

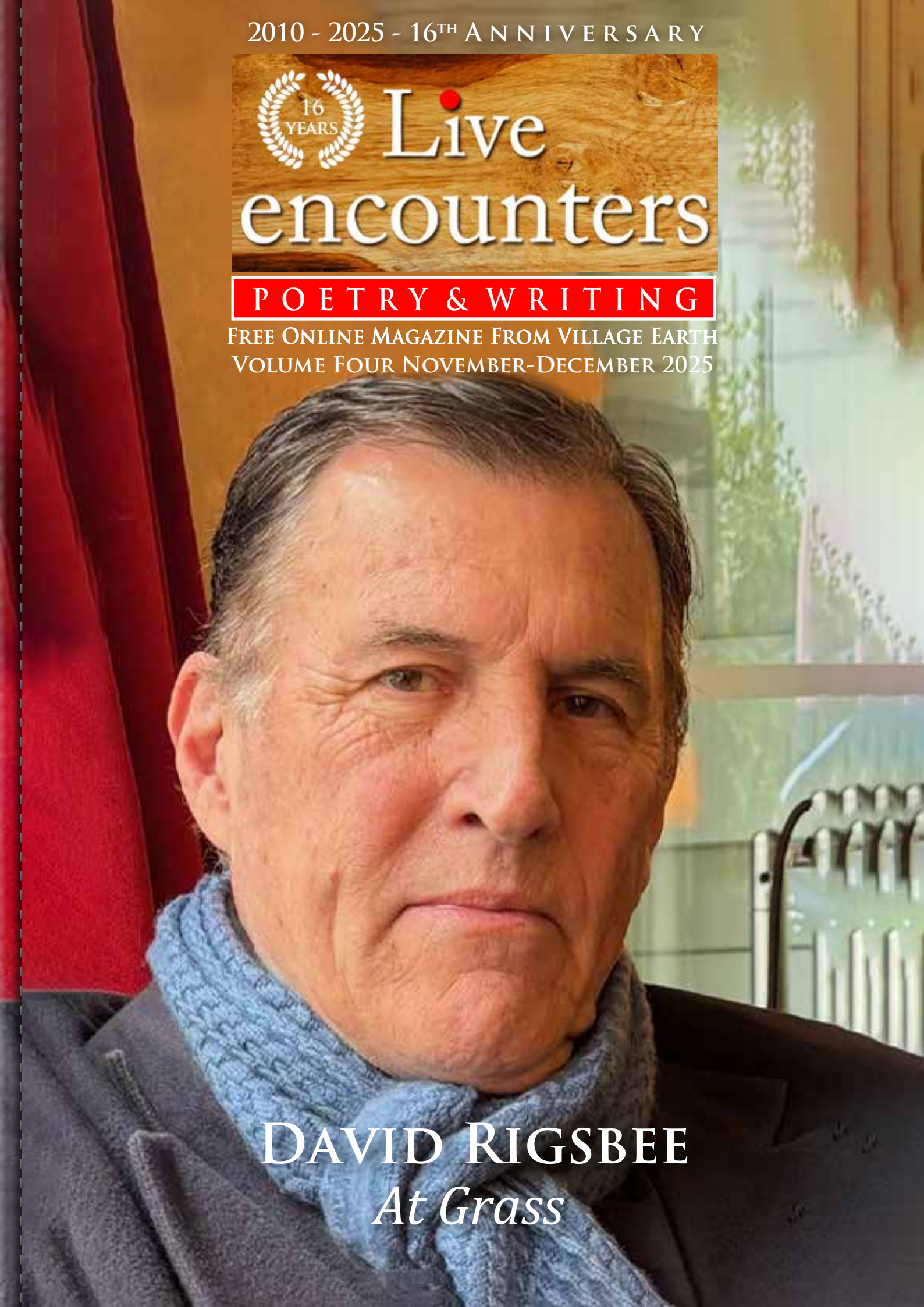
2010 - 2025 - 16TH ANNIVERSARY

16
YEARS

Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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

A close-up portrait of David Riggsbee, an older man with grey hair, wearing a blue knitted scarf and a dark jacket. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is slightly blurred, showing a red curtain on the left and a window with a radiator on the right.

DAVID RIGSBEE
At Grass



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



VOLUME FOUR
16TH ANNIVERSARY
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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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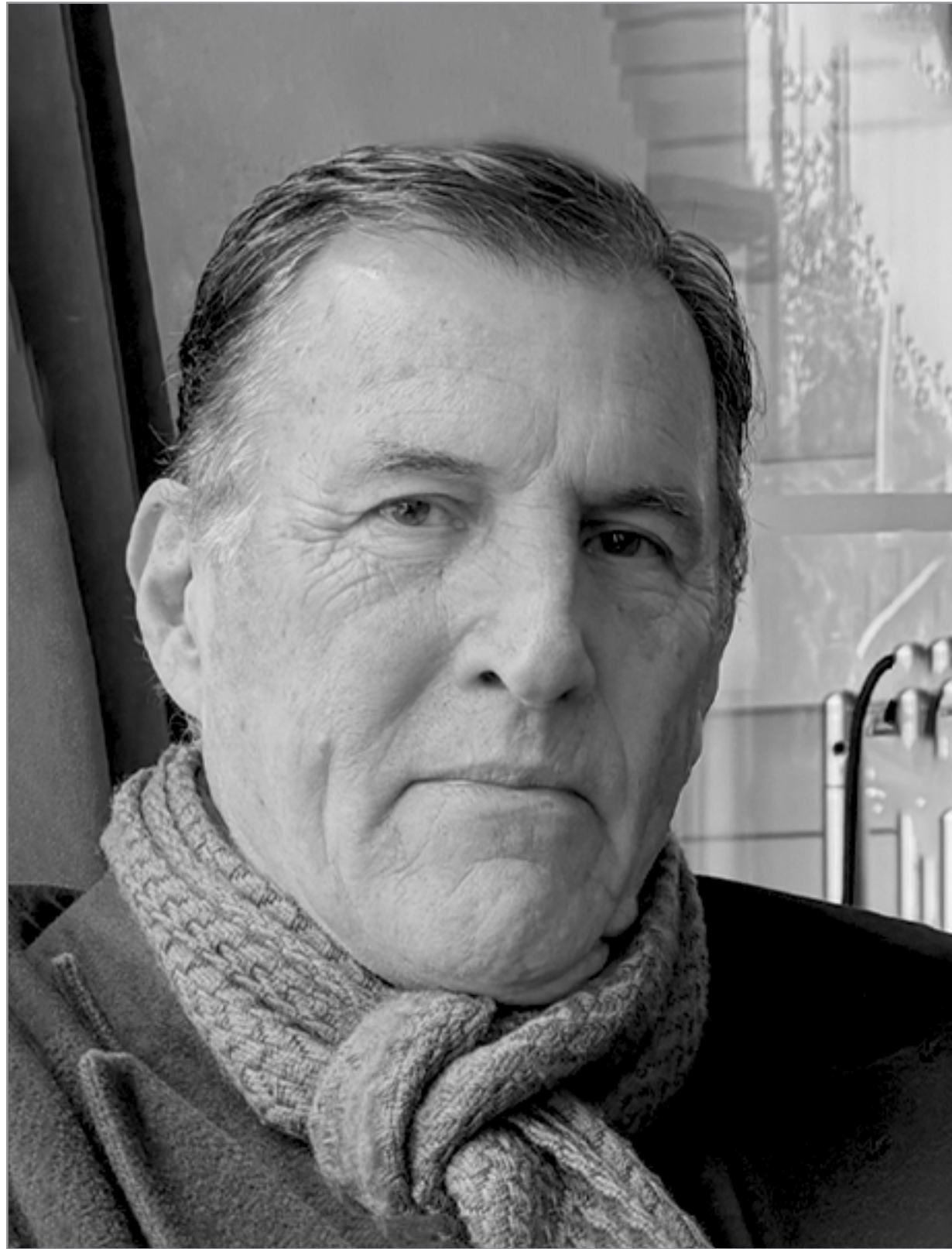
DAVID RIGSBEE – GUEST EDITORIAL
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David Rigsbee is the recipient of many fellowships and awards, including two Fellowships in Literature from The National Endowment for the Arts, The National Endowment for the Humanities (for The American Academy in 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 published by Black Lawrence Press in 2024.

DAVID RIGSBEE AT GRASS

There's a poem by Philip Larkin that bears on plight of poets as they age, using racehorses as its conceit. The poem begins by showing us two thoroughbreds at a distance. They belong to a breed that once won famous races and now fifteen years later stand anonymous in a field. Larkin doesn't present this as diminishment. The shift from "the starting-gates, the crowd and cries" to standing "at ease" in pastoral anonymity feels like a kind of earned peace, even dignity. It asks: what if the aftermath, the quiet aftermath, has its own validity? He then explores the ramifications and raises an issue that has been on the minds of my poet friends and me.

On July 4th of this year, I went with my old friend Michael, an accomplished and prolific poet, to the beach at Asbury Park, New Jersey. He joked that we could swan our way in Speedos down the famous boardwalk and sink into the beach sand in our aluminum chairs. Michael had always been an encyclopedic historian and aficionado of rock music. I once asked him if he remembered the group who sang an old tune from my junior high days, "Denise," and in a nanosecond he shot back: "Randy and the Rainbows!" That was their hit, and they never charted again. On this day Michael supplied us with baseball caps signaling his fealty, and now mine, to The Ramones. It was like accepting a communion wafer. Of course what turned up were two poet dudes in their seventies, regarding the families and children strolling by, and occasionally looking out to sea, but also reflecting on the recent deaths of such poets as Stephen Dunn, Michael Burkard and Gerald Stern, all of whom we knew, and of the ailments of others within our range: failing eyesight here, the onset of dementia there, maladies as varied as gout and cancer.



David Rigsbee.



Michael Burkard and David Rigsbee, ca. 1975. Photo credit: Doris Low Kamenetz.

Michael and I have known each other over half a century, and in this fact alone, our experiences took on their own kind of rhyme scheme: teaching, lovers, wives, children and grandchildren, shared books, emergencies and all manner of existential changes. It was Bergson who reminded us that time was something more accurately felt than marked. We also talked about oeuvres and careers, who was still at work, who survived, even thrived, who could write and perhaps more tellingly who never learned how to, who were self-blinded and who merely odd, like toadstools persisting in plots of basil.

The poem acknowledges that “their names were artifice” to be “inlaid” in memory—but the horses themselves seem indifferent to whether anyone remembers. They’ve moved beyond any need for recognition, if indeed they had this need in the first place.



Philip Larkin. Photo credit: <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/philip-larkin-life-art-and-love/>

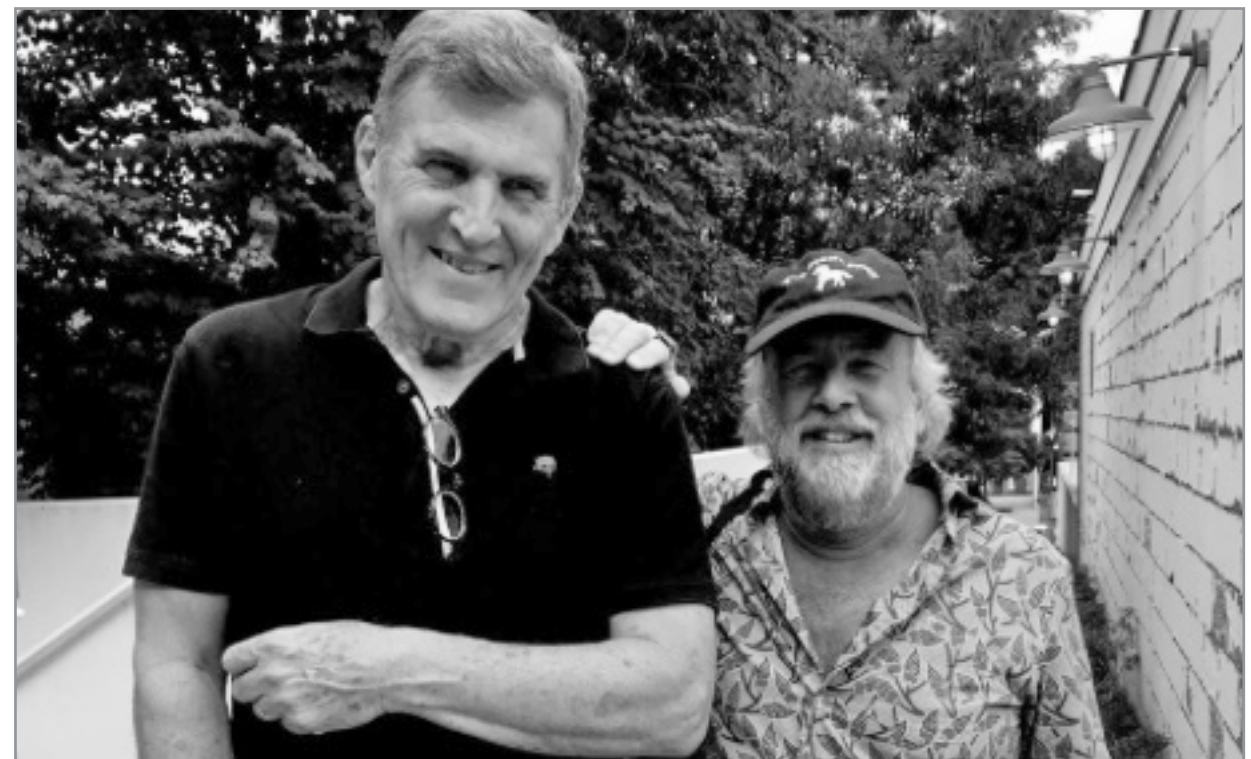
Their status now might offer a complicated consolation: the races mattered in their moment, aroused enthusiasm, fan loyalty, and the spectacle of energy and mastery at work, just as (it is implied) a poem promised aesthetic pleasure, shaped sensibilities, and invited imaginative participation, etc. Whether that poem goes on to be known by successive generations should not be confused with its intrinsic value. Or so this line of thinking goes.

