds, leach the daylight in,
the mission your father's parish
quickened, your eye almost
grazing that miniature tip,
the small, fired clay your father
saved, cherried in the wood
of his last study. You hold it in

one hand, the gray stone, the black
hinged door, Queen Anne's Chapel,
1712, etched above that entry,
nine white windows split
into quadrants, a silent copper bell
tiny in its still tower. Keeping a low
profile, above the absent call
to Evensong, the wired right angles
of your near miss, a soldered clip.

Unglazed in the bottom of that clay
penciled in your father's script,
250th Anniversary, 1962, Made
by the Brotherhood of St. Andrew.
The Iroquois grew skeptically near
apples in white flower everywhere.
The Revolution torched them,
harbored in that one burnt mission
dead Brits, dead priests, praying Indians.

continued overleaf...

Pick your poison, Johnny, pick it well,
Yanks and Union Jacks, hold them
like a gem to the cataract
of your one good eye, then shut
its brother, baby, pray for your
burnt site. How strange
to think you might have been
struck in the lens by your father's
life-long gig! Each bedside chat,

each shut-in, each drive to teach
literacy in one prison, the devotions
of a life, and somewhere
in the burnt offering of this desk
the legacy of your own
familial touch. Razing that stone,
blood glazed in your father's mold,
you rub the smoke and mirror
of that show. A gentle ghost
trickles up. You spirit
your way home, wish yourself
a corporate million, soot choking
the flowers near the watchtower
commanding your kitchen.

Somewhere in the potter's fire
it's you yourself you must marry
with your one blind eye, the father
you prayed by, this crazed bisque,
the Queen's saved silver grown
strange and flat, leavened by the stab
of a small gray cross.

THE DAILY DOUBLE

You wake to find the world as it is
and know it to be a heaven. Against your
better disbelief the Earth as it is
and always now will be, and now forever
is again. You know that you have fallen
out of it, and here in your waking,
refreshed in an everlasting lastingness,
insects drill their malarial bills. Heaven is
the long thin oboes of mosquitoes
just as you never wanted it camping in
the Adirondack Mountains. Or else you

wake to a gaggle of geese, snow-white herons
overhead, herring spawning in a creek
so thick you might scoop those scales
in bunches with the cornucopia
of your thin hands. Or Shangri-La takes
you to 105 degrees, the antithesis
of anything that ever sailed
or soldered you. Between the pincers
of your thumb and index, you skewer
deer ticks by the dozens and still
behind one knee dementia buries
its necessary blackhead. You scratch

continued overleaf...

the concentricity of that target
 then wake to the reality of your
 absent father in one bare bulb.
 Now who will crack your bread?
 In a hunger so hot and heavenly
 it all seems Earth again, power saws
 revolve their circular hymns.
 Once again, the early morning shift
 hums as you thought you left it
 rotting its \$3.12/hour in a clock
 you punched one adolescent noon
 then fled the smell of stale tobacco
 lingering forever among the plastic
 chairs and linoleum of Building Six.

Now it is your mother who simply
 dissolves to nothing again:
 She is nowhere in the bone spurs
 of your heavenly ankles,
 nowhere on the loading dock
 where each deathless blast stirs
 the insomnia of this daily double.

You watch her picking gravel
 from her corned feet, weighing
 the pressure behind one retina,
 detached from everything
 she will never see, one wink
 weighing the surgical click
 of your scoped-out knee,
 your patched hip waiting on
 its lost bone, one gnawed metallic
 thankfulness, long and round,
 your Kaddish, your rosary,
 your prayer rug pointed East.

THREE FRIENDS

He refused to shovel shit at the home
 of his foster parents and would punch
 dumb beasts square in the face until one day
 he broke his hand. When he turned sixteen
 by law they sent him home to the city
 where violence marked him, chalked
 silhouette shadowing even his absence.
 We feared the sudden explosion of his
 diminutive frame, as if the dominant passion
 of puberty trumped scale, reason,
 and the experiment of newly-grown bodies
 blossomed its most beautiful barbed flower
 in abandon only. Then one night
 something happened, I don't know: Snow
 was drifting through one broken window.
 Someone named Ross wanted to play
 instead of Black Jack, Pinochle. A bottle
 smashed against the plasterboard.
 Brooks—all five foot four of him—grabbed
 an old ax, swung once and twice, so drunk
 that all he could do was miss, threw it down
 and ran outside into the bloodless snow.

continued overleaf...