In Larkin, the horses stay together; they “shelter” each other. There’s something about shared experience, mutual recognition among those who understand what the others have been through. In my circle of poet friends we know each other’s work and share reference points.

The web of recognition and understanding has its own completeness. As for the lure of ambition, it should be noted that the horses once had greatness “flung” over them—in other words, it was imposed. Now they possess time differently, inhabit their lives rather than being driven through them. As for us, we had our entire poetic training—as had the generation before us—built on the assumption of continuity. The implicit promise was that this transmission would continue: our work would enter a similar stream, be available to future poets in the way those voices were available to you. But what if that model of literary time is dissolving? It’s not through anyone’s failure, but through genuine historical shift—the sheer proliferation of voices, changed reading practices, different cultural priorities, the fragmentation of any shared canon.

This is where “At Grass” turns philosophical. The horses don’t know they’re forgotten. But we do—or at least we’re contemplating that possibility. So the question for me becomes: can you choose the horses’ condition? Can you actively embrace making work whose primary justification is not its future reception but something else entirely? What would that something else look like? Well, there’s the satisfaction of the making itself—the problem-solving, the music, the craft involved in capturing something true about experience, regardless of the audience. There’s the sharing of allusions and standards, such as I find in the wide net of Americana that so many of the poets roughly my age can never seem to exhaust. And yet (and Randall Jarrell, himself turning up on few reading lists, remarked that “and yet” was a proper next move to almost any observation) here’s the other thing. Poetry isn’t private meditation. It’s an art form that assumes communication and connection. A poem without readers isn’t quite complete as a poem. So there’s real loss in imagining your work becoming inaccessible to future practitioners. Maybe the tension is irresolvable; which might be why “At Grass” proceeds with an image of the horses simply standing and looking on, not transcending their situation but inhabiting it. It’s not consolation exactly, but a kind of earned equilibrium it surely is.

So what started out as my memory of discussions I have had with my poet friends and the feeling that our time and our own favorite poems from the previous generation have been superannuated becomes an accounting of a deeper sort.

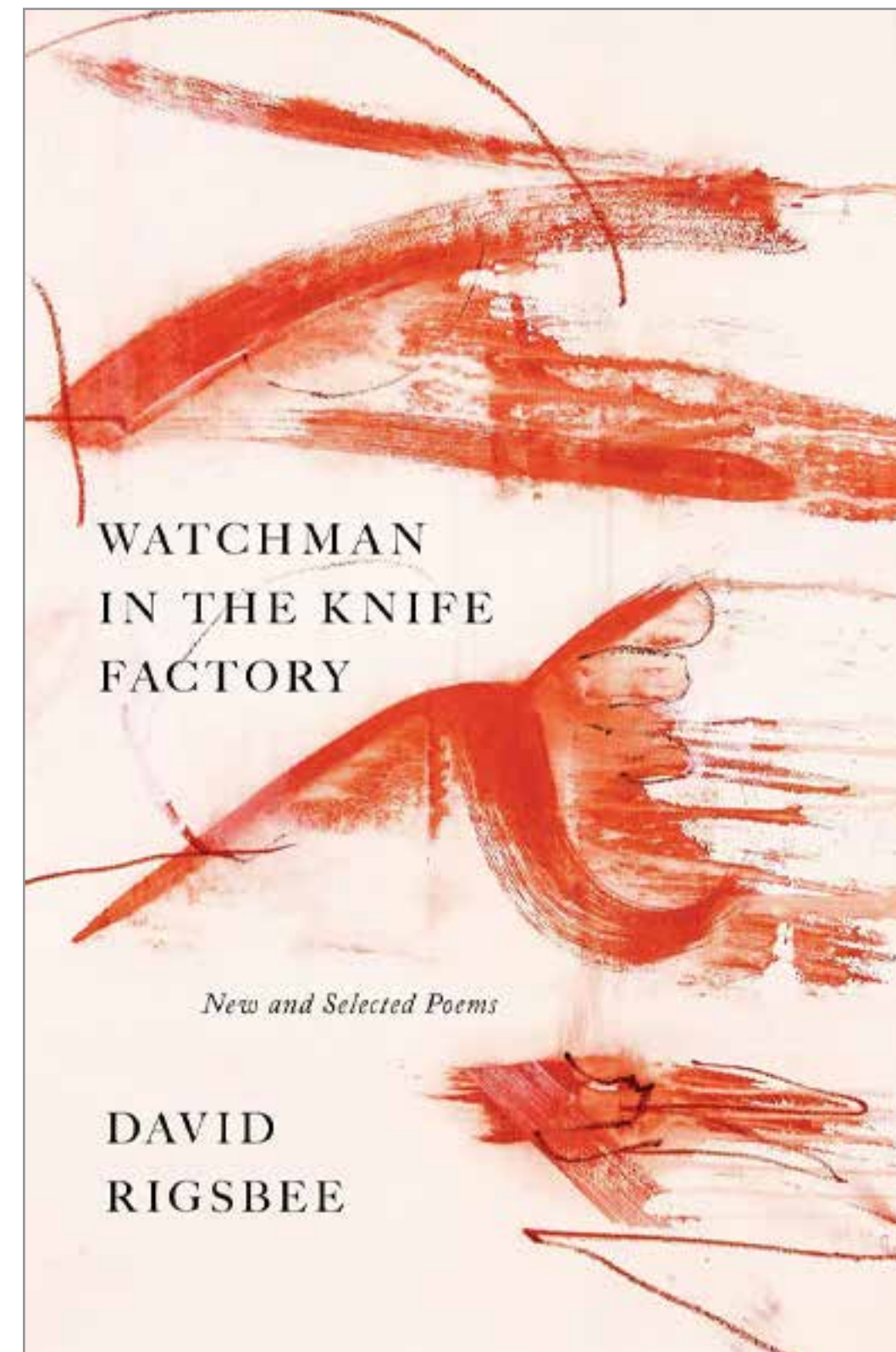


David Rigsbee and Michael Waters, ca. 2016. Photo courtesy David Rigsbee.

This isn’t a pity-party. It’s a thing, and I want to think of it in terms of poets who have passed on and those who are about to. Larkin’s poem, by a less circuitous way than it would first seem, reminded me of the death of an aunt of mine from 40 or so years ago. She was the oldest member of my mother’s large, hardscrabble farm family in the south. She was more cheerful than she had cause to be, having lost her only son to an early stroke (he was also hobbled by polio) and her husband, who succumbed of Lou Gehrig’s Disease. What I thought of was the manner of her death: a stroke that yanked her from life and left her wedged between the refrigerator and the kitchen counter. Larkin feared a similar death, of being wedged between a radiator and a bookcase. And that was in fact how he died. My aunt’s death both mirrors and rhymes with Larkin’s. She had no poetry in her, but who is to deny a connection between private mortality and cultural passing?

As for Michael and myself, it was a good day. We passed the legendary music club The Stone Pony on the way back to his car. I was sunburned, but I added to my store of trivia the fact that that Blondie and Sam & Dave had been among the stars who over the years rocked the same stage as Springsteen. Michael also explained that Randy and the Rainbows' single 1963 hit, "Denise" had been gender-flipped by Blondie and went on to become a massive international hit ("Denis") in 1978. I don't know if Larkin himself ever himself experienced being "at grass." I suspect not, any more than my aunt did. The poem concludes, however, quietly and majestically with the image of the horses being led by "only the grooms, and the grooms boy/ With bridles in the evening come." They've had their race, whether they knew it or not, and the track has long been raked smoothed again.

Still, something in us stirs when an old poem reenters the air. A line brought up from memory, even a half-forgotten one, still carries a vestigial sound, the background noise, of the years it has traveled. The past, it seems, is not behind us but grazing nearby, head down in the long grass. Perhaps that's what it means to outlast one's moment—not to remain visible, but to remain available. The field doesn't notice who's famous; it only receives what comes to rest there.



Available at: <https://blacklawrencepress.com/books/>

Carolyn Wright's most recent books are *Masquerade*, a memoir in poetry (Lost Horse Press, 2021), and *This Dream the World: New & Selected Poems* (Lost Horse, 2017), whose title poem received a Pushcart Prize and appeared in *The Best American Poetry*. She has nine earlier books and chapbooks of poetry; a ground-breaking anthology, *Raising Lilly Ledbetter: Women Poets Occupy the Workspace* (Lost Horse, 2015), which received ten Pushcart Prize nominations; and five award-winning volumes of poetry in translation from Bengali and Spanish—including *Map Traces, Blood Traces / Trazas de mapa, trazas de sangre* (Mayapple Press, 2017) by Seattle-based Chilean poet, Eugenia Toledo (Finalist, 2018 Washington State Book Award in Poetry, and 2018 PEN Los Angeles Award in Translation). A Contributing Editor for the Pushcart Prizes, Carolyn lived in Chile and traveled in Brazil on a Fulbright Grant; on her return, she studied with Elizabeth Bishop at the University of Washington. Carolyn returned to Brazil in 2018 for an Instituto Sacatar artist's residency in Bahia. A Seattle native who teaches for Richard Hugo House, she has received grants from the NEA, 4Culture, and the Radcliffe Institute, among others. A Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award to Brazil took her back to Salvador, Bahia, in 2022 and 2024.

NOSTALGIA

(In memory of Jim)

This poem
is not about
the moon.
It is about the day
that you and I
walked
into the garden
where
the snowman stood
with his icy frill of willow twigs
and his walnut
eyes
staring us down
as if our places
had been changed
and he could return
to his abode of snows
thinking
in the shivered
crystal of his brain,
Himalaya Himalaya Himalaya



Photograph of Carolyn Wright by Alessandro Couto, for the Institute of International Education, via the production company, Hayden5.

THE EIGERWAND COFFEEHOUSE

“What we are to be, we are now becoming”
--Theodore Roosevelt High School motto

We were sixteen, invincible and deadhead
deep in the centrifugal cycle of our first lycergic spin.
Polly, Lesley, and little me: we sashayed in, wild thangs
out on the town, our day-tripper faces
veering toward evening, high on a hectic blush.
Our salivary glands shot into dry dock,
we ground our teeth on the mind’s
molasses gravel as if it were party mix.

What else did you expect?
We were making the scene, three stoned chicks
in the Ave’s oldest magic-mushroom hangout,
and we couldn’t wrap our minds around
the come-down dusk. Out for the trip
and nothing but the trip, we were nubile
but not quite fixing to be jail-bait,
our nipples poking through luna-moth
gauze and mandala-pattern silk.
We jostled onto a thronged bench
along the long tables’ knife-gouged planks
and let the hairy eyeballing begin.

Those who ogled us: psilocybin-eyed
malingerers and languid undraftables
hunched over chess boards in a craze
of windowpane; Joni and Janis wannabees
with butterfly tattoos and waterfall
manes, their pout-lips feigning disaffection—
everyone a vision-quester or Lotos-eater
of passion-petal hash. Desire kaleidoscoped
our brains, our reflexes webbed with spun-sugar
filaments, our sense of perspective overwhelmed
as if we were stumbling among crumbling
basalt pillars in Fingal’s Cave.

Then
a water glass shattered
on the concrete floor and

the room stopped.

The tablesful of chessmen stunned to a catatonic
shudder, the hippie mamas’ tongues
stubbed in acid’s afterglow. The loaded dudes
and dudettes flipped their fright wigs,
fingered their threads’ bare pockets
for the damning stash, just in case
this was the first foray of Seattle’s
Finest out on their twice-weekly
bust-o-rama.

Meanwhile, crash echoes
radiated, concentric aftershocks,
the glass-shard tinkle bending the noise
around galactic absences.
Such an antidote to light.

Heavy,
we groaned. Our eyes—when we glanced
into one wall’s rippled floor-to-ceiling mirror—
were huge and crystal-meth blue with translucent veins
looming through them in a molten dream.

We fled then, my acid-head girlfriends
splitting like rhythm’s sisters for their custom
villas in Windermere, jingling the keys
to daddy’s Porsche like family jewels.
They dropped me at the bus stop and vroomed off
to slum among the head shoppes. *Not*

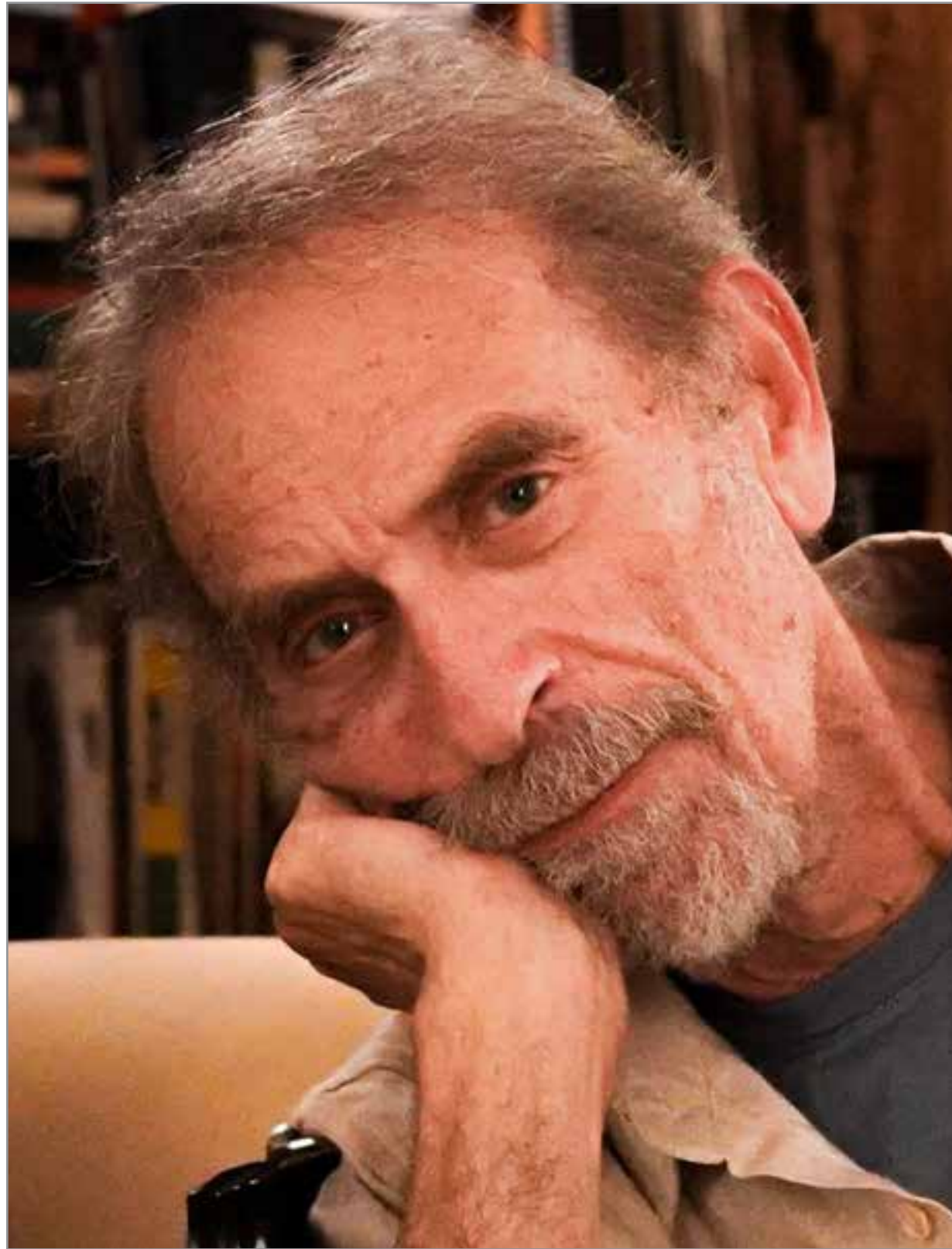
me, man—I told myself—*not this prophetess,*
as I clambered aboard the View Ridge bus
like Jonah splitting from Nineveh.
I was nobody’s scioness or satin doll,
sprung from no power broker’s inner
thighs. I couldn’t turn on, tune in, drop out
and still count on an ancestral bequest
or bespoke trousseau as fallback.

Upwardly mobile and self-propelled,
I had to head home, come down, and get
my grades up. Get my head around
those flashes of gamma oscillation
blowing in to my meditator’s brain.
Whatever I was to become
I’d have to get there on my own.



Sunset with the lights of the lobster fishing boats. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Alan Walowitz is a retired teacher, school administrator, and professor of education. He's a Contributing Editor at *Verse-Virtual*, an Online Community Journal of Poetry. His chapbook *Exactly Like Love* comes from Osedax Press. *The Story of the Milkman and Other Poems* is published by Truth Serum Press. From Arroyo Seco Press: *In the Muddle of the Night*, written with poet Betsy Mars. *The Poems of the Air* is available for free download from Red Wolf Editions.



Alan Walowitz

TIME-ON-TASK

Though not recommended in *The New Teacher Handbook*,
I call the roll every day,
say each child's name,
though my boss might come by
and record that, and all my faults,
on his legal pad, in his fine florid hand:

*Wasting teaching-time
Windows open from the bottom—
the children might fly away
The rows untidy and Nicholas wandering off
Why can't he stay still?*

Then, he tells me, sotto voce,
as he leaves my classroom,
perhaps my final warning:
This will become part of your file.
The file--this small world's bitter permanence.
Later, he tells me, in private,
the importance of "time-on-task"—
to maximize my chance
to make a difference
in these needful little lives.

Guilty as charged. But let me explain:
When that quiet one hides
in the classroom's farthest reach—
remote as the moon,
at the radiator to warm,
or at the open window ready for flight,
she might like to hear her name said right:
Grizeth Abundancia Sepulveda, the Second--
and the one who's doing the saying
sounding sort of happy that she's here.

IS THERE LIFE ON THE MOON?

The moon didn't mean much then.
We were young and had only one another.
and held each other close enough
to see in the light we gave off.
That was as far as we wanted to know.
Sometimes, even with the moon to light us
we found ourselves stumbling,
between the Sea of Tranquility and the Canyon of Guilt,
much misunderstood by those, unlike us,
with low tolerance for shame, we could only suppose.
The moon pulled us this way or shoved us that
and we happily obeyed but, bright as we were,
we couldn't find our way without a map.
And where were we going, anyhow?

These days, earthbound and no one around,
I prefer the dark, though I suppose
even the moon has its use sometimes—
if you're lost at home,
and you've placed the furniture treacherously,
and wandered so far from sleep
what started as a yawn emerges as a sigh.
Truth is, I never cared for the old life,
and paid no mind to those who insisted
on landing on the moon,
or any place so much like here, airless and dim,
that I've come to know by heart.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Anne McDonald is an award-winning poet, playwright and artist. She has recently won the 12th Annual Bangor Poetry Competition (2025) and the Keshkerrigan Short Story Competition (2025). Her first play, “Crystal Belles in Bettystown,” has been read in her hometown of Bettystown, Co. Meath, Ireland, and in Dublin City, directed by Claire Galligan. Her poetry collection “Crow’s Books” was published in 2020. She has had many short stories and poems published widely in print and online journals, and her work has been reviewed and broadcast on Irish National Radio. She is a creative writing facilitator working with adults, and her writing weaves real life and social justice issues together with humor and pathos. She is a firm believer in the power of creativity to heal, inspire and connect people.



NO! VEMBER

What if I spent this month saying no?
To toxic odds
To it'll do
Or it's not me at fault, it's you?

What if I said no?

What if we said no?

To funding bombs
And blocking aid
And using God
To get landmines laid

What if I said no?

To keeping quiet
When all I see
Is human hurt and misery
In the name of something
written in a book by men
(I'm not sure any God has a pen?)

What then?

What if we don't stop?

There will be no one left.
And we can have church and pew
And synagogue and holy shrine
And temples full of fat buddhas
And watchtowers claiming power

But there will be no one left to go.
What if we, I, you,
Before November ends,
To see how we go,
Just said no?

Anne McDonald

SEA VIEW TERRACE

Sea View Terrace is exactly seven and a half miles from the sea.
Front doors watched by coal plant chimney stacks,
windows dulled with powdered soot, net curtains torn.
At dawn, the back lanes creak and groan as hydraulic arms
swing jumbo bins across the sky,
crash landing them into *Jim's Scrap Metal Supplies*.
Outside lavatories on Sea View Terrace now house pigeons,
rusty bikes and bags of coal that smell of cats.

Residents of Sea View Terrace make little eye contact
when lugging groceries from a shop no longer on a corner.
Bought on tick, prices inflated, meat outdated, "but still good to eat,"
says Benji as he fills his A4 hardback with accounts
of what is owed and what is lent.
Benefits stretched, then quickly spent by Friday
when it's two for one at *Milo's Chippy Kingdom*,
comfort wrapped in greaseproof paper.

A boot mark scars the door of Number Three,
rendered by a late-night session and a lost key.
Number Four has a reinforced door after a raid
that shattered locks and glass panels
originally stained to prettify the light.
A fight at Number Seven ended in a death.
Fines for debts, defaults or threats not taken lightly here.

There is no sea near Sea View Terrace,
so the bachelor at Number Nine took a bus the seven miles,
walked the last half on Christmas Eve.
He walked and walked and never baulked at waters' cold.
He was known only as "Old Jo", no relatives to speak of,
no I.D. when washed back ashore with the tide at dawn.

A child from Number Three laid a grubby toy
on his doorstep on Christmas morning,
and prayed to God that he had gone to heaven.

Carolyn Van Der Meer lives and writes in Montreal, Canada. She has five published books, including *Motherlode: A Mosaic of Dutch Wartime Experience* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), and the poetry collections *Sensorial* (Inanna, 2022) and *All This As I Stand By* (Ekstasis Editions, 2024). Two chapbooks have been released in 2025: *Birdology*, published by Cactus Press; and *Sincerely, Sincerely*, co-written with Rayanne Haines, and published by Agatha Press. She is currently working on a book of linked fictional vignettes.



KNOWING

What do we know when we're born that we don't know when we die
It's what comes to mind as I help my mother navigate her small apartment
a trip to the bathroom with tender broken ribs
Between the critical remarks that exit her lips and the gratitude for the help of a visiting daughter
she tells me she wants to die
that life is too long that the music is too fast that everything hurts
not just the fractured bones
When we're born the world is a place of awe
everything new and wondrous
our parents perfect
doting
We know certain things intrinsically until experience tells us otherwise
that our parents are flawed
that our husbands have the power to break us
our children too
that our minds might give out before our bodies
Her own mother died young from pancreatic cancer after her father
knocked her up some fifteen times
miscarriage after miscarriage
Her husband
philanderer extraordinaire
left her bereft at fifty
after thirty years of (too) blind faith
Once the blinkers were off she made her way slowly towards the broken ribs
the clouded-over eyes
the unsure steps to the toilet
squeezing my hand repeatedly
as if constantly assuring herself that I am still there
She doesn't wish she'd never been born
she just wishes that what she knew in those first days was still true

Carolyn Van Der Meer

THE VINTAGE ROLEX KNOCK-OFF AT STANLEY BRIDGE, PEI

My husband is a watch enthusiast knows a face when he sees one I show him the knock-off with the jubilee bracelet sitting on the counter where the two owners older and grey-haired chat with a gaggle of young men probably relatives he laughs says it's likely an eighties replica almost mint no scratches on the face keeping excellent time I place it back on the case and one owner tells me it's fifteen dollars keeps better time than her own She starts to tell me about the quest for jewelry to sell here her partner joining in with stories about a vintage crystal stone set in silver purchased by a young man as his girlfriend combed the shelves for treasures they left his package well hidden moments later she rushed back in ear-to-ear grin *I said yes!* A story told with such authenticity I said yes to the watch paid my fifteen dollars and wear it despite its cheapness for the way it captures the memory of connection at Stanley Bridge locks in the hope of that couple still together

WHEN YOUR HAIRDRESSER TELLS YOU HOW IT IS

She presses my hair down on strips of aluminum foil paints on bleach tells me stories family matters marital issues ageing mothers struggling friends all with her pragmatic approach no mincing of words old-world Italian tradition of telling it how it is Of a friend who has become increasingly unhinged she says *Si perde dentro un bicchiere di Aqua!* She'd lose herself in a glass of water singsong voice and *Oh that's an old Italian expression hard to explain* but to me it's perfectly clear imagine the perfect panic as I try to get my bearings in the narrow glass up down across none of it far or wide yet I cannot see my way clear We're all hanging on for dear life our kids leave us with empty nests our parents depart our marriages traverse these losses gone for good I want to put my foot down on the bottom of the glass hoist myself up on the rim but instead feel the swirl the churning the rush of water as Stella takes me back to another time bleaching my hair to the colour of young sunlight

Charlotte Innes is the author of a book of poems, *Descanso Drive* (Kelsay Books, 2017) and three poetry chapbooks, most recently *Twenty Pandemics* (Kelsay Books, 2021). Her poems have appeared in many publications in the U.S. and the U.K. including *Agenda* (online), *The High Window*, *The Hudson Review*, *Rattle*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review* and *Xavier Review*. Her poetry has also appeared in several anthologies, including *The Best American Spiritual Writing for 2006* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006). She is currently working on a novel-in-verse (from which one poem here, “Rain,” is excerpted). A former newspaper reporter, freelance writer and teacher, she has written on books and the arts for many publications, including *The Nation* and the *Los Angeles Times*. Originally from England, Charlotte Innes now lives in Los Angeles.