Brooks's dog ran back and forth. Ross passed out finally on the couch. I couldn't stay and had nowhere to go, so I went out, along the river, through the sleepless night all night and nearly froze. When I got back at noon, Ross cracked a grin: "Where the hell you been?" It's a wonder Ross didn't kill Brooks then. Brooks just opened another bottle, never mentioned the ax, the scattered cards and broken glass. They bit the hair of the dog that bit them and laughed and laughed. I drank too. Huddled in the corner, watching whiskey help old friends stay friends, I grew older. And warmer than I'd been that night sheltering only in the lockkeeper's doorway while the frozen Mohawk broke up and brushed by the long silence of the Mohawk Carpet smokestacks.



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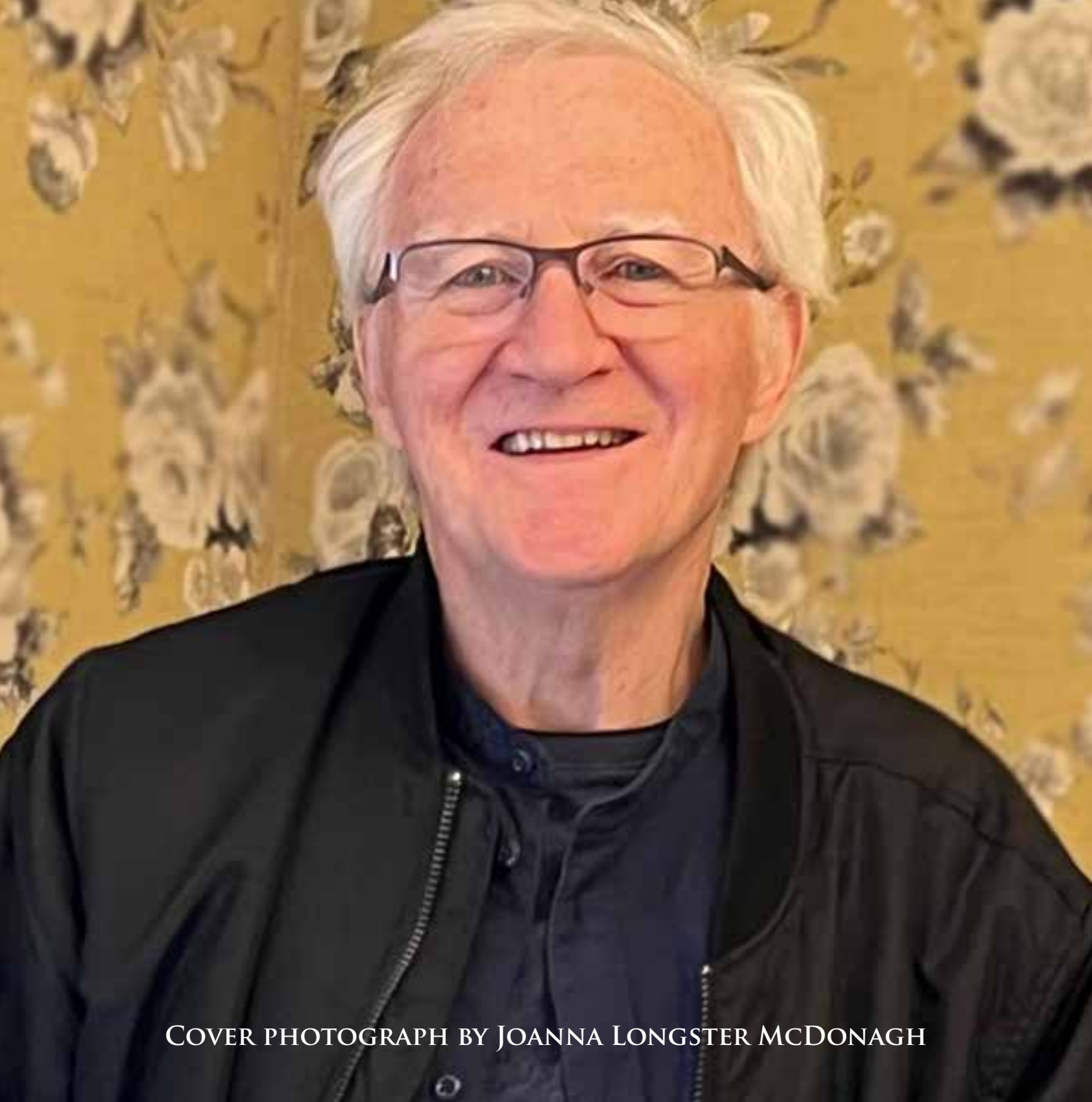
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