WE TRY

Here’s a bleak road, a hill, mid-city,
where petals like long tongues, veined, blue,
transparent as chiffon scarves,
scatter in the wind, blowing fog in,
chilling us to old silences, until
we rake up words, sodden as damp leaves,
worn thin as old party clothes,
words we can’t ignite.



Charlotte Innes

LIKE A VIOLIN

It was probably spring, probably by the lake
where you first heard a red-winged blackbird sing,
two clear notes and a trill, like a violin
hinting of tough times, you said, and release.

You said it was like getting caught by cold rain—
drenched in your shorts and the red T-shirt you'd worn
for decades until you ripped it up for rags—
the way cold and rain can heighten pleasure,

you said, like a soak in a long, hot bath,
followed by dinner, spicy chili with rice,
like reading the news by a fire, drink in hand,
thinking, *I have a roof over my head.*

I forget so much these days. Images stay,
the violin, the rain, the T-shirt, the bath,
but I can't recall what you tried to tell me.
You were by the lake. A bird sang. The weather changed.

RAIN

Excerpt from the future.
Set in an army camp guarding an aquifer
and a patch of green in a wasted world.

The day it rains (a miracle!), everyone rushes outside, dancing and hugging,
celebrating in soaked clothes this respite from twenty years of drought.
After weeks of holding back, Alex kisses Emily on the cheek. Emily yells,
It's my birthday, y'all. I'm seventeen! Alex begins to sing and everyone cheers,
soldiers and scientists moshing around, Esme still in her apron, ditching her cooking,
to sounds that some have never heard. Rain, pounding the corrugated roof—
exuberant drums. Water, sliding over their bodies, whooshing down the hill,
an ode to harmony between all living creatures and the rock they live on.

As in a fairytale, the rain stops close to midnight and everyone shivers.
Call to attention, Alex says to his second-in-command. *Attention*, PT yells.
Alex steps forward. *Everyone take a shower to wash potential toxins off—*
sounding like the doctor he really is. *Those on watch take your shower,*
complete your shift. Let's all meet in the fort at eight, to discuss our next steps.
The soldiers race to their hobbit homes, as Emily calls them, carved into the hill.
Jo and Melissa stop collecting samples of soil. Two hours, and they'll be back.
Esme, Alex says, *we'll breakfast somehow! PT, see you at 7, my place.*

Emily... he stops. *Yes*, she says, *I know. Go for a run at 5?*
Of course, he says. *Just knock on my door.*
She senses he wants to reach for her, and she,
tense with wanting too, turns away. Even a hug is dangerous till...
Showered and warm in bed, she corrals her crazy whirl of thoughts. Wait. Just wait.
She'll go back to the city soon, for college. Alex, his army contract up
in the fall, plans to return to his job at the city hospital. One more year
till anything more than a friendly hug would not be thought a crime.
But what of the kiss?
She smiles. A birthday treat.
He'd murmured, *Thank you, Lord.* Something they'd done felt right.

Damen O'Brien is a multi-award-winning Australian poet. Damen's prizes include The Moth Poetry Prize, the Peter Porter Poetry Prize, the New Millennium Writing Award and the Café Writer's International Poetry Competition. In 2024 he won the Ware Poets Open Poetry Competition, the Fingal Poetry Prize, the Ros Spencer Poetry Prize and the Grieve Hunter Writer's Centre Prize. His poems have been published in the journals of seven countries including Aesthetica, Arc Poetry Journal, New Ohio Review, Southword and Overland. Damen's poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and highly commended in the Forward Prizes. His latest book of poetry is *Walking the Boundary* (Pitt Street Poetry, 2024).

ROOSTING

The spoonbills arrive at dusk
settling themselves with the dignity
of some nineteenth century queen,
bowing like courtiers, they burn
in the orange sunset like rushlights,
they have a magic which is only
apparent in afterthought, they
thicken the ghost gum trees
as though white fruit. They are
suddenly everywhere, shifting
on the highwire of the whipping
uppermost branches. If they
cause any harm, I do not know it,
if any ill flows from their existence,
I cannot conceive of it. I wish
I could have their gentleness.
They flutter their wings like
opera capes, regain their balance
in the brown reach of branches,
disturb nothing. The spongy
dark smudges them out. It is
possible to live gently on this Earth.



Damen O'Brien

I MARRIED A MURDERER

She calls me 'my last husband' and we laugh. She shines for me like the glint on sharpened knives. I'd never shop her to the cops, I'd never give the pigs a tip. She doesn't kill that many folks, no more than influenza, say, or whooping cough, way below malaria or the kills that cancer claims. My wife is calm and cool and kind. The garden's never looked so good – seven vegetable beds so far. And she's so clean and neat. Fastidious really, keeps her hair short, always wears gloves, burns her clothing if they show a single spot. I love her little ways. Her box of locks of hair, her burner phone, the plastic laid on every floor. I love my wife more than blood and bone and death. I love her with my every dying breath. The world is hard and cold and she's no harder. We have a relationship of honesty and trust. Siegfried and Roy loved Manticore. The scorpion loved the frog. Rust loves iron. Sometimes I pretend to sleep. I feel her eyes watching me late into the night. She loves to watch me. No matter who she's murdered, I am sure they deserved it, or if they didn't deserve it, they looked at her funny, or if not funny, they happened to be passing. The point is she is really loving when you get to know her.

Full of little jokes and pranks: she hides around corners, makes me jump, she pulls the trigger of empty guns behind my ear, she gives me small electric shocks, she draws an invisible knife across her neck and says 'you're next'. Meteors have been known to wipe out planets but my wife has never killed a dinosaur, forest fires have been known to burn down country towns but my wife has never set a fire. My wife has never posed an existential threat like climate change or nuclear proliferation. She's a cuddly teddy bear really. Mixes all my medicine herself. Fixes the brakes on my car. I love my wife to death.

POISON TRIPTYCH

On one panel, the King who took a hundred tinctures every day: a vial, sluggish with a hundred antidotes washed down with watered wine, who never had a slice of meat, or crust of bread that hadn't first been chewed or blessed by Tasters wiping crumbs from off the corners of their plump conniving smiles and though occasionally their face goes black or skin sloughs off, or eyes weep blood, they're mostly eating better than the king. Does he look sick to you? A little sallow, a little bit too gaunt? His sumptuous robes of state, the sceptre in his hand can barely hide the palsy in his grip. He takes a hundred antidotes a day, so far they've kept his killers at bay. Unfounded and un-tested cures that twist his gut and combine in unknown ways. A small price: to stay well he must remain forever sick.

On another panel, his assassin fulminates – stick thin too but dressed in black. He takes the smallest scraping of the poisons he deploys. Tasteless, odourless, colourless works of art – a grain or two, less than a pinch. A dusting more would drop the strongest ox. A gulp enough, so that if he accidentally imbibes his own thorny nicks, he might survive the experience. He's handled his potions for so long he's quite inured to dying and he knows: the only way to live is to not to die, or more precisely, to only die a little death each day. Does he seem a little lost to you? A little scared? Assassins must see assassins everywhere. Perhaps they are. The King invites him to dinner every day. He draws his robes of non-descript around him like a tomb.

In the middle is no panel but a mirror and in it you who've never had to deal with wounds given, nor have offered them yourself, mostly unremarkable subject – you have to wonder if you could get used to anything even death – that little assassin hiding in your blood. If you would rather be unhappy every day just to live or would you take poison in order not to die or is there a secret middle way? The artist has not depicted it, leaving the middle spot for contemplation because it is too hard to fix with paint. The way that some people who are wronged – who are hurt in ways that only ever man can find to hurt his fellow man, can drink the poison knowing what it is, knowing that it cannot make things any worse, who take the frothy flagon from the tray and down it in one motion and forgive.

Eileen Casey is originally from Offaly. Widely published, her poetry received many awards, including The Oliver Goldsmith International Prize together with a Katherine and Patrick Kavanagh Fellowship. Author of seven poetry collections, she's also published short stories, essays and articles. A commissioned play (Creative Ireland, County Laois) will debut in November, 2025 by Ballyfinn Players.



AT THE HEART OF THE RIDICULOUS

Vapour rises. Clouds part, invisible
portal stepped into. He won't be long.
November, season of mellow
forgetfulness.
No explanation. No note.
No-one sees him leave, no trace.
No snapped twig. Neighbours fill-in

blank spaces. Graft leaf onto bare branch.
Acorn grows to Sequoia. They give him
jingling bellbottoms. A song;
Smoke on the Water by Deep Purple.
A full pack of cigarettes, a comb
for raking through kinks.
Straighten his thick cow's lick.
In his pockets,
a perfumed scarf. Whiskey smells
in a Willesden pub. A lighter flicked
like a penknife. A wallet stuffed with silver.
Thirty pieces.
In his wake, his wife and children fade,
walk the town like ghosts.

Eileen Casey

IMAGINARIUM AQUARIUM

(for librarians everywhere)

Imagination is a pod. A hammock strung
between pouches of juicy *yes*, dry *no*.
Pomegranate tinted, treacle sweet,
Cardinals flit above to a mating mantra;
can't or *won't*. *Maybe*.
Gelatinous flesh scoops out,
spins into clouds. Seeds sprinkle
over golden stars in a midnight pond;
hatch lily-livered pads for side-stepping
one decision or another, inches apart
on a pathway carved by Gaudi's great
aunt's uncle. *Twice* removed.

A woman with candyfloss hair rules
such sugar-coated kingdom.
Mistress of suspense; she stalls
princes at the gates, glassy-eyed
slippers held aloft, questing the *One*,
the *Right One*. *Will she* or *won't she*.

A lullaby of light prickles through
her needle, sieves colander size
entrance or *exit* in thick, pithy, luscious
outer layers, muffling sounds to a low hum.
She knows imagination's code,
tick tock workings of a cuckoo clock.
Pendulous chimes swung
east to west, right to left.

Green skies with cumulus frogspawn
hover over cities of *derring don't* or *do*
on the outskirts of a forest where trees,
stand tall, free as an undressed moment.
Hillsides wobble like jelly moulds;
shimmer blushed blue or raspberry magnolia,
depending on the weather.
Itself depending on the weather.

A brook speaks in tongues;
rosy, polka-dotted blow-mouthed fishes
babel in a large aquarium,
once a lake where Arthur left his sword.

It flows into a river of wishes seeded
by *tomorrow never comes* shaded thrushes,
wave upon wave; *guilt* or *regret*
washed up on the shores of today,
tomorrow, next week. Sealed safe,

within the covers of a book.

LEAVES

Falling leaves, autumnal thieves
Daylight grieves, no reprieve
Sleeping bees.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Finbar Lennon is a retired surgeon. He lives in Dublin. He is the author of three collections of Poetry published by Lapwing Publications, Belfast (2021/2022). He is a member of the Bealtaine writing group and has had poems published online in Live Encounters, Planet Earth Poetry and on Viewless Wings. Two of his poems have recently been published in a new Anthology "When The Lapwing Takes Flight" edited by Amos Greig. Some of his early poems appear in his late wife's memoir "The Heavens are all Blue" that he co-authored. It was published by Hachette Ireland in 2020.



CONVERSATIONS

An evening sway in sky before a conversation,
word of mouth to fleeting image – spellbound;
they swarm, swoop and swirl in fading light
together and apart, multitude on manoeuvres,
no belonging to the flock or separation to distinguish,
pause in murmur to foretell a flight to ground;
when day is done, land in reeds to rest and greet -
whistle blows along the rows to signal home.

Up next a different kind of 'murmur', more a storm,
darting schoolyard runs by screaming children,
some huddle round in pods to match the squall,
jumbled morning traffic, discordant sounds, abound;
clamour is their name, standouts in the crowd,
din is dimmed at bell, when conversation stalls,
enter class in single file to answer yes when called;
to and fro each day engaged in nature's social norms.

Teenage years ever shorter, as many grow up old,
no bell to ring when lonely, downtime spent alone,
lost online in adult world, answers are all cold;
when not beside – no smiles to share, the words
don't greet, no hands to touch, no comfort felt,
gestures matter more when sadness in the core;
best reflect on starlings and what went on before,
don't give up on senses – count on voice and tone.

Finbar Lennon

EYES FOR YOU

Eye contact was the cue for spark
that day in April long ago.
she held her gaze – his wandered
to the cloth of white she wore;
moments spoiled by wink astray,
missed his chance with half glance;
he realised too late, it is the eyes
that count – set the course to be,
spring blooms don't last till June.

To meet again when all is done,
he with offspring, she with none,
twenty years had passed them by;
wistful minutes – gazing eyes,
another telling moment in their lives,
gestures yes, they matter naught;
two butterflies at rest on grass,
in blink, fly off on different paths.

ON HIGH!

With a long arm he could pluck a star.
Instead hailed a bus and missed a call;
no message left to track a name,
head on pane, watched dark outside,
at end of day the light goes out,
not for him, his drugs will come
the heroin and crack cocaine;
short half lives, fast decays,
why no delay when pressed to pay
by furtive youths in tawdry suits;
his crave will not protect his brain
or stop his life been blown away.

Jane Downing's poems have appeared at home and overseas including in Meanjin, Rabbit, Cordite, Canberra Times, Not Very Quiet, Social Alternatives, e.ratio, Last Stanza, Best Australian Poems, and previously in Live Encounters. In 2025 she won the NSW Poetry Prize. Her collection, 'When Figs Fly' (Close-Up Books) was published in 2019.



SATURDAY AFTERNOON

I
 He leaves the lawn mower running while he makes the call
 She will not know he's down the side on his gambling app
 away from the engine's roar
 And he does not know why he does it
 – five minutes of pleasure and ten of regret –
 with twenty three and three quarter hours
 left to a monotonous drone

II
 She is veiled behind the Venetians her misery
 lost to puke and shit
 the child at her breast suckling blood
 bawling while she grits her teeth
 She's flicking through channels of ifs, shoulds, coulds
 hanging onto the normality of the mown lawn
 to keep her breathing

III
 Next door the old man's death is stalking
 Unmown grass and dandelion sores invade
 the edges of his dreams between
 Meals On Wheels/Home Care/Community Nursing
 – the scaffolding of his crumbling life easy to dismantle
 He awakens to the engine roar through the open window
 clings doesn't want to go life he fears precious
 after all

Jane Downing

FUNERAL WORDS

There are no words, we say
using words to say it
meaning, we cannot now
find the right words
as they play hide and seek
with grief

Sorrow and rage
blow up the tracks
of these funeral conversations
working first in tandem
taking turns
to tie the tongue

Prayers and gods
banished – new platitudes
yet to come

ABANDONED ARCHITECTURE

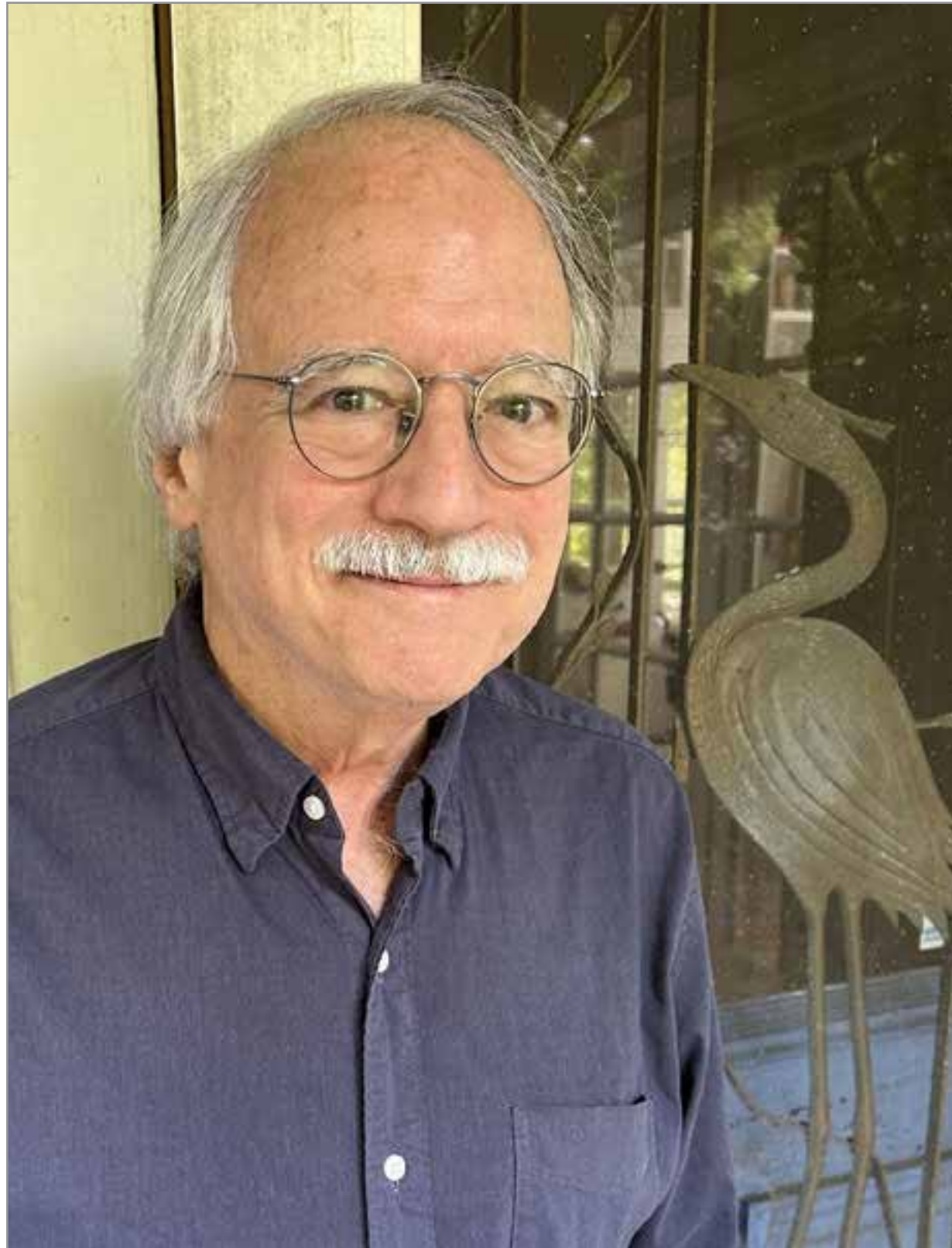
empty rooms
ivy sneaking through cracks
in the brickwork
stains leaked from fissures
in the cornices – those
skirting boards set up high

cupboard doors fallen open
contents mulched
on the tessellated Victorian tiles
shelves left fly-spotted
and cockroach pooped
ghost prints on the walls

wanton graffiti
passing for romance

broken dreams
 lost stories no one can reclaim
 and a premonition
in the spray of diamond glass
each facet a mirror
to the vacant-window sky

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



DELIVERING THE NEWS

I was always in the dark, bent over a stack of *Washington Posts*, fumbling with wire cutters at the fat bale of newsprint.

Early morning, under street lights, I walked to the drop-off point and could see, even from a distance, the flags of yellow notes (complaints), or blue (start-ups), or red (cancels), creased beneath the wire I had to cut. Long strands were shedding from the serrated edges of copies I peeled apart, fitting the news into my battered red wagon.

I never threw a paper, too lazy to fold them. Instead, I walked up the steps and dropped them on porches or wedged them behind screen doors.

At night I went out collecting, dreading the sound of footsteps when I rang a bell or banged the knocker, hoping for silence. Each lit window was a diorama. And I fantasized that if a door opened a girl would invite me to her bedroom, or a woman with a martini would ask me to rub her back. I spent the money as I got it, instead of paying the distributor first. At month's end, I had to beg my mother for cash to pay off the bill.

On empty streets, I paused halfway through my route to check basketball scores, approaching dark houses where something was starting to hum: a kitchen suddenly lit, a car warming up in the garage, a dog scratching at the door to get out.

John Philip Drury. Photo credit: Tess Despres Weinberg.

POPLAR

One evening when I was in the kitchen, spooning mayonnaise into crabmeat, the whole room turned blazing white with a flash, and a rifle blast cracked. A voice outside the apartment squealed “Hoo-ee! Damn!” and started whistling.

Lightning had hit the tallest tree on the lawn, a poplar, spiraling a gash around the bark, whittling off long strips that scattered on the grass. I’ve read that lightning starts upward from the ground, where positive particles shoot up to meet the negative, as though the target volunteered itself. But there were other trees close by, almost as large and more exposed, and cupolas, weathervanes, telephone poles that could have attracted the lightning.

When I went outside, I saw the pickup sticks of splinters, bark peeled and curled like truck tires beside an interstate, and a broken wooden platform with nails sticking out on one side and metal brackets on the other. A neighbor had built it for squirrels, jamming ears of corn on the nails. Now, crossing his arms, he declared that the tree was dead.

But I wasn’t sure. The coil of exposed wood didn’t quite girdle the trunk of the poplar, though a section had buckled, bulging out like a door handle, and its color was partly the rosé of a sunset we’d missed because of the gathering clouds.

One nail remained in the tree. A red ant crawled down toward the bark. On a branch above the damage, a squirrel was rubbing its paws. And the leaves made a dry ringing sound from the wind that was stirring, a shimmer of tambourines. I couldn’t stop looking at the wood’s bloody tint and the gash like a rip in a coat seam, exposing the lining, the hanging strands.

The neighbor said, “No, it’s a goner. After winter, the leaves won’t come back.”

But how could he know? Was it dead already, though glittering and imposing, like El Cid in full armor, strapped to his charger as it moved among cheering troops? I’d like to be so lucky when lightning hits: to explode from within and throw off what nails me shut, what hardens me against the elements.

AFTER LABOR DAY

Out on the beach, a crowd in terrycloth has gathered on a mess of wreckage, stepping carefully, like paramedics—or that's what I suppose from seven stories up.

But when I leave my shaded balcony and walk across the sand, I realize the darkened patches there are rocks and seaweed, low tide's revelation of the depths of shallows—pools of sand-colored fish, almost invisible, like fighter squadrons painted the vacant color of the air, and then a gliding slab, a triangle like a Stealth bomber flying low: a stingray.

People with long tubes, poking at conchs and whelks, wade from slick rock to clear puddle, unnerving crabs that snap back with white claws at white prods.

Not much ocean is left beneath the pier where rods are holstered, pails of fish dropped back in waves beyond the surf that's now regrouping, this day of rain, sun, shade, when everything darkens and flares, like jalousie windows shuttering, where a sandcastle abandoned at the high-tide line—a pyramid with runes of scallop shells—remains unsmashed, while barefoot strollers pocket coins with whorls and ripples, a bank vault blown wide open.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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* and *Otoliths*.



THE COST OF LIVING

I'm walking past brown brick terraces in an old part of the city
as a train whooshes by one block away. The footpath is cracked

and uneven. Under my breath, I curse the city council for not fixing
it for the sake of public safety. I come across a woman

in her late eighties straining as she tries—using the handle
of her walking stick—to reach some fruit in a tree high above.

She's very short, has many teeth missing, and a dark melanoma
on her bottom lip. I offer to pick the exotic-looking fruit for her.

"Thank you, this very kind," she says in a heavy accent. I'd never heard
of the plant *Monstera deliciosa*. *"Delicious monster"*: what a paradox.

Is it possible to be two distinct things at once, I wonder? I weigh up
the worst of my traits against the best. Am I a walking contradiction?

A negative thought here, soon followed by a positive deed there? Perhaps.
Monstera deliciosa: aka Mexican breadfruit, Penglai banana, or simply

the Fruit Salad Plant. Native to Central America, it's edible and is also used
to make a cure for arthritis. Its fruit looks like a green ear of corn covered

in tessellated, hexagonal scales; and is said to taste like peach meets pineapple.
"Is good to chop on top of salad," she tells me as I hand her the key ingredient

for tonight's meal. I look up at the large leaf of this bountiful tree—fruit for free
—and I'm happy to see it just happens to resemble the shape of a big green heart.

Jonathan Cant

DIVINE INTERVENTION

A winter chill creeps its way along a London street. Like dry ice, vapours haunt the man-

hole covers. Somebody stepping off the kerb is struck by a delivery truck

skidding around the corner on the wrong side of the road. And you wouldn't think

a skull cracking could sound so metallic. He's not even cold as curious onlookers

gather. Some walk right up close to stare. There they stand—a flock

of bewildered sheep—indifferent and absurd, reaching a silent, collective

verdict: they've just lost one of the herd. Time ticks away. No sign of help.

A dark red thought bubble expands next to the man's head on the road—

where he lies motionless, his open mouth and eyes facing the sky.

And, on the side of the frozen goods van, the company name reads *Puritan Maid*.

THE FRENCH CAFÉ CHAIR

In Twenty-Nineteen, a young religious zealot went on a violent rampage through Sydney's city streets. He began by stabbing a female

sex worker to death—perhaps because she *offended* him, or worse: offended, *Him*. He fled the scene with a huge kitchen knife

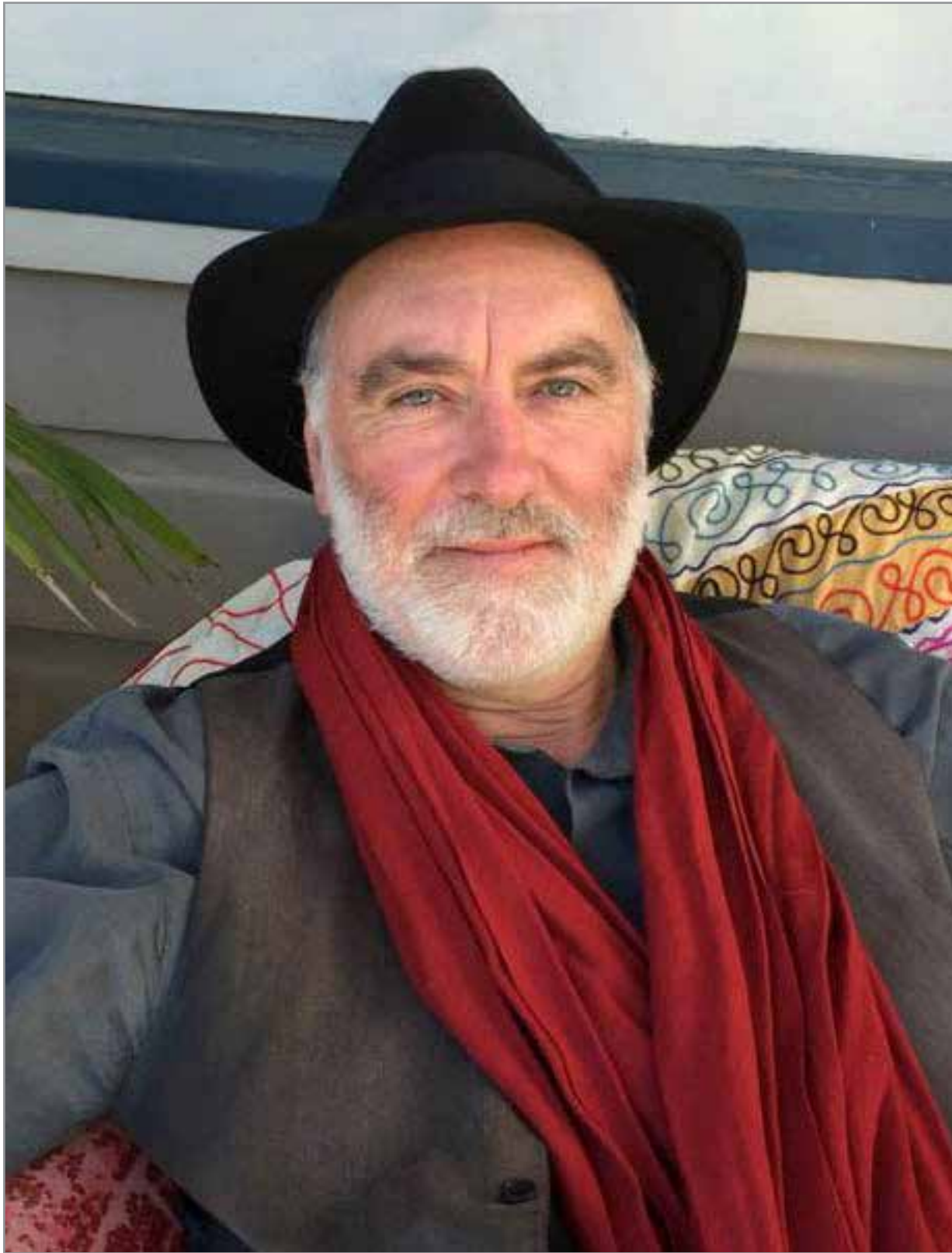
and began chanting his hymn of hate at scared bystanders. I watched him run—blood-soaked—down York Street that day as he was chased

by brave citizens. One pursuer grabbed a café chair (yes, of all things!) to use as a weapon and defence against the man's large knife and ranting threats.

Finally, he was cornered by civilian heroes close to Wynyard Station. Together, they tackled the raging man and pinned him to the pavement with nothing

more than that elegant café chair. Unlike Religion, the Age of Enlightenment was born in coffeehouses, not in barren, empty deserts. Reason drinks espresso.

Justin Lowe lives in a house called “Doug” in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney where for 18 years he edited international poetry blog, Bluepepper. His ninth collection, “San Luis”, was released through Puncher&Wattmann in October 2024.



FIDELIA

she sets down the candles each side of the platter
while the discussion continues uninterrupted.

she stands back on the edge of the ring of light
with tingling feet, she hears but does not listen.

so that later, when questioned, even under the screws,
she can honestly say she heard nothing.

word soon spreads of her devotion to her family,
to hushed talk whose words meant nothing to her,

other than that men sometimes treat her gently,
but that her hands are so mangled by the magistrates

that no-one has any more use for her,
turn her away with a few coins pressed to her scars.

Justin Lowe

NINETY-NINE

my father
would have turned 99
years old yesterday.

today
he is once again a few
scraps of paper in a drawer,

some
dusty photographs in cheap
frames hanging crooked on a wall.

I think
I can hear him groaning
at the very idea -

of the 99 years, I mean,
not the cheap frames or
the dust left to gather,

or
the official documents recording
his coming into the world,

or of his
marriage to my mother,
and then his leaving so quietly

in search of her.

a few scraps in a drawer
of a life lived
to the very end of it.

so much more
than the 99 years
he never made it to.

he can
roll his dead eyes all
he wants, but it is

a grave responsibility
being the sole curator of this
dusty museum full of such treasure,

all its trick mirrors and laughing clowns
with their sad cautionary tales,
and a bent coin behind each ear.

AFTER THE ASTEROID

my dog and I are both creatures of habit.
that is how you get known in a place.

if you want to pass unnoticed
don't get a dog like mine

don't stand each morning
gazing out over the valley

across to the ancient ridgeline
and on clear days to a ridge beyond that

and so on to country beyond
the Gundungarra.

the sun breaks all molten from the stone
and lights the valley with song.

my dog cannot see what I see
and I cannot smell what she smells

but we can both hear the cockatoos
and the men hammering behind us

putting up a grand marquee for the tourists
to house some dinosaur exhibit.

there are dingos down in that valley
that have never set eyes on a white man

so vast is the expanse in space and time
unfolding at my feet.

the hammering stops for a while.
the first dinosaur is mounted and roars awake.

then stillness again.
just the ineffable murmur of the sun as it rises

and the screech of a single bird
like someone tearing out the pages of a book.

Kaaren Kitchell's poems have appeared in various literary journals, including *The Jung Journal* Winter-Spring 2023, *Live Encounters*, anthologies, and in a fine art manuscript at the Getty Museum. She received an MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University, LA. She and her late husband, Richard Beban, taught *Living Mythically* at the C.G. Jung Institute in L.A., at Esalen in Big Sur, and in private workshops, based on her 30-year vision quest. Her most recent book of poems is *Ariadne's Threads*. She lives in Paris, France, and Berkeley, California. She can be reached at ariadnesweb@msn.com



OBITUARY, NEW YORK TIMES

I read about my long-ago love,
of his two marriages, each lasting
a mere two years.

I know why.

That man was a leopard in bed,
a woodpecker in daily life—
he nearly pecked me to death.

But my god, the lightning between us!

Kaaren Kitchell

RECEIPT OR FOUND OBJECT

Poking out of the cardboard plank
at the bottom of the caddy:
the corner of a receipt.

I pluck it out, look at the date.
Just as I thought: 31-12-18, four months
before the end when you were still alive.

You showed your love
with acts of devotion
did most of the marketing for us

and when you had lost
more than half your lung capacity
your ability to breathe

after that second ICU scare
when you'd come home in April
and needed an oxygen tank

as tall as your chest,
with a tube trailing out of your nose
just to walk to the kitchen

or the petit coin,
you apologized to me, said you were sorry,
you'd only be able to carry a few items

home after that. I would market for us
with pleasure, I said, but I knew
what you really meant,

that it was a diminishment
of your greatest power, a heart
that wants only to give.

Early in our love you'd called me
the Goddess, till I forbade it—
knowing the real goddesses hate hubris.

But your every action continued to say,
my Goddess, my Goddess,
I adore you.

PEREGRINE FALCON

My father ruined me
for any man who doesn't love
the Celtic way

madly, deeply, wholly.
Ruined me for half-hearted men,
surface skimmers, mere seducers.

He dove straight for what he wanted
like a peregrine falcon dives for a dove.
He chose her and was true to her for life.

Having no sisters, how did he learn
the delicate passionate dance
between a man and a woman,

when to lead, when to follow,
when to speak, when to listen,
when to work, when to dare the next adventure?

Perhaps it came from his Irish English mother
with the musical voice, humorous and full of grace
(she reminded me of a calico cat).

Or perhaps it came from his father's forebears,
French Welsh English gentle men, troubadours,
pilgrims, a peregrine falcon on their coat of arms.

Democratic American to the core,
he treated others with care and respect,
as if he saw the sacred in every soul.

I SEE HIM AS A STATELY ANGEL

Driving up Vine, he says,
I could have been a great architect
but I wondered, what is the good
of that if all life is an illusion?

I laugh—I can’t help it. He wonders why.
The floating figures of his art,
his imagination that wants off the earth
and into the Afterlife.

Oh, but that is not the direction
my soul wants to go.
It’s this life I love,
this moment, this oak and squirrel,

this family of deer, this swallow, this body
in which I live, this city across the bay,
and all the inner images of my life on earth,
the treasures in my memory chest.

L’HOMME AVEC OISEAU

Who, what is he?
A magical encounter.
A man with a bird on his shoulder (left side).

An engineer with a secret seer inside.
Shapely letters in blue ink.
A curious mind, winged.

A spark of fire, leaping heart. A sturdy back
carrying the weight of work and a punitive ex.
A man with a sense of measure,

of how things are made. Agi māri, ruler of the edge.
A thirsty soul, French Hungarian Jew.
What kind of bird? *Mon petit doigt m’a dit*¹.

1 - In *The White Goddess, a historical grammar of poetic myth*, Robert Graves traces the Druidic associations of each finger to a particular Ancient Greek god or goddess. The little finger is associated with the divinatory god Hermes. "... the ear-finger—in French—*doigt auriculaire*--...has oracular power—...as they still say in France of a person who gets information from a mysterious source: *Son petit doigt le lui dit*." His little finger told him. "...the earliest sense of ‘auricular finger’ is ‘secretly whispered in the ear’. The auricular finger was probably used by the Gallic and British Druids for stopping the ear as an aid to inspiration."

Kathryn MacDonald's poetry has been published in *Room*, *FreeFall* and other Canadian literary journals and anthologies, as well as internationally in the U.K., U.S., Ireland and Indonesia. Kathryn has a new poetry collection to be released by Frontenac House, Spring 2026. *Liminal Spaces* is a chapbook anthology of ekphrastic poetry by Kathryn and three fellow-poets (2025). She is the author of *Far Side of the Shadow Moon: Enchantments* (poetry chapbook, 2024), *A Breeze You Whisper: Poems* (2010) and *Calla & Édourd* (novel, 2009). For more information: <https://kathrynmacdonald.com>.



ON THAT FORBIDDEN EVENING

it was late dusk, neither
light nor dark but pearly
earth and sky. We ducked
under the bathing suit
line and startled ourselves
and a Northern Saw-whet
who kept to her perch
on the cord.

She was as tiny as my hand
in yours on that evening
after the sun had fallen
over the horizon.

In the dusk
that was neither day nor night,
a mellow whistle rose
from deep inside her downy breast
filling the silence.

Our held breath
flowed silently into her song.

Kathryn MacDonald. Photograph credit: James Archbold.

WILLOW DREAM

I run through wet grass
toward the bluff, rain
slashes my skin, wind
whips hair and
I cannot see
the willow –

only a gap, a hole,
where the willow should be.

I lean over the edge –
green leaves dance
in the wind. I grasp
sumac, lower
myself –

willow-roots rise,
exposed, heavy with earth.

I shut my eyes and stumble,
open them to see the tree
naked of leaves, its bark
bone-grey, its trunk
an arc over water

reaching

ALBINONI’S ADAGIO

Ten years –
soon eleven –
dawns
and dusks
merge
while all the sorcery
I conjure
fails
to resurrect you

Hauser’s cello
fills the air
with cavernous
yearning.

Still I live.

Hauser makes love
to his cello
as you did to me –
passionately
tenderly –

salt on our lips
honey whispers
in the room.

Albinoni’s Adagio
rises
falls
swells
into fullness

slowly
cascades
into silence
to haunt
each blue
breath and still

I live.

LaWanda Walters earned her M.F.A. from Indiana University, where she won the Academy of American Poets Prize. Her first book of poems, *Light Is the Odalisque*, was published in 2016 by Press 53 in its Silver Concho Poetry Series. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Georgia Review*, *Southern Review*, *Nine Mile*, *Antioch Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, and several anthologies, including *Best American Poetry 2015*, *Obsession: Sestinas in the Twenty-First Century*, and *I Wanna Be Loved by You: Poems on Marilyn Monroe*. She received Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Awards in 2020 and 2024. She lives in Cincinnati with her husband, poet John Philip Drury.



SPLENDOR IN THE GRASS

The crickets sound so optimistic.
They still tune their instruments
at twilight, evensong. They fill my ears
with their chorus of yeses, sighs, maracas.
The crescendo and then, en masse,
diminuendo. Virtuoso phrasing,
offbeat percussion in the grass.
Crickets stand in for a nightingale,
and the sun goes down on the earth.

LaWanda Walters. Photo credit: Tess Despres Weinberg.

MERMAID SIRENS CALLING BOATS AT SEA

After the painting by Gail Siptak

These mermaids are not pretty,
and neither are their voices. Just look
at their mouths—how they wrinkle up
their noses. They aren't singing—

unless it's country music from the 1950s,
employing the use of whine, snarl, yodel,
and mountain echoes. Last night
these trashy mermaids brewed a tempest

with their hair guitars—their hair thick,
like sticks or hemp, and braided to be hip.
After all, their medium is water.
They look like they're fussing at each other,

their faces, like those of Cinderella's
bitter sisters, screwed into a tantrum.
Perhaps they are bored, since the ships
have sunk, and the sailors were so tiny,

disappointing as popcorn shrimp.
How these mermaids wail
when they are crossed. The boys are gone,
and the toy sailing ships

lie sideways in the drink.



Painting by Gail Siptak, "Mermaid Sirens Calling Boats at Sea," gouache on Indian Village paper from India, 2010.

A PROVINCIAL TALE

Call me Madame Bovary.
I'd married a man
who never got jealous, thinking

it was wild, passionate love that caused
my first husband to beat me up.
Back then I was "Maggie, Girl of the Streets."

But I moved in with my mother in Atlanta, found
a job at the Circulation Desk at Emory.
David was handsome enough, and at first

I thought, since he was checking out *Artforum*
with his faculty card, that he was an artist.
"So you teach Art?" I asked on our first date.

"Economics," he said, and I hardly knew what that meant.
But I liked the idea that he was a professor,
that for once I was making a good decision.

He actually said, "I might not look like much
but I have great genes." Just what I was shopping for,
and so I said yes. Sex felt good enough

but was so perfunctory. I missed the passion,
but we'd bought an old house that reminded me
of books I loved set in England. The basement had

a genuine bar, from the days of prohibition, a bathroom
with an opaque window in the door that said "W.C."
I'd be upstairs looking at catalogues and ordering

a fountain with a lion's face, cute outfits for going out.
He'd be in the basement bar, where he kept *Penthouse*
magazines. We'd had our children, though, and I was happy.

It was our kids, playing around the bar, who discovered
the magazines. For once he was the bad one.
I'd discovered I was pretty. My curly hair

was in style finally—you'd call it "big hair" now.
His brother said I was vain when I used the rear-view
mirror to put my make-up on. Yes, I liked to shop

and know I seemed superficial. When I look at old pictures
of myself I wish I looked like that, except you can see
I was too aware of my looks. I'd like to warn that young woman,

Madame Bovary in Cincinnati, maxing out credit cards
and flirting with everyone. Then David got diagnosed with
a "cranial pharyngioma." Benign, but there's not much room

in the brain. He was brave about the surgery, but of course
the tumor grew back. "I don't want them to cut into my skull again,"
he said in the Kroger parking lot. Like a pressed flower,

continued overleaf...

those words preserve his pure and sane worry, as if
he knew what would happen. And the doctors did
“nick” something. Blood in the brain burns like acid.

I didn’t handle it well. The psychologist at the hospital
had a framed picture of his perfect family on his desk, facing out.
I broke down when he said, “I’m sure you and your husband

had made lots of plans.” They didn’t approve of my crying—
“Do your children know you’re so depressed?” It turned out
my brother-in-law was talking to the staff about taking away

my custody. He’d told David (and David told me, with all
his impairment), “You have two problems. You have this wife,
and you also have a brain tumor.” So I was worse

than the tumor. My children and I got through it.
Our genes, together, had made lovely children, so David
had been right about that. My kids say I’m a good mother

but I know they are better human beings—
fiscally responsible, having been there when I ordered
all those flamingo shakers and tablecloths on eBay.



Piano Leg and Swimmer, painting by LaWanda Walters.



Maria Miraglia is a poet, essayist, translator, and peace activist. Her commitment to human rights and peace activism is evident in her long-standing membership in Amnesty International, ICA, and the International Observatory for Human Rights. She is the Vice President of the World Movement for the Defence of Children, Kenya, and the founder of the World Foundation for Peace. She is a founding member and Literary Director of the Pablo Neruda Association and a member of several editorial boards of international literary magazines; Member of the International Writers Association; Member of the International Academy Mihai Eminescu; Honorary Member of Naciones Unidas de las Letras; 2018 Poet Laureate, WNWU; and World Poet Laureate and Golden Medal 2020 - Xi'an, China. Miraglia got her most recent award, "50 Women Memorables Europea", at the Pontifical University Antonianum, Rome. She writes in Italian, English, or both languages. Her poems have been translated into over thirty languages and are featured in more than one hundred anthologies worldwide. She can skillfully intertwine emotions and creativity, philosophy, logic and reason, giving her poems an air of new beauty, which also got her the most recent award, "50 Mujeres Memorables Europea" at the Pontifical University Antonianum, Rome.

A LADYBIRD

My mind always at work
thoughts after thoughts
memories and emotions
are a heavy burden

A walk along the sea
is what it takes
the murmur of the waves
their slow pace
rhythmically repeating
and the seagulls flying overhead
dancers on an amazing stage
their cries in the open air
music to the ears

A ladybird on the top
of a daisy petal
and my gaze captured
by the bright hue and
the perfection of the tiny shape
elegant in her eye-catching livery
all at once
I can hear the silence
there admiring the little creature
my thoughts gone up
with the seagulls
to dance with them

Maria Miraglia

A PHOTO

I held you in my womb
nursed you
lovingly watched and
observed your every move
from small to large
and the memories
still evoke the same feelings
of when you said the word “mom”
for the first time
of when I heard
your first tooth break through
while sucking at my breast

How tender you were
when your eyes first met a cat
or enchanted you watched the birds freely fly
every small creature next to a larger one
you named mother and child
your gentle nature showed
in everything you did
so kind and mindful

I still recall the hours
spent learning to write
my hand guiding yours
across the page
but little by little you grew and
I began to see
the adult of tomorrow I dreamed about
and spun myself stories

You were beautiful
and wise beyond your years
and with your manners
you garnered smiles from all
even the nuns at the kindergarten and later at school
strict with others
were smiling with you
and always accommodating

How many the memories
this photo tells us
I could write a book
an essay on a mother's love
a love that gives
expects nothing
and simply waits

ONLY YOU

Listening to the rain
that, beating on the roofs of the houses
sang strange melodies
Or enjoying on your skin
the warmth of the sun
that the wheat fields
flooded with its yellow rays
while listening to the chirping of the birds
among the bright foliage
of the olive trees

Only you
staying captivated
by the babbling of the foaming streams
did not notice the time passing
nor did you catch any sign
from the mirror
such was the hurry to care for this
and that

Now
Images of the past
tell you of the time
that flowed
unaware it was life you let go

The sun warmed the countryside
the rain cooled the air
the thunder and lightning told you
that one more winter had arrived
that a day was dying
and a new one was rising

Now that wrinkles
mark your face
you return with your mind
to that woman of once
always interested in so many things
and ask yourself if that was
the best way
to consume your time

Michael Minassian is a Contributing Editor for Verse-Virtual, an online poetry journal. His poetry collections *Time is Not a River*, *Morning Calm*, *A Matter of Timing* and *Jack Pays a Visit* are all available on Amazon. His newest collection *1000 Pieces of Time* has just been released by Sheila-Na-Gig Publications. For more information: <https://michaelminassian.com>



Michael Minassian

FOUR SEASONS

I found a message
you left behind,
a map of the countryside
cut into four pieces.

On each one you wrote
summer, winter, spring, and fall,
then crossed out the places
we visited together.

I struggled to interpret
the symbolism or understand
the tangle of directions
you had rearranged.

You once complained
I chose back roads at random,
while you pretended to explore
new places from the past.

The suitcase you left
in the driveway was empty,
another false clue
as if I was a detective

while you were the prime
suspect who had disappeared.
A few weeks later,
I received a letter in the mail

bearing a fake return address—
an empty envelope
full of silence and the scent
of a pond approaching winter.

LEARNING TO FLY

When I was a child
I collected feathers—
blue jays, robins, ducks,
sparrows, cardinals, and gulls,
until my mother told me
to clean them out,
claiming they made her sneeze.

*Can she really be
my mother, I thought,
if she's allergic to birds?*

The last time I saw
her lifeless body
in the nursing home,
I wondered if she
had lifted off the earth,
soundless and alone.

Later, in the park,
I watch a flock
of blackbirds walk
in a solemn line
like monks waiting
for bread and wine.

How restless I felt,
devoid of feathers,
a naked stillness
around me,
the moon above
in silent flight.

THE RAW EGG OF MORNING

In a dream, I see myself,
on a beach watching gulls
circle just off shore.

The dream unscrolls
like a dog's tongue.
I lose track of where I am—
an island appears,
palm trees, and grass huts
dot the landscape,
wildflowers open their petals
and bees escape, drunk
with nectar and pine sap.

I think I see a hummingbird,
but, no, it is a drone
shaped like a wasp's jaw
hovering just above sleep—

An antique map sheds its borders,
artificial boundaries between tapestries
peel like an orange rind, eyelids flutter,
a momentary bridge linking sleep,
the cinema of the subconscious,
the world waiting,
then wide awake.

Piers Davies was born in Sydney, Australia but has lived most of his life in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. He is a Law of the Sea specialist having graduated with an LL.B from Auckland University and a Diploma in ECL from the City of London College. He has been a long-time writer and reciter of poetry. His poems have appeared in journals and anthologies in New Zealand, Australia, U.K., France, Switzerland, South Africa, Poland, U.S.A., and India. Four books/chapbooks of his poetry have been published. He is co-facilitator of Titirangi Poets and co-editor of Titirangi Poets Ezines and anthologies. He was a scriptwriter of feature films (*Homesdale* and *The Cars that Ate Paris* (Australia) and *Skin Deep* (New Zealand)), short films and documentaries. He was some-time Poet Laureate of Haringey, London.

LABILE

It was as if he had
suddenly melted
his emotions liquid
slopping around the brain
brimming over the edge
seeping down his face.

No longer the Master
of his, or any other, Universe
a dried leaf buffeted
by every passing breeze
destined for the gutter—
just another failed hero.

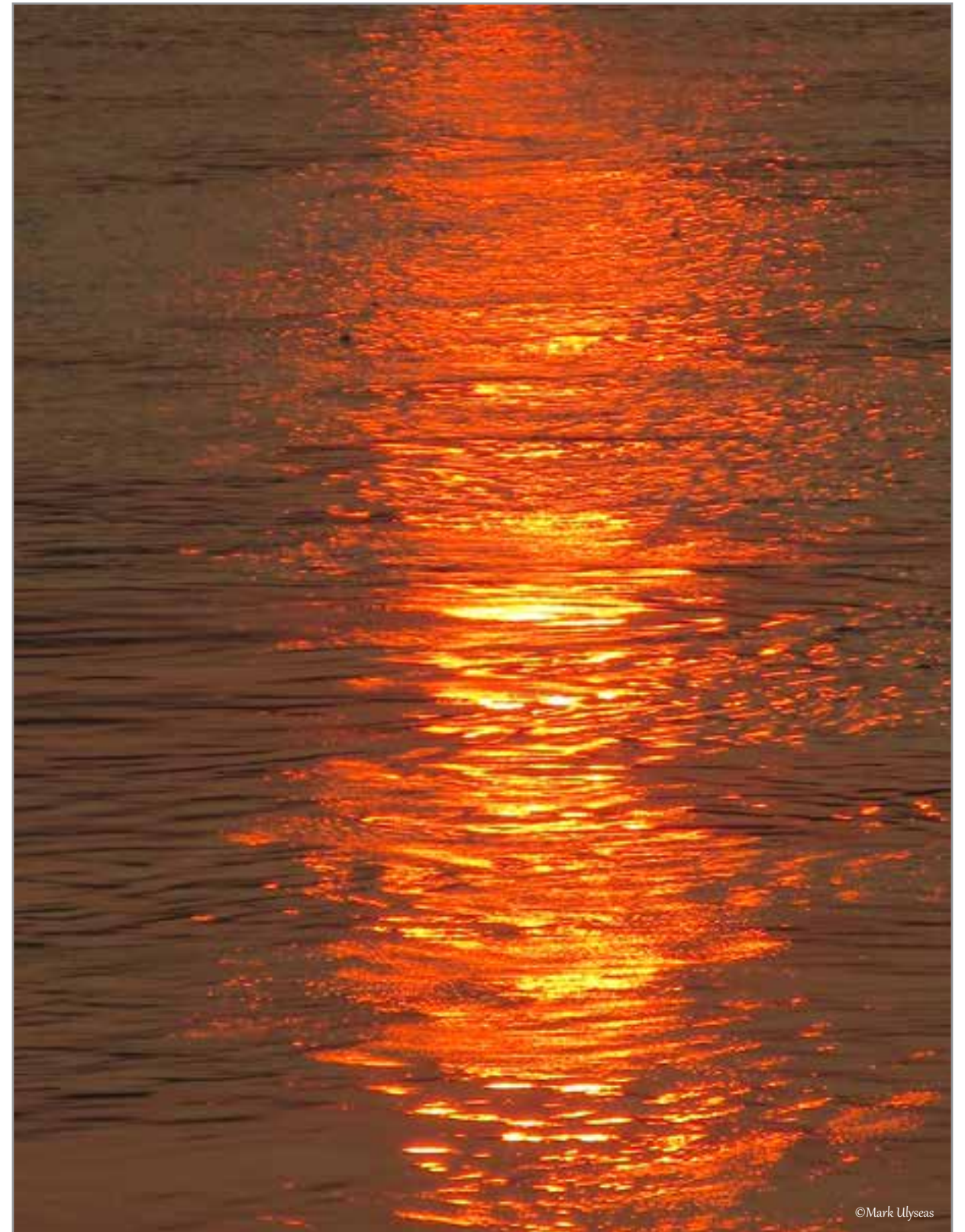


Piers Davies

AFTER THE FALL

Caught by a passing angel
Icarus survived the fall—
feathers singed and pride hurt;
no effusive thanks
just a curt complaint
about the suburb he landed in.

In future years he soared again
with flights of ever wilder fantasy
and visions totally bizarre,
each time an angel intervened
until at last the grumpy curmudgeon
was consumed by internal fire.



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Susana H. Case is the author of nine books of poetry, most recently, *If This Isn't Love*, Broadstone Books (2023), and co-editor with Margo Taft Stever of *I Wanna Be Loved by You: Poems on Marilyn Monroe*, Milk & Cake Press (2022), Honorable Mention for the Eric Hoffer Book Award as well as Finalist for several awards. She won the Slapering Hol Press Chapbook Competition in 2002 for *The Scottish Café*, which was re-released in English/Polish as *Kawiarnia Szkocka* (Opole University Press, 2010) and in English/Ukrainian as *Шотландська Кав'ярня* (Slapering Hol Press, 2024). She is co-editor with Margo Taft Stever and Sandra Yannone of *Unsinkable: Poetry Inspired by the Titanic* (Salmon Poetry, forthcoming in 2026). See more at: <https://susanahcase.com/>



GUÉREWOL

The men drink fermented bark juice—
hallucinogenic—while they line dance,
in ostrich feathers and beads, sing,
for a week, sometimes, under the blazing
sun, manic in black lipstick
and face paint, a vertical stripe down each face.

I am a woman not given to grace of movement.
How elegant, in contrast, is the man
in a striped red and blue tunic,
one of the contestants. How easy to know
who will make a good catch, a second
love match after the first arranged marriage,
when this is the standard of beauty:
even white teeth, clear eyes, height.
The standard for men that is—at a pageant
judged by Wodaabe women, a jury of three
who choose the most attractive man

from among men who are given mirrors
at birth, who have to mimic the movement
and stance of the agile white egret.

Susana H Case

ERASURE

The taxi driver points: *here it is, look*—
the largest slum in Nairobi,
the largest in Africa—
as if it must be written
in the book of our knowing.
Earlier, the travel agent claimed never
to have heard of Kibera.
One million people compressed
onto an *unauthorized settlement*
the size of New York's Central Park.

Unlike in Brazilian *favelas*,
few tourists wander Kibera,
though curiosity has a way of arriving—
cameras intrude into alleys.

A house is a mud-walled box
with metal roof, twelve-by-twelve feet;
eight bodies or more breathe
the same air. Soot from open fires
clings to hair and skin.

Little relief on the streets,
which pool with dirty water
from the Ngong River. Garbage
piles high. One outdoor latrine
for every fifty shacks.
Plastic bags of excrement—
flying toilets—scatter
across rooftops and drainage ditches.

Residents sit and gulp methanol,
wood alcohol, an industrial solvent.
Life expectancy—thirty years.

The government owns the land,
sells leases to landlords, withholds
services to the visible invisible.
Kibera, originally Kibra, means *forest*.

CLOSING THE DISTANCE

Maasai feet have few ailments,
a little curling of the toes. Barefoot,
or in sandals made from tires,

they might walk their cattle
more than thirty miles a day. Their boma,
huts of mud and dung, illegal

now near Ngorongoro grassland—
thousands pushed off ancestral land
to protect the terrain.

No—they bring in oil sheiks to shoot
big game, the Maasai say, drinking water
blocked, zebu cattle starved.

Security forces fire bullets,
tear gas. A tribesman kills
a policeman with an arrow. Local

leaders go to prison. I go to see
the wildebeest, elephants, but
what stays is when wandering

on the plains, looking for animals,
a tall and thin Maasai in a red sheet
walks by. He has an old Kodak plastic

canister in the stretched piercing
of his earlobe—for snuff, he gestures.
I hand him binoculars, pantomime

what to do, and he gasps as the distance
enlarges through the lenses, at everything
about the world's closeness.

Thaddeus Rutkowski is the author of eight books, most recently *Safe Colors*, a novel in short fictions. He teaches at Medgar Evers College/City University of NY and at a YMCA. He received a New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship and a Best Small Fictions award.



SELF-PORTRAIT

Along with everyone else in my high-school class, I was supposed to have my picture taken for our yearbook. But I didn't want to be photographed. I didn't want to follow the crowd, and, more importantly, I didn't like the way I looked.

One student, an artist, told me he was going to draw his portrait for the yearbook, and I decided to do the same.

In my bedroom, there was a small mirror—a gift from my grandmother. The mirror sat on top of my dresser, and the glass could be tilted forward and back. I stood in front of the dresser and, with a fountain pen, drew a thin, black outline of my head. I scratched in my long hair with the nib. Then I added features: a wide nose, slitted eyes, thick lips. There was a shadow under my nose—I put that in, too. I outlined my glasses, with thick frames, so my eyes would be obscured. But my wide cheeks gave me away: I was the only half Asian, the only half anything, in my high-school class.

I brought the sketch to my father's studio—the room was dark, even during the day. When I looked in, I saw my father sitting on a stool next to a drawing board. I put the sketch on the board and slid it across to him. "I want to go to art school," I said.

"I'm surprised," my father said.

He opened a brown-glass bottle with a church key and poured beer into a ceramic mug.

"See all this artwork?" he continued. He waved his hand at paintings stacked on the floor and papers piled on shelves. "It's all here because nobody wants it. I should have invented the Etch A Sketch. I'd be rich now."

Thaddeus Rutkowski

continued overleaf...

I looked more closely at my self-portrait. My hair lay in a thick tuft down my neck. The shadow under my nose resembled a mustache. I looked older than my sixteen years. I was no Asian sage, but I knew what I wanted. “I want to move to a city,” I said, “and be an artist.”

“You should learn how to finish Sheetrock,” my father said as he drank from his mug. “Then you should learn to paint walls.”

I brought my drawing to school and gave it to the yearbook supervisor.

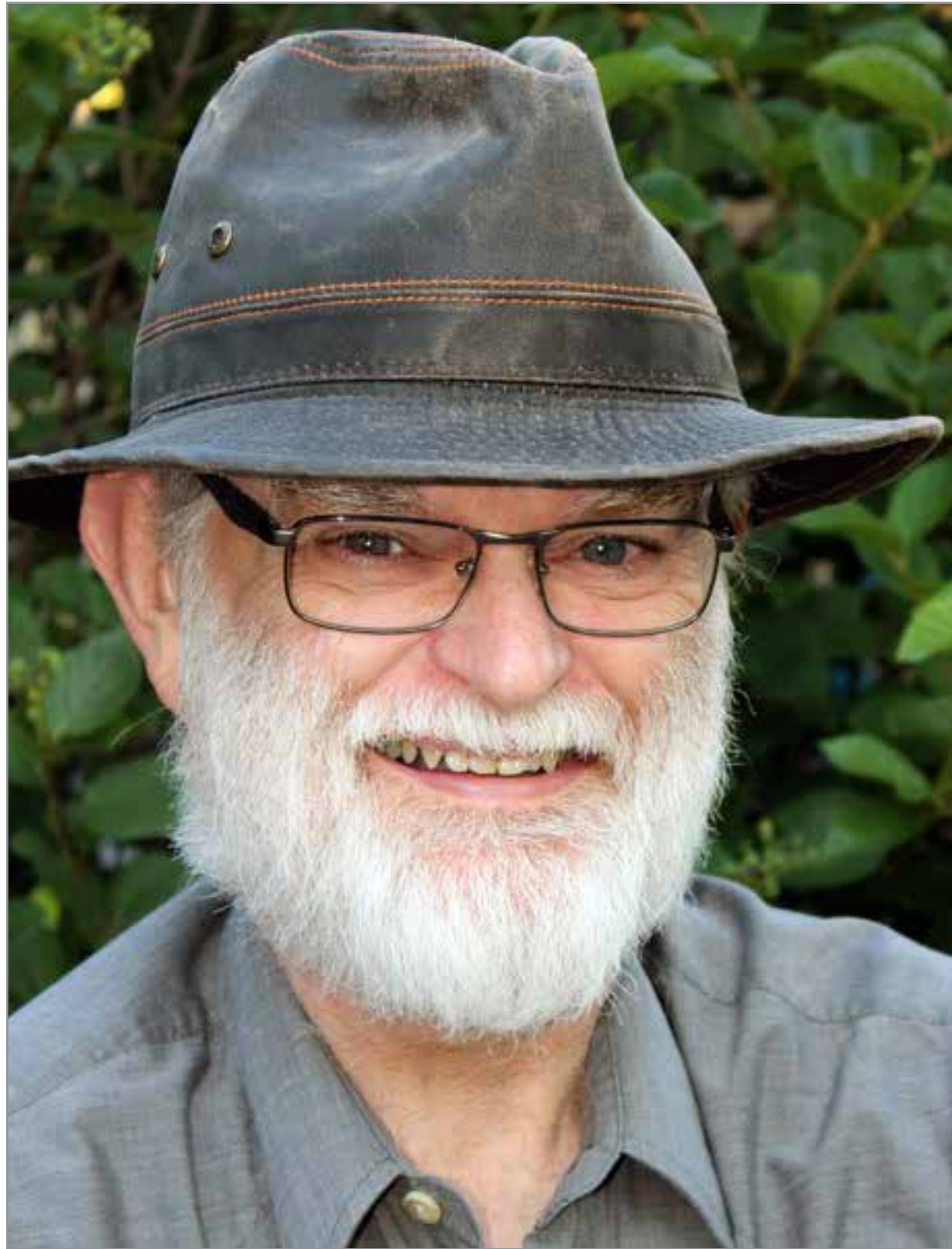
“There’s our pen-and-ink boy,” he said as he took the sketch.

My self-portrait was published in the yearbook. Below the headshots, each student was to describe a “dream for the future.” My dream, I wrote, was “not to have swum the Hellespont”; it was “to pay attention at the right time.” I didn’t know who’d said that but thought I’d heard it somewhere.

Soon after the yearbook came out, I learned that the student who’d told me he would draw his portrait hadn’t actually done so. He’d had his picture taken, like everyone else. I was the only sketcher in the book. I would have to live with that drawing for the rest of my life.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Tim Hunt is the author of six collections of poetry, including *Western Where* and *Voice to Voice in the Dark* (both Broadstone Books) and *Ticket Stubs and Liner Notes*, winner of the 2018 Main Street Rag Poetry Book Award. Recognitions include six Pushcart Prize Nominations, and the Chester H. Jones National Poetry Award for “Lake County Diamond” from his first collection *Fault Lines* (The Backwaters Press). He has been a finalist for various book prizes, including, The Sexton Prize for Poetry, The Richard Snyder Publication Prize, The May Swenson Poetry Award, The Frederick Morgan Poetry Prize, The Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize, Off the Grid Prize, The Saint Lawrence Book Award, and The Holland Prize. His critical work includes two studies of Jack Kerouac (*Kerouac’s Crooked Road: Development of a Fiction* and *The Textuality of Soulwork: Kerouac’s Quest for Spontaneous Prose*) and *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. Originally from the hill country of northern California, he was educated at Cornell University and concluded his teaching career at Illinois State University where he was University Professor of English. He and his wife, Susan, live in Normal, Illinois.

Is

The desert has a voice
and its voice is light.

At midday the light speaks the far ridge
as a shimmer—

the gliding hawk
a note of its music.

At dusk as the air cools
the light says let there be

dark
and the ridge stands forth against the sky.

But best is the moment
when the risen light

pauses
and says nothing at all—

and everything
is

Tim Hunt

1968

Do you remember when
we were so sure
that what mattered was injustice

as we wondered what to burn to make us free?

The boy at the war protest
burning a slip of paper that might,
as we watch from the crowd,

be a draft card
or driver's license or library card,
who's to say,

as the girl at his side admires
the waving bit of flame
and I think of the card in my wallet

that the law says I must carry,
and think, too, about Canada and jail,
and napalmed huts

and the quiet that probably follows
the burning
before the world murmurs on again.

Or the women, young and old,
at their different rally, burning their bras
to say they reject our gaze

as we gaze from the margin as if we understand.

Or the righteous flames in black and white—
the newspaper photos from Watts, Detroit,
the burning cars and gutted store fronts—

funeral pyres for the old order
that will reincarnate as the old order
as the embers cool to ash

and the weeds, in time, scabbing the cracked
and blackened concrete as these flames of anger and of hope,
of despair and love, fade—

as we come to know that what we burn
will not make us free,
whatever it was that we thought

Free might be.

PORTUGUESE BEACH, SONOMA COUNTY, CA, 1969

June, and the full moon
setting into the dark water
looks as if it is the sun,

and the ocean so calm
at the lull of high tide
he could, it seems, walk

all the way out to the moon.

But only Lord Jesus walked on the water,
and Lord Jesus isn't here
to take his hand and walk

with him,

and God the Father has said that what he wants
is wrong,

and The Prophet of The Church has said
that what he wants is wrong,

and his father has said that he will not,
cannot, love him because who he is
is wrong

and that he must choose

whether to walk in the light
or be lost in the dark,

and so, he is leaning
against this outcrop of rock,
his knees drawn up and looking
across the darkened water

at the moon.

He knows that its light is not his father's light
and that this dark is not his father's dark.

And as the night deepens,
he zips his jacket against the onshore breeze,

and the moon
begins to disappear below the horizon,

until there is only
his father's light

and his father's dark,

and he brings his mouth
to the barrel of his father's rifle,

and takes it into his mouth
and holds it there,

cold against his tongue
and tasting the oil,

then opens his eyes
to the exploding glory

of the dark light.

2010 - 2025 - 16TH ANNIVERSARY



POETRY & WRITING

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